

Bob and Bob

BY NANCY STETSON

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If you live in Southwest Florida, you may think you know Bob Morris.

But chances are, you're wrong.

There are at least two Bob Morrises, and both of them are writers. Both have published books. Both have written for newspapers. And both have written travel stories for Condé Nast magazines.



N.Y. Bob Morris



Fla. Bob Morris

Not the best situation, if you're trying to make a name for yourself as a writer.

If you know Bob, you probably know the Bob Morris who wrote for *The News-Press* for a while, then moved on to the *Orlando Sentinel*. A freelance writer now, he also writes comic mysteries set in tropical settings – three, so far: “Bahamarama,” “Jamaica Me Dead” and “Bermuda Schwartz.”

But he's not the Bob Morris who wrote “Assisted Loving.” That Bob Morris lives in New York City and wrote “The Age of Dissonance,” a weekly column for the *New York Times*. It was urbane and witty, and, as Morris himself says, he said things in print that other people only thought.

On February 26, 2006, he wrote about the other Bob Morris – the Florida one, in a column called “The Man With My Name.” The Florida Bob Morris had written a six-page advertorial for Marriott Timeshare Vacation Villas, which, unfortunately, ran

with his byline. (Serious journalists generally don't write advertorials, because it's considered degrading to their professional image; journalism and advertising don't mix.)

Of course, everyone who knew the New York Bob Morris and saw the ad thought he'd written it.

“Call me self-involved,” he wrote, “but I suddenly found myself fiercely believing that my clean reputation as a journalist was irrevocably sullied.”

The New York Bob Morris e-mailed Florida Bob Morris, then called the corporate office of Marriott. But he couldn't get the byline removed. New York Bob wound up calling Florida Bob, whom he calls “gracious and sunny.”

As he wrote in his column: “I often get compliments for things you write,” said my Doppelnamer, who has been married 27 years, with two sons he's working hard to support through law school. ‘And I always thought our situation was kind of funny.’ He even thinks it's funny when old girlfriends call up after reading my columns about my gay partner to ask him clumsy questions.”

The two did meet in person when Florida Bob was doing a book tour.

“He's a great guy,” New York Bob says. “He's been getting a ton of e-mail to his Web site [about my book.]” He adds that a friend of his mother-in-law read a review of “Assisted Loving” “and was freaked out that he was gay!” Of course, she didn't realize she was reading about the other Bob Morris.

Things will even out, eventually. The Florida Bob Morris is coming out with a new book.

The New York Bob Morris expects to get a lot of e-mails about it. ■

The Guy on the cover

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While Bob Morris's book, “Assisted Loving: True Tales of Double Dating With My Dad” is about his father, the man pictured on the front isn't his dad.

It's a question Morris, and his publisher, get a lot.

“It's the grandfather of a younger friend of mine,” Morris explains, a contemporary of his dad.

The man, too tan to be healthy, is sitting on the beach, eating a sandwich with both hands. He's wearing a gold chain and bracelet, and his gut is hanging over the top of his Burberry swim trunks. He looks as if he's about to say something taunting or outrageous, even with a mouthful of food.

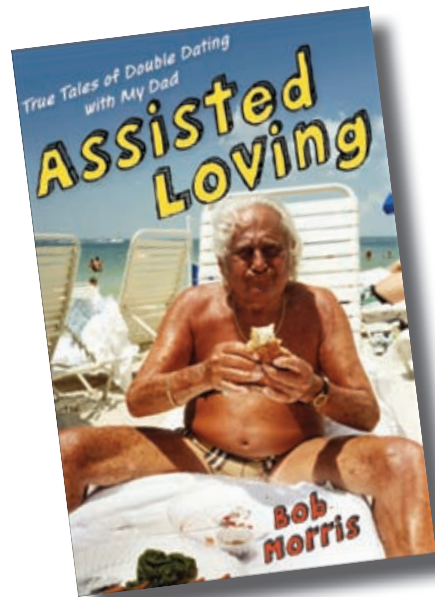
“It was a choice I had to make,” Morris says of the cover. “I think that the vitality and joy of that image of a man's face, the way he's taking life, that was the world of my dad. He could be any number of people in Palm Beach.”

But his mom's sister, who's 85, was disappointed with the image.

And Dinah Lenney, who reviewed the book in the *Los Angeles Times*, took the publisher to task for it at the very beginning of her review: “What was HarperCollins thinking?” she writes.

“An old guy, with a comb-over and a gut, sitting on a chaise at the beach – legs spread wide in his too-tight Burberry swim trunks – skin like leather, gold chains at his neck and wrists, his mouth full of sandwich, this is supposed to be funny? Because, what, the real story isn't funny enough? They're going to sell more copies if they insinuate vulgarity between the covers?”

Lenny loves the book, hates the cover. And it's true – the book isn't as crass



as its cover suggests. It's tender and endearing, funny and insightful.

But Morris likes it.

“I love this guy, he's such a character, so himself. Exactly like my dad. It captures the joy, the essence of my father,” he says.

Morris feels the cover is “antic and frantic, edgy. The goal is to say: ‘This book is unafraid of putting it in your face.’”

“This is a strange image,” he admits. “But a lot of people say: ‘I know this guy.’”

The book's received positive reviews and has great word-of-mouth, but some bookstores don't know what to do with it.

For some reason Borders Books, he moans, has placed the book in the self-help section in the back of the store, of all places. He's hoping that guy on the cover grabs readers' attention and entices them to buy the book.

But no matter what you think of the cover, what's inside is well-worth reading. ■

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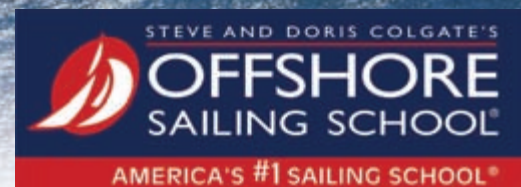
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