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The #1 Lesbian Monthly

March 2004

# Girlfriends

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INTERVIEW

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# Alice's Rest Stop

The Sundance favorite *What Alice Found* gives us a road map to raunch.

by Candace Moore

## A. Dean Bell's character-driven

indie, *What Alice Found*, hits major cities this winter with a carefully measured wallop. This film, about a teen learning the in-and-outs of the "servicing industry" from a weathered truck-stop prostitute, won a Special Jury Prize for "Artistic Merit and Emotional Truth" at 2003's Sundance Film Festival. Like slow pupils, we are re-schooled scene after scene by Bell's film before we acclimate to the fact that here we cannot rely on stock inferences about characters, nor do we have a road guide to

where this particular story will park. Shot on digital camera, mostly in close-ups inside the confines of an RV, it's a sometimes out-of-focus,

grainy, wobbly ride, which only underscores the narrative's carsick qualities. Recalling *You Can Count on Me's* emotional precision, *What Alice Found* unpacks its dramatic tension surprisingly, without stunts or much excess fat to lop off the script.

Disgruntled with her day job as a ground-down New Hampshire supermarket clerk, Alice (screen newcomer Emily Grace) stuffs a wad of register cash in her crotch and heads out on the highway. Destination: Florida. She fiddles with a beloved dolphin necklace, coddling a fantasy that she'll study marine biology in the sunshine state.

A world away from small-town New England, there are fewer sun-dappled, rose-colored realities in store for Alice. When one of her tires is slashed at a rest stop, an older couple swoops in to the rescue. Like a stolid Western hero grown gray and roly-poly, Bill

(Bill Raymond) slaps on her spare while his chatterbox wife Sandra (Tony-winner Judith Ivey, who carries the film) soothes the girl's ruffled feathers with the sweet intonations of a surrogate mom. They'll keep close behind her on the interstate to ensure she's okay. Of course, Alice's car engine goes up in smoke on the side of the road miles later. Stranded in the dark, with her stash of cash nowhere to be found, Alice takes Bill and Sandra up on their offer of a cushy ride south.

We sense that appearances aren't what they seem with the sweet couple Alice first describes as "old farts" or "born-again." But we aren't sure what the two are hiding until we hear Sandra moaning and groaning with a trucker at an overnight stop as Bill polices patiently outside. Alice gets an earful, and a clue as she watches the john exiting, zipping up his pants. She soon grills Sandra about the world's oldest profession, looking to make up the getaway money she's lost. Expert and unfazed, Sandra saucily lays her tricking secrets bare, pointedly telling Alice to remember one thing about men: "they're all dogs—even Jesus picked Mary Magdalene." Once an innocent plain jane, Alice transforms into a smoky-eyed Cleopatra, racking up five times the ordinary "lot lizard's" fee, while tipping her good Samaritans for her use of their "Honey Bunny Wagon" (as Bill advertises it over the CB).

As the "recreational" vehicle veers off course more than it makes headway, the question *What Alice Found* ultimately asks is: How does Alice's job affect her sexuality? The sex scenes lack the violence the movie seems to imply is imminent, yet they are gruesome in their vacuity. One customer, dripping sweat on Alice's face, begs her to tell him how large he is inside her. Eyes glazed, she replies, "Oh, it's so big," with no awe whatsoever. Afterward, the man rips off her dolphin necklace—a bit too obvious a reference to the simultaneous symbolic deflowering of Alice's dreams.

What Alice finds in the "wilderness" she explores is not so unseemly or



Sandra (Judith Ivey) shares sex tips with naive Alice (Emily Grace).

horrifying as much as it is utterly dull. In this regard, the film is less of a moral fable and more of a reality check. Playing on the viewer's own expectations, fears of the unknown, and notions about how sex work changes (or does not change) the identity of the sex worker, *What Alice Found* posits the no-nonsense Sandra, in some ways, as a perfectly good mentor. If and when Alice does get to Florida, the film suggests, she's going to be able to cope with the complexities of a very real world. Grade: **B+**

Candace Moore recently edited the book *Revolutions of the Mind*.



video & dvd

# Hollywood Heavies

These DVDs prove Tinseltown's commitment to the cause.

by Candace Moore

## Featuring monologues performed by some of

Hollywood's elite actresses (including Glenn Close, Mary Alice, and Marisa Tomei), this tear-jerking documentary gives an insider's view on the writing workshops playwright Eve Ensler (*Vagina Monologues*) has facilitated for four years at the New York Bedford Hills Correctional Facility for Women. Although coach Ensler comes off as annoying at times, the convicts' stories themselves are fascinating and cut right to the heart.

### What I Want My Words to Do to You

dirs. Madeleine Gavin, Judith Katz, and Gary Sunshine  
Warner Home Video, 2003



Close (center) performs for the prisoners.

