



## **Becoming Nicole: The Transformation of an American Family**

*Amy Ellis Nutt*

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When Wayne and Kelly Maines adopted identical twin boys, they thought their lives were complete. But it wasn't long before they noticed a marked difference between Jonas and his brother, Wyatt. Jonas preferred sports and trucks and many of the things little boys were "supposed" to like; but Wyatt liked princess dolls and dress-up and playing Little Mermaid. By the time the twins were toddlers, confusion over Wyatt's insistence that he was female began to tear the family apart. In the years that followed, the Maineses came to question their long-held views on gender and identity, to accept and embrace Wyatt's transition to Nicole, and to undergo an emotionally wrenching transformation of their own that would change all their lives forever.

*Becoming Nicole* chronicles a journey that could have destroyed a family but instead brought it closer together. It's the story of a mother whose instincts told her that her child needed love and acceptance, not ostracism and disapproval; of a Republican, Air Force veteran father who overcame his deepest fears to become a vocal advocate for trans rights; of a loving brother who bravely stuck up for his twin sister; and of a town forced to confront its prejudices, a school compelled to rewrite its rules, and a courageous community of transgender activists determined to make their voices heard. Ultimately, *Becoming Nicole* is the story of an extraordinary girl who fought for the right to be herself.

Granted wide-ranging access to personal diaries, home videos, clinical journals, legal documents, medical records, and the Maineses themselves, Amy Ellis Nutt spent almost four years reporting this immersive account of an American family confronting an issue that is at the center of today's cultural debate. *Becoming Nicole* will resonate with anyone who's ever raised a child, felt at odds with society's conventions and norms, or had to embrace life when it plays out unexpectedly. It's a story of standing up for your beliefs and yourself—and it will inspire all of us to do the same.

## Becoming Nicole: The Transformation of an American Family Details

Date : Published June 7th 2016 by Random House Trade Paperbacks (first published October 20th 2015)

ISBN : 9780812995435

Author : Amy Ellis Nutt

Format : Paperback 297 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Biography, Lgbt, Autobiography, Memoir



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## **From Reader Review *Becoming Nicole: The Transformation of an American Family* for online ebook**

### **Book Riot Community says**

Nicole Maines won a landmark transgender rights victory when she and her family took her Orono Maine school district to court for failing to provide her with the same access to school facilities as other female students. But behind the headlines was the personal journey of a transgender child who knew from the age of two that "I'm a boy-girl." And that journey took place in a close knit family context, with parents who weren't even sure what "transgender" meant at first, a father who struggled to accept it, and an identical twin brother trying to find his own way. Maines' lawsuit was a big local story, and even though I don't know the family personally, I was curious to go beyond the headlines. I knew the plot going in, but I didn't know the characters, all of them imperfect but loving human beings trying to figure it out. As soon as I read the first page, I was hooked. *Becoming Nicole* is the very last book I read this month, but also the best. I'll end with a beautiful passage from Nicole's sixth grade poem, "Disequality": "They have you sit alone, away from friends in hopes that your difference will come to an end. What do you call a girl with a head who regrets what she heard that equality said? That you deserve the same as your peers without blame? You call her Nicole. And her difference makes her whole." — Jessica Tripler

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from The Best Books We Read In October: <http://bookriot.com/2015/11/02/riot-r...>

### **Diane Yannick says**

*Becoming Diane* is a never-ending process. You would think I'd have it all figured out as I close in on 70. Not so much. I have an open heart/mind and liberal beliefs. Plus I read a lot. I have a friend who is transitioning-- FTM (she taught me to use these letters signifying female to male). I have a 10 year old granddaughter who told me that she's glad that she's okay being a girl. A boy in her acting class told her he used to be a girl. She passed no judgment but thought it would make life harder. I have so much yet to understand. (I only talked to my grandmother about cooking and the Phillies.)

This book helped me to understand what transgender means on a much deeper level. Sure, it's just one story but it's such an important one. I consider it a gift that has been given to open our hearts and inform our minds. Thank you Amy Ellis Nutt, the talented, award-winning author who told the story in such an engaging manner. Thank you to the Maines family who shared their lives so openly.

