

it to be or the way that it had always been. But I surely wouldn't have made it any other way. Or had it any other way, either."

Geoffrey Norman takes the reader on a spiritual and physical struggle up Aconcagua, one of the highest mountain peaks in the world. He describes the events leading up to this mid-life adventure (he has just turned 50), takes us back over a series of glimpses of his life as a father, and then carries us up the mountain as if we are watching through a camera mounted on his shoulder. His daughter walks alongside him, rising to the challenge of the climb while Norman struggles, realizing at some point that he, in fact, may not make the summit. His daughter may succeed where he might fail, and at that moment she is no longer his little girl. The child becomes the leader, challenging the parent to succeed.

The mountain is a metaphor for parenting – a laborious and joyous experience that changes over time. When he realizes that he may not make the summit, Norman decides to talk to his daughter: "The kind of talk that you have a lot, but never get used to having, I suppose, when you are a dad. The kind where you say things that have to be said but that you wish you didn't have to talk about. I decided, as I had many times, to put the talk off as long as possible."

I waited for Norman to share his thoughts on parenting and middle age. In fact, he put off the talk, both with his daughter and with the reader. I waited to read about his deep feelings for his daughter but he never articulated them. Nonetheless, I believe Norman descended the mountain a changed man, changed in spirit and in his connection to his daughter. I wanted Norman to describe these changes. Unfortunately, it is as if Norman's whole story has not been told.

### ***The Big Rumpus: A Mother's Tale from the Trenches***

Halliday, Ayun.  
Seattle: Seal Press, 2002.

#### **Reviewed by Patricia R. Payette**

Ayun Halliday has been called a new generation's urban Erma Bombeck. Writing from her family's tiny Brooklyn apartment, Halliday demonstrates a Bombeckesque dry humour for reporting the absurd and hilarious everyday details of raising children. *The Big Rumpus* grew out of Halliday's pen-and-ink photocopied 'zine called the *East Village Inky* that she describes as "an anticorporate, consciousness-raising, feminist call to arms," actually a cleverly disguised collection of amusing rants, raves, and lovingly-drawn cartoons about the minute details of her family life and their colourful adventures in the East Village.

Inky is the nickname of Halliday's four-year-old daughter India, a sylph-like creature whose love of being unclothed makes her appear destined to take after her mother, a former performance artist. With impish Inky and her baby boy Milo, Halliday struggles in the motherhood trenches, determined to be true to herself while she raises kids in the "culinary and cultural diaspora" of New York, a city that she embraces as the anthesis of the soul-deadening suburbs of her Midwestern childhood. Halliday is a stay-at-home mom while her husband temps at Citibank, and she finds the only way to fight off the "isolation and despair" of her radical new lifestyle is to create a 'zine that gives full expression to her mothering self and her artist self. *The Big Rumpus* gives her room to elaborate on the topics covered in her 'zine – taking a stand in the working mothers versus stay-at-home mothers debate (she concludes that we each must do what works for us), reliving the adventures of breastfeeding Inky into late toddlerhood, discussing how she fights the commercialization of the holidays, and why she convinced her husband not to have their son circumcised.

Throughout *The Big Rumpus*, Halliday is insightful, funny, and candid about what she perceives as her strengths (she dresses Milo in Inky's hand-me-downs despite the disapproval of other playground mothers) and foibles as a parent (Inky swears like a sailor). I felt my own feelings about the challenges of motherhood validated when Halliday confesses, "the baby had me in such a choke hold that I felt nostalgic for the days when mopping the floor didn't require hours of strategic preparation." What Halliday expertly avoids is sweet sentimentality and the cliches that abound in other tales about becoming a mother. Even her soul-baring report of Inky's first two weeks spent in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit and her love letter to Milo at the book's conclusion crackle with her quick wit. "Nobody wants to read about a perfect mother," writes Halliday, and so *The Big Rumpus*, like the *East Village Inky* before it, is a highly readable account of an imperfectly real mother.

### ***The Politics of Fertility Control***

McFarlane, Deborah R., and Kenneth J. Meier.  
New York: Chatham House Publishers.

#### **Reviewed by Sandra Jarvie**

In *The Politics of Fertility Control*, McFarlane and Meier examine what "looms behind abortion policies" and review the politics of fertility control in the United States over the past thirty years. Convinced that nearly all induced abortions are preventable by effective contraception, McFarlane and Meier suggest "that abortion politics are part of a larger political struggle about values" which they term "morality politics."