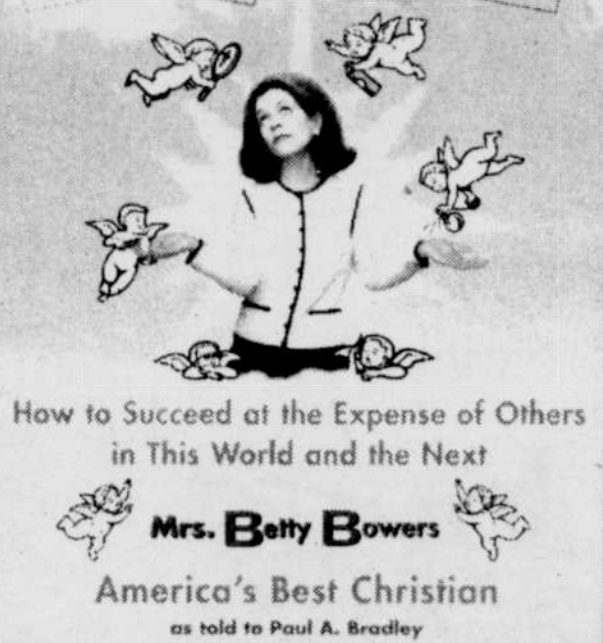


BOOKS

What Would Betty Do?



**WHAT WOULD BETTY DO?**  
**HOW TO SUCCEED AT THE EXPENSE**  
**OF OTHERS IN THIS WORLD AND THE NEXT**  
 by Mrs. Betty Bowers, *America's Best Christian*,  
 as told to Paul A. Bradley. Fireside, 2002;  
 \$12 softcover.

Self-help has become one of America's de facto religions, practically on par with Christianity. And like Christianity, it's such a big, brainless target that it's spawned many a satire. (Who can forget *Is Martha Stuart Living?* from her highness's hey-day a few years back?)

*What Would Betty Do?* combines self-help with religion, making the target bigger and better. Betty isn't a new phenomenon; she has had a cult Internet site, [www.bettybowers.com](http://www.bettybowers.com), for a couple of years. But this guide by "America's Best Christian" is new, and it's one of those rare instances of the Net producing words that deserve to be preserved in print.

The preternaturally pushy Betty is a delirious combination of self-delusion and self-righteousness. Like a Bible-crazed Joan Crawford, she tells readers exactly what to think and how to live, all the time making it clear that even the most devoted will never come up to her heavenly standard. Even the Lord isn't safe from her barbs: "If God created me in His image, I have more than returned the compliment!"

She's equally handy with recipes ("Betty's World-Famous 'Brutal Death of Our Savior' Cookies") and tips on the proper couture for abortion clinic bombings and executions. In her all-Betty-all-the-time world, even cherubs—those cloying little butterballs with wings—conspire to keep her on top: The cover shows them doing her hair, spraying perfume

What's a gay to do?

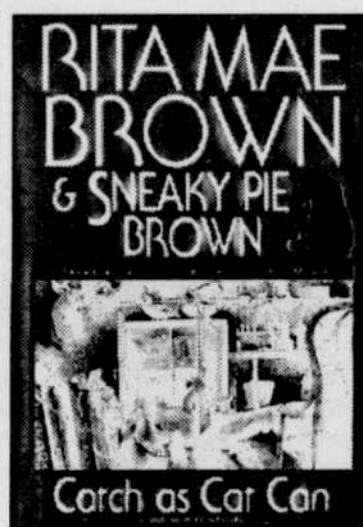
Advice from America's Best Christian tops the list of current must-haves

on her wrists and generally slaving to keep her looking good.

"Real" author Paul A. Bradley is so good at sending up the rabid Christian right that readers might want to sample the book rather than read it straight through, lest the fun end too fast. It's hard to resist such choice items as "Betty's pet project, the Christian Crack Whore Ministry" or her mock interviews with Eminem and Laura Schlessinger ("You are simply too slutty to speak at my church, dear"). Her version of the gay agenda is a to-do list with such entries as "4:10 p.m.: Time permitting, bring about the decline of Western Civilization."

Like Martha, she's also seasonally minded. Many readers will want to know "there are only 297 shopping days 'til the Apocalypse." If only the hellfire crowd would read this book. Now that would be self-improvement.

—Gary Morris



**CATCH AS CAT CAN: A MRS. MURPHY MYSTERY**  
 by Rita Mae Brown and Sneaky Pie Brown.  
 Bantam Books, 2002; \$24.95 hardbound.

For a small, usually quiet town nestled at the edge of the

Blue Ridge Mountains and inhabited by some of Virginia's finest old-money descendants, the rate of mysterious happenings in Crozet during this spring season is awfully high.

