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The Inheritance of Shame: A Memoir
By Peter Gajdics
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LONG BEACH, CALIF. — A new memoir written by a man who survived six years of “gay conversion” therapy will be published this spring, just in time for Pride festivals across the country.

The Inheritance of Shame by Canadian author Peter Gajdics is a beautifully rendered testament to the pain and futility of trying to “change” someone’s sexual orientation, and to the healing capabilities of compassion and forgiveness.

Written over a period of 20 years, the book chronicles Gajdics’ deeply emotional odyssey from isolation and self-doubt to reconnection and self-acceptance. Kirkus Reviews calls the memoir “raw and unflinching.” Foreword Reviews calls it “appallingly appropriate in these times.” And Boy Erased author Garrard Conley calls it “a necessary, incredibly nuanced portrait of a survivor.”

“The Inheritance of Shame will change lives,” Conley said.

The book will be released May 16 by Brown Paper Press, a publisher of progressive nonfiction based in Long Beach, Calif.
“Peter’s story is bigger than his own remarkable experience,” said Jennifer Volland, co-publisher of Brown Paper Press. “His book explores how trauma can pass from one generation to the next, and how deep-seated shame can lead people to abandon their true selves in favor of something that doesn’t exist.”

Gajdics was raised in British Columbia by a mother who survived a communist concentration camp and a father who was orphaned as a child in war-torn Hungary. Their Catholic faith, which grew stronger after their move to Canada, led them to reject their son’s homosexuality — a rejection that ultimately drove Gajdics, then in his early 20s, to seek help from a psychiatrist.

Instead of finding solace, however, the author found himself in a cult-like atmosphere, medicated, and undergoing an experimental form of primal therapy that sought to regress him emotionally to a childlike state so that he could be “re-parented” in a healthy way. This, his doctor informed him, would “cure” him of his homosexuality.

The book opens with a vignette of Gajdics prostituting himself for the first time, then flashes back to alternately happy and painful scenes from his childhood. Like many LGBTQ youths and others who feel hopelessly set apart, he makes the difficult transition to adulthood with his internal struggle to resolve emotions that feel real and true, along with deeply ingrained perceptions of right and wrong, heaped on top of all the traditional agonies of adolescence.

From there, we follow Gajdics into and out of therapy before discovering that the answers he seeks already lie within himself. Here begins the author’s exhilarating journey toward redemption as, step by painful step, he struggles to put his life back together and make sense of what has happened to him — from seeking justice for the cruel junk science to which he was subjected by his doctor to his emotional and combustive attempts to reconnect with his family.

In reflecting on his own journey to complete The Inheritance of Shame, Gajdics states, “Writing this memoir was an act of survival — an act of defiance against the effects of silence. I’m grateful to have the opportunity to speak when so many others, by default, endure other forms of this experience in silence.”

The book’s subject matter is particularly timely as church-funded conversion programs continue to gain support among regional and national figures, including newly elected U.S. Vice President Mike Pence. Despite overwhelming evidence of the psychologically damaging effects of these programs, several states nationwide still refuse to ban the practice.

Gajdics said he hopes his book might serve as a call to action to put anti-gay therapies out of business once and for all, adding, “At a time in history when a change of government and a strike of the pen could rescind legal decisions and set human rights back decades, I remind myself that perhaps now more than ever the world needs true-life stories, road maps and an empathetic voice from those who’ve gone before us.”

The Inheritance of Shame: A Memoir will be distributed in the United States and Canada by SCB Distributors and available for pre-order now.

For more information, to receive a review copy, or to arrange an interview with Peter Gajdics, contact Zoe Grams, ZG Communications, at zoe@zgcommunications.com or +1 (604) 336-3822.

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Nominee for The Publishing Triangle Randy Shilts Award for Gay Nonfiction

“Deeply moving.”
—The Advocate

“The bulk of Gajdics’s memoir charts his horrific six years under this doctor’s manipulation, but it’s about more than the manufacture and trade in shame. It is also about inheritance – in Gajdics’ case, from his parents’ experiences around the Second World War – and perseverance. For marginalized people, the words ‘I’m still here’ hold emancipatory power. There’s pride in that.”
—The Globe and Mail

