FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Clarion Review ★★★☆☆ GENERAL FICTION

BO

LA Long
Ajae Sterling, Illustrator
Xlibris (May 14, 2004)
Softcover $20.99 (122pp)
978-1-4257-5198-2

Two best friends grapple with an AIDS diagnosis in this humane novel about suffering and friendship.

L. A. Long's new novella, *Bo*, is a moving account of two friends coming face-to-face with the ugly, but not defeating, reality of AIDS. With realistic characters and a funny, sympathetic voice, Long focuses on the human side of disease and how pain and suffering can bring people closer.

The titular character, Bo, short for Bobby, is a single, successful black man whose past struggles with drug addiction come back to haunt him when he learns that he has full-blown AIDS. His character is revealed through the book's first-person narrator, Annie, Bo's best friend and confidante. When vivacious Annie learns that Bo is ill, she is devastated. Bo's family virtually disowns him, and he moves in with Annie; the narrative follows subsequent developments in their relationship.

Characters are drawn sympathetically, with personality and pizazz. Annie's voice is irreverent and sassy—"Had I been born rich, I wouldn't be working at this bullshit nine-to-five of mine"—but also vulnerable and sensitive—"I will always remember Bo's face when he said it. I remember him leaning his head back, closing his eyes and softly speaking the words." Bo is also relatable via his deep interactions with Annie, which are viewed both through her thoughts and through *Bo*'s scenes and dialogue.

The most touching moments of the book come immediately after Annie learns of Bo's diagnosis. The internal landscapes of the characters play on the external landscape of the setting, New York City, and vice versa. "Suddenly, everything was terribly new," Annie says. "I even found myself noticing things on street corners that I never in my life noticed before."

This naturalism falters in the book's second half, when the text becomes too reliant on long blocks of internal monologue. Annie's voice becomes singsong: "He looked rested and content. Then what is my problem? Why is there an underlying fear in my heart? I've made peace with this months ago. I'm just tired, and after a good night's rest, I'll be fine. The next morning I felt great." Bo's final scenes should be gripping, but their emotional impact is dulled by too much exposition, which is crammed into the text, straight from Annie's head.

Though the final scenes lack vivid detail, Annie's narration elicits important life lessons from Bo's death. The character mulls over the "guarded happiness" of people untouched by mortality versus the strength, endurance, and ultimate acceptance found in facing death. These reflections add emotional depth and compensate for some of the thinner scenes.

Source: https://www.forewordreviews.com/reviews/bo/

Long ends with a well-written and heartwarming twist—a way for Annie to immortalize her friend. *Bo* demonstrates that the warmth of human companionship can infuse any challenge. The book provides a humane lesson on coping with disease.

SCOTT NEUFFER (February 9, 2016)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the publisher will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.