



My Son Wears Heels: One Mom's Journey from Clueless to Kickass

Julie Tarney

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Conscientious parents often wonder if they're doing a better job than their own parents did. Mother, writer, and activist Julie Tarney takes this concern to heart in her timely and touching memoir, *My Son Wears Heels*. The book revolves around Tarney's son Harry, who, from an early age, displays different interests and ideas about gender and tells his parents he feels like a girl inside. The chapters follow Tarney's evolution from an anxious and protective mother to an openly celebratory and supportive parent.

Tarney writes with the adulation of a proud parent. It's hard not to smile when she relishes in inimitable moments from Harry's childhood, like when Harry tells his father he wants to be a "scientist comedian" who makes rocket fuel "out of chips and dip." Tarney's skillful prose turns poetic to capture later scenes. In New York City, for example, cherry blossoms cover the street like "pink confetti."

But as spirited and colorfully optimistic as the memoir is, its most affecting passages stem from a mother's emotional strain and fear. When Harry is harassed by bullies at school, Tarney struggles with how to proceed. She tries to balance her overprotective side with Harry's independence and ability to solve problems on his own. The episodes are heart-wrenching and demonstrate that equality is still very much a fight for some. Artfully interspersed between the episodes are flashbacks to Tarney's own childhood and her domineering mother and abusive father. The flashbacks raise the moral stakes of the memoir by highlighting Tarney's own personal progress as she distances herself from harmful beliefs and practices of an earlier generation.

With an enlightening introduction by Diane Ehrensaft, an expert on gender development, *My Son Wears Heels* is a memorable account of one young person's journey toward self-identity and a valuable parenting guide for a new era of gender awareness and acceptance.

SCOTT NEUFFER (Fall 2016)

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