POZ Picks

September 1, 1998 By Edited by Kevin O'Leary

Bitter Pills
Inside the Dangerous World of Legal Drugs
Stephen Fried
Bantam Books

Johnson & Johnson may wish for “No more tears” after the release of Fried’s bombshell. Picture this: A woman is prescribed a big-league antibiotic, J & J’s Floxin, for a little-league urinary-tract infection. After taking one pill, she suffers serious—and lasting—neurological damage. Just another statistic? Not when your husband is an investigative journalist. The book chronicles a Lorenzo’s Oil–like labor of love to uncover the truth about Floxin’s dangers. But Fried doesn’t stop there; he uses his reportorial prowess to analyze the drug industry’s massively mixed motives—including those that produced protease inhibitors. Not simply a diatribe against the big business of illness, Bitter Pills is a warning that the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

BOOKS
We Must Love One Another Or Die: The Life and Legacies of Larry Kramer
Edited by Lawrence D. Mass
St. Martin’s Press

More than a valentine to gay author and America’s most famous and controversial AIDS activist, these essays about Larry Kramer offer a fascinating kaleidoscopic view of an era through the prism of one man’s heroic life.

The ambivalent feelings Kramer provokes are well-reflected in this anthology, which is by no means uncritical. Larry Mass selects the adverse comments well, ranging from his own misgivings—expressed in his opening essay and his closing conversation with Kramer—to Canaan Parker’s brilliant take on Kramer’s take on Parker as an African-American gay man. Even Kramer’s closest friends, like Rodger MacFarlane, do not hesitate to criticize him. Such openness to wide-ranging opinions marks this book as a distinguished work.

Best line in the book? Gabriel Rotello’s: “While the gay world has yet to produce a genuine leader, in Larry Kramer we seem to have produced a genuine prophet. Troubled. Resented. Mostly correct. And tragically, still mostly unheeded.” --Willian M. Hoffman

Surviving the Fall

Peter A. Selwyn, MD
Yale University Press

Dr. Peter Selwyn's heartfelt look at the first decade of the AIDS epidemic is an open wound of a memoir—the removal of a restraining bit long in the mouth. A revered AIDS specialist, Selwyn begins with his residency in the Bronx, struggling valiantly in poetic language to convey the horror of so much loss. But it is later, in more sober prose, that the book fulfills its ambitions.

Its second half pays off richly as the author reveals his confusion and fear over an epidemic spiraling out of control. Here the narrative is laid out in a series of revealing snapshots: Selwyn's caged terror after he accidentally sticks himself with an HIV-tainted needle, late-night escapes to the Roxy and a visit to the site of his father's suicide, where he runs his finger along the window ledge and tries to "remember my father's last moments." The parallel he draws between the mute shame of parental suicide and the epidemic's silence=death experience is surprisingly touching.

The book ultimately works as a solid portrait of one doctor's encounter with an unsparing disease. --Scott Hess

Venus in Blue Jeans
Nathalie Bartle, EdD
Houghton Mifflin Company

Dr. Nathalie Bartle is what my mother would call a good egg. After leaving the ivory tower of Harvard with her EdD in developmental psychology, she went on to counsel adolescents. And that's when her real education began. The results are here in this manual on how to talk to daughters about sex. Anyone who is dreading "the talk" will take comfort from her prescription for helping girls bloom.

Teens, Bartle observes in a memorable kitchen-table discussion about masturbation, can smell fear. It's unfortunate, then, that the author seems least brave in the sections concerning HIV; she chooses to quote, with little of the analytic skill she shows elsewhere, health educators who use the abstract "AIDS as death sentence" model to scare young people into using condoms. Bartle is holding back here, and as I read, I wished she would follow her own advice about decreasing the risk-taking of adolescents through information rather than fear.

