

Difficult Seductress!

Dorothy Allison

interviewed by Barbarism

I creamed over the opportunity to talk about fat with very busy Dorothy Allison: brilliant, sexy author extraordinaire, whose challenging writing saved my life and provides me with constant inspiration. Her works include the award-winning bestseller *Bastard Out of Carolina*, *Skin*, *Trash*, and *The Women Who Hate Me*. Dorothy is currently working on *Two or Three Things I know for Sure*, due out this September from Dutton, and took precious time out to talk to *Fat Girl*.

Barbarism: What's your new book about?

Dorothy: It's about my family (with photos)—the photos are my mother's snap shots. And then we're pairing them with snap shots of when I was in my 20s and 30s, when I was in the lesbian collective. Some of them when I was a difficult seductress.

B: A difficult seductress!

The first book I picked up of yours was *The Women Who Hate Me*, and it saved my life. I was really suicidal and having a really hard time. I picked it up in a *Different Light*, and sat there and read it from cover to cover. I had no money whatsoever and I came back and I read it and I just kept coming back and reading it all week long. And it really made a difference—it spoke to me. There's something about the language you use that I felt as a fat woman, that you were talking about people in my life in a way that I rarely have come across as a reader. So I want to talk to you about fat.

D: I always think of *Dumpling Child* as my fat poem. Since I've had some lovers who were obviously "high up"—you were pretty high up when you were on their thighs.

B: As you were coming out as a dyke, was fat also a related issue for you, something you talked about or you were conscious of?

D: We never talked about it. I don't think I have ever not been conscious of it. I mean, it makes for, it's like another level of excruciating self-consciousness when you're a fat lesbian. Especially when I was a teenager, you never got in bed with it but it was always there. And it was because of the kind of girls that I would go after, they would tend to be these jocks. Jocks don't have fat, they have muscles. It made for an enormous amount of self-consciousness. A sense of not being a match for them. So I had to work harder. Way harder.

B: In your coming out process did you ever come across people assuming that you became a lesbian because you were fat?

D: Well, I think that's one of the givens. But I had other stuff going on. They had a long list of reasons for me to be a lesbian, on top of being fat and ugly. Basically, when I was a kid, they were equal. Fat was equal to ugly. It's really funny, because today I was working on these photos and there are all these pictures of my sisters and other women in my family and most of the women in my family are what we call "gravy-fed girls." Nice, big, husky, strong looking, with wide faces. But my editor is like, "you know, you're not ugly. These kids aren't ugly." And I would say "yeah, but look at 'em. They *think* they're ugly." And they're not the American ideal of a svelte, young teenager.

B: It's funny going back to pictures, I just went through that process. My grandmother died recently. She helped raise me. So I did an altar and I went through a lot of old family photos...looking at myself in pictures and remembering who I was at that point, and

feeling like a fat person, and having been told at that age that I was fat, but when I look at those pictures and I think, "I don't look fat. What's going on here?"

D: That's what hit me really hard, because I can remember this sense of being this grotesque, fat creature, and that's how I thought of myself, but in pictures I don't even look fat! So, it's like this complete disjunction. I can remember, christ, in '73, going to a what was kind of a body-consciousness group, and it was this huge thing. We were all supposed to name the part of your body that you're most ashamed of that you haven't made friends with. And it was like, "Part of my body? You're talking about my entire body!" But I look at these pictures and I don't recognize myself as that person. I recognize the situation, I recognize the other people, but *that* body is not how I ever saw myself.

B: It is a disjuncture.

Do you think the meaning of fat has changed for you from when you were growing up to what it means now for you?

D: I'm not sure that it's any more accurate, my body sense. I think my body sense is permanently damaged. I have to constantly check in to get a sense of what my real dimensions are. Hell, even what size I wear. But mostly just a sense of who I am in space. But when I was young, I had no notion. My notion was of this excruciating self-consciousness. I hunched, I wore dark clothing, my god, I used read those wretched magazines looking for clues on how to hide the fact that I was this fat person. Except that, when I was around 24, and I became really involved in the feminist activist community, there was an enormous amount of information that said "This is all a cultural myth and you have to resist it." So I learned this language to lay on top of it. And I was trying to live up to the language, but I didn't notice that it had much impact on people's behavior.

B: Ha ha ha, that's for sure! In terms of fat, how has it shaped your self-awareness of your sexuality?

