

The
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in
the
Gray
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Skirt

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The vibrant, funny, and heartwarming story of an outcast who becomes an odd man in

If you have ever felt like a misfit in school or been paralyzed by your family's imposing expectations, if you have ever obsessed about your appearance or panicked about choosing a career path, if you have ever wondered if every single thing to which your body is exposed, from egg yolks to X-rays, might harm you, then you may be surprised to find a kindred spirit in *The Man in the Gray Flannel Skirt*.

Growing up in sunny La Jolla, California, Jon-Jon Goulian was a hyperneurotic kid who felt out of place wherever he turned, and who, in his own words, was forever on the verge of "caving in beneath the pressures of modern life." From his fear of competition to his fear of pimples, from his fear of sex to his fear of saturated fat, the range and depth of Jon-Jon's phobias were seemingly boundless. With his two older brothers providing a sterling example he believed he could never live up to, and his stern grandfather, the political philosopher Sidney Hook, continually calling him to account for his intellectual failure, Jon-Jon, feeling pressed against the wall, wracked with despair, and dizzy with insecurity, instinctively resorted, for reasons that became clear to him only many years later, to a most ingenious scheme for keeping conventional expectations at bay: women's clothing! Ingenious, perhaps, but woefully ineffective, as Jon-Jon discovers, again and again, that behind his skirt, leggings, halter top, and high heels, he's still as wildly neurotic, and as wracked with anxiety, as he's always been.

In this hilarious and heartfelt memoir, Jon-Jon Goulian's witty and exuberant voice shines through, as he comes to terms with what it means to truly be yourself.

The Man in the Gray Flannel Skirt Details

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Author : Jon-Jon Goulian

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From Reader Review The Man in the Gray Flannel Skirt for online ebook

Catherine Woodman says

This is a memoir that I think is supposed to be funnier than I found it--the fascination with cross dressing (which is what I would call this, not androgyny) and the anxiety about sex screams get yourself to a therapist ASAP, rather than writing a book about it (although maybe you have to admit it to yourself before you can tell someone else and this is like bloggin about it big time). I found it strangely sad--I did not feel sorry for the author--not that kind of sad, but rather it left me perplexed and very aware there was nothing I could do about this.

Nicolemauerman says

This memoir was very frustrating. The purpose of the book is for the author to explain why he turned out so abnormal (dressing like a woman, OCD, cannot hold a job) when he grew-up in a family of over-achievers. The author never really explains why. Instead he jumps from thought to thought and story to story. One wonders if his underachievement could be explained as a simple case of ADD combined with OCD. I felt that the author was trying to gain sympathy from his childhood having grown-up with those who expected so much. However, the author had a very privileged life: East coast summer camp, spending the summers in his family's Vermont summer home, meeting presidents; that I often found myself rolling my eyes at his stories. This author's boring stories are filled with the longest sentences. Jon-Jon ditch the comas and learn how to use some periods! I would recommend other readers to avoid this book.

Dylan says

I won this book from a giveaway and I entered it for no reason other than the title caught my eye. Not knowing what the book would be about I started it ready for anything, and what I got was nothing I was expecting. The Man in the Gray Flannel Skirt is a memoir, each chapter opening with something happening in his life, and then quickly shifting to something else from his past that relates to the theme of that chapter. While this did lead me to expecting what was coming next I really did like the way he wrote his story. In the beginning few chapters of the book I began to wonder why he wrote a memoir, what had he done? I realized then at the end that that's just it, he hadn't "done" anything, he just lived how he wanted and that led him to have one of the most interesting lives (with a somewhat exception of one chapter, which was a bit uncomfortable to read but still interesting!) I have ever read about. That is what I have taken from this story, live how you want and it's never too late to change your life. I extremely enjoyed reading about his life, excellent book.

Lisa Bertagnoli says

I LOVED this book. It struck me, sort of, as the male Bossypants - the story of how a quite unusual character came to be. I loved how Goulian walked me through his life. I loved that he credits his "androgynous about

town" status to just, well, fate - not crappy parents or a crappy childhood, anything like that. I couldn't wait to finish it and was sad when it ended. If you like stories about curious lives, read this book.

