

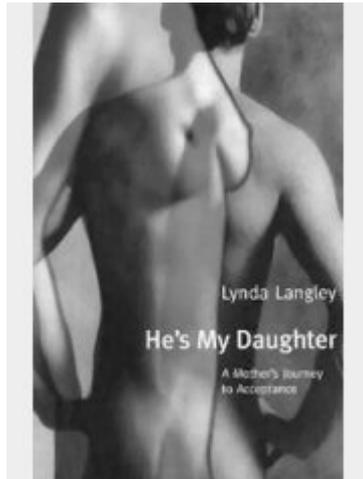
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## Book Review: He's My Daughter

### A Mother's Journey to Self-Acceptance

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**He's My Daughter: A Mother's Journey to Self-Acceptance, by Lynda Langley, the mother of a transsexual woman in Australia poignantly presents a mother's tale of her son's transition.**

#### He's My Daughter: A Mother's Journey to Self-Acceptance

by Lynda Langley  
Published by Indra Publishing,  
Victoria, Australia (2002)  
I.S.B.N.-13 978 0957873557

***He's My Daughter shows that some parents and families do stay together, through all the perils of transition and more.***

I come from hearty Eastern European stock — the lands of large extended families. It has been years since I have talked to my surviving parent, my sister and all my uncles, aunts and cousins who formed such a large part of my life during childhood. Since starting transition, there has been no contact at all. None ... *He's My Daughter* shows that some parents and families do stay together, through all the perils of transition and more. Written by the mother of a transsexual woman in Australia, it poignantly presents a mother's tale of her son's transition. Things get off to a rocky start. A frantic call from a daughter-in-law tells of self-castration. Tony, the son, is in hospital after removing his testicles by himself. Mother and father, frantic with worry and facing another family crisis, fly off to be with him. It is only with this shock that they discover Tony is really Toni and has had a life-long secret.

Mrs. Langley sounds like a very matter-of-fact woman, a steady and caring mother. Her love is not conditional, even if she does not fully comprehend what has occurred, and what must follow. Indeed, it is not until much later that she reads *True Selves* (Brown) and learns

such basics as the difference between transvestites and transsexuals. But before that, long before, what she has is an intuitive understanding of her child and the desire to help.

Her love washes over issues that would send other parents into shock and ostracism. She is with her son as he leaves his wife and child, with him as he relocates first to a trailer park, and then returning to the family home. She is with him as he takes his first tentative steps as Toni. Her husband, a more distant but equally caring man, is there too, no doubt steadied in his course by her dogged affection for her children, no matter what.

Transition, seen from her eyes, starts with a deep hurt. Her son is figuratively dying and she cannot prevent it. Alone in her home, she rails out against this cruel fate — but also comes to grips with the arrival of a new daughter. Tony is now Toni and gradually, with trepidation and courage, Lynda faces the new world with her. Shopping trips, new friends - transsexual friends - and so much more are taken in firm stride. Indeed, Toni's two brothers and the rest of the family seem cut from the same cloth. After a time of adjustment, the family continues to enjoy its close bond.

The 'home-spun' charm of this book stems from the third party observations of events normally described by us in the first person. Toni learns about the clinics of Australia, experiments with clothing, faces electrolysis, and talks, talks, talks. As his protective screen disappears, it seems that Toni can talk of little else and Lynda's grace is that she listens — even when the same story or theme repeats endlessly. Toni goes on dates with men and Lynda is there with advice and comfort, as a mother should be with a daughter. With her family in the midst of a terrible year, surrounded by medical and other problems, her strength allows her to continue and support.

Not that she escapes unscathed. She too has to confront issues and deep feelings, but her matter-of-fact manner conquers all.

Reading this book, I picture Lynda in my mind — a warm open woman, with arms big enough to hold the world. I am certain that Toni wished at times that she was not quite as involved in his life, but she is there for him and with him each step of the way — all the way until S.R.S.

A typical event in the book serves as an example of the humour and love that permeates every page. A shopping trip for Toni, Lynda, Richard (Lynda's husband and Toni's Father) and Grams. Toni needs his first bra and his mother is there to assist in the selection.

Yes, that's right. Toni, in his thirties, gets his first bra on a shopping trip with his Mother, with father and grandmother not far away! They go to the mall closest to home, to get others used to Toni, and Toni used to being in public near where he lives. Later, they get

together in a small restaurant in the mall for a quick bite to eat:

**The guys at Richard's golf club had met Tony a couple of years previously and knew that Richard had three sons ... They played a round or two with Tony when he visited Melbourne for Christmas that year. As Richard began to tell his story, we urged him to hurry up. He has a knack of taking a long time to get to the punch line and we thought this was a joke he was telling us.**

**"You've got three sons, haven't you, Richard?" his golfing buddy asked. "Well, I used to have three sons", Richard replied. "Now I've got two sons and a daughter." His partner looked at him as if he'd lost his marbles and simply played his next shot with no further inquiry."**

**My coffee was spluttered across the table as I failed to control my mirth. I was so proud of my husband and the story sounded so funny. I wished I could be as blasé as Richard, yet I knew that he was still having an extremely difficult time coping with the changes that Toni was making to her body and her life.**

The picture of Toni, Lynda, Richard and Grams in a small café will stay with me for a long time as another happy memory of this most delightful book. I try to imagine a similar scene with my parents and grandmother — it is simply not possible. Indeed, for such to happen seems almost like a fantasy. My parents would never have done so, nor any of my relatives. Enjoy this book and the family you will find within its pages. It is so wonderful to know that this can indeed happen, like a fairytale, in reality.

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