“Peter Gajdics carries us along effortlessly on his incredible struggle with family rejection, loss of self and ultimate recovery from the deep wounds inflicted by anti-gay ‘therapy.’ At this time of immense suffering for LGBTQ+ youth around the world, his emergence from shame should give hope for healing to all victims of this destructive practice.”
—Jason Marsden, Executive Director, Matthew Shepard Foundation

“Reflective but passionate, Gajdics takes the reader on an exploration beyond the what of his experience as a young, conflicted gay man and deeply into the chasm of his search to discover who he was…. This exploration is a hero’s journey in which any reader, gay or straight, can find inspiration.”
—Lambda Literary Foundation

“Raw and unflinching: a powerful argument against conversion therapy as well as the healing power of memoir.”
—Kirkus Reviews

“In a book that celebrates and embodies the power of the medium of writing in a pure way, Gajdics uses the written word to heal from trauma, to reconcile with his parents, to unearth their own suffering in WWII, and as an unforgettable call for compassion. His passionate writing makes the book not only an intriguing read but an important one in the literary and political realms.”
—Foreword Reviews

“The Inheritance of Shame is a profound journey to self-destruction, self-acceptance, and finally a reckoning with the dangers of shame and silence. This is a memoir that is hard to read, but one that must absolutely be read.”
—KQED book review

“The Inheritance of Shame provides an in-depth account of the triumph of one man’s sanity over a psychotherapy system designed to eradicate personhood. Particularly moving were passages of Gajdics’ fondness for the very therapist who abused him, a kind of Stockholm syndrome most survivors of conversion therapy have experienced. A necessary, incredibly nuanced portrait of a survivor, The Inheritance of Shame will change lives.”
—Garrard Conley, author of Boy Erased

“The Inheritance of Shame is a harrowing, enraging, triumphant, and necessary book. This is a story that should never have happened, but because the horrors of homophobia continue in this country and around the world, we need the testimony of people with the courage of Peter Gajdics.”
—Ellen Bass, co-author of The Courage to Heal
“Peter Gajdics’ multi-faceted memoir offers help for abuse survivors and those who care about them. He provides inside perspective on the many effects of childhood sexual abuse, including the way societal, religious, and familial homophobia and denial became internalized and made a young man vulnerable to a destructive ‘therapeutic’ cult. His healing speaks to the power and fortitude of the human spirit. The Inheritance of Shame is both about damage and healing. This is a work of love.”

“The Inheritance of Shame is a testament to one family’s ability to survive oppression in its many forms, from insidious to institutionalized. Peter Gajdics traces his transformation from ‘a man whose food seemed poisonous to his hunger,’ to a writer who makes real what seemed unreal. Through unrelenting prose, his words provide a home for his orphaned father, tortured mother, and most importantly, his own identity that others wanted to drug, demonize, and destroy.”
— Kate Gray, author of Carry the Sky

“The Inheritance of Shame is a necessary book for anyone wanting to understand the trauma one goes through if society has deemed them different. If shame has already been passed down to the next generation and there are perceived added differences the shame is compounded. Cults come in many forms and unfortunately those who want to be normal sometimes become victims of these cults. The book focuses on the triumph of the human spirit and shows how everyone may be different in some ways but no one is born to be what others think they should be. At the end, be yourself and be happier is the theme of the book.”
— Bev Sellars, bestselling author of They Called Me Number One

“In Peter Gajdics’ memoir, we’re taken into a real-life horror film of malpractice and corrupt psychotherapy, hoping at every turn of the page that our narrator escapes. A shocking, crystal-clear, unsettling book. The Inheritance of Shame is both a necessary and devastating memoir about the trauma of conversion therapy and the homophobia that persists to this day.”
— Daniel Zomparelli, author of Everything is Awful and You’re a Terrible Person

“The reader is taken on a gripping, shocking and unimaginable journey shared by this courageous author… To quote the book: ‘The horror of it all provokes disbelief.’ I couldn’t put this book down.”
— Claire Slack, Educator
Peter Gajdics is an award-winning writer whose essays, short memoir and poetry have appeared in, among others, The Advocate, New York Tyrant, The Gay and Lesbian Review / Worldwide, Cosmonauts Avenue, and Opium. He is a recipient of a writers grant from Canada Council for the Arts, a fellowship from The Summer Literary Seminars, and an alumni of Lambda Literary Foundation’s “Writers Retreat for Emerging LGBT Voices.” When not in Budapest, Hungary, his home away from home, Peter lives in Vancouver, Canada. This is his first book.