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SODOMY EMERGES VICTORIOUS

An excerpt from *Reviving the Tribe: Regenerating Gay Men's Sexuality and Culture in the Ongoing Epidemic*

by Eric Rofes

Editor's note: In his new book *Reviving the Tribe*, longtime gay activist Eric Rofes offers a provocative look at the impact of AIDS on several generations of urban gay men in the United States. Rofes unflinchingly confronts key controversies facing the gay men's community as we approach the third decade of the epidemic, and as our collective understanding of HIV disease shifts from that of a short-term crisis to a lifelong challenge.

The excerpt that follows, from the chapter titled "Sodomy Emerges Victorious," introduces a provocative analysis of the high rates of continuing infection among generations of gay men in epicenter cities and suggests new ways of viewing the importance of specific sex acts in gay cultural life and a new approach to working with men's sexuality.

Ben Schatz, executive director of the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association, calls the book "a brilliant and courageous work that will challenge readers and provoke intense thought, emotion and discussion."

Activist and author Urvashi Vaid has called *Reviving the Tribe* "the most important book yet written about the ongoing AIDS epidemic."

And the Rev. Jim Mitulski of Metropolitan Community Church San Francisco wrote, "As *Tales of the City* was to the '70s and *And the Band Played On* was to the '80s, so *Reviving the Tribe* will be to the '90s: a lens through which we fearlessly scrutinize our communal culture, come to an understanding of our generation, reorder our priorities and redirect our activism."



Eric Rofes

We may be witnessing the creation of a new urban gay male life cycle.

Hank Homo (primarily white, but not always; primarily middle class, though not always) spends his childhood in the Midwest (or the South, or New England, or Colorado) with a dawning sense of being "different," which blooms in adolescence into full-blown alienation. He fools around with

dreamed of: out and proud as a gay man, immersed in a gay-positive environment, sharing in a communal culture of pleasure and freedom and affirmation.

One night (or day, or afternoon) he goes home with a man he's dated a few times (or a man he met on the street, or his ex-lover, or his ex-lover's new lover), and gets caught up in a moment of passion (or too much to drink, or wanting it so bad...) and he engages in sex he knows he's not supposed to engage in and never has before (or only has had a few times, or has had quite a bit lately). He frets about it for days (or weeks, or years) and before he knows it, he's at the HIV test site, scared shitless, waiting to get the results.

Books

guys in high school, sneaks out of his college dorm on Saturday night to visit the nearest gay bar, and shortly after graduation, comes out of the closet at age 21.

Hank spends the next few years exorcising demons of self-hatred and addiction, immersing himself in the queer culture of the nearest small city, and trying on different kinds of gay identities. At 25, seeking to fulfill a seemingly unquenchable thirst for gay life and heightened queer identity, he packs his bags and gets on a Trailways bus (or a plane, or in his used '78 Chevy Nova) and heads for San Francisco (or New York, or Los Angeles, or Chicago....) He finds a roommate situation in the Castro (or the East Village, or West Hollywood, or New Town), a gig as a barback at a neighborhood bar, and a gym filled with hundreds of other mid-20s homo-migrants.

He knows what's safe and what's not safe and wears a red ribbon on his jacket lapel. Hank throws himself into "the life" with gusto, good humor and the best intentions. He discovers the dance clubs and the sex clubs, is jerked off in the showers at his gym (or the park at night, or the tearoom in the department store), and picks up men on subways, street corners and at the corner market. He's feeling good, he's feeling hot—finally attractive and at home in his body. At 28 years old, he's living the kind of life he's always

At 30 he hears the news he's feared for years (or expected to hear for years): He finds out he's infected with HIV. From age 30 to 33, he's in denial and tells himself HIV is "chronic and manageable" (or the test was wrong, or that there'll be a cure soon). From 33 to 36, he's mildly symptomatic and learns to meditate and eat right (or begins taking AZT, or becomes religious, or joins ACT UP). At 37 he's diagnosed with KS (must have been those poppers, or the speed, or all the semen swallowed, or bad genes) and gets on several experimental treatments (or withdraws into severe depression, or writes a column for the local gay paper, or moves back to the Midwest, the South, or New England).

He recovers his health for a while, joins a healing circle (or a 12-Step program, or a phone-sex line, or a new compact disc club) and tells the world he's "gonna beat it!" His energy begins slipping away, and he loses weight (or eyesight, or bowel control, or mental functioning), becomes increasingly debilitated and homebound.

Two months before his 40th birthday, Hank Homo succumbs to HIV disease, another soul caught up in a truncated life cycle increasingly prevalent in gay male worlds.

Eric Rofes will read from *Reviving the Tribe* at 7 pm on Thursday, July 18, at Looking Glass Bookstore, 318 SW Taylor St., in Portland.