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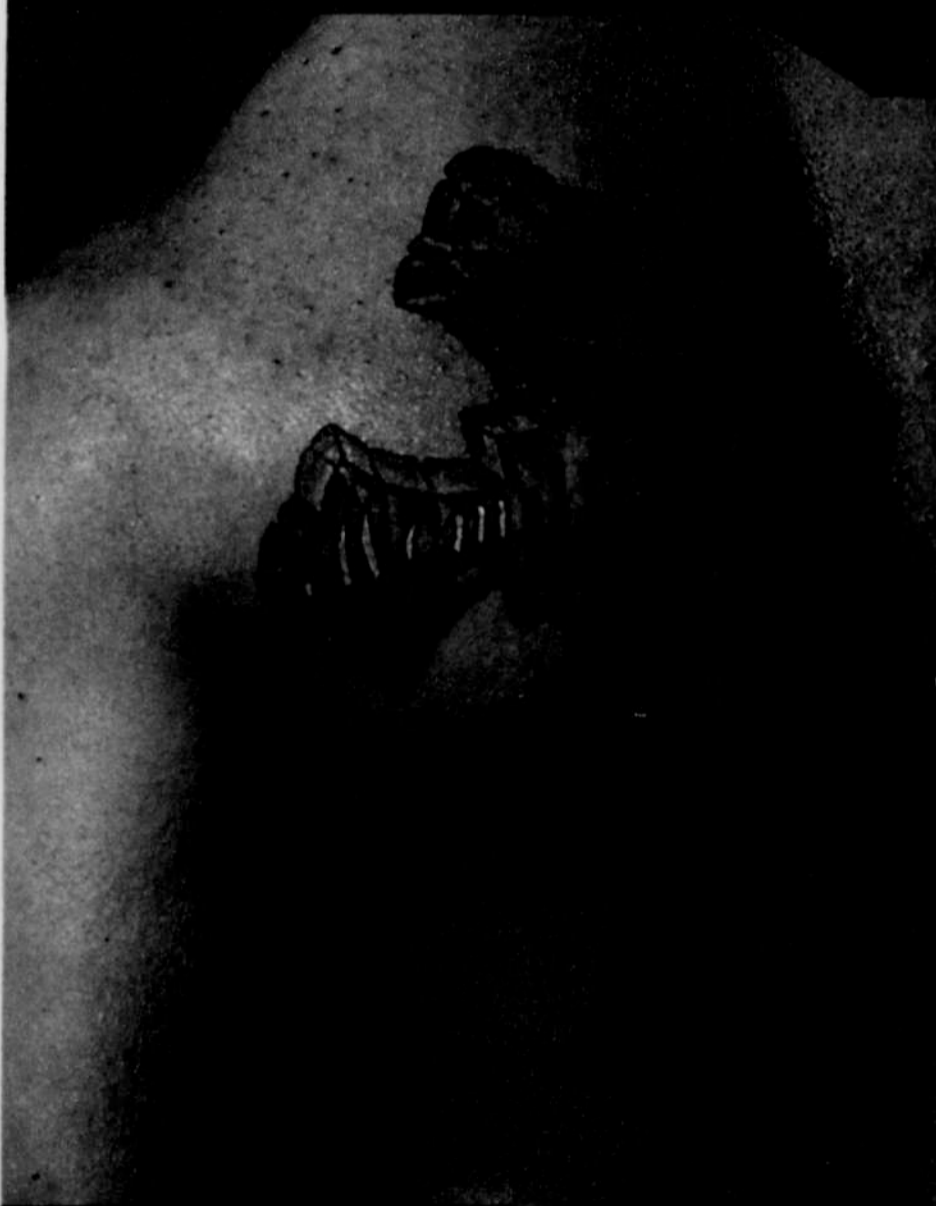


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Mama's Boy

Don't mess with Texas

Think your family is hard to handle? Try this on for size: A gold-digging divorcée tricks her 16-year-old son into giving her a high-speed ride to a plastic surgeon...by faking a vaginal-bleeding emergency.

And that's just the first act of Robert Leleux's *The Memoirs of a Beautiful Boy* (St. Martin's Press, 2008; \$23.95 hardcover), a charming account of his unorthodox upbringing in small-town East Texas. Mother eventually chases a rich man to California, leaving the author with the much more functional family of his boyfriend, Michael.

But like any good gay son, Leleux and his mother remain inseparable; in fact, he's bringing her on the road with him for a cross-country book tour. Here are some highlights from a conversation that touched on the importance of generosity, humility and gratitude.

Jim Radosta: When you were growing up, were you aware of how unusual your family life was, or did it seem normal in your world?

Robert Leleux: Well, I guess both. There's a Sarah Churchill quote—when somebody asks her, "What was it like being the daughter of Sir Winston Churchill and Lady Churchill?" and she said, "It was like having a mother and a father."

I think because my mother took me on so many vacations, I did have a sense that the place I had been born to in my life was not where I wanted to end up. I always had an idea that, at the first possible moment, I was getting out of there. Most gay kids grow up with the idea of being misplaced and anxious to sort of "get thee to a big city," you know?



Robert Leleux lives in Manhattan, where he teaches creative writing to underprivileged children.

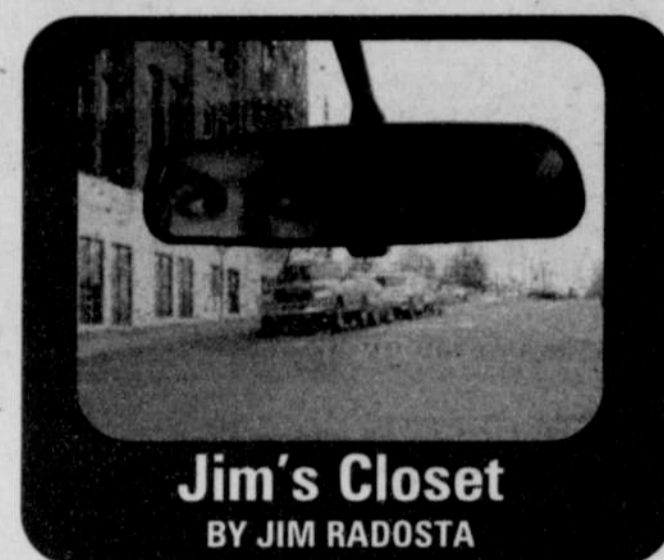
JR: The book shifts tone midway when your mother moves to California—from her being the focus of your life to Michael being the focus. Was this a difficult transition?

RL: I remember having this sensation that my life had been lived on a single radio frequency, and suddenly I was tuning the channels and there were so many other frequencies to participate in. I remember having a real sense that the world was so much broader than I'd ever realized.

JR: How do your mothers get along now, and was there any jealousy when you started spending more time around Michael's mom?

RL: Fortunately, they're such different people that they're able to appreciate each other. Michael's mother—she's a soap opera addict, and I think that, for her, my mother is the closest thing she'll ever meet to Erica Kane. [Laughs] Which is the thing about my mother—the worse she behaves, the more you adore her. I think my mother-in-law is just sort of star-struck by her.

And my mother has a real appreciation for Michael's mother's sweetness. It's hard to dislike a person who's truly sweet.



JR: Has the book caused pain for any of the subjects being exposed?

RL: Not that I have heard. My mother is absolutely delighted, because I feel that my mother has been a star in search of a stage her entire life. I feel like I have provided her with the stage, and she's absolutely thrilled and excited. And she has prepared for it...by going shopping, and she has bought what she assures me is the most beautiful new wardrobe for my tour.

My father has had enormous good grace about all of this and has really been terribly sweet.... I gave

him the manuscript to read, and he read the first 50 pages. He's still very much in love with my mother, so this is...not something that he can find amusing. He gave it back to me and he said, "I'm so proud of you, and I can't read any more of this." I thought that was the most generous response possible.

JR: In hindsight, now that you've written the book and had this reconciliation with your father, do you understand why he had to get away from your mother?

RL: [Laughs] Yes. You know, I recommend writing about your parents' lives to anyone. It gave me an enormous humility. Don't you think that everyone's just trying to

do the best that they can? I do. My parents are wonderful, beautifully flawed people. Writing it, I got to experience that anything that they might have done, they really thought was the best thing at the time.

JR: Did you discover anything about yourself during the writing process?

RL: Just how incredibly sweet so many people have been to me. I feel like the boy who got everything he asked for for Christmas—profoundly grateful for everything.

I was satisfied with the way that [the book] turned out, and that satisfaction meant that I couldn't feel sorry for myself about anything that ever happened to me. And so on some level, at least, I have to have a real gratitude, even for the shitty things that happened, because those all contributed to something. ☺

ROBERT LELEUX reads 7:30 p.m. Jan. 24 at Powell's Books, 1005 W. Burnside St.

Arts and Culture Editor JIM RADOSTA needs your feedback. E-mail him at jim@justout.com.