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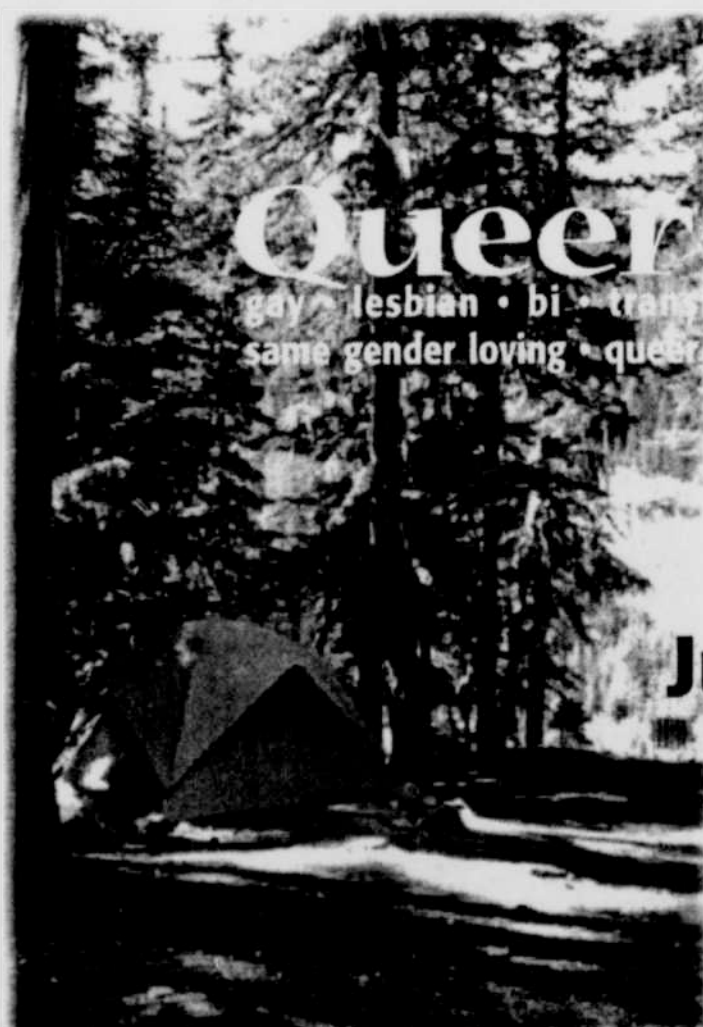
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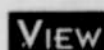
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BOOKS

Strange but true

Michael Thomas Ford's new book chronicles the
oddball adventures of life in the '90s as a gay man

BY J.S. HALL

Truth is almost always stranger than fiction, and I have often been told that I have a very strange life," writes Boston resident Michael Thomas Ford in the introduction to his collection of essays, *Alec Baldwin Doesn't Love Me and Other Trials from My Queer Life*. After reading it, I'm inclined to agree with his assessment. I'm no stranger to strangeness myself, and Ford's slightly off-kilter perspective is one I can entirely respect, relate to and laugh out loud with.

The first section, "My Queer Life," gives a guided tour of the highlights of Ford's unusual, humor-tinged existence as a gay guy in the '90s.

In "Diary of a Would-be Porn Star," he watches one porn movie too many and embarks on a hilarious quest to test the theory that life imitates art.

"Too Much of a Good Thing" offers his take on Martha Stewart in the form of confessions of a Marthaholic, proving that in this case, to paraphrase the late Mae West, too much of a good thing can be wonderful.

"Dyke the Halls" demonstrates that it's nearly impossible to celebrate Christmas with four lesbian friends of varying

aim at *The Sound of Music*, he reports that as a kid he asked the real-life Maria von Trapp why she wasn't dead yet. He's delighted, though, that his 10-year-old nephew has begun showing a queer bent, memorizing songs from Broadway cast albums like *Cats* and *Phantom of the Opera*.

In the section "Adventures Among the Straight People," Ford's friendship with his straight best friend, Grace, is sorely put to the test by an alluring fireman, and he has a gay old time figuring out why Home Depot is cruiser than most bars.

He's back in disgruntled mode in "A Model Queer," in which he helps a straight friend on a photo shoot at a strip club. Too bad the friend forgot to mention beforehand that the strippers were female!

There's more wry amusement as Ford's parents separate and divorce after 35 years of marriage: Mom runs off with the pastor of her church, while Dad resumes dating and blissfully plots revenge.

