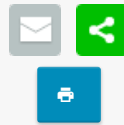


How We Fight for Our Lives.



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Reviews

Because memories evolve over time, grow fuzzy or distorted, and occasionally disappear, a compelling memoir must improve upon dry facts with poetic embellishment. As such, Jones, author of the poetry collection, *Prelude to Bruise* (2014), is well-suited to write in this nebulous genre. In quick, impactful chapters, Jones recounts his experiences growing up gay and Black in the South, the only child of a single mother who's Buddhist, a practice which complicates the relationship with his assiduously Christian grandmother. As he figures out how to negotiate these relationships, Jones draws poignant parallels between two important figures, James Byrd, Jr., a Black man killed by three white men in a truck, and Matthew Shepherd, a gay man murdered by a pair of straight men. An uncomfortable, defining moment of the memoir occurs when Jones accompanies a straight white man back home after a party and an altercation ensues, which Jones renders with gut-wrenching clarity and surprising sympathy. Jones' unabashed honesty and gift for self-aware humor will resonate with readers, especially those in search of a story that resembles their own. Copyright 2019 Booklist Reviews.

LJ Reviews 2019 May

Having triumphed with the knife-sharp *Prelude to Bruise*, winner of the PEN/Joyce Osterweil Award for Poetry and the Stonewall Book Award/Barbara Gittings Literature Award and an NBCC finalist to boot, Buzzfeed staffer Jones here blends prose and poetry to tell the story of being young, black, and gay from the South. With a 75,000-copy first printing.

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LJ Reviews 2019 August

In this highly anticipated memoir, writer and poet Jones (*Prelude To Bruise*) begins with the influence of James Baldwin and what it means to create an alternate version of oneself. He describes a childhood spent alternating between the suburbs of Dallas with his mother, and summers in Memphis with his evangelical grandmother. With lyrical writing, Jones shows the impact of lingering silence around sexuality; gay was an unspoken word in either home. This is all set against the backdrop of the deaths of James Byrd Jr. and Matthew Shepard in 1998—if being black can get you killed and so can being gay, what does it mean to be black and gay? Throughout, Jones tells of slipping away from his mother and grandmother, of wanting a sense of newfound freedom. While college allowed this, it came with a physical and mental cost. An underlying question is: What does it mean to become someone else? Jones answers this and more, distinguishing memory from the present moment in the process. Gripping chapters on the complicated relationship with his mother, and her life with a heart condition, make for moving reading. VERDICT An unforgettable memoir that pulls you in and doesn't let go until the very last page. [An editor's pick, see "Fall Fireworks," p. 24]—Stephanie Sendaula, Library Journal

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PW Reviews 2019 June #3

Poet Jones (*Prelude to Bruise*) explores sexual identity, race, and the bond between a mother and child in a powerful memoir filled with devastating moments. As a gay African-American boy growing up in Texas, Jones struggled to find his way. In 1998, at age 12, "I thought about being gay all the time," he writes, but at home the subject was taboo. Here, Jones candidly discusses his coming of age, his sexual history, and his struggle to love himself. He describes engaging in destructive behavior in college, including repeated relations with a sadistic, racist man, and their encounters graphically illustrate how sex and race can be used as weapons of hate. Jones writes that, at that grim time in his life, he appeared to others to be a happy young man: "Standing in front of the mirror, my reflection and I were like rival animals, just moments away from tearing each other limb from limb." Jones beautifully records his painful emergence into adulthood and, along the way, he honors his mother, a single parent who struggled to support him financially, sometimes emotionally, but who loved him unconditionally until her death in 2011. Jones is a remarkable, unflinching storyteller, and his book is a rewarding page-turner. (Oct.)

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Haunted and haunting, *How We Fight for Our Lives* is a stunning coming-of-age memoir about a young, black, gay man from the South as he fights to carve out a place for himself, within his family, within his country, within his own hopes, desires, and fears. Through a series of vignettes that chart a course across the American landscape, Jones draws readers into his boyhood and adolescence—into tumultuous relationships with his family, into passing flings with lovers, friends, and strangers. Each piece builds into a larger examination of race and queerness, power and vulnerability, love and grief. Extremely personal, emotionally gritty, and unabashedly honest, *How We Fight for Our Lives* is an outstanding memoir that somehow manages a perfect balance between love and violence, hope and hostility, transformation and resentment. Jones was born in Memphis, Tenn., and grew up in Lewisville, Texas. From there he moved to Kentucky to earn a BA at Western Kentucky University and then on to New Jersey to pursue an MFA at Rutgers University-Newark. Despite the changing backgrounds, the core of his life remained the same: his mother; his family; his passion for words; and his sexuality. Jones knew as much as Jones wrote "*How We Fight for Our Lives*" as an exploration of identity, existence and self, he also wrote it as a love letter to his mother,

to whom it is dedicated. Although she is present throughout all four parts of the memoir, she becomes the focus of the final section when he recounts his final experiences with her and her death. Despite her death not being a surprise — Jones shares that she will die within a decade in the prelude — the ending is tender and heartbreaking. The reader has come to know her as a loving and formidable woman. We come to see that while Jones fights for his own life, she fights for her own as she battles health issues. She also fights for his, working to bring home money to support him while raising him on her own. Four stars. Read *How We Fight for Our Lives* if you're interested in a powerful account of the author's intersectional experience. (Readers should be forewarned that some content is graphic.) Thanks to Simon & Schuster and NetGalley for giving me a DRC of this book, which will be available for purchase on October 8th. ...more. It brings me great pain and joy to know Saeed Jones' *How We Fight For Our Lives* will be set upon us all. Pain for the collective loss and sorrow gay black boys have suffered, and joy in knowing that it is stories like these that will set us free. It's been a month since I read Saeed Jones' *How We Fight For Our Lives*, and I fumbled so long to put words to its visceral glamour. When I first heard of its arrival over the winter, I needed it immediately. Haunted and haunting, *How We Fight for Our Lives* is a stunning coming-of-age memoir about a young, black, gay man from the South as he fights to carve out a place for himself, within his family, within his country, within his own hopes, desires, and fears. Through a series of vignettes that chart a course across the American landscape, Jones draws readers into his boyhood and adolescence—into tumultuous relationships with his family, into passing flings with lovers, friends, and strangers. Each piece builds into a larger examination of race and queerness, power and vulnerability, love and grie