

BOOKS

He bangs

Heavy metal scribe Paul Gallotta writes a brutally honest journal

BY J.S. HALL

LIVING AND DYING IN 4/4 TIME
by Paul Gallotta. Upstart Press, 2000;
softcover \$12.95.

Paul Gallotta can't be accused of having a heart of pure gold—can anyone who refers to people as “human speed bumps” and “Spam-sucking parasites” really be described as wholly charitable? But like all of us, he has his moments of good deeds. Most of these deeds have come from working or volunteering at various AIDS service organizations, mostly Center One in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

As this collection of excerpts from his journals (“Women keep diaries, men don't. I keep a journal”) attests, he has made quite a journey thus far in his life. When the journal began in 1985, Gallotta was a miserable closet case in New York City living with a girlfriend named Eva, writing for the heavy metal magazine *Circus* and drinking and drugging his way to oblivion on a regular basis.

As the years passed, he spent a decade with a loser boyfriend (aptly named Dick), took care of his father as he died of cancer and eventually got into a healthy relationship with a man. Together, they raised a young adopted girl.

Gallotta's bad habits, though, remained a steady companion for many years. Despite occasional bouts of clarity (“If I behave like my friends do when they're hammered, I'm amazed that nobody has shot me yet”), it would be many years before he went sober.

Although it borders on schmaltz, the sentiment he expressed in his introduction seems genuine: “If a drug-addled borderline psychotic piece of trailer-trash such as myself can make a difference in other people's lives, anyone can.

You just gotta wanna. And imagine what a planet this would be if we all gave it a shot.”

As a semiclosed gay man in the less-than-tolerant world of heavy metal, Gallotta often found himself in the unenviable position of listening to rock stars such as Axl Rose and Sebastian Bach spout

anti-gay, anti-AIDS rhetoric yet not having the courage to call them on their prejudices. As he came to accept his sexual orientation, his journals reflect a growing awareness of the daily injustices faced by gay men and lesbians.

Of the August 1987 death of civil rights activist Bayard Rustin, he observes: “Every obituary I read mentioned that he was instrumental in helping Martin Luther King with his civil rights campaign in the early to mid-'60s. None mentioned he was gay. You know they'd have said something if he were a child molester.”

Gallotta's AIDS activism began with Gay Men's Health Crisis in New York and continued in several states. His substance abuse often blunted the depressing parade of clients, and as he gradually eased off drink and drugs, some person or incident would make him bitterly regret his efforts.



IN
4/4 TIME

PAUL GALLOTTA

But rather than succumbing to the ennui of daily bureaucracy, he remained fiery, even though he seems fueled largely by exasperation. Some of his journal entries certainly will give one pause—imagine going into a bar and recognizing “about 60 percent of the patrons as being clients of Center One” and discovering many of them either giving or receiving blow jobs in the hallway connecting the outside and inside bars.

And what would barebackers think of someday having a syringe of drugs injected directly into an eyeball in hopes of saving their vision? If such brutal honesty, delivered with all the tact of an echoing fart in a fancy restaurant, gets some people to reconsider their sexual behaviors, then so much the better.

Gallotta's scathing wit offsets the grimness of his daily work. Not since actor Tom Baker's darkly comic autobiography *Who on Earth Is Tom Baker?* has there been such a successful mix of heartwrenching moments swiftly followed by moments of hilarious lunacy.

For example, Gallotta often asked his dying clients if they wanted any embarrassing items disposed of before their families discovered them. After one such run—with dildos, vibrators and other sex toys bouncing in the back seat—he gets pulled over by a cop.

Some might accuse Gallotta of name-dropping (a staff writer of a highly acclaimed but short-lived magazine of his would become much more famous as the freaky rock star Marilyn Manson), but if the initial paradox of a gay man immersing himself in heavy metal gets more people to read *Living and Dying in 4/4 Time*, then that's a great thing.

Bracing yet searingly funny, the book might lack subtlety, but its heart is in the right place. Downbeat yet strangely uplifting, it's the literary equivalent of a cold shower with an exfoliating scrub. The product of a small press, it might not look quite as professional and polished as some of its shelfmates, but its message certainly deserves to be heard, read and spread. **JH**

J.S. HALL is a free-lance book reviewer.



Paul Gallotta

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