Body at Work

An excerpt from Queer and Loathing: Rants and Raves of a Raging AIDS Clone

March 1, 1997 By Introduction by RonniLyn Pustil

David Feinberg announces at the beginning of this collection of autobiographical essays, "Now it's time to come clean." And that's exactly what Feinberg does in the remaining 275 pages of Queer and Loathing.

I dare you to read this book and not be profoundly moved. You will face the maddening sense of what it's like to be a gay man living with AIDS in the '90s.

AIDS stormed into my life years ago, and ever since, I've been trying to glean some shred of understanding. Feinberg's soul-barings have given me long-awaited insight into outliving your HIV positive friends, ex-lovers and doctors-fearing all the while that their fate awaits you.

Most of the essays read like diary entries, complete with lists, sexual confessions, self-revelations and musings that will leave you breathless and incredulous. And you will feel that way until Loathing's very end, in which the author, POZ's first Sex columnist, admits he doesn't want to think about AIDS anymore.

I double-sare you to pick up this book. And so would David Feinberg, were he here. He died of AIDS on November 2, 1994.

[Excerpt]

This past year, it seems that ACT UP is cming to terms with death.

Tim Bailey wanted us to throw his body over the White House fence, but we could not do that. Instead, we chartered two buses and drove to DC at 7:30 in the morning. Without a second thought, 100 activists take off work Thursday to go to a political funeral to honor Tim Bailey.

We arrive in DC at noon. We mill around for an hour, trying not to look too conspicuous. We fail. One hundred activists with ACT UP t-shirts, stickers and posters can't exactly fade into the reflecting pool by the Capitol. Some of us have pinned Tim Bailey's photo to our chests. Some have drums.

An hour later the van arrives with Tim's body. Several police cars have appeared in the interim. A few minutes later we hear there is trouble.

The police won't let us remove the casket from the van. They will not allow the procession to take place, on the grounds that it is an unseemly and obscene display.

In a way, the police are right. Death is unseemly. Death is obscene. Death is ugly.

A light rain is falling. We haven't eaten since 7:00 in the morning.

For close to three hours we have stood, we have sat, we have guarded th van holding the body of our friend Tim Bailey as a solid wall of police lines the perimeter of our group. We are in a parking lot. A car blocks us at the front. The cops want us to leave, but there is no possible method of egress available, even if we wanted to go.

We decide to take the coffin out of the van and start our procession. We open the door and several people start to take out the coffin.

"Put it back in!" scream the police. "Put it back in!"

It seems that they are afraid of death; they are afraid of the physical evidence of the notorious neglect of this administration and the previous two presidential administrations. Tim Bailey's body is the smoking gun of the epidemic. Tim Bailey's body accuses them of murder with quiet fury.

What follows is one of the most horrible moments of my life. In a fracas that reminds me of *Day of the Locust*, police and pallbearers struggle with the coffin. I can't tell whether the police are trying to shove the coffin back into the van or steal it as evidence of our transgression. This moment of madness is captured on CNN. I can see the coffin banged on the edges. In the extreme violence of the scene, I have the impression that the wood is chipping, splintering, cracking and breaking. To protect the body, the pallbearers return the coffin to the van. When it is over, the police have arrested Randy Bailey, brother of the deceased, for assaulting a police officer.

Randy Bailey isn't an activist. He isn't a member of ACT UP. He's had no experience with AIDS activism. He's never been arrested for a political protest. Randy Bailey is a straight man from Ohio whose brother died of AIDS.

Someone yells, "Someone volunteer to get arrested with him so he won't be alone!"

I look around. I am tired. Jim Aquino pauses, then marches straight into the police, and they immediately arrest him. He is as innocent as a lamb led to the slaughter.

This is not a game. This is life and death. This is murder. This is the physical evidence. This is AIDS. This is the remains of Timothy Bailey, dead of AIDS at 35.

What do you plan on doing with your body after your death? Do you want your body burned in effigy at the offices of the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association? Do you want it impaled on the White House fence as an indictment of the current administration? Do you want to donate your HIV-infected organs to the Archdiocese of New York, members of the Religious Right, militant antiabortionists, members of the National Rifle Association, feminists against pornography, and right-wing Republicans?

I stand in awe of those like Mark Lowe Fisher and Tim Bailey who are able to commit their bodies for

political funerals. The concept is unfathomable, incomprehensible, as difficult to grasp as death.

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