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turning point where his whole condition just went to hell. Apparently, he'd had this mini heroin habit all these years, which I hadn't known about. [Winik immediately ceased all drug use upon learning of her first pregnancy, and believed Heubach had also kicked the habit.]

You write that you never stopped loving Tony, but that you did fall out of love with him. When did that happen?

When I had that affair. My sexuality is such a powerful part of me.... I think I say it's like I opened a Pandora's Box. It just took me over. The affair really ended up being a lot more important to me than it really was. It was a two-week affair. And it ended up really taking over my mind and my heart for quite a while. I think it's because I had lived a long time in the absence of those kinds of feelings. I don't know. To tell you the truth, I also think I was distracting myself from the main problem, you know? As I say in the book, it was easier to mourn my perfect little boyfriend that wouldn't sleep with me than my husband who was really dying.

You also state that you failed Tony in love, but not in strength. How so?

Well, because I went so crazy over the affair. I broke his heart with that, and he was obsessed about that forever. I mean, he would never let go of his having seen me develop that passion for someone else. But I believed in us—and I believed in him—in a way that wasn't damaged by that. I also held out forever thinking he could beat [AIDS]—that he could beat it at least for a while longer, or maybe forever. I didn't give up until he had given up so completely. Tony wasn't going to wait.

In 1994, when he asked you to help him die, how hard was it to decide whether or not you would?

It was very, very hard. It was the hardest decision I ever made, mainly because our relationship had become so troubled.... I went back and forth, and he got really mad at me because his attitude was, "Look, I want you to help me do this, and now you're saying you won't help me." I got a lot of counseling and talked to people and finally got as much closure and reconciliation with him as I possibly could. And then I just had to go on my moral belief that it was right for him to be able to do this, and it was right for me to be there and hold his hand.

Where do you stand on the controversial issue of a person's right to die?

I believe it's a personal decision. What I came to realize that last summer of Tony's life is that what we call suicide counseling is somebody saying, "Stop! Don't do it!" There needs to be

more resources for people in this situation. But since it's both illegal and against the codes of medical ethics, it's very hard for people to get the help they need. It's similar to abortion. When abortion was illegal, it didn't stop people from having abortions. It stopped them from having good abortions. And that's kind of where we're at now. The laws and ethics are not stopping people from committing suicide, but it is stopping them from having available all the resources that could make the decision easier, and the whole project a little smoother.

How did you tell Hayes and Vince, who were so young at the time, about AIDS and their father's death?

I was very much on a need-to-know basis with them. I followed the lead of their questions. First of all, Tony was not visibly sick for a long time. They didn't have to know anything, and we didn't tell them anything. They were tiny little kids. Even the concept of death was meaningless to them. They understand a lot now.... They saw Tony begin to get ill. They saw that he started being in bed more, and they saw that he took so much medicine. That made a big impression on Hayes. When he found out that Tony couldn't get better from AIDS, he said, "God, all that medicine and it doesn't do a thing!" And that's such an echo. Tony used to say that all the time: "Why am I taking all this stuff?"

Things just moved so quickly at the end, you know? It was like, "OK, Daddy's very sick. OK, Daddy's in the hospital. No, Daddy can't get better. Yes, he might die." I just gave them these very straightforward answers.

The last hurdle for me was to explain to them that he had died by taking sleeping pills, and not actually as a result of his illness.... They couldn't

believe it at first. They said, "No, that's not what happened!" because that's not what they were [originally] told. Then they asked, "Why did he do that? He shouldn't have done that." And I explained to them that he would have only lived a short while more, and that every week he would have gotten sicker and sicker and sicker, and that he would have had to breathe through tubes and eat through tubes and that he would have had to wear diapers. And when I said diapers, they both just looked at me and said, "Oh, my God! Well, no wonder!" [Laughs] That was the thing they got. "Daddy's going to have to wear diapers? Oh, I'd kill myself too!" [Laughs] They are little, and I am sure we will go over all this ground many, many, many times as they take it in in different ways. They have no idea that AIDS carries any kind of stigma, for example. It was handled so beautifully by people in our town and their school. They don't



Marion Winik

PHOTO BY MARION ETLINGER

even know it's some supposedly shameful disease. They never had any reason to know that.

For whom did you write this book?

The book is dedicated to Tony, and in a lot of ways I wrote it for Tony, as a tribute and a memorial to him, and to make a record of who he was, how he lived, and how he died. I wrote it for myself because I needed to try to understand what had happened and, as much as I could, why. Then I guess I could say I wrote it for everybody else who wrestles with any one of the things that we dealt with, whether it's AIDS, addiction, cross-sexual relationships. Even stuff like difficulties with one's in-laws. I felt like every little thing I'd say could be meaningful to someone. And I know some people might think this is odd, but I think I wrote it for my children, too. Because in making a record of who Tony was, it preserves him for them, too. Even though they're going to know their parents in a way that very few children would ever know their parents, I want them to know.

You write that you and Tony thought of each other as the best stupid mistake you'd ever made. Why do you think you were meant to be in each other's lives?

Because God is good? I don't know. I consider it a huge gift. He was a gift to me. Even as sad as the whole thing is, I feel so lucky that it even happened. These children are so beautiful and great. They, too, are a daily gift. I don't know. I don't know why, but I'm certainly glad it happened.

Do you think that you and Tony could have made it if AIDS hadn't entered the picture?

AIDS was the biggest problem. It destroyed our whole world gradually, and I think every other bad thing that happened to us is sort of linked to it. If Tony had been healthy in every other way, could he have been able to avoid drug addiction? I don't know. But I think so. He had such a wonderful attachment to the children. I know that being a father was the most fulfilling thing he ever did in his life. We had other problems—which were basically sex and money—and those problems definitely destroy marriages on their own, with no terminal illness in the picture. But I think we might have been able to figure those things out.

First Comes Love by Marion Winik.
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Winik is set to appear on ABC's Prime Time Live at 10 pm on Wednesday, April 24. Check local listings. She will also be reading at Powell's City of Books, 1005 W Burnside St. in Portland, on May 1 at 7:30 pm.

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