

Evans, C. (2016). I Promised Not to Tell: Raising a Transgender Child. Ontario:
Cheryl B. Evans.

Reviewed by: Brittany Adelman, MacEwan University

Cheryl Evans' book, "I Promised Not to Tell: Raising a Transgender Child", is a true story written through her own eyes, about her family discovering a son they did not know they had. Evans brings the reader along every step of the way as her story documents the life of her transgender child from birth to the age of eighteen. In her memoir, Evans sheds light on the highly controversial and frequently misunderstood topic of transgenderism. She discusses the struggles her family faced and continues to face during this journey, and the strains that it placed on them. In spite of these obstacles, Evans remains the loving and accepting mother she had always been, by putting her children's happiness and health above everything else. In her introduction, she mentions the hardships that transgender people are faced with in their everyday lives, and by telling her story hopes to educate society about the misconceptions related to transgenderism. With great detail, Evans covers everything from religion and hormones, to surgery and the bureaucracy. Over the three years it took her to write this book, Cheryl Evans was able significantly change her viewpoint from ignorance to acceptance.

Even though the book is about the life-changing steps of her youngest child Jordan's transition from female to male, Evans includes a lot of important information concerning transgenderism that helps educate her readers. Evans reveals that one of the most common misconceptions of transgenderism is that people think the transgender person is gay. She has a

whole chapter dedicated to this misunderstanding. She explains that transgenderism, or medically known as Gender Dysphoria, is when someone's mental gender and physical or biological gender don't match up, and that it has nothing to do with sexual orientation (p. 105). For example, she states that her child Jordan was born into a body with the physical appearance and characteristics of a female, but in his mind, he has always viewed himself as a male.

Evans mentions that some people believe being transgender is a mental illness, and some parents even go to the extent of taking their transgender child to therapy in order to 'fix' them. She explains that having gender dysmorphia is not a choice, and just like when her own child pretended to be his biological gender, it can lead to depression, self-harm, or even suicide. In the chapter titled "Worthy of Support", Evans says that many transgender children are without the love and support that they need and there are many living on the streets or in foster care because their families have turned them away (p. 80). A reason why a family might disown their child and throw them to the streets is because transgenderism may go against their religious beliefs, they might be afraid of public embarrassment, or they might just be trying to scare them straight. She goes on to mention that the frequency of suicide attempts amongst transgender youth are much higher than suicide amongst non-transgender youth. It is forty-one percent versus only four percent and it even goes as high as over fifty percent for transgender youth who do not have family supporting them.

In addition to explaining what transgenderism is, and the negative effects it can have on an individual, Cheryl Evans discusses how her, and her son challenged the bureaucracy. If something is unfair, she encourages everyone to fight for a change, not only for themselves, but

for others who might be going through the same, or similar situations. When transitioning from female to male, or vice versa, Evans explains how difficult it can be for a minor to get new identification, such as birth certificates, healthcare cards, social insurance numbers, passports, and driver's licenses. This process can take months, even years to change, and it makes one think about all the forms to be filled, that ask one to identify themselves as either male or female, and how difficult it must be when they are forced to choose their biological gender, and not the mental gender that they see themselves as.

Religion is another important topic in this story. Evans discusses how other people's understanding of the bible and what they believed to be right, hurt her family more than she could care to admit. Evans eldest child Mariah, turned to people of a strong Christian faith who told her that transgenderism is 'not of god'. After hearing this, Evans was determined to figure out what god thinks, and she has a chapter in her book dedicated to this topic. It took her seven months, but after reading the Old and New Testaments, Evans concludes that "no one lives their life according to the bible, they can only live their life according to their 'interpretation of the bible'" (i.e. p. 72). The point that she continues to stress in this chapter, is that while everyone is allowed to have their own opinions, they should still be respectful of those who think differently.

This is a very heartfelt and informative, step by step story of one family's journey while helping their child transition from female to male. I believe that Cheryl Evans' intention while writing this book was to raise awareness and educate people about transgenderism. And for me, it did just that. I am going to be completely honest and say that before reading this book, the idea of transgenderism kind of scared me. Not because I thought that people who are transgender were scary, but because I had little to no knowledge on the situation, and I didn't know what

being transgender really meant. In my opinion, this book should be implemented in the curriculum of high school health classes across the country because it is an important topic that I was never taught about in school and I'm sure there are other people like me who are a little scared of the unknown. I highly recommend this book to people of all ages, especially if they and their child are in a similar situation. I believe that the academic audience that would be interested in reading this book would be psychologists, sociologists, social workers, and anyone in the field of child development. I am glad that I chose to write my book review on this book, because in the end, it was not just a book, it was a learning experience. This story is extremely unique because it follows her transgender child from birth through age eighteen, so you really get a sense of the hardships and triumphs that this family has gone through. Evans did a wonderful job writing and structuring this book: it is to the point, well written, and everything is coherently organised into chapters. I admire the courage Cheryl Evans and her children have shown throughout their heart-wrenching story; and one day, when I have children of my own, I aspire to be as strong of a mother as she is. In her story, Evans offers wisdom, encouragement, and support in hopes of ending the stigma related to Gender Dysphoria. I truly believe that this book can help pave the way to understanding and accepting the transgender community.