

BOOKS

IN YOUR FACE: THE CULTURE OF BEAUTY AND YOU

Shari Graydon

[Annick Press] 176 pages, \$16.95

Advertisers make a fortune by making women feel like crap about the way we look. Fairy tales teach us that pretty equals good and ugly equals bad. Most TV shows, mainstream films and women's magazines are obsessed with beauty, and sometimes make it seem like popularity, success and happiness is just for the prettiest, blondest and skinniest. Here is a book that asks: does beauty really make a difference? And what is beauty anyway?

In Your Face: The Culture of Beauty and You deconstructs everything we think we know about beauty — what we think our weight, skin colour, nose shape and even height should be — so we can see where these ideas come from, what they say about us and just how little sense they actually make.

Shari Graydon tells us that skinny wasn't always considered attractive, that beauty pageants are such a big deal because they make big money, and why trends dictate when tans are in and when they're out. *In Your Face* gives you the information you need to decide if beauty really makes a difference. **CHRISTINA DECARIE**

A GIRL LIKE SUGAR

Emily Pohl-Weary

[McGilligan Books] 324 pages, \$24.95

There is likely a part of you somewhere in this book. *A Girl Like Sugar*, the debut novel from indie author Emily Pohl-Weary, is the sweet story of an empty girl trying to figure out who she is after her rock star boyfriend overdoses and dies, leaving her alone in her basement apartment.

At first Sugar thinks she too is dead. She talks to her boyfriend's ghost, gorges on junk food and zones out watching Parker Posey movies and reruns of *ER*. She has no interest in being part of the real world. But slowly Sugar starts to get her life together. She scores a job shelving CDs at a local megastore, finds herself standing up for her co-workers' rights, moves out of her basement apartment and takes an interest in filmmaking. She also meets a cute filmmaker/activist who, despite Sugar's resistance, manages to charm her pants off.

Pohl-Weary (editor of literary zine *Kiss Machine* and 2004's *Girls Who Bite Back*:



Writer Emily Pohl-Weary hits a sweet spot with *A Girl Like Sugar*.

Witches, Mutants, Slayers and Freaks) punctuates her story with pop-culture references and the energy of political activism, capturing what it feels like to figure out who you are in a world steered by consumerism, social standards and impossible expectations. For many of us, a girl like Sugar is a real-life hero. **NICOLE COHEN**

PROOF OF A TONGUE

Sandra Alland

[McGilligan Books] 104 pages, \$16.95

In this collection, Sandra Alland gives herself permission to live in the world just as she is. The poetic self in these poems is still developing, testing the possibilities of language as a tool of self discovery and invention.

Alland plays with the image of the poet as political and sexual outlaw in the manner of Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich and Wanda Coleman. But the voice in these poems, while making a case for her own needs, is gentle and compassionate, more often reaching out toward others or nursing her own lonely wounds than taking an overtly strident or hard-edged tone. Alland is strongest when she inhabits physical memories, allowing her natural rhythm to create a warm and immediate body of poetry that shines in simple lines

like "a woman I lost like a train."

While a sense of fear permeates the book — landscapes defined by nuclear plants, the threat of rapists behind street corners — this powerlessness is countered by a clearly expressed longing for human contact.

Alland is known as a performer, and many of these poems undoubtedly have a fuller life on stage. Still, there are lovely moments here, like the image of her riding her red, fish-shaped skateboard through the sewer system, her survival seeming at once impossible and heroic. **DAMIAN ROGERS**

HEAR ME OUT: TRUE STORIES OF TEENS EDUCATING AND CONFRONTING HOMOPHOBIA

A Project of Planned Parenthood of Toronto

[Second Story Press] 197 pages, \$12.95

www.teachtoronto.ca

"That's so gay!" Insults heard on the playground show how quickly children learn to hate those who are different. Words are powerful. Teens Educating And Confronting Homophobia (TEACH) is a group that uses storytelling to encourage critical thinking about homophobia and to fight queer discrimination.

Hear Me Out contains brave and compelling coming-out stories. It's also a thoughtful look