

Transparent

Love, Family and Living the T with Transgender Teenagers

Harcourt Inc., Orlando, FL

By Cris Beam

When Cris Beam moved to Los Angeles so her partner could get a Ph. D., she found she needed a challenge to offset the boredom of working at home in a strange city. When she heard of Eagles, a “small, scrappy high school for gay and transgender teenagers,” she decided to volunteer “maybe once or twice a week.”

Like most adults, she had little idea of how transgender teenagers survive on the streets. Most could care less – they shake their heads and ignore them as they pass by, or else they stop and become the kids’ prostitution customers. Ms. Beam’s experience with them over the next several years, chronicled in *Transparent*, sheds new light on their lives.

Her story is not about child abuse or exploitation, yet it reflects a great deal of both. While we hear a lot about physical and sexual abuse of children, reading this book raised several questions in my mind. What is child abuse?

Is it destroying all your 11 year-olds possessions, and then throwing him out on the street?

Is it refusing to recognize your child's identity and forcing them into a role against their will?

Is it throwing a child in jail for fighting back against abusive classmates or teachers?

Is it incarcerating transgirls in the male section of the juvenile hall or prison?

In many ways, *Transparent* is about children reacting to abusive authority figures of all kinds – parents, school personnel, law enforcement, social services, and medical professionals. Unloved or rejected by their birth parents because they do not fit societal norms, they find acceptance on the street. Their survival is often through prostitution and the concurrent drug use that makes it possible. This book is about survival - the struggles of unloved, rejected, cast-off children to survive and mature in whatever way they can.

Transparent also serves as a primer for dealing openly and supportively with these kids. They need acceptance and family – and they find it on the streets with their “drag mothers,” and gender variant brothers, and sisters. They need love. Cris beam shows just how much they need love and how difficult it is to overcome their natural fear of adults and authority figures. *Transparent* shows the impact a single, concerned, loving person can have on their lives.

We need more such people.

Reviewed by:

Dave Parker, President

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