



# The Best Little Boy in the World

*Andrew Tobias*

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## **The Best Little Boy in the World** Andrew Tobias

The classic account of growing up gay in America.

"The best little boy in the world never had wet dreams or masturbated; he always topped his class, honored mom and dad, deferred to elders and excelled in sports . . . The best little boy in the world was . . . the model IBM exec . . . The best little boy in the world was a closet case who 'never read anything about homosexuality.' . . . John Reid comes out slowly, hilariously, brilliantly. One reads this utterly honest account with the shock of recognition." *The New York Times*

"The quality of this book is fantastic because it comes of equal parts honesty and logic and humor. It is far from being the story of a Gay crusader, nor is it the story of a closet queen. It is the story of a normal boy growing into maturity without managing to get raped into, or taunted because of, his homosexuality. . . . He is bright enough to be aware of his hangups and the reasons for them. And he writes well enough that he doesn't resort to sensationalism . . ." *San Francisco Bay Area Reporter*

## **The Best Little Boy in the World Details**

Date : Published May 11th 1993 by Ballantine Books (first published January 1st 1973)

ISBN : 9780345381767

Author : Andrew Tobias

Format : Paperback 247 pages

Genre : Lgbt, Gay, Nonfiction, Biography, Autobiography, Memoir, Gblt, Queer, Gay Fiction, Literature, American, Romance, M M Romance

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## **From Reader Review The Best Little Boy in the World for online ebook**

### **Brian says**

Honest, funny, and poignant. Many, if not most currently middle-aged gay men will find much of their own growing-up and coming-out experiences captured quite neatly, with frank humor and a touch of the bittersweet. The author's early sexual exploits may be more numerous, and perhaps bordering closer to what some may consider "sordid" than many people have experienced, the associated thoughts, feelings and responses are familiar to nearly everyone.

Those with a close relationship with an adult gay man could find a wealth of insight in this story into what it is like to grow up gay in this culture.

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### **Samy Rose says**

a classic, but I don't see it. Author thinks he came out of the closet. More like he poked his nose out and felt around a bit. Never gets into a full relationship.

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### **Mark says**

It's definitely refreshing to read a coming out memoir with such a lively sense of humor at work. The angst of dealing with the sexual self for the first time is honestly dealt with, but it isn't related with the usual sense of doom. The author accurately conveys that mindset of youth--with all its intensity and changeability. I admired the author's honesty. I think, however, that I would have gotten a lot more out of this book if I'd read it earlier in my life. Although the jolts of recognition it provides are enjoyable and comforting in a way, the storyline isn't all that compelling. I certainly didn't dislike our protagonist, I just didn't care that much about him. I guess I knew that he'd be alright. I found myself skimming the last thirty or forty pages, just to finish it. There's a brief word at the back of the book that dates to the late nineties where the author says he's doing well, but so many of his friends aren't and maybe he should write another book. That book I would like to read.

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### **Carlos Mock says**

The Best Little Boy in The World by Andrew Tobias - written as John Reid

This is the story of a boy that is the best little boy in the world (BLBITW) as measured by all standards - great grades, great in sports and bound to Yale. However he hides a secret: he's gay. So he proceeds to tell us the story of his coming out.

Some coming out stories are classics that transcend the test of time. This book is not. Just like Tobias/Reid spends lots of times reciting Spartacus' guide to gay life in new York City, Boston, and Provincetown in the

seventies - both that Spartacus issue and this books are "old news."

Narrated from the first person point of view - it starts with a bang: "I was eighteen years old when I learned to fart." Tobias/Reid then goes on on masturbation, which he also discovered at age 18. (Don't believe it).

From there he goes on to a series of boring descriptions of several relationships - most of which are nameless (for example Esquire is a lawyer, Mother is his mother and Father is his father). The most humanity in the book is when the writer decides that there may be a worthiness to some people other than their looks. Mr. Tobias/Reid comes out as a snob - favoring men who are Ivy League graduates or "butch." Effeminate men are discriminated upon.

I could tolerate that, only because it was written in the seventies, but I was offended by the blatant racism: "I'm from Queens, New York, and my life's ambition is to go to Puerto Rico and find some gorgeous number to f\*\*k me." p. 207.

Even though the work could be considered as a time period capsule, I'm afraid I will pass on *The Best Little Boy in the World Grows up*.

I think you should read something else....

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### **Karen says**

I tend to appreciate autobiographies about coming out. I like the introspection, the grappling with inner turmoil, and the tremendous courage involved. Originally written in 1973 under a pseudonym, *The Best Little Boy in the World* has some of the trappings of that era (the baths, a more hidden social culture, etc.) but also the timelessness of discovering and standing up for who you are. The updated version of the book not only uses the author's real name, but has been slightly revised and tightened, with a short update in the final chapters. I'm looking forward to reading the follow-up, his "coming-of-middle-age story," *The Best Little Boy in the World Grows Up* (1998).

