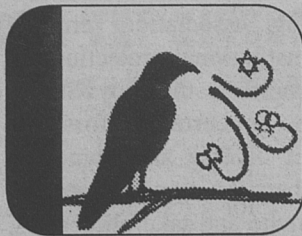


feature

CROW'S CAWS
by crow cohen



How Sweet It Is

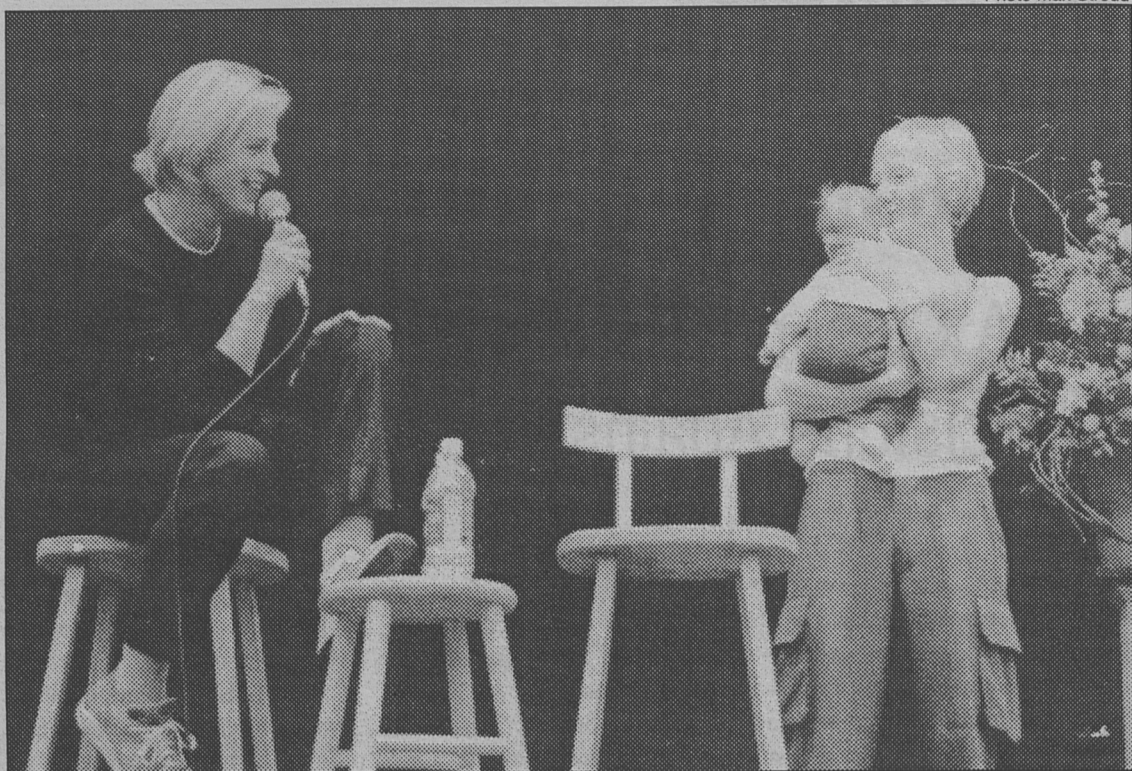
I went to see Ellen DeGeneres and her partner, Anne Heche, at UVM. I felt so lucky to be going with my 31-year-old niece and 25 year old daughter — both straight. I'm one of the fortunate ones whose family is completely accepting of my lesbianism. I've only seen the Ellen show about three times because I so seldom watch TV, but aside from the obnoxious commercials, her sitcom gave me a lift. There was a huge audience at Patrick gym; and as my niece said, Ellen brings together mainstream TV folks and queers (who, come to think of it, are not necessarily mutually exclusive these days.)

Ellen was endearing. I loved it that she didn't dress glamorously and has that comic demeanor of keeping a perfectly straight face while 1000 of us were hootin' and hollerin' all around her which drove us even wilder. You know you're in the presence of a brilliant comic when merely to look at her is to laugh. She is wonderfully quick-witted. Before she launched into her main remarks she just kept throwing out these one-liners — comments about what was happening for her in the moment in that gym in Burlington, Vermont. She was upfront about her discomfort in doing this college lecture gig. She doesn't describe herself as political, although she admitted she was catapulted into that arena when she took a stand. (Funny how that works, eh?) She seemed basically shy, hesitant. Perhaps she's used to hid-

ing behind her jokes. I hear that's pretty common among comedians. She sounded almost naive. Most of what she had to say was about eliminating hate, that the words "faggot" and "nigger" are just not acceptable. (OK, Ellen. We promise not to use those words again.) Not much of an analysis about how oppression plays out in our lives. I do think she's brave as hell, though. So what, if it's Hollywood she confronted. I'll take coming out heroes wherever I can find them. And she's right. Famous people have an obligation to speak out about justice since they have all that media attention.

Anne seemed a lot more sure of herself. She talked about the battle she fought between "survival" and "passion," and she chose passion — love at first sight as a matter of fact. I'm not sure I would put the career struggle to become a movie star in the same category as "survival," but it's definitely no fun to lose your job over bigotry. It was sweet to hear how devoted they were to one another although it might have been slightly more edifying for them to describe in detail how they work through their shit. Isn't that what most couples are up against in the long run if they last?

The baby-holding stuff was a bit romanticized, too, I'm afraid. Here's this young childless couple just dying to have a kid and listening intently to the hosannas of a couple in the audience carting around a



"Hold the head!" gasped hundreds in the crowd as Anne Heche and Ellen DeGeneres cooed over a nine-week-old from the audience.

cherubic, placid nine-week-old. They should have given my daughter and I some mic time if they really wanted a dose of lesbian parenthood.

Speaking of my daughter, I was proud of her remark as we were leaving. She said, "If I stood in line to ask a question, I'd want to know if Anne would have become a lesbian if she hadn't met Ellen." I think my kid caught onto a point that wasn't addressed in their happy couple routine —

namely, what does it mean to be a lesbian if you're not being sexual? Does it mean you're just waiting around for the "big moment" until you can firm up your identity in the eyes of the world? Does a single lesbian identify herself by the com-

pany she keeps? Or is there something deep inside that shifts your relationship to yourself, your family and the rest of society when you take on the identity of a maligned group? It may be true that love conquers all, but it has to be more than romantic love that keeps us going since not all of us are romantically involved throughout the length of our lesbianhood. Compassion comes closer to conquering all

— compassion for yourself when you botch up your life and compassion for those you perceive are out to get you. That's no easy feat.

Hey, I'm not knocking romantic love nor even coupledom. They can be some of life's biggest gifts. I'm curious to see what Ellen's new CBS show next fall will be about. Maybe I'll even go out and buy a TV aerial by then. ▼

Photo Max Stroud

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