



Playwright Eve Ensler's hand totally cracks her up.

The 'Vagina' dialogue

Eve Ensler discusses domestic violence, the Bush administration and whether she really hates men

BY NIKKI SILVERSTEIN

Eve Ensler, author, playwright, performer, activist and mother, will be the keynote speaker at the Marin Services for Women 2006 annual benefit dinner this Wednesday, September 27. Best known for her Obie Award-winning play *The Vagina Monologues*, Ensler's hit motivated her to create V-Day, a movement to end violence against women and girls, funded by worldwide performances of the play. Bold, passionate and compassionate at 63, Ensler spoke with the *Pacific Sun* about V-Day, politics and her reconceived freedom as a single woman.

You've had many well-known women participate in V-Day by reading *The Vagina Monologues*. Have you considered building a bridge to the conservatives by inviting Ann Coulter and her friends to read it, especially since it involves her jumping up and down saying the word "c--t" over and over?

Everyone is welcome to help end violence on V-Day. It doesn't excite me to think about Ann Coulter saying that word. I get excited thinking about *all* women wanting to be a part of V-Day and helping end violence against women. I want all women to be part of it.

My sister and I are both in our 40s and dealing with sagging skin and cellulite. After we saw you perform *The Good Body* in San Francisco, we both walked away wanting to feel

empowered and comfortable about our bodies. Much easier said than done. How did you get to the place where you accepted your body?

Acceptance is not an absolute state. I'd like to tell you "you get there and you're done," but it doesn't work that way. I'm really happy that I have a body and live in it, but I have my bad days. The body is always changing, so you're constantly coming to terms with your new body. I find that when I reach outside of myself, then my obsession with my body goes away. When I'm working to help people, I'm not self-obsessed.

How can we teach our daughters to be happy in their own skin when the media bombards us with gorgeous women and perfect bodies?

Daughters get their messages from mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, aunts and uncles. We need to change the message that we send to our daughters. When you're around a 10-year-old girl, don't talk about how great she looks because she's thin or that she looks like she gained weight. All of this conversation does have an impact on girls. If we could all send the right messages to young girls, they would be happy with their bodies. The obsession would just end.

Are women guilty of complicity by buying *Vanity Fair* and *Cosmo* every month?

Guilt doesn't serve anything. I > 10

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don't buy those magazines. It opens up a pathology in me that I don't want to open. Don't you find it's about consumerism and wanting more?

Yeah. It makes me feel that I'll never be good enough.

Magazines are an entryway to that feeling. It's really a choice where you pick up your pain.

Bill Clinton recently spoke about how to determine if a presidential administration is successful. He says that we have to ask, "Are we better off today than we were before?" and that we should be "keeping score." Do you think women in America are better off today, under the current administration, than they were six years ago?

Under the Bush administration? How could that be?

Have you been keeping score?

Reproductive rights have been undermined significantly. Women are living in a culture where there is a strong push back to the traditional family and fundamentalism in the form of Christianity. When there's fundamentalism, in any form, women's rights are always suppressed. Sexuality is suppressed, women are demonized and turned into bad girls.

Bush says the War on Terror has helped liberate women in Afghanistan and Iraq.

He's told a lot of lies. I've traveled to Afghanistan and it's almost as bad as it always was. We're responsible for raping women in Iraq; for creating an environment where there's a serious erosion of women's rights. Under Saddam Hussein, women in Iraq were the most free women in the Mideast. They were doctors and lawyers. V-Day funds women in Iraq who are on the front lines protecting women there. We've brought in a much more fundamental Islamic rule. Rape, selling women, sex trafficking. This is documented. Absolutely horrific. It's dangerous and out of control for women in Iraq.

Some critics have said you're anti-male. What do you say when someone asks, "Do you hate men?"