Kelly and Wayne adopted twin boys then went about loving them with every fiber of their beings. This included accepting Wyatt's belief from a very early age that he was really a girl. His transition into Nicole is at the heart of this story but it's much more. It's the story of Jonas, the twin who is in the right body. It's the story of Wayne, a dad who had a hard time wrapping his mind around what was happening to his son. It's the story of Kelly, a mama bear who didn't care who she offended as long as her child was treated fairly. They relocated to find acceptance and educational opportunities, temporarily split up their family and drained their resources; yet they continued to speak out and help change transgender legislation.

I'm sure there's controversy about this theory and I do intend to read more but it makes sense to me: "Our

genitals and our gender identity are not the same.

Sexual anatomy and gender identity are the products of two different processes, occurring at distinctly different times and along different neural pathways, before we are even born. Both are functions of genes as well as hormones, and while sexual anatomy and gender identity usually match, there are dozens of biological events that can affect the outcome of the latter and cause an incongruence between the two."

I will not soon forget this family. I agree with the author Honor Moore who is quoted at the end, " I believe we don't choose our stories. Our stories choose us.....And if we don't tell them, then we are somehow diminished." I hope that unspooling their story helped the Maines . I hope it's true that "the knots in their hearts were freed." They deserve only the best.

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### **Lynnski says**

When I saw the picture of Nicole on the cover of this book, I remembered seeing her in a documentary I watched a few years back regarding transgenders. I immediately knew it was a book I wanted to read. I don't know any transgenders personally (that I know of) but I do know there are a couple at my daughters' high school and that our county is one of those currently struggling to provide equal rights to those children in our school system. I am very supportive of that cause and hope they do the right thing, but wanted to read more about Nicole's journey to get a better understanding of what these children go through and the effects it has on them and their families. This book definitely delivered.

Some people think a person's sexual orientation or gender identity is a choice....it's not. It is not something you just change....you are born that way. It's a matter of accepting it and adjusting life to embrace one's true self. I believe this book can help people understand that. Maybe open some doors and windows to those living close-minded lives, to become more accepting of others that aren't like them, that might go against their religious beliefs. Knowledge is the key – this book can provide some of that.

Whatever your beliefs, I hope you will take the time to read this book. If nothing else, it will let you know what it's like to be a little boy that wants nothing to do with being a boy. He's a "girl-boy" and prefers it that way until he can realize his dream of truly becoming a girl – to then dress how she wants, act how she wants, and be accepted as one of the girls. Because truly, that is what she is. The innocent minds of children can accept her as she is, it's those darn close minded adults that get in the way.

I give this book 5 out of 5 stars, not because it's beautifully written or a great literary piece. I give it 5 stars because it is a wonderful story of love and commitment, finding ones self, supporting others, diversity, and acceptance. It's not preachy or critical, it's honest and educational (without feeling educational). It is truly moving.

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### **Gia Drew says**

Through damp eyes and under the fading November daylight, I just completed "Becoming Nicole, The Transformation of an American Family", by Amy Ellis Nutt. I was slightly hesitant to read the story because I know and have worked with several of the main characters. I also wavered because I'm trans like the title character, and I'm always afraid and often dubious of how non-trans folk write about us. But after I was

given a copy of the book directly from Wayne, I thought I'd better get to it.

Early on in the story, I was troubled by the flip-flop of names and pronouns when referring to the main character, but let it go as I'm sure the author discussed this at length with her. I must say, despite the unavoidable narrative struggle of retelling a true story and the few factual missteps that I encountered, I really enjoyed book. In addition to the revelatory sections about the science of sex and gender, I was also touched by the vulnerability and resiliency of Nicole and Jonas' parents, and their determination to protect and love their children in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. I know first-hand that by sharing their story over the past few years, the Maines' family has already saved lives and opened many hearts. I'm confident this book will do the same.

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### **Emily says**

I enjoyed this -- it's informative, heartbreakingly, and inspiring, but I kept wishing it was narrated by the teens. While I particularly appreciated the science and the perspective of the parents and their unique struggles (and victories), it was the teens' voices that were still missing for me. Hearing about them was important, hearing more from them would have been even more powerful.

