

BEING JAZZ:

MY LIFE AS A (TRANSGENDER) TEEN



Young Adult

Book Summary:

The autobiography of Jazz Jennings, a celebrity, transgender girl who transitions via hormone blockers, at a very young age.

Summary of Concerns:

This book contains alternate sexualities; alternate gender ideologies; sexual nudity; sexual activities; and mild/infrequent profanity.

By Jazz Jennings

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	Ever since I could form coherent thoughts, I knew I was a girl trapped inside a boy's body.	
	For a while they settled on Owen, but then they switched to the Jordan and Aaron combo. It was conveniently gender neutral, which would come in very handy down the road My little penis felt so wrong on me. I wished I could take the sponge and wipe it off, and behind it I'd magically find a "gagina" like what my sister and my mom had. It definitely bothered me, but I remember feeling frustrated and confused more than anything else. It was a strange growth hanging off me that didn't look at all like it belonged there. When I finally did start to talk, I'd say "dwess like Awee" to my mom every time she put clothes on me.	
	And during the day, what made me comfortable was wearing a dress. I'd steal Ari's oversize pink or purple T-shirts and wobble around the kitchen in dress-up heels covered in feathers. (In fact, I first started wearing those heels back when I was still in diapers.) My parents were cool about it but drew the line at going out in public dressed in girls' stuff. Mom would put me in shorts styled for boys, and I'd scream and cry as she dragged me to the car. I didn't just like girly clothing—I felt ashamed and humiliated if I had to wear anything else.	
6	Whenever my mom or dad would compliment me by saying something like "Good boy," I'd immediately correct them. "No. Good girl."After a long morning of playing with Ari's dolls, dressing them up and staring enviously at the smooth area between their legs, I took a nap in my sister's bed.	
7	She promised to use her wand to turn my penis into a vagina. I ran downstairs and found my mother sitting in our living room. "When is the Good Fairy going to come with her magic wand?" I asked. " The who?" "The Good Fairy, who will turn my penis into a vagina!"	
9	It gets revised and updated as doctors learn more about mental health, and back then the most current version still included something called gender identity disorder. The word "disorder" has a negative connotation that's pretty offensive to transgender people. (The same manual used to list being gay as a disorder, too.)Does he insist that he is the other sex? Yes. Does he prefer to wear girls' attire? Yes, oh yes. Does he fantasize about being the other sex and cross-dress during make-believe? All the time, YES. Does he have an intense desire to participate in the stereotypical games and pastimes of the opposite sex? Yep. Does he have a strong preference for playmates of the other sex? Only plays with girls, YES! It wasn't like Mom had never heard of someone being transgender.	
	My mom's cousin Debbie, who was a licensed mental health counselor (and would later go on to get a doctorate in counseling transgender youth because of me), finally introduced them to Dr. Marilyn Volker, a therapist who worked with both gender issues and kids.	
11	She asked what I had between my legs, and I pointed to the penis. She then asked what I wanted, and I pointed to the vagina. That was the first day I ever heard the word "transgender." I remember feeling this overwhelming sense of relief that there was finally a word that described me—a girl who had accidentally been born into a boy's body.	



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1 486	I thought everything was going to happen fast after we left, that I was finally going to be allowed to live my life publicly as a girl, but my parents still weren't quite ready to let me take the full leap into transitioning.	
16	Even though I wasn't allowed to dress the way I wanted at preschool, I had no problem telling the other kids what I'd learned about myself at Dr. Marilyn's office. I was too young to pronounce "transgender" correctly, so I called myself "twansdender." Samantha and some of the other kids asked, "What does that mean?" and I said I had a girl's brain and a boy's body.	
17	Someone once told my mom that it's really common for transgender kids to be into mermaids, because they don't have genitals. I guess the idea is that for trans children, having no genitals is better than having the wrong genitals. I can see the logic in that theory, but at that age all I was aware of was that mermaids were the most beautiful creatures imaginable.	
19	When she first signed into a chat forum, she asked if anyone had ever had any experience transitioning a kid before kindergarten, and got the sound of crickets chirping in return. She was desperate for some sort of manual, like a version of What to Expect When You're Expecting but about raising a transgender child. (Luckily that kind of book does exist now!) Another time, a woman sent Mom a study that said 80 percent of little kids who transitioned were just gay and would transition back once they were older because they grew out of it. The study was disproven as BS, though, since none of the participants had actually ever been diagnosed with GID. (The clinic that funded that study also practiced conversion therapy to try to forcefully change a kid's natural inclinations to play with the toys they wanted to, but thankfully they recently ended the practice. Several city, state, and federal governments are now making these kinds of "therapy" illegal.) Mom wasn't buying it anyway, even before the study was debunked.	
	About a year after my first meeting with Dr. Marilyn, when it was very, very clear to my dad that I wasn't going to change, he finally agreed with Mom that it was time to let me begin fully transitioning at home. The first step was to tell my siblings. Dad and Mom sat my brothers and sister down to explain to them that as a family they were all going to start recognizing me for what I was—a girl. Ari took it a little harder. She really liked being the only daughter. She was nine at the time and wasn't too happy to suddenly have to share the family princess status. But after my dad explained to her that many transgender kids have really difficult lives and that more than 50 percent try to kill themselves at some point because they aren't loved and accepted, she started to cry and promised him she'd be the best big sister ever.	
21	I still hadn't started socially transitioning by changing my pronoun and wearing dresses outside the house, the two of them were able to convince the school's director to ease up on the dress code for me. When kids asked questions about why I could wear girly shirts, I told them it was because I was a girl. If they kept asking about it, the teacher would tell them I was allowed to be whatever I wanted to be.	
	The worst part was that after the girl's mother complained to the school about what I had supposedly done, the director called my mom and suggested that I had pushed the girl because I was jealous that she was an "actual" girl.	
28	Still, they waited about six more months, until my fifth birthday, to have my coming-out party.	



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	On that day, I was finally allowed to wear whatever I wanted in front of my friends and their families because Mom had invited my entire preschool class.	
30	Still feeling protective, Dad was a little wary of my outfits, but nobody glanced at me twice during our entire trip, except for one time when we were in line for a ride and Ari forgot to use the right pronoun. I had fallen behind a little and Mom asked where I was. Ari saw me a few feet away ar said, "He's right there," before correcting herself.	
32	She talked to everyone about what she and Dad were currently working on—the process of enrolling me in kindergarten as a girl.	
34	With a skort, if you have a boy body, everything down there stays tucked away. The problem is that skorts aren't made for boy bodies, which presented a big issue that I'll explain in a sec.	
36	There was no way Rebecca and Catherine would ever slip up and call me he, because they had no idea that I had ever had to present myself as a boy. I kept getting in trouble because I was always picking at myself down there, trying to arrange my penis into a comfortable position. My teacher was very sweet and accommodating of my situation, but she'd still have to constantly rush over to my chair and lean down to whisper at me to remove my hand from my pants.	
37	And what I was sketching was fairly realistic portraits of vaginas, breasts, and butts. All the boobs were big because my mom's were, and since those were the only ones I'd ever seen naked, they were all I really knew. My teacher sent me to Ms. Reynolds's office one day when she caught me with one of my "nude pics." Ms. Reynolds had no idea what to do about it except call my mom, who grew scared that the principal was going to use this seemingly deviant behavior as an excuse to tell her that allowing me to transition was wrong. Ms. Reynolds didn't go quite that far, but Mom definitely felt like she was the one in trouble. "These kinds of drawings are utterly unacceptable and inappropriate," Ms. Reynolds told Mom, before warning her that she'd better figure out a way to make me quit.	
38	The truth is that I was running around with my new friend I'd met there: Stephanie, a trans girl who had been adopted from China.	
	"Do you want to tell everyone how you feel about being a girl?"At school I became more and more confident and even told a few kids, including Rebecca and Catherine, that I was a girl who had been born in a boy's bodyI had no idea that during that whole school year my parents were being majorly pursued by television producers from New York City, who wanted nothing more than to hear me talk about how I'd been mistakenly born in a boy's body.	
43	When Mom and Dad finally sat me down to ask what I thought about doing the television show and explained how it could help other transgender children, I immediately said yes. I wish I could say that my intentions at the time were all about being an advocate, but I was in kindergarten.	
	Most important in my eyes now, they also insisted that the show not offer any kind of counterpoint, like talking to some whacked-out doctor who might say that being transgender was all in my head	
50	The rec team organizers weren't even checking for proof of gender, but just in case, Mom conveniently placed an "accidental" coffee ring over the little box with an "M" in it, obscuring the letter. When Dad slid the document across the counter for the clerk to check my name and age, he also placed his thumb over it for good measure, and it worked! I was registered as a girl.	



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51	I tried out and won a spot, and since we were nearing the end of the season, I joined as an unregistered guest player. But we needed to officially register me before the next season started the following year, when I'd be in third grade, and my parents decided to tell my new coach that I was transgender. She When my parents first began the registration process for the travel team, they turned in a clean version of my birth certificate, which said I was male, along with letters from my physician and Dr. Marilyn that explained I was transgender.
52	My parents were pushing back hard against the state soccer association after my registration got denied. They immediately went to the National Center for Lesbian Rights for help. Don't let their name fool you—the NCLR fights for all LGBTQ communities when it comes to discrimination in sports. They got right to work, reaching out to other trans rights advocates like the Transgender Law & Policy Institute, to build a team of professionals who could come up with a report that supported all the reasons why a child should be allowed to play sports in their affirmed gender. The eventual outcome was a paper called Guidelines for Creating Policies for Transgender Children in Recreational Sports.
53	I'd understood in a general sense that there would probably be other problems I'd have to face in life besides bathrooms and pronouns, but I began to feel the full weight of how much people didn't get what being transgender is.
54	I knew it was because of bigotry, fear, and ignorance, but it just didn't compute.
58	That January, I was issued a US passport that recognized me as female. The process was really easy—all the forms were right there on the website for us to print and take to Dr. Marilyn and my pediatrician.
63	My soccer battle was still ahead of me when I first transitioned in kindergarten, but for now I was feeling so confident about the world accepting me as a girl that I was ready to start exploring my dramatic side.
65	What I liked even better than the pancakes was this one game we'd always play. Well, it was less of a game and more of a "let's pull down our pants and show each other what's there" sort of situation. We didn't waste any time by pretending we were playing doctor—it was just schwoop, undies down, there it is.
66	Anyway, I don't remember feeling jealous that Rebecca had the parts I needed. I'd seen my share of vaginas at home so I already knew I wanted one. It was definitely interesting to see a new one, but I think the game was more to satisfy Rebecca's curiosity and help her better understand me and what being transgender meant.
67	One came in from a male-to-female transgender teen who had been about to leap off a building after her mom and dad told her they would rather have a dead son than a living transgender daughter.
69	The first really big panel I spoke on was at something called TransCon, an all-day conference in Miami devoted to transgender issues.
	When the 60 Minutes Australia reporter had asked me earlier in the year how I felt about having a girl brain and a boy body, I'd told her I felt fine.
71	I blamed the school for leaving me with such terrible choices: the in-classroom bathroom with absolutely no privacy, the long, humiliating trek to the nurse's bathroom, or having accidents.
73	It wasn't until I walked back out into the hallway that I glanced down and realized that without underwear to tuck it away, the outline of my penis was now visible through the fabric. I shuffled



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	down the hallway hunched over a little, trying to maneuver my body in a way that would make my penis move farther back between my legsBut it was worse because I felt doubly exposed—it wasn't just that my genitals were showing. They were the wrong kind.	
81	By that age I was telling anyone who became a friend that I was transgender.	
82	But it wasn't long before a girl I didn't even know came up to me in music class and said, "Alicia is telling everyone you're a chick with a dick."	
	We'd had to skip the previous few years because of scheduling conflicts, but we returned the summer before fifth grade started and decided to host our own workshop on transitioning while you're young. In addition to ours, I attended a panel about teenagers who have transitioned, and I introduced the two speakers.	
88	The workshop my family hosted later, on transitioning as a kid, was such a success that we decided to offer it every year. Since the people who show up tend to get really emotional (including us), we now jokingly call it the Love Fest in the workshop description, and the nickname quickly caught on with everyone.	
89	But I had only just turned eleven, so puberty wasn't on our minds at all yet. My parents and I had already researched options for me in terms of taking hormone blockers to suppress my body's male development when the time came, but we had figured that was a year away at the very least. At my physical, the doctor poked around between my legs and announced that I'd already entered something called Tanner 2. The Tanner scale is a method of tracking puberty development, and for male bodies, stage 2 meant that my testes were beginning to grow bigger. I didn't panic. I understood that we'd caught it early and that we still had time before anything drastic happened. The most that might occur between then and the time it took for me to get my blockers was that I might grow a couple of pubic hairs. For the puberty blockers, I had two options. There was Lupron, which is a suppressor that you inject into your butt every month, or Supprelin, a tiny implant that gets embedded in your arm and releases medicine over time, anywhere from one to three years. That was the option I wanted.	
	The idea with blockers is that they would give me time to figure out what I wanted to do about my male body later in life, without developing things like facial hair, a lower voice, an Adam's apple, and other male characteristics. For a long time when I was younger I'd had the same nightmare over and over about giant beards and mustaches chasing me and trying to attach themselves to my face. With the blockers, I'd be able to pick the time that was right for me to start taking estrogen to help me develop into a more feminine body, and then possibly have surgery somewhere down the line. I knew I was still too young to make those kinds of decisions. It's really important to understand that not every transgender person decides to go this route, and many aren't fortunate enough to even have blockers as an option. They don't have the family, medical, or financial support that I did. I really want to stress that every single person's transition is different. Some people choose surgery and hormones, and some don't.	
93	Thankfully the doctor had been treating a child with precocious puberty, which is when a kid enters puberty at a really young age, so he had some extra Lupron lying around. After all that, I ended up having to get the butt shot anyway. I could feel the liquid course through me as soon as the needle went in, but other than that I didn't feel any different physically. Since it took so long for our replacement implant to arrive, I ended up having to get the shot three	



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	more times over the next several months. Four butt shots later, I was finally ready to get that little sucker implanted under my skin.	
	Feeling that assertiveness, along with the safety of knowing that male puberty wasn't going to hit because of my new hormone blockers, really helped build up my dating confidence.	
	Fifth-grade crushes are so weird. On that day we kissed even longer, but we still kept our mouths closed. It was nearing the end of the school year, and I was determined to really make out with him before I started middle school. I knew I had the whole summer to make it happen, but the last day of school presented a perfect opportunity—Griffen and Sander were throwing an end-of-the-year party at our house. There would be tons of teenagers running all over the place, creating the perfect distraction for my parents if I could just get Zack alone somewhere. Once the party was raging, I snuck Zack up to my room and shut the door. We got on the bed and cuddled together for a few minutes before I climbed on top of him. Here goes, I thought. I closed my eyes, leaned down, and kissed him. I opened my mouth, but the second my tongue touched Zack's lips he pushed my face away.	
	As soon as that was all over, Mom got back to work on helping me win the right to use the bathroomMom posted a video on YouTube called "11-year-old transgender girl JAZZ, message to Obama." In it we did a quick recap of my life so far, and included a clip of me when I was younger saying: I got in trouble for using the girls' bathroom, and I should have the right to use that bathroom. I'm not different from anybody else, and I can lock the door and make sure they don't walk in!	
113	Not too much later the school board finally updated their policies to catch up with the regulation put out by the Office for Civil Rights of the US Department of Education that "prohibits discrimination against students on the basis of sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation." Translation: I got to use the girls' bathroom! I could finally pee in peace.	
	Families started listening to youth who were gender nonconforming, and more kids like me were allowed to be true to themselves.	
	The next day, our whole family marched in the gay pride parade. The two other winners and I got to ride in a car while our families walked beside us, and my heart just about burst seeing millions of people cheering and showing their support. That changed the next month when I went to Camp Aranu'tiq, a camp specifically for transgender and gender nonconforming kids, for the first time. "Aranu'tiq" is a word that comes from an indigenous population in Alaska. It describes a person who embodies both a male and a female spirit, and Aranu'tiq people are considered very special because it means they can see beyond a lot of the normal boundaries of the world and view things in all sorts of different ways. "Two-Spirit" is a similar Native American term. Mom had originally found out about the camp through her online support network when I was younger, and the TransKids Purple Rainbow Foundation had already been sending the camp donations and providing scholarships for kids for a while.	
	I'm not sure if he normally acted that way, or maybe he was trying out some sort of new macho act because he had recently transitioned, but he had a very exaggerated swagger.	
128	"I feel like I'm a girl inside, too!" Emory exclaimed. "So that's why my mom sent me here!"	
136	I was up front with him early on, and came out to him as transgender via text: ME: I wanted to tell you that I'm transgender, which means that I was a boy but became a girl so I have a girl brain and a boy body.	





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	He wrote back immediately. JASON: But you have a girl body, right? I'd already spelled it out for him, so I sent him a link to a YouTube video I'd made when I was younger that gave a much more detailed description about being transgender. He still didn't fully understand. JASON: That's a cute video. So what parts of a boy do you have? ME: The P word.	
137	He called you" She lowered her voice. "A chick with a dick."	
145	But for those who have decided to take estrogen, there's no set-in-stone age to start the treatment, although many doctors won't prescribe it until a patient turns sixteen.	
	On March 6, 2012, I got my first dose of estrogen. I think a lot of transgender people who decide to take hormones remember the date of their first course. It felt like a second birthday, because I knew my body was finally going to start catching up with my brain. The plan worked. We also made an adjustment in my antidepressant dosage, and I gradually felt my spirits start to rise after a couple of weeks. Even better, my boobs started to grow! At first they felt like two little bug bites, then quickly turned into what seemed like two seeds under my skin. I'd been obsessively researching the stages of breast development for years and knew all the normal signs. I didn't mind the soreness I felt because I knew the ache was leading to something huge in my life. (Not huge boobs—finally experiencing a female body!)	
149	The hormones definitely helped me with that. On the soccer field all of us girls would compare our emerging boobs. On the one hand, those talks made me feel like part of the group, since I had my own boobs starting to pop out and could participate. On the other hand, I knew that some of the girls were starting to get their periods, and that was a rite of passage I was never going to be able to share with them. Sometimes one would ask if I'd gotten mine yet, and I'd have to remind them that it was impossible for me. I'd tell them, "Hello, I have a D, remember?!"	
	Feeling bad about my body didn't get any better when Sophie stopped by the house that summer to say hi. I couldn't stop staring at her chest—her boobs had basically exploded. She'd gone from an A cup to a B cup overnight! She even pulled up her shirt to show them to me.	
158	To top things off, I was in the process of working with a woman named Jessica Herthel on a children's picture book!She's a lawyer and used to be the director of the Stonewall National Education Project, which develops LGBTQ educational materials for schools around the country. Mom had worked with her on a bunch of different projects for our school district, and Jessica had originally approached Mom toward the end of sixth grade to see if I'd be willing to work on a kids' book about being transgender, because there were none out there. It had never even occurred to me that really little kids didn't have a simple book that explained what it meant to be trans. More important, it suddenly felt worrying to me that there wasn't a book for a little trans kid to see a reflection of himself or herself in. I would have given anything as a child to see someone like me represented in a bedtime story. Plus I knew it was a great opportunity to educate nontrans people.	
165	By the time puberty hit, Edward had done enough research on the Internet to understand that she was transgender, and told her parents that she was a girl trapped in a boy's body. Like my own parents, they immediately set out to find a doctor who could help, but they lived in a country that didn't accept being transgender was something a child could experience. The common belief among their medical community was that only adults could experience gender dysphoria. They were eventually able to find a psychiatrist who was willing to see Edward as she transitioned	



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	to Angeline, but the doctor drew the line at prescribing any sort of hormone blockers or estrogen. So while Angeline socially transitioned, she suffered through male puberty, including growing facial hair and developing a deep voice.	
	When society tells you that genitalia dictate your gender, you better believe that many transgender kids are going to study up on what is or isn't between our legs. I think a lot of us learn about sex early, because we spend so much time researching and talking about the human body. And like any other place where you gather a bunch of teenagers together on an overnight trip, the Philadelphia Trans-Heath Conference was a breeding ground for sex talk. Quick side note for any parents out there reading this—do NOT let me saying this deter you from letting your kid attend if you're considering it. It's really healthy for trans teens to talk about sex and share stories with each other. It can be a confusing topic that raises a lot of questions when we're young, and it's really helpful to hear about other trans people's experiences so we can begin to get a stronger sense of what we would or wouldn't be okay with. The Trans-Heath Conference is a safe space where we can have some very honest conversations that we might not feel comfortable having with our friends back home.	
170	I remember one year when they were still in elementary school and they heard me saying in the car that I had been playing with some condoms that were being given away at the conference. When Griffen and Sander started laughing and asking how that was even possible, Mom turned around in the front seat and raised an eyebrow. "Do you boys even know what condoms are?" she asked.	
	Anyway, after Tia came back from shopping we got to finally catch up, and later that night we joined a big group of kids who were hanging out in a hotel room that happened to be parent-free for a while. It didn't take long for someone to break out a bottle for spinning. When we were all younger, the games at the conference tended to be a lot more innocent—things like Manhunt, which was just hide-and-seek but with teams. When we grew into teenagers, the hormones were flowing and many of us, most definitely including me, didn't have a whole lot of experience.	
	I was bummed that it hadn't landed on me once, but it turned out that my brothers were on the case. Griffen pulled me aside and pointed to a trans guy named Timmy who was sitting on a bed on the other side of the room. I didn't really know him, but we'd been introduced earlier that night. "That's who you should make out with," Griffen whispered. "Why?" I asked. Timmy didn't seem like my type, but I wanted more info. I'm always curious to know more if someone likes me!	
	It had suddenly become very important to me that I make out with somebody that night. Not because I was really attracted to anyