



Author, Author

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Breakfast at the Berkeley, Calif., home of writers Michael Chabon and Ayelet Waldman doesn't unfold over leisurely cups of tea and conversations about Chekhov. Instead Waldman scrambles to get the couple's two oldest kids—ages 8 and 5—ready for school. (“There’s no Bisquick! What about French toast?”) If Chabon is awake” (he usually works past 3 a.m.), he pitches in. “We need earth tones!” he yells, searching for a pair of his daughter’s tights.

Things are no less hectic when it comes to the couple’s professional lives. After winning the 2001 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, Chabon plunged into his next projects: a screenplay for *Spider-Man 2* and a kids’ book, *Summerland*, about a boy’s quest to save the universe by playing baseball. It debuted in October at No. 1 on The New York Times’ children’s bestseller list.

Waldman, meanwhile, has *Death Gets a Time-Out*, the fourth installment in her Mommy Track mystery series, coming out in June. The books (which include this year’s *A Playdate with Death*) follow heroine Juliet Applebaum—like Waldman, a former public defender turned stay-at-home mom—as she dashes from clue to clue in between raising two kids. “Waldman breaks ground,” says mystery writer Carolyn Hart, author of the bestselling *Death on Demand* series. “She’s showing women who are wondering, ‘Do I really want to try and have it all?’ ”

Chabon, 39, and Waldman, 38, certainly seem to have struck the right balance. After getting Sophie and Ezekiel to school, Waldman turns over Ida-Rose, 18 months, to a babysitter so she can spend at least three hours writing. Chabon starts daddy duty around 1 p.m. and later cooks the family dinner. “They’re very fortunate,” says Waldman’s mother, Ricki, “that they can construct their lives so they spend a lot of time with their kids.”

The couple even manage to make time for each other, meeting weekdays at 12:30 p.m. to review their works in progress. Chabon line-edits Waldman, who began writing six years ago with his encouragement. She, in turn, offers him advice about character and plot. “Oh, for the days I was shy and retiring!” says Waldman, who was once too intimidated by her husband’s oeuvre, which includes the bestselling *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh*, to speak up. But Chabon is grateful his wife has found her voice. “I’ve gotten to the point,” he says, “where I completely depend on her reactions.”

Married since 1993 after meeting on a blind date, the couple always assumed Waldman would be the family breadwinner. The older of two children brought up mostly in Ridgewood, N.J., by retired fund-raiser Leonard, 77, and hospital administrator Ricki, 62, Waldman graduated from Harvard Law School in 1991. If she worked, the couple reasoned, Chabon (who got a master’s degree from the University of California, Irvine, in creative writing and is the older of two sons raised in Columbia, Md., by pediatrician Robert, 64, and lawyer Sharon, 60) could avoid what Waldman calls “provider anxiety.”

But with the arrival of Sophie in 1994, Waldman, then a Los Angeles public defender, began reevaluating her choices. “I’d run back from seeing clients in jail,” Waldman says, “to pump breast milk before a court appearance.” The next year she quit her job and soon after started writing. Despite her success, she says she feels no competition with her spouse: “It would be silly. He’s someone people will be buying in 300 years.” Still, she adds, it would be “awesome to make more money than he. It would take a lot of pressure off

him.” Especially now that the couple are expecting again: A son they’ve already named Abraham is due in April. Says Waldman: “We’re working on a Jewish old folks’ home with the names.”

And, perhaps, a second generation of writers. When Chabon read aloud a prepublication version of *Summerland* to Sophie, then 7, she had an editor’s reaction. “She said, ‘It said in chapter two that so-and-so had brown eyes, and 300 pages later it said she had green eyes,’ ” Chabon recalls. To him, the moment was like the life he and Waldman have made: “So unexpected,” Chabon says, “and great.”

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