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### **Virgowriter (Brad Windhauser) says**

The book is definitely a product of its time--and it's also interesting to perhaps account for the intended audience (straight people) and how that shaped his approach. Still, although the early chapters were engaging, the longer he explores his gay life, the more full of himself he becomes. The writing is still engaging, though, and it's a worthwhile book, especially for its era, for it explores a point of view uncommon for its day.

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### **Joe Miguez says**

A breezy, but important, book about What It's Like To Be Gay...or at least what it was like in the early '70s. Reid - the pen name of financial writer Andrew Tobias - describes his journey from childhood to coming out to learning to live "out" with humor and insight. This book was ahead of its time in its boldness, and it's sad that many of the same basic, logical, common-sense arguments for equality for gays and lesbians that still

must be made today were in fact being made quite publicly back when this book dropped nearly four decades ago. Reid's musings on what makes someone gay, as well as his observations on the differences between various "out" gays at the time, as well as the similarities between gays and other groups, are written with keen insight into human nature, and are funny as hell. This was a quick read, but a good one, and I highly recommend it to anyone -- gay or straight. In fact, it ought to be required reading for any of us straights who think it's our place to comment on anyone's sexual orientation, or what rights that orientation ought to give or deny them.

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### **Stephen Kirkpatrick says**

I warmed to this book in particular for how much the author and I seem to have in common - struggling with living up to an image and reconciling one's sexuality with that image. The first several chapters, despite the 45-year age gap, paralleled my own journey pretty closely. Tobias is also a legitimately funny writer, and his self-awareness were enough to warm me to the book despite its flaws.

But oh, are there flaws. It's very dated, both in terms of the writing style (a mishmash of '70s New Journalism and Salinger-esque clichés) and in terms of how it describes the gay scene (again, it's the '70s/pre-AIDS/etc.). Even the veneer of self-awareness made it hard to slog through the last few chapters' tedious descriptions of his numerous affairs - he seems to have been made aware of this, as he noted in the afterword for his edited version - and his personal "theories" on where gayness comes from are pretty cringeworthy.

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### **Aude says**

That was a really interesting read, often funny.

The narrator (and author) is not entirely likeable, yet we have so many common points, that I actually admired him. It takes balls to paint yourself as a jerk.

I haven't managed to say all I wanted to or to say it properly or in a way that would inspire the indignation I wanted you to feel.

Indeed, you did not. I'm not sure what I was supposed to feel indignant at: your behaviour? the oppression of homosexual? homosexuality? Often-times the narrator expresses the expectation that his homosexuality will shock the readers, but we know exactly what we get into when we start reading that book, so why would we if we found the subject offensive?

That's why the book feels dated at several points. Obviously some homosexuals are still oppressed as of 2013, but most of them are better accepted as they were back when this was written.

What IS mildly offensive is the narrator's attempt to interpret why each homosexual he met "became" homosexual. This one was small and feeble as a child, that one grew up fatherless and identified with his mother, that black guy was more intellectual than sporty, so he felt inferior to his black peers... the thing is, I'm still not sure how he explains how HE became gay. I think it was the point of the whole book, but his explanation of his own homosexuality isn't clear at all.

On the whole, a quick, fun, shockingly frank book at times, with some interesting thinking - which may or may not be true. As an example, a quote I highlighted:

In both cases, it is the prejudice, not the condition, that does the harm. It may be, as some would have it, that blacks are inherently inferior to whites or that homosexuals are all, by definition, sick. So what? Even if either condition truly is inherently undesirable, no manner of social pressure will turn blacks into whites or gays into straights. Social pressure will only exaggerate the handicap. It is still the prejudice, more than the condition, that does the harm.

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## Songfire says

Egads. Welcome once again to the mind of an over-privileged rich white guy (and WHEEEE! He's a self-hating homophobic gay, how's that for an upgrade?!)

\*headdesk\*

Mind you, it's not because he's worried about getting dumped by his friends and family - all this special snowflake is worried about is no longer being "THE BEST LITTLE BOY IN THE WORLD"(TM) and of course his career. He is completely incapable of empathizing with anyone/anything that doesn't immediately affect *\*himself\**, and only worries about not being able to really *\*feel\** deep emotions because it might get in the way of accomplishing his goals...

I'm not a certified psychologist, but he appears to be a textbook case of Anti-Social Personality Disorder. And I really hope his victims/ex-boyfriends were able to find a man able to love and accept them.

