



“Saints & Sinners” Festival Honors Its Roots in HIV/AIDS

The New Orleans-based LGBTQ+ literary festival was founded to amplify HIV/AIDS in literature. They still lift up those voices.

March 31, 2023 By [Mark S. King](#)

Any LGBTQ writer who has endured the gauntlet of getting their book to a reading audience knows what a frustrating, fitfully satisfying process it can be. God only knows how many queer masterworks are trapped in laptops because the writer has no idea how to navigate the confusion of agents, boutique imprints, book promotion, or the growing self-publishing industry.

You can count me among that number. And that is why the warm, supportive embrace of the [Saints & Sinners LGBTQ+ Literary Festival](#), which just celebrated its 20th year, was such a delight for me.

Held each year in the incomparable city of New Orleans (and at [the historic Hotel Monteleone](#) in the French Quarter, no less), Saints & Sinners brings together all the cogs of the publishing machine under one roof: LGBTQ writers who are published or hope to be, publicists ready to promote them, and boutique publishers dedicated to lifting up their voices.

Queer publishing is a small, feisty, and devoted family, or at least when it comes to attendees of Saints & Sinners. Throughout the lobby and hallways there were old friends reunited and introductions being made, with news of a new title or books being offered for an author's signature. I got hugged by strangers and introduced as a writer. What's not to love?

The festival was founded as a tool to amplify the issue of HIV/AIDS in literature. They haven't forgotten their roots. I served on a panel, “Coming of Age in the Time of HIV/AIDS,” and was so moved and impressed by the facilitator, [Jonathan Alexander](#), and my fellow panelists [Jobert E. Abueva](#), [Gerard Cabrera](#), [Wes Jamison](#), and [Daniel W.K. Lee](#) (and yes, I want you to follow the links and support their work). As the elder on the panel, I was fascinated by the various ways in which community trauma trickles down across the generations, and how the permutations of HIV are being captured by younger writers.

There were so many helpful workshops for writers navigating the publishing terrain. How to self publish, how to produce your own audio book, how to promote your work (alas, writing your book is only the beginning of the promotional process, as my new publicist [Michele Karlsberg](#) has taught me), and the weekend even included pitch meetings with queer-leaning publishing houses.

Speaking of promotion, I have a new book coming in September, and you'll be hearing about in the months to come. [My Fabulous Disease: Chronicles of a Gay Survivor](#) is a collection of my work over the course of four decades. It has humor, sex, HIV, illicit drugs, and sometimes all of them at once.

Meanwhile, if you are trying to figure out how to get your HIV related story into the hands of readers, you might want to check out Saints & Sinners. You will find a queer publishing family there, ready to help craft a writer's dreams into reality.

Mark

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