D: I think it's made me more sexually aggressive. Because I always assumed I had to be a little bit faster and more pushy than anyone else. Anyways, my girlfriends says, "You know, if you ain't pretty you gotta work harder."

B: Do you think it has affected your development as a writer?

D: Hmm. The sense of being ugly has affected my sense, my development as a writer, in the sense of being an outsider, physically an outsider. I look, I watch people and I notice things. And I think most people don't usually pay any attention. I notice, for example, what colors people choose to wear, how they dress, how they move their bodies, how they *don't* move their bodies. All that comes not from being a writer but from being a fat woman. Watching other fat women.

B: That's very true. I think I spend a lot of time into the visual, and I remember people visually—I have a hard time with names, but I'll remember what they wore and how they moved physically. I don't know if it's a part of my defense process or if I'm trying to figure out where I fit in relationship to people in the world.

D: Oh hell, get real! We're always looking for somebody fatter than us so that we don't look quite so outside the pale. I'm always completely aware of my weight in relation to my friends' weight. Even though I really don't approve of this, I don't like it, and the other thing is I don't date skinny girls. I'm not comfortable with skinny girls, either physically or emotionally. They're just too foreign to me. I have to really work to get their stuff. But I figure it's justice. They're prejudiced against *me*, and it balances out.

B: Do you think your readers are aware of you being fat?

D: Ha! [laughter] No! They're not aware of anything. I show up...[more laughter] It depends. You know, because I've been running around the country for 20 years now doing this, there's a lesbian feminist audience that's aware of me, of who I am physically and who I am in the world and what I look like, but I go to these University gigs and they ain't got a clue. Because basically, publishers tend to want to use the photo of you that makes you look the skinniest, and they tend to want to use the photo of you that makes you look the youngest and the most socially acceptable. Well, by the time I get to Universities I'm usually three days exhausted, and you know water weight retention, and I *really* don't look like those pictures. [Big laugh] Oh god. But they tend to be well behaved.

B: What kind of assumptions do you come across about your size when you're interacting?

D: People are *really* careful.

B: So here we are asking you all these questions!

D: If I show up as Dorothy Allison the writer, they tend to be extremely polite and really careful. But, I travel a lot, and when you're traveling nobody knows who the fuck you are, and a fat woman with a suitcase is living hell. People are rude, it's not just the physical stress, the tiny little airplane seats, people are mean. I get on a bus and people will refuse to sit with me, people say nasty things, I'm hauling my luggage through the airport to get to the next plane and people have literally tripped me. This is a real...People hate fat women. And they have complete permission to act out on it. So, when I am anonymous, when I'm just another fat woman, it's mean. When I show up as the writer they tend to be more polite and very careful. I suspect that the answer is get rich and famous. I haven't made rich yet, but I'm working hard on famous, and the don't fuck with me stuff.

That's another thing. I'm 46. You mouth at me in an airport and I mouth back. I find that they're really startled.

B: I think they think that we're so big that everything bounces off of us. They don't really see us as real people, and they definitely expect us to be really submissive.

D: Old, cowed, ashamed.

B: I had a really great visual treat a day or two ago that made my day. I was walking around downtown in the business area of San Francisco. Most people don't walk around at lunch hour eating, you know, they don't want to show you that they're eating. And there was

this big fat woman walking along eating her yogurt and she was so happy with her friend, bouncing along through the crosswalk. It was so great to see that. And when you're traveling you're so vulnerable, because you're living your life, you're eating, being yourself, and you don't have your support network around you, you don't have the things that you use to touch base with to keep aware of feeling good about yourself, and everyone's just shitting on you. I think it must be really difficult for you to travel all the time.

D: Except there's another thing that happens when you're traveling. You bond with other fat women, pretty quickly. Especially in airports and train stations.

B: That's refreshing to hear, because sometimes I feel like fat people who don't get it or aren't there yet avoid you.

D: You can spot how they dress. A certain kind of upper-class fat person would never talk to you in public. But on trains, I've had really good experiences on trains, especially going across the country on trains. God, I think that's where we all are. I met more fat people on that train from Portland to Boston than I've ever met.

And for good damn reason! It's physically more comfortable.

B: Were the seats more spacious? That's good to know. I don't travel that much because...if I don't know if I'm going to fit in, physically if I'm not gonna fit, it leaves a lot to be desired.

