

REVIEWS

**DRESS YOUR FAMILY IN CORDUROY AND DENIM**  
by David Sedaris; Little, Brown and Co., 2004; \$24.95 hardcover

David Sedaris, perhaps more than any other contemporary author, has figured out how to successfully mine his pain—the ore he extracts is solid gold. The closest thing the intelligentsia has to a rock star, Sedaris attracts thousands of devoted fans to his personal appearances, many of whom have been following his antics since 1992's "SantaLand Diaries."

His latest collection, *Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim*,

provides another set of enjoyable essays incisively detailing his misspent youth and continued mistreatment by the world around him.

Sedaris is an astute observer, but what he does most brilliantly is shine a spotlight on the flaws and foibles of those he encounters, particularly his family. He describes himself as "a friendly junkman building things from the little pieces of scrap I find here and there." It can't be easy for them ("More and more often," he writes, "their stories begin with the line, 'You have to swear you won't repeat this'"), but the Sedarises are among the most original characters to emerge from literature in years.

Sedaris always allows his vulnerability to show through his ironic veneer, but now he is also more open about being gay than in the past. "You should look at yourself...really look at yourself," his mother tells him in the first essay as he stuffs Halloween candy into his mouth rather than share it. And look at himself he does—in an intimate and revealing way.

Of course, the more honest Sedaris is, the funnier he is, such as: "They rarely make movies about long-term couples, and for good reason: Our lives are boring.... Look, they're opening their electric bill!"

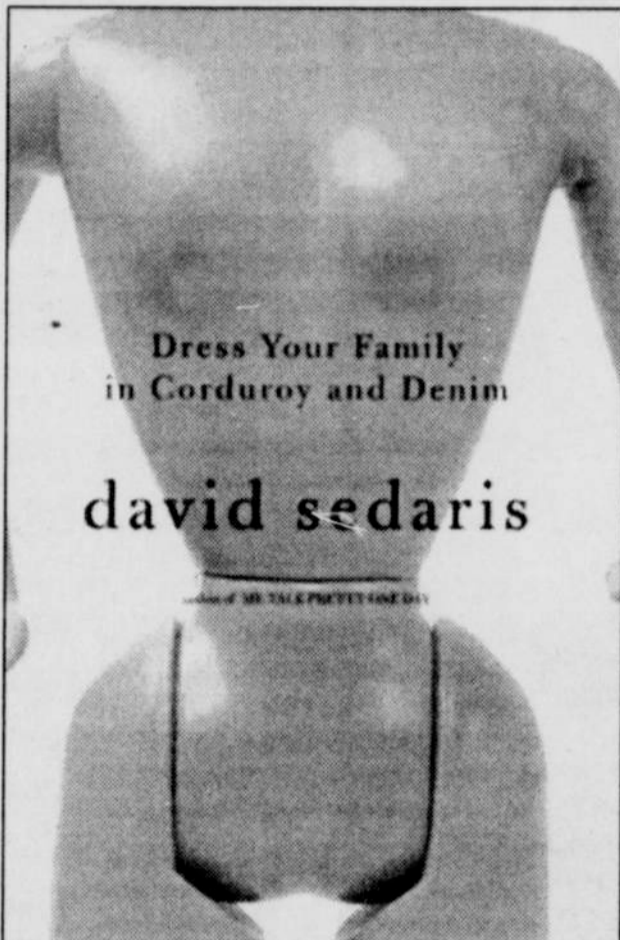
Much of what we learn is unsettling, such as his fear of being accused of pedophilia or the pain that he and his family cause each other: "I haven't had a chance to clean," his sister Tiffany tells him when he visits, "but the lie feels uncomfortable and so she corrects herself. 'What I meant to say is that I don't give a fuck what you think of my apartment. I didn't really want you here in the first place.'" Ouch.

Sedaris is a masterful essayist with a keen observer's eye, and his newfound queer sensibility is sure to delight and touch you.

—Floyd Sklover

**THE END OF GAY AND THE DEATH OF HETEROSEXUALITY**  
by Bert Archer; Thunder's Mouth Press, 2004 edition; \$14.95 softcover

would be tempted, in a different time and place, to proclaim Canadian Bert Archer's 2000 book



*The End of Gay and the Death of Heterosexuality*, just published in paperback in the United States, an absolutely essential read for anyone in the sexual minorities community.

Archer's claim that sexual identity is a onetime political necessity that has now become more hindrance than help has been and continues to be controversial, but it's refreshingly galvanizing. Being taken out of our comfort zones can, even if we're inclined to disagree, at least reaffirm one's thoughts and feelings, and Archer is, for the most part, non-confrontational in tone (despite his title).

