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Book Review: All She Wanted

The Girl who became a Boy but paid the Ultimate Price

Reviewed by Kevin Heyne

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All She Wanted by Aphrodite Jones

All She Wanted: The Girl Who Became a Boy but Paid the Ultimate Price

by Aphrodite Jones
Pocket Publishing (2002)
I.S.B.N. -13 978 1439101027

All She Wanted is the first true crime novel I've read where the writing contains as many paradoxes as the subject matter itself. Aphrodite Jones is a writer of the true crime genre. Having made the *New York Times* Best Sellers list twice before, she has certainly won acclaim in her field. She has presented a very well researched story in *All She Wanted*. As the reader however, I was never sure about the author's intentions in this book.

Writing about the killing of Brandon Teena, as well as his friends Phillip De Vine and Lisa Lambert isn't really as clear cut as it might seem, mainly because this particular triple murder was a hate crime of transgendered proportions. I felt that in some areas, the author tried to downplay this aspect somewhat.

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Ms Jones spends a lot of time exploring the origin of Brandon's transition into manhood, attempts to discuss the issue of his transsexualism but seems to hold onto, or be of the belief that 'the Brandon identity' is really a deception. That, regardless of the fact that this person has gone to great lengths to live as a man, Brandon always seems to remain as Teena in her opinion. Jones seems to feel justified in her statements and cleverly hides this by using the ignorance of his family members in maintaining that 'she' is an acceptable pronoun to use.

As the reader and as a transgendered man, I was disappointed that Ms Jones felt she had this right and made me wonder about how acceptable it would be for a sighted person to describe a blind man's experience or a straight person to do justice to a gay experience in print. Towards the end of her book she mocks transgendered activists and accuses them of asserting their own agenda in trying to label Brandon as one of them, but seemingly ignores any agenda of her own which comes through clearly in the experience of reading her work.

Despite these protests, I found the book easy to read and informative (in some places too much so). It does seem to lose itself in the middle; where the author seems to get a little lost in the wealth of information she tries to present about each character in the tragedy. Also, as the trial is underway, Ms. Jones seems to attempt to change the focus of the story away from the crime against Brandon and tries to point out that both Lambert and De Vine also lost their lives and thus, despite being merely in the wrong place at the wrong time, are equal victims of the crime. Rightly so, except as I recall, neither Lambert's nor De Vine's faces have made it onto the book cover.

In the end, it's a worthwhile read. There is much more information detailed in the book that hasn't appeared elsewhere. It is definitely however, a true crime novel and can not be mistaken as a transgendered novel. In its defence, it did leave room in my mind for an internal debate about the subject. I would advise that it's worth the read if only to see how critical it is for people to see that the treatment of minority groups in the media is never something that one can afford to be lax about.

Brandon Teena

Edited from Wikipedia  Brandon Teena was born Teena Renae Brandon in Lincoln, Nebraska, U.S.A. in 1972, the younger of two children to Patrick and JoAnn Brandon, however his father died in a car accident eight months before he was born. He and his older sister, Tammy, lived with their maternal grandmother before they were reclaimed by their mother when Teena Brandon was three years old. As young children, both Teena and Tammy were sexually abused by their uncle for several years.

Brandon's family described Teena as being a tomboy since early childhood; he began identifying as male during adolescence and dated a female student during this period. His mother rejected his male identity



and continued referring to him as her daughter.

Brandon was socially awkward at school. During his sophomore year, he rejected Christianity after he protested to a priest regarding Christian views on homosexuality. He also began rebelling at school by violating the school dress-code policy to dress more masculine. During the first semester of his senior year, a U.S. Army recruiter visited the high school, encouraging students to enlist in the armed forces. Brandon enlisted in the Army shortly after his 18th birthday but failed the written entrance exam by claiming to be male.

