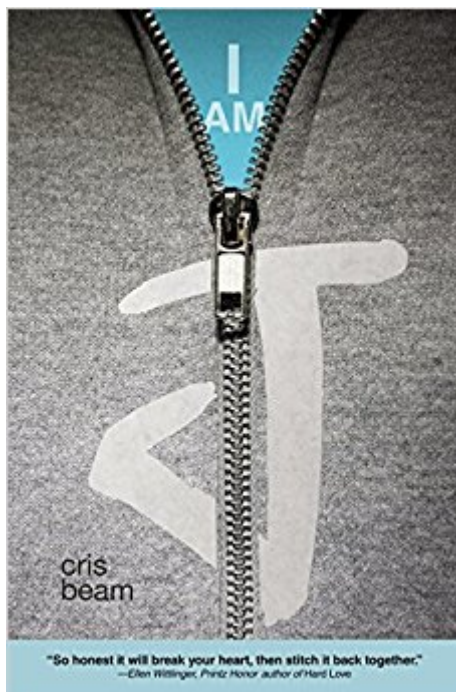


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I Am J



Synopsis

A powerful and inspiring story about a transgender teen's struggle to find his own path -- and love his true self. J had always felt different. He was certain that eventually everyone would understand who he really was: a boy mistakenly born as a girl. Yet as he grew up, his body began to betray him; eventually J stopped praying to wake up a "real boy" and started covering up his body, keeping himself invisible -- from his parents, from his friends, from the world. But after being deserted by the best friend he thought would always be by his side, J decides that he's done hiding -- it's time to be who he really is. And this time he is determined not to give up, no matter the cost.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Best Books of the Month, March 2011: Growing up, J (born as Jennifer) always thought of himself as a boy stuck in the body of a girl. In elementary school J shunned his mom's attempts to stick him in dresses and preferred the rough-and-tumble play of boys on the playground. Now, as a teenager, J's Puerto Rican mother and Jewish father want him to think about his future and one day start a family, a possibility that makes J feel misunderstood and anxious about what lies ahead. So after an argument with his best friend, J strikes out on his own. He starts classes at a school for transgender and gay teens, but the complications resulting from who he is and who he wants to be prevent J from truly connecting with anyone. Fed up hiding inside layers of oversized t-shirts, J decides to explore testosterone treatments and embarks on a path that will test his patience, maturity, and commitment. Author Cris Beam's extraordinary understanding of this often overlooked population shows in J--a complex, conflicted character whose emotional

journey will resonate beyond the final page. Equally impressive is Beam's vivid dialog, which illuminates relationships and situations that any teen who has felt isolated will easily relate to. Thoughtfully researched and written, *I Am J* is ultimately an inspiring novel about deciding to lead the life one is meant to--no matter at what cost. --Jessica Schein --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Gr 9 Up-When J reached adolescence, he quit the swim team and began covering his body with extra clothes to hide the fact that he had been born a girl. At 17, J dreams of being accepted as a boy, binding his breasts and despising his monthly periods. His close friend, Melissa, a cutter, tries her best to understand and support him. His parents are confused, angry, and sad. He runs away from home and enrolls in a special school for gay and transgender teens, where he makes a helpful friend, a transgender girl. He also embarks on a shaky romance with Blue, a straight female artist who believes J is a boy and to whom he must eventually confess the truth. When he learns about testosterone and how it can help with his transformation, he is overjoyed, despite the obstacles he faces in getting the drug legally. Finally, J turns 18 and is able to begin getting his shots. He applies to and is accepted at college to study photography as a transgender young man, and holds out hope that one day his parents will accept him as well. Beam is the author of the informative adult book, *Transparent: Love, Family and Living the T with Transgender Teenagers* (Houghton, 2007). This novel is just as impressive. J is an especially vivid character, and the supporting characters are carefully drawn. Told in third person, the story is believable and effective due to insightful situations, realistic language, and convincing dialogue. Readers who relished Julie Anne Peters's *Luna* (Little, Brown, 2004) will snap it up. -Diane P. Tuccillo, Poudre River Public Library District, Fort Collins, CO (c) Copyright 2010. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I am J tells a story that is rarely told--the coming of age of a transgender teenager. In this case, it's the story of J, a biracial (Latino and Jewish) transgender boy who is struggling to become comfortable with his gender identity while coming out to his family and friends. J's story features many aspects of "typical" young adult novels--the search for identity, the need for a sense of belonging, emerging values that conflict with those of parents, romance, the confusion of adolescent sexuality, the pressures of high school. J, however, also copes with the challenges of a gender identity that doesn't match his physical body. Further frustrating matters, J has few resources

he can use to educate himself about his predicament until he runs away from home and encounters a marginalized community of others who, like him, are gender variant. Identifying the resources that can help him leads J to confront new issues accepting and understanding those resources, finding a way to make them work for him, and developing the confidence to share his gender identity with those he loves. Although some of the plot developments feel as though they've been lifted directly from some standardized paradigm of the challenges faced by most trans* youth (running away from home, confusion over sexual orientation, asserting control over one's physical development, securing the resources for hormone therapy, finding a community, enduring bullying), Beam has woven these elements into a credible story about a protagonist who is complex, dynamic, and likeable. J is by no means perfect, but it is nearly impossible not to root for his success.

