



# The Boy Who Went Away

*Eli Gottlieb*

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## **The Boy Who Went Away** Eli Gottlieb

For Denny Graubert, the chaotic summer of 1967, when the screams of napalm bombs on the nightly news drowned the cheers of the All-Star game, brings the painful realization that childhood has passed. While engaging in his favorite domestic spying game, Denny unwittingly discovers the desperate measures his mother will take to save his autistic older brother, Fad, who is lost in the diagnostic Dark Ages of the 1960s. At the heart of this novel is not only the story of Denny's coltish entrance to adolescence, but also that of his relationship with Fad, which will be forever changed during the course of that summer at 44 Drainer Drive. This is the cruelly antic, heartrending story of two childhoods that would, by fall's arrival, be irretrievably lost.

## **The Boy Who Went Away Details**

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# From Reader Review *The Boy Who Went Away* for online ebook

## David says

This is a marvelously done depiction of an impossible situation, a young teen boy swept up in the stress of a family dealing with the boy's brother's autism. The effects on him and the effects he causes, him having less choice in what is going on than anyone perhaps beyond his brother. Do the parent's really have a choice though? They have some choices in what they do, but they have to try to do best by his brother...and in the course of that neglect or damage each other and the narrator. The narrator does his own share, but he's a young teen without the benefit of moral development his parents have. I go back and forth as to whose situation is more impossible, and I include all that just to illustrate. It's a moving book both in its narrative and that moral complexity. The voice is spot on too. I'm going to read "Best Boy," what I understand to be a related work this time from the side of the brother, and see what I think of the two in total. I'm not expecting the complexity to decrease, or the skill of the depiction to go down.

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## TK says

I picked this up after I read the author's second novel, *Now You See Him*, in manuscript form and was so jazzed to find a new writer to love I had to keep reading his stuff.

Many of the same things I liked about *Now You See Him* are present in this novel -- the sparkling prose, the unflinching look at awkwardness and painful truths. It has a darkness, and an honesty, that would make me think twice about recommending it to all but certain specific readers (city boys, smart unflappable men, broads, and maybe wives who are childless by choice).

This says more about readers than it does about the writer, in this case.

One of the things that Gottlieb does brilliantly in this novel is capture the sinister in the suburban.

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## Tripp says

This came with the new Powell's Indispensable book *Best Boy*. This book is a prequel set in the 60s. In it, a family contends with a severely autistic son that no one seems to know how to treat. The doctors mostly wash their hands of them. The father retreats into drink. The mother creates a false reality in hopes of keeping her eldest out of an institution. The younger son, the narrator, is largely ignored and so steeps in resentment. Not a very pleasant story and none of the characters are fine exemplars of behavior. That said, the book feels very real and that is what makes it a solid read.

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## Elderberrywine says

The harrowing autobiographical account of the younger brother of a severely autistic boy set in the '60's, when the condition was little understood. Fad Graubert's mother will do absolutely anything to help her son

stay out of an institution, even to the detriment of her husband and other son. The fact that the younger son is, unnoticed, staggering into puberty helps create a perfect storm of turbulence and paranoia. Powerfully written, but not a novel to wander into unawares.

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### **Sylvia says**

This slim novel attracted my attention since I really loved Gottlieb's recent *Best Boy*. Told from the view of the younger brother in a dysfunctional family with an older autistic brother, this novel shows the strain and pain involved with living with a disabled sibling, who soaks up much of the family's attention and focus. I thought it was well done, but not as good as *Best Boy*. Together, they would make an outstanding book club discussion.

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### **Sarah says**

Gottlieb writes with such an intense and authentic honesty. Some passages were so raw that they were difficult to read. The perspectives Denny offers as the sibling to an autistic brother are both dark and heartbreaking. I think the detailed extrospection executed throughout the novel was a calculated choice, simultaneously staying true to its greater environmental themes while allowing readers a complete and unpolished look at a complicated, dysfunctional, and multi-faceted family. A completely vivid and electric read; if you feel nothing after finishing this book, you're probably dead inside.

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### **Nikki Putnam says**

I liked this book. Unsure why people are so critical of the way the family is depicted. It's a fictional family after all. I'm glad it was written the way it was because I think it more accurately portrayed the way ASD, along with other mental differences, was looked at during the 60s. It definitely reminds me of *The Catcher in the Rye* in some ways as well. Look forward to reading *Best Boy* next. Thank you to Powell's Indiespensable club for introducing me to this author.

