

BOOKS

**THE END OF INNOCENCE:
A MEMOIR**
by Chastity Bono and Michele Kort. Alyson Publications, 2002; \$22.95 hardcover.

Timeline of Chastity Bono: The only child of the beloved Sonny and Cher, she was first seen on their variety show in the 1970s. She launched her coming out on the 1995 cover of *The Advocate*, became a spokeswoman for the Human Rights Campaign and penned the well-selling *Family Outing* in 1998. Now follows a second book, the so-called memoir *The End of Innocence*.

This one spits the media in the face. It's one step ahead of the tabloids, rejecting all heretofore painful distortions, replacing them by a whole and authentic representation of the author.

Simultaneously, it serves a personal therapeutic purpose. Bono travels back in time to deal with a traumatic loss, reaching a successful catharsis in the end; she comes off better equipped to handle life's shady sides.

And the readers? They get to enjoy the cheap thrill of peeking into somebody else's (real!) life.

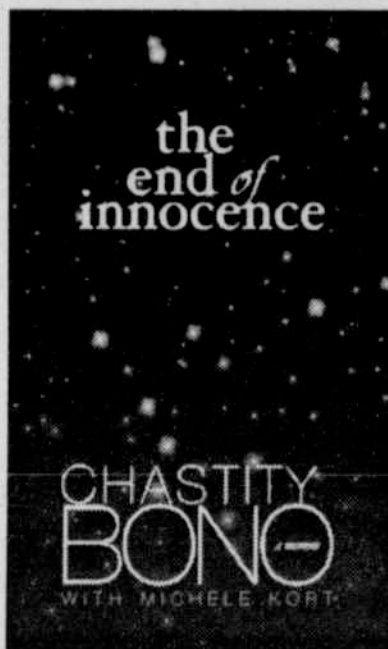
In a nutshell, *Innocence* is a brutally honest celebrity coming-of-age story. Detailing five years in the famous dyke's life, the book covers Bono's attempts at a closeted life with girlfriend Rachel as they start up the band Ceremony on the Geffen label.

All the while, part of Bono is still in love with her mom's friend Joan Stephens, a woman twice her age. We hear reminiscences of her crush on Stephens at age 13 and subsequent sexual encounter several years later.

Too many details about the internal (non)workings and progress of the band load the book down before Bono touches on what she really wants to address. It's clear her heart was never in her music, and that section of the story reflects accordingly. She seems a looker-on while a meaningless career passes her by.

The book finally takes flight when Stephens and Bono get together in the midst of a lot of dykedrama. All becomes heart-wrenching when Stephens' terminal non-Hodgkin's lymphoma starts to direct Bono's life.

Sadly, as is the case with so many celebrity bios, *Innocence* does no justice to the art of memoir; it's just another diary in disguise. Many irrelevant details take up space, and the language is mediocre at best: "Since we spent time lying by the pool, I made sure to put on sunscreen, because I'm pretty fair and hadn't developed my base tan for the year. At some point



The end of memoir

Fortunately, a couple of fine choices sit next to another bad celebrity bio

though, I was lying with my arms behind my head—and I ended up burning by armpits, the one area I hadn't protected!"

The editing, too, is unsatisfying: "In fact, no one caught my eye—until I saw Joan in a sleeveless summer dress, sparkling like a Christmas tree in August."

As it has throughout her life, once again status will save Chastity Bono. Her name alone

will sell this piece of self-indulgent tripe.

There's some consolation in the fact that she dares to be dangerously vulnerable and never loses her integrity while fighting the good fight against homophobia. For that I say, hats off.

—Els Debbaut

THE FEMALE EUNUCH
by Germaine Greer, edited by Jennifer Baumgardner. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002; \$15 softcover.

First published in 1971, *The Female Eunuch* by Germaine Greer was hailed by the *New York Times* as "the best feminist book so far." It was an instant hit but soon went out of print—until last year when journalist Jennifer Baumgardner set about resurrecting feminist classics and putting them back into the hands of feminists.

"Imagine if most of the moral lessons you learned were derived from the Bible," Baumgardner writes in the introduction to this 21st anniversary edition, "but you were never allowed to read that book's text yourself. You could never come to your own conclusions or have your own relationship with morality." Baumgardner contends that the classic texts of the women's movement are every bit as important as any other "classic" texts.

So, who or what is this eunuch? According to Greer, a second wave British scholar, the castrated female is the woman who has been conditioned to sublimate her sexuality, physically and psychically. Taught from the cradle to deny "the element of quest in her sexuality," the eunuch denies "new forms of desire and curiosity" in all realms of life.



Greer's postulation was and is revolutionary, not because she was the first to link sexual energy and life force—Nietzsche wrote that "the degree and essential nature of any human being's sexuality extends into the highest pinnacle of his spirit"—but she was one of the first to link libido to women's liberation.

Eunuch is by turns sweeping, antiquated, overwrought, riveting, sharply insightful and propagandistic. For many of us long schooled in feminist politics, it reads as old news. The challenge is to put the work in context and appreciate how radical Greer's pro-sex, pro-independent-woman, anti-consumer-culture message was—and still is.

