

BOOKS

Did you ever know that you're my heeereero?
You're everything I would like to beeeeee.
I can fly hiiiiiigher than an eeeagle,
For you are the wind beneath my wings...

Wait a minute. That's Bette Midler, not Cher or anyone else in the Bono family tree. But the sentiment still applies because that's just how I felt after reading Chastity Bono's new book, *Family Outing*.

Family Outing is more than just a collection of coming out stories (and more than just the inside dirt on Sonny and Cher). It's also a thoughtful, unpretentious treatise on coming out: why we do it, when and how to do it, and so on.

Family Outing reminded me how lucky I am that my family was and is so accepting of my queerness, and how much I cherish my friends for taking me as I am. It also reminded me that not everyone is so lucky, that coming out can be an explosive event in some families.

No scare tactics are employed in *Family Outing*, however, simply because the truth is often scary enough. Indeed, some of the coming out stories shared in the book might frighten one into staying in the closet if they weren't presented in the context of Bono's soothing and supportive narrative.

No one mentioned in the book pretends that coming out is easy, even for those whose parents and friends are open-minded and liberal. Even for those people, there is no escape from the fear and self-loathing that young homosexuals feel. Such things grow out of the ignorance, disrespect and shyness with which society at large treats the idea of homosexu-

ty. So when a child—or an adult—understands that for him or her, homosexuality is not just an idea but a reality, those issues are already there and must be conquered.

It's fairly easy to imagine why coming out is important for a person's own well-being: To be honest with oneself and others, to live openly and without fear,

to love oneself, to find a compatible partner—these are all necessary to achieve happiness in life. One of the unique aspects of *Family Outing* is Bono's insistence that, when an individual decides to come out of the closet, parents and friends must make that journey also. Even for parents who have gay friends, knowing that their child is gay can have a profound effect on the relationship. The direction of that effect is what's up for grabs, and controlling that direction is what the book teaches.

Organized into two sections—one of personal coming out stories, one of par-



ents' coming to terms—*Family Outing* is an excellent guide for anyone about to step out of the closet. And it's not too preachy either. While it does drive home the personal and political importance of coming out, the book also advises caution in some situations. Although adamant that coming out is always a healthy thing in the long run, Bono shows a rare honesty in admitting that under certain circumstances one might be better off changing jobs or moving to a new town.

Through its honest, intimate portrayals of the difficulties so many people face in coming out, *Family Outing* also reminded me why we must come out—not just to friends and families and co-workers, but to everyone every day.

Before reading it, I thought, "I'm out and everyone who doesn't know usually assumes anyway, so what's the big deal?" I expected to be bored. Bono's book made me realize that, while coming out is intensely personal, it must eventually become something political. It's not enough to say it once and move on.

If homosexuality is ever to be accepted in our society, in order for coming out to be made less traumatic for future generations, we who are queer must come out again and again, forcing those around us to deal with who we are. Only in this way will people realize that homosexuality is not something weird and shameful.

As Bono writes, "In order to break society of the delusion that compulsory heterosexuality is the norm, which is the foundation for all homophobic attitudes, gays and lesbians must come out."

■ *FAMILY OUTING* by Chastity Bono with Billie Fitzpatrick. Little, Brown and Company, 1998; \$24 cloth.

WEDDING RINGS

AS individual AS YOU ARE.

TWIST