



**Barkin, Janna. (2017). He's always been my Son: A Mother's Story about Raising her Transgender Son. Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.**

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Janna Barkin's book, "He's Always Been My Son: A Mother's Story About Raising Her Transgender Son," is a blend of memories and stories discussing the Barkin family's journey following her transgender son, Amaya, as he transitioned from female to male. In her prose, Barkin intertwines various emotional viewpoints such as her own, as Amaya's mother, her husband, her siblings, Amaya, and family and friends, to build a friendly and insightful environment to tell the story of Amaya's transition. Ranging from stories discussing the family's first encounter with Amaya presenting an interest in wanting to be a boy, to the present stage Amaya and his family are at now, the book is divided into phases, frequently encountered by transgender people; this includes the before years, the early years, the tween years, the transition years, and the complete. The highs and lows the family experienced, told through passion and wit, create a raw and inspirational book that provides guidance, reassurance, and support to families and individuals who may relate to what the Barkin's family went through.

Barkin brings light to some of the struggles transgender people face as she recalls her personal experience. The notion that transgender people often experience a limited period in which they feel that their assigned gender is who they truly are; for Amaya, the urge to act, look like, and want to be a boy started to be expressed around the age of four. In Amaya's situation, simply

wearing "girls" clothes caused him great discomfort, stress, and even anxiety. Barkin explains that while to outsiders – who do not know Amaya – it may seem as though Amaya was overreacting or was different from other kids his age; however, for Amaya, clothes such as dresses or girls' underwear were just "not her." Reflecting on the memories of Amaya's conflict with finding clothes he wanted to wear, Barkin comes to realize that it was just another sign that Amaya would grow up to transition to a boy. It was as if Amaya's body was rejecting the embodiment of the female stereotypes. Barkin goes on to explain that the transition to another gender or gender non-conforming is one that may potentially never end. Through Barkin's book, it is clear that the transition, especially for Amaya, was slow, complex, beautiful, heartbreaking, and extraordinary. Barkin accentuates the transformation Amaya went through to become the incredible man he is now.

In Barkin's experience with her son's transition, the confusing requests Amaya desired from an early age allowed Barkin and her husband insight into the young mind of Amaya. She discusses that while experience may be confusing and scary for the parents or family members, just as it was for Barkin and her husband, Gabriel, it is important to remember the courage and strength it takes for transgender people who have to accept and discover their true identity. Barkin recalls feeling like an outsider being hurt as Amaya continued aspects his journey in private. She adds instances of being in public with Amaya when he was still a female but had short hair and wore baggy clothes and a ball cap, and a stranger referred to Amaya as a boy and remembers the looks of contentment and joy on Amaya's face; Barkin also includes a period of time in which Amaya went through depression and intense anxiety as a result of not knowing what washroom to use at school.

She wanted to bring awareness that parents of children who may be transgender or fall somewhere on the LGBTQ spectrum, should remain patient, understanding, and welcome their child with open arms as they navigate their identity and the harsh experience they may face from the world of peers.

Barkin attempts to emphasize the importance of keeping an open mind and becoming more accepting. The struggles Amaya face, both mentally and physically, from not being able to feel comfortable in his own body as he navigates his identity, are apparent. The question Amaya and his parents struggled with was whether or not he was going to be accepted by those around him, such as his classmates. Barkin also includes the message that the expectations and standards parents impose on their children creates a harsh and never-ending pressure for their child; who they are, what they want to be when they get older, and what are they going to do with their life, are just some of the expectations children are expected to answer by a young age. The primary goal of Barkin's book, is to raise awareness for those who are transgender. Speaking from her own experience, Barkin highlights the importance of becoming educated on the topic and gaining insight into what would support and benefit someone who is still discovering their identity. An instance of this can be seen as Barkin reaching out to specialists that aided in providing guidance for Barkin so she could provide Amaya with the support he needed at certain stages of his transition. Barkin believes that all people, through educating themselves on transgender people, as well as the LGBTQ spectrum, they can remove these heavy expectations that they impose, and render support for transgender children, instead of being a burden or causing harm.

Barkin also recalls several memories prior to Amaya's birth and the moment of his birth.

She explains she did not want to know the gender of the baby before it was born; because of this, Barkin also includes that she used to write down notes in a parental dream journal while she was pregnant with Amaya, and as she looked back on them, she discovers that she had always been referring to baby Amaya as a "him" and dreamed he was a boy. Barkin also brings forth the time of the naming ceremony, as Amaya's paternal grandparents wrote letters stating to "become whomever you want to be" and for his life to be filled "with constant discovery. "This unique memory shows yet another sign that Amaya was meant to be a boy. In hindsight, even prior to Amaya's birth, Barkin and her family all subconsciously visualized Amaya to be a boy.

The intended audience for Barkin's book, "He's Always Been My Son: A Mother's Story About Raising Her Transgender Son," is primarily for children or young adults who are having difficulty uncovering their true inner self. I also believe this book is a great tool to anyone who wants to learn and educate themselves about transgenderism and the experiences one may face. This book would be educational for friends and family, teachers, and doctors, and also for those in the discipline of psychology, sociology, and anthropology.

To conclude, the goals Barkin aimed to portray in her book were achieved. Through Barkin's story telling and tone, she brings readers along the journey that she goes on with her child Amaya in a fun and educational way. I believe that this book does a phenomenal job at raising awareness and preaching the importance of acceptance for transgender people and the LGBTQ community. The only aspect I would suggest for the book is adding a story or chapter from the perspective of Amaya, so readers get a first-hand view of what Amaya endured. Besides that, I

highly recommend this book to anyone who is open to expanding their knowledge on transgenderism or gender non-conforming children. I found "He's Always Been My Son: A Mother's Story About Raising Her Transgender Son" to be a raw and engaging book, created to inspire and impact others.