Ellen says

It's not required by law that people tangentially related to publishing in New York have to read this book. I just want to put that out there.

Karla says

I received this as a first reads giveaway as well. I must also admit that the title caught me because I have been wanting to read "The Man In the Gay Flannel Shirt", and thought this one may offer an interesting twist. I am sorry, but I could not get through it. I can see how this might be more engaging to someone who really enjoys the tragic memoir style of writing that it offers. Just not my cup of tea. One can only listen to the whinings of a poor little rich kid for so long.

Rachel Dixon says

I read this book after reading an interview with Jon-Jon and very much thinking that I wanted to have a conversation with him at a bar someday. The book reads similarly, which is his greatest asset. He is instantly likeable.

Memoirs are weird, which is why I choose often to not read the genre; many of its authors think they are much more interesting than they are. Jon-Jon is the black sheep of the family and a straight dude who wears a skirt most of the time. Otherwise he is just as neurotic as any of your citydwelling friends, and has lovely anecdotes to relate to that experience.

I want to give him props on his exceptionally tight elliptical structure, as well; each chapter begins as it ends with a flashback or series of flashbacks in the middle to explicate. It's a sci fi writer's trick, and it works here as a hook marvelously. By the last 10 pages or so I couldn't put it down. I only wished that by the end of the book I had found Jon-Jon's experience more worthy of a book (So you wear a skirt! That's cool, what else you got?), as his writing certainly deserves more exposure.

Janine says

"For the great bulk of my adult life, beginning roughly when I was sixteen and continuing, off and on, until now, at the age of forty, I have fallen short, sometimes dangerously short, of the conventional ideal of masculinity." So begins Jon-Jon Goulian's memoir, a courageous explanation of why he is who he is. Be yourself, his writing wants to implore, even if your self doesn't meet the standards of the exacting, categorizing culture you live in.

Reading this book is an interesting -- if sometimes uncomfortable -- experience because of the way Goulian

essentially throws himself at you and doesn't hold anything back. He enthusiastically presents his flaws, his quirks, his failures, his uncertainty and his squeamishness.

Goulian has struggled with body issues his whole life. He's had two nose jobs and is planning on a third. He hates his bow legs. He dresses in women's clothing, though he does not categorize himself as gay or a cross-dresser. He finds comfort in stuffed animals and has spent thousands of dollars building his stuffed animal collection. He acquired a law degree that he will not use, partially because practicing law would require him to wear men's clothing. He once worked for Robert Silvers at the esteemed *New York Review of Books*, though his most recent stint (other than writing a book) has been babysitting, for \$12 an hour, a seven-year-old girl named Ruth. He is not only self-deprecating, but he's incredibly sympathetic with those who are shocked or even revolted by him.

If you have ever reviewed a memoir before, you're probably familiar with the sinking feeling that comes along with making a judgment – that somehow it's impossible to judge a memoir without judging the person who wrote it. I am currently undergoing said sinking feeling, for I did not enjoy this memoir as much as I had hoped. While Goulian's explanation of his beliefs and choices is indeed fascinating, there's not as much substance here as you might expect from a "be yourself" narrative. I kept waiting to come across some sort of analysis or grappling, some deeper segment to open up Goulian's life story to all of us. Some larger truth. And I'm sad to say I didn't really find it. The story remained about him, and him only. Though it's a courageous and incredibly readable book, at the end of the day, this memoir won't really stay with me.

Dwight Garner in *The New York Times Book Review* described *The Man in the Gray Flannel Skirt* as "loquacious, high-strung, daft, and vaguely sad," and while the overall assessment is a bit harsh, I agree with the "vaguely sad" part. When I finished the book and read the back inside cover and learned that Goulian now spends his time in Vermont living by himself and gardening, I felt a weird small sense of sorrow about what the pressure of our culture does to people who don't "fit in" and found myself just wishing that Goulian can be happy, wherever he is and whatever he's doing.

