



Martinac, Paula (b. 1954)

by Tina Gianoulis

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Writer Paula Martinac's career has been devoted to exploring and documenting the place that lesbians occupy in society, history, and the family. Whether in her fiction, her syndicated column, or in a unique guidebook to gay historical sites, Martinac is always most interested in the ways in which lesbians affect and are affected by the society around them.

Born on July 30, 1954, in Pittsburgh, Martinac received her undergraduate degree from Chatham College in that city and went on to graduate school at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. After earning her M.A. in 1979, she took a job as assistant curator at the West Virginia State Museum in Charleston.

In 1982, she left West Virginia and moved to New Jersey to work as a production editor at the publishing firm Prentice Hall. That same year she joined the editorial collective for the New York City feminist newspaper, *WomaNews*. From then on, New York would be Martinac's city and the setting for many of her novels and short stories.

Martinac's work at *WomaNews* was the start of a long and productive involvement in women's publishing. In 1985, she went to work as production director at the Feminist Press at City University of New York. She worked on production at the Press until 1994 and after that continued to contribute as a freelance writer.

In 1988, Martinac joined the editorial board of the feminist literary magazine *Conditions*, which was published in Brooklyn. From 1990 to 1995, she co-chaired the board of directors of New York's Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center, where she established a lesbian and gay reading and writing series titled "In Our Own Write."

Meanwhile, Martinac began to publish her own work, beginning in 1989 with *Voyages Out One: Lesbian Short Fiction*, an anthology of stories written by Martinac and Carla Tomaso, another lesbian writer. That year she also edited another short story anthology, *The One You Call Sister: New Women's Fiction*, in which different writers, lesbian and straight, explore the unique connection between sisters.

In 1990, Martinac published her first novel, *Out of Time*, a fantasy romance that playfully explores the history of lesbian identity. *Out of Time* tells the story of a modern lesbian who is first mesmerized, then bewitched, by a photograph of lesbians from the 1920s that she finds in a scrapbook in an antique shop. The book was received well by critics and won the Lambda Literary Award in the category of best lesbian fiction of 1990.

Martinac has continued to publish prolifically. Her works not only include novels--such as *Home Movies* (1993), about a family's complex reaction to loss filtered through the memory of a lesbian novelist, and *Chicken* (1997), a comic novel about a forty-something ghost writer who embarks on affairs with two twenty-somethings after she is dumped by her lover--but also a variety of other books as well.



Paula Martinac.
Photograph by Katie Hogan.
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Syndicate.

In *k.d. lang* (1996), a young adult biography of the lesbian chanteuse, she paints a compelling portrait for young readers of growing up lesbian.

In *The Lesbian and Gay Book of Love and Marriage: Creating the Stories of Our Lives* (1998), Martinac draws from her own experiences in a long-term committed relationship with her life-partner Katie Hogan, a writer and teacher, to explore the new frontier of gay marriage.

Martinac's fascination with the lesbian's place in history has provided inspiration for other books. In 1996, while working with the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center, she compiled *The Lesbian Almanac*, which includes a wide range of lesbiana-- historical facts, quotes, and resources for lesbians and bisexual women.

In 1997, Martinac published *The Queerest Places: A National Guide to Gay and Lesbian Historic Sites*, a lively guide to U.S. locations of interest to queers everywhere, from the Texas birthplace of famed athlete Babe Didrikson to the Massachusetts home of the reclusive Emily Dickinson.

She has also become a sort of community historian in her home city of New York, and the June 2003 queer book expo, Pink Ink, featured several literary walks with Martinac, who guided walkers to queer sites of interest throughout the city.

Until recently, Martinac shared her humor, insight, and politics with readers in an immediate and regular way in her column "Lesbian Notions," which is syndicated in queer news journals throughout the country. The column was originated by Martinac in 1997; it is now written by veteran activist Libby Post.

Although Martinac no longer writes "Lesbian Notions" herself, in her position as Editor in Chief of Q Syndicate, the largest syndicator to the gay press, she edits the "Lesbian Notions" column.

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About the Author

Tina Gianoulis is an essayist and free-lance writer who has contributed to a number of encyclopedias and anthologies, as well as to journals such as *Sinister Wisdom*.