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Not Like Other Boys



Synopsis

This frank memoir chronicles the long journey mother and son took from shame and concealment to acceptance and love. In alternating voices, this poignant book describes the parallel lives of a mother and son during the painful years that they kept silent, even though they both suspected that Chris was gay. Chris tells of his ongoing struggle to change his sexual orientation, and Marlene's attempt to control her son's sexual future.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Mom, I don't know how to tell you this... I'm gay," Christopher Shyer, then 26, told his mother, Marlene, on Thanksgiving Day 1987. How he summoned the courage to come out, after years of torment, isolation and self-hatred growing up in the suburbs of New York City, is revealed in a deeply moving memoir, told in alternating voices. Marlene, a novelist, children's-book author and journalist, worried obsessively from the time Chris was five that he'd become a homosexual and dragged him to psychotherapists seeking assurance that he was "normal." She eventually overcame her homophobia, but Chris's father (whom Marlene subsequently divorced) was less accepting of his son's sexual orientation: "I have no problem with it.... As long as it doesn't show." Chris, a business executive in New York, writes forcefully. "It's those who condemn and deride us, those who are ignorant and misinformed who should be scorned and ridiculed. It is homophobia that should be in the closet." Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.

YA?In alternating chapters, Marlene Shyer and her son Christopher present a forthright account of

their memories of various stages of Chris's life?from the time he was five years old (when Mom first had twinges of suspicion) until his early adult years, when he divulged, first to her and then later to other family members, the fact that he was gay. These accounts are well written: the prose pulls readers along on the whole family's difficult journey. Honesty in expressing fears, the ebb and flow of human emotions, the devastation of self-blame, and, finally, the wonderful joy and release of acceptance make this title a strong choice for any collection serving YAs and/or parents. It is a hopeful book for today's society. ?Rebecca C. Burgee, Langley High School, McLean, VACopyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

I read this book only a few months after I came out. At that time in my life I still didn't accept myself as gay. This book helped me see that you don't have to be a queen to be gay. This book also helped me look back on my own childhood. That helped me see that I've been gay all along and that I was discovering it instead of creating it. This book is an absolute joy to read. My parents read this book, too, and that helped both of us start our conversations from some common ground.

I first found this book and started reading it in my local library when I was in High School. I was scared to death of actually checking it out, but I couldn't put it down! I bought it from the first chance I had, and read it cover to cover. I really enjoyed the tandem story-telling between Chris and his mother (in alternating chapters), and it was the first real affirmation of those strange and terrifying feelings I was having for other guys. This is a highly recommendable title.

This book is a beautiful, both heartwarming and heart-wrenching, account of the struggles of both the mother of a gay child and the son who is coming to terms with his homosexuality. I was able to relate to the feelings and experiences of the mother and many times I felt like I had written the book! I cried as I read some of the son's accounts of his feelings, and it brings me to realization of some of the struggles my own child has faced and will continue to face in years to come. After reading this book, I have a much better understanding of a gay person's life. It opens my eyes to a new world and an enhanced relationship with my child. Thank you, Marlene and Christopher for exposing your personal story in a way that can help others. A must read.

True

The dual authorship - toggling back and forth between the son and mother's versions of their lives

growing up as/with a gay son might strike some as disruptive or overly constructed, but it provides a depth of emotional experience that hearing either side of the story alone would not provide. The boy, from early years, felt there must be something different about him, some flaw that must be obvious to all around him that kept him from fitting into the preordained all-american-boy model. As he realizes that a sexual attraction to other boys is at the heart of his "problem", his concern and confusion are retrained to fear of exposure and self-hatred. At the same time, his mother, suspecting that her son might be homosexual and seeking "expert" advice on preventing this, at the same time largely buries or hides her concern and carries on, through denial, her Ozzie and Harriet suburban life. Moving from the 70s, through the 80s to the 90s, some semblance of acceptance for gays develops. The boy becomes a man, closeted but over time more self-accepting and eventually "comes out" to his mother, siblings and mercurial father. None reject or ostracize him, though surprisingly only his mother had the slightest suspicion. Their reactions, and the obvious love and support his mother and siblings provide are the most heart-warming and affecting moments in the book. After so many years of fearing their rejection and condemnation, Chris is released from the chains of secrecy, though still choosing to remain largely closeted. The grudging "as long as it's not obvious" acceptance from his father suggests the larger societal ambivalence still prevalent at that time (and despite the public approval for gay marriage, even today). One of the consequences of his "coming out" was the loss of his closest friends and his "second family", who go from an open-door policy to not wanting 'someone like him, swimming in our pool'. The book may be a bit outdated, but still provides a thoughtful, honest look into the personal side of what may seem to many as more of a political issue. Hopefully, a time will come when growing up gay won't be something to write about, because it will gain the normality of acceptance. For now, this book may help someone realize they are not alone, not lacking or deviant. Maybe it can help some parent see that their child is a unique and wonderful person, who need only the understanding love and respect that every child should have.

I LOVED this book!! I go back and review it periodically just to remind myself of different aspects of it. I have two children whom I have raised to understand what equality is all about and how painful it can be to be different. Oddly, so many of us are different in so many ways, it's absurd to pick one group out and isolate them as wrong. Appalling really. This book reveals so much about our behavior and the harm we can cause, it's enlightening on many levels. Also, it's nice to be able to identify what to look for in kids that feels a bit different so we can support them. Gay kids are born all the time - telling them from early on that it's normal and wonderful and just a different way to

express themselves is key to their happiness and sense of self. Chris & Marlene clearly have a very close relationship and it's comforting to know that throughout the book - you can see that everything she does is because she cares about him. Though she wanted him "normal", it was the time frame and the culture at that time. Really, what she wanted was for him to be happy, and she'd do whatever she could to achieve that....like any good mom. Wonderful wonderful wonderful!

My mother dies when I was 14 so I will never know what her reaction to me being gay would be. I have no ideas if she suspected or not and my dad is dead. This book was an interesting experience for me to vicariously relive my relationship with my mother and think about those issues. I think the mother is pretty honest about her story, which is not easy to do as she was far from a perfect mother. Ideally, all mothers would make sure their children believe from an early age that being gay would not make a difference to them. Maybe this book will help some mothers and fathers realize what is really important. Great book!

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