



Tomboy Survival Guide

Ivan E. Coyote

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Ivan Coyote is a celebrated storyteller and the author of ten previous books, including *Gender Failure* (with Rae Spoon) and *One in Every Crowd*, a collection for LGBT youth. *Tomboy Survival Guide* is a funny and moving memoir told in stories, in which Ivan recounts the pleasures and difficulties of growing up a tomboy in Canada's Yukon, and how they learned to embrace their tomboy past while carving out a space for those of us who don't fit neatly into boxes or identities or labels.

Ivan writes movingly about many firsts: the first time they were mistaken for a boy; the first time they purposely discarded their bikini top so they could join the boys at the local swimming pool; and the first time they were chastised for using the women's washroom. Ivan also explores their years as a young butch, dealing with new infatuations and old baggage, and life as a gender-box-defying adult, in which they offer advice to young people while seeking guidance from others. (And for tomboys in training, there are even directions on building your very own unicorn trap.)

Tomboy Survival Guide warmly recounts Ivan's adventures and mishaps as a diffident yet free-spirited tomboy, and maps their journey through treacherous gender landscapes and a maze of labels that don't quite stick, to a place of self-acceptance and an authentic and personal strength. These heartfelt, funny, and moving stories are about the culture of difference—a "guide" to being true to one's self.

Tomboy Survival Guide Details

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Author : Ivan E. Coyote

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From Reader Review Tomboy Survival Guide for online ebook

Allison says

You know what I love in a person?

Competence.

You know what else I love? Intelligence.

Layer on top of all that a good dose of kindness, and I am smitten. Completely in love.

I have fallen for Ivan E. Coyote in the same way that I am star-struck and weak-kneed over Barack Obama and Carol Off. I'm awed and breathlessly impressed. I want to have Coyote over for dinner. I want them to speak at my kids' school -- and maybe they will, if I have anything to do with it. I can't wait to have the opportunity to see them speak sometime, and I hope that is sooner than later.

Not sure how you feel about transgender issues? Feeling ignorant on the topic? Open-minded but uninformed? Closed-minded but ultimately still human? Read this book. It's utterly convincing and I doubt anyone could come out from it unchanged. I loved every single page of this book.

CaseyTheCanadianLesbrarian says

In case you had the wild notion that it wouldn't be: Ivan Coyote's latest and unbelievably 11th book is just as great, and possibly greater, than everything they've done up until now. If you've never read an Ivan Coyote book before, Tomboy Survival Guide would be a great one to start with, as I think it really shows this celebrated writer and storyteller at the height of their powers. But if you've read every single book Coyote has written, and seen them multiple times doing live performances like recent collaborations with Vivek Shraya, you will definitely still enjoy this collection of personal short stories. Knowing what to expect with their books is kind of awesome actually: it's like coming home...

See my full review on my blog [here](#)

Rosie says

"I am not trapped in the wrong body, I am trapped in a world that makes very little space for bodies like mine." This book is warm, well written, and moving. Detailed snapshots of Ivan's life show their struggles with not fitting into a gender binary as a young tomboy turned butch. But Ivan also highlights the pockets of beauty throughout their life, such as the relationship with their grandmother, who had secrets of her own she didn't share until much later in her life. I felt like I was really immersed in Ivan's life with this memoir. Coyote's books not only resonate with transfolks, but also with anyone who has ever not fit neatly into an expected label.

Lydia says

This memoir is how memoirs should be.

Coyote's tender craftsmanship is incredible. Their vignettes are like memories, with a message they tie into their later life, like a lifeline. Each time you read a new vignette, you can feel it building and building, until they release it like a rope, coiling at your feet. The message comes through. This is why they wrote this.

Arsenal Pulp Press published this book and they are definitely one of my favourite publishers. They've included gorgeous illustrations and etchings of usually things that you would find in instruction manuals. How to tie knots, how to cast on knitting, the component parts of a generator, how to use a hacksaw, which gives the stories such great individual texture. Each of the etchings means something to the story and it just adds another layer of polish to an already fantastic book.

A trans friend of mine read this and she said she cried on average every 23 pages, good tears and bad tears. Any time she didn't cry, she laughed.

It was the same for me.

I love Ivan. I feel like so many trans books and memoirs are ... written to help cisgender people to understand trans people. And the problem with some of those is that you begin to see only the one side of a person, the trans side.

Ivan Coyote is more than their trans-ness, and by writing moments of their lived experience, you begin to understand how they live their life as a trans person, without it ever being a spectacle. Coyote writes for everyone.