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### **Thomas says**

A great book about a more traditional American family and how they come to accept and fight for their transgender daughter, Nicole. Born as Wyatt Maines, Nicole had always preferred more feminine toys and activities, in particular when compared to her twin brother, Jonas. Kelly and Wayne Maines, Nicole's parents, accepted their daughter's transition from male to female with kindness and open minds, though Wayne took more time to warm up to the idea. When Nicole's middle school discriminates against her because of her status as a trans teen, the Maines family bonds together to protect their daughter's rights in the face of hatred and mean conservatism. Amy Ellis Nutt details this family's journey with their daughter and her twin brother, their political and legal activism, and what it means to be trans today.

*Becoming Nicole* will serve as a splendid foray into trans issues for those who do not have much exposure to the topic. As a 22-year-old who went to college, reads a lot, and has predominately-liberal friends, none of the book's material surprised me. However, I appreciated how Nutt delved into the Maines family's background and chronicled the loving way they treated Nicole, even though they experienced challenges along the way. I suspect that for me and for others my age, we have a more flexible mindset and would think something along the lines of "well duh we should let people choose the gender and pronouns they want to identify with, of course." But, for those who have more outdated conceptions of gender, sex, gender roles, etc. this book offers a great opportunity to engage in self-education surrounding those topics. In addition to writing about the Maines family, Nutt includes some nicely-written information pertaining to the science surrounding transgender folk as well as trans history.

Overall, a solid read I would recommend you give to that one uncle who complains about political correctness and always makes problematic comments about sex and gender. While the book could have incorporated more thoughts on how trans people of color face even more injustices than white trans individuals, it still serves as a good start. Let us hope that we can all practice love, compassion, and acceptance, even in an era with a government as dark and cruel as the Trump administration.

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### **Susan says**

If you love someone who is transgender, you should read this book. If you love someone who loves someone who is transgender, you should read this book. If you align yourself with the virtues of perseverance, dignity, and compassion, you should read this book. You will be so glad you did.

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### **Leah says**

Nicole Maines's story is simply a story about growing up and becoming who you are. The circumstances aren't simple, it's true, but author Amy Ellis Nutt writes in such a way that you feel you know and understand Nicole and her family. That Nicole knew she was a girl when she was a toddler named Wyatt doesn't seem strange; it's just that she knew who she was even when her body didn't match.

Transgender issues have come to the forefront lately, at times somewhat sensationalized in the case of celebrities like Caitlyn Jenner, but *Becoming Nicole* is not about a celebrity, it's about an ordinary family that anyone can relate to. It's about love, perseverance, and family. And as such, it has a chance to really reach people and spread understanding not only about what it means to be transgender but about fighting against prejudice for the right to be yourself. A beautiful book about a beautiful family.

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### **Angie says**

Originally posted @ [readaholiczone.blogspot.com](http://readaholiczone.blogspot.com)

I loved this book. It is very enlightening and would be so helpful to the people that are full of hatred toward transgender people to help them realize how fluid gender is. Being Transgender as the book explains so well has nothing to do with a person's sexuality. There are actual medical reasons for a person that is transgender to be that way. It is written in the voice of the father but by someone outside the family so it does not have as much of an intimate feel as it should. The sacrifices this family had to endure were monumental to make Nicole be whole and happy. It is worth the read for EVERYONE!

"But the lord said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height...The lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the lord looks at the heart"  
~1 Samuel 16:7 (from the book)

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### **Marie says**

I consider myself quite open to LGBTQ people and the movement for greater recognition and consideration, especially in terms of legal rights. However, I went to school at a time when transgender individuals were not identifying themselves as such, in contrast to today where there are several transgender children in the school system in my town. So, in a way, I was uninformed on much of the difficulties faced by transgender individuals and this book changed that for me. It really opened my eyes to what it means to be transgender. Being transgender in today's society is easier than it's ever been, but that is not saying much. There are so

many inherent biases built into our culture. It takes a very loving, supportive family, school and community to create a safe environment for transgender children.