I was also slightly relieved to be able to move on and immerse myself in a new book.

I received an advanced reviewer's copy of this book for free through Goodreads First Reads. Many thanks to Random House for sending the copy my way.

Ozma says

This was the first book I read on my new Kindle (kindly gifted by my brother -- a kind kindle gift!). It was a great book to read on the Kindle because I wasn't sure if I wanted to invest in buying the book, but I did want to read it. The Kindle edition was less of a "commitment." I read a piece by the author in *Vogue* and was impressed with his writing. The story -- of basically the first metrosexual man ever and his poor, confused childhood -- sucked me in a lot more than I thought it would. While the content may not be for everyone, I think kids who feel alienated, who are trying to figure out who they are, will really enjoy this book. I think the author should do a YA graphic novel version. I loved the story about Goulian's boss, who approved of his stuffed animals saying something like, "By God, we need all the help we can get!" If you feel weird about your teenage years or are struggling through them, this book will make you feel a lot better!

Abbey says

This book was BEYOND terrible. Jon-Jon Goulian is like a wannabe Augusten Burroughs or David Sedaris, only he suffers from serious writer's ADD and a spoiled upbringing.

I found myself beginning a chapter with a comprehensive anecdote- then being thrown down a maze of tangents only to come back to the original thought with nothing to show for it. The point of the story is completely lost on me. What I learned about his life is that he is a middle-aged extremely vain man from a driven and wealthy family. He practically threw all his opportunities down the drain yet still got into an amazing college, and what does he have to show for it? Nothing, he hides in Vermont and writes books about his privileged life.

There are only two reasons why I would recommend this book:

1. If you would like read a book to compare your own writing endeavors, a great self-esteem booster.
2. If you are in the mood to be completely agitated.

Poppy says

This is like sitting with your chattiest gay male friend on a 3 day coke binge. I fail to see the whole life impact of getting a hernia in high school.

Also, I hate to say this but - First World Problems. A Harvard education, a law degree and making 12 an hour babysitting. . . no wonder your parents are bewildered and dismayed. I don't think that being gender variant means you have to give up on the concept of working for a living. But whatever, the guy is brave to be out about his stuff.

Megan says

Overall, this was just okay. Some parts were simply boring, and others were annoying or offensive enough that I was tempted to ditch it and move on to my next book. I stuck with it because it is also, at times, witty and entertaining.

The author is a very privileged white boy, fairly bright, who is excruciatingly vain and self-absorbed. He criticizes himself frequently, but in a way that makes me think he secretly thinks he's the bee's knees. He makes sweeping generalizations about females and other large classes of people and seems not to have explored his personal biases at all. Instead, he seems to have spent most of his time minutely examining odd and random events in his life to which he attributes deep significance.

The organization is random, parenthetical, tangential, and repetitive. This isn't entirely bad, but a bit of tidying for clarity would have been an improvement. I'd give another book by this author a chance, and I hope Gray Flannel Skirt isn't his best effort.

Velma says

Let's just cut to the chase, shall we? "I hesitate to bore you with walking you through them." This, from the penultimate chapter of this bore of a memoir, although referring to the potential "moral implications" of the author's prototypical Freudian interaction with his mommy as a child, could serve just as well as a stand-alone indictment of this entire account. I, as reviewer, hesitate to bore you with walking through the myriad shortcomings of this tepid tome, but bore you I shall.

Don't get me wrong: I love a good dysfunction junction re-hash of a broken childhood. But the key word there is "good". This? Not so much. To whit:

What was so bad about this dude's life, anyway? Not much that I could find. He grew up a privileged white kid in one of the most affluent (& physically beautiful) settings in the U.S. who went on to be educated, on his parents' dime I might add, in several of the most prestigious Ivy League institutions here. So he has body issues; who doesn't? And his parents, who apparently supported him into his late 20s or early 30s, expected he might make use of his multiple degrees? If he wanted to piss away his education, seems perfectly fine to me, it's his life after all. But get over it already! If you want to be your own person, do it on your own & shut UP about it already, enough of the guilt-ridden angsty bullshit.