That is so crazy. I never see the world in generalities like that. I don't know why people say I hate men because of *The Vagina Monologues*. When people don't want to confront reality they make up things. It wasn't about men, it was about women. Men don't like to hear that something isn't about them. Women go to the movies or read a book about men and they embrace it, but men don't do that.

So, how do you feel about men?

I have a son who's the heart of my hearts [Enslar's adopted son is actor Dylan McDermott]. He's the great love of my life.

Dylan McDermott's a love of my life, too!

[Laughs] But I don't hate men. I'm against violence against women. Is 95 percent of that violence committed by men? Yes. Do I hold men responsible for violence against women? Yes, but that doesn't mean I'm against men. I want to help transform.

Besides fundamentalism, why do you think some men become violent against women?

Men are brought up in a tyrannical way. They're taught not to cry. They're taught not to feel.

Where does all that pain and anger go? It expresses itself in violence. We have many men involved in V-Day. They tell me to keep speaking out, because they aren't violent and they want it to end. Actually, saying I hate men, it's like saying you hate the Earth because you want to stop global warming.

We have some important elections coming this November. Do you think having more vaginas on the ballot would be helpful?

It's not going to help unless it's the right women. Having a woman in office isn't always the answer. Look at Condoleezza Rice. We need to put women in power who have different ethics and different operating systems. It's difficult for women. They climb the ladder, they compete with men and they lose their own way of operating. If they all end up like men, how has that made a difference.

What will make a difference?

Ending violence against women should be central in everything. Then we'd be able to focus on peace and compassion. We could think about global warming. Connecting with others could be the point of our lives.

I understand that V-Day is making a difference. After nine years and more than \$40 million dollars raised, tell me one of your success stories.

There are so many successes. We opened a safehouse in Africa to protect women from genital mutilation. Women are coming and bringing their daughters. It's making a difference.

What project are you working on now?

It's a play called *The Treatment*. It's all about torture and it just started running in New York. My son Dylan is starring in it.

I write a column on the dating triumphs and disasters of women [See "Single in the Suburbs," page 13]. Tell me about your worst date.

I don't date.

Not ever?

I'm now single. I'm now free. I have no idea what that dating thing is. I just don't get it. I meet people and I have experiences, but I don't date. When it's defined as a date, I don't want a part of

that. I never have. When I was younger I was a hippie and things just happened. I've had two long-term relationships, so I didn't date. I love this period of my life today. I love having my own place, waking up by myself, being the creator of my own destiny.

To me, waking up alone is the worst part.

It shouldn't be. Reconcieve it. You think this story is about being alone, but you need to change it. Think about how glorious it is to have a life, to be with the people *you want* to be with. How did you get this story?

From the time I was a little girl, I've been programmed to want to be married.

There's a bad rap with women—called marriage. I've been doing interviews with women about marriage. I asked a woman who's getting married soon, "Why?" She said no one had ever asked her that before. She said, "They only ask when." You need to break out of the conditioning. Can you unweave the story?

It's a pretty solid story. Even now, my parents always ask me when I'm getting married.

You need to ask them, "What's the

problem?" Let's really rethink that. Ask your parents to stop asking you that question. Have them ask another question like—how's your work? How's your soul? How's your mortality? Have them ask another question. Reconcieve it.

Did you have to reconceive things when you became single again?

I did. When I was supposedly secure, I was living in an illusion. Then all that illusion got torn away. It was scary. I actually have a new book about this coming out in two weeks: *Insecure at Last*. It's about embracing insecurity. I love being insecure. We're all insecure. For me, it was about the attachment. Then I started to get happy. Sometimes when you're with someone you become deadened. It freezes you so you don't have to grow anymore. You think—I'm with someone so I'm not really alone. But you are. I'm with someone, so I won't die. But you will. I don't want anyone to take away the real story anymore. I want to live in the truth. *

For information about reservations for the annual benefit dinner with keynote speaker Eve Ensler, please go to the Marin Services for Women's Web site at www.marinservicesforwomen.org.