

SUMMER READING

A sizzling list of regional queer personalities offer their personal picks of books to beat the heat

BY WILL O'BRYAN

With the autumnal Equinox still more than a month away, Oregonians have plenty more hazy, lazy days of summer to enjoy. And, as Oregonians are rumored to be a fairly well-read crowd, summertime for many of us means more reading. Certainly there's time enough before the days get short to squeeze a couple more books into your schedule.

Beren DeMotier, a Portland-based syndicated lesbian columnist with two small children, may actually have less time to read in summer, considering school's out and the kids are at home. Nevertheless, she's currently reading two books: *SUITS ME: THE DOUBLE LIFE OF BILLY TIPTON* (Houghton Mifflin, 1998) by Diane Wood Middlebrook, chronicling the life of a transgender performer who had her audiences and the authorities fooled as to her native sex; and *THE LESBIAN AND GAY BOOK OF LOVE AND MARRIAGE* (Broadway Books, 1998) by Paula Martinac.

With the kids, she's reading aloud from *THE WORLD OF WILLIAM JOYCE SCRAPBOOK* (HarperCollins, 1997) by William Joyce, with photos by William Gould.

For other adults, DeMotier has a few recommendations, starting with *THE DIVINE SECRETS OF THE YA YA SISTERHOOD* (HarperCollins, 1996) by Rebecca Wells, which, DeMotier says, also makes a great gift. "I've given four copies already. ...It's just so good!" She feels similarly about Alan Gurganus' *PLAYS WELL WITH OTHERS* (Knopf, 1997). The novel, recalling amorphous sexualities and engaging personalities in New York at the dawn of the AIDS pandemic is, DeMotier

says, "fantastic and moving."

On the lighter side for summer, DeMotier admits she enjoys a little brain candy in her book list. "But not insulting brain candy," she assures. For DeMotier, and many others, that means mysteries. One she recommends is *REPORT FOR MURDER* (Spinsters Ink, 1998) by Val McDermid, featuring a sleuthing "cynical socialist lesbian feminist journalist" Lindsay Gordon cracking a case at an elitist private girls' boarding school.

For those who think they may have tastes roughly in line with DeMotier's, there are a couple books she's willing to warn you about.

WHEN THE DEAD SPEAK (The Naiad Press, 1998) by Therese Szymanski, a novel about a former underworld figure trying to leave her violent life behind and start fresh with her lover "was so darned hard-boiled," says DeMotier, adding, "If you like heart-of-gold strippers and serious butch-femme tough guy stuff, it's not so bad."

