POZ Awards 2020 / Best in Literature

Read about the nominees, then scroll down to vote for your favorite!

October 1, 2020

Welcome to the 5th Annual POZ Awards, which spotlight the best representations of HIV/AIDS in media and culture.

The POZ editorial staff selects the nominees, but POZ readers choose the winners.

Eligible nominees were active or were presented, published or produced between October 1, 2019, and September 30, 2020.

Be sure to vote for your favorite nominees by the World AIDS Day deadline: Tuesday, December 1, 2020.

VOTING IS CLOSED

Here are the nominees:

The American People, Volume 2: The Brutality of Fact by Larry Kramer

Larry Kramer was like the feisty, sharp tongued, super smart, grumpy grandpa to the HIV community, and unfortunately he passed away in May of this year. He left behind a catalogue of amazing work, including this final novel, The American People, Volume 2. The book completes the premise from The American People, Volume 1: Search for my Heart, where Kramer reimagined history from primates up to the 1950s. In Volume 2, he completes the tale with deliciously lurid ideas of U.S. presidents' sex lives, tales of American spies, sex in popular culture, all leading up to the rise of a terrible plague that the government ignores (sound familiar?). The book is rich with biting satirical wit, passionate social criticism, and brilliant storytelling, just like Larry.

Blood Criminals: Living with HIV in 21st Century America by Jonathan Thurston

In this fascinating book, Thurston, himself living with HIV, tells us about six people living with HIV as they go from sex education, testing HIV positive, dealing with stigma, starting treatment and exploring dating life. It's one of the only books to talk about current issues for people living with HIV in the modern world. Thurston interviewed over 100 doctors, pharmacists, lawyers, law enforcement officers, medical scientists, people living with HIV and people affected by HIV, as background for this manuscript. Through the stories of the six, Thurston explains things that many

of us living with HIV know a lot about, like challenges with access to care, being threatened on social media and abuse from the legal system. It's a captivating book, especially relevant for those of us who are living it.

Full Disclosure by Camryn Garrett

At times funny, at times sad, this debut novel by young Camryn Garrett (she was just 18 when she wrote it!) tells the story of a teenage girl who was born with HIV. Simone, who also has two adoptive daddies, is the new girl in school. She's starting over, making friends and even has a serious crush, but all that is endangered when an anonymous note is left in her locker threatening to disclose her HIV status. What follows is a story many of us living with HIV can relate to, when Simone has to balance her privacy and fear with her desire to live her authentic self and not let the bullies win. It's an inspiring and thoughtful book, told by a fresh, young, unapologetic voice. We love it.

Like a Love Story by Abdi Nazemian

This young adult novel is a beautiful coming-of-age story about three teens in New York City, struggling to find themselves in the midst of the AIDS crisis in 1989. Reza (a recent immigrant from Iran), Judy and Art each face relatable challenges as young, queer adolescents, fighting through the most awkward and messy emotions of growing up at a time when the word "gay" was synonymous with disease and death. Author Nazemian transports us back to that time, giving us a mini-queer history lesson in the process, and reminding us that no matter what happens, "together we are limitless and whole," and that "love is our legacy." It may be written for a young audience, but Like a Love Story may just be the medicine we all need right now.

WINNER: Lyrics of My Life: My Journey with Family, HIV and Reality TV by Branden James

Branden was a bundle of nerves when he took the stage for Season 8 of the reality hit America's Got Talent, but when he opened his mouth to sing the opera classic "Nessun Dorma" by Puccini, the audience rose to their feet and the celebrity judges beamed. What they didn't know, and what even his family didn't know, was that Branden was living with HIV. In this frank autobiography, the handsome singer tells his life story, growing up in a conservative, religious household, discovering music at a young age, wrestling with challenges of God versus gay, his career, and finally love and acceptance. Branden's story is honest, charming, relatable, and gives you just a glimpse of the struggles of a professional singer and what happens behind the glamour.

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