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BOOKS

Scissors sister

Straight talk from gay scribe Augusten Burroughs

BY JIM RADOSTA

If you haven't read *Running with Scissors* yet, here's your wake-up call.

Gay author Augusten Burroughs' bizarre memoir—soon to be made into a major motion picture starring Julianne Moore as the dysfunctional mother who let her eccentric shrink raise him—is a must-read, especially for fans of humorist David Sedaris. His other books are *Dry*, a memoir about his days as an alcoholic ad exec and subsequent stint at a gay rehab, and *Sellelevision*, a comic novel about the behind-the-scenes drama at a Home Shopping Network.

Burroughs chatted with *Just Out* before embarking on a nationwide book tour to promote his new collection of essays, *Magical Thinking*.

Jim Radosta: How do you feel about the book's release this month? Do you have any jitters?

Augusten Burroughs: You know, most of my jitters actually are related to things like travel. I look at the itinerary and I think, "There's no way I'm gonna make all these connecting flights!" There's always anxiety, but I have less of that really because I write about one topic—myself—so there's not much I can do to influence whether people are gonna like things or not.

JR: Do you have to concern yourself with sales because the expectations might be a little bit higher?

AB: I try not to do that. That's sort of my publisher's domain.... My editor once told me that there are two types of writers. There are the writers who look at the daily sales figures and...mark their position on the *Times* list every Wednesday when it comes out, and there are writers who are just oblivious. She was saying that, in her experience, the writers who are oblivious tend to be happier.

JR: Did your background in advertising

help or hinder your writing? Since advertising is all about the manipulation of truth, and what makes your writing so fresh is its uncensored honesty, how do you reconcile those two?

AB: My experience in advertising was the best training I could ever imagine for a writer. In advertising, you may not feel creative on a given day, and that's just too bad—you have to do it anyway. So years and years and years in advertising trained me to just soldier on despite

my mood. And I learned one thing that was really important, which is you don't wait for inspiration. You begin writing, and then as you write, you kind of become filled with a sense of inspiration. You may have to write a long time before you get that feeling, but the more you write, the more it sort of frees you up, limbers you up—and it improves your mood.

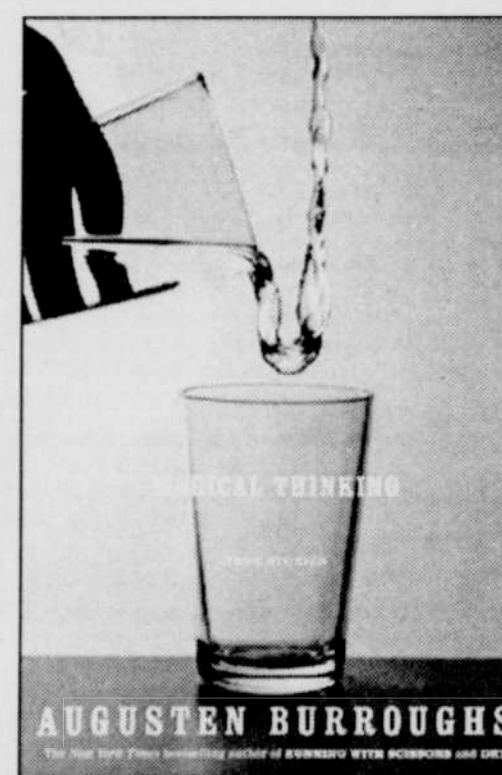
I also learned not to be afraid to cut something if it's not working. Advertising is like poetry in the sense that every word matters.... So you need to cut things that don't work—ruthlessly, even if you think it's a great line.

JR: Have you had some rabid fans who are more obsessive than you're accustomed to?

AB: There have been some that have misinterpreted some things I've written and been very, very angry and give me death threats and things like that. Those are always kind of uncomfortable, but I guess that just goes with the territory.

For the most part...the people who come to my readings always amaze me.... I think, "Jesus, where the hell were you five, six years ago?" It's just weird.... I'm just astounded that someone that cool would like me.

JR: What is it like to write columns for a "straight" magazine like *Details*? Do you ever have to tone down your writing?



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by WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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