



## Child's Play

Filmmaker Su Friedrich tells America about growing up lesbian.

NEA] still seemed to have the courage of their convictions and thought it was an important subject to be talked about."

A true artisan, the 42-year-old Friedrich is a self-taught filmmaker who typically writes, produces, directs, shoots, and edits all of her films—though *Hide and Seek* was shot by cinematographer Jim Denault and co-written by Friedrich's long-time girlfriend, painter Cathy Nan Quinlan. Friedrich created her first sensual, silent, black-and-white shorts in the late '70s, in a realm then dominated by men. These early works (the most famous being her exquisite 1982 short, *Gently Down the Stream*), were acclaimed at straight and gay film festivals worldwide and soon gave way to more ambitious projects: *The Ties That Bind* (1984) explored her mother's experience growing up in World War II Germany; *Damned If You Don't* (1987) combined clips from the Deborah Kerr classic *Black Narcissus*, text from the diaries of lesbian nuns, and fictional footage of a young nun's hesitant pursuit of her voluptuous neighbor; and *Sink or Swim* (1990)

**F**ILMMAKER Su Friedrich's tactile, monochrome intimacies have been touching audiences for nearly 20 years now—a long trek indeed to reach the overnight success of her latest film, *Hide and Seek*, airing throughout June on public television stations. Equal parts fiction, documentary, and found footage, the hour-long work portrays a lesbian childhood in the early 1960s. Wherever *Hide and*

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*Seek's* been shown since its premiere at January's Sundance Film Festival, the response has been tremendous. "People really identify with the film," says Friedrich, 42. Smiling brightly, she adds, "not just lesbians, but also straight women, as well as men. *Everyone* has been through that time of life."

The fictional segment of *Hide and Seek* drops in on a 12-year-old girl

named Lou (Chels Holland) and lets us tag along for licking the middle stuff out of Oreos, playing games at sleep-over parties, having crushes on girls, and learning the meanings of friendship and loyalty. This simple narrative is beautifully complemented by clips from campy educational films of the '50s and '60s, as well as contemporary interviews with women talking about their early lesbian experiences, sexual and otherwise.

Friedrich says she wouldn't have been able to make *Hide and Seek* without the Independent Television Service, which directs government money under a Congressional mandate to serve underrepresented groups via public television, and support from the National Endowment for the Arts. "It's really encouraging that something like this gets supported," she says with the fervor of an activist. "When I got the money it was an indication that [the

offered a semi-autobiographical chronicle of a young girl's relationship with her father.

Friedrich has lit a path for a different kind of filmmaking—and a different kind of filmgoing experience—by challenging her viewers with non-traditional films that, in their intimate specificity, speak to a universal experience. Of *Hide and Seek*, Friedrich says, "In a certain way it's directed to lesbians, but I tried to open the film up so that it speaks to more people than the most obvious audience. The film is really meant to give people a way to remember their childhoods."

You can't get more universal—and intimate—than that.—JENNI OLSON

*Jenni Olson is the author of The Ultimate Guide to Lesbian & Gay Film and Video (Serpent's Tail) and producer of PopcornQ, PlanetOut's gay movie Web site (www.popcornq.com).*