Do you think that your readers and audiences make invisible your physical body when they see you? That once they see you, that they listen to you but they don't look at your physical body? Do they gloss it over?

D: I don't know. I don't know actually how I would know that. I do know that when I did the gig in Boston, I did a performance of two or three weeks in the same theater, and there was a very short section of questions and answers afterwards where I had this conversation. This guy asked this old question I'm really used to, which is "How can

you do what you do? How can you be who you are? What's the process?" And I said, "Everybody is constantly in the process of discovering their vulnerabilities. That's what writers do." And so then I started talking about being fat, and I said, "You know, sometimes I look at myself and I think oh god, yeah, I'm fat." And I watched and he flinched! It was like I had said something really forbidden. And because he flinched, I went on about it for quite awhile. And it was really interesting to watch people's faces, and a good half of the people just glazed, because they don't want to discuss this subject. They want it to be cute, and they want me to be funny about it, but they don't want to take it seriously.

B: There's this phenomenon, if you know people, if they know you personally or if they have a personal tie-in to you, as opposed to someone who doesn't, if they saw you physically, someone of your physical size, they'd be like "Oh, look at that woman. She's fat." Or say something else derogatory. But if they know you, they say "Oh, you're not fat."

D: They're always telling me that, "You're not fat!" Get real, honey! It's because they don't...It's also kind of insulting. They say, "Oh you're not fat." Well, what's fat then, dear?

B: Or, why won't you look at me and see me how I am? That's what I meant about making you invisible.

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D: Well, I assume that people don't really see me. But I also know that once I start talking, they forget. They forget how you're dressed, what you look like, everything disappears.

B: Do you ever feel that your fat is eroticized by your audience? I know that within the dyke community you have become a sexual icon. Many women are bowled over by you.

D: I wonder why. I bowl them over at every opportunity. The best thing that ever happened to me was Alix, my lover, who makes no bones about the fact that she's a chubby chaser, although she hates that term. She basically had one skinny girlfriend, and we have these jokes about "she hurt me!" 'cause her bones stick out. But then basically, Alix really has this whole erotic response to large buttocks and large breasts and meaty thighs. And because she is so, I don't know, she's just, it's very present, she's always like grabbing my butt, grabbing my thighs and making these lip smacking noises.

B: That's nice!

D: It's been going on now for eight years, and it's really become... Well, at first I didn't really believe her, and at first I was really uncomfortable, because she was constantly calling attention to parts of my body that I was very self-conscious about or unhappy with. And she likes my tummy, and I've had surgery, so my belly *hangs*, honey. And she *likes* it! And she would touch it and play with it and I would flip out, but after a couple years of somebody who's really a good fuck telling you that you're really beautiful and she really loves it and demonstrating it constantly, something peculiar happened and I started to be able to enjoy parts of my body that, up to that point, I don't think I could even feel. And now, I've basically taken on Alix's behavior, 'cause it's like it gave me permission to start flirting with women for what I really like. I like women with large butts, it's just one of my things.

B: Well, it's a good thing! Yeah, there's nothing like a nice fat ass.

D: Oh, god. Oh, god. And also, it's really attractive to see somebody who's comfortable in their body. I've been working on that one for a long time. Big women who are comfortable in their body, like the woman you saw. One that is moving freely and happily. It just makes the world look better. Very sensual.

B: How has fat affected your experience as a femme in the dyke community?

D: (I have to make my own corsets!) It's almost as if you're not really a femme if you're fat, or at least it was for a long time. That's changed. But then, a lot of us have worked really hard to change it. *sigh*, it's real difficult. It's really... I used to have this girlfriend whose horror in life was her fear that her lover would leave her for a man. Well, my horror as a femme is that my lover would leave me for a skinny femme. A high-fashion femme. And I don't do high fashion. I do a form of high fashion, but since I make most of my high-fashion clothes or alter them, it's not like your traditional... [heavy laugh]... it's not Kate Moss; it's not even Isabel Rosalini. No, it required an enormous amount of chutzpah. Fortunately I knew some really big women who were femmes who did it and carried it off with no money, thrift store makeovers, and it gave me all these notions. So, I got into the whole thing about being a trash femme. Which means, you know, it doesn't matter if your fishnet hose split—it adds to the look—because they always do, for chrissake! Who can afford to buy new ones? And I made corsets. I made corsets for all my big girlfriends. I said god, who could pay those prices? And I got the

recipe from Amazon Drygoods and started making my own.

