

Profile

A Talk with Alison Bechdel

Alison Bechdel

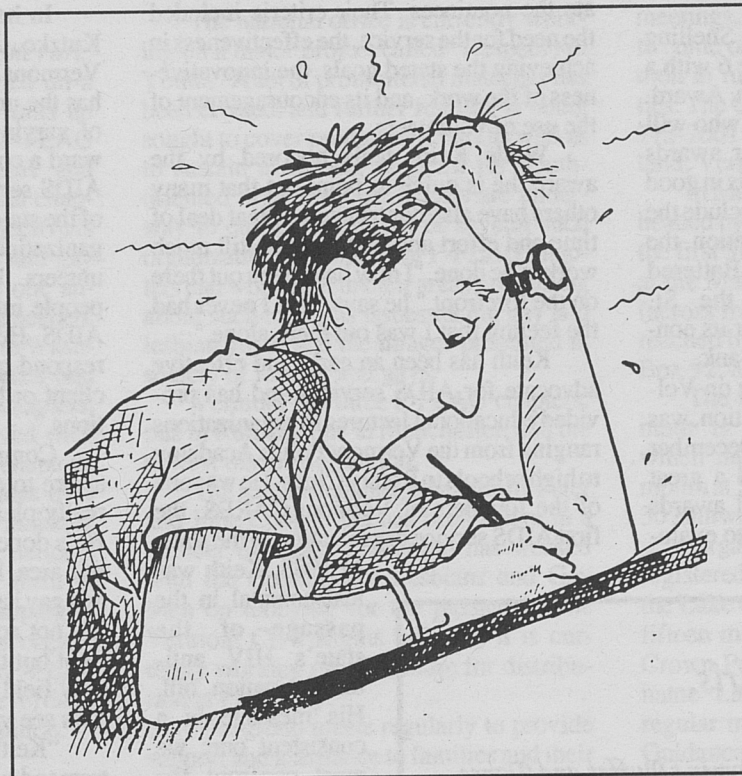
has been drawing cartoons all her life. "Dykes to Watch Out For" began as drawings of "little wild lesbians" in the margins of her letters to a friend. It was first published in 1983 in *WomanNews*, a feminist newspaper in New York City.

Bechdel has been a "full-time professional lesbian" for about five years, working at gay and lesbian newspapers and syndicating "DTWOF" on her own. Mo, Harriet and her other characters have become beloved figures in the lesbian community and can be found in books, calendars, mugs and T-shirts, as well as in 35-40 gay/lesbian and progressive newspapers in the U.S. and Canada.

Last August Bechdel decided she could finally afford to make the big leap and left her newspaper job in Minneapolis to become a full-time lesbian cartoonist. That decision enabled her to move to Vermont in January to be with her lover. In April Alison Bechdel talked with *OITM's* Sage Russell.

OITM: I think "Dykes to Watch Out For" is just amazing. If someone wants to know about a certain kind of lesbian life in the U.S. in the 1980's, all they have to do is read "Dykes to Watch Out For."

Alison: Well, that's interesting, because I really think of myself as an archivist in a way. I really want to capture all these details. I just want to preserve it or mirror it.



OITM: It amazes me that you've got Mo and Harriet and Lois and Clarice and Toni and all the others inside of you. What's your relationship to them?

Alison: Well, in a way they're not really inside me. This might sound really flaky, but people ask me: are you really involved with your characters, do you have dreams about your characters, do you have conversations with your characters? And I really don't. It's as if they exist off in this little lesbian land, in this comic strip land, and my job is to kind of just tune in every week when I sit down to write.

It's almost like I don't really create it.

Although I know of course I am creating it and I'm making these decisions. I'm doing it, but it's almost like it's beyond my control in a way, that it's a process not so much of writing as of discovering.

OITM: Is Mo some kind of alter ego? Or are they all alter egos?

Alison: They all are. They're all aspects of myself...like Lois is perhaps one percent my personality, whereas Mo is more like 30 percent.

OITM: When Mo's political, or when she gets into these really high anxiety states?

Alison: I'm a very anxiety-prone person. I'm very guilt-ridden. But I don't think I'm quite as impotent as Mo. She never quite seems to get anywhere.

OITM: Do you ever find yourself worrying about running out of inspiration?

Alison: In a way I do. It's a constant fear. And then in another way, no, I always seem to come up with something. I was having a low self-esteem day a while ago, and I had to say to myself, 'Look, you've been turning this thing out every two weeks like clockwork.' I haven't missed a deadline in years and years. So there's a way that I have a certain faith that something will come up.

It's kind of about self-esteem. I do the strip so I know that I'm good, that I can and I'm able and have people like it. It's really important to me. And I wonder if I weren't

Connie & Ann's

• Daily Home Cooked Meals •

361 St. Paul Street • Burlington, Vt. • (802) 658-2001

MON-FRI 11-8 SAT 2-8

energy work
massage

Ashli

personal healing for
lesbians and womyn friends

RR 3, Box 228 • Putney, VT 05346 • 802-387-5507