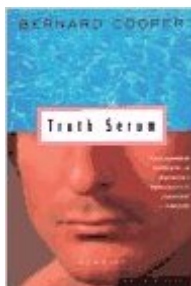


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Truth Serum: A Memoir



Synopsis

Bernard Cooper recalls his 1960s adolescence in Los Angeles and the emotional rollercoaster of puberty in this painfully honest memoir. He recounts the schoolboy crushes, the family strife, and the ebb and flow of youthful desire, all with a "humor that animates just about every sentence" (New York Times Book Review).

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Cooper's memoir of growing up gay in Los Angeles has at its center the title piece, "Truth Serum," and it is Cooper at his best: exquisite, funny, wise and blessed with a novelist's gift for the epiphanic image. The sodium Pentothol and amphetamine "cocktail" administered to Cooper by his therapist so that he can reduce his attraction to men ironically empowers him to accept his homosexuality, which he does while huddling out of the rain in a doorway in Greenwich Village, newly emboldened to leave his girlfriend. Cooper is a likable sort, and very bright company, if a bit solipsistic (though he is often a solipsist in a sea of narcissists). But the aftereffects of the sodium Pentothol manage to pervade the whole book: it is endlessly chatty and rambling and makes the deadly assumption that an emotional life is necessarily interesting once expressed. And the corollary assumption, that such expression is heroic because it is in a homosexual key, grates. Still, Cooper's writing talent (he wrote the well-received novel *A Year of Rhymes*) and his alert and often graphic portrait of gay life among professionals in L.A. will find its appreciative readers. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Cooper tells a now familiar life story: growing up with homosexual feelings, first denying but eventually accepting them, coming out to friends and family, taking a lover, and getting AIDS. Yet he offers some gems of self-revelation that will strike evocative chords with gay readers and their families. Cooper, an only child, was very close to his mother--a relationship that filled mutual deep needs but from which Cooper recalls many distinctive moments of mixed comfort and resentment. Also unique is his recollection of reaching out to a close friend in high school, knowing that sexual rejection would be likely but being unable to postpone or control the moment. Scenes of Cooper's adult life don't come across with the same intensity, although some of his AIDS memories are quite wrenching and may prove cathartic for many readers. Paul Monette's National Book Award-winning *Becoming a Man* (1992) and Marlene and Christopher Shyer's *Not Like Other Boys* cover similar ground and are more compelling. Charles Harmon --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I didn't really want to be reminded of the great die-off of the 1980s. I love Bernard Cooper through and through, but this one was so somber and so associated with sad, bad memories that I didn't enjoy the experience.

after reading this and *The Bill From My Father*, I feel like Bernard Cooper is a close friend. In *Truth Serum*, he gives us another look even deeper into his life and into his heart. I hope and pray that things are going well for Bernard and his partner, Brian. A wonderful, spellbinding book that grabs your attention immediately and never lets go. I would recommend this to anyone, including my two sons.

The honesty is riveting and the wordplay divine. I've been inspired by the phrases to write more poetry in the style.

Great read!

I just read this because I went to school with this guy (author) and was curious. It was well written, easy reading, and actually kept my interest even though I'm not that interested in the plight of homosexuals in our society. Its indeed sad and my heart goes out to them all for the added burden they face living in our society. Life's hard enough, right? Anyway, the chapters about school were of

special interest to me as I knew all the people he mentions (names changed of course). Gave me a chuckle reading it. I suspect that since the school stuff seems quite believable, the rest of the book is too. I understand he's still writing and probably even better at it by now.

I checked this book out of the library and read half of it before I realized that I had to own it, so I bought a copy the next day and picked up where I'd left off in the other copy. It's not a book-length memoir as much as it's a series of shorter memoirs. And what I find the most compelling in this book is his sense of focus. He writes a rather extensive essay about high school called "101 Ways to Cook Hamburger," and it essentially consists of three scenes. But from those scenes, I get a strong sense of his high school experience as a whole. Also, he covers his entire life in this relatively short book. He has an essay on his mother that centers on the freezer she coveted, and an essay on his father. He talks about joining the gym, and the various gyms of his life, and that leads him to a discussion of AIDS. He has a short essay that categorizes all of the different kinds of sighs. One of the greatest compliments I can give a book is to say that I wish I'd written it. I'm going through this book again, underlining passages and studying his use of scene, description, and exposition. He's a writer to learn from, in a lot of ways.

I checked this book out of the library after being intrigued by the jacket blurb on this story of a gay man's journey from childhood through adolescence and into adulthood. This is one of those satisfying reading experiences in which the reader is drawn into the writer's world. Despite few identifications with the specifics of the author's life (I'm not a gay man or from California or Jewish or ...), the beautiful and gentle writing seems to mirror Cooper's actual experiences so well that I easily recognized the human commonalities available to us all. I read this book ever more slowly as I came close to its end; I wanted to know more and more. The only thing that kept it from being entirely flawless for me was the extended use of metaphor and simile: most of the time, the prose was so elegant that these constructions sat in the background, creating visual and emotional content. But on occasion, the actual situations--strong enough to stand without embellishment or comparison--seemed diluted by the grammatical embroidery. It's a small criticism. Read this book. You'll be the richer for it.

I almost didn't finish this book. My initial impression was that this guy's life is as dull and as vapid as anyone else's. He visits a department store with his mother and her neighborhood friend -- big deal. His dad finally gives in and buys the big freezer for the kitchen -- so what? But suddenly, and quite

by accident, I realized that the book had me firmly in its grip. It somehow became important to find out what happened at the AIDS clinic. The minutiae of which gym he was attending -- and why -- gained a greater significance than I could have anticipated earlier in the book. Cooper's writing style makes it easy to digest these essays. He writes with a precision that reminds me of Edmund White, or even Buckley, but without the pompous esoteric nature they sometimes employ. The book ends abruptly. Whatever happened to Bryan, his roommate? What further progress was there in his relationship with his father, if any? But real life isn't conveniently episodic. I ended yesterday with unfinished business; I will leave unfinished business at this day's end. Just as a photograph captures only the briefest millisecond between what-has-gone-before and the unknowable what-will-be, so this book snatches Cooper midway between life's experiences, with stories as-yet unfinished. In the end, it makes his autobiography all the more real.

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