

# Twenty-Something Love in Pictures

**Cartoonist Robert Kirby deals with life, sex, relationships in second *Curbside* "graphic novel"**

BY PAUL OLSEN

State Rep. Nancy Sheltra (R-Derby) won't be reading Robert Kirby's new book, *Curbside Boys: The New York Years*. After all, it was Kirby's "Curbside" comic strip that led Sheltra to protest the presence of *Out in the Mountains* in the Vermont Statehouse. She claimed a strip featuring two bare-chested men kissing and a story line about obsessions with ex-lovers was "pornographic."

At the time of the controversy, Kirby welcomed the publicity his *Curbside* strip received in Montpelier. "Although that strip was very innocuous and I don't know why anybody would be offended by it, I have to admit that I get a little thrill out of pissing off right-wing Republicans," he said.

With his new book, *Curbside Boys: The New York Years* (\$10.95, Cleis Press), Kirby is likely to continue pissing off right-wing Republicans while entertaining the gay and lesbian community.

**Curbside Boys: the New York Years**

by Robert Kirby  
Cleis Press (2003)

This is the second collection of Kirby's "Curbside" comic strips in a book format (the first was *Curbside* and collected the "early largely autobiographical years"). In it, Kirby cleverly and accurately deals with relationships, clubbing, work, sex, mourning the loss of a lover, one-night stands, and Gay Pride Day.

The book's main characters are Kevin, Nathan, and Drew, three gay men sharing a Manhattan apartment. Nathan is adjusting to his new life in New York City where he works at a coffee shop and fantasizes about having sex with attractive customers. Drew, an aspiring writer who vomits under stress, is mourning the AIDS death of his lover and develops a crush on Nathan. Drew and Nathan eventually fall in love and Kevin is left to watch, and mediate, as the relationship develops. Throughout the book, Nathan and Drew deal with

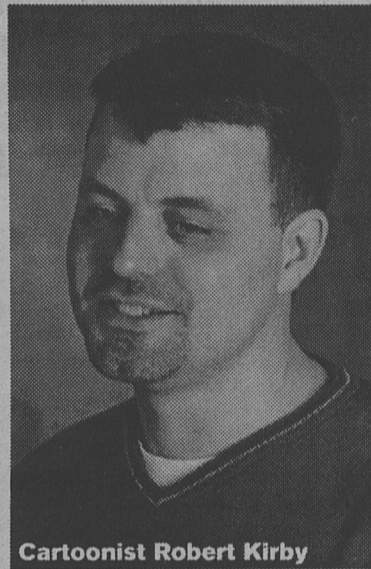
sex, commitment, and infidelity.

Cartoonist Kirby was born in Detroit, Michigan, and lived in Manhattan for a time (hence "the New York years"). He now lives and works in Minneapolis. He is also the creator of two queer comics anthologies, *Strange-Looking Exile* and the "all-male, alterna-gay" *Boy Trouble*.

In a brief email interview with OITM, Kirby wrote that this storyline was always a book in installments: "Right from the get-go I envisioned the saga of Nathan and Drew as a graphic novel, a self-contained story, so it's satisfying to have it all bound into a single volume. I think the story works very well in book form. Nathan and Drew encapsulate every twenty-something relationship I ever had, so *Curbside Boys* is pretty close to my heart.

"A graphic novel is literally-what the term would suggest: it's a novel with pictures. I don't care how folks want to read *Curbside Boys* - in the can, on the couch, on the bus; if they want to read it all in one sitting or in dribs and drabs (the latter is how I'm currently slogging through D.H. Lawrence's *Women In Love*): if they are reading it, and more importantly, if they are relating to it and liking it, that's good enough for me!"

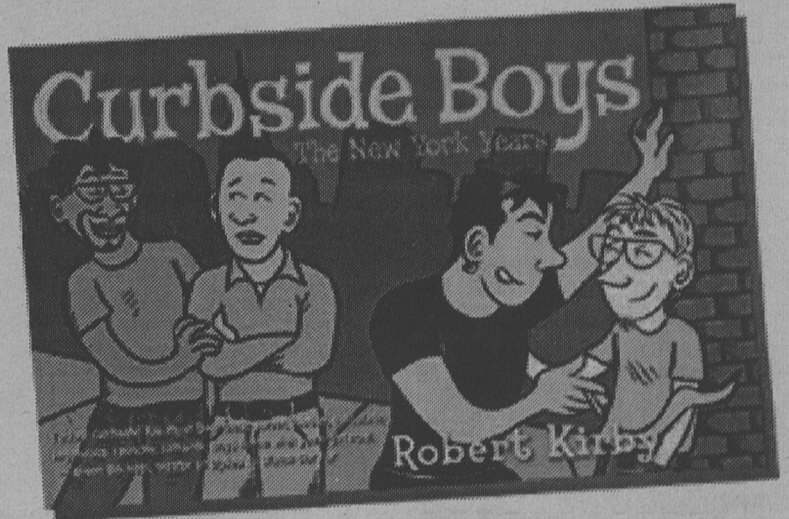
Kirby has been drawing *Curbside* since 1991, eleven-plus years. "It began running in OITM in I believe 1997, when the editor at the time, Chris Moes, asked me



Cartoonist Robert Kirby

started out as a largely autobiographical strip ('Rob' - i.e. myself - was the main character) but over time I found that format limiting, so I began to branch out. In some ways the strip is still autobiographical, only now I don't have to take the heat for what my characters do and say! In the current storyline - taking place after the events chronicled in *Curbside Boys* - I am using elements of the mystery and suspense genres, which is fresh, fun and challenging to do. So stay tuned!"

In praise of Kirby's book, Vermont's Alison Bechdel, creator of "Dykes to Watch Out For," says "You must take these sweet,



to contribute," he wrote. Ask whether the issues have changed in all that time, Kirby responded, "My strip really isn't issue-oriented, it's more personal, character-based work. *Curbside*

loutish, calculating, ingenuous, raunchy, romantic boys home with you right now." Alison Bechdel is right and, once again, state Rep. Nancy Sheltra is wrong. ▼

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