



# Even You

*Marilyn Oser*

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## **Even You** Marilyn Oser

Where do you turn when love turns to hurt, when loss turns to fury?

Impetuous isn't a word you'd use to describe Claire Bramany. She's capable, reliable and steady. But when a sudden accident in Brooklyn in 1995 takes the life of her lover, Jessie Friedman, Claire's world implodes.

And worse is soon to come: while cleaning out Jessie's desk, Claire finds hidden journals that tell long-buried secrets of Jessie's western girlhood.

Jessie's account of Tulsa in 1944 appears innocent and playful, at first. Her days are peopled with quirky characters--especially Uncle Jimmy, an honest-to-goodness teenage hero just back from war-torn Europe. He's Jessie's favorite, until the afternoon he makes his move on nine-year-old Jessie.

No secrets, secrets kill: this was the promise Claire and Jessie had made to each other. But in twenty-three years together with Jessie, Claire never heard of any Uncle Jimmy, much less any sexual violation. Shattered, yearning to reconnect with the Jessie she thought she knew, Claire heads out to Oklahoma to find this man.

Is the story in the journals true? If so, has Claire any other course than to avenge Jimmy's hideous crimes...?

## **Even You Details**

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# From Reader Review Even You for online ebook

## Bandit says

It's always a privilege to be the first review for a book particularly a good one as was the case here. Took the author ten years to complete and the result is a very well written, nuanced, multilayered story of split time narratives about love, grief and revenge. Yes, that's pretty generic, but there is no point in a summary when one is already provided. Summaries are objective, opinions are subjective and by that logic this book was an emotionally intelligent, moving, interesting read. Thanks Netgalley.

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## Katina Sprouse says

I received a free copy of this for a fair and honest review from NetGalley

This is a story of Claire and the loss of her longtime partner Jessie. Claire sets out to understand Jessie through the notebooks she has left in the wake of her death; notebooks filled with stories of Jessie's childhood across the country, where things and times were different. Things take a dark turn when Claire realizes that all of Jessie's past is not as pleasant as she thought.

The story line is well researched and written with great attention given to historical details. The author relates events in the story to things that actually happened in US history and nails it.

As refreshing as it was to have an LGBTQ story that wasn't written about young teens in love, I wasn't satisfied with this novel. I felt that the beginning of the book was not laid out very well. While the characters were developed there was some confusion about how the chapters kept flipping back and forth. Once I get past the first few chapters, it made more sense. I am not sure if it was purposeful to style the opening chapters this way or not.

Overall it was a good read. I had a hard time getting hooked or interested in the beginning but once I got about a quarter of the way into it, I didn't put it down much. The author does well to address thoughts and feelings dealing with loss and depression. I would be interested in reading more by Marilyn Oser simply because the honesty and complexity of the characters thought process was heartfelt and showed signs of a terrific writer.

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## Karli says

I had a hard time putting this book down - it bounces between Oklahoma in 1944 (end of WWII) and Oklahoma in the aftermath of the bombing at the Federal Building, and centers around a vibrant, lively character named Jessie, and her surviving partner Claire's attempt to understand and avenge her.

This novel pits the singular love of Claire for Jessie against the history she discovers in Jessie's childhood notebooks after Jessie's death.

I found myself focusing on two truths that are reflected in this story - one is that what we choose to do with the life and experience we are given are vast and beautiful. The other, is that life is too big to love only one.

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## **Blow Pop says**

Content warnings: paedophilia, molestation, cancer mention, violence mention, lesbian relationship, death mention, terrorism mention, drug mention

I received a free copy of this for a fair and honest review from NetGalley.

Pardon me while I gag. This book made me nauseated. I will NEVER understand adults who take advantage of children. I don't see the appeal nor do I have the desire to have sexual encounters with minors.

A good thing I will say about the author, she at least did some pretty good research. Especially since she mentions the Oklahoma City Bombing in '95. And her bits about the morphine and not sure if it's still potent after being expired for 2 months. She also got the incident in the early 1910s where a group of white people went after a bunch of black people for something they thought happened but didn't actually happen. That's some real good research there.

Honestly, some of this reads like John Green's Looking For Alaska. But in the sense of someone died, left journals behind, and now partner is trying to figure out who they really were of things that were never told to partner. So in a way it is but in a way, a definite GOOD way, it isn't. But that's the best frame of reference that I can really do. Every other chapter is one of the journals that Jessie kept about her childhood and things that happened. The chapters that aren't about Jessie's childhood are about Claire trying to figure out who Jessie, her partner, was and who her uncle Jimmy who molested her as a child was in an effort to exact justice.

