

# Martha and Belinda's Excellent Adventure: Part 5

Belinda Darcy

## Day 5. Manhattan, KS to St Louis, MO.

Apparently there was a major thunderstorm last night. Martha got next to no sleep, and has attractive dark circles and the cheerless demeanor to prove it. As usual, I slept like a baby. Didn't hear a thing. After 2 hours of driving through relentless rain, we pulled over for a big, hot breakfast at The Country Kitchen, which turned out to be attached to a Ho-Jo's. (Ho-Jo's have a very nostalgic effect on Martha, since her father dragged her family to so many of them, including the oldest one in America, on their frequent road trips). To our great satisfaction, our host, a big queen, kindly sat us in the section served by the only gay waiter in the place. I have no doubt that our presence improved his morning as much as his did ours. Funny how the mutual recognition of one queer to another can be communicated by nothing more than huge knowing grins. We ARE everywhere.

I drove the rest of the way through bleak, washed-out scenery, and managed to miss the turnoff into St. Louis. In the blink of an eye, we shot over the Mississippi River and were headed to Chicago. Backtracking is probably the most frustrating element of any road trip. It inevitably elicits an argument ("Give me the map ... Please?". "No. I got us here, I'll get us back." "Would you just give it to me? Christ, you're worse than my father!" etc). Anyway, we found the Holiday Inn Downtown Riverfront (chosen for its proximity to the gay section of town, which by this stage we were sorely in need of). Our room, on the 17th floor, turned out to be a Junior Suite, with a view of The Arch, (a giant silvery monument rising straight out of the ground, with teeny windows at the top. Martha loved it). It also had a big kitchen, two

T.V.'s and a porch ("No, honey, I really don't need to see all the little cars way down there".) We were wondering if the swishy Assistant Manager had had anything to do with it, when our thoughts were interrupted by the couple next door. It sounded like a man and a woman desperately trying to lift some very heavy furniture. Evidently they were successful. Lovely.

We decided to go and be tourists. Martha talked me into taking the trip to the top of The Arch. This involved squishing into a tiny claustrophobic capsule with a nervous hetero couple, and enduring the nerve-wracking four minute - "ride" to the Observation Deck, with its 30-mile panoramic view. You really could see a long way, but one can only stare at an unfamiliar view for so long. The return ride was faster, but clunkier. I felt rather like a multi-vitamin making its way through the human body. As we lurched on down, I was reminded of all those made-for-TV movies I'd seen, that featured malfunctioning elevators, whose cables snapped sending their passengers plummeting to their deaths. I couldn't wait to get out of there.

After consulting our handy *Women's Traveller*- (such a safe, closeted title for a LESBIAN travel guide, don't you think?), I deduced that one Euclid Ave, which listed no less than three gay restaurants, was the heart of the community, and an excellent starting point for our evening's explorations.

I was right. It was Homo Central. Lots of gift shops, a bookstore, a hair salon or two, a health food shop, and a scattering of tastefully-decorated-small-businesses-sporting-impressive-graphics. I wanted to check out all three restaurants before deciding, but it was 7:00 pm, and Martha's blood sugar was down around her ankles. We ended up at Cafe Balaban's. The food

was unbelievably good, which managed to distract us until about halfway through my dessert, when I brought up the subject of hypoglycemia. We got into a polite argument which escalated into an argument, which rapidly escalated and progressed onto such delightful topics as: who's doing more of the driving on this trip, who's dealing with the luggage and the ever-present cooler, and who's not getting up early enough. It was ugly. So we were in no mood to go out dancing, (although I secretly contemplated dropping her off at the hotel, and going out by myself in my sassy, black cowboy boots). We returned to our hotel in stony silence. Back in the room we broke down and made up, promising to be more tolerant of each other. At least until we got to Vermont. ▼

(to be continued)



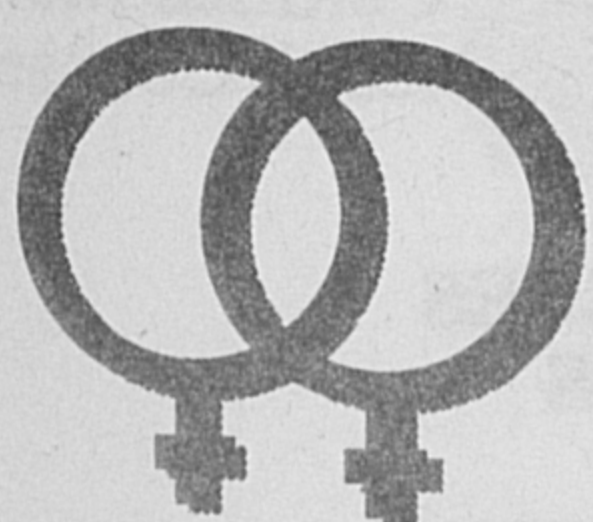
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