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### **Deborah says**

I felt compelled to read this after finishing Gottlieb's "*Best Boy*", which I could not put down. For me, this book was the opposite: I couldn't wait to be finished. It was interesting to be in Denny's head the whole way, remembering how confusing adolescence can be. The best experience in the book was the long paragraph of his thoughts in answer to Sabina's question about whether he'd missed Fad ...that was a great wrap up.

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### **Nan says**

I wanted to like this book more than I did. The narrator, though, was barely likable. He seemed way too old for the job. His relentless pursuit of his mother's private life, his sociopathic friend, his rampage through a

family doctor's office didn't quite ring true. (Maybe for a scorned older adult, but not a kid.) Although Fad, the narrator's brother is the boy who went away, he seems to be absent long before the nurse in the station wagon picked him up. (This bothers me most. People with autism do have personality and presence. They need to be seen in our lives. More of Fad needed to be seen in this book.) Fad also functioned much better than most of the kids with whom I work. It is a change in societal attitudes, I know, but Fad's institutionalization seemed unbelievable and unnecessary.

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### **Sydney says**

I got this as part of my Powell's Indiespensable package. Quick read--and a very real (sometimes uncomfortably so) boy voice.

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### **Lindsay says**

This was a heart wrenching story and I really wanted to like it more. Many things took place but it was still anticlimactic to me. The story is told by Denny in the 1960's whose brother Fad, is autistic. Denny is a self proclaimed "spy" and keeps copious notes on all of the members of his family due to his suspicions that something terrible is going on. Denny's roller coaster of emotions were written well. I loved and hated each character in this book at particular moments - which, to me, is a sign of good writing.

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### **Rob Hermanowski says**

Eli Gottlieb's "The Boy Who Went Away" was written nearly 20 years ago, but was recently released in audio format as he has just published a companion book called "Best Boy." Both books depict someone with autism, and the tremendous impact this has on his family. Gottlieb's books are semi-autobiographical - he apparently has an autistic brother, but the family and situations he depicts in "The Boy Who Went Away" are fictional. The author is brutally honest in this book, and this frankness packs quite an emotional punch despite it's relatively short length. Chris Patton does a fine job narrating the story. I will be following this up with "Best Boy" - Gottlieb's depiction of autism in middle age - very soon.

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### **Jim B says**

This story about a 60's dysfunctional family dealing with a younger son who is apparently autistic is told through the unreliable view point of the older brother. He spies on his mother and is convinced she is having an affair with his brother's doctor.

I wanted to like this book. Perhaps if I'd grown up in a dysfunctional family, I would have related better to the story. It seemed to me to lack heart, possibly because it's told through the eyes of a adolescent sibling who acts out.

I try to read books that challenge my view of human nature, to try to understand how others think. I don't know if I learned anything about human nature from this book (others might, I've had my own set of life

experiences). Maybe the experience I gained from reading this book is how unsatisfactory it is for a family to try to love and raise a profoundly disabled child when there isn't a lot of medical knowledge or help.

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### **Mary Wilt says**

I went back to read this after Best Boy, which was the best novel I read last year. This book suffers by comparison because the character of the boy with autism is one-dimensional. This is appropriate, given the context of the story told from his brother's perspective. A device of the story--that the narrator is a "spy" of his family, ferreting out details of day to day life--often leads to a feeling that the story is being described, not lived. And the flat portrayal of the affected brother, while appropriate given the immaturity of the narrator, nevertheless dulls the effect of the ending. While this is a perfectly readable book with a damning portrait of social and clinical mistreatment of autism, it's possibly best read to inform your reading of Best Boy.

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### **Jessica says**

The topic was interesting and original - the effects on a family of a son with a mysterious mental illness/ learning disability that turns out to be what we now know as Autism. The mother's persistence and love of her son while trying to keep the family together makes for compelling reading but the brother's struggle with the situation is at times difficult yet believable and other times just annoying. And aspects of the novel seem half baked, like the best friend and girlfriend who were flat and only seemed like they were only included as necessary characters for a coming of age novel but never felt real or integral to the story. The book was okay but uneven.

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