This biography does an amazing job of giving an unbiased straightforward approach to the life and struggles of the Maines family who adopted identical twin boys at birth. It was clear very early on that one of the twins, Wyatt, was identifying as a girl. He wore tutus and high heels, played with barbies, and hated his penis. Wayne and Kelly Maines were very loving parents who did everything they could to honor who their child really was. It took Wayne, an avid hunter and air force veteran, longer to come around to the idea that Wyatt was really a girl, but once he did, he fully embraced it. He became a huge supporter of his daughter and advocate of transgender rights in the public.

Amy Ellis Nutt, a health and science writer at the Washington Post, skillfully offers research, statistics and other information within this biography that provides insight into the history, politics, biology and sociology regarding this complex subject.

The Maines family found tremendous support in some places. However, Nicole also had to endure the bullying and stalking behavior of a peer that led to her being banned from the girls' bathroom in grade school. The Maines family filed a lawsuit which they eventually won in the Maine Supreme Court against the school system in Orono bringing transgender rights movement even further. This became the first lawsuit granting transgenders the legal right to use the bathroom of their perceived gender, rather than their biological gender. Maine became the second state (behind California) to have such a law in place.

This is a book that might your perspective. It is a very timely with all the recent legal changes regarding transgender rights. This book demonstrates the strength and courage of an amazing girl who had an incredible family to support her and together they helped to change the law. I would recommend this to anyone interested in the subject. I really think it is an important book for everyone to read, in order to grasp and understand transgenderism better from a historical, biological and most importantly personal point of view.

For discussion questions, please see: <http://www.book-chatter.com/?p=879>.

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### **Petra X says**

My views are far from politically correct so if being pc is important to you, pass on by....

Is there an explosion of gender-confused people in the West or is it just acceptable now, and it never was before, to speak of the confusion aloud? Why does it strike me as weird that a man wants to become a woman so he can be with another woman because he really a lesbian inside but other people understand this? I don't disbelieve any of these people, anyone who is willing to go through gender reassignment surgery must be absolutely committed. That is major pain and for most, major money too.

But then there are people with body dysphoric disorder, or apotemnophilia who want perfectly healthy limbs cut off so in a terribly disabled state they can feel whole. When you read that I am sure you thought but these people have a mental problem. Their limbs are healthy, they are whole, it's all in their heads.

Exactly.

But then if someone is more comfortable with a change of body whatever that involves what is to me to judge? Well we all do inside even if we keep our personal views to ourselves. But going back to apotemnophilia, would you do this to a child? Would you allow a child's leg to be cut off so that he could feel rid of that which he feels doesn't belong and he could feel, as an amputee, the person he is supposed to be? No of course not. You'd say get him therapy, he needs help. But it is ok to do this to a child who says they aren't the right sex? It's all right to give them hormones to stop them going into puberty and seeing what it is like to be the gender that their bodies are? And to chop off bits of their bodies in their teens, that's even worse.

That's what this book is all about. How his/her parents enable the process of gender change from such a young age I'm not sure that a child can really know. How much is the child influenced by enabling parents who want to be modern and accepting and do their best, but it isn't their best. Maybe time and waiting and seeing would be their best.

I wasn't with Nicole in the book when she insisted on being accepted as a female and using the girls-only bathroom (the alternative was the teachers, but she didn't want to do that). Whatever she is in her head, under her skirt she is a male and young girls being what they are, aren't they going to want to see, especially if they don't have brothers. And after seeing comes touching. It's not directly sexual, it's the curiosity of sex and gender of childhood. We all went through that. Perhaps that is why we do have separate bathrooms in the first place? Mind, I didn't like the horribly red neck opposition to her either. He and his son were even worse, despicable people.

Part of me understands that it is important that children who feel they are the wrong gender don't go through the horrors of puberty and an adult body. But then part of me feels, say they were away from enabling people (right or wrong) maybe they would change, they would enjoy their body and their power as teenagers and be happy in themselves. And if not then they would be making a decision to change gender in full knowledge. A bit like the Anabaptists not allowing children to be baptised because it requires knowledge and a commitment only a mature mind can make.

