

DEREK FROST

Living

and

Loving

in the age

of AIDS

A MEMOIR

"This book is  
both a history and  
an inspiration."

Matthew Parris



“If I had been better-looking in my early thirties I would be dead. This is the story of those less lucky: of a life interwoven with HIV and the author and his husband’s mission to bring hope and relief to others. Derek Frost writes with unsentimental honesty: a stark witness that has been largely absent from the literature. This book is both a history and an inspiration.”

**Matthew Parris, British political writer and broadcaster,  
Conservative Member of Parliament 1979–1986**

“This memoir is incredibly vivid, moving, and compelling. When I was first diagnosed HIV Positive in 1988 I thought I was being handed a death sentence. Derek’s book led me through all the pain and anguish and loss, and also the love and the hope, all over again.”

**Lord Chris Smith, UK Secretary of State for Culture,  
Media and Sport 1997–2001; Master of Pembroke College,  
Cambridge University, UK**

“This is a powerful book, at once a love letter, a well-informed history of the AIDS epidemic, and the life-story of a beautiful young man in London, moving happily through the early days of gay liberation into a time of widespread anguish and despair. The book’s rhetorical beginning – ‘How did it feel then, my darling husband, my J?’ – takes us on a journey into the very heart of darkness, and then, as importantly, out of it and beyond. It moves into a new way of living and loving including the founding and funding of ‘Aids Ark’, a charity furnishing essential medications to people living with HIV in some of the most disadvantaged parts of the world. More than a thousand lives have been saved.”

**Del Kolve, Professor of English Literature  
UCLA, CA, USA**

“This is a poignant and heart-touching memoir which gives the forty year global HIV pandemic a truly human face. It’s a book that epitomizes the human struggles of sexuality, privacy, belonging, exclusion and stigma all coloured by the complexity of worldwide viral contagion, untimely death and the advancing triumphs of medical innovation. Above all it is a story of coping, overcoming, generosity and enduring love.”

**Linda-Gail Bekker, Professor of Medicine,  
President of the International AIDS Society 2016–2018,  
Co-Founder of the Desmond Tutu HIV Centre and  
Health Foundation, Cape Town, South Africa**

*... and about the charity Aids Ark started in 2002 by the  
author, Derek Frost, and his husband J:*

“In 2003, when ARVs were but a distant hope for our Sotho people, Aids Ark arrived and made this dream a reality. Many patients who would have died without the treatment made possible by Aids Ark are today not only alive but productive, happy and eager to do what they can to help those who continue to suffer. Aids Ark has truly been a pioneer of ARV treatment in the Kingdom of Lesotho, and for this I express my overwhelming gratitude.”

**Dr Mphu Ramatlapeng, Minister of Health and Social  
Welfare Lesotho 2007 – 2012, Executive Vice President –  
Clinton HIV/AIDS Initiative**

“Support from Aids Ark has unquestionably spearheaded government-funded ARV access in South Africa.”

**Dr Jenni Zeinecker, Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation,  
South Africa**

“You are soul to Aids Ark’s humanitarian services. You are founding pillars of the FXB programme which has saved the lives of so many HIV Positive people.”

**Dr P S K P Raju, Medical Director FXB India**

“My parents born me with first life. ARV drugs give me second life. Aids Ark who support me with ARV drugs is my life-saver. My health is good. Our family lives again. We have a future. This is the miracle Aids Ark brings us.”

**From Indazita, one of Aids Ark’s many beneficiaries**

copyright © Derek Frost / Watkins Publishing 2021



**DEREK FROST**

**Living  
and  
Loving  
in the age  
of AIDS**

**A MEMOIR**



**WATKINS**  
Sharing Wisdom Since 1893

This edition first published in the UK and USA in 2021 by  
Watkins, an imprint of Watkins Media Limited  
Unit 11, Shepperton House  
89-93 Shepperton Road  
London  
N1 3DF

[enquiries@watkinspublishing.com](mailto:enquiries@watkinspublishing.com)

Design and typography copyright © Watkins Media Limited 2021

Text copyright © Derek Frost 2021

Derek Frost has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and  
Patents Act 1988 to be identified as the author of this work.

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any form or  
by any means, electronic or mechanical,  
without prior permission in writing from the Publishers.

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed and bound in the UK by TJ Books Ltd.

