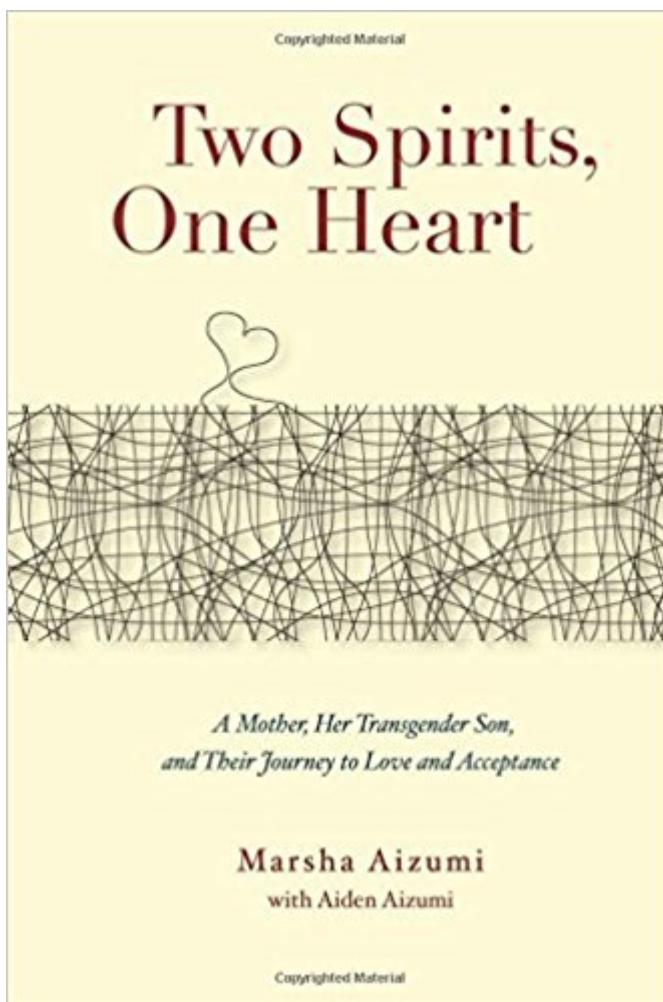


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Two Spirits, One Heart: A Mother, Her Transgender Son, And Their Journey To Love And Acceptance



Synopsis

“Marsha shares her journey from fear and uncertainty to acceptance, support, and unconditional love of Aiden as he reconciled his gender identity.” I recommend their co-written memoir *Two Spirits, One Heart*.¹ George Takei In the first book of its kind, mother, educator, and LGBT activist Marsha Aizumi shares her compelling story of parenting a young woman who came out as a lesbian, then transitioned to male. *Two Spirits, One Heart* chronicles Marsha’s personal journey from fear, uncertainty, and sadness to eventual unconditional love, acceptance, and support of her child who struggled to reconcile his gender identity. Told with honesty and warmth, this book is a must-read for parents and loved ones of LGBT individuals everywhere. “Marsha and Aiden’s moving story of confronting and overcoming fear—and of the love and deeper bond that emerge between a mother and her son because of that profound journey” shows how all families can accept each other’s humanity. I was deeply inspired by the honesty, awareness, and healing found in these pages.²

Rea Carey, Executive Director of the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force About the authors: Marsha Aizumi is an educator, motivational speaker, and advocate for the LGBT community. She serves on the National Board of Directors of Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG). You can visit Marsha online at www.marshaalizumi.com Aiden Takeo Aizumi is a committed activist for LGBT rights. In 2010, he was honored as a youth leader with the Paul A. Anderson award from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. He currently serves on the PFLAG National Transgender Gender Non-conforming Advisory Council. Aiden is also pursuing a bachelor’s degree in education.

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ABOUT AUTHOR MARSHA AIZUMI Marsha Aizumi has combined a lifelong commitment to parenting, social causes, education and administration with her personal journey as the mother of a transgender son in *Two Spirits, One Heart*. She is an advocate for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender community, helping to bring safe and nurturing high school diploma programs to students who face intolerable cruelty every day at their local high schools. Her dream is not to marginalize students, but to invite all harassed and bullied students to continue their education at locations that provide teachers and staff that value their individuality and see the greatness that they possess. Since February 2010, a high school diploma program has been offered through the partnership of the Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Center's LifeWorks Program and Opportunities for Learning Public Charter School. The L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center is the largest gay and lesbian center in the United States. Marsha is currently working with a number of organizations across the nation to open similar programs. The good and bad experiences of her son, Aiden, inspired her to become involved; these are detailed in *Two Spirits, One Heart*. Her dream is that all LGBT and LGBT friendly students find places to graduate where they are treated with compassion and respect. Marsha has been married for 39 years to Tad Aizumi. She is the proud mother of two wonderful sons, Aiden Takeo and Stefen Lawrence.

ABOUT AIDEN TAKEO AIZUMI Aiden Takeo Aizumi was born in Japan on May 24, 1988. Adopted by Tad and Marsha Aizumi, who named their baby Ashley Akemi Aizumi, he lived as a female for the first twenty years of his life. He attended public schools in Arcadia, California. In high school, he played varsity golf and was awarded MVP all four years. Coming out as a lesbian, he experienced intolerable cruelty daily in high school and was diagnosed agoraphobic with panic attacks. Barely graduating due to these issues, Aiden received a diploma from Arcadia High School in 2006. In 2008, Aiden decided to transition to male. Since that day, his life has taken an upward turn. Currently, he works at the Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Center's LifeWorks Program in a paid apprenticeship position for Public Allies. He is a program assistant responsible for community outreach, specifically reaching out to youth. Following the end of his apprenticeship, he will return to Pasadena City College, where he will continue his studies in Psychology with a minor in LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender) Studies. Aiden is actively involved in the LGBTQ community. He serves on the Trevor Project National Youth Advisory Council, the Executive Board of Pasadena PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), and is currently in training for GLIDE (Gay and Lesbian Initiating Dialogue for Equality) to

speak at high schools and colleges in the area to broaden the awareness of LGBT issues. Aiden was awarded 2009 and 2010 scholarships from PFLAG Pasadena. In 2010, he was honored with the Paul A. Anderson Youth Leader Award from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force at their annual Creating Change Conference. Aiden believes by sharing his story and working in the community, he can bring hope to the LGBT youth of tomorrow.

SAMPLE CHAPTER ONE:Marching to a Different Beat We marched side-by-side, my daughter and I, the smile on her face stretching almost as long as the band. I missed that smile. Where had it been all these years? At long last, Ashley seemed to be finding herself, five years after coming out as a lesbian. She was turning the corner after some very difficult intermediary years ; for both of us. I could see it in her face, her movement. She marched with her head held high, part of a drum corps comprised of predominately gay and lesbian musicians. She felt happy. She played her music, and played it with people marching to the beat of the same drum - literally and figuratively. It was a day worthy of celebration: Ashley and her drum corps band mates won first place. After the hugging and cheering were over, most of the group decided to continue the celebration by having dinner together. Initially, Ashley and I waited with the group for a large table to open up. Eventually, we decided to skip the victory dinner and head home. I was tired from marching as an unofficial photographer, and Ashley's mood clearly showed her preference. Happy just a few minutes before, she moped around, a scowl on her face, a black cloud hanging over her head. Anyone within ten feet could sense her irritability. How could an interior storm blow in so quickly on such a triumphant day, after a victorious performance? ;I was binding all day; it was really getting uncomfortable, she later said, referring to the uncomfortable way she tied down her breasts. She learned it from other lesbians who identify with their masculine side. The pressure of the binding seemed to increase something else: Ashley's internal powder keg. A series of emotions and thoughts erupted from within. Like summer race riots partially attributable to the heat that percolates and boils already deep-seated resentments, her binding created a similar inability to hold back thoughts and feelings she had bottled up for years. She could restrain herself from expressing this resentment, but could not hide her unhappiness. Totally baffled, I shook my head. Wasn't this the same girl I'd seen marching, smiling and celebrating a couple of hours before? I don't care who you are ; and I'm every bit as observant and sensitive as any other mother ; you will never convince me that any parent can solve the deep-ocean mystery known as a teenage girl's feelings. We drove home in silence. My inner introvert recharged the way all introverts do: by withdrawing into my own quiet world. Ashley brooded beside me, also withdrawn and quiet, but for

