POZ Picks

July 1, 1998 By Kevin O'Leary

Pick of the Litter

A Young Woman's Survival Guide
Edited by Yesenia Aguirre
HIFY (Health Initiativesfor Youth)

San Francisco's kick-ass Young Women's Health Team serves up survival tips from the hip. With a tone free from squeamish hand-wringing and the usual side order of preachiness, this manual provides intelligent health info on everything from pregnancy to street drugs. With gritty photos and straightforward teenspeak, this guide is anything but immature. In addition to the HIV section, which includes a thoughtful discussion of drug trials and HIV positive sex, there's an extensive clip 'n' save STD chart. While not a health-care tome, progressive info on needle exchange and safe sex make this an Our Bodies, Ourselves for the millennial age.

-Gabbi Horn

BOOKS

In the Flesh

Gavin Geoffrey Dillard
Barricade Books

There's no better beach reading than a salacious Hollywood tell-all. Try this: An erstwhile kept boy, cult enthusiast and post-porn poet with HIV, Dillard went through hell to bring you this one. Not even David Geffen—allegedly one of the many thinly veiled suitors appearing in these pages—could forbid publication. And since the Zelig-like Dillard has a genius for being in the (for him) right place at the (for others) wrong time, no one is spared: Barry Diller, Cher and Barbra Streisand all get skewered.

That said, my review copy came with quaint ink cross-outs of passages in which Dillard apparently went into too much detail about certain someones. Did the Velvet Mafia pay off an intern at Barricade Books? Or was it the "AMA/FDA hitmen" Dillard claims are killing off scientists who take a holistic approach to the treatment of HIV?

Yes, the New Age cant is a little overdone—Dillard found out he had HIV and then found his spiritual self, you see—but it's all worth it for scenes such as that of a testy Streisand hitting the

Aspen ski slopes. So slosh on the sunscreen (SPF 45), turn your back to the parading flesh, let go and let Gavin.

-Kevin O'Leary

Women and AIDS: Negotiating Safer Practices, Care and Representation
Edited by Nancy L. Roth, PhD, and Linda K. Fuller, PhD
The Harrington Park Press

These essays about prevention and care for HIV positive women fail in what the jacket copy claims is their mission: "Nothing less than to prevent the spread of AIDS among women." Really? Unless you have an advanced degree with your HIV, reader, beware of academic books with such grandiose statements.

The editors repeatedly make the valid point that in order to be to be effective, health education and AIDS research must be culturally sensitive. But the two articles about Asian women, for example, do not allow their voices to come directly to us, thus reinforcing the stereotype of Asian passivity and invisibility.

And, oddly enough for a book compiled by communications experts, the section on media representation is weak. Fuller's 30-page piece on female producers and directors of AIDS films consists mostly of fatuous autobiographical notes, leaving the reader no wiser about how the media portray women with HIV. And though Katie Hogan's analysis of "Boys on the Side" nails Whoopi Goldberg's role as a racist reconstitution of the "Mammy" model, did this insight deserve such space in a book that devotes only 10 pages to women IV drug-users?

Because it's a start, Women With AIDS should be on your shelf, but it's hardly the last word.

-Pat Califia

Vanitas
Joseph Olshan
Simon & Schuster

So, is Joseph Olshan's follow-up to Clara's Heart a cerebral comment on love in the shadow of AIDS, or is it just a juicy art-world mystery? Melding the two is a major reach, one that not surprisingly exceeds this writer's grasp.

Despite the omniscient narrator, Olshan clumsily imposes the main character's fear of AIDS onto the entire proceedings. In the beginning, when the mystery is told more Raymond Chandler–esquely, referring to AIDS only by its symptoms or as "an infection" amounts to a distracting parlor trick. Now you see it, now you don't.

Then the narrative takes a sharp detour and the characters ruminate about the toll the epidemic has taken on their psyches. This is Olshan at his most engaging, so when the mystery plotline

returns, it seems like an annoying afterthought.

Olshan is a good writer—his characters are developed and their motives are understandable if not admirable—but this makes the novel all the more disappointing. Let's hope that next time he only writes one book at a time.

-Dorian Carr

In the Studio
Tom Bianchi
St. Martin's Press

After reviewing Tom Bianchi's original submission for this season's collection of male nudes, his editor advised the renowned HIV positive photographer to "go further." And Bianchi did—he went not just more explicit, but deeper, more soulful.

At the outset, we learn that some of the men pictured have since died of AIDS. With this knowledge, the erections and erotics—shocking enough in a coffee-table book—hint at a meaning beyond sex for sex's sake. This is Bianchi's real achievement: He decontaminates the image of the gay male body. In this collection, white semen on a muscular, hairy chest doesn't inspire fears of biohazard, even though we know it likely contains HIV. And this is not because Bianchi's images lull us into desire's timeless state, but because he shows figures of strength rendered even more beautiful by our knowledge of their mortality.

-KO

MOVIES

The Human Race
Written and Directed by Bobby Houston
Tell the Truth Pictures

Had a sucky day? Go see this documentary and wash that angst right out of your hair. You'll get to play stowaway with the all-HIV positive crew of Survivor as they set out to win the Transpacific Yacht Race, and you'll rediscover the joy of being the underdog.

"We're either stupid or brave," says the ship's cook, Ted Taylor—"depends on the moment." Intrepid filmmaker Bobby Houston catches every one of those moments, even those that resemble Mutiny on the Bounty. During the journey, each man uses the camera as a sort of diary, telling the story of what brought him to sea. Their hope is amazing because they are doing so much to create reasons to believe.

And OK, the opening monologue may make you cry, but after that the film inspires action, not waterworks. Look for it on its upcoming 50-city stellar tour, or just sit back and wait until a cable station snaps it up.

-KO

RECOMMENDED DOSE

Monica Johnson (NMAC adviser): “I just rented One Night Stand with Wesley Snipes and Robert Downey Jr. It wasn’t the plot that I liked—I just thought they handled AIDS well. Downey Jr. was very believable as a PWA and I loved how Wesley handled it as his best friend. The movie turned out to be a tearjerker.”

Sean Sasser (GLAAD man): “Some friends just turned me on to comic books. My favorites are DC Comics’ Preacher and The Sandman—really wild, easy reads with incredible graphics. Not too heavy, kind of fun.”

Andrew Sullivan (cultural observer): “I’ve been trying to read Pillar of Fire, Taylor Branch’s second installment in his biographical history of Martin Luther King Jr. I’m not as impressed by this second effort, but it’s mandatory reading after my evening meds.”

CYBER POZ

Haven’t racked up enough frequent-flyer miles to get you to Geneva for the 12th World AIDS Conference (June 28-–July 3)? Those with clipped wings can eavesdrop on the chit-chat at the largest AIDS cocktail party in history by logging onto the snazzy conference website. Non-Swiss Misses can download info on scholarships, special events and abstracts from the comfort of their computer terminals. And if you want to get to Le Pont, Geneva ’98’s community newsletter, look no further than this site. The treatment wonks are so excited that the homepage sports a countdown to the big day in June. Dr. David Ho better hurry if he wants his skis back from the pro shop in time! Catch your lift at **www.aids98.ch.**

-KO

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