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By Pat Patrick

Carlip's A la Cart Is Wildly Creative

Hawaiian Breeze plug-in oil. Amstel Light. Bananas. Little Debbie Nutty Bars. Breath Busters dog treats. Turkey.

This appears to be your basic grocery shopping list... or at least, it is mine. Fairly harmless if it is left behind in the cart, right?

Maybe not.

Lambda Award-winning author Hillary Carlip has been collecting abandoned shopping lists for years, and in her new book *A la Cart*, she puts them to use, giving each a persona and going so far as to embody the character that she has created for each list.

An exercise in amazing creativity and hilarity, *A la Cart* is also a study in the human psyche. Carlip takes into account not only the items on the lists she highlights, but also the penmanship and what each list is written on in developing larger than life characters.

Far and away, the most creative book of the year, *A la Cart* is a wild, laugh-out-loud ride that takes a sharp look at that guy or gal standing next to you in line at Kroger. Carlip once again proves that she is in fact the "SHE-daris" of writing with the same wit and daring that made *Queen of the Oddballs* such a success.



Carlip took the time to answer some questions regarding her new book:

Pat Patrick: What was your inspiration for A la Cart?

Hillary Carlip: For years I've been obsessed with shopping lists that I find in grocery stores. I'm fascinated by how much you can tell about a person from some random snippet of their lives. From the items included on the list, the style of handwriting, the paper and pen/pencil/computer used, and even misspellings ("Aunt Spray"), I can't help but imagine the women and men who left behind their lists. So in A la Cart, I took it a step further and actually became the people by portraying them and being photographed in markets as them, and also writing short stories about each.

PP: How long have you been collecting found grocery lists? What made you start collecting them? What was on the first list that spoke to you?

HC: I've been collecting lists for decades, and I have thousands. It was quite a process narrowing down to the 26 that ended up on *A la Cart*! The first list that spoke to me included, among other items, "Twizzlers", "Gum", and "Peanut Brittle", and it was written on the back of a dental appointment reminder card! How could I not start collecting them after that? To me, shopping lists are like the new memoir.

PP: What is on your grocery list right now? Anything particularly revealing about you?

HC: Well, one of my lists appears in *A la Cart* with a story about me instead of the traditional BIO. And by looking at it you can see it's not just what's ON the list that's revealing, but what it's written on, the handwriting, etc. I think mine shows a playful, creative quality with a bit o' healthy livin' thrown in!

PP: Aside from "Hillary," which of the characters you've drawn are you most like? Why? Which one are you least like?

HC: Maybe I'm most like Woody, a "Lady's Man with NO BANKRUPCIES ready to meet just one special lady with NO KIDS." Kidding. I don't think I'm really like any of them as a whole, but there are characteristics in probably all of them that are in me.

I'm definitely the least like Derrick, whose list consists of just three items: "Mouse Traps", "Cheese", "Mouse". I swear I found that list!

PP: Which character was the most fun to become?

HC: Definitely ex-porn star Pammy. I don't think I've EVER had men offer to carry my groceries out to my car!

PP: What kind of sense of accomplishment do you feel having completed a book that is a Herculean exercise in creativity?

HC: This really feels no different from anything I do creatively. I'm so pleased I fulfilled a vision I had (and "conned" someone into publishing it =)) and I'm always just hoping what I do entertains and inspires people, and they learn a little something about themselves. In this case they'll probably learn not to leave their shopping list behind! Who knows whose hands it could fall into!

PP: What's next for Hillary Carlip?

HC: I'm narrowing that down right now. I know one thing for sure -- it'll definitely be as oddball as everything else I've ever done!

----- Pat Patrick can be reached at ioutbooks@aol.com.