



# Stuck in the Middle with You: A Memoir of Parenting in Three Genders

By Jennifer Finney Boylan

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**Stuck in the Middle with You: A Memoir of Parenting in Three Genders** By Jennifer Finney Boylan

***New York Times* bestselling author Jennifer Finney Boylan returns with a remarkable memoir about gender and parenting that discusses how families are shaped and the difficulties and wonders of being human.**

A father for six years, a mother for ten, and for a time in between, neither, or both, Jennifer Finney Boylan has seen parenthood from both sides of the gender divide. When her two children were young, Boylan came out as transgender, and as Jenny transitioned from a man to a woman and from a father to a mother, her family faced unique challenges and questions. In this thoughtful, tear-jerking, hilarious memoir, Jenny asks what it means to be a father, or a mother, and to what extent gender shades our experiences as parents.

Through both her own story and incredibly insightful interviews with others, including Richard Russo, Edward Albee, Ann Beattie, Augusten Burroughs, Susan Minot, Trey Ellis, Timothy Kreider, and more, Jenny examines relationships between fathers, mothers, and children; people's memories of the children they were and the parents they became; and the many different ways a family can be. With an Afterword by Anna Quindlen, *Stuck in the Middle with You* is a brilliant meditation on raising—and on being—a child.

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## **Stuck in the Middle with You: A Memoir of Parenting in Three Genders** By Jennifer Finney Boylan **Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

### *Stuck in the Middle with You: A Memoir of Parenting in Three Genders* Reader's Guide Questions



1. On page 7, author Jennifer Finney Boylan compares her own marriage to Deirdre with that of Grenadine Phelps, whom she meets at a fencing match. “By almost anyone’s measure,” she writes, “Deedie and I are the dangerous outliers, and Grenadine and her husband Mr. and Mrs. Normal.” Do you think of Jennifer and Deirdre as “outliers”? What makes a family “normal”?
2. Boylan writes, “It is my hope that having a father who became a woman has made my two remarkable boys, in turn, into better men.” Do you believe this is true? How do you think having a parent who is “atypical” affects children? Does it strengthen a family, or place it at risk?
3. Throughout *Stuck in the Middle with You*, we observe Boylan worrying that her sons will suffer by not having a father, that it will be harder for them to learn what they need in order to become men. And yet, her sons appear to flourish and thrive, and she notes that she has taught them some “masculine” things, like splitting wood, regardless of her gender. How important is having both a mother and a father for raising well-rounded children? Is it possible that the sex of the parents is less important than the values they teach or model?
4. Deirdre Boylan says that “marrying Jenny was the luckiest thing that ever happened to me.” Do you think this is true? If you were married to a spouse who emerged as transgender, would you be able to stay married to him or her? How important is gender to a relationship? Do you believe that we fall in love with a person, with a body, or both?
5. Boylan writes that “womanhood—like manhood—is a strangely flexible term.” She even notes that there are “genetic” women who have a Y chromosome. Is there a single thing that you believe defines someone as a man or a woman? Is, as Boylan suggests, our gender identity more “strangely flexible” than we first suspect?

6. “One of the things about manhood I learned from my father,” Boylan writes, “is that it’s a solitary experience, a land of silences and understatement, a place where a lot of important things have to be learned alone. Whereas womanhood, a lot of the time, is a thing you get to share.” Later, she suggests that fathers are more playful than mothers, and that mothers worry more about their sons and daughters. How do you think mothers and fathers are different in the way they interact with their children?

7. Richard Russo, in describing his largely absent father, says, “[I] can either take what he’s offering . . . enjoy it and let the rest go, or . . . be bitter and resentful. For me [it was] just an easy choice. . . . Just to have fun with him.” Are you surprised about Russo’s remarkably forgiving approach to his father’s many shortcomings? Have you ever been able, in your own life, to choose to “take what someone’s offering” and “just have fun,” instead of giving in to the very human instinct to feel resentment or anger?

8. Boylan’s children, at a remarkably young age, seem to adjust to the change in their parent, and go so far as to come up with a new name for her—“Maddy,” their combination of Mommy and Daddy. Are you surprised by the way the boys so lovingly accept something that many adults might have struggled with? Do you think the boys might have struggled more if Boylan’s transition occurred when they were older?

9. Edward Albee asks, in his interview with Boylan, whether parenthood “mean[s] making or is it the being?” He says, Boylan “never birthed [her two sons]. Isn’t that a different quality of parenthood?” What do you think? Are parents who are not biologically related to their children different from parents who are? Does the experience of actually going through labor and giving birth change the relationship between parent and child?

