

Palmdale native explores 'Side Effects' of anxiety, depression in new book of poems, stories

By **ANDREW SHACKLEY**
Showcase Editor

Each of the six chapters in "Side Effects," an intensely personal collection of poetry, short stories, plays and observations from Simi Valley author Taylor Bradley (available now through Barnes & Noble's Nook Publishing imprint), begins with a warning that reads not unlike the string of afflictions that might arise from taking prescribed medications like Zoloft, Prozac or Celexa.

After being diagnosed with her own cases of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress, Bradley, 25, sought to write a book in hopes of uniting "Millennials who are struggling with their mental health and don't know how to give words to what they're feeling."

Whether lamenting a dreary day in the desert, or her broken childhood home, the Palmdale native never strays from the raw emotion that her stories evoke. Across dozens of largely autobiographical works, the frustration, sadness and disappointments of life are met with clear voice marked with wit, fortitude and an unwavering will to move forward.

"I feel like everyone is so concerned with establishing their own corner of the internet, they forget to establish their own little corner of the world," she muses in one of the many single-sentence observations littered throughout these pages.

The personal revelations present within "Side Effects" are indeed tough pills to swallow, but Bradley has managed to fashion a wry and sometimes darkly comic world view that seems constantly illuminated with the inextinguishable flame of hope.

The feeling is likely to rub-off on readers.

Valley Press: How did your upbringing in the Antelope Valley influ-

ence your writing and world view?

Taylor Bradley: Growing up in the desert was a struggle; I would be lying if I painted a picture of contentment. However, it was because of these struggles that I found solace in theatre and writing and art. Usually it was too hot to spend much time outside, so I spent my days covering the walls of my bedroom in collages, and poems, and photos I had taken. I lived in a creative haven that inspired me to always be creating new worlds and telling new stories.

I attended Highland High School, which gave me the chance to really try my hand at exploring theatre. Peggy Self's drama program and enthusiasm for teaching created an environment that encouraged me to write, direct, and perform constantly. I was reading four to five plays a week and writing every day.

Now I have my own non-profit theatre company (48 Hours Theatre) that produces original work, and an educational program that teaches kids how to write, direct, and produce their own shows.

VP: Many of the stories in "Side Effects" are told from a clear perspective — i.e. as a Millennial born and raised in a world connected by (and critical of) social media. Why was it important to have this voice be the driving force behind so many of these stories and observations?

Bradley: I love social media. It's an incredible platform for young entrepreneurs to promote their work and what they believe in. I'm a Millennial, but I still grew up in a time before everyone had cell phones and if someone was using the dial-up internet, no one could use the house phone. It's the obsession that I'm critical of. The need to create a false narrative to prove, somehow, that you're interesting.

VP: "Side Effects" contains

many different styles of storytelling — from poetry to short stories and even stage plays. Why? How do you think including so many styles helps convey your message?

Bradley: I don't think anyone thinks or feels in only one medium. Also, this book spans about eight years of my writing, and I think, depending on what phase of life you're in, you relate more to different types of literature.

If I can convey an idea by comparison, or if it's especially vivid I'll probably write a poem.

If what I'm trying to explore is about people and their interaction with other people (love, friendship, conflict) I'll probably write a play.

Or if I just have a strangely poignant thought, or an absurd interaction that I want to speak on, it may just be an "11 Word Observation."

Also, I think people respond better to multiple mediums — especially younger generations. Patience is fleeting and I want my book to be accessible and easy to consume.

VP: What inspired the framing device for each chapter — starting each new chapter with a "warning label" of sorts?

Bradley: I feel like I have an abundance of "side effects" that come from medication, or life experiences, or just my DNA.

I wanted to poke fun at the absurdity of some of the things that my mind is fixated on by calling them

side effects and framing them as if they had a warning label (e.g. the chapter entitled, "Southern Affliction"). Tennessee Williams has always been one of my biggest inspirations and ever since I started high school, I was obsessed with writing southern dramas.

Then, of course, there are serious side effects, like insomnia, depression, and anxiety. Those tend to be my more serious sections.

VP: Which story was the most difficult to put on paper? Why? How did you crack it?

Bradley: "Lost Without Water." It's about my parents, and it isn't dramatized. I struggled a lot writing it because of how honest it was. It felt a lot like letting the world read my diary. But eventually I realized that making the end optimistic, it didn't feel as heavy and awful.

VP: How have your other artistic endeavors (acting, photography, directing) informed your writing?

Bradley: I think any kind of art is all about being observant of your surroundings and commenting on it in some way.

