

The Boy Who Loved Too Much: A True Story Of Pathological Friendliness



Synopsis

The poignant story of a boy's coming-of-age complicated by Williams syndrome, a genetic disorder that makes people biologically incapable of distrust. What would it be like to see everyone as a friend? Twelve-year-old Eli D'Angelo has a genetic disorder that obliterates social inhibitions, making him irrepressibly friendly, indiscriminately trusting, and unconditionally loving toward everyone he meets. It also makes him enormously vulnerable. Eli lacks the innate skepticism that will help his peers navigate adolescence more safely and vastly more successfully. Journalist Jennifer Latson follows Eli over three critical years of his life as his mother, Gayle, must decide whether to shield Eli entirely from the world and its dangers or give him the freedom to find his own way and become his own person. By intertwining Eli and Gayle's story with the science and history of Williams syndrome, the book explores the genetic basis of behavior and the quirks of human nature. More than a case study of a rare disorder, however, *The Boy Who Loved Too Much* is a universal tale about the joys and struggles of raising a child, of growing up, and of being different.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"[Latson's] prose is fresh and engaging, her story leavened with humor to take the edge off the ongoing struggle of characters we have come to care about deeply. It would be a mistake to squeeze this book into the "disease narrative" genre. It transcends that niche, partly through the author's reflections on what our reactions to people with Williams Syndrome have to say about

the human condition." ---HOUSTON CHRONICLE " [Jennifer Latson] skillfully interweaves the science of what we do and don't know about genetic disorders such as Williams with a powerful story line. Eli and especially Gayle are beautifully drawn, and their struggles with an unknown future are both unique to their situation and universal to all parents. As the book's perspective deliberately pans out to include teachers, counselors, family, friends, and, finally, Eli's entire eighth-grade class, Latson delivers some unforgettable lessons about inclusion and parenthood." ---PUBLISHERS WEEKLY " [Latson's] book provides a thorough overview of Williams syndrome and its thought-provoking paradox. No doubt life for people with Williams (and those who love them) has its difficulties. But given the state of the world today -- the hate attacks, the divisiveness, the vitriol -- it's hard not to wish that we all had more kind-heartedness and openness, even if our embrace of other humans is only metaphorical." ---THE NEW YORK TIMES " The narrative is alternately moving and heartbreaking, as Latson walks readers through the tumultuous obstacles that Eli and Gayle face daily. Throughout, Latson demonstrates a sharp, journalistic eye for telling detail and the ability to capture poignant moments without resorting to cliché or overly sappy writing...In this balanced, readable work, Latson effectively and sympathetically captures Eli's essential humanity and opens a clear window on a little-understood genetic disorder." ---THE BOSTON GLOBE "Latson blends life concerns and hard medical facts in this widely appealing chronicle of a fascinating disorder." ---BOOKLIST " The book could have been exploitative, but instead it's a moving portrait of a mother facing the fact that her child has a different future from the one she imagined...The fascinating journey shows Angelo's mother learning to accept Eli's differences and those differences lessening as he matures. I only wish I could find out how their story pans out." ---NEW SCIENTIST "Latson tells [this] story with great sympathy and eloquence, giving voice to the frustration, anguish, and despair a parent feels when their child struggles with a rare disorder. A well-researched, perceptive exploration of a rare genetic disorder seen through the eyes of a mother and son." •KIRKUS REVIEWS "The Boy Who Loved Too Much" is an astonishing debut. Before the book crossed my desk, I'd never heard of Williams syndrome, and once I started reading, I could think of little else. This is narrative nonfiction of the highest order -- rigorously reported, elegantly told, and nearly impossible to put down. Always empathetic and consistently insightful, Jennifer Latson's deep dive into Eli's life not only illuminates an under-known condition but made me rethink the very nature of human connection. I cannot recommend this book highly enough." •Kate Bolick, author of SPINSTER: Making a Life of One's Own

“What is the opposite of autism? What does it like to be born with an insatiable drive to connect, to love others without shyness or reserve? In this humane and fascinating book, Jennifer Latson introduces us to Eli, a boy with the rare genetic disorder of Williams Syndrome. She marvels at his capacity for love but is sensitive as well to the difficulties of raising such a child in an often cruel and unloving world, and the challenges that arise with the emergence of sexual desire. This is a book about a very unusual child, but it’s also a thoughtful and moving exploration into the very nature of affection and love.”

• Paul Bloom, Professor of Psychology at Yale University, and author of *AGAINST EMPATHY: The Case for Rational Compassion*

“Latson’s haunting book is an intimate look at the relationship between a boy with a rare and fascinating genetic disability and his mother, as she learns over time to stop overprotecting him and allow him to take his own path toward independence. There are valuable lessons for all parents here.”

• Steve Silberman, author of *NEUROTRIBES: The Legacy of Autism and the Future of Neurodiversity*

“Jennifer Latson has written a book of uncommon empathy, a powerful narrative that speaks not only to the love of a mother for her son but to a genetic disorder that poses questions about the nature and limits of love itself.”

• Mimi Swartz, author of *POWER FAILURE: The Inside Story of the Collapse of Enron*

Jennifer Latson has written for *The Boston Globe*, the *Houston Chronicle*, and *Time*. She received an MFA in creative nonfiction from the University of New Hampshire and was a recipient of the Norman Mailer Fellowship for nonfiction in 2013. *The Boy Who Loved Too Much* is her first book.

So many scenes in this book took my breath away. It’s the story of Eli, a boy with a very rare condition called Williams Syndrome in which a person unconditionally loves everyone he or she meets -- with no inhibitions. Through great storytelling, the book shows what it like to be someone as lovable and vulnerable as Eli and also what it’s like to be his mom Gayle who does her best to protect him and help him get the most out of life. Eli and Gayle are both amazing. The book is heart-wrenching, funny and inspiring. The author Jennifer Latson does a masterful job of weaving in the science behind this genetic disorder and shedding light on how Williams Syndrome in particular offers insights on the rest of us. The book also has fascinating historical background and anecdotes. For example, Williams might be behind ancient myths about elfin creatures in fairy tales (people with Williams typically have elfin like features). I highly recommend this book!

Fantastic insight not only for parents but also for researchers who are interested in the complex

disorder that is Williams syndrome. The author could have highlighted that there is more individual variability, she seems to downplay this aspect although even research shows that. Overall a wonderful book worth reading that gives amazing insight into the ups and downs of having a child with Williams syndrome. Although there might have been some more focus on the ups. I love that she highlights that the social connection in WS may be as tough as in autism because more research is needed on this area.

Incredibly informative book on WS. Gayle and Eli's story truly captured my heart. I'd highly recommend reading this book with tissues nearby.

Very interesting topic with a lot of explaining, organized well,. Sometimes detailed historical, biological, psychological information related to Williams. Overall I liked it

The story of Eli is beautifully told in a sympathetic but not pitying way. Williams Syndrome is understandable due to the explanations every few chapters. I was especially interested in the comparisons between it and autism. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in genetic disorders or even the story of a mother coping with a child who is disabled.

Excellent book about a real boy who has Williams Syndrome. Very enlightening.

Great little book!

If you have a loved one or know a family that faces Williams Syndrome this is a must read. It is well written, informative and insightful on both the caregiver and one afflicted with Williams Syndrome.

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