Read This

Books tackle different sides of AIDS

August 1, 1994 By Michael Grumet

Douglas Sadownick's first novel, *Sacred Lips of the Bronx* is the compelling story of Mike Kaplan, a Jewish gay man who grew up in the Bronx and is now a Los Angeles newspaper journalist on the AIDS beat. He and his lover of 10 years, an AIDS activist, are drifting apart. The end of their relationship is due in large part to Mike's belief that his lover is responsible for infecting him with the AIDS virus.

The novel is most engaging when Mike tells us about his early life. His beloved grandmother, Fieda, who died several years ago, still inhabits his present life. As does his first lover, Hector, a Puerto Rican youth who taught him much of what life was about. You can almost taste the images of the Bronx that he so vividly creates in a time of integration and transition.

My Own Country: A Doctor's Story of a Town and Its People in the Age of AIDS, by Abraham Vergese, is the true story of a man forced by his experiences as a doctor treating AIDS patients in a rural southern town to confront all the major questions of life. An immigrant from India, Verghese must know first-hand the effects of prejudice and racism in this country. His feelings of being an outsider are overcome when he realizes how universally present AIDS has become in all our lives and, ultimately, how similar his feelings and beliefs are to those of his patients and their families.

He makes you realize that AIDS does affect everyone. Thanks to the media coverage devoted to white, male, urban homosexuals, they have become synonymous with our image of AIDS sufferers. This is no longer the case. AIDS appears in every area of the country, in every racial and economic group.

His book is so moving because it is not about AIDS, it is about people: His patients who have the disease, their families, their town. Their stories of courage, pain, sadness, loss and joy are told with compassion and great skill. The writing affecte me in a way I used to think only fiction could. It makes you realize that there are, in fact, real-life heroes and villains.

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