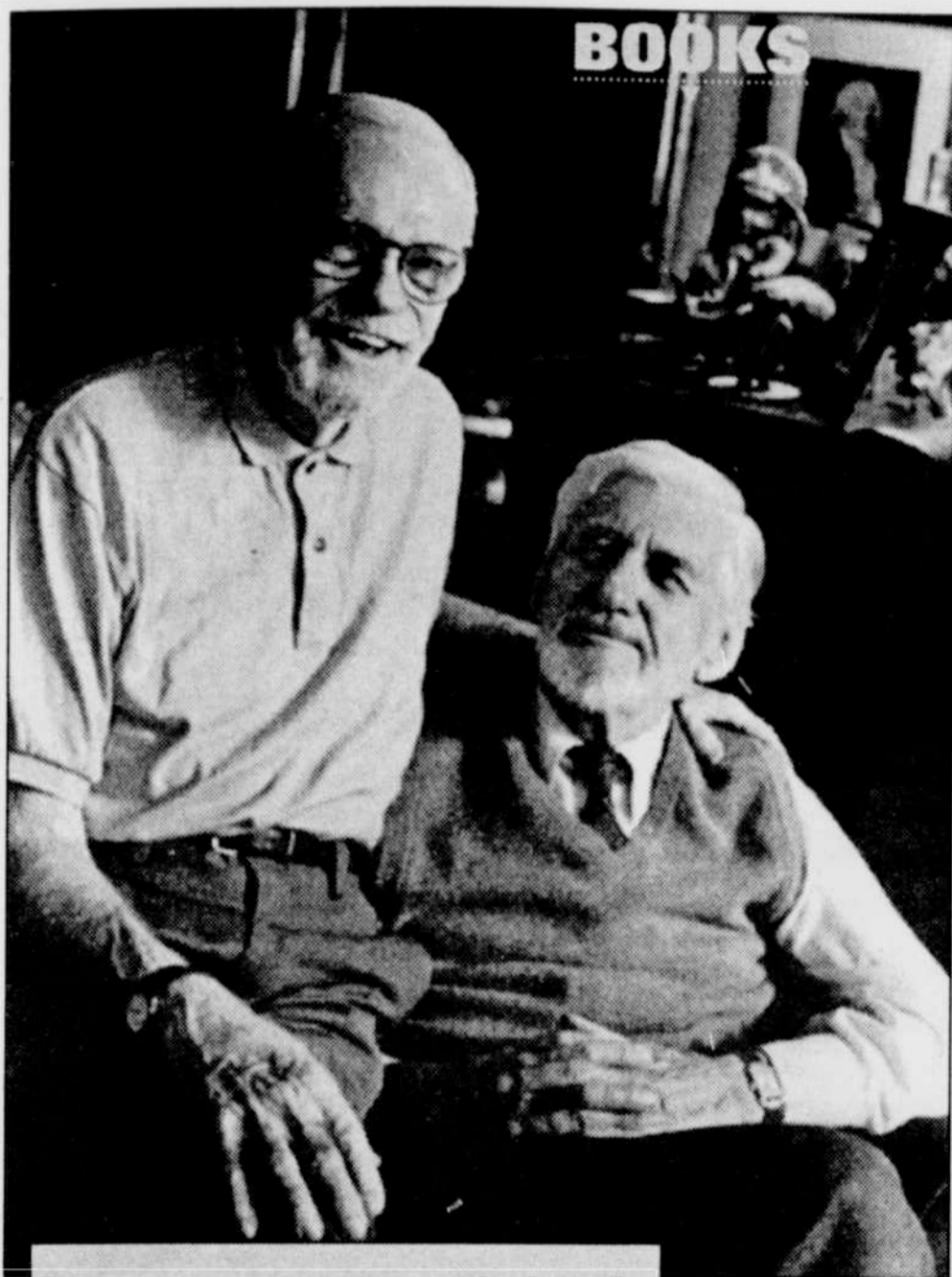


BOOKS



Village Elders

Penny Coleman



and courage. This joins other excellent oral histories already on my shelf—if you enjoyed *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* or *Lone Hunters: An Oral History of Lesbian and Gay Southern Life 1948-1968*, you certainly will enjoy *Village Elders*.

Part photo documentary and part biography, the book profiles older gay men and lesbians living in New York City who loosely are affiliated by their participation with Senior Action in a Gay Environment. Penny Coleman allows the subjects' wide range of idiosyncrasies to emerge in her candid black-and-white images. From the obsessive single activist to the comfortable couple in their matching plaid shirts, the photographs are sensitive and revealing.

The oral history method of obtaining the profiles in this book is somewhat haphazard, but the resulting narratives provide glimpses into a wide variety of gay experiences during the past five decades. Because all of the subjects had final editorial say on their sections, the results are disparate, and no solid narrative voice provides context or historical framework.

Letting the subjects speak out about their experiences of gayness (some for the first time in their lives) has the advantage, however, of reminding readers about the many options afforded a gay person growing old and the changing definitions of concepts such as partnership, autonomy and age differences. Moreover, these stories bring together otherwise invisible bits of private life from decades that, in mainstream culture, are prone to nostalgic, static reinvention. Just as we learn to resist nostalgic histories by reading books like *Village*

Elders, we can begin to more deeply understand the possibilities for change in our own lives.

—Sarah Dougher

NOT A DAY GOES BY
by E. Lynn Harris.
Doubleday & Company,
2000; \$19.95 hardcover.

This is the latest in best-selling author E. Lynn Harris' chronicles of American sexual and cultural lives. He sprinted into mainstream fiction 10 years ago, when his *Invisible Life* forced publishers into a bidding frenzy after the novel sold amazingly well from the back of his car. Harris' first books sold very well, breaking through to mainstream best-seller lists; today, his books are on those lists before they even are

released. His books are soaked in both African American and homo/bi cultures.

But if Harris is the country's contemporary voice of bisexuality, we're all a bit screwed. Bisexuality, in his books, tends to be merely the indecisiveness of closeted, frustrated gay men—men who seem destined to lie to, manipulate and injure the people they care about and who only can find true happiness by becoming exclusively homosexual or heterosexual.

The well-adjusted, happy bisexual man is not to be found here and only occasionally and uncertainly is implied to exist at all. The brightest moment for bisexuality in *Not a Day Goes By* comes only in the final paragraph, which I would love to reproduce for you here in its entirety as an anthem to liberated and liberal bisexual and polyamorous people everywhere, except it would give the ending away. But then perhaps I already have.

Not a Day Goes By is the story of two of the most shallow and contemptibly perverse people you ever will read about. John "Basil" Henderson is a former football player and sports commentator who is about to be married to Broadway diva Yancey Harrington when their secret pasts begin to catch up with them.

The novel reads like a Harlequin romance: He is abominably rich, has exquisite style and is hung like a horse; she is stunningly gorgeous, flawlessly talented and sexually adept. The relationship begins to unravel as silence turns to whispers, private investigators are hired and wiretaps are installed. The ending is formulaic, abrupt and entirely unsatisfactory.

Many of the characters appear in Harris' earlier works; Basil and Yancey are in *If This World Were Mine* and *Abide with Me*—both much superior novels to this one. The wretched wasteland of these two people's lives might be a good lesson to the author that not everyone's story is worth spending \$20 and 288 pages on. —Glenn Williams

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