Gender identity is obviously a continuum. But some people really stick in my craw. Like Bruce Jenner. He has had breasts constructed and facial feminising surgery at the least, but he doesn't want the chop. He doesn't want to give up his penis and have a vagina and yet he wants to be fully identified with and treated as a woman. Is he just a Kardashian - in love with publicity and plastic surgery or does he just want the best of both worlds?

But even Bruce (sorry can't remember his female name) I would treat with respect. Whatever you say you are, I will treat you as, no matter what thoughts are in my head.

I thought this was a very interesting book. I felt it was very much akin to 'the lady doth protest too much'. There was no opposition, it was yay go behind this little boy/girl all the way and I wondered if perhaps the child had been trapped into something that went further than they ever envisaged, long before they knew what the word 'envisaged' even meant. Will we ever know. We might. But not for years....

So, 4 stars because it was a good read even if I didn't agree with much of it.

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**Cece (ProblemsOfaBookNerd) says**

\*3.5/5

This book had some very valuable things to say in terms of family and finding strength in times of difficulty, but I think that the sections on the evolving legislative battle across the U.S. was the more interesting part of it. I appreciated Nicole's story a lot, and definitely feel it was told well, but I would have preferred hearing more from Nicole herself. However, the sections on worldwide views of gender, the breakdown of what being intersex means and the ways it proves that biological sex isn't binary, and the tracking of transgender inclusive anti-harassment laws across America were incredibly interesting and I really enjoyed them.

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### **Kaethe says**

A marvelous introduction to transgender equality issues (and equality issues in general in public schools). The Maines family have to be thanked for their education, advocacy, and their admirable frankness. It can't be easy for anyone to fight for the rights their children deserve, or to balance such a fight against the needs of the family for privacy and "a normal childhood". Nutt shows the struggle for rights and the costs of that struggle, with no obvious efforts at myth making.

I cried pretty much every time someone chose to be kind, and every time something good happened, which was thankfully often. When my own state is being gratuitously cruel, Maine comes off as a great place.

Library copy

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### **Emma Deplores Goodreads Censorship says**

3.5 stars

This is a story of a remarkable family. Wayne and Kelly thought their lives were complete when, after years of infertility, they were able to adopt her teenage cousin's newborn twins. Though identical, from a young age the boys were very different: Jonas was a typical boy, while Wyatt loved pink, princesses, and makeup, and insisted that he was a girl. Wyatt, of course, ultimately became Nicole, and this book follows the family's journey – through conflict with the schools, a landmark court case, the kids' growing up, Nicole's transition, and Wayne's finally coming to terms with having a transgender daughter.

It is quite an interesting story, written in a clear journalistic style; while the vast majority of Americans know someone who is LGB, only a small minority (not including myself) know someone who is transgender, and this is an excellent book for raising awareness. It is also a hopeful story, and many people will relate to it because the Maineses are such an all-American family; both parents pulled themselves up by their bootstraps, and while the family isn't always united (Wayne takes ten or twelve years to accept that he has a daughter), they ultimately pull together and do everything they can for their kids.

My reservation about this book is that, although it's primarily a story about the family, with a few chapters about science and history included for context, we don't get to know them – and especially Nicole – quite as well as I expected. If this were to protect the teenagers' privacy, I would understand: Nicole and Jonas turned 18 only two weeks before this book's release, and the final chapters take place only months before that. But I don't get that impression: there's a lot of sensitive information about the twins in here (who's contemplating

self-harm, who has anger issues, etc.), and this family seems to have decided years ago to sacrifice their privacy in order to make a difference. (You can read one of many articles about them here.) Which is an impressive step – I just don't feel Nutt fully captured the personalities involved.

Still, I am glad I read this book. It's an inspiring story, it's quite informative, and it's likely to make you think about gender in ways you haven't before. It's notable to me that Nicole is extremely girly from a young age, and I wonder if this is typical of transgender women, and the reverse of transgender men. How many of us would have felt we were born in the wrong bodies if we'd been assigned the other gender, and how many could have gone either way? Gender is complicated and we can't yet answer that question. At any rate, though easy and quick to read, this book raises complicated issues and develops them as well as is possible within its relatively short page count. It is certainly worth a read.