10. Dr. Christine McGinn notes in her interview that the definition of motherhood and fatherhood are changing. She tells the story of being transgender, (from male to female), saving sperm, and later using that sperm so that she and her female partner could have children. Both mothers breast-feed, and both mothers are the biological parents of their children. Do you view this, as Boylan seems to, as primarily a story about love, and adaptability? What does it mean to be a mother or a father in the twenty-first century, when the definitions are changing so rapidly? Will all this change have a positive effect on children, making them, possibly, more accepting of the diversity of human experience?

11. Cartoonist Tim Kreider discusses his affection for the biological mother and half sisters he first meets in his forties. What do you think accounts for the connection that biological siblings can feel? Later, he suggests that while he’s glad to have found his biological mother, he is unlikely to undergo a similar search for his biological father. Why would an adopted child be more curious about his or her biological mother than his or her father?

12. Boylan’s mother, Hildegard, seems to accept Jennifer as her daughter, even after raising her as her son, in spite of the fact that she is a conservative person, both spiritually and politically. What do you think explains Boylan’s mother’s ability to put aside her confusion and simply believe that “love will prevail”? If your child came out to you as transgender, would you be able to accept him or her with the same love that we see from Hildegard? Is there anything that could happen that would make you turn your back on your child? Or should the love between parents and their children be a love without conditions?

From [Booklist](#)

Boylan, a best-selling novelist for youth and adult readers and a nonfiction writer, picks up the thread of her *She’s Not There: A Life in Two Genders* (2003) in this combination of memoir and interviews. Born male, Boylan became a woman after marrying and fathering two children. Here she recounts 6 years of life as a cross-dressing father and 10 years as a mother and chronicles the demanding transition between those two roles. She writes of her yearning for normalcy and shares her mother’s loving and affecting response to the

announced change, “I would never desert my child. . . . There will be a scandal, for a while. . . . But—I will adjust.” As striking as Boylan’s transgender experiences are, she also offers reverberating counterpoint in universally relevant observations about parenting and time’s passing. By including candid and revealing conversations on gender and families with such writers as Richard Russo, Edward Albee, Susan Minot, and Anna Quindlen, Boylan illuminates diverse family relationships and the many ways families operate fluidly on a seemingly never-ending spectrum. This unique and giving book has tremendous resonance. --Whitney Scott

#### Review

“*Stuck in the Middle* also comes with vivid observations....Boylan remains a role model for her brisk prose and her high spirits as well as for her public advocacy and attention to her wife and their sons.” —*Los Angeles Times*

“Parents will recognize the basics here: The days go on forever; the years fly by; the heart is gripped by an aching, terrified love. The fact that Boylan changes her gender along the way—father of babies becomes mother of teenagers—does not make this memoir a cabinet of curiosities. It’s a family love story, bighearted and fearlessly funny. ‘To accept the wondrous scope of gender,’ Boylan writes, ‘is to affirm the vast potential of life, in all its messy, unfathomable beauty.’ And her story, interspersed with celebrity interviews on parenting, is messy and beautiful indeed. In the end...as Boylan’s mother puts it, ‘love will prevail.’” —*More Magazine*

“[A] warm, engaging memoir...This informal investigation and her touchingly funny and always candid story work together to reveal the book’s ultimate truth: that ‘to accept the wondrous scope of gender is to affirm the vast potential of life in all its messy, unfathomable beauty’ ...Genuinely insightful through and through.” —*Kirkus*

“Boylan illuminates diverse family relationships and the many ways families operate fluidly on a seemingly never-ending spectrum. This unique and giving book has tremendous resonance.” —*Booklist*

“Boylan enlists different perspectives by writers and others to explore in depth how parenting involves much more than birthing...Boylan records in engaging short narratives her complicated process of evolving as a parent, from being a father (“Jim”) for six years, a mother for 10, and throughout embracing a ‘flexible’ and ‘openhearted’ approach that has proven remarkably successful and long-lasting. Boylan writes honestly about the enormous toll her transitioning took on the family, the sense of ‘loss’ they all suffered when she became a woman in 2000, the anxieties she and Deedee felt over the children’s reaction to public censure, dread that the kids harbored their own dark secrets, and annoyance at other people’s inability to use the right pronoun.” —*Publishers Weekly*

“No other memoirist I’ve read so perfectly blends intimacy and witty remove, soul-searching and slapstick, joy and pain. As a child—or as a reader—one could not ask for a wiser, warmer, more engaging companion than Jennifer Finney Boylan.” —*Mary Roach, author of *Stiff* and *Packing for Mars**

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Have you spare time for just a day? What do you do when you have considerably more or little spare time? Sure, you can choose the suitable activity to get spend your time. Any person spent all their spare time to

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**Beatrice Kennemer:**

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