Brandon began binding his breasts in order to pass as a boy. He started dating younger girls and began cross-dressing regularly in an attempt to attract teenage women. In early 1992 he underwent a psychiatric evaluation, which concluded that he was suffering from a severe "sexual identity crisis". He was taken to the Lancaster County Crisis Centre to ensure that he was not suicidal and later confessed to his mother that he had been raped by a male relative as a young child. He was released from the centre three days later and began attending therapy sessions with his mother four times per week, which ended two weeks later.

In 1993, after some legal trouble, he moved to the Falls City region of Nebraska, U.S.A. where he began identifying solely as a man and became friends with several local residents. After moving into the home of Lisa Lambert, he began dating his friend, 19-year-old Lana Tisdel, and began associating with ex-convicts John Lotter and Marvin Thomas "Tom" Nissen.

On December 19, 1993, Brandon was arrested for forging checks; Tisdel paid his bail, but because he was in the female section of the jail, Tisdel learned that he was transgender. Brandon's arrest was posted in the local paper under his birth name and his acquaintances subsequently learned that he was anatomically female.

During a Christmas Eve party, Nissen and Lotter grabbed Brandon and forced him to remove his pants, proving to Tisdel that Brandon was anatomically female. Lotter and Nissen later assaulted Brandon, and forced him into a car. They drove to an area by a meat-packing plant where they further assaulted and raped him. They then returned to Nissen's home. Brandon escaped from Nissen's bathroom by climbing out the window, and went to Tisdel's house. He was convinced by Tisdel to file a police report, though Nissen and Lotter had warned him not to tell the police about the rape or they would "silence him permanently". The County Sheriff questioned Brandon about the rape; reportedly, he seemed especially interested in his transsexuality, to the point that Brandon found his questions rude and unnecessary, and refused to answer. Nissen and Lotter learned of the report, and they began to search for Brandon. They didn't find him, and three days later the police questioned them. The sheriff declined to have them arrested due to lack of evidence.

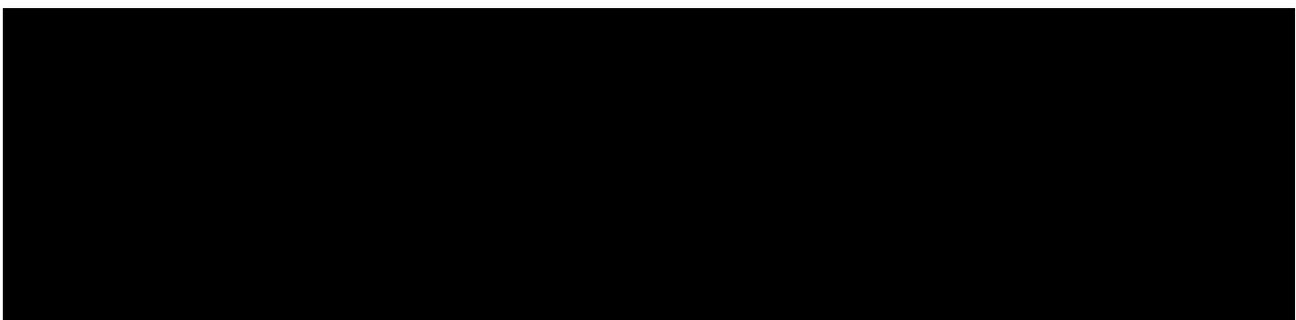
Nissen and Lotter drove to Lambert's house and broke in. They found Lambert in bed and demanded to know where Brandon was. Lambert refused to tell them. Nissen searched and found Brandon under the bed. The men asked Lambert if there was anyone else in the house, and she replied that Phillip DeVine, who at the time was dating Tisdel's sister, was staying with her. They shot and killed DeVine, Lambert, and Brandon in front of Lambert's toddler. Nissen would later testify in court that he noticed that Brandon was twitching, and asked Lotter for a knife, with which Nissen stabbed him, to ensure that he was dead. Nissen and Lotter then left, later being arrested and charged with murder.

