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BOOKS BY SUZI STEFFEN

What's in a Convention?

Two memoirs and a novel provide different views of the gay

SWISH: My Quest to Become the Gayest Person Ever, memoir by Joel Derfner. Broadway Books, 2008. Hardcover, \$22.95.

HOMO DOMESTICUS: Notes From a Same-Sex Marriage, memoir by David Valdes Greenwood. DaCapo Press, 2007. Hardcover, \$22; trade paper, \$14.

THE STORY OF A MARRIAGE, fiction by Andrew Sean Greer. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2008. Hardcover, \$22.

Look at the cover of *Swish*. It's pretty much focused on five muscled guys, one wearing a hot pink thong.

Wouldn't you believe the subtitle of Joel Derfner's book and think hey, perhaps this guy can explain things like why gay erotica features men with 10-inch dicks or why sailor hats are so damn gay — and also: What's up with the tiny poodles?

Not what happens. The first chapter contains this sentence: "When your mother gets out of her wheelchair and crawls up the stairs in her nightgown on hands and knees bleeding from diabetic neuropathy, gaily pretending that she has simply found a particularly invigorating new form of exercise, and all you can do, since your father is five hundred miles away saving the world, is make her a rum and Coke with enough Bacardi to knock out a rhinoceros, it becomes difficult to tell her that when she rejected your sexuality she hurt your feelings."

Yikes. Simply not the kind of topic that was promised on the cover, frankly. The rest of the book — which covers online dating, Derfner's step aerobics classes, writing musicals and the Holocaust, go-go dancing and ex-gay therapy, among other things — provides plenty of fascinating, emotionally moving and well-written episodes in Derfner's life. Once I accepted that the title and the cover had less than nothing to do with the book, and despite the painfully obvious wrap-up

discussion of religious right male bonding (done far better in Donna Minkowitz's 1998 *Ferocious Romance*), Derfner's writing yielded its many charms. But no, nothing about purse-sized dogs.

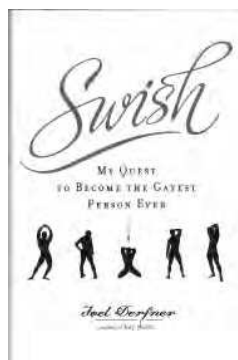
Although David Valdes Greenwood and his husband do experience pet ownership — of a rabbit, no less — in *Homo Domesticus*, Greenwood's memoir leans far more in the "We're just like you!" direction than

Derfner's definitely queer sensibility. Greenwood and his spouse met in grad school and held a wedding a decade before same-sex marriage became legal in Massachusetts. This memoir covers the basics that any twenty- and thirty-something couple experience, especially in a big city: money differences, house hunting, learning to fight and to compromise, dealing

with pets and figuring out how to deal with the kid issue (and then the kid). If you're a person who needs reassurance that not all gay men become knitting, neurotic, step-aerobicizing, go-go dancing New Yorkers, this is the sweet, smart book for you. If you roll your eyes at the idea that *anyone* would give in to the patriarchal construct of marriage, stay away.

But you might want to check out Andrew Sean Greer's *The Story of a Marriage*. This novel, the follow-up to his tremendously successful *The Confessions of Max Tivoli*, centers around the story of Pearlie Cook and her husband Holland — and another man, a white man, who could wreck Pearlie's hard-earned marriage. Set in 1950s San Francisco and touching without harping on sexual orientation, race, class, courage and betrayal, this quick read (fastest literary

novel ever!) provides lovely passages on its way to a surprising finale. Greer reads from *Story of a Marriage* at 7:30 pm Tuesday, May 27, at Powell's on Burnside in Portland. If you go, expect a packed Pearl(ie) Room and plan accordingly. **EW**



BOOK NOTES

Emory Douglas gives a slide show presentation on his book *Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas*, 4 pm 5/22, Mills International Resource Center, EMU, UO. **Adam Leigh Gollner** discusses *The Fruit Hunters*, 7:30 pm 5/26, Powell's on Burnside, Portland. **Armistead Maupin** reads from *Michael Tolliver Lives*, 7 pm 5/27, Powell's, Beaverton. **John Pomfret** discusses *Notes From a Gambling Nation: Why China is Not Going to Be the World's Next Superpower*, 5 pm 5/28, 282 Lillis, UO. **Phillip Margolin** (*Shadow of Power*) and **Steve Martini** (*Executive Privilege*) read, 7 pm 5/28, Powell's, Beaverton. **Leonard Mlodinow** discusses *The Drunkard's Walk*, 7:30 pm 5/28, Powell's on Burnside, Portland. **Oregon Quarterly Essay Contest winners'** reading, with judge/opening speaker Kathleen Dean Moore, 7:30 pm 5/29, Gerlinger Lounge, UO. **Richard Thompson** discusses *Willamette Valley Railways*, 7 pm 5/29, Powell's, Beaverton. Editor **Shari MacDonald Strong** and contributors **Jennifer Margulis**, **Alisa Gordaneer**, **Gigi Rosenberg** and **Margaret McConnell** discuss *The Maternal is Political*, 7:30 pm 5/29, Powell's on Hawthorne, Portland.