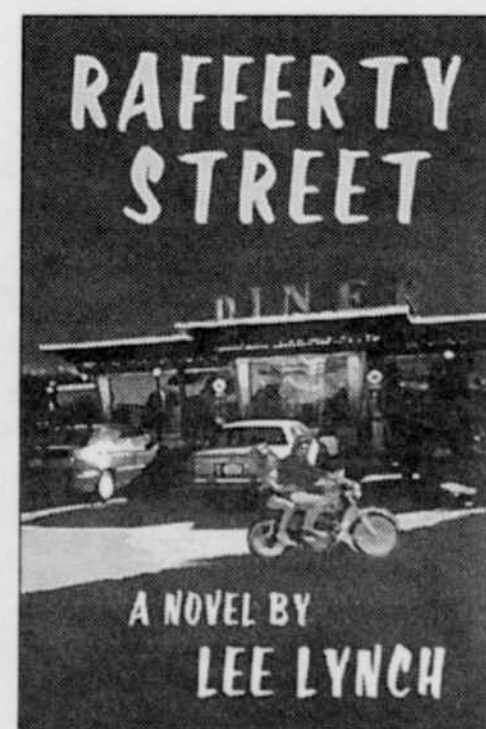
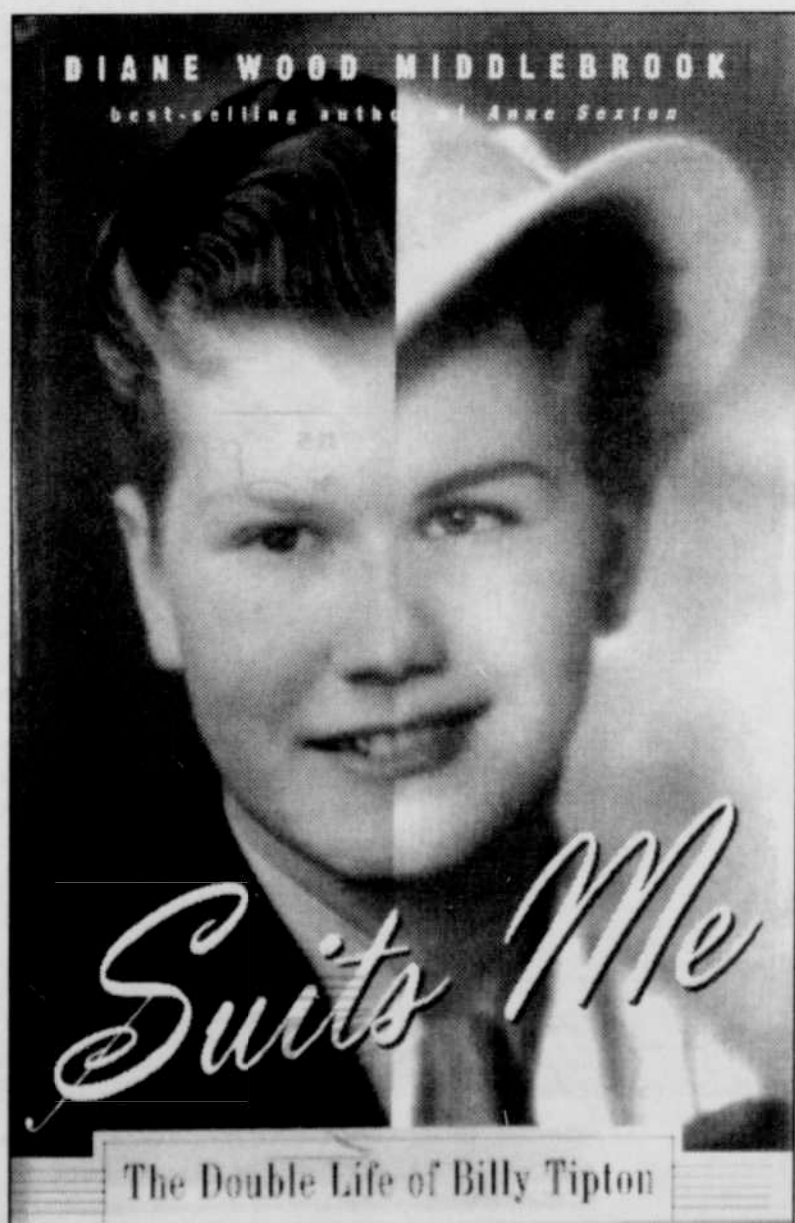
The other book she's not terribly thrilled with is *THE LESBIAN LOVE COMPANION* (Harper, 1998) by Marny Hall. Hall's premise, DeMotier explains, "is that partnerships never last. It was too depressing, [and] ... not for monogamy nuts."

Some highly literate young people also served up some thoughts on good reads. Polling 10 young people from YouthNet, a Multnomah County-funded group of and for young queers,

at one of their weekly meetings during a Portland sweltering summer afternoon was a gold mine of suggestions. Ranging in age from 15 to 30 and representing the lesbian, gay, bi, trans rainbow, they offered titles—generally in a sort of free-form simultaneous volley—spanning the gamut.

The *BORDERLANDS* series, mosaic novels edited by Terri Windling and featuring punk elves got a rousing endorsement, with the comment thrown out that "some of the punk elves are queer." Urvashi Vaid's *VIRTUAL EQUALITY: THE MAINSTREAMING OF GAY & LESBIAN LIBERATION* (Anchor Books, 1995) was suggested along with Judy Carter's *THE HOMO HANDBOOK: GETTING IN TOUCH WITH YOUR INNER HOMO* (Simon & Schuster, 1996); *THE TAO OF POOH* (Penguin Books, 1983) by Benjamin Hoff; Loren Cameron's female-to-male transsexual's chronicle, *BODY ALCHEMY* (Cleis Press, 1996); as well as anything by William Burroughs or Toni Morrison. And so many others.

When asked what sort of reading list they might suggest for young people in the coming-out process, old standard *RUBYFRUIT JUNGLE* (Daughters, 1973) by Rita Mae Brown—even in 1998—was still an obvious choice. Other selections were *EYES OF DESIRE* (Alyson, 1993), an anthology of work by deaf, queer writers, edited by Raymond Luczak; *ANNIE ON MY MIND* (Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982) by Nancy Garden; any books from Alison Bechdel's *DYKES TO*



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