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## Chris says

The sexually repressed childhood and adolescence of now-famous journalist, columnist, and investment guru Andrew Tobias [writing as John Reid] must have been awful for him, as it was for many of us. Tobias makes us sympathize, and we recognize much of our own early lives in his. In these respects his book is largely successful.

Certainly it has been read extensively since 1973 by gay people for inspiration to come-out and by straight people to understand them. There is no doubt it has had a mostly positive and significant effect. It's funny throughout, and manages to build up a significant emotional weight. So, judging by the cultural situation of the 1970s re: homosexuality, these positive considerations rate the book **5-stars**.

Yet...this is one of the hardest books for me to rate in total, ever. There is a darker side.

The book has aged badly, *very* badly, and it suffers from Tobias's stratospheric level of naiveté. Can *anyone* be so clueless? Sure, it makes us feel better that he may have had it worse than us, but it just becomes embarrassing.

Even worse, can we forgive 1) his cringingly overt racism (most of it revealingly removed in later editions: I read the first edition, and also the latest reprint because of my book collector's bibliographic curiosity: it's a

quick read);

2) his astounding feeling of superiority over everyone caused by his arrogant personality—apart from sex, where he was a total loser;

3) his bragging about his early business success at 22-years-old, making loads of money at IBM;

4) his continually expressed hatred of effeminacy, and the incessant insults he spews about "faggots" with their "limp wrists" and "lisping" voices [the quoted words in this review are used throughout Tobias's book: repetition is an element of his style, most repeated words and phrases should have been caught by his editor but weren't] ;

5) his demand for homosexuals to behave like straight people and blend in, other than those they choose to have sex with.

Take a breath...

6) His overstatements that he is ONLY attracted to "cowboys," meaning, in the book's context, conservative and straight-acting people;

7) his admission that only beautiful people should be gay, it's better for "ugly" (I lost count how many times he used that word) people to stay home and clear the field for him and his beauties;

8) his stupid beliefs that homosexuality is determined by environment, body type and height (!), physical beauty, closeness to mothers and absence of fathers—"born that way" is not part of his conception, although he does state it can't be cured;

9) his truly disgusting agism, claiming that older people (roughly over 35) are sexually unwanted and become pedophiles and/or steal the young "munchkins" for themselves by paying for their services, or "keeping" them—yet Tobias hypocritically worries that *he* will get old and ugly eventually, and wonders who will take care of him then.

Taken together, all of these complaints rate **1-star** at best.

It all becomes almost too silly to read. If not for its humor and the author's obvious sincerity, even when his attitude is so wrongheaded in hindsight, I would have thrown this book away. At least he won't get even so much as a glance from me when he gets old—so totally ugly and old.

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### **Keith says**

This book changed my life. It was as if I were reading my own story on the pages. I will never forget it.

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### **Michael Holland says**

This was my coming out book, and I was so happy that there was a narrator who was so much like me!

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## **MBJ says**

I was really excited about reading it because it was voted as one of the 50 best gay books by AE readers, many call it a classic and it had an interesting title but it turned out very disappointing for me and I guess that shows you how very different people's tastes can be.

-if you liked this book I advise you not to read the rest of my review-

I didn't like it at all and could barely finish it.

I was hoping that leaving it for a while and getting back to it would help and that I might find it bearable, that didn't work obviously... I think the personality of the mc (the author) is kinda obnoxious and I can't find anything that I like about him or his story.

he finds himself to be so smart and handsome and he can predict what people will do and he knows what they're thinking about. he is basically superior to everyone he knows except maybe his friend Hank. the entire time I was reading I was hoping for something horrible to happen to him and turn him into a decent person and I hope that doesn't make me as obnoxious as he was.

and the parts where he explained how/why this person or that turned/developed gay and how the reason wasn't the same for him...like everyone was so easy to analyze and understand but he was (yet again) a superior being that was more complicated really annoyed me  
overall I HATED IT.

if you hate brats who have it easy all their lives and don't have any real world problems or worries this book is not for you.

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## **Paul Kaefer says**

I want to preface by saying that the times have really changed since this book was written. Unfortunately, there are still many places where gay people are persecuted and attitudes are homophobic. But quite a few things said in this book are different from our current understanding of gender and sexuality.

That all said, it was a really great book about a boy growing up as a "good boy" who had a supporting family, good education, and did many "normal" things all the while knowing, deep down, that he was "not normal." Eventually, he comes to accept that who he is is normal (or perhaps that we should accept who we are, and not live by other peoples' standards).

Highly recommended for people questioning or coming to terms with their own sexuality (especially people who identify as male/gay male). Also recommended for parents and friends of those who have come out recently.

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