

The Weight of Comic Pondering

BY JOEL NICHOLS

Naturally, I wanted to read *Funny That Way: Adventures in Fabulousness* by Joel Perry; for one, my name is Joel too, and I felt an instant connection to the other Joel when I read the back flap: "Joel Perry grew up fat and queer in North Carolina."

Growing up similarly fat and queer in Vermont, I wanted to read what this guy was saying. The great cover design by Philip Pirolo is a really good visual representation of what is in the book.

Perry divided the book into ten sections, ranging from "Getting to Know Me" and "Politics and God", to "Food and Sex". The jacket tells us that he produces comedy sketches for the same company that employs the likes of Dr. Laura and Rush Limbaugh. He seems to have a unique perspective on being gay coming from this situation; his essays do not present a utopia of gay-

ness or an indictment of anti-queers. Perry is able to laugh at gays and straights (there are few bisexuals in this book) without seeming preachy or bitchy.

The first chapter is about his fetishes and how they were created in his childhood near a military base in North Carolina. His babysitters were often Marines, and he has at least one fond memory of a group of Marines wearing only shorts and boots who pushed his mother's car when it had run out of gas. These two accounts I found particularly funny and got me in the mood to tolerate some of the less-funny moments that finish the first section.

Living in L.A. with his "spouse" Fred of 19 years, Perry has a very gay daily existence that is somewhat foreign to me. In one night he has close encounters with four celebrities; he regularly attends the Metropolitan Community Church where he has appeared

in the erotic-themed reenactments of bible stories; and he regularly has nightmarish experiences experimenting in leather. His trials at leather bars permeate the book and provide a lot of humor. When he gets on stage to enter the "furiest butt" contest, he realizes that his black jeans are covered with cat fur and dirt glowing from the black lights, and the cheap dye from those jeans has bled all over his skin. Perry takes this trauma in stride and goes on to lament about how much leather costs.

The best thing about this book is the covertly political message in a chapter called "Politics 'Lite'—Activism Made Easy". In the chapter, he makes it clear that you are political if you are gay, no matter whether you march or lobby or not. Just being queer in this country makes a political statement. He has a good policy on the closet.

Ignore it; do not hide and do not be quiet. His assertion that "you're not fooling anyone" based on some work-place criteria is a little off-base, but the general attitude of being out and being a good representative of the gay community is interesting.

He demands being truthful, whether telling the groom's family what "YMCA" means at a wedding reception or standing up if someone tells a homophobic joke.

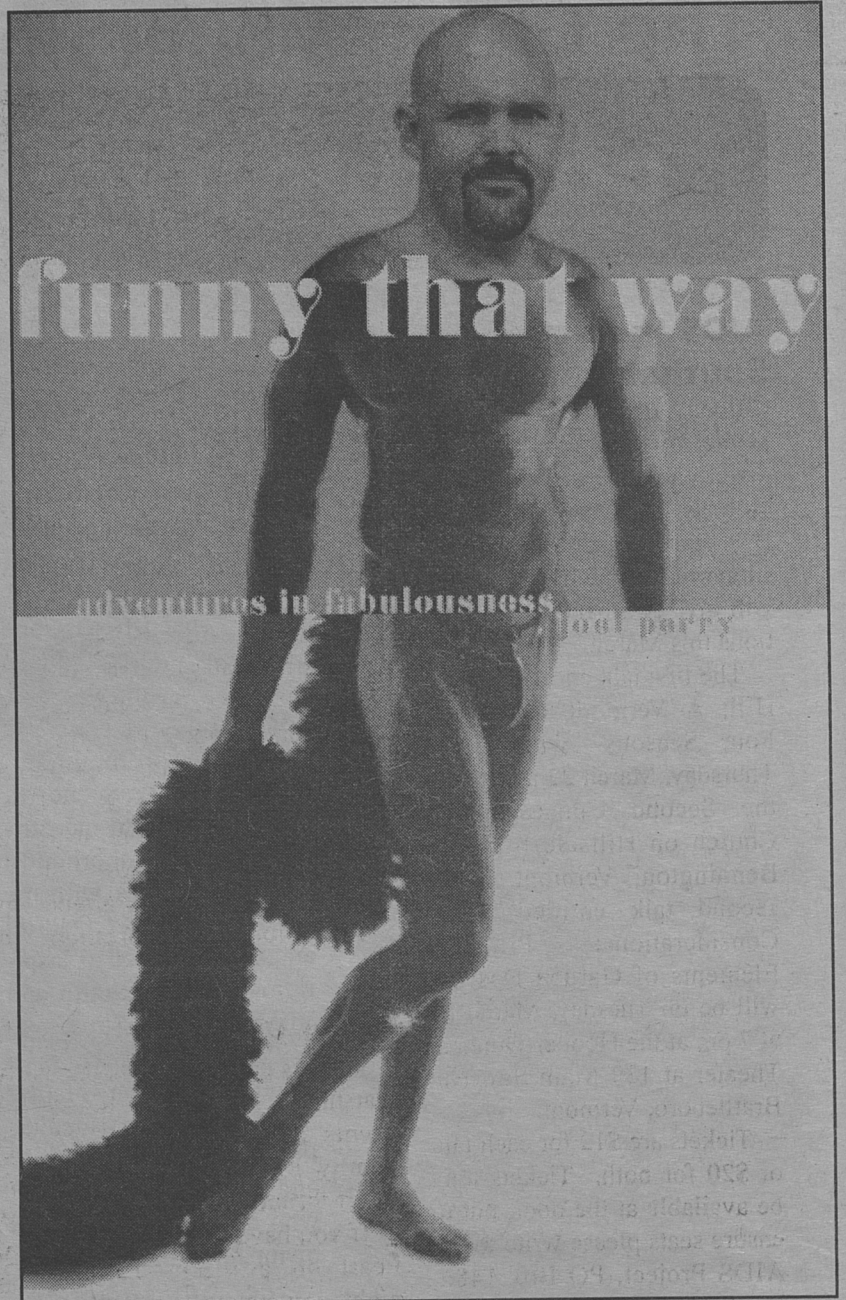
I disagree with his image of being a "good" gay and assimilating, but defending it by noting that it pisses off not only the religious right, but also the

club boys, and that no other couples can share clothes as successfully, is cogent. I like his political attitude, even if I don't agree with every point of his politics.

Perry's book is full of hilarious lines that help him make his criticisms and comments on life, especially gay life. Probably the funniest is his wisdom about weight: "Always weigh yourself with your shoes on. That way you can mentally deduct the estimated weight of your footwear. My shoes currently weigh twenty-five pounds."

The book, like it or not, attempts to be feel-good writ-

ing. I found his observations about pride to be affirming, but also grating. "I am also proud of every single G, L, B, and T who has learned to say 'screw it all' and embrace their own worth because, believe me, that positive force benefits not only them but everyone, whether you 'do it' with men, women, or seasonal melons." This sort of cheesy, sentimental business is all over the book, but Perry's humor and attitude make it tolerable.



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