Through memoir, it seems, each of the fifteen women is able to unlock deeper feelings about their crimes, their sentences (mostly twenty-five to life, for murder), and themselves. Grade: **A**

### The Laramie Project (HBO, 2002)

This film dramatizes a New York theatre company's attempt to phrase a tragedy and its aftermath in the words of the citizens of Laramie, Wyoming—the town where gay college student Matthew Shepard was brutally beaten and left tied to a country fence to die. The players of the Tectonic Theatre Project, led by Moisés Kaufman (who interviewed hundreds of Laramie's citizens over a period of two years), are joined by an all-star cast, including Laura Linney, Peter Fonda, Christina Ricci, Steve Buscemi, Catherine Manheim, and Clea DuVall. Enacting the language used to verbalize the horror, bafflement, homophobia, and hope experienced at this site, *The Laramie Project* offers up a lyrical homage to Shepard's memory. Grade: **A**

### The Celluloid Closet (Columbia Tri-Star Home Video, 1996)

Based on Vito Russo's seminal work of published film criticism/history, which looks at gay and lesbian representation on the silver screen from the advent of the moving picture until the early '90s—when Russo passed away from AIDS—this is *the* movie about homosexuals in the movies. Sexpert Susie Bright lovingly details her young identification with early black-and-white lesbian faves such as Morocco and Queen Christina. Lily Tomlin provides the voiceover—the glue that holds together commentaries by Shirley MacLaine, Jan Oxenberg, Susan Sarandon, and Whoopi Goldberg (to name just a handful of the industry greats interviewed in the film) and numerous clips from the history of gay cinema. Grade: **A**

### After Stonewall (PBS, 1999)

Picking up where 1986's Emmy award-winning PBS documentary *Before Stonewall* left off, *After Stonewall* captures the major historical events and queer cultural movements since the 1969 Stonewall riots galvanized gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and gender variants to fight together against oppression, hate, and near-genocide. Narrated by singer Melissa Etheridge and including interviews with Jewelle Gomez, Dorothy Allison, and Rita Mae Brown, *After Stonewall* traces the grueling civil-rights battles we've fought and victories we've won over the past three decades. Bringing its historical coverage as current as 1999, the film also highlights how much is left to be desired. Should be required viewing for any Contemporary American History class. Grade: **A**

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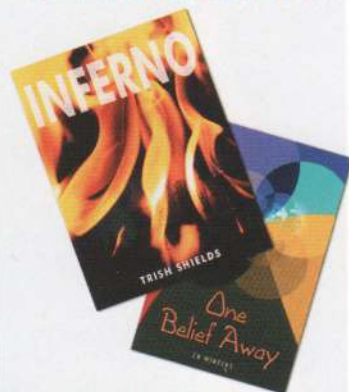
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# Keep Getting Better

It was a true *Queer Eye* moment. Ten harried employees at a lesbian publishing company realized one day they were unable to bear another nine-to-five in their junky office. Demoralized by thrift-store desks, dangling cables, and plastic shelving someone rescued from the street, we made the call.

Enter tanned, Italian-leather-jacketed interior designer David Barnett. He drew maps, picked our colors, bossed around his "previously owned" office furniture dealer, and terrorized a small army of installers. In the midst of the chaos, he took me shopping for a fish-tail palm.

Our professional-looking new office is only one of the major changes taking place as *Girlfriends* marks its tenth anniversary. I'm sure you've noticed, for example, that since this year's January issue, the magazine has been sixteen pages longer. As of June, Creative Director (and our favorite in-house "queer eye") Ethan Duran will completely redesign the magazine, and Assistant Editor Mignon Freeman and I will debut longer features and new regular departments (including food and wine—a first).

Budget-conscious readers will also have noticed that we recently cut *Girlfriends'* subscription price, from \$29.99 to \$21.95. The new price reflects our commitment to offering quality content at a price that's competitive with other gay magazines.

Speaking of the newsstand, Circulation Director Heather Petrocelli just informed me that beginning with this issue, *Girlfriends* will be available in a bunch of Safeway supermarkets in California. I was floored. In these days of increasing

conservatism, when Wal-Mart balks at even carrying *Cosmopolitan*, Heather P. made it possible for left-coast gay ladies to pick up a quart of milk, a loaf of bread, and their favorite lesbian magazine all at once. Brava!

Also noteworthy in this issue, we're bringing out our eighth annual Sappho Awards—honoring queer-friendly film—a month early this year, to coincide with the Oscars. For the fourth time, Melissa Etheridge, symbolic godmother to many lesbians, graces our cover. (Don't tell David that one of us actually has a Melissa symbol tattoo; I don't think that passes as very stylish!)

Enjoy.

Heather Findlay, Editor in Chief



RANI GOEL

Me in our new digs, just one of some exciting changes here.

# Girlfriends

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