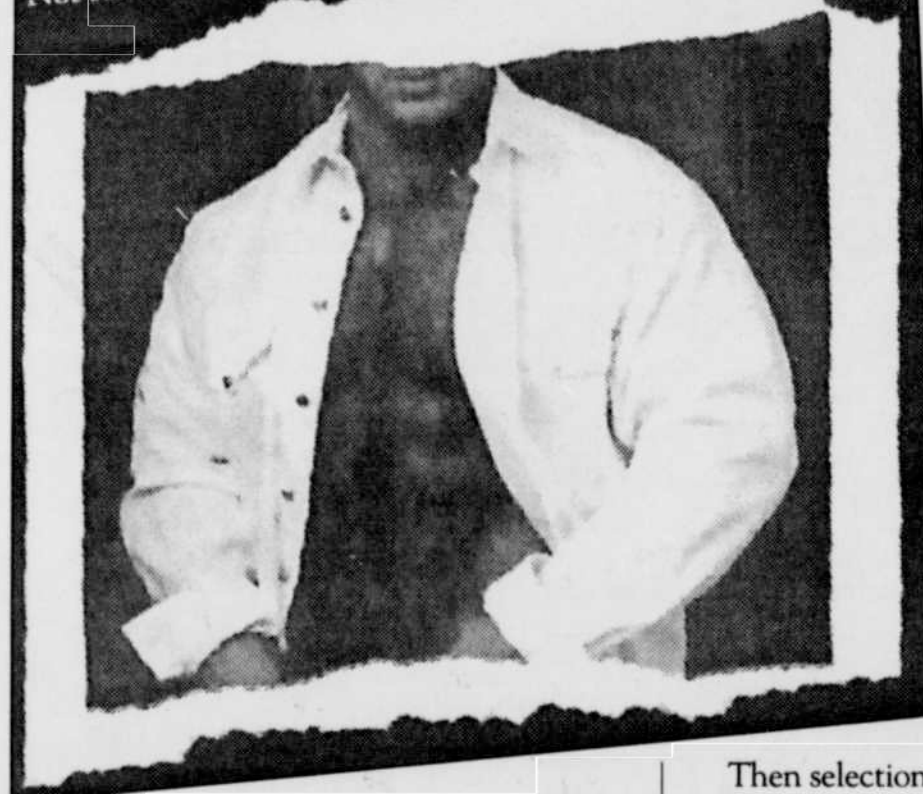
After that, the author has an orgasmic time playing the on-line equivalent of *The Crying Game* in "Cyberslut."

The book occasionally hits a more serious

note in the last sections, "The Way I See It" and "A Slightly Dented Childhood"—but not always.

Ford lets loose on fishermen with both barrels in "A Sporting Chance," pondering whether fishing can be considered a sport. "Where is the skill in throwing a hook loaded with tempting bait into the general vicinity of lots of perpetually hungry creatures with brains the size of mustard seeds?" he asks. "You might as well go to a playground, scatter M&M's around, and club to death the first four-year-old foolish enough to approach."

Not Alec Baldwin



degrees of political correctness, while "Taking the Credit" shows how, in addition to good intentions, the road to hell is sometimes paved with plastic as well.

And in "The Nonwriting Life," he states many a writer's unspoken true feelings about their profession: At times, he hates writing.

"How books are written remains a mystery I do not fully understand," says the author of more than 25 books. "I know only that, in my case, they generally are pieced together in fits of activity that come between extended periods of not doing anything at all."

No, Ford is not the stereotypical graphomaniacal writer, nor is he a typical gay male—and thank heaven for that. Although I think most gay male readers will readily sympathize with "How Alec Baldwin Ruined My Life"—because it is both a paean to Baldwin's many manly attributes and a hissing condemnation of Kim Basinger, "the human equivalent of cotton candy"—it takes uncommon courage to say these things.

The author unflinchingly takes sacred cows by the horns, declaring that he loathes shopping, detests dating, can't stand having his picture taken and hates musicals. Taking special

Then selections like "If Jesus Loves Me, Why Hasn't He Called?" and "The Crown of Heaven" humorously illustrate the damage that an overly-religious upbringing can inflict upon unsuspecting children.

However, *Alec Baldwin Doesn't Love Me* ends on a less somber note with observations of Ford's wacky family. In "The Theory of Relativity," he pays tribute to his lesbian Aunt Betty, her chain-smoking, turquoise-bedecked "friend," Doreen, and their knickknack-filled house.

Finally, "Saying Good-bye to Grandma" is a remembrance of an exasperating, iron-willed woman who wished to have her cremated remains buried in the pot of her favorite garish garden gnome.

The chest on the front cover may not belong to Alec Baldwin, but nothing else about this collection of humorous essays rings false.

To me, Michael Thomas Ford is like a male Fran Lebowitz: disgruntled, disenchanted, disaffected, and distinctly, disarmingly delightful.

■ **ALEC BALDWIN DOESN'T LOVE ME AND OTHER TRIALS FROM MY QUEER LIFE** by Michael Thomas Ford. Alyson Publications, 1998; \$10.95 paper.