

Running in Bed

Jeffrey Sharlach

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Nothing changes faster in the gay community than a young person's coming out experience. In most of the United States, the isolation that once accompanied the realization of one's homosexuality has gone. Thanks to a growing public discussion about gay rights and outreach projects like *It Gets Better*, straight and gay people know they're not dealing with an abomination or pathology. Rather, the love that once dared not speak its name has now found its place in the national conversation. And while the fear of losing friends or family with this admission lingers, some of the physical danger has dissipated.

With the publication of his debut book, Jeffrey Sharlach's *Running in Bed* offers readers a historic novel set at the moment when homosexuals as a group came out of the closet and entered the public discussion: the late '70s.

Social movements are not felt by everybody on a personal level at once. For Sharlach's protagonist, Josh Silver, it comes in the nick of time. A graduate of Cornell with a *Mad Men* style ad gig, Silver's inability to accept his homosexuality had led him to voluntary shock treatment. *Running in Bed* opens with Silver on a flight home to New York from Detroit, recognizing himself as an adult for the first time and able to let go of what others may think of his life.

The shift for Silver opens new worlds both at home and at work in terms of friends, family, and love. Through the character, readers experience the exhilaration of falling in love during a time marked by shifting priorities, norms, and mores. But with that excitement, Sharlach also manages to impress upon readers what had gone before to make any of those shifts possible:

The last weekend in June was the tenth anniversary of the '69 Stonewall Riots, and I decided I wouldn't go out to Fire Island. The Christopher Street Liberation Day Parade had been getting bigger and bigger each year ... It had been renamed the Gay Pride parade.

As the story moves through the '80s, Silver and his entire generation face the scourge of AIDS. With it comes the overwhelming sense of fighting a losing battle, checking online bulletin boards for any shreds of hope or just shutting it all out. For Silver there is loss, but there is also peace, if not acceptance.

A lot has changed since the late '70s. The conversation around homosexuality has gone from a basic right to exist to full-blown marriage. But in life, as in books, there are eternal themes. And while the danger of coming out may be lessened for many, the pains and joys of love and life remain universal.

JOSEPH THOMPSON (April 5, 2012)

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