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## Binnie Kirshenbaum

**History on a Personal Note**  
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**Why do you choose to write your stories in the first person?**

There is an intimacy to the first person, as if the author is speaking directly to the reader. As if the "I" is telling "You" about something that happened to "Me". Like two friends talking, sharing secrets. I also like working with voice, to try and hear and then relate how a person speaks. To write in the first person is like writing a monologue for that character. While I am writing a particular story, during that time when I am at my desk with it, I try to become that person, and to tell their story as if they were telling it to a friend over dinner.

**The theme of being "Jewish, but not really" runs through many of your stories. Why are you drawn to the general sense of displacement and lack of belonging these characters display?**

I am often concerned with the themes of alienation and loneliness; I think those conditions tug at the heart and we all feel them but have a hard time admitting when we do. To be Jewish is to be, in some ways, forever the outsider, and the "not really" prevents the characters from having any sense of community, to be outside society at large and outside the Jewish world as well ... It assures that they will never quite belong. Because people need each other to be happy, this creates an unhappiness I think is important to explore.

**Many of the married women in these stories have affairs. Several of your stories feature younger women with older men. Is there anything in particular about these couplings that provides dramatic possibilities?**

Dramatic possibilities arise from conflict, from difficulties, from differences. Love that is forbidden or frowned upon inherently sets up conflict and also can heighten the passion. *Romeo and Juliet* is a great play because their love was forbidden. Had their parents been friends, not only would we have no story, they probably wouldn't have even liked each other.

**Most of your stories in *History on a Personal Note* and *A Disturbance in One Place* do not reveal the name of the narrator. Is this intentional? Do you have an individual character sketch in mind before you write the story?**

I always have a character in mind. Voice and character come to me long before story or plot. In *A Disturbance in One Place*, the narrator doesn't have a name because the character is so lonely, that no one in her life is really personally connected to her. She can't even connect that simple way of sharing. She doesn't have a name because she feels entirely without identity, she is lost. Our names are the first way in which we identify ourselves and she can't even have that. That is sometimes the reason. I don't name the narrators in some of my stories. In other cases, it is for the opposite reason; if the narrator is sharing secrets with the reader, it would seem to me that they already know each other, and no introduction is necessary. When we talk to our friends, we can assume they know our names.