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-78678-496-4 (paperback)

ISBN: 978-1-78678-500-8 (e-book)

[www.watkinspublishing.com](http://www.watkinspublishing.com)



# CONTENTS

Covid-19 and AIDS	ix
Dedication	x
Preface	xiii
<b>Part One</b>	<b>1</b>
Love	5
Being Gay Then	12
Early Years	22
Bright and Precious Days	33
Directions Home	45
<b>Part Two</b>	<b>57</b>
Key West	59
Our War Begins	79
The Storm Rages	105
Finally Hope	125
<b>Part Three</b>	<b>137</b>
Fighting to Stay Sane	139
Darkness to Light	149
<b>Part Four</b>	<b>165</b>
The Aftermath	167
Giving Back	176
More Lives Saved	201



<b>Part Five</b>	<b>227</b>
Being Gay Now	229
This Precious Life	241
Afterword	263
Postscript by Jeremy Norman	267
Recommended Reading	270
Abbreviations	275
Acknowledgements	277

copyright © Derek Frost / Watkins Publishing 2021

# COVID-19 AND AIDS

**A**s I sit to finish writing this memoir, to end a long period reflecting on my life as a gay man and the pandemic called AIDS, another invisible killer called Covid-19 has crept unwelcome into our lives. Yet again, the health of our human population is threatened. Let's hope that the legacy of AIDS, and the lessons our ongoing battle to vanquish it have taught us, will help us in our response to Covid-19 and the other "pandemics" that will, no doubt, follow it; will guide us in how best to save lives, honour human dignity and restore our confidence in the promise of a secure, healthy and joyful future.

From the 2020 UNAIDS Fact Sheet:

Since the start of the AIDS pandemic a median estimate of 75.7 million (range 55.9–100 million) people have become HIV Positive, of which a median estimate of 32.7 million (range 24.8–42.2 million) people have died from AIDS-related illnesses. Annual AIDS deaths have been reduced by 60% since the peak in 2004.

*Living and Loving in the Age of AIDS* is dedicated to the memory of our many young gay friends who died from AIDS.

Willy Aleman	Kenny Everett
Andrew Appleton	Tosh Fitzgerald
Stephen Barry	Terry Gallowhur
John Beswick	Michael Golder
Dicky Bird	Ross Hamilton
Stanley Black	Nigel Hart
Chris Brame	Julian Hosking
Angus Brandon	Paul Jabarra
Donald Brown	Adrian Ward-Jackson
Richard Burgess	Gervase Jackson-Stops
Jamie Burks	Charles Hope-Johnstone
Oliver Cadogan	Anthony Keith
Roberto Cilloniz	Nicholas Kimber
Richard Clarke	Ian Kirby
Andrew Cleveland	Doug Lambert
Jeff Cochran	Nigel Lepard
John Curry	David Levy
Les Daley	Keith Lichtenstein
Wilf Davenport	Malcolm Livingstone
Julian Hooper Davis	Fraser Logan
Russell Dexter	John MacLaren
Sheridan Dufferin	Patrick Morris
Nick Eden	Guy Munthe
David Elliott	Tommy Nutter
Peregrine Elliott	Edward Pearson

Bob Perkins  
Roger Banks-Pye  
Geoffrey Roberts  
Tim Romanello  
Philip Rose  
Claus Runkle  
Vito Russo  
Christopher Selmes  
Dana Severn  
George de Sipio

Hugh Steers  
David Stephens  
Philip Sturgeon  
Ian Symons  
Kip Trafton  
Mario Tremble  
Sebastian Walker  
Conal Walsh  
Tom Wilson  
Kit Woolcott

Dougie, Fotios, Jorge and the others who came to my yoga class at London Lighthouse and the young men who worked at the Embassy Club or Heaven who died.

My memoir is also dedicated to our many friends across the world who continue to live with HIV infection, to the many who have fought extraordinary battles to survive.

For varying reasons I have thought it best not to reveal their names.

Surviving Aids Ark beneficiaries have been given pseudonyms.

*Be mindful of this truth.  
Side by side with happiness, health and life,  
every sentient being will also know sadness, sickness and death.*

From the teachings of the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama

copyright © Derek Frost, Weirins Publishing 2021

# PREFACE

**H**ow did I feel then, my darling husband, my J?  
Then, when I sat beside you, holding your hand,  
waiting to hear what the doctor had to tell us?

Then, when the doctor told you that the virus killing so many  
of our young friends now inhabited you, that you were HIV  
Positive?

Then, when he told you that this virus would also kill you?

Then, when he told me that I was HIV Negative?

How did you feel then, my darling husband, my J?

How did you feel when you learnt that I was going to live and  
you were going to die?



# PART ONE

copyright © Derek Frost / Watkins Publishing 2021





*The best relationship is one in which your love for each other exceeds your need for each other.*

Dalai Lama

copyright © Derek Flett / Watkins Publishing 2021



The year we met and fell in love, 1977.

