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ALL ABOUT OUT

Plan your next family vacation to include a tour of queer historic sites, or sink into an armchair voyage on a rainy afternoon

by Beren deMotier

When I heard of Paula Martinac's book *The Queerest Places: A Guide to Gay and Lesbian Historic Sites*, I immediately thought of those mythic summer voyages in station wagons that earnest American families are supposed to take. The ones where brother and sister kick each other in the back seat the entire way, and when the family finally reaches the Grand Canyon the kids rush to the gift shop for

modern world as it relates to being gay, lesbian or bisexual. Especially good were the longer articles included on various subjects, including Arwyn Moore's piece on the Harlem Renaissance, "Forming a Queer Consciousness Through the Blues."

Humor is also used to good effect, by cartoons and by humorous articles lampooning attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, such as Daniel Mendelsohn's "Born Republican" article in the "Are You Born That Way?" section.

Out in All Directions is strong on people of color, and does a

Books

something to torment the adults with for the remainder of the journey. I thought to myself, now here's a new twist on an old theme for lesbian parents like the wife and I, or any mighty enlightened family unit. Of course, you might need brother and sister to be a little older to take this trip, or better yet, leave them at Grandma's and take some queer teenagers who could use a slice of history to nourish them through life instead.

Of course, to be more accurate, *The Queerest Places* is many slices of different lives. Martinac takes on the country state by state and breaks down locations of queer interest—bars, businesses, homes of gay men, lesbians and transgendered people past and present—plus historic moments, cultural events and community resources. Her pleasing and informative narration gives us facts about famous individuals, and individuals not famous at all but who made a difference, such as Joe Cino, who ran Caffè Cino in New York (1958-67) and who is credited with providing the place where both gay theater and off-off-Broadway was born.

If you are a student of gay and lesbian history, and have read some of the excellent material out there, much of what is included in *The Queerest Places* will be familiar. One striking thing about the format is the way Martinac includes quotations from literature, or from individuals' letters or diaries, as ways to bring the history alive, such as in the excerpt from a letter to Emily Dickinson's sister-in-law by Dickinson which refutes her biographers' claim to heterosexual exclusivity:

Susie, will you indeed come home next Saturday, and be my own again, and kiss me as you used to?

Similar in content, but totally different in approach, is *Out in All Directions: A Treasury of Gay and Lesbian America*, edited by Lynn Witt, Sherry Thomas and Eric Marcus. Whereas *The Queerest Places* calls you to an overstuffed couch with a bowl of grapes and a fine bottle of water, *Out in All Directions* is a Diet Coke on the front porch while you watch the girls (or boys) go by. Not that *Out in All Directions* isn't good, in fact it's fascinating reading and it's about how we live. Though there are chapter headings from "We Are Everywhere" to "The Material World," I found the groupings illogical and random. However, this is just a matter of style and taste, the content is a treasure trove of history, culture and the

A GUIDE TO
GAY AND LESBIAN
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THE
QUEEREST
PLACES

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good job of covering just about every aspect of gay or lesbian experience for people living in the United States. The section on creating family seemed grossly inadequate considering the baby boom going on around us, not just by lesbians through insemination or adoption, but by gay men claiming their right to fatherhood through prior marriages, as adoptive parents and as step parents. But that's just me and my station wagon talking.

Out in all Directions is chock-full of good stuff, as is *The Queerest Places*. If you're looking for your queer history, look no further than these two books.

The Queerest Places is many slices of different lives. Martinac takes on the country state by state and breaks down locations of queer interest—bars, businesses, homes of gay men, lesbians and transgendered people past and present—plus historic moments, cultural events and community resources.

The Queerest Places: A Guide to Gay and Lesbian Historic Sites by Paula Martinac. Owl Books, 1997; \$14.95 paper.
Out in All Directions: A Treasury of Gay and Lesbian America edited by Lynn Witt, Sherry Thomas and Eric Marcus. Warner Books, 1995; \$16.99 paper.