But as a whole, the book meets its goal: To support your efforts to be a source of information—and even inspiration—in helping the girls you love make decisions they can live with. --Kevin O'Leary

White Light, Silent Shadows
Bruce Cratsley
Arena Editions

"Photography is the art of the split second," renowned photographer Lisette Model once told her student Bruce Cratsley. He not only listened but spent two decades capturing such moments, now

compiled in one book. A “Greatest Hits of 1976–1996,” this work speaks not only about the scientific, physical nature of photography, but also about Cratsley’s emotional and spiritual response to living with AIDS.
His images range from the whimsical nature of everyday objects (“Gumballs in SoHo, 1994”) to the uncompromisingly defiant protesters of ACT UP to bright, abstract light boldly confronting the darkness of shadows.

Cratsley delivers an entire book of black-and-white photographs that display his talents, his interests, his life. The subject matter can be almost jarringly varied, but each genre of images should be viewed as relevant and worthy of attention. Cratsley returns us to the true nature of photography: A moment rendered forever, offered for meditation. --Matthew Sandager

THEATER
The Dying Gaul
Written by Craig Lucas
Vineyard Theatre, New York City

One of the country’s premier playwrights (Prelude to a Kiss) and screenwriters (Longtime Companion), Craig Lucas again directly addresses AIDS in his latest work, The Dying Gaul. The title is taken from a Roman statue of a fatally wounded Gaul warrior as he realizes his imminent death. The play, which opened in New York City this summer, is perhaps Lucas’ most personal expression of the despair at the heart of the grieving process after a lover dies of AIDS. Yet it comes across oddly flat and meanders to an excessively dramatic end.

Five months after his lover’s death, a grieving Robert (Tim Hopper) agrees to sell a screenplay—and, we’re meant to believe, his soul—to a handsome, married producer, Jeffrey (Tony Goldwyn), for a cool million. Robert is brusquely seduced by Jeffrey, who dismisses concerns that his wife, Elaine (Linda Emond), knows something is afoot. Naturally, this is not the case, and Elaine embarks on a campaign—conducted via long, clandestine e-mail chats with Robert—to end the affair. Elaine’s efforts prove ultimately disastrous to her and her family, but Robert manages to emerge from the chaos with a renewed desire to live—a recovered Gaul leaving his Roman adversaries vanquished.

Lucas’ attempt to use the Internet (in scenes far too long and repetitive) to convey both loneliness and rejuvenation is unconvincing. And perhaps because Robert’s heartache is so genuinely moving, his ability to so quickly embrace life again seems far-fetched under these circumstances. --Jeff Hoover

RECOMMENDED DOSE
Tony Valenzuela (porn star, activist): “I love Madonna’s Ray of Light. She asks so many open-ended questions about the meaning of life that resonate with me. Madonna has seen it all but knows there’s something more.”

Mary Lucey (policy analyst for the city of Los Angeles, cofounder of Women Alive): “I just got a

tattoo of two women symbols intertwined on my leg at 22 Tattoo, the best parlor in San Francisco. Ask for Kasmala. He's excellent—if you're into solid black tattoos like I am, he's probably the best in the nation."

Greg Lugliani (GMHC communications director): "I just read Europe: A History by Norman Davies. It's 1,300 pages—fun to read and full of factoids. It also manages to put our own lives in perspective. Pay particular attention to the discussion of the Black Death."

CYBER POZ

Taking it as Gospel

Singing "This Little Light of Mine" to myself gets me through anything. So it was the promise of info on the Winan Family's Gospel Against AIDS, the program that spreads the good word on HIV ed to American churches, that brought me to the site for The Family AIDS Network. And who was there to welcome me but Mary Fisher, HIV-land's most famous Republican gal. And yikes, is that Steve Gunderson, the former GOP rep from the cheesehead state taking a turn as the network's trustee? What is this, a convention? Well, honey, bless 'em for doing their thing. Find out when the Winans are coming to your town. It's no sin if you want to skip the preaching and just listen to the music. www.familyaidsnet.org. —KO

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