In addition to trenchant insights and hilarious wit, Greer is prone to erroneous interpretations of science and psychology. She focuses almost solely upon heterosexual women; when she does mention lesbians, she is supportive, if misinformed:

"Much lesbianism may be understood as revolt against the limitations of the female role of passivity, hypocrisy and indirect action, as well as rejection of the brutality and mechanicalness of male sexual passion." Greer then assures readers that "dildoes are not used by butch lesbians." Where is she going with this, one wonders; unfortunately, there's no follow-up.

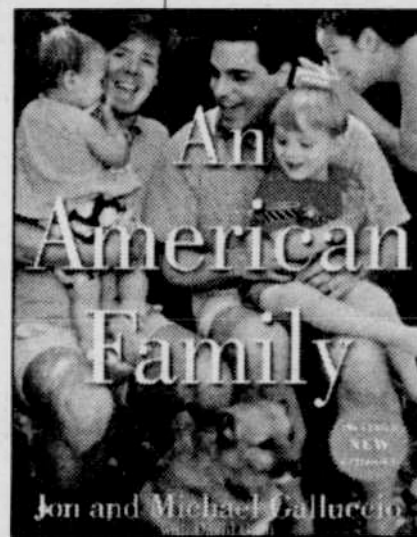
She does, however, have many brilliant insights, such as her comment on the famous Masters and Johnson study of sexuality: "Sexual enlightenment happened under government subsidy, so that its discoveries were released in bad prose and clinical jargon."

Also, she is admirably resolute in her connection between women's sexual oppression and capitalistic consumer economies: "The depression of women is necessary to the maintenance of the economy. If the present economic structure can change only by collapsing, then it had better collapse as soon as possible."

The Female Eunuch is a wild ride. Not for the timid or the repressed at heart.

—Meg Daly

AN AMERICAN FAMILY
by Jon and Michael Galluccio and David M. Groff. St. Martin's Press, 2002; \$14.95 softcover.



Courageous. That's the only word to describe the heroes of *An American Family*, the deeply moving personal account of a New Jersey gay couple who create a family based exclusively on love.

The story is familiar to anyone who has followed the saga of Portland's own Steve Lofton and Roger Croteau, who are fighting Florida's ban on gay adoption. Jon and Michael Gal-

luccio are enlisted to become foster parents to an HIV-positive baby named Adam, who has been born addicted to crack cocaine, severely underweight and with tuberculosis, a hole in his heart and a host of other health problems.

Through tender care, Adam is weaned off his addictions and nursed to safety. Jon and Michael (and everyone else, including the reader) fall in love with the unforgettable Adam.

But, despite assurances by officials of the Child Services Division, New Jersey state law refuses to allow a gay couple to adopt. Michael is free to adopt Adam alone, but it is Jon who has been the stay-at-home dad, leading the crusade to restore Adam's health and battling bureaucracies every step of the way. Ignoring the advice of their families, friends and attorney, the couple sue the state for the right to adopt Adam together.

Along the way to a precedent-setting victory, Jon and Michael take in another deathly ill foster child who is ultimately taken away from them after regaining his health. Then, yet undaunted, they bring home still another. Jon, the driving force behind the lawsuit, goes in search of (and finds) his own birth mother, and Michael fights for the support of his tight-knit and tight-lipped family.

There are even more twists and turns, but I don't want to give away too much of this harrowing and heartwarming tale. Suffice it to say that the love and strength these two remarkable men have will stir your emotions and bring tears to your eyes again and again.

The world is a better place because of this American family, and I am a better person for having read their extraordinary story.

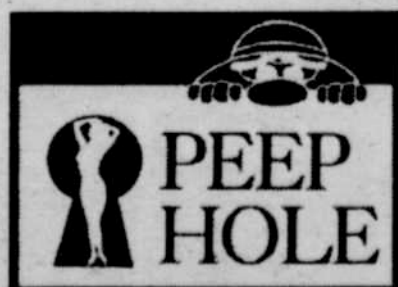
—Floyd Sklaver

ELS DEBBAUT is the assistant manager of *In Other Words*.

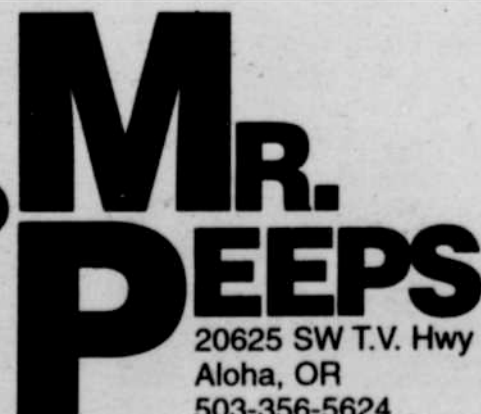
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Confidential. For more information, contact Philip or Misha at 503.223.5907, or by email at ThePinkLinkPDX@aol.com