

Alison Bechdel on Looking Hard at the World



**Alison
Bechdel**

photo
Sage Russell

*Alison Bechdel is an articulate and deeply thoughtful woman. At the end of her slide show, she talked about the belief system that informs both her cartoon strip, *Dykes to Watch Out For*, and her life as a whole. Her concluding remarks are reproduced here.*

I think of myself as a lesbian cartoonist, rather than as a cartoonist who happens to be a lesbian, because it's who I am and what I do and they're totally intertwined.

Since I feel like I can't control whether I get an idea or not, I try to control the things I can. I try to be disciplined in my work habits. I try to observe people very carefully and find out what they're thinking and what they're doing. But mostly, I think, it's important to look, to look hard at things, especially little things.

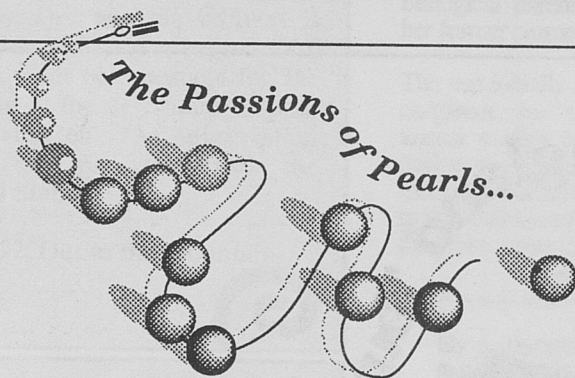
As lesbians, we're not used to seeing ourselves represented anywhere. And I think we're all basically starved for images of ourselves. I think it's such an important, nurturing thing to see yourself reflected in the world. In a way I see my job as being kind of an archivist. I want to create a reflection of our community that's as true and clear as possible...But probably more than an archivist, I'm a propagandist. And my stuff is total, left-wing propaganda. I promote this kind of feminist, anti-nuclear, vegetarian way of looking at the world. But the important thing to realize is that all comic strips are propaganda, especially the innocuous ones like *Dennis the Menace* or *Beetle Bailey* or *B.C.* They advocate everything from rigid sex-role stereotyping to misogyny to violence to racism to militarism. They think about these cartoons is that the guys who draw them don't really look at the world. Most of these strips are drawn by straight, white, golf-playing men. They don't look beyond their own preconceptions of the world.

And I think that really looking at the world, really looking hard at people and looking honestly — not just seeing what your preconceptions tell you is there, what you've been taught to see — is the most important thing we can do.

Another thing about the funny pages in the daily papers is that 98 percent of those characters are white. It's hard for white people to draw people of other colors, because in order to draw them you have to see them. A similar thing is the way straight people mistake me for a man all the time. How people mistake Mo for a male cartoon character. Because they're not looking hard enough to see. And seeing people is hard. It's a continual challenge and risk, and more than that, it's an act of love.

Drawing lesbians is an act of love for me. It's a way of fighting back against the dehumanized, objectified way that I saw women represented when I was a kid. It's my way of healing myself, of trying to reconnect the way I got so split off from myself that I couldn't even draw women. I want to draw real women with real bodies and feelings and ideas, women who are adorable and irritating and independent and committed and radical because I'm still trying to unlearn the lie that women can't be any of those things.

But most of all I want to draw women who are lovable and who love other women. Because the most amazing thing to me about being a lesbian is how we're able to unlearn all this garbage and defy all the stereotypes, how we're able to see beyond them till we can see ourselves and love ourselves as women. And I think that's pretty important, so that's why I try to draw it. ▼



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| Fri. April 3 | Women's Buffet Dance
\$5.00 5-9 p.m. |
| Sat. April 4 | Comedy Night
Presenting Cheril Vendetti
\$5.00 8 p.m. |
| Wed. April 15 | Pasta Night-All you can eat
\$5.95 6-9 p.m. |
| Thur. April 16 | Juice Bar - 18 & Older
\$3.00 cover 9 p.m.
<i>Smoke and alcohol free</i> |
| Sat. April 18 | Ladies Lounge Dance
\$1.00 7-10 p.m. |
| Sat. April 25 | Dances with Men - Buffet
\$3.00 7-10 p.m. |

9:00 - 10:00 PM Friday and Saturday dollar at the door

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