Their writing is soft in a world that tried to make them hard. They have thoughtful insights on gender and how that makes us the way we are.

Coyote often says that the world didn't make space for their trans body, but every time they write a book (and they've written 11), they make space for another trans person. And another, and another, and another.

Because I have short hair, I'm often asked by lots of people:

"Are you a boy or a girl?"

My favourite response tends to be: "Yes."

They frown, tilt their heads, try to guess. Try to ask me to confirm, but I won't budge. I shrug, smile, grin, don't say much.

I've spent 17 hour flights being called alternating titles "Sir", "Miss", and it felt liberating to have the chokehold of gender away from me for a little while.

Kids are also fun because their concepts of gender, from so young, are so rigid.

"If blue is a boy's colour and pink is a girl's colour, what's yellow?"

Oh, how they argue. How they bicker. How they defend that yellow is a girl's colour because princess' hair is blonde and ...!!

But then I got to the chapters where Coyote discussed going to a public bathroom. And as much as I like to flirt with gender, poke at it, irritate it, I've never been called out in a lady's bathroom.

I argue in favour of bathroom equality a lot. I've seen disabled bathrooms up a flight of stairs with no lift access (???), I've seen single dads hurrying into lady's bathrooms with their tiny tiny daughters because there was no parents room, all the while being judged. And I always say that if people of any gender can use your bathroom at home, then, ta da! You have yourself a gender-neutral bathroom. Congratulations.

And while I knew, of course, that using a public bathroom as a trans person was a risk for trans people, Coyote still taught me so much.

So now, any time I go anywhere, I'll look for gender-neutral bathrooms. I will make note of the ones that are less busy, I'll use my disability and allow a trans person to come into the disabled bathroom with me, if that makes them more comfortable.

My point is this: Tomboy Survival Guide made me a better ally.

Théo says

An other amazing book by an amazing author. I was super excited about this book and really, I was not disappointed.

As usual, Ivan's stories are deeply moving and touching, and their discourse on gender is really on point.

One of my favourite passages from this book explains the problem with the (unfortunately) too common expression "trapped in the wrong body":

I am not trapped in the wrong body; I am trapped in a world that makes very little space for bodies like mine.

I live in a world where public washrooms are a battle ground, where politicians can stand up and be applauded for putting forth an amendment barring me from choosing which gendered bathroom I belong in. I live in a world where my trans sisters are routinely murdered without consequence or justice. I live in a world where trans youth get kicked out onto the street by their parents who think their God is standing behind them as they close their front doors on their own children. Going to the beach is an act of bravery for me.

None of this is a battle between me and my own flesh. For me to be free, it is the world that has to change, not trans people. (p.170)

Rebecca Jessen says

'Writing about vulnerable things doesn't make me feel vulnerable. Writing about my tenderest bits is the only way I know how to have power over them. Staying silent would leave me alone with them. My silence is what makes me vulnerable.'

I have all the feels for this book and this beautiful human. There is such warmth in these stories, I cried more than a few times at points of difference and similarity. Read it so you understand, even just a little, what that other life is like - that life you have never even considered that some people are living. Read it so you understand how something as seemingly simple as going to the bathroom can become a personal battleground. Read it - just read it.

Emily says

My friend Becki gave this book to me when she finished reading it for Curious Iguana's Read Broader initiative, and I'm so grateful she did. Ivan Coyote is a wonderful storyteller--honest, warm and true.

Akelly says

I always hope to come across a few books that make me feel seen. This was one of them and I am forever grateful.

Danika at The Lesbrary says

I loved this! I really missed reading Ivan Coyote's writing. It's just so... fortifying.

Krista says

You don't have to look a certain way to be a tomboy. Don't let anyone tell you that, ever, and please don't find that here in my words. Tomboy thrums in your heart. It's in your head. It's what is holding your spine in place. It can't be hidden by a haircut. It's not about nail polish or not. It's running right now in your veins. If it is in you, you already know. Tomboy blood is so much bigger than the outside of you.

I guess I'm late to the Ivan Coyote party. Tomboy Survival Guide is their (Coyote uses the pronouns “they” and “their” to refer to themselves) eleventh book, and as Coyote seems to be about my own age, they would appear to have been at the vanguard of writing about the trans person experience. I can only imagine how scary and lonely it must have been in their early career to be openly pushing for understanding and

acceptance for something that most of us had no exposure to, and I do hope that Coyote's everyday experiences have been improved by the growing presence of trans persons in the news and in the entertainment industry. I think that most people read in order to learn about the lives of others (and by extension, learn about ourselves) and this book of essays about Coyote's life taught me plenty; it would be of interest to any person who cares about people; it couldn't help but spread empathy and understanding; read it.

Coyote was born in the Yukon, into what appears to have been a large and supportive family; and while some early family drama is hinted at (and may well have been described in their earlier books), they would seem to now be in a place of love and acceptance. The essays in this collection range from the first time – at five years old – that Coyote remembers feeling pride at being mistaken for a little boy, through their awkward adolescence as they tried to figure out just *what* they were, to early dating and workplace experiences, to their present as a respected writer, performer, and public speaker. As we *are* about the same age, I identified with all of the cultural references, and as a fellow Canadian, I enjoyed the recognisable geographical bits (loved the mental picture of playing softball under a midnight sun). Mostly, I appreciated the learning I gained about the non-binary experience: Coyote may have been born with female parts, but they never felt like a girl, exactly, but not like a boy either; “lesbian” would seem to be the wrong word, too, and “trans person” will need to do if I need a term:

My day-to-day struggles are not so much between me and my body. I am not trapped in the wrong body; I am trapped in a world that makes very little space for bodies like mine. I live in a world where public washrooms are a battle ground, where politicians can stand up and be applauded for putting forth an amendment barring me from choosing which gendered bathroom I belong in. I live in a world where my trans sisters are routinely murdered without consequence or justice. I live in a world where trans youth get kicked out onto the street by their parents who think their God is standing behind them as they close their front doors on their own children. Going to the beach is an act of bravery for me. None of this is a battle between me and my own flesh. For me to be free, it is the world that has to change, not trans people.

This is not an angry or political book; Coyote's tone is easy, engaging, and often humourous. However, as Coyote is a public speaker, some of these essays felt a little performative – as though written to be spoken aloud to a crowd rather than read; but that's a small complaint. The text includes charming diagrams (from how to tie useful knots to the assembly of an iron), short observations from the real world, and a few responses to the people who have written to Coyote for advice:

I promise you that you are not alone. I'm here. I'm here and I see you. I feel you. I was you, and I am you. It's not you, it's them. It really is. And those boxes, those binaries, those bathroom signs, those rigid roles, they hurt them too, they do, they carve away at their souls and secret desires and self-esteem and believable dreams and possible wardrobes and acceptable careers just like they do ours, just it's harder for them to tell it's happening on account of no one is hassling them in the bathrooms every other day about it. They somehow just fit better in those boxes, so they can't see what fitting has cost them, not like we can.

This book is a conversation, not a lecture, and I enjoyed every bit of it; learned much. (I will, however, need

to think hard about whether or not baby-showers-as-gender-reveal-parties are nothing more than an attempt to hang a burdensome label on the unborn; I honestly don't see us moving into some post-gender world.) This deserves to be read widely and I wish Ivan Coyote all the best.

Louise says

I was pleasantly surprised at how much I enjoyed reading this book, by a newly discovered author. Coyote writes with much humour and compassion, and evoked so many memories for me. Fighting with siblings over the best individual cereal boxes with the perforated lines. Are You There God, it's Me Margaret. Crime of the Century. Tea for the Tillerman. Twister. Lite Brite. Many parts of my childhood resurfaced while I read this engaging book.

Ann-Marie says

The Canada Reads 2018 theme is "one book to open your eyes"... This memoir made the long list but shockingly not the short list?! It can only be defined as an eye opening read for anyone, particularly those of us that fall into the mainstream heterosexual culture. Even those who claim to be open minded and welcoming.... Ivan Coyote invites us into the inside psyche and constant turmoil, even in acceptance, those who define themselves as Trans, deal with every single day. It's brilliant, beautifully written patchwork of stories, piece of Canadian art. A must read and a must discuss book. A true shame it's not on the CBC short list.

Morgan says

I finished this in one sitting and had to have a little cry. Moving and fantastically well written.

Katie says

As always, Ivan Coyote gets me right in the feels. I haven't encountered any other authors' works that make me feel as understood, comforted, and part of a community. As a gender non-conforming person, their stories soothe my soul especially in these tumultuous political times.

In this collection of all new stories, Ivan weaves tales of first loves, navigating growing up different, dealing with strangers and friends and gender, unexpectedly inspirational school presentations, and how grandparents connect families in a magical way. Individually and all together, they create a beautiful work of art and storytelling.

Robert Pearson says

Everyone should read this. There were a few stories not quite as strong as the others, but it feels like I am

quibbling.
