

Article on Robert Leleux for IN Los Angeles Magazine

A father abandoning his wife and gay son, then leaving them destitute could be material for a truly sad, sad story. In *Memoirs of a Beautiful Boy* by Robert Leleux, this scenario is the impetus for a hilarious and tender journey of a gay boy and his absolutely fabulous mother, Jessica, who tries to find a rich husband to replace the one that left. It is an outrageous, raunchy ride, filled with pages of bend-over funny writing.

We meet young Robert, a fey kid if there ever was one. He writes, “I had my hair streaked and my nails coated with a clear varnish as delicate as lacquer on Chinese porcelain. Finding the school’s air conditioning weak, I carried, in my monogrammed suede book bag, aerosol spray cans of French water, sold in six-packs at Nieman’s. The moment I felt a mere bead of sweat forming on my brow in, say, Texas History class, I’d reach down and mist myself.”

When you’re that effeminate, you’re bound to get some teasing. Fortunately, for him his mother, a former cheerleader, gives him some intriguing advice on dealing with bullies. “You’ve got to kick ‘em in the cunt,” she says, encouraging the kind of acerbic wit that is associated with gay men. She even comes up with a few examples for him to use on a girl named Barbie who harasses him. She pages Robert out of class to tell him, “If that Barbie says anything to you today, you just say this. Say: Barbie, your vagina is looser than the top of an old mayonnaise jar.” Or, “When you open your mouth like that, Barbie darling, I can almost see your vulva. Do you need to write that down, Robert? Isn’t that wicked? She’ll drop dead.”

In Leleux's memoir, he raises the curtain and let's us watch his crazy mother scheme to get a wealthy husband. All the while, supporting and loving her homosexual offspring. She says to her son, "How could you be my child and *not* be gay? Women like me *always* have gay children. Cher, Lana Turner, Queen Elizabeth. My God, look at Queen Elizabeth."

It is clear that Mr. Leleux loves and adores his mother dearly. He says of her, "My mother is my movie star and my football hero, and nothing feels impossible when she charges forth, mink coat a bristle. Of all the women in the world, I would choose her for my mother. No child or man has ever been luckier than I."

He loves her so much, she's also touring with him promoting *Memoirs of a Beautiful Boy*. Perhaps that's what makes this story so different from other memoirs that have been written. This is not Mommie Dearest.

"How many memoirs do you read where someone loves his mother?" said Robert in a phone interview. He speaks with a drawl, all charming and upbeat. He'd confer with his mother, making sure her voice in the book was accurate. "I'd say, 'Mom, would you call dad a bastard?' She'd say, 'Oh, no. I'd never say that. I'd call him a RAT bastard.'"

Robert laughs. He's the kind of guy who likes to laugh. Why shouldn't he? Reviews have compared him to David Sedaris and Augustin Burroughs. Mr. Leleux admits, "I've never read them. I'd read Christopher Isherwood. Truman Capote is as good as it gets."

Regardless of the success of his book, he contends the writing life is difficult. "It's not fun. It's hard. It's very hard to sit at a table eight hours a day, every day." Fortunately, being a memoirist has its perks: writing about friends and family can be

quite fulfilling. He says, “I found if I bring all the people I love with me, it’s not lonely. It’s fun.” He doesn’t believe that a memoir has to be dreary. “You can be happy and an artist at the same time.” He also doesn’t believe that a memoir, a genre of writing that he believes has been conflated with self-help books, needs to be therapeutic. “If you need healing, go to a doctor, not a writer.”

At twenty-eight, one might question what business does he have writing a memoir? Most of his life is yet to come. Fortunately, Leleux is not attempting to paint a sweeping portrait of his grand life. He is only focusing on his years between 16-18 and is really telling the story of the women who aided in his development, particularly his mother.

In coming of age and coming out tales, who is f-ing who is a major part of the story. Not here. It’s quite refreshing to see a young gay man who didn’t turn to prostitution, alcohol, and drugs to assist in his development. And neither did he have sex with a million men as part of his coming out experience. Robert Leleux was born Robert O’doole, but took the name of his husband Michael Leleux, a man we are introduced to in the book. Robert says, “He’s the first person I’d ever kissed.” They’ve been together for eleven years now.

It’s fun discovering a writer early in his career. We’re bound to read more from him, as he recognizes that he is following in the literary traditions of his people. He means, “The Irish, Texans, and gays. We love life, but love a story more.”