

COEN'S CROSSING

First the Oscars, now the New York Times best-seller list? With the publication of his first book of short stories, Fargo producer Ethan Coen flexes his literary muscles—and earns rave reviews.



First things first: Ethan Coen is not the Coen brother who's married to Frances McDormand. Nor is he the one who directed those quirky, hit-and-miss movies such as *Fargo* (the big hit) and *The Big Lebowski* (the one you missed). That's Joel. Ethan is the producer. And, what many in Hollywood don't know, is that this Coen brother is also a writer who has just penned a book of short stories called *Gates of Eden*. Coen, who won an Oscar for his work on *Fargo*, writes his fiction whenever he needs to take a break from the screenplays he co-writes with his brother. "Since it's not my profession," Ethan says, "I don't feel bad about putting the stories aside if I'm not getting anywhere." Apparently that's been pretty often, since Coen first began some of the stories in *Gates of Eden* 12 years ago. So how is this famously private—some might even say "geeky"—guy coping with the adulation of Hollywood and literary success to boot? Here, Coen lets a bit slip about his family, getting onstage at the Oscars, and how being published in *The New Yorker* felt "good, I think." —B.J. Sigesmund

Q: Let's tackle the obvious question. How different is writing short stories from scripts?

A: It's not—except there's one less of us. To tell you the truth, writing by myself isn't that different from writing with Joel.

Q: You've been elusive about the way you and your brother write.

A: It's just hard to describe. We just talk ideas through. It's a continuous conversation until we come up with where to start.

Q: Why write short stories?

A: It's a release from movies, which run the gamut from me and Joel writing alone, through production when you're interacting with scores of people, to post-production when you're with just a few people. It's sort of a break. But I wouldn't want it as a steady diet.

Q: What have you read lately?

A: Mostly Dr. Seuss and the *Rugrats* books. I've got a two-year-old.

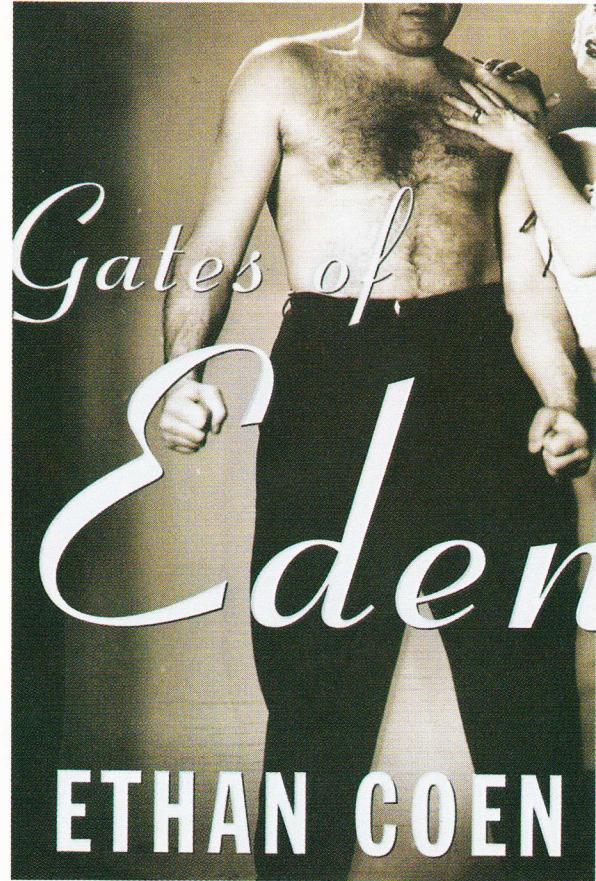
Q: It's hard to find personal information on you. So you have a child?

A: I let that slip, didn't I?

Q: What's with the privacy?

A: The obvious thing. You talk to journalists because you're promoting something. But it's not part of what you're selling.

Q: One of the stories in your book was published in



The New Yorker this summer. How'd that feel?

A: Good, I think. Yeah. Sure. What are you gonna say about it? It's gratifying. It's not the sort of thing you complain about.

Q: Are you sick of people asking you if Hollywood's treating you better since your Oscar for *Fargo*?

A: Ah, yeeeah. But we have few dealings with Hollywood. If you're part of the studio development system, winning an Oscar is a big thing in terms of what you get offered and paid; we're not, so it made less of an impact.

Q: Frances McDormand was amazingly blasé when she won hers. She may as well have been getting an award from the local PTA.

A: That's Fran. She has a healthy attitude. Those things are unbelievably odd. You get up onstage and everyone's looking at you. It's alarming. But it's like the other thing—I'm gonna complain about it?

Q: Will you tell me where you live in the city?

A: Ah, yeeeah. On the east side but below midtown. A non-descript neighborhood.

Q: Your favorite things to do in New York?

A: I'm trying to think of something that isn't insipid, like taking walks. Do you know the Earth Room [at the Dia Center for the Arts]? It's a conceptual art thing. A bunch of earth. I've never taken a person there who hasn't liked it.

Q: Where else do you hang out?

A: I used to ride my bike around Wall Street when it's empty.

Q: What else do you do?

A: I take walks.