

Nonfiction

★ Acid for the Children: A Memoir

Flea. Grand Central, \$29 (400p) ISBN 978-1-4789-8351-4

Red Hot Chili Peppers bassist Flea recalls his youth in this electric, surprisingly moving memoir. The author, born Michael Peter Balzary in 1962 in Melbourne, Australia, moved to Los Angeles in 1972 with his mother and her erratic boyfriend. He describes his mother as unaffectionate (“There is not one instance in my life where I can ever remember her holding or cuddling me”) and inattentive, which gave him opportunity to run the streets unsupervised. When he wasn’t causing trouble (“I became a regular shoplifter,” he admits), he was listening to music (Charlie Parker, the Beatles) and reading books (Kurt Vonnegut “parented me,” he writes). In high school, he met Anthony Kiedis, the future Chili Peppers lead singer, who instantly became his “brother” and with whom he’d start making music in 1983. Flea talks about “going primal” on the bass, which he taught himself to play; liking girls; and doing drugs (including crystal meth and cocaine), but this is not a typical sex, drugs, and rock ‘n’ roll story. The author respectfully references his first girlfriend, to whom he lost his virginity at 17, and calls drug use a “pit of sadness,” adding, “You can do anything. Walk through it, don’t numb or hide.” Flea is an enlightened narrator, and this passionate, smart memoir will resonate with readers whether they’re fans of the band or not. (Nov.)

Alta California: From San Diego to San Francisco, a Journey on Foot to Rediscover the Golden State

Nick Neely. Counterpoint, \$26 (432p) ISBN 978-1-64009-165-8

In this detailed travel memoir, environmental writer Neely (*Coast Range*) relates his 650-mile walk in the footsteps of an 18th-century Spanish exploration along the coast of California. In 1769, the Portola expedition went overland from what became the towns of San Diego to San Francisco, setting the stage for the settlements, forts, and Catholic missions that would become California. Neely relies



Cubby, a comfort dog shown here with his handler, Bonnie Fear, is one of the canine do-gooders profiled in Liz Stavrindes and John Schlimm’s *Extraordinary Dogs* (reviewed on p. 53).

heavily on expedition journals along his walk, especially one by a friar named Juan Crespi, and reimagines the near untouched splendor of the West Coast. Even walking through subdivisions and cities and along highways, he finds poetic images in the most unlikely places (“The holy red palms of an In-N-Out cup. A water bottle of sunflower seed husks like a ravaged bird-feeder from someone’s lips”) and encounters many of those who rely on the land—surfers, farm laborers, winemakers. Along the way, he explores the roots of such famous Californians as José Francisco Ortega (founder of the Ortega chili company), writer John Steinbeck, civil engineer William Mulholland, and John Paul Getty. Neely ends in the Bay Area under a redwood tree where the Portola expedition camped, with the hope that the tree “might live another thousand years.” Neely’s naturalist, erudite work will appeal to readers of Thoreau’s *Walden* and Edward Albee’s *Desert Solitaire*. (Nov.)

★ The Lives of Lucian Freud: The Restless Years, 1922–1968

William Feaver. Knopf, \$40 (704p) ISBN 978-0-525-65752-1

Art, debauchery, nightlife, and lowlives fill out this rollicking biography of the celebrated British painter. Art critic and

curator Feaver (*Frank Auerbach*) follows Lucian Freud (1922–2011), grandson of psychologist Sigmund Freud, through his rise to the top of Britain’s art scene, where his realist portraits thrummed with tension and suspicion, perhaps because of the marathon sittings his models endured or the pitiless depictions of flesh in his paintings. Feaver has much to say about the art—“Here are individual fingernails and individual hairs, some with split ends,” he writes of the landmark *Girl with Roses*, “as fully realized as the golden tresses of a Dürer”—but more about Freud’s daily picaresque: the relentless womanizing (he fathered 12 illegitimate children), the studied eccentricities (he carpeted his studio with broken glass), the gambling addiction that saddled him with debts to gangsters, and the swirl of colorful acquaintances, from nobility to famous artists to petty criminals, all of whom he painted. Feaver heavily quotes from his interviews with Freud, and the artist’s chatty, insouciant voice—“I said, ‘I’m going to pay you when I’ve got the money and if you kill me you won’t get the money,’ an argument that impressed them”—suffuses the book. The result is a riotously entertaining narrative that immerses readers in Freud’s beguiling sensibility. Photos. (Nov.)