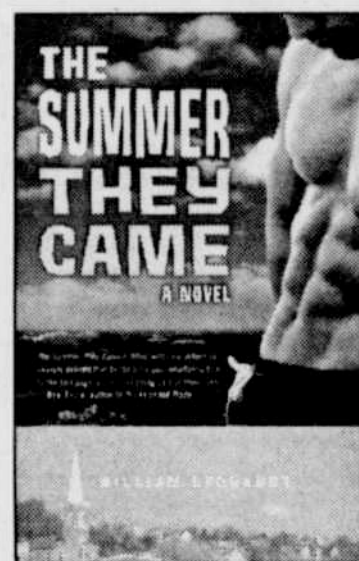
A dead pileated woodpecker is found, Miranda Hogendobber's hubcaps have been stolen, Roger O'Bannon (the vulgar and obnoxious salvage yard owner) dies suddenly after drinking a cup of coffee at the Dogwood Festival Tea Party, followed by another mysterious death and a string of crimes ranging from minor to international. Postmistress "Harry" Haristeen and her entourage of house pets—Mrs. Murphy the tiger cat, Tee Tucker the Welsh corgi and Pewter the shamelessly fat gray cat—must, of course, investigate.

*Catch as Cat Can* is the 10th installment of the charming Mrs. Murphy mystery series by

Rita Mae Brown, considered by many to be America's most successful modern lesbian writer. (The author adopted Sneaky Pie Brown from her local SPCA.)

As with previous Mrs. Murphy mysteries, *Catch as Cat Can* offers a delightfully fun escape from the stresses of present-day reality. It is the "purr-fect" read for animal lovers who want a light getaway over a rainy weekend or a lazy week's retreat in the sun. Escape and enjoy!

—Page Jordan



**THE SUMMER THEY CAME**  
 by William Storandt. Villard Books, 2002; \$12.95 softbound.

The *Summer They Came* is an example of what I like to call an "ab book"—a gay novel that has nothing to recommend it except a set of

beautiful abs on the cover. This first novel by William Storandt (author of the memoir *Outbound*) is poorly structured and populated by one-dimensional stock characters.

The story concerns the town of Long Spit, R.I., an area of pristine beaches and old-money mansions. But it's so isolated (and insulated) that even the next generation of blue bloods isn't coming any more, and the neglected town is falling into disrepair.

Enter Mike, who takes his friend, Artie, for a helicopter ride over the town to show its potential as the next Fire Island. Along with a small band of friends, they decide to turn Long Spit into a mecca for beach-loving gays, complete with tea dances, backroom bars and lots of naked frolicking on the sands. The premise is sound, but the inevitable conflicts between the blue bloods and the blue boys are unoriginal and predictable.

Along the way, Storandt introduces characters and sets up plot points that immediately disappear or are dispensed with sans explanation (Mike, for instance, who is never heard from again after Page 6). Likewise, on Page 66, we learn about the mysterious entrance to the harbor of the yacht

Nighthawk, only finally to learn on Page 237 whose yacht it is but never why its entrance was a secret. These are not red herring, they're pickled herring. Another mark of the book's sloppiness is a cover that promises "three lives altered by these lycra-clad visitors," and I can't, for the life of me, figure out who the three are.

The publisher promises "a comedy that's sure to appeal to beach readers everywhere." However, its main beach appeal is that it's flimsy enough to toss as a Frisbee to your dog.

—Floyd Sklaver



**GODSPEED**  
 by Lynn Breedlove. St. Martin's Press, 2002; \$23.95 hardcover.

Lynn Breedlove, the lead singer/songwriter for the dyke punk band Tribe 8, takes a leap from her energetic, in-your-face lyrics

and lands on mostly solid footing with her debut novel, *Godspeed*.

From the very beginning, she sets a racy pace and keeps it up as the reader tags along with Jim, a bad-ass punk bike messenger dyke who is hopelessly in love with Ally Cat, a sex worker who quickly tires of Jim's "nothing matters but the rush" drug addiction.

The first half of the book goes a bit overboard with descriptions of Jim's various trips, but eventually the action keeps up with the jaunty prose when she volunteers to go on tour as a roadie for the all-chick band Hostile Mucous. As the addiction fades (perhaps too easily) and the band works its way across the country, Jim starts to learn that love means more than conquest and that friends are good for more than just a high.

The novel's strength lies in Breedlove's sharp use of language and in the fringe-dwelling characters who are full of attitude. Though the fast pacing sometimes allows crucial scenes to zip by without giving the reader much time to absorb the gravity of the events, the depth is there. The author's lively style makes *Godspeed* a quick, fun read.

—Karen Kudej

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