It also helps moving here. In New York it was really painful and impossible. Jewelle and I have talked about this. Being big in New York was really, much more obnoxious. But moving to California there was much more of a community that really did more than lip service. There were actually a great many big women here who were like, really working on body acceptance. And there were shops. It's really extraordinary for me to buy clothes that fit. Most of my life, probably it was because of being poor, I bought clothes in thrift stores. Honey, finding clothes to fit you in thrift stores is really hard, and even making over clothes. I used to be the mistress of buying big jeans and splitting the seams and putting panels in. When I'd buy jeans I'd split every one of 'em and then my girlfriend discovered... well, suggested that I make some further alterations.

B: Zippers?

D: Velcro. Velcro's much more fun. Zippers are a pain in the butt. Although it does make a noise when she opens it in the restaurant.

B: When you fantasize sexually, are you fat?

D: [giggle] I'm not even human in some of my fantasies. I'm pretty much myself, which has only been the case for the last decade. No, when I was a kid I was never... when I was a kid I used to have fantasies like some of those short stories by Samuel Delaney, where the

preliminary part of the fantasy was always being kidnapped and taken to an alien fat farm, and forcibly fucked and reduced until I was *the* perfect size, and *then* everything would happen, which is a really interesting self-hating sexual fantasy. Some of the masochism was ok, but the rest of it was pretty awful. Now pretty much, I'm me, but I'm younger and my back doesn't hurt.

B: Where do you find a sense of community in your life? Do you currently feel closely connected to the "women's SM community"?

D: Not in particular. I find a sense of community from my friends. The virtue of living this long is that I have friends that I've had for 20 years, that I've known through a great many struggles, and we're all of an age, and we're all of a size, and we're all pretty much of an attitude. And those are the people I trust. Since turning 40, I don't make friends as easily. It's harder and harder. I'm a little concerned about it. It's hard for me to meet new people. There's just so much history you can't catch up. It drives me crazy. I

find it frustrating. I'll tell you, though, I find more of a community with, essentially what I think of as the fat women's community these days. Because it's *really* important to me.

I had this moment in my mom's last bout with cancer. She had gone through chemo, and she was just, she looked like she had been through hell. She was just gray and exhausted and sick as a dog. She was lying in this bed, and she said "well, if there's one good thing, I've lost five pounds." And when she said that it was like she had just punched me right in the heart, and it was like I can't stand this any fucking more. And that's been, it was five years ago. And I stopped, and I just get really angry and really disgusted. So I kinda work on this stuff. Sometimes it's really work, it's real serious emotional work. It's insidious. But I get bored with it. I get bored with work.

B: How has having a child affected your sex life?

D: [big laughs] Ah, the year when there was none?! God! It totally and completely stopped it for awhile, altered it significantly, and has only recently come back.

B: Do you think you will talk about being fat with your son?

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Dorothy Allison and Alix Layman photographed by Jill Posener

D: I don't think I'll have to. I don't know. Probably. It's different with boys. I don't think...my experience with my sisters and other people in my family with boys is that they don't talk about bodies. There's this whole "mommies are not for that kind of discussion." We talk about it now, and we take baths together and it's just, he's more fascinated with my genital jewelry than fat. He's still pretty comfortable. He's still in that stage where he's not self-conscious. It was a big issue for me with one of my nieces. My niece is my, as my mother says, my spittin' image. She's probably 18 this year. And I bet she's been doing amphetamines. She's lost a lot of weight. It makes me crazy! My sister basically is like "well, she's lost weight." Come on girl, I was an addict, you were an addict, let's get real. My sister won't listen. She'd rather my niece be an addict than be fat. And I've been talking to her since she was 11 about it, because she...my younger sister is two years younger than me, and she is, it's the biggest issue of her life. She is convinced that because she is, was, fat, she is a rigid dieter—christ, god, she looks like Pat Nixon, and she looks that miserable!—my sister's attitude pretty much shaped my niece's attitude, and I've tried to be a different voice. But I can't see that it's had any effect. It's more important with girls.

B: Yeah, I know that my grandmother on my father's side was very fat, and I know that my father had a lot of negativity about fat and it's really class related for him. He's first generation middle class and trying to move away from being seen as working class. I remember as a little child him saying that he doesn't want a wife with a fat ass, he doesn't want a woman like his mother.

