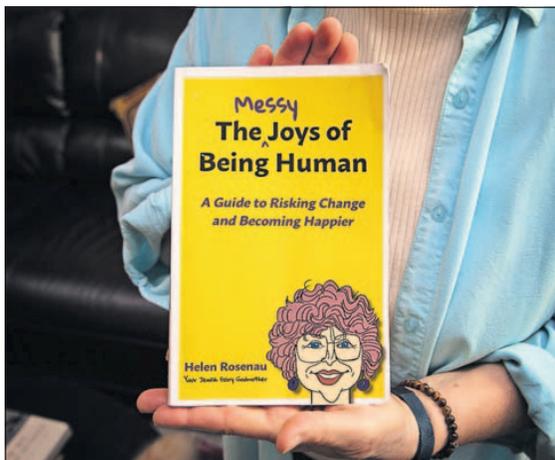




Eugene author Helen Rosenau, in her favorite writing spot in her home, has published a book, “The Messy Joys of Being Human: A Guide to Risking Change and Becoming Happier.” [PHOTOS BY CHRIS PIETSCH/THE REGISTER-GUARD]

# Taking a risk and listening

In her book, ‘The Messy Joys of Being Human,’ Helen Rosenau offers up what she’s learned



**By Cara Roberts Murez**  
For The Register-Guard

For a long time, Helen Rosenau has been listening.

She paid attention to the sparks of inspiration that led her to write an advice column in a newspaper and later to write her first book.

She’s listened to the many people who’ve written her as “Ask Your Jewish Fairy Godmother,” and “Ask Helen.” She’s answered them with advice on getting along with other people, making choices about life and work, and family drama.

Now, she’s offering what she’s learned in several decades of living, working, learning and self-reflection with the hope that it will help others work through their own issues in her new book, “The Messy Joys of Being Human: A Guide to Risking Change and Becoming Happier” (Riverview Press).

Rosenau, a Eugenean since 1981, is retired from a career that included such day jobs as teaching

**See ROSENAU, E5**

## ROSENAU

From Page E1

statistics and handling the administration work at an economics consulting firm. She published the book in September.

"I love it. I'm proud," Rosenau said. "I think I said something. I think I said it well. I think it truly reflects my philosophy of why we as humans are here and I think it's worth reading."

### Making changes

Rosenau has spent many years studying and reflecting to bring her to this point where she felt she could help others do that, too. She's worked through her own issues and, though she doesn't have all the answers, she is willing to share her own stories and what she's learned. The biggest message of the book, Rosenau said, is the need to listen.

"We have to listen to what's inside us. We have to listen to those messages that come in from the universe that sometimes we're way too dense to hear for a really long time," Rosenau said. "The reason most people fail at change is because we're trying to do it from the outside in, and this book is about changing yourself, reinventing yourself from the inside out."

We all have wounds from earlier years, she said.

"All those old stories have such a hold on us. They determine how we see ourselves. They determine how we relate to people. They limit what we aim for," Rosenau said. "I think until you can diffuse the hold that those stories have on you ... we can't make the kinds of changes that we want."

Rosenau came to her side career in advice-giving through happenstance and inspiration.

Born and raised in Philadelphia, Rosenau is the daughter of two Jewish immigrant parents, who were fortunate to leave Germany in the years shortly before World War II. Her mother arrived in Philadelphia in 1939. Her father left Germany for Brazil in 1936, then later visited Philadelphia for his brother's wedding and met his future wife.

Rosenau got a bachelor's degree in international relations from the University of Pennsylvania. She then attended UCLA, where she studied Russian history. She returned to college California State University, Northridge, where she got a master's degree in epidemiology and biostatistics.

After college, she worked as a statistical researcher and later as a counselor/recruiter for the off-campus degree programs for a couple of colleges, including Linfield College. She spent the next many years of her career as administrator at ECONorthwest, a "white hat economics firm."

"I always felt good in my day job," Rosenau said.

She reduced her schedule to part time in the late 1990s, though she didn't retire until 2012. The lighter schedule made it possible for her to seek out creative pursuits.

"In April 2000, I was sitting in my back yard and having a glass of wine and all of a sudden, literally like a billboard in my head came [www.yourjewish-fairygodmother.com](http://www.yourjewish-fairygodmother.com)," Rosenau said.

She recalled how with her coworkers, "I was everybody's problem solver, secret keeper." She thought "What does it mean? I realized that I had to figure out what does a godmother does," she said.

"The first thing that came into my head was motivation, inspiration, support and problem

solving."

She started her advice-giving as a website, then got the opportunity to write it for the Jewish Journal in South Florida.

"I'm not shy about giving my opinions to anyone," Rosenau said.

Her column continues today. At its peak, about 2008, it was in about 15 to 20 Jewish newspapers, she estimates. For a time she was also writing work-advice columns for a niche working world publication.

"It's been a really satisfying thing to write that. It hasn't been for the money. It gets to the part of me that genuinely likes people and likes to help people," Rosenau said.

### Inspired again

Several years ago she was working with an agent and almost wrote a book before deciding she couldn't tell other people how to live if she was unhappy with her own life. She made some changes in her own life that she felt were "incredibly liberating."

This included studying Kaballah, an ancient Jewish tradition of mystical interpretation of the Bible. She also studied the Torah, and she began a lot of work on her own personal development, sharing some of it through a blog she writes on her Kaballah Glass website, which also showcases her fused-glass art.

Rosenau was again sitting in her favorite chaise lounge when she realized she wanted to write a collection of essays. She went through a process that included contacting her former agent, working with a developmental editor and writing, rewriting and rewriting some more.

Since self-publishing the book in September, she has been thrilled to have her book reviewed both by Publishers Weekly and Kirkus.

"They got the book on an emotional level and that just mattered so much to me," Rosenau said of the Kirkus review. "Simply knowing that somebody got that I genuinely care about people, that I'm showing enough of me to show I'm down here in the weeds with everybody else."

Rosenau feels she's risked change and improved herself, partially through writing the book. "The journey itself would have been worth it even if she were the only reader of the book, Rosenau said. Rather than trying to sell someone "the answer," she said she is trying to show them a process by which they can evolve into their next better self.

In her wildest dreams, she hopes that someday her book will become a series, kind of like the "Chicken Soup for the Soul" books.

"I want the Messy Joys books. I want this to be the flagship for the Messy Joys of Love, the Messy Joys of Work," Rosenau said.

What is it about her that she thinks made her the right person to write this book at this time?

"Part of it's simply karma and personality. Some of it is 16 years of advice, listening to people wanting to be happier, listening to where people get stuck. Some of it is I think that I've honestly paid my spiritual dues," Rosenau said.

"I think that I've spent a lot of time listening to people and caring about people," she added. "I have put everything I have into this book to say whatever I've been put on this earth to say as well as I can, so if it finds more than just me, I've done a good job."

*Cara Roberts Murex is a freelance writer who lives in Eugene. She has worked as a writer in Oregon for the past 21 years.*