

**BOOKS**

# Art imitates life

Author Armistead Maupin talks about his new book and how much of his own relationship drama is in it

BY REX WOCKNER

**T**ales of the City author Armistead Maupin is back with a book that is part autobiography, part fiction, part mystery novel and all Maupin.

*The Night Listener* deals with his breakup with longtime lover Terry Anderson via the characters Gabriel and Jess and follows Gabriel through a mysterious relationship with a fan—an abused teen-age boy with AIDS. Maupin, Anderson and I sat down recently in La Jolla, Calif., for a chat.

**Rex Wockner:** From what I know of you, the book seems to wander back and forth, almost from sentence to sentence sometimes, between autobiography and fiction.

**Armistead Maupin:** My work has done that from the very beginning. I've always drawn on bits and pieces of my own life. Terry and I, as you may know, were DeDe and D'orothea in *Significant Others*, and we were Thack and Michael in *Sure of You*. This time around, I've gotten a lot closer to the bone, but I've still reserved the right to alter in homage to the story itself. That remains my single obsession—to tell a really good story—so I have to be able to play fast and loose with the facts and the order of things—

invent dialogue and scenes that never occurred. My chief goal was to make it as emotionally autobiographical as possible, to stay true to my own feelings, because I've always found that when I do that I connect best with the readers. But the notion is not so much to illuminate my own life as to illuminate the lives of others through conclusions that I've come to.

**RW:** I'm probably not the only reader who felt he was sort of hanging at the end. Is there another book, a sequel to this book, maybe?

**AM:** I didn't want you to be hanging so much as swirled back into the center of the book. When I was 15 years old, I saw *Vertigo*, and my life was changed immeasurably. Now that I'm the age of Jimmy Stewart in that movie, I find that it said so much that I'd always wanted to say through my own work. I think of *The Night Listener* as sort of a thriller of the heart where what's really being dealt with is the nature of love lost, but all wrapped up in a mystery story.

**RW:** So that's a no?

**AM:** So that's a no. I consider it to be complete in and of itself. That's not to say that I wouldn't resurrect Gabriel Noone, but it's highly unlikely. Terry watched me through the whole process of this one, and it was one of the toughest things I've ever had to do, because there was the likelihood that people would see

this as the two of us—and there's plenty of reason to do that; there's the suggestion that this might be true. At the same time, the theme of the novel is that truth and fiction are often indistinguishable, depending on who the storyteller is, and that what really matters in the end is the intensity with which we're able to feel love.

**RW:** You talked in another interview about having a gay family that is something other than a traditional couple, which is my own situation, too. It's hard to explain even to some gay people sometimes.

**AM:** It is.

**RW:** That your family might be three people or four people and that sex is not the key determinant.

**AM:** Exactly.

**RW:** In other words, the relationship you and Terry still have four years after breaking up.

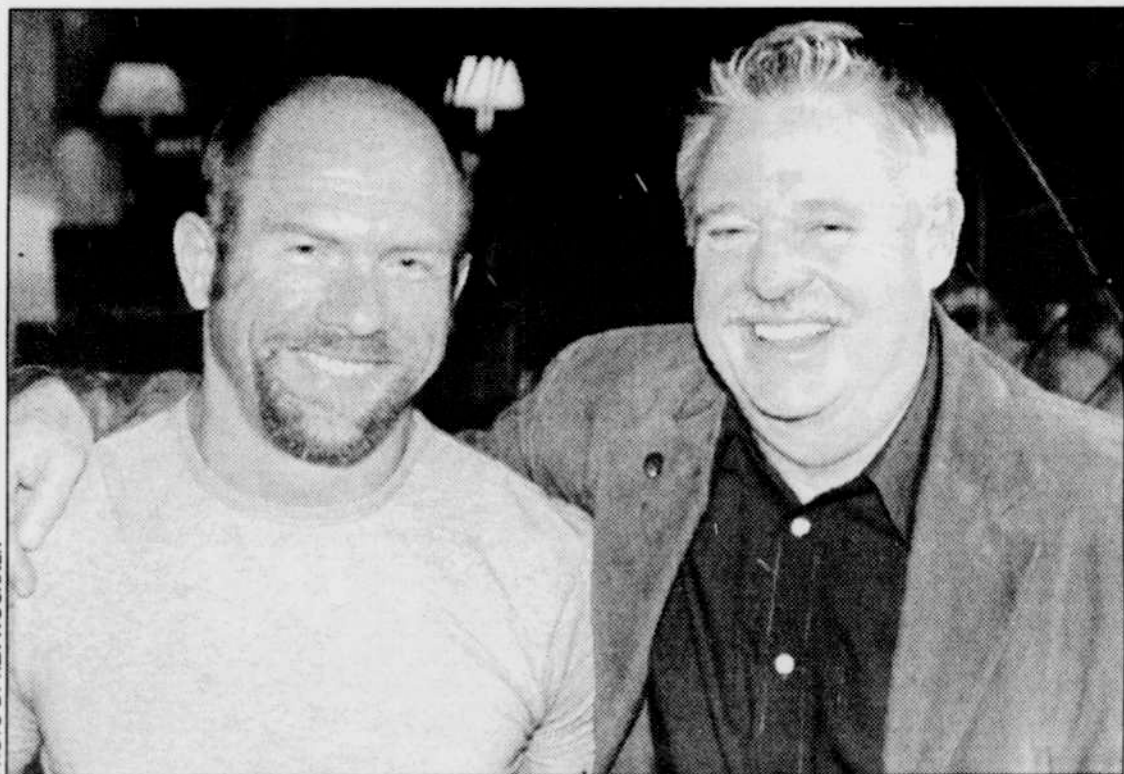


PHOTO BY REX WOCKNER

Terry Anderson (left) and Armistead Maupin

**AM:** It's been one of the great discoveries of my life, because when Terry and I broke up, I felt this huge sense of panic that I was losing everything we'd ever built together. And he was very calm and loving through the whole process and constantly reassuring me that I was loved as much as I'd ever been. The circumstances of our lives had changed but not the love. And I was realizing it in the course of writing *The Night Listener*. Several places throughout the novel, Gabriel Noone says, "How can I write this when I don't know the end?" Well, I was feeling that during that process myself. Terry knew from the beginning that writing would be the best way for me to work through the experience, and he encouraged me to do so—not only encouraged me but was my chief muse and booster when the inevitable morning came and I thought: "I can't do this. This is just too hard. I can't do this." And, of course, Terry's been marketing and promoting the novel and traveling throughout Britain and America with me. We have a love and respect for each other that is so much greater than it's ever been in the past. **JW**

**NOTE:** This is just an excerpt of a much longer interview; full text at [www.gaywired.com](http://www.gaywired.com).

ARMISTEAD MAUPIN will read from *The Night Listener* from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. Oct. 26 at Powell's Books, 1005 W Burnside St.

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