

PRESSING TENDER BUTTONS: Portland's Gertrude Press and The Little Journal That Could

By RYAN J. PRADO

With the news this month that Window Media—a parent company that published *The Washington Blade* and *Southern Voice*, among many other gay, lesbian, bi and trans publications—print media was dealt another telling blow. The void left by the 40-year-old *Blade* fold-up is a palpable one, indeed; and major newspapers everywhere are clearly tired of looking over their shoulders for the next wave of layoffs.

Gertrude Press doesn't have to worry about that very much. The Portland-based gay, lesbian, bi and trans literary and poetry journal, while not on a daily deadline for hard-hitting news and comprehensive election coverage, is a big piece to the niche press puzzle. What's more, it's growing every day.

"Now is the time for the small presses to take hold and grow," explained Gertrude Press spokesperson and Web editor Siobhan Crosby. "I think journals with a really strong and deep vertical focus are finding more support with a targeted audience that has a voracious appetite for print."

Gertrude Press' journey began in 1998, when *Gertrude: A Journal of Voice and Vision* offered a vehicle for the over-abundance of queer writers and artists who could not find publishing opportunities to showcase their craft. An editorial board was assembled in Fort Collins, Colorado, and the premiere issue appeared in spring of 1999 as a 36-page, black-and-white, saddle-stitched journal featuring eight writers and three artists.

It would take two more years to get a perfect-bound issue published, but Gertrude's gradual growth yielded a move to Portland as its official base in 2002. The journal went on hiatus for two years before being resurrected in response to Oregon's passage of

Measure 36. Since 2006, Gertrude Press has been incorporated and changed its journal name to simply *Gertrude*, while producing two journals, a fiction chapbook, and a poetry chapbook annually.

Creating a connection with readers, artists, dreamers and writers in the community is the most important goal to the editorial board. Recent efforts have included the journal's focus on visual art and the annual fiction and poetry chapbook contest. Gertrude is currently accepting submissions for the 2010 chapbook contests (the deadline is February 15, 2010), which will showcase one winner from each chapbook category for a limited run.

"What's nice about the chapbooks is that they provide a spotlight for somebody who may not normally get the chance to have their own book with their name on it," said Crosby. "We think that that's really inspiring and provides hope for queer artists in the community to give them something to aspire to."

The folks at Gertrude hope to cast a wider net for submissions in the journal's next few issues. As it stands, the board receives work from emerging and established writers and artists from over 30 states and 10 countries. The journal's impact on more isolated areas of the country should not be overlooked either.

Crosby feels that the link the journals provide to combat alienation and loneliness are invaluable to the drive of the independent publisher.

"[Gertrude] can sort of transport you from wherever you might be living, especially if



that's a hostile culture," she offered. "It will make you appreciate the different ways that people express themselves."

In May, Gertrude Press achieved 501(c)(3) nonprofit status, which among other things affords Gertrude the opportunity to apply for funding grants. As a result, the February 2010 Gertrude Art Show at Q Center has been made possible by a grant from The Standard.

The art show will operate under the theme "Yesterday: Today: Tomorrow" and is billed as falling within the curatorial framework of queerness, "an unidentified identity in constant flux." Participating artists will include Michelle Achuff, Dawn Forbes, Frank Munns and more, and the show will run February 6–28; an opening reception is slated for February 7 at 6 p.m.

The current issue of *Gertrude*—released this fall/winter—is its 13th installment. Mid-2010 will see the debut of Gertrude Press' first themed journal, hilariously dubbed "Gertrude's Gayest Issue Ever." Expect a call for "super ridiculously 'gay'" art, fiction and poetry soon. "What keeps us going is whom we're reaching and how we're connecting," reiterated Crosby.

The connection is stronger than ever. The Little Journal That Could not only thinks it can, it knows it can. ☪

For further details on Gertrude Press, including subscription information and contest guidelines, visit www.gertrudepress.org. Pick up Issue 13 of Gertrude at In Other Words Women's Books (8 B NE Killingsworth St.).

in enforced gender roles. In the feminist community in Portland, people have experienced a lot of that, but we don't necessarily talk about it. I grew up in an evangelical background

in Northern California, in Chico. Even in dating guys in college, they would have this idea that he would have the job and I would have the kids. Even before I came out as gay,

I disagreed with the church that people who are gay would go to hell." ☪

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COLUMNIST'S PICK

LeAnn Locher

Push by Sapphire

If you're looking for a sweet, fun romp of a book, keep looking. *Push* is a tough window into the world of a young woman whose life is filled with incest and neglect—the cycle of abuse that grabs hold of families and pushes them through crises unimaginable to many. The power of a novel like this is the incredible humanity and strength of a girl to discover her own voice and to begin to rise above it.

Push is the basis for the current movie *Precious*, in theaters now with the formidable backing of Oprah Winfrey and Tyler Perry and starring Gabourey Sidibe, Mariah Carey and Mo'Nique. But the movie can only be as good as the novel upon which it's based, and the book is worth the read. Be forewarned:

you have to push yourself to get through it all, and that isn't easy.

Writing within the dialect of her main character, author Sapphire delivers a raw reality: Claireece Precious Jones not only can't read or write, she can barely give voice to her life. At just 16-years-old,

she's pregnant for the second time, sexually and physically abused by her parents, and quickly losing any ground in the public system—that is, until she's placed in an alternative school and comes into contact with a teacher who connects with her as have few other adults in her life. The fact that this teacher is a lesbian surprises Precious. She realizes it's not the gays who have raped her, ignored her or surrounded her life with drugs. It's "the homos" who finally see her preciousness.

It's one thing to be marginalized or discriminated against. It's a whole other level of oppression to be a unnoticed within the very society in which you exist. Precious moves through a life of victimization and invisibility, but the growth and hopefulness she displays through these pages is simply amazing and compelling. Poetic and rough, *Push* is a beautiful read through darkness and profound misery. ☪



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