In Archer's view, even if the exclusively gay and straight labels do apply to a significant number of people in practice, they're too limiting to truly open people's sexual consciousness. He backs this up by making a convincing case that the homosexual as a "type" and homosexuals as a "group" was an idea consolidated and shaped by heterosexuals well before gay liberation, creating a false gay/straight, us/them binary.

He offers well-researched and enlightening viewpoints from both earlier and more radical contemporary gay lib movements, quoting 1970's *Woman-Identified Woman Manifesto* ("In a society in which...sexual expression is allowed to follow feelings, the categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality would disappear") and pre-op Pat Califia ("Gay male and lesbian culture is obsessed with purity of identity.... This creates a lavender breed of segregationism.").

It's an interesting, informative, thought-provoking read. I just wish I could say it was all more relevant and useful than it is.

Part of Archer's attempt to moisten some of the dry data he's working with is to give us plenty of insights into his own personal experiences, which are those of a middle-class, private-college-educated Gen-Xer living in a major metropolitan area (Toronto) in the '90s.

This got me thinking: Doesn't my reading this book and appreciating its subtlety and fluency constitute a rather closed conversation? This well-researched, enthusiastically written book about the history, subtleties and viability of sexual identity hardly extends to those still struggling with the basic acknowledgment and acceptance of same-sex desire.

In addition to his unintentional insularity, Archer is a little too optimistic; he simply disregards the mixed-at-best signals our culture has been sending lately, where the newspaper reports a gay-bashing one week and the great advancements in same-sex partner workplace benefits the next.

*The End of Gay* is astute enough and is, in fact, well worth reading, but it's too utopian to be all that applicable in our current United States of Dubya's Evergreen Approval Rating, where it seems increasingly likely those of us concerned with sexual liberty and equality will find ourselves in more urgent need of a united political front than finely modulated queer theory.

—Christopher McQuain



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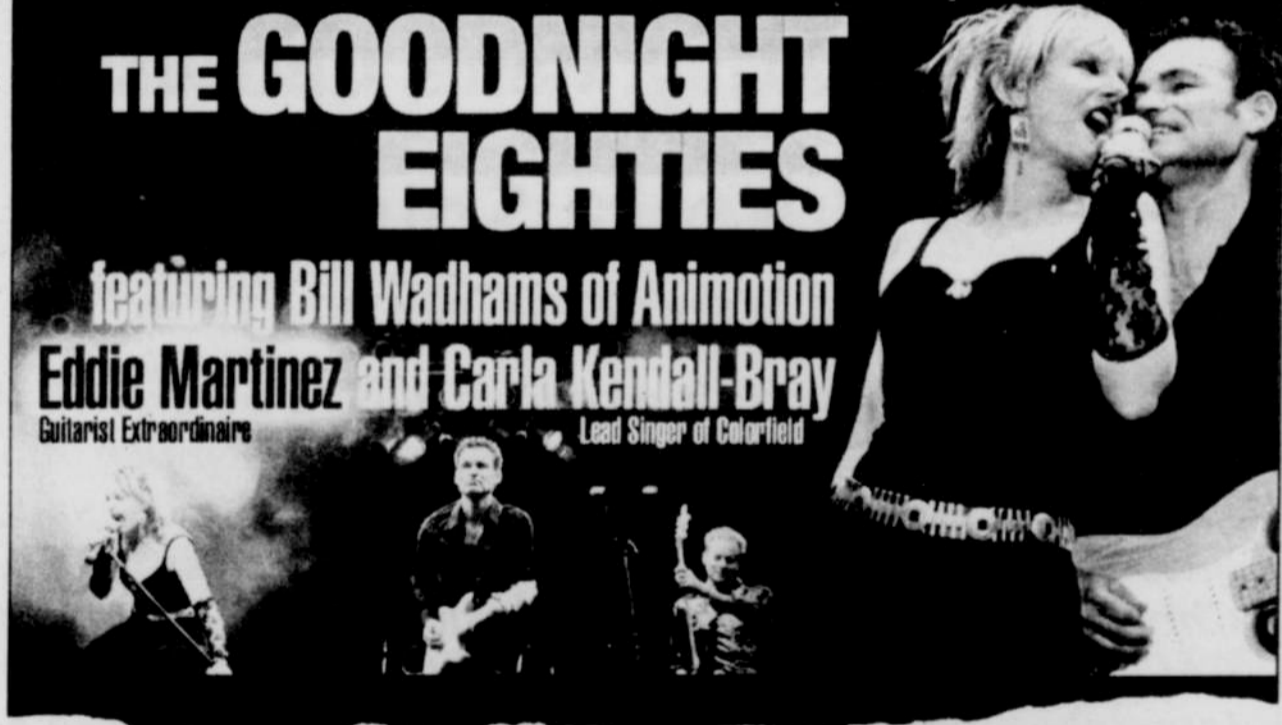
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