I'm trying to say this: feeling broken & adrift and wanting to write about it is one thing, but it ain't worth reading about if you don't make it interesting/funny/poignant or somehow *relevant*. Entertain me, fer chrissakes. I'd rather read his grandfather Sydney Hook's autobiography than this self-indulgent drivel; he came across as much more interesting. And Mr. Goulian, if you're planning to continue your literary pursuits, might I suggest you invest in a good dictionary, cease & desist with the inane parentheticals & footnotes, quit with the over-generalizations, & please, for the love of all that is holy, stop whining!

This ARC was provided to me by the publisher via my local Indie bookstore, and no money was exchanged.

Rebeccahowden says

Disclaimer: I have spent time with the author personally and his loveliness may be biasing this review, but I genuinely did enjoy reading the book before I met him.

Jon-Jon Goulian is one of the strangest people I've ever met. He's also one of the sweetest, and his utterly lovable memoir is both heartbreakingly and heart-warming, leaving you with an intense desire to give him a big hug – and maybe go out shopping with him.

For anyone who has ever felt like a fish out of water, Goulian's story strikes a familiar chord. On the surface, there was no real reason why he should have felt out of place. Growing up in the sunny beachside town of La Jolla, San Diego, surrounded by a family of doctors and lawyers and political philosophers, and blessed with a sharp intelligence and talent for soccer, he was all set on a very conventional path towards success.

But at some point as a teenager, the expectations became paralysing. Plagued by an endless list of phobias,

deeply insecure about his (mostly imaginary) physical flaws, and finding more things every day to fret about, Goulian was completely overwhelmed by fear, anxiety and self-loathing. His solution, without knowing why, was to start experimenting with androgyny. He shaved his legs, waxed his eyebrows, started wearing lip-gloss and eyeliner. Next came the sarongs, the leggings, the high heels. To this day at the age of 43, his midriff-skimming tank tops, low-waisted flannel skirts and chunky Steve Madden heels are all part of his signature look.

The Man in the Gray Flannel Skirt is a brave and honest account of Goulian's flailing search for a place in a world that doesn't quite know what to do with him. It's carefully crafted, with each chapter structured to explore a particular source of anxiety in his life, from food, to sex, to his body, punctuated with letters from his father and grandparents begging for help in understanding why he is "doing nothing" with his life.

Despite having a BA from Columbia and a law degree from NYU, he flits from one menial job to another, making just enough money to live. He's instantly affectionate towards everyone he meets, but he still sometimes retreats into an apartment filled with stuffed animals, going for weeks or even months without talking to anyone. He is, in his own words, "vain, prissy, neurotic, body obsessed." He declares, with a strange sort of pride, "I own nothing, save nothing, accomplish nothing tangible and have no permanent hold on life."

And yet far from being self-pitying, Goulian tells his story with amusement. He places all his weirdness on the table and laughs at it, showing compassion towards himself at the same time as he realises how strange he is. For someone who has spent so much of his life feeling uncomfortable in his own skin, there is a strong sense of self that comes through in this book, and it threads his anecdotes together in a story of self-acceptance that is touching and inspirational, without being overly sentimental.

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See also: <http://rebeccahowden.com.au/my-new-fr...>

Bob Lopez says

Great book! What a down-to-earth guy he is; more so, even, because of his raging insecurities...he's beyond grounded, he's downright catatonic. There is very little that is unusual about Jon-Jon apart from his name and how he chooses to dress himself. Life has been a struggle, a competition between what is expected of him and what he is capable of...the sad part is that he often takes himself out of the fight, for fear of failure, fear of not living up, or for the sake of fear itself. He's a germaphobe of the highest order and I can almost feel the bland food to which he grew accustomed. His relationship with his family is endearing, and I appreciate that he wasn't a malcontent for the sake of being one. He just spent a lot of his time being misunderstood, I think. Great book.
