

just entertainment

Women and AIDS

Editors Rieder and Ruppelt shed light on AIDS-affected women who must battle not only the disease but the racism, sexism, homophobia and poverty that keep them invisible

BY ANNDEE HOCHMAN

AIDS: The Women. Edited by Ines Rieder and Patricia Ruppelt. Cleis Press, 1988. 251 pages. \$9.95.

Much of what is written about AIDS has the quality of a snapshot taken on the run, a picture barely able to keep up with constantly shifting information, changing faces, mounting

Books

numbers. **AIDS: The Women**, a new anthology published by Cleis Press, has the opposite effect. It slowly pans through the personal stories of 41 women affected in some way by AIDS, bringing each one into close focus, yet leaving the reader with a broad sense of how AIDS is changing the lives of women everywhere.

To read this book straight through is to induce the exhaustion faced by anyone dealing directly with AIDS. Just when you think you cannot absorb any more information, handle any more emotion, you turn the page . . . and there she is, the woman who is seropositive, the mother or sister or lover of someone who is dying, the doctor or social worker, prostitute, IV drug

user, health educator, hotline worker, policy maker. They are all here, speaking in honest, unflinching voices about the pain, love, and insight AIDS has brought to their lives.

There is Dyana Basist, who speaks the despair others have felt when she writes about a friend who has died of AIDS: "All sounds are sudden/everything is happening for the first time/nothing is enough." And there is Elisabeth, a 29-year-old Berliner who writes that, through her HIV infection, "I have come to a deeper and fuller understanding of life, and I will continue on this track."

The editors, both former editors of *Connections*, the international women's quarterly, have stretched to include disparate voices in this book. There are women from the United States, Western Europe, Zimbabwe, the Philippines; there are women who speak with anger, frustration, hope, wistfulness, alienation, trust. There are residents of welfare hotels and there are university researchers. There are no easy stereotypes in this book, and no simple answers.

The bulk of AIDS research and writing has focused on men. In publishing this book, editors Rieder and Ruppelt shed light on AIDS-affected women who must battle not only the disease but the racism, sexism, homophobia, and poverty that keep them invisible.

There is Jennifer Brown, who writes of her terror and fury at the hospital workers who fed



her lover, Joan, immobilizing doses of Com-pazine. There is JH, living in a \$400 per month hotel room with her eight-year-old daughter, struggling to pay expenses with AFDC income of \$460 per month. There is Lynn Hampton, an outreach worker in Atlanta, who tries to talk long-term AIDS prevention to a cocaine-addicted prostitute who responds that she'll be lucky to be alive next week, the hell with five years from now. There is Kate Scannell, who learns that her physician's bag of tricks isn't enough for some AIDS patients.

And there is Ilse Groth, a Danish woman whose eloquent essay must speak for others:

How do you tell the people whom you are closest to that you have AIDS? How do you tell your mother of ninety-two that her one and only child is ill with the most feared illness of our time? Your daughter at the other end of the country? Your son and his family? . . . No, gentlemen. I will not live anonymously. On the contrary, I feel an obligation

to tell my story and in my own small way help tear down the wall of taboos regarding AIDS.

The essays, composed from interviews or the contributors' own written words, are not heroic, but they inspire awe; they are not sentimental, but they provoke tears. They raise a spectrum of sticky issues about AIDS — of confidentiality and privacy, inadequate medical care, attitudes about sexuality and death, homophobia and classism — but they are not abstract or academic. Instead, these dilemmas come forth in the voices of real women talking about their very real lives.

The editors allow their contributors to speak for themselves, adding only a brief overview of AIDS statistics and short introductions before each section. Each essay, then, touches the reader directly. And that contact is crucial, because it challenges one of the most insidious effects of AIDS. For many people, AIDS has become a reason to retreat into private worlds, shore up an illusion of personal safety, to increase our isolation and further our prejudice, to build walls between ourselves and those who are "different."

This book refuses to allow those fences. In it, the experience of the drug-addicted prostitute has as much to teach as the work of the government researcher. We may not know these women, or anyone like them, but surely we can identify with their grief, their struggle, their hope, and match it to our own. We are not so different — all human, after all. And in communicating that simple message, *AIDS: The Women*, accomplishes something important. Because the way we must grapple with AIDS, or with any global, complex issues, demands first that we see clearly how it affects the human being in each of us.

An Evening with Louise Hay

International Lecturer and Best Selling author of: I Love My Body AIDS: A Positive Approach You Can Heal Your Life (a million copies in print, translated into ten languages)

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Louise explains how our beliefs and ideas about ourselves and others impact our physical and emotional health. The evening will include Louise's presentation and live music.



Stephanie Torres, Faith McDevitt, Kathay Duff, Mary Miles, Cherise Millhouse

PWTC presents evening of one-acts

Portland Women's Theatre Company's new production has the title *Just Between Us*, but this is not just one play — it's five one-acts with the common theme of relationships. This format is a departure from PWTC's usual fare, and will provide an opportunity for us to see the range and scope of the company's actors.

The plays are: *After All We've Been Through*, by Leslea Newman; *Beauty Standards* by Sandra de Helen and Kate Kasten; *Movie Queens* by Claudia Allen; *This Property Is Condemned* by Tennessee Williams; and *Walt Was Wrong* by PWTC's Artistic Director, Kathay Duff.

Kathay says the company is excited to be producing Tennessee Williams' work alongside the works of contemporary women playwrights.

This theatrical sampler evening will range from the Broadway dressing room of Claudia Allen's *Movie Queens* to Williams' dilapidated road house in *Condemned*. *Beauty Standards* (unfortunately) has not become outdated since it was last produced in Portland a few years ago. It is a humorous look at the standards of youth and beauty that society has created and that we as women both embrace and are victimized by. *Walt Was Wrong* is Duff's recreation of the Sleeping Beauty tale.

Just Between Us promises to be a lively and fun evening out. The plays open April 14 and run through May 21 (see Calendar for details).

— Sandra de Helen