

News Profile: 'Nice Jewish girl's' unlikely porn-mag stint

Former editor of Playgirl seeks new, feminist fields

FROM SARAH BRONSON, NEW YORK

RONNIE KOENIG grew up in a typical Jewish home — but that didn't prevent her editing Playgirl, the female version of Playboy, until a few months ago.

Her father, a judge, and her mother, a full-time mum, enrolled her in Hebrew school and took her to synagogue on High-Holy days. Both, to put it mildly, were surprised when she went to work for the magazine — having answered an advert in the New York Times reading: “writer/editor. Must be comfortable with male nudity.”

During her job interview, she recalls, she had to look through a copy of Playgirl with minimal flinching, and was asked to write accompanying text for a pictorial of a man running through a sand dune with only a spear and his birthday suit.

Her rise was rapid — the magazine has a high turnaround rate. Soon she was associate editor, and within months, became managing editor. By the age of 26, she was editor-in-chief.

“My father has been very cool about it,” Ms Koenig told the JC.

“My mother says she's ok with it. But one time I gave her a copy of the magazine to show her articles I'd written, and the next time I came home I found that issue in a drawer under my bed. She keeps a folder with all my certificates and prizes, and I guess Playgirl didn't make it into the folder.”

Her fiancé, luckily, has been quite understanding, though according to Ms Koenig, he is uncomfortable — for two reasons.

“First, he doesn't like it that I'm looking at naked men all day,” she said. “He doesn't believe that I don't go to work to be turned on. But of course I can't get turned on at work. How could I have got anything done?”



'Full frontal feminist' — Ronnie Koenig, departing editor of Playgirl

Besides, she added, she was not attracted to the type of men featured in Playgirl. “I like skinny, artist types,” she remarked.

Less seriously, her fiancé complained: “I can never run for President now. You can't have a First Lady who was the editor of Playgirl.”

That bothered him for a day, she said, smiling. Then he came to realise that he probably wouldn't run for President anyway. “He's a writer and an actor,” she noted. “And a temp.”

After two years at Playgirl, an experience she described as a “crash course in running a magazine,” Ms

Koenig has now decided to move on to other fields.

She is focusing now on play-writing and screen-writing, and is also planning to lecture on college campuses. Her topic: “Full Frontal Feminism.”

But she'll always have Playgirl on her CV — not a bad conversation-starter.

“People assume the magazine is run by gay men,” she declared, “or by housewives with dyed red beehives and housedresses, or by sexpots with male servants in fig leaves feeding us grapes.”

“They are very surprised to see I'm this little Jewish girl.”