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Man Alive: A True Story Of Violence, Forgiveness And Becoming A Man (City Lights/Sister Spit)



Synopsis

"Thomas Page McBee's *Man Alive* hurtled through my life. I read it in a matter of hours. It's a confession, it's a poem, it's a time warp, it's a brilliant work of art. I bow down to McBee's humility, his sense of humor, his insightfulness, his structural deftness, his ability to put into words what is often said but rarely, with such visceral clarity and beauty, communicated."—Heidi Julavits, author of *The Vanishers* and *The Uses of Enchantment* What does it really mean to be a man? In *Man Alive*, Thomas Page McBee attempts to answer that question by focusing on two of the men who most impacted his life; one, his otherwise ordinary father who abused him as a child, and the other, a mugger who almost killed him. Standing at the brink of the life-changing decision to transition from female to male, McBee seeks to understand these examples of flawed manhood and tells us how a brush with violence sent him on the quest to untangle a sinister past, and freed him to become the man he was meant to be. *Man Alive* engages an extraordinary personal story to tell a universal one; how we all struggle to create ourselves, and how this struggle often requires risks. Far from a transgender transition tell-all, *Man Alive* grapples with the larger questions of legacy and forgiveness, love and violence, agency and invisibility. Praise for *Man Alive*: "Man Alive is a sweet, tender hurt of a memoir ... about forgiveness and self-discovery, but mostly it's about love, so much love. McBee takes us in his capable hands and shows us what it takes to become a man who is gloriously, gloriously alive."—Roxane Gay, author of *Bad Feminist* and *An Untamed State* "Thomas Page McBee's story of how he came to claim both his past and his future is by turns despairing and hopeful, exceptional and relatable. To read it is to witness the birth of a fuller, truer self. I loved this book."—Ann Friedman, columnist, *New York Magazine* "'Whoever's child I am, my body belongs to me,' McBee writes, and his book is an elegant, generous transcription of the journey toward this incandescent, non-aggrandized, life-sustaining form of self-possession; the kind that emanates from dispossession, rather than running from it."—Maggie Nelson, author of *Bluets* and *The Art of Cruelty: A Reckoning* "Well aware that memory and identity rarely follow a linear path, Thomas Page McBee attempts to answer the question, 'What does it really mean to be a man?' Weaving past and present to do so, the book's journey connects violence, masculinity and forgiveness. McBee has an intelligent heart, and it beats in every sentence of this gorgeous book."—Saeed Jones, author of *Prelude to Bruise* "Exquisitely written and bristling with emotion, this important book reminds us of how much vulnerability and violence inheres to any identity. A real achievement of form and narrative."—Jack Halberstam, author of *The Queer Art of Failure* About the Author: Thomas Page McBee was the "masculinity expert" for VICE and

writes the columns "Self-Made Man" for The Rumpus and "The American Man" for Pacific Standard. His essays and reportage have appeared in the the New York Times, TheAtlantic.com, Salon, and BuzzFeed, where he was a regular contributor on gender issues. He lives in New York City where he works as the editor of special projects at Quartz, and is currently at work on a book about modern American masculinity.

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Customer Reviews

"Man Alive: A True Story of Violence" author/columnist Thomas McBee, recalled his life from childhood on, revealing his impassioned story in short chapters from past to present. He discussed how child abuse, parental betrayal, a violent street mugging impacted his life, and importantly how he chose not to be defined by trauma. McBee wrote with tremendous integrity and compassion of his views on modern masculinity, his relationships with family members, others, also his partner, Parker. To come to terms with his family history, McBee was challenged to get the information he needed from his educated professional mother, who raised him, lived across the country, and seemed somewhat disengaged from the dysfunction, her many poor choices in men, and how her

decisions affected her family. It seemed easier to leave past unpleasant truths unspoken. McBee made the trip to S.C. to visit his uncles family- and Roy, the father who abused him. The only caring advice he had ever received from Roy was to put premium gas in his car on occasion, yet McBee forgave him. Unlike so many memoirs with similar topics, there was no self pity, anger, focus on hurt/pain, or need for revenge. The journey was more about learning, reflection, and further healing; which was connected in part, to his mugging in Oakland. The mugger, George Higgins, was later charged in another crime leading to murder in 2010. With insight, self-awareness, and resolve McBee began his female to male transition, with the loving support of Parker. They both missed their relationship as it was, or used to be, knowing life held no guarantees for happiness. Thomas Page McBee has written many columns, articles, and essays featuring gender and men's studies, his work has appeared in many notable publications including the N.Y. Times, he lives in NYC. This is his first book. ~ With thanks to the Seattle Public Library.

This book was gorgeous and it hit me hard. The writing style was beautiful and tender and brutal at the same time. I loved that the author shared exactly what he wanted to and each part of his narrative informed what was to come. The book made me think about the difference between masculinity and manhood, about the relationship between violence and manhood, and about what it means to be deliberate about who you are. The latter is something that's universal in its importance - queer, straight, cis, trans - the idea of being deliberate about who you are is a powerful thing. The book is first and foremost a memoir, sharing details of one person's history and experience, but it also sheds light on the process of gender transition (without being preachy or feeling like a PSA) in a way that I found informative and accessible as a straight ciswoman - and made me want to seek out more works by trans authors. Thank you for sharing this beautiful work!

Man Alive by Thomas Page McBeel could argue that the entire project of RAD DAD (a magazine on fathering I write and edit) was a way for me to explore, come to terms with, and claim what it means to be a man. So many pieces that I wrote excavate over and over themes concerning absent or silent fathers, angry and exhausted mothers, the desperate need for models and stories about masculinity. In the book Man Alive I have found one such role model. Thomas Page McBee takes readers on journeys of confrontation and self-discovery. There's the story of childhood abuse and facing his father. There's the story of street violence and learning to understand his attacker. But ultimately, it's the story of looking at and seeing our own beautiful bodies, embracing our scarred, foreign, malleable, naked selves. It's about taking off our shirts (literally and

metaphorically) and loving who we are. It's about discovering what makes a man, and then adding to that, so you can make yourself whole. Read it.

Very well written book that captures the inner conflict and innate certainty of living in the wrong body. McBee conveys brilliantly societies bias and fears of "breaking" the rules of expected behavior both as a lesbian and a transgender person. More importantly the book opens are minds to what it means to be different in a society that, for all its proclaiming freedoms, requires conformity.

This book gave me the same feeling as if I had just watched a really good independent movie, i.e.: "This is something real. This is something personal. This is someone's unique view of the world and I'm very fortunate to have seen it. This is beautiful." McBee takes us on a journey through different experiences in his life, non-chronologically, that have shaped him into his adult self. As he insightfully transmutes his past into his present, he vividly captures subtle nuances of life as a transgender man. Read this book!

A smart, searing, exquisitely crafted book from one of the best new voices I've read in a very, very long time. I taught this book in my senior capstone class for undergraduate creative writers this fall, & the students adored it (of course). We learn so much from McBee -- not only about how to be a man or how to navigate violence or how to wield a beautiful sentence, but about how to be human. This is a gorgeous, wise, utterly necessary book. We are so very lucky to have this voice in the world.

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