different reasons. We found a restaurant close to home and stopped for a quick dinner. Her mood was still surly, but we could make it through the meal. This wasn't the first time, nor would it be the last, I reasoned. So I thought. It had been a long day for both of us. We'd eat dinner and drive home. I envisioned each of us walking into our separate bedrooms, she to find a happy place, me to read and crash on a Sunday night. As we ate, I tried to make pleasant conversation, but she grew more ill tempered by the moment. Finally, I couldn't take it any more. I looked at her. "We have had the most wonderful day together. Your band performed so well and you took first place. And you have become grouchier by the minute. What is your problem?" My exasperation now released like a spent geyser, I braced myself for a harsh response. Any number of possibilities could be heading my way: something I did, said, didn't do or didn't say. While my friends and colleagues know me well for sensing others accurately through verbal and non-verbal cues, my "A" game deserted me in this important moment: reading my daughter. I waited for her to tell me what new boundaries I'd apparently crossed. "Momma, you promise you're not going to get mad..." My back stiffened. I didn't expect that response. Since they were young, both of my children knew one of my cardinal rules of communication: use this phrase before confiding something that they knew would provoke a reaction from me. "If you warn Momma, then I can prepare myself not to get mad." I'd said. "If you don't warn Momma and tell me something that will make me mad, I will probably get mad." My message was clear: if you blindside me, you will receive a negative reaction. If you prepare me, I can ground myself to hear the bad news. A couple of times, they'd failed to use the "promise" phrase, and felt the aftereffects. After that, my children, especially Ashley, grew very good at giving me a heads-up. I responded in my usual way: "I promise, Ash." My energy settled into a gentle and loving place as I watched her forehead crinkle and her eyes draw upward, formulating the words she'd say. Her body sank ever so slightly into a position of uncertainty, hesitation. I picked up deep fear. She later told me she felt like dinosaurs were running between her stomach and heart, big, loud and thumpy. "In that moment the restaurant around us disappeared, and all I could hear was my heart pounding like a drum." Ashley stared at the table between us. I waited, my own uneasiness building with each silent second. Finally, the words tumbled out of her mouth like boulders down a mountainside: "I'm uncomfortable in my body now and I want to transition to a guy." She looked up at me warily, waiting for a response. For many living beings on this earth, eternities can be measured in seconds. Ashley looked like she was experiencing it. My mind froze. I stopped breathing for what

seemed like a minute; all extraneous noises and people disappeared from my consciousness. We looked across the table at each other. Ashley's eyes searched mine for an answer: When I told her I loved her, did I mean forever, no matter what, and no matter who you are? Her face wore her deepest fear: that I was two seconds away from rejecting her and throwing her out of the house, adding to the sad and disturbing collection of horror stories that accompany these types of revealing moments. But I wasn't thinking about rejection, transgender kids, uncomfortable bodies or anything of the sort. Instead, the enormous missing scenes of a movie dropped into place: a two-year-old refusing to wear dresses and bows; a first grader announcing she was in love with a girl named Allie; a middle school student who didn't feel like she fit in anywhere; a high school cutter and binder; a withdrawn, emotional and angry teenager who refused to wear the traditional black drape for senior pictures and opted to don a tuxedo like the other boys. Often, I tried to grasp what the choices of my daughter meant. "Do you feel like you want to be a boy?" I once asked her. "No, Momma." "But you dress like a boy, want to wear your hair like a boy and you don't like anything girlie." "I am a butch lesbian. I just like boy things." Now, I realized she had finally come to terms with the truth: she could no longer masquerade as someone she was not. She wasn't a butch lesbian. She was a boy in a girl's body. The voices in my head rushed to center stage. They fought for the microphone and began to speak all at once: What does transition to a guy really mean? Does she want to change into a boy physically? What does THAT mean? What will we call her? How will I keep her safe? HOW WILL I KEEP HER SAFE! The only thing I remember not hearing? An answer. As these and other questions grappled for my spinning mind's attention, Ashley called herself "transgender;" more specifically, a female-to-male transgender or "FTM." Within her calm description, my academic mind picked up signs of contemplation, research and investigation. She'd thought this through. Conversely, although transgender was not a foreign word to me, I didn't use it. Or understand it fully. Heck, I was still learning how to be the mother of a lesbian. Finally, I spoke. "How many people know about this decision?" "No one, Momma, but you." Red flags raced up my protective pole. Flags of fear. I felt afraid for her because she was uncertain; not about her direction, but about whether people would accept her. Family members and friends still loved her when she came out as a lesbian, but she was also still a girl. Would they love her as a boy? I had no answers. I didn't know what it meant to be transgender. This unsettled me as much as Ashley's revelation. I felt completely unprepared, out of control. As I sat in the chair, trying to pull myself together, my scurrying thoughts vacillated between several things: fear for Ashley's personal safety and

social acceptance; fear I wouldn't have the answers to support her; fear of Ashley's acceptance within our family. I didn't know the process of becoming transgender. I didn't know where to turn or who to ask for advice. I couldn't think of a single person to whom I was comfortable turning for answers. I don't have to know the answers to something, but my comfort level relies on knowing where to turn, something at which I've become very proficient over the years as a businesswoman and educator. Not this time. However, I did know one thing, beyond the shadow of a doubt: since I was the first person to whom she'd announced this life-changing decision, I held a responsibility they didn't exactly cover in all those parenting books I'd read: setting the course to transition the family before Ashley's transition. It felt no less solemn and imposing than a championship game of chess, where one wrong move can doom you. My next move would determine how her father, brother, aunts and uncles, cousins, and other close family and friends would respond. More importantly, my actions, words and thoughts would tell Ashley how ...

