One Virus, Two Memoirs, Endless Insights

Young-adult books thrive on fast-paced narratives and crisp, clear writing. Paige Rawl's riveting memoir, Positive, delivers the goods and much, much more.

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Born with HIV, the Indiana native always considered herself a normal girl, interested in beauty pageants, cute boys and cheerleading. A popular go-getter, she didn't expect anything to change when, in sixth grade, she told a friend about her HIV status. Wrong! The resulting bullying led to stress-induced seizures, a lawsuit against her school and, finally, a suicide attempt. But there's a happy ending. Today, she's an empowered advocate against bullying who just wrapped up her freshman year of college and stars in Andrew Jenks's upcoming HIV documentary. And for those of you jaded about the AIDS Walk, wait till you experience it through the eyes of this teenage girl.

Far from the young-adult world, we encounter The Nearness of Others by David Caron, a professor of French and women's studies at the University of Michigan who tested positive in post-September 11 New York City. Instead of traditional narrative, he offers thematic essays, provocative vignettes and academic ruminations. By invoking Barbara Stanwyck, Nazi Germany and our sense of tactfulness, Caron shows us new ways to think about life with HIV.

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