Ugh and then what kind of person tells a child who has lost her mum that because you are now her new mum she can't talk about the mum she lost because it hurts/offends you? And then takes away their only picture of the mum they lost? That just sounds horrible.

And because Jessie's childhood takes place during WW2 there's a lot of anti-semitism in the book especially in regards to Jessie and whether or not she's half Jewish because her father is Jewish. Whether it's religiously or culturally or both it's never stated.

I also kind of like Jessie's imaginary friend. I like the idea of her imaginary friend being not white and not of lighter skin.

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## **Darlene says**

Disclaimer: I was given this book for an honest review by NetGalley.com.

Warning: There are trigger issues in this book as my tags suggest, this book has sexual abuse, incest, grief that if you're not ready for them this book may not be for you. And though the two main characters are in a

lesbian relationship that doesn't play much of a part. It is more about getting over the death of a loved one.

All of the above said I think this was a very interesting book. I like the tool the author used of the journals of the lost partner. These journals were of the time when the lost partner was a young girl in the 1940s. The widowed person left behind is dealing with this in 1995 I think it was in Oklahoma at the time when McVeigh did his dastardly deed. The evils of the present (1995) play against the bigotries and misogyny of the 1940s. And against all of that is the bereavement and depression the main character must contain.

I don't think I'm doing this book justice. There is a lot here, a lot of story. I like the main character, but my sympathies/empathies hurt for her. Through the journal, I learned to like the partner. We don't learn a lot about her as an adult but if the main character loves her than we do too.

This book would be good for a younger generation who didn't live through the 40s who might not remember the 90s. Especially in the South. It is history made personal.

Thank you NetGalley for letting me read this book. Thank you, Marilyn Oser for writing a very touching book. Warnings aside, I recommend this book highly.

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### **Josie says**

This was very well done.

I had a few problems with it, namely that Claire annoyed the hell out of me, but overall I thought it was a well executed novel tackling a very difficult subject.

Now, back to Claire...The term "whiney bitch" comes to mind! Harsh given the love of her life just died, I know.

I'm not sure if it was down to her not being developed enough as a character in her own right that gave me little to no compassion for her, but I found reading the chapters in present tense from Claire's vantage point simply something to get through in order to get to the good parts of Jessie's story.

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### **Arja Salafranca says**

Even You opens with grief, that most mind-numbing of things that makes one do strange things. As fiftysomething Claire Bramany discovers when her partner of twenty-three years, Jessie Friedman, dies in an accident. This happens ironically and cruelly after Jessie has survived a battle with cancer. Life so often doesn't make sense. Oser describes the grieving process with accurate precision: "Jessie death had catapulted her into a different place, a different country, some kind of mirror image that only looked the same as where she'd lived before."

While in the midst of mourning Jessie, Claire discovers a cache of secret diaries kept and hidden away, and so begins a journey into Jessie's hidden past. The journals tell of Jessie's time living with her grandparents in Tulsa in 1944, when she is nine years old, after her mother had sent her there, unable to care for her. It's a different world – a time when secrets fester, and children don't always know when to tell, or how to tell. Because it's here that Jessie encounters her Uncle Jimmy, a man with a sinister taste for little girls, and it's this secret that Jessie will keep from her lover, despite their promises never to keep secrets between them. The novel alternates between the journals and Claire's present day journey, through grief, and ultimately

back to Oklahoma to find Jimmy, who long ago violated Jessie and ripped through the innocence of her childhood. The journal is compelling and skilfully told, and heart-rending in its portrayal. The journal is the meat of the story around which the later years weave themselves, and contains some of the finest writing and description in the novel.

However, I found the present-day narrative less compelling, and while Jessie leapt from the page as a child in the journal pages, I found it less easy to relate to the tough, although grief-worn Claire. I missed too reading more of the relationship between the two, and the bonds that formed between them, and would have liked more back story.

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## Catalina says

Book received on NetGalley for an honest review, I guess. But seen that is now way past the deadline when I could have submitted my review, pointless is the correct description even if nonetheless honest hihhi.

In terms of plot the only word I can summon is generic, almost as rereading a story that I already read in a form or another; and then the hints of the abuse right up at the beginning. I seriously felt waves after waves of disappointment washing over me and my inner voice going like: "noooo, nooo, I don't want to know what is wrong so soon in the story..."