J has never had the easiest of lives growing up: his best friend is his only friend will focus more on herself than their friendship, kids in his public New York high school harass him, his parents aren't a constant presence, and he's a guy born in a girl's body. When J's best friend and crush Melissa turns her back on him, J decides it's time to start truly becoming the man he wishes people would see him as, whether that means hormone treatment or just truly accepting himself. I am J is a unique, ultra-modern coming-of-age novel whose highlights include a dynamic protagonist set against a vivid, real world with real-world issues. J's struggle truly became a riveting part of this novel, and the way his struggle to become the gender he desired became a mission that readers came to cheer for when J succeeded and sighed when he had to take a step back. Clearly, the FTM (female-to-male) transition process was well researched, and J's hopes for his world to accept him as a boy come to represent all the struggles people face for others to accept them. The reader gets to see each stage: the unsure pre-transition J who hides his body with layers of shirts, the J who is sure of his gender and physically projects that to the world (and passes sometimes), and the J who begins the physical alterations of the transition. It gives a nearly complete curve and leaves the reader a bit more informed about the fascinating life. But, luckily, the book didn't singularly define J by being a transgender person: he's resilient, loyal, open to learn, and has a big heart. Also, he's human. His relationships aren't defined by being good or bad, but go through patches of both, namely with his mother, Melissa, and the friends he meets along the way. Besides the issues it brings up,

I Am J is a wonderfully painted story in terms of the techniques the author uses. J is a multi-racial child, and many of his friends are as he is, so the diversity of New York is explored. As well, J's rougher neighborhood and life was an interesting choice, and the reader not only got to learn about transgender life but also about a less read area of New York. The dialogue is top notch and completely realistic. There's swearing, idioms, and just the syntax of the sentences make it so each line could seriously be said by real people, really pushing the story's credibility. The writing itself was very frank, and the story didn't leave out bits and pieces because someone might feel uncomfortable. It leaves the reader satisfied by the end, and a bit more empathetic toward the transgender people community. In conclusion, if you are looking for a great piece of fiction including a well-made protagonist and a setting that isn't as heavily explored, and/or want to dabble into the still-on-the-rare-side LGBTQ fiction, *I Am J* is a great choice.

It is a rare thing to find a book that truly reflects the transgender experience in a fashion that appeals to young adults. "*I Am J*" does this, and does it well. There are many autobiographical (non-fiction) books or memoirs that report one individual's experience. This fictional account of a 17 year old FtM transsexual delves deep into this young man's psyche as he struggles with his own awareness, identity, and relationships. Author Cris Beam has drawn upon her years of experience in the transgender community to present a character - J - who represents feelings and experiences of many gender variant teens of both assigned genders. While classmates and family struggle to understand his attitude and behaviors, J is struggling with his awareness of himself. Declaring early in his senior year of high school that he is male, not female, is not a spur of the moment decision; he has known for some time. As with most teens, he is trying to discover who he is as a person and who he will be as an adult. Compounded with that is his anguish over his relationships with his parents and friends; he is trying to express himself while in constant fear of rejection by those he loves. No one who is not transgender can truly understand the emotional stress of accepting oneself and the fear of sharing that knowledge with loved ones. In "*I Am J*" author Cris Beam has portrayed this superbly.

I am J is the story of transgender youth. J, born Jennifer, hates his name and has always thought of himself as a boy, despite being a girl. He struggles with this and spends most of the early part of the novel in a very dark place. *I am J* is a coming out tale that is more complicated than just a coming out tale. The main storyline deals with J's coming out, how his family reacts and his first few steps

toward transition. The cast of characters have their own issues, his best friend Melissa is a cutter. His parent's marriage is in trouble and they are both flawed individuals, his new trans friend Chanelle has her own very restricted view of gender and the roles boys and girls must play. This all adds up to a much deeper and more realistic novel, one that is about a trans-individual who is coming out, but doesn't read like a one dimensional coming out story. Very good book and a very easy read.

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