Once I picked it up, I couldn't put it down. I cried all the way as I read what Marsha has gone through. How similar mothers are! Marsha describes her confusion, fear, worry, anger, guilt, and, at times, devastation -- I almost felt she was talking about me. The biggest questions that kept her awake at night were: will my child be safe, healthy and happy going through the journey?

Those questions are constantly on my mind, too. Marsha spent hours and hours on research, delving herself in books, articles and online information in order to understand what her child was going through and search for options along a difficult, unknown path that was me, too. Above all this, Marsha struggled to learn how to let go her motherly instinct to protect her child, how to trust her child in exploring self-identity and growing into a man with own voice, and through the efforts how she and her son reached a new level of love based on mutual acceptance and trust this is inspiring to me, who is still at an early stage of struggling. Reading Marsha's book is, thus, a timely blessing to me, and perhaps many mothers out there who love their trans children with all hearts but have yet to overcome incredibly hurdles in the experience. Seeing Marsha's success, I gain hope!

Two Spirits, One Heart is a glimpse into the difficult but rewarding journey Marsha Aizumi experienced as the mother of a transgender son. The most striking aspect of this memoir is Aizumi's brutal honesty about the ups and downs she and her family experienced throughout the course of Ashley's transition to Aiden. Though Aizumi is now an activist for LGBT rights and is involved in

PFLAG, her memoir shows that she, too struggled with figuring out how to be the mother of a transgender child. She openly discusses her guilt for the times she did not know how to comfort her child, or for the times when she chose to ignore that Ashley was struggling with her gender identity. This is perhaps the most helpful aspect of the book in terms of what it can do for other parents of transgender people. Aizumi lets readers know that it is okay not to know exactly how to handle this situation • for she herself struggled • but that love for your child should prevail over the fear of a "different" life. Aizumi reflects on her choice to rise up and show her son (and the world) what unconditional love and support truly means. She notes the importance of researching what it meant to be transgender, and mentions the books she read on the subject prior to her son's transition. Her research made her more able to support her child and help family and friends to accept and support Aiden. The details about what surgery entails were enlightening for those who are not familiar with the extensive (and painful) process. *Two Spirits, One Heart* truly embodies what a memoir should be • a reflection on transformation • and is a trailblazer and a resource for those who are either struggling with their gender identity, or those who have a loved one who is.

I am so grateful to Marsha Aizumi for writing this candid and captivating account of her own process as a mother with a transgender son. When I picked it up and started reading it one evening, I found it so engaging that I stayed awake reading for hours. This mother's story includes the toughest most challenging moments as well as the moments of triumph. Marsha shares the process she went through to overcome misgivings and come to terms with her son's transition. As a Japanese American, it was refreshing for me to read this story from another Japanese American family. At the same time, I feel that she shares universal lessons of courage, love and wisdom that all families can relate to. Reading this book is both informative and heartwarming and I highly recommend it to anyone, especially those who work with families and youth.

Marsha, thank you for being a brave heart and sharing your personal journey with me. It has helped me with my own personal struggles in life and for that I am grateful. You write with such clarity, honesty and vulnerability that I felt like I was on the journey with you and your son. My point of view is that all struggles help us to become more of who we are meant to be and are blessings in disguise so my hope is that many people will read your wonderful story which will give them comfort in knowing they are not alone in going through whatever challenges they may face in life.

Two Spirits, One Heart is a moving story about a family's journey into the transgender world as their daughter transitioned into their son. Marsha Aizumi shares her very personal and heartfelt struggle as she supported her son on his journey. This is not only a story about the LGBT community but also about the struggle for human rights by a group of people that are often misunderstood and forced into the shadows. This book is a must read for all teachers, psychologists, ministers and others in the helping professions. It will also provide support, understanding and a path forward for those who are currently undertaking this journey into the unknown.

Recommended reading by a close friend. Perfect for the situation we are in.

Not many parents will travel this journey. For those that have, are and will, this is a healthy and loving way to unconditionally love your child however they end up evolving.....

Amazing book. Must read

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