



## Michael Tolliver Lives

By Armistead Maupin  
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### Introduction

Michael Tolliver, the sweet-spirited Southerner in Armistead Maupin's classic *Tales of the City* series, is arguably one of the most widely loved characters in contemporary fiction. Now, almost twenty years after ending his ground-breaking saga of San Francisco life, Maupin revisits his all-too-human hero, letting the fifty-five-year-old gardener tell his story in his own voice.

Having survived the plague that took so many of his friends and lovers, Michael has learned to embrace the random pleasures of life, the tender alliances that sustain him in the hardest of times. *Michael Tolliver Lives* follows its eponymous protagonist as he finds love with a younger man, attends to his dying fundamentalist mother in Florida, and finally affirms his allegiance to a wise octogenarian who was once his landlady.

*Michael Tolliver Lives* is a novel about the act of growing older joyfully and the everyday miracles that somehow make that possible.

### Questions for Discussion

1. To what degree does the fact of his being HIV-positive impact Michael's awareness of his mortality? Does he seem more concerned generally with growing older or dying from his disease?
2. What roles do Ben's youth, and Michael's acute awareness of it, play in the dynamics of their marriage?
3. How does the author's frank depiction of gay sexuality impact you as a reader? How did you relate to the romantic relationships he explores?
4. How is Michael's return to Florida to visit his mother responsible for disturbing the fragile peace that she has established with her daughter-in-law, Lenore?
5. In what ways does Michael and Ben's shared sexual encounter with Patreese Johnson strengthen their marriage?
6. Why does Shawna's plan to move to New York carry such significance for both Brian and Michael, and how does it succeed in stirring up difficult memories for both of them?
7. Why does Anna Madrigal's unconventional path in life serve as an inspiration for so many characters in *Michael Tolliver Lives*?
8. Why does Irwin open up to Michael about Lenore's affair with their father, and how does his revelation change the nature of their bond as siblings? Given the way Irwin feels about Michael's 'lifestyle,' to what extent do you think this thawing in their relations will prove permanent?
9. Why does Michael decide to stay by Anna's bedside instead of flying to be present at his mother's deathbed? What does his decision reveal about the nature of his feelings for both women?
10. How do you interpret the meaning of the "fifth destination," and what do you think the author might have intended by including the phrase in *Michael Tolliver Lives*?

### About the Author

About the Author Armistead Maupin is the author of *Tales of the City*, *More Tales of the City*, *Further Tales of the City*, *Babycakes*, *Significant Others*, *Sure of You*, *Maybe the Moon*, and *The Night Listener*. A musical based on *Tales of the City*, written by Jeff Whitty (*Avenue Q*) with music by Jake Shears and John Garden of the Scissor Sisters, is slated to open during the 2009-2010 Broadway season. Maupin lives in San Francisco with his husband, Christopher Turner.