Brandon Teena is buried in Lincoln Memorial Cemetery in Lincoln, Nebraska, U.S.A., his headstone inscribed with his birth name and the epitaph daughter, sister, & friend.

Nissen accused Lotter of committing the murders. In exchange for a reduced sentence, Nissen admitted to being an accessory to the rape and murder. Nissen testified against Lotter and was sentenced to life in prison. Lotter proceeded to deny the veracity of Nissen's testimony, and his testimony was discredited. The jury found Lotter guilty of murder and he received the death penalty. Lotter and Nissen both appealed their convictions, and their cases have gone to review. In September 2007, Nissen recanted his testimony against Lotter. He claimed that he was the only one to shoot Brandon and that Lotter had not committed the murders. In 2009 Lotter's appeal, using Nissen's new testimony to assert a claim of innocence, was rejected by the Nebraska Supreme Court, which held that since (even under Nissen's revised testimony) both Lotter and Nissen were involved in the murder, the specific identity of the shooter was legally irrelevant. In August 2011, a three-judge panel of the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals rejected John Lotter's appeal.

In 1999, Brandon became the subject of a movie entitled *Boys Don't Cry*, starring Hilary Swank as Teena and Chloë Sevigny as Tisdel. For their performances, Swank won and Sevigny was nominated for an Academy Award. Tisdel sued the producers of the film for unauthorized use of her name and likeness before the film's release. She claimed the film depicted her as "lazy, white trash, and a skanky snake". Tisdel also claimed that the film falsely portrayed that she continued the relationship with Teena after she discovered Teena was anatomically female. She eventually settled her lawsuit against the movie's distributor for an undisclosed sum.

JoAnn Brandon publicly objected to the media referring to her child as "he" and "Brandon". Following Hilary Swank's Oscar acceptance speech, JoAnn Brandon took offence at Swank for thanking "Brandon Teena" - the name Teena Brandon adopted - and for referring to her as a man.



Brandon Teena (December 12, 1972 – December 31, 1993) was an American transman, a female-to-male transgender person, who was raped and murdered in Humboldt, Nebraska. His life and death were the subject of the Academy Award-winning 1999 film *Boys Don't Cry*, which was based on the documentary film *The Brandon Teena Story*.



All S/he Wanted
Author: Aphrodite Jones
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Edited from Amazon Books: [📖](#) Living as a man, twenty-one-year-old Teena Brandon hit the dust bowl town of Falls City, Nebraska, on the run from her family in Lincoln - and from the law for forging checks. Handsome and sophisticated, Brandon was an instant success, with young women hanging all over him. But when Brandon started to date the beautiful blonde Lana Tisdell, [his] luck ran out. In a terrifying incident on Christmas Eve, Brandon's true identity was unmasked. On New Year's Eve, Brandon, [his] roommate, and a friend were found shot to death in an isolated farmhouse. Writing with exclusive cooperation of Brandon's ex-girlfriends and family, the accused murderers, and numerous other sources, *New York Times* bestselling author Aphrodite Jones explores the extravagant life and violent death of Teena Brandon, as well as the investigation and murder trial. Jones lays bare an America where many young people boldly experiment with gender identity, challenging our ideas of male and female, gay and straight - and where Teena Brandon and [his] friends paid a terrible price for sexual freedom.

Further Information

The Internet is littered with tributes to Brandon Teena. Following is a list of some of those websites beginning with his Wikipedia entry:

- [Brandon Teena on Wikipedia](#) [📖](#)
- [Collection of Articles on Brandon Teena at BrandonTeena.org](#) [📖](#)
- [Remember Brandon Teena](#) [📖](#)
- [The Inconvenient Truth About Teena Brandon](#) [📖](#)
- [You Tube: Brandon Teena](#) [📖](#)

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The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities, which enhance the ability of people with gender issues to make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to people with gender issues, their partners, family members and friends in New South Wales. We are an accommodation service and also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.