But at the same time, in just a few short pages I was also already in love with the voice of young Jessie. Such a witty and smart little voice. The narrative, in the chapters about Jessie, is so tender and full of details that really makes you imagine a young girl of 8-9 presenting you the world through her eyes. Eyes of innocence and playfulness; eyes of curiosity and learning, eyes of joyfulness yet eyes that know what sorrow is. I truly love the childish logic; how a child can "think outside the box", insightful but hilarious:

*"The two words are butt and ass. You can say cigarette butt, and no one will think the worse of you, and you can say ass if you mean donkey, even in church. Yet it is very bad, like a curse, to say butt or ass if you mean backside. Either which way, you spell and pronounce the words exactly the same - butt, ass - the only difference being what you're thinking of when you say them. Maybe it's the thinking of that part of your body that makes you bad - except that's the same part you think of when you say backside or behind. So there must be some other connection between the thinking and the saying that I haven't figured out yet."*

As I went ahead, lured by Jessie, I discovered this book is not about its plot, but about the characters . This story is about Jessie -more like the ghost of the adult self, but her essence explained by her younger self. You are part of young Jessie's adventures, sufferings, abuse. I bit of coming of age. She was definitely dealt a bad hand but she did come on top of everything. She actually discovered the essence for what a child needs to make it and she paid it forward. *"Every kid need to shine, she said: needs a place to shine, or a way to shine, or a person to shine for. Nothing big, just something that means something to the kid."*

And then you have Claire: the overly ordered, 'plan everything' Claire, an accountant for Goodness sake!! And Claire is plummeted into chaos by Jessie's death. "Follow your gut, they say", but how to do that after a life of panning? How do you cope with grief? On top of that how do you cope with discovering you didn't knew half the story of your loved one? How do you cope with all the hurt caused by the sufferings of the young self of your partner? So much desperation, frustration, need for revenge or maybe to just discover her, to truly know and understand her so that some peacefulness finally come! Grief, such a complex, layered response...

*"All this time Claire had envied Jessie. Dead meant being past pain and out of all trouble, while Claire slogged on alone. [...] And so it had never occurred to her until now, [...], that the spirit world might envy us - envy us the fall of snowflakes on our tongues, the savor of honeysuckle in the air, the tang of new wine, the taut stretch of muscles, the trickle of sweat. Even our discomforts enviable, the small aches and twinges that tell us Yes, I'm alive. I'm alive"*

My final rating is around 3.5\* Even if the plot is more like a supporting "character" for the main 2 character, it really was too generic and I also couldn't really pass over my first disappointment (with the subject being so out in the open from the start). Both characters are well written, powerful. And while I incline towards young Jessie, I could also empathize with Claire (for example: I felt the scene with the old man through my stomach :o, so real and scary even!) But I also got tiny bit bored and felt like skimming through the pages when reading some of the chapters on Clair. That's not to say I didn't enjoy this read, all in all it is a good one!

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## **Rhayne says**

**\*SPOILER ALERT\***

Overall I had some good and some very bad things to say about this book. While the writing was consistent and the plot and story moved well with a decent flow I found the content flawed. While I can definitely understand wanting to tackle a subject like child abuse whether it be physical, emotional or sexual, I do believe there is a way to go about it. This book did not take that route.

While Claire was a wonderfully developed character who really struggled with the loss of her partner and the information she gathered afterward about her childhood molestation by her uncle Jimmy that didn't make up for what followed. I discovered in middle lying chapters within the book rather detailed accounts of two of these instances of sexual abuse. Both recounts were from when the character telling about the events was 9 years old. In my opinion they were too detailed and completely inappropriate.

Abuse happens, yes, but there is no need to highlight and detail it in such a way that makes the reader uncomfortable. It could have easily been vague and referenced the abuse, we've all watched TV enough to know what is involved. I also found the fact that, at the end, Claire actually managed to relate with the uncle Jimmy character and somehow seems to 'understand' how he could have done what he did to his niece disturbing. Having your character, who has spent the entire book trying to hunt this man down in some kind of anger driven revenge fantasy suddenly believe he abused the child out of 'love' is sickening.

The only saving grace in this entire book is that other than those two scenes and minus the last chapter it is well written and flows wonderfully. However I wouldn't be comfortable recommending it to anyone.

I was given this book in exchange for an honest review by Inked Rainbow Reads

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## **Rajan says**

A very heartfelt thanks to netgalley and for providing me a copy for reading and reviewing.  
I give it 3.5 stars but taht option is not in goodreads ;).