I've spent my whole life looking at my realities from many different perspectives, and I think it helps me figure out what observation I want to share. When I see what new thought or feeling I can bring to something, that's what goes out into the world.

ashackley@avpress.com



A new 'Band of Brothers' in Ritchie Boys of 'Sons & Soldiers'

By **ANDREW CLARK**
Valley Press Staff Writer

"Sons and Soldiers: The Untold Story of the Jews Who Escaped the Nazis and Returned with the U.S. Army to Fight Hitler" by Bruce Henderson (William Morrow; 384 pages)

World War II nonfiction is one of the largest slices of the literary landscape, from memoirs like Robert Leckie's "Helmet for My Pillow" and Eugene Sledge's "With the Old Breed" to histories like Stephen Ambrose's "Band of Brothers" and Donald Miller's "Masters of the Air." Among the qualities that make these books compelling is how ordinary men from humble backgrounds were called to journey across oceans and rise to the seemingly insurmountable challenge of ending the first truly global war.

In the case of historian Bruce Henderson's latest World War II offering, "Sons and Soldiers," the men featured had the most proverbial skin in the game, for the fate of their homeland lay in the balance. They were "The Ritchie Boys"—nearly 2,000 German Jews who fled the country as Hitler came to power then returned to Europe as soldiers in the U.S. Army. Once there, they interrogated German prisoners of war and gained valuable intelligence that aided the Allies.

"Sons and Soldiers" presents the Ritchie Boys — so named for the camp in Maryland whence they

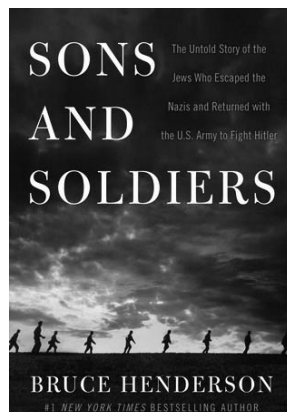
trained — as boys who became men in the crucible of war-torn Europe. Many of the boys fled Nazi persecution and had to make several stops in France or Holland before reaching the safety of America — only to go back. The Nazis valued the capture of the boys and, as a result, their safety was always in peril, creating a tension that lasts the duration of the book.

Henderson's research is extensive via records in the National Archives in Maryland, military personnel records in Missouri, documentarian transcripts from Germany, the Library of

Congress and survivor accounts from the University of Southern California's Shoah Foundation. But despite the extensive research, the narrative is never bogged down, a sign of first-rate writing. One very minor quibble is that due to the multiple plot threads in the book (Ritchie Boys were sprinkled throughout the Army, serving in different divisions and units), figuring out who was where at what time can be a bit tricky, particularly for those that read via audiobook.

Early buzz compared "Sons and Soldiers" to high watermarks in the World War II history genre that have become classics, such as "Unbroken," "The Boys in the Boat," and the aforementioned "Band of Brothers." Consider the comparisons well-earned.

aclark@avpress.com



BESTSELLERS

FICTION

1. "The Late Show" by Michael Connelly (Little, Brown)
2. "Camino Island" by John Grisham (Doubleday)
3. "The Lying Game" by Ruth Ware (Gallery/Scout Press)
4. "House of Spies" by Daniel Silva (Harper)
5. "Paradise Valley" by C.J. Box (St. Martin's Press)
6. "Murder Games" by Patterson/Roughan (Little, Brown)
7. "Into the Water" by Paula Hawkins (Riverhead)
8. "The Painted Queen" by Peters/Hess (William Morrow)
9. "A Gentleman in Moscow" by Amor Towles (Viking)
10. "Use of Force" by Brad Thor (Atria)
11. "The Duchess" by Danielle Steel (Delacorte)
12. "Star Wars: Battlefront II: Inferno Squad" by Christie Golden (Del Rey)
13. "The Breakdown" by B.A. Paris (St. Martin's)
14. "Deadfall" by Linda Fairstein (Dutton)
15. "Dragon Teeth" by Michael Crichton (Harper)

NONFICTION

1. "The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F---" by Mark Manson (HarperOne)
2. "Astrophysics for People in a Hurry" Neil deGrasse Tyson (Norton)
3. "Rediscovering Americanism" by Mark R. Levin (Threshold)
4. "Al Franken, Giant of the Senate" by Al Franken (Twelve)
5. "Devil's Bargain" by Joshua Green (Penguin Press)
6. "Make Your Bed" by William H. McRaven (Grand Central Publishing)
7. "Dangerous" by Milo Yu-annopoulos (Dangerous Books)
8. "Option B" by Sheryl Sandberg and Adam Grant (Grand Central Publishing)
9. "The Swamp" by Eric Boling (St. Martin's Press)
10. "Understanding Trump" by Newt Gingrich (Center Street)
11. "The Operator" by Robert O'Neill (Scribner)
12. "Bill O'Reilly's Legends and Lies: The Civil War" by David Fisher (Holt)
13. "Jesus Always" by Sarah Young (Thomas Nelson)
14. "Killers of the Flower Moon" by David Grann (Doubleday)
15. "The Plant Paradox" by Steven R. Gundry (Harper Wave)