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### **Taryn says**

Extremely accessible introduction to gender identity issues. This heartwarming story of an ordinary family fighting to make a safer world for their transgender daughter is both engaging and informative. While the Maines family is central to the book, there is also a ton of information on the science behind gender development. This is one of the few non-fiction books that I have stayed up way too late reading!

*Lesson number one: "Sexual orientation is who you go to bed with," he told Spack. "Gender identity is who you go to bed as."*

Kelly and Wayne Maines are thrilled to start their family when they adopt, by all appearances, twin boys. Wayne can't wait to share his knowledge with his two little guys. But almost as soon as the twins are verbal, one of them makes it clear that she identifies as a girl. As the years go on, it is obvious this is not just a phase. *Becoming Nicole* tells us about Nicole's journey, but it is just as much about Wayne's "transition" to acceptance, Kelly's fierce determination to support and protect her daughter, and her twin brother Jonas's struggle to find his own role in the world and in his family.

*Nicole's story had started before she was even born. So had Jonas's—in atoms and molecules, in liquid beginnings. One DNA, two souls, and a billion possibilities.*

I was especially curious about this book because of current issues in my area: an uproar over a transgender substitute teacher in my hometown and Houston's recently failed equal rights ordinance. The twin aspect was also intriguing: (1) Identical twins from the same egg, the same DNA, and eventually the same environment. (2) The twin's interaction with each other, both Nicole's frustrations that her twin is allowed to express himself in a way she can't and Jonas feeling like he is a supporting character in his own life. I was also very interested in the parents, who had two very different reactions. Wayne has a difficult time handling it all and deals by pulling away from the family. Kelly doesn't really know much about gender identity, but she throws herself into research and does the best she can for Nicole. (Jonas was never in any question. Nicole was always his sister.) The author begins the book with the family backgrounds of Wayne and Kelly and it really helps illuminate why they each react to their unexpected circumstances the way they do. Wayne comes a

long way and eventually becomes Nicole's biggest champion.

*Sometimes it all made Kelly and Wayne's heads spin. But just because they didn't understand it all didn't make it any less true.*

The book is written in a detached journalistic writing style, with the occasional literary flourish. It reads like a long magazine article. It is a fantastic mix of human interest, science, history and psychology. I learned the most with the chapters on the brain and fetal development. The complex processes that make us who we are are fascinating.

*Recognizing that the sexual differentiation of a fetus's brain happens later in pregnancy than genital differentiation and that both are complex biological processes, the fact that variations in gender identity exist should ultimately come as no surprise.*

The hardest part to read was the bullying of Nicole, which began when an adult actively encouraged his grandson to intimidate her at elementary school. This eventually becomes the impetus for the discrimination lawsuit the Maines file against the school district, which is a central focus of the book. The landmark case "marked the first time a state's highest court ruled that a transgender person has the right to use the restroom of the gender with which they identify." (TIME).

*Ultimately gender identity is the result of biological processes and is a function of the interplay between sex hormones and the developing brain, and because it is a process that takes place over time, in utero, it can be influenced by any number of environmental effects...Beyond chromosomes, any kind of mutation, or change, in the balance of hormones will tip the sexual development of the fetus toward one side or the other independently of what the chromosomes "say."*

Since I have seen complaints about this on other forums, I will say that for historical clarity there is a very clear shift in the names and pronouns used, which occurs at the time of the official name change. It appears that the Maines family was extremely involved with this book and Nicole has been supporting the book heavily on Twitter, so I assume that this was okay with her.

The book ends after Nicole's gender confirmation surgery, right before she heads off to college. Nicole is extremely confident and happy, which is probably in no small part due to a loving and supportive family. *Becoming Nicole* is both inspiring and informative. I would recommend this book to anyone who is interested in knowing more about gender identity issues or is looking for a book about an ordinary family dealing with extraordinary circumstances.

*For so long Wayne had tried to analyze kids, including his own child, looking for the right descriptions, the right terms, to explain it all, but here in Machias, in this dormitory suite, he*

*finally gave up. It didn't matter to these kids whether someone was called gay, transgender, genderqueer or whatever, so why should it matter to him?*

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