The book is story of two woman in a relationship jassie and claire. The relationship cant be labeled as the author explains below. this book moves semalessly vetween past and present. It slowly builds up the story and keep you engrossed.

Here are some excerpts from the book:

“Your resumé?”He fished it from a stack on the corner of his desk and waved it in the air. “Your experience?”Brandishing it, accusing her of something, but what? “Here’s what I think of your experience.”He crumpled the twenty-pound, cream-colored laid paper in his fist and, rising from his chair, turned his back to her. Then—flamboyantly, protractedly, comprehensively—he wiped his rear end with it."

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“Forget it. Listen to your gut,” they said. “What good are your plans, anyway? Man proposes, and God shits all over him.”“Old Yiddish saying: ‘Man plans, and God laughs.’”“No, man plans, and God shits all over him, and then God laughs. Claire, go with your gut.”

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"Claire detested labels. Any labels: morning person, night person; intellectual, flirt; flibbertigibbet, leader. Flattering or not, grain of truth or not, she loathed, abhorred and defied them all. The worst was lezzzzbian, with its ugly buzz there in the middle, like bees zeroing in on the sting, like kamikaze planes homing in for the smashup. The word fogged the truth, which was that Claire had fallen in love with Jessie because she was Jessie, and vice versa."

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Children were gorgeous: he was right about that. How fleeting their beauty was—how soon the body changed, hair darkening and thickening, bones growing prominent. Not that adults were unsightly—just different. They didn’t have the faces of children, the bodies of children, the minds of children. They didn’t have the energy or the curiosity or the liveliness of children. You could desire a child; that was understandable, if only barely. What wasn’t permissible was to act upon it, because you spoiled her childhood forever. Did that even need to be said?

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## **Kristina Aziz says**

I've been reading a lot of books lately with a similar theme to the one found in this book, when grief turns up new information and the ones left behind get latched on to an obsession in the name of finding closure. But even tough it's a similar theme, this book was poignantly written and a delight to read. I found myself drawn to Claire's character in her quest to come to terms with Jessie's death. It was pretty refreshing to read an LGBT+ book from the point of view of middle aged women. Not that points of view from teenagers aren't important, but there are so many of them. How are those who survived puberty supposed to relate to anyone older in books? While this book would make a fine addition to my shelf, I'm afraid it wouldn't be read too often. That said, I recommend borrowing it first or getting the cheaper kindle version before making your decision on the physical copy. My rating: 4.5

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## **Marilyn says**

\* I won this book from a GoodReads giveaway \*

I really enjoyed this book...until the last few chapters. I did not care for the ending at all. I can't believe that Claire would actually have a conversation with Uncle Jimmy, let alone a civilized one. Not to mention giving that man Jessie's notebooks. I am positive Jessie wouldn't want him to have them. Or anything, for that matter. I am just very frustrated with the ending. I have a couple of scenarios in my head that I feel would have been much better endings to the story. This is one of those books that I will play out the different endings in my head for a while. Until the next one, of course. LOL

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## **Nora Eliana says**

This book surprised me with its intensity.

It tackles such difficult topics. Death and rape. But I think they were both handled very carefully, but yet were quite impactful. I took my time finishing it. It is not a book to just fly through. but worth the read!

Usually, I'm not a fan of stories told in two different times and I don't really like to read a diary format, but both worked very well with the story and I enjoyed reading about Jessie's life.

Claire felt very real in her pain and her coping mechanisms. And in her struggle to believe. what happened. Her relationship with Jessie sounds so pure.

The layered portrayal of Uncle Jimmie was great too. Nothing glorifying, but showcasing various aspects of his personality even though we mostly get to see him through Jessie's eyes and therefore get to see the uglier, more despicable parts of him and how that contrast to how everyone else perceives him.

Jessie as a child, her way of thinking and acting, felt so real and true. Often I find children to be either too 'childlike' or too grown-up or not 'real' in books because the author forgot how the mind of children work but not in this one!

I can really recommend this book, though it definitely is on the heavier side. (And not what I usually read, but I'm glad I did)

*I recieved an e-copy of this book from Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.*

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## **Natalie says**

Beautifully written. Marilyn Oser captures her character's quirks and demons artfully. I definitely recommend.

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## **Carol Ascher says**

This powerful novel combines a gently-told love story, a beautiful description of mourning, and a psychological thriller. Though passages are painful to read, it's an engrossing and deeply satisfying novel.

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