D: He wants a trophy wife.

B: He wants to move away from that...You really have to start working on people when they're young.

D: Or just preventing that stuff from getting lodged in. Most of my mother's family, the women were big, most of them were fat, but they were also big—I'm a shrimp—much taller than me, broader shoulders, and so they could carry weight better. They weren't just fat. My stepfather's family, who were like, really dragging their ass into the middle class with every tooth they could grab, man, they all became dentists and lawyers. And their women were much skinnier. My stepfather was obsessed with it, and you could see the impact on Barbara and me. I can remember, his stuff about food and control was appalling. Just that whole way of making you eat what he wanted you to eat and then constantly belittling us and harping on us, and harping about how fat my aunts were, how fat my cousins were, how ugly we were, and going after my mother on the same stuff. So we grew up with that crucible. It's amazing that any of us can have any kind of comfort in our bodies at all. And I think he's the norm.

B: Yes.

D: I can remember visiting my aunts, who were big women who ate and cooked a lot, and we'd all sit around the table and eat finger food, and they were really comfortable in their bodies. Especially when I was in my 20s, that was when I held onto it with every tooth I had, because I had to have something to hold onto. Because I was trying to pass as middle class. And it was clear to me that part of passing as middle class was trying to be skinny. And being comfortable with being held in contempt by other people was also passing. Because they would go to the grocery store and people would make snarky comments and my aunts would mouth off back. But my mother would never mouth back. I wanted to be like my aunts, and take no shit, and not be ashamed of myself. It's been something I've been trying my whole life.

B: My mother's family is very fat phobic, first-generation middle

class, and the same...cooking a lot of food, (big Irish-Catholic family,) always cooking, always eating, tea, everything; but then, at the same time, "don't eat anything!" The urge to cook and nurture through cooking—that being a part of a family—was very much there, but it was very much for, what my grandmother calls my brother, "the little man." It was about feeding my brother, feeding my uncle, with the women just picking or not getting a plate, but there would always be all this food around. There was such a conflict of...

D: For me it was also really clear that being poor and trashy was about being fat. About passing was about losing weight. Assume the guise, wear the right clothes. The right clothes never fit!

B: That's one of the things I wanted to talk about. In *Skin* you talked about "Class, Race, Sexuality, gender and all the other categories by which we categorize and dismiss each other," and it has always seemed to me that fat phobia is really intertwined with the operating modes and the stereotypes of those categories and that often there is...it gets complicated. Because they are conflicting stereotypes of "poor fat lazy" and "rich fat capitalist pig"—it's ok for a business man to be big and fat.

D: A man.

B: If you are fat it seems like your success is occurring despite the fact that you are fat. Like you said earlier about being sexually aggressive, you have to be aggressive—you have to be twice as wonderful in every way—you have to be bright, you have to be on top of things.

D: You damn well have to have a sense of humor!

B: To make up for the fact that you are taking up so much space! And that you're *so* present. How do you see the ways that classism works to intersect and perpetuate fat phobia and vice versa?

D: I don't think of it as fat phobia. I think of it as hatred. I don't think they're afraid of us. I think they hate us. Like people who'd rather you be addicted to amphetamines than that you be a size twenty. It's incomprehensible except it isn't. It's totally comprehensible. It makes perfect sense. Fat is trashy. Fat is lower class. Fat is evidence that you are unredeemed, far as I can tell. Salvation is clearly held through eating lettuce and starving yourself. Ascetic model. But, what has saved my life—the piece of one of the pieces that has saved my life—is that concept of embracing being scary; embracing being unacceptable. And I'll tell you the truth. I think that the fantasy that I cooked up of my aunts as not giving a shit about what people thought of them—big women comfortable in their bodies—is a fantasy. I don't think that was entirely true. I think the reality is that my aunts—I know—their men left them, their men treated them bad, the men laughed at them. These were women who, a lot of their identity was built around their families: "The Husband," then the father and the children. And since that whole thing was about losing that loved object. They were miserable a lot of the time and that a lot of what they did—the bravado—was a life-saving strategy. And they could only use it sometimes. But every time I saw it I grabbed it and held on to it. The thing is, I think the culture thinks about lower class women—the image of the lower class woman—is this big mouthy dangerous...

B: Like Rosanne.

D: Taking up lots of space...yeah. And also, a woman who is willing to do the forbidden, say the forbidden thing, cause you know, mostly, we do. Lower class women tend to have a fearlessness about their body and its functions. I used to think skinny girls didn't shit. Ya know?

B: YES!

D: And I knew that fat women had more odor to them, more sense of—when they came by you could smell one coming. Skinny girls didn't smell and didn't shit. They weren't real. They didn't have bodies. They were these ethereal creatures. You were earthy, real, and at the same time, dirty and contemptible and scary. It all gets bound up together. I don't think the culture has sorted it out. I know for a *fact* that even the best-intentioned feminist-conscious fat women haven't sorted it out. Cause I've run into it over and over again.

B: I feel like we have such a death culture that we just fear bodies. A lot of it is people have problems with other people—the differences that we have. Like shitting and just all of those things that we do that people don't want to talk about and they can't deal with them but they are such a part of our lives.

D: I am on the other side of it too, I am starting to be aware of the fact that—I am in early menopause—I am having all of that stuff, all the hot flashes, sweats, and insomnia and everything. Boy, people do *not* want that to be mentioned. You can be standing there, water

just running all over you, sweat running all over your body, and you're like cooking and they're pretending that nothing is happening. You say "I need to fan myself and sit down." and they're like "is something wrong?" LOOK CLOSER. Same thing with being big. And don't know about the fear. I think it is hatred. And I think it's about people hating our bodies. We are more our bodies in some consensual sense.

B: People are always trying to get away from that—always this pursuit of immortality...living for the future and raising themselves above their bodies. There is such a split.

D: But there is so much stuff! What I am excited about with the whole idea of FaT GiRL magazine is that we start to talk about some other stuff. And I have got some questions that people are not even addressing. LIKE: Have you ever noticed that the SM community, women or men, has this whole thing about discipline? *You know the whole fantasy of discipline?* Well honey, think about the fantasy of discipline for fat girls. Cause I know—I once did an interrogation discipline scene for three days and all I was fed for three days was water and gruel. And at the time I kept thinking, there's something about this I gotta remember after I stop having orgasms.

B: That's very funny because...I have been a very good girl, and then broken a scene over someone trying to feed me gruel. I didn't realize what a...

D: Gruel is awful! (big cackle)

B: Besides having to deal with that level of—I can give anything else but if you're gonna force me—I can't deal with this. Forget it! I was so out. This is it. Get away from me! But it's true. Physically being a fat woman who's got society always disciplining your body and then breaking through—giving that up and allowing someone to discipline you. There's a lot that's going on.

D: Oh, massive stuff. I'm totally fascinated. I remember having long conversations with Fakir. He does the amazing tight-waisting. He has been doing it since he was a teenager. Well, I've done the same thing. There were two years of my life as a teenager when I wore a chain as tight as I could wear it around my waist, and I was never a small girl. But I am really fascinated with how that dovetails with learning to love the body. We haven't even gotten to that. We are still fighting over whether we can be a size twenty and live in the world. There is so much more stuff.

B: It's something I've been thinking about with corsets—allowing

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myself to be photographed with a corset on—what’s going on here for me? It’s something I enjoy—the process, I like the way it feels, I like how I get high, I feel very sexy, but is it an image I want to be reproduced for other people to see? When we were doing our Fat Girl reading there was a discussion between some of us about fetish wear—not wanting to wear some of it because of how it can be restricting or binding or how it shapes our bodies. To do that in public—when I wear it am I reinforcing their things about fat or is it...it’s really fun for me because it is sort of, in your face, ya know?

D: Besides. You and I both know a fat woman wearing a corset is an entirely different movie than a skinny person.

B: That’s for sure!

D: And it’s way more—at least for me—it’s like cross dressing. It’s a real challenge to the concept of who is supposed to, what you are supposed to look like wearing a corset. Now, this is separate from the image which has it’s own sexual context. And separate from the physical sensation. I love the physical sensations of corsets and tight bondage. In fact, my assumption is that tight-waisting is a kind of bondage for me that I really enjoy. There is no way in hell that I will allow anybody to tell me that I couldn’t do it because it would communicate a bad image. But I’m not always gonna want to give those people that treat.

B: Right.

D: Sometimes it’s just too personal.

B: That is something we have been trying to do with Fat Girl—getting past Fat 101 and start really talking about complicated things. Feeling good about my body is a complicated process. I feel that with doing the zine, doing public things, people have been calling me a lot on the phone about so much that they are getting from the zine and how liberating it is for them, and I feel like when they call I have to be in ok space with them and Rah Rah Yeah it’s wonderful but you know that it’s not always fun. Being fat is very complex and...

D: I can be positive and supportive lots of times but sometimes I am not feeling comfortable in my own body.

B: Right. You want to be angry. You want to be where you’re at! I think that the fat women’s communities have grown and progressed enough where to be able to not be a *fat happy monolithic fat happy* crowd.

D: Especially that whole word *happy*. The whole notion that we are all supposed to be so fucking happy.

B: I have one last question. We at Fat Girl, in publishing the zine, have had to make some difficult choices about penetration, and hard core materials. Some of the decisions have been in terms of within the fat dyke community itself, having the zine be flexible enough to have a dialogue for as varied as the community is. Some of the choices we have had to make in terms of how and where we are going to be able to distribute. And we have made a choice that if something comes along that makes us hot or is difficult we are going to print it. And if we can’t distribute it where we have been then we can’t. But we are going to try to take that route. How do you think that the ongoing political back lash against the queer community and in particular the focus on banning the distribution of obscene queer writing across the borders of Canada—right now there is very aggressive movement on the part of the right to control material even to the point of trying to legislate stuff on the internet (trying to put obscenity laws on the internet)—how does this affect you as a writer and your writing?

D: I work with PEN, I do all this volunteer work. I see one of my major have-to-do stuff is to basically be completely conscious of the

fact that these sons of bitches are trying this shit and keep working. Some of the legal stuff is nightmarish. Because they’ll break you financially before they break you legally. For example, if you do publish pictures with penetration and they basically rule it as obscene and confiscate the magazine and take you to court—you can get really busted in North Carolina—it can cost you a fortune. Now you will probably eventually win the case except nobody’s been able to carry the case long enough to win. Because it is so fucking expensive. Same movie in Canada. They’re not winning on the censorship issues, they’re winning on financial issues. And the same thing is happening to writers. If you can’t get paid you are basically writing to exchange work with other people, you’re not able to do any wider distribution. It’s really...*sigh*...same old same old. I don’t think they can shut it down on the internet. I think they can shut it down on the services like AOL and CompuServe and Prodigy. They can try to control it but they’re not going to be able to...

B: That’s what the legislation is about. Looking at charging huge fines to service providers for every bit that is written.

D: But they won’t have to do it. The service providers are going to censor themselves. They already are. And people will go off the service providers to get it. Just trickier—you have to do some education. I think in the long run that is something I am in favor of. Of not being bonded into...That’s not where I am worried. Where I am worried is what people are persuaded to do themselves. What people are

I’m in favor of the creation of more mouthy big girls!

being persuaded not to write. Out of either fear or financial need. Just making a living stuff. I’m just going through dealing with the lawyers at Dutton because of this new book. It is a very lesbian book. It’s very frank. And they are totally—these are all true stories, all family stories—and everything has to go through the lawyers. It’s driving me *nuts*. I keep thinking I don’t ever want to do this again. Except that I believe in doing this. But I can see where the impulse comes not to do it. I have friends who are writing who are really fine young writers who can’t sell their stuff to a trade press cause it’s sexually explicit and the trade press are scared shitless of them. Scared for two reasons. One the legal stuff, which is about money, and then scared because they’re afraid we won’t sell enough. You have some astonishing young writers that are being deliberately

marginalized. Writing is about time; time is about cash. I am less worried about government censorship than that.

B: I think that censorship works well when it creates the environment where people are censoring themselves and I feel that is what is going on.

D: If you make people really embattled you get fat women who are afraid to show images of themselves, because after all it might hurt your distribution. You might suddenly have to start making these decisions because the money would become so tight.

B: Well, we’re not publishing for any money right now so...

D: It’s a labor of love.

B: It would change what we are doing. We set out realistically knowing that Fat Girl magazine wouldn’t support me in that way but it gives the juice and go out and do my job and do the mundane things that I do to get my survival money.

D: There is one other little detail. It will have an enormous impact on other magazines that are more straight because these ideas generalize. It’s the kind of work that goes out and changes the world.

B: It’s changing me.

D: I’m in favor of the creation of more mouthy big girls! ✨