

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

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The book “I Promised Not To Tell: Raising a Transgender Child” by Cheryl B. Evans is the telling of a mother's journey as she raises two daughters named Mariah and Jordan. While both children got along very well with each other in the beginning, it wasn't long before differences started to emerge between them. The author mentions that Jordan had started wanting to be called “Jake” and that when the two girls were taking part in a glamour day to take pictures as a Christmas gift for their mother “Jordan began to strongly protest the whole idea” (p. 12). In the end “It was all in the name of doing something nice for 'Mom’” (p. 13) and it wasn't until Jordan stated “Mommy, why did God make me a girl? Did I do something wrong? I feel like a boy and I want to be a boy” (p. 15) did the long journey of self discovery truly begin. The book follows this format by walking through the journey in four major sections. The first two sections cover the identification of Jordan as transgender and the collection of information from various sources on what should be done. The last two sections cover surgeries, hormone replacement therapy, the legal battle to change paperwork from the male gender to female, and finally ends with thoughts on the future.

The identification procedure for Jordan was quite long and involved help from many specialists. The family began to notice that whenever Jordan's gender expression was female

Bijader

“Jordan's antisocial behaviour and depression grew stronger” (p. 28). It was only a matter of time before a friend would reveal to the school's administration that Jordan had been engaged in suicidal behaviour and the parents in addition to a school psychologist were called in. Once Jordan explained the feelings they had regarding gender, the parents decided to seek therapy in order to understand what was causing the behaviour. After many different medical professionals had taken their time to diagnose Jordan through proper procedures, the answer was clear that Jordan was transgender. When Jordan was asked if he wanted to transition “he replied 100%. He was 100% sure he was male and wanted to transition” (p. 44). The author then goes on to describe the feelings felt during this time as mourning the loss of a daughter as well as entering a brief discussion on the church and personal thoughts that the church should be all inclusive rather than segregate people (such as closing it's doors to transgender individuals).

At this point Jordan starts on hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and soon after decides to have chest surgery (double mastectomy). For a female to male transgender person several aspects need to be considered in order to maintain the appearance of the gender they identify with. Chest bindings and “packing” (a silicon replacement for the sexual organs of the opposite sex) need to be considered and because the bindings restrict movement, especially after a meal, chest surgery was the first consideration. After the surgery, Jordan was on the road to recovery for some time as the procedure took several weeks to heal. The healing process involved drains and sacks being placed under the armpit (to conceal scaring after the drains are removed) in order to remove extra fluid from the chest, which meant that “for the next week or so these sacks needed to be emptied at regular intervals” (p. 115). In addition to this procedure, Jordan also decided to go through a second procedure (a hysterectomy) roughly one year after the chest

Bijader

surgery. The procedure went perfectly fine and after only a couple days Jordan was discharged from the hospital and back home.

The final bit of the book speaks about identification and the future. Transgender people in general face many roadblocks when it comes to how they want to be identified and how that will appear on their government credentials. As the author notes in the book, the laws relating to transgender persons can be “discrimination, plain and simple” (p. 133). In addition to this, law changes may leave people caught between laws. An example of this is seen when Jordan was caught between qualifying under the old law yet not qualifying under the newest revision for a change in birth certificate gender. Prerequisites such as the need for surgery, letters from doctors, and age limits are important and could change the reality for the transgender community either for the better or make matters much worse. The author brings up rather a rather insightful point when Jordan writes a letter requesting the laws be changed due to issues such as passports showing the female gender on them, while in actuality the transgender person does not at all appear as a female due to their HRT treatments and surgeries. This only serves to confuse officials and also creates a situation where explanations are needed every time the credentials are used. The author notes at the end of the book that activities such as dating and living a life of stealth (hiding the fact that they were once of the opposite sex) are always going to be obstacles, but the children themselves should go through these experiences whenever they're ready and it is the parents that should support them when they need it.

The purpose of the book as set out by the author is to enable “a better understanding of what it means to be a transgender person” (p. 3) and that by understanding these issues we as a society would be better suited to accepting and providing assistance if needed. It is of no doubt

Bijader

that this book could serve as a supplementary reading to a gender studies course within a university setting and could also be used within the anthropological context as well. This would allow the book to be examined through different perspectives and theories that deal with human relations and society.

The book however has several limitations. Firstly, the book is limited because it mainly focuses on the mother and Jordan. While there was some mention of Mariah and Jim (the father) throughout the book, it was not explored in-depth what they thought about what was happening. This leads to sections of the book feeling as if Jim and Mariah were either not present or present in a very minimalistic sort of way (such as the chapter involving Jordan wanting to obtain new government identification). Secondly, there simply isn't enough information provided about the other side of being transgender (Male to Female or MTF). While the author does provide many resources at the end of the book in the form of links to web pages, an email address that the author can be reached at, various terms and their definitions etc. the information is mostly targeted towards Female to Male transgender persons which heavily limits its ability to provide significant help for MTF individuals. Due to these two limitations the book feels as if it is only a small part of the total experience and this only serves to detract from its original purpose which was to provide greater depth and understanding of the implications of a person going through the experience of living as transgender.

With only a few improvements, the book could be made more inclusive and thereby rectifying its limitations. Jim's thoughts about the process are valuable for single or married fathers who may be reading the book and are interested in information about how to raise a transgender child. Especially if they are looking for some information on what to do or how to

Bijader

deal with feelings from a male perspective. If Mariah's perspective was also included in more depth it could provide a source of information and strength for sisters who are suddenly finding themselves in the same situation. These thoughts would especially be useful if they were added in the chapters on government laws for bathroom use and identification change procedures by providing different viewpoints. As for Male to Female transgender information, more links could be added in the last section that are specific to MTF such as places to buy MTF specific items or help websites.

The book itself was easy to follow and explained the terms used very clearly either in text or at the back under the helpful terms section. Due to its easy to follow nature, the book could be easily recommended to those that have little or no exposure to transgender issues.