

**Shenher, L. (2019). This One Looks Like a Boy: My Gender Journey to Life as a Man. Vancouver: Greystone Books.**

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Lorimer Shenher's book "This One Looks Like a Boy", tells a tale of a young girl who does not recognize her<sup>i</sup> female body as her own, and was certain of her male identity growing up. Shenher experienced countless out-of-body experiences as her female self, from buying her first bra, to having intimate relationships with men and women, and greatest of all, becoming pregnant. Lorimer Shenher brings us on a lifelong journey of pain, struggle, and triumph, as she becomes her authentic self. "This One Looks Like a Boy" is a coming of age story about the struggles of denying your psyche, hiding your identity, conforming to social structures, pushing athletic limits, finding and abusing vices, and ultimately freeing yourself. The book is addressed to readers of all natures, followers of her previous work "That Lonely Section of Hell ", parents of children who are questioning their gender, old folks wondering if it's too late to pursue their own liberty, people who question the nature of transgender ideologies, and most importantly the kids who smuggled this book into the safety of their bedroom, scared to believe this might be their truth too. Lorimer leaves readers with a strong opportune message in his introduction, "If I made it here you can, too. I lived to tell my tale. And so, will you." (p. 2).

The book is broken into 20 chapters, each telling a story critical to the growth of

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Lori, but each leaving you with a lingering taste of his never receding gender dysphoria. *Two lineups*, chapter one of the book, describes Shenher's earliest memory of standing out, when in kindergarten the children were asked to separate into two lines, one for boys and one for girls. Lori stood in the boy's line. Her teacher, holding her back at the recess bell, confronted her on her choice of lines. Lori, who was standing in the boy's line stated she was supposed to be a boy, was met with a comforting hand on her shoulder and the sympathetic words "do you think that could be something private you only share with really good friends?" (p. 4). This essential moment would lead Shenher to a lifetime of trying to fit it.

Throughout the entirety of the book, Lori has an internal dialogue that is present, made known by her use of italicized font and insufferable thoughts, while the rest of the dialogue is captured using quotations or her own paraphrased words. We see our first glimpse of this discourse when Lorimer's paternal grandmother states, "this one looks like a boy", while Lori silently reflects, "*See? Even she can see it!*" (p. 15). Lori would come to encounter several other influential people in her life besides her grandmother. Renée, Shirley, and Rosalyn became allies, role models, and confidants at different stages in Lorimer's life. Renée Richards, a New York doctor who voluntarily went through sex reassignment surgery, would symbolize to twelve year old Lori that "*there [were] other people like me*". She was not alone in her world of feeling her gender was erroneous. Shirley, would be the first to approach Lori about her gender identity, reassuring her "we're kind of the same..." (p. 64). Allowing sixteen-year-old Lori to venture cautiously into

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taboo issues that numerous other populations in the 1980's preferred not to discuss. Rosalyn Shakespeare would enter Lorimer's life at a much different time, a fully transitioned detective; Roz was the first transgender officer in the Vancouver Police Department. Lorimer saw Roz as an innovator, conducting training sessions for all VPD members, and gracefully opposing any impolite and cruel labels or "jokes" that came her way. Shenher saw other officers "taking the piss out of him – her" (p. 188) and protested the disrespect by baring her own secret to fellow colleagues who respected her. To Lorimer's own surprise the revelation, of her secret, came naturally to her and the respect came along with it.

Lorimer spent the majority of her life, and this book discussing how she put a pin in her urge to transition. She spent the majority of her youth playing basketball and drinking to suppress every waking moment, and inclination, to think her life, as a girl could be any different. Similarly, as an adult, she threw herself into work, sports, and relationships to hide her distress. However, at twenty-five, she chose to be assessed at the Vancouver General Hospitals Gender Dysphoria Clinic; Lori was diagnosed as suffering with "true transsexualism" (p. 137). Nonetheless, she decided against pursuing the transition. She threw herself into her career in the Vancouver Police Department, trusting a successful career would mask her unhappiness. Her career at the VPD lasted many years, in numerous departments, but was most esteemed for her elaborate and teeming work on the case of Robert Pickton, the now famous serial killer. When her career was no longer sufficient at distracting her, the exhilaration of sports was no longer washing away her unease, and her

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long-term lesbian relationship, although filled with love, commitment, and children, could no longer suppress the aching that the pin was causing, Lorimer Shenher once again return to the doctors who had diagnosed her as transsexual, many years ago. Returning to the doctor's office she spoke of the ease at which the doctors gave her the option of transitioning, and the complete burden and guilt she felt at the thought of how simple such a life-altering decision could be. Understanding the complexity of transitioning, the psychological toll it would take on her wife, kids, parents, job, and ultimately herself, was the reason that Lorimer pushed away her dream for so long. However the irrefutable torment and pain that grew from the pin she has been sitting on became unbearable. In 2016, Lorimer transitioned.

Life as a man came with its own struggles. Having previously identified as a woman Lori had a hard time adjusting to the assumed privilege that white men are given in society. Having experienced life as a woman and currently living as a man, Lori gave second thoughts to experiences he encountered and became more courteous walking through the world as a man.

I give lone women a wider berth when I pass them on my morning run in the forest, careful not to come too close or to startle them if I'm coming from behind. Often when our paths cross, women won't say hello or meet my gaze and I suspect it's for safety; they likely won't engage with a strange man when they're alone and vulnerable. At first, I'd say hello as I had always done, but when I saw that many women appeared uncomfortable or frightened, I stopped. If I'm walking the dog after dark, I'll cross to the other side of the street rather than come up on a woman from behind. Perhaps this is paternalistic, but I was once someone who should have been afraid (p. 282).

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Not keen of his new privilege, Lori became accustomed to calling out every man on sexism when he saw it. However, his transition was not meant to convey thoughts of political righteousness, but defy the meaning of being your authentic self. Shenher closes the book with a message supporting parents to inform themselves and find resources to help “support their children who may be struggling - whatever their issue - to reach their fullest potential, without shame, without judgment, and with boundless unconditional love (p. 286). While many readers will find this book appealing, it would also be of interest to those working in the fields of psychology, sociology, gender studies, and social work.

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<sup>1</sup>The pronouns her/she will be used to refer to Lorimer until the gender transition took place.