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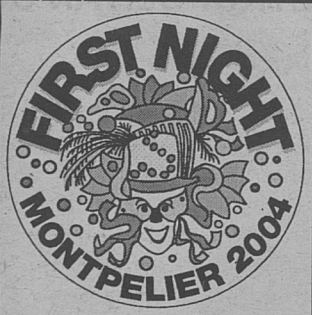
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arts

Price Is Right

Cartoonist Crystallizes the Mundane - And It's Funny!

BY SUSAN MCMILLAN

Hilary Price is the cartoonist responsible for *Rhymes With Orange*. We'll get to what that means later. Price recently published *Reigning Cats & Dogs: A Rhymes With Orange Tribute To Those Who Shed*, a collection of cartoons worth owning.

First, I must be honest. I love my dog and cat, but I am not a freaky pet owner. I am not interested in filling my home with trinkets that resemble my dog. I am not a fan of *Garfield*. I do like to laugh, and this book of cartoons about critters made me laugh out loud.

Born in 1970, Hilary Price is an accomplished cartoonist: at age 25, she was the youngest woman ever to have a syndicated daily comic strip. Last year, *Rhymes With Orange* was nominated for a Reuben, the 'Oscar' of the cartoon world. Nearly as amazing, Price was chosen by *Jewish Woman Monthly* as one of ten Jewish women to watch in 5761 (that was the year 2000). Although her work first appeared in a political satire magazine, her big break was with the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Today, the simple drawings of this self-taught artist and Stanford English major are seen in 100 newspapers daily.

Rhymes With Orange (RWO) is silly and smart. In each cartoon, Price goes straight to the heart of the most mundane moments of our lives. She sees clearly into our kitchens, bedrooms, and daily rituals and cleverly reminds us that life really is funny, if only we'd stop and notice. Although compared with *Seinfeld* for its commentary on contemporary life, *RWO* is never mean-spirited or insincere. Instead, the commonplace is crystallized, and the insight into the overlooked moments of our lives is startlingly funny. Who among us has not wondered if maybe the dog was going deaf? Price depicts a veterinarian examining a dog's ears. 'So you're saying inside he comes when he's called but outside, you can yell 'til you're blue and he won't respond?' Diagnosis? Another case of park-induced deafness.

Her work masterfully reflects that funny world of pets that many of us live in. *Reigning Cats & Dogs* features great pet parodies: "My Years Under House Arrest: The Memoirs of An Indoor Cat" and "Poodles: The Inner Struggle." If you've ever medicated a dog, you'll laugh at the strip titled "The Epiphany" (time for your amoxicillin and jalsberg). Imagine two dogs in front of a wine and cheese shop. The dogs wonder 'Cheese goes with wine?' 'I've only had it with antibiotics.'

Anyone who has tried to train a cat will recognize the strip on the art of feline discipline. A couple is eating at the dinner table, and they each have a cat perched on their head. The man says 'You have to be firm. You have to say you cannot sit on the dining room table! Then you can be flexible elsewhere.' And

you know how sometimes, at the change of season, you'll get a jacket out of the closet and find money in the pocket? Price captures the dog owner's reality, when searching the pockets produces two liver snaps and a plastic bag instead.

Several of Price's regular strips have been censored, not because they were so racy but because they might offend *someone*. One depicted two men shopping for flowers. While reviewing their shopping list, one guy mentioned pansies and the other said 'what's that got to do with it?' It turns out that syndicate policy is to never refer to anyone as 'pansy.' References to Judaism and being gay sometimes make the syndicators nervous. As a Jewish lesbian, Price has lots of material to keep her editors on edge.

Favorites listed on her website are divided into categories: Jewish, Gay, Cats, Therapy. In one strip, she depicts "Cows at Ellis Island" where a cow with a suitcase proclaims to the immigration official, "No, it's not Holberg. It's *Holstein*."

Asked if being gay has had an impact on her career, Price answered that there aren't many women in her field, and being a lesbian cartoonist is just not a big deal. She came out her junior year in college, but for years, professionally, it went unspoken. Like many of us, she used opposite pronouns to conceal the identity of her partner.

Three years ago, after an interview, she was fed up with hiding. She contacted the interviewer and revealed that her partner was a woman. Then she called her manager and officially came out. No one really cared. Price certainly has no regrets and is relieved. No more disguising pronouns. *Reigning Cats & Dogs* is dedicated to her partner, Kerry.

Ok, so what does the name mean? That's easy: nothing does ... rhyme with orange that is. Price's aunt once told her that no English word rhymes with 'orange.' (For you etymologists, Price says that 'door hinge' is the closest rhyme to orange, but is not close enough.) According to her website, the title reflects "the singularity of the strip's perspective." She acknowledges that her work "appeals to a small niche of witty, intelligent and incredibly good-looking people." If all this is of no interest, the book may not be your bag either. Or, you may see yourself and your pets on every page.

Price and Kerry live in Florence, Massachusetts with a dog, two cats and two fish. *Reigning Cats & Dogs* is available at online and independent bookstores and at the Humane Society of Chittenden County's new Best Friends Boutique. Price's website is rhymeswithorange.com. ▼

Assistant Editor Susan McMillan is a veterinarian and lives with her companion animals and her human partner in Charlotte.