# LOVE

**A**s a young man on his first five-year work tour of what was then called the Far East, my father was not allowed, by the bank for whom he worked, to be married. This tour was followed by five months' leave "back home", which for him meant Blackheath in London. These few months would be his first opportunity to find a wife, before another five-year posting overseas. With only a fortnight of leave remaining, he met Betty. In two short weeks, they fell in love, married at St Michael's Church in Chester Square, London, then departed together back east. It was 1947. My mother had never been outside England. Now, she embarked on a three-month journey to the other side of the world. Love gives you unbelievable courage.

Their relationship flourished.

This is the love that I grew up with: romantic, impulsive, exotic and brave. I saw how love was for my parents. I learned I could trust love.

So how will love be for me? Will it be for me as it was for them? Who will I love and who will love me? It's 1977, I'm 25 and I'm about to find out.

\* \* \*

Johnnie Galliher is an accomplished New York City "walker" and one-time boyfriend of a wealthy Mr Bloomingdale. He keeps his grand lady friends, his rich Manhattan social X-rays,

separate from “the boys”, claiming: “They just don’t mix.” I suppose he kids himself that the ladies don’t know he’s gay.

I’m invited to lunch at his elegant silver-wallpapered Chester Row flat in London, a lunch that is populated by only handsome and accomplished young men. Is Johnnie wearing a touch of make-up, a suggestion of rouge? You can never be sure ... impeccable grooming. Grey hair carefully arranged, super slim like his smart lady friends, beautiful clothes always white and navy. As required, we all dress for lunch – jackets and ties – no jeans for Johnnie.

Johnnie, we suspect, pretends he’s richer than he is. The phone rings. Johnnie answers with a clipped patrician accent and then, rather grandly, announces: “Luncheon is served.” But no one serves the meal. You never see staff. They’re just implied. Everyone jokes that Johnnie sets an alarm call, that no one’s at the other end of the phone. He thinks we’ll be impressed. Instead we’re amused.

It’s here, at Johnnie’s perfectly styled lunch, surrounded by the giggle and banter of queens, where the most significant event of my life occurs: It’s here that I meet Jeremy Norman, whom I call J; the man who will be my lover, my lifelong companion, my best friend, my soul mate, my other half, my husband.

What happens in that moment when our eyes first connect? What do we both know? J will later say he’s immediately “dazzled” by his first sight of me. I feel the same. That’s something already. Dazzled is not being in love. For us there is an immediate attraction but no falling in love at first sight. For that we both need to know more about each other.

Later, when the table is no longer between us, we quickly find each other. How do we feel? Excited, I’m sure. Maybe already wondering if something bigger might be in play?

What do I think of this man about whom I then knew nothing, and about whom I will later know everything? What does he think of me? Is there some kind of deeper exchange during those first moments of seeing and talking and being

close? What do we say to each other? The words we used have faded from memory; that first thrilling connection never will.

Of course, we don't waste time before sleeping with each other. Gays in particular don't delay in such matters. That happens on our first date, the day after we first meet. Sleeping with J is never only a sexual exchange; immediately it's more. "Dazzled" quickly becomes something deeper.

We keep seeing each other, while at the same time continuing to see others. We're young. We're having fun. Why close doors when others open?

What I quickly learn is that J is a very English kind of man. He went to Harrow Public School and Cambridge University. He's seriously bright and well educated. He knows a lot about a lot. He's a grounded, secure, wise and confident adult. He's self-motivated and despite his young age, just 30, has already achieved more than most of his contemporaries.

I already know that he's beautiful, that he attracts me sexually. I knew that the first moment I saw him. I soon discover he's also an individualist with a contemporary point of view; that he's fun to be with. It's clear he's kind and trustworthy. I quickly feel admiration and respect for him.

What I'm surprised to learn is how unhappy he was as a child; how he felt insecure and isolated. He tells me he was a sissy who liked beautiful fabrics, had a passion for insects and a disdain for sport; a mother who was over-occupied with socializing and a father who died when he was young. I learn that ill health forced him to leave school prematurely with poor grades, that this was followed by a period when he was lonely and suffered from confusion about both his homosexuality and his future.

Following this unhappy period J determined to make better sense of his life. He retook school exams, got great grades and was offered a place at Cambridge to read Archaeology and Anthropology. From then on his life blossomed both socially and intellectually. He made good friends, many remain important to him to this day.

In the years that follow, some will describe J as one of the more successful entrepreneurs of his generation. Maybe, but if so, never in a mainstream way; always on his own terms and following his own compass. Successful. What is that? Yes, he will be financially successful. More importantly he will inspire, he will enrich the lives of others, he will present others with the opportunity to become who they have the potential to become and to express themselves proudly and with joy. He will do this time and time again.

So what does this man see in me in those first moments? Why do I attract him? I suppose I appear somewhat exotic and different to him. I'm clearly not from the same conventional, old-fashioned mould that formed him. I'm flirtatious and forward, while he's rather reserved. Just before we met, I had been in a short relationship with a high-born Indian whom we all call the Maharani. Kohl still clings to my lower eyelids and I'm often swathed in long floating scarves. There was, and still is, much of the hippy in me. J likes the girl in boys and being girlish runs strong in me. One of J's last boyfriends was Peruvian. He appears to have a taste for foreign boys.

Differences attract and in many ways we are different. In other, more fundamental ways, we are similar. Both of us are fiercely loyal and both of us can be trusted. We quickly see this in each other.

J has plenty to focus on. He is preparing to open his first nightclub, to relaunch the famous Embassy Club on Bond Street. Its doors open May 1978. He will honour me with the club's number one membership. Maybe he has a greater interest in me than I understand.

Just as one older American queen introduces us, a second now plays a pivotal role in our lives.

\* \* \*

At Cambridge J met Alan Taulbee. Although separated in age by more than 30 years, Alan became close to J and his Cambridge friends. Post-university he continues to be so

and will often be at the Embassy Club bar. He's amusing and popular, liberally sharing both drinks and stories with his many friends. Unbeknownst to them, J picks up his tab. Many think he's the club's rich backer but, in reality, he's practically insolvent and increasingly reliant on the kindness of friends.

Alan is friendly with Max Reed, the son of British film director Sir Carol Reed, and is offered the loan of his flat in Cannes. By then, J needs a break from the club and Alan invites him, together with a friend of J's choice, to join him there for a weekend. Generous, dear Alan. Needless to say, J picks up all the bills. Despite this, the value of Alan's invitation proves beyond worth. J invites me to join them.

On the day we depart, he arrives, together with Alan, in a black London taxi to pick me up. It's a grey rainy morning. Soon there will be more light and colour than either J or I ever expected.

There are few more romantic places than the Boulevard de la Croisette at Cannes. A necklace of perfectly groomed white sand fringes an azure bay. Along its length, beautifully appointed beach clubs set out regimented armies of matching loungers and umbrellas, attended by bronzed beauties. Cantilevered over the back of the beach is the great promenade *par excellence*. Along it, lines of giant terracotta pots, overflowing with summer flowers, stand sentinel. Here, on this broad sweep overlooking the bay, the fashion crowd and the beach crowd mix with coiffured local ladies out with their high-stepping dogs. The boulevard, along which only the smartest cars seem to drive, is set back from the promenade, divided from it by a carpet of manicured lawn in which stands a line of umbrella pines and immaculately pruned palms. To its landward side are *Les Hotels*, white Edwardian confections standing adjacent to the best restaurants and the chicest shops. All come here to see and be seen. All seems perfection. What a scene. Certainly enough to turn a young boy's head.

During that weekend, and in that wonderful place, unexpectedly, simultaneously, J and I fall in love.



I remember the exact moment.

We're walking off the beach to join the evening *passeggiata* along the Croisette. We stroll hand in hand amongst the sun-kissed throng and come together in a way that requires no words. Suddenly there's an absolute knowing. What we experience is a mutual opening that is nothing like making a choice. Something entirely different happens; a force that is bigger and more powerful takes charge. Bang – and we're committed to sharing the rest of our lives. Our broad grins must have announced the fact to all who pass us, so great is our happiness.

What is this love? What sort of overwhelmingly joyous and powerful event occurs when one is fortunate in life and meets one's soulmate and recognizes it? Each remains an individual but finds they have become completely joined to the other. It has much to do with mutual trust, honesty and respect. I trust this person sufficiently to put my life into their care. They feel the same.

For me and for J, this is the love and the completeness that we now feel for each other. We do not choose to fall in love. There is no choice. Love finds us. Through love we find home in each other.

That's love. Love gifts you with unbelievable certainty. There can be few greater gifts than to find oneself truly loved.

How easily might we have missed meeting each other and falling in love? Across all lives lived – past, present and future – our meeting and our falling in love still feels, now more than 40 years on, like our greatest stroke of good luck, our greatest good fortune.

We have lived together as a loving couple ever since.

*This above all: to thine own self be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.*

*Hamlet*, William Shakespeare