



Forrest, Katherine V. (b. 1939)

by Teresa Theophano

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Katherine V. Forrest at the West Hollywood Book Fair in 2006. Photograph by Angela Brinskele. Courtesy Angela Brinskele.

Widely acclaimed writer and editor Katherine V. Forrest has played a major role in bringing lesbian fiction to the forefront of the mystery and science fiction genres. Citing women writers such as Agatha Christie, Ngaio Marsh, and Josephine Tey as her inspiration, Forrest began her writing career at age 40. She has since written numerous mystery and science-fiction books, and edited several anthologies.

Forrest was born in Windsor, Ontario on April 20, 1939. She lost her parents at age 16. She was educated at Wayne State University and UCLA. She became an American citizen in 1976.

She recalls that from as early as five years old, she began falling in love with her female playmates, but by her adolescence she understood that "any orientation beyond friendship with my own gender was unacceptable to my parents, peers, and to my church."

She decided to repress her sexuality, and as a consequence, "Like so many self-denying gay people of my generation, I muddied my own life and the lives of anyone who cared about me. Self-hatred did its insidious damage to every relationship, and I marched on to the next one and the next one, leaving the wreckage behind and convincing myself that I was really okay, I just needed time, and with a little more maturity I would grow out of this aberration and mature into what was expected of me."

Even after Forrest came out and entered into loving relationships with other women, "I remained essentially in the grip of all the early shame and my own powerful homophobia. Until I was forty years old." Not coincidentally, in that same year, she abandoned a career in the business world as an administrative manager to become a writer.

Forrest published her first novel, a romance entitled *Curious Wine*, with Naiad Press in 1983. Known for its breakthrough candor in its depiction of lesbian eroticism, it is her most commercially successful book to date. It has sold over 300,000 copies, and has become established as a classic of lesbian fiction.

Forrest has described the experience of writing *Curious Wine* in almost mystic terms: "at age forty, forcing its way to the surface was a book, unbidden, pouring out of me like a song, the book that was mine to write." She adds, "I have perhaps written better novels in the years since, but none I will ever love more than this book in which I claimed my identity, found my truth, my integrity, my pride, my voice, and my future."

Just over a decade after its first publication, an audio recording of *Curious Wine* was released (1994), which is reputed to be the very first audiobook based on a lesbian novel.

With *Amateur City* in 1984, Forrest launched her popular police procedurals featuring lesbian homicide detective Kate Delafield. The seven books in the series have been well received by reviewers and readers alike. They provide entertaining reading as well as a realistic, intelligent portrayal of lesbian life. Delafield, a former Marine and Vietnam vet, is a confident, capable member of the Los Angeles Police

Department, who finds herself forced to deal with a homophobic atmosphere.

The Delafield titles delve not only into the protagonist's personal life, but into social issues as well. For example, in *Murder by Tradition* (1991), Forrest explores gay-bashing, while in *Liberty Square* (1996), she illustrates the effects of war on soldiers both gay and straight. Though Forrest says the latter work does not center on the issue of gays in the military, there is no doubt that *Liberty Square* pinpoints some of the risks and hardships faced by gay and lesbian soldiers.

Lesbian publishing house Naiad Press released all of Forrest's novels prior to 1994, including her Delafield series and her science fiction books: the lesbian cult classic *Daughters of a Coral Dawn* (1984) and *An Emergence of Green* (1986). That Naiad should publish Forrest's books was altogether appropriate since Forrest was Naiad's senior fiction editor from 1984 to 1994. She also co-edited three Naiad anthologies, released from 1992 to 1994, with Naiad's publisher, Barbara Grier.

Forrest retired from Naiad in 1994 to concentrate further on her writing, and as of 1996 Berkley Prime Crime began publishing her Delafield novels. Forrest has stated that her work targets a primarily lesbian audience, but as the switch to a more mainstream publisher may indicate, the Delafield books have a broad appeal.

Forrest's 1987 Delafield novel *Murder at the Nightwood Bar* has been optioned for a film several times, but no film is currently in progress.

Twice winner of the Lambda Literary Award for Best Mystery--one for *The Beverly Malibu* (1989) and the other for *Murder by Tradition*--Forrest is also the recipient of the 1998 Pioneer Award of the Lambda Literary Foundation. In 2003, at the New Orleans Saints and Sinners Literary Festival, she was inducted into the "Saints and Sinners Literary Hall of Fame."

In 2002, Alyson Books published Forrest's long-awaited science fiction novel *Daughters of an Amber Moon*, the sequel to *Coral Dawn*. While several of her titles from the 1980s are currently out of print, Spinsters Ink and Alyson Publications have both begun reissuing Forrest's backlist.

Long a resident of California, Forrest currently lives in San Francisco with her partner, Jo Hercus. In addition to writing her own books, she teaches writing and does some free-lance editing.

On July 15, 2008, Forrest and Hercus were married in San Francisco in the private chambers of California Supreme Court Justice Carlos Moreno, one of the four justices who voted in favor of the historic decision that legalized same-sex marriage in California.

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About the Author

Teresa Theophano, a freelance writer, is a social worker who specializes in community organizing with glbtq populations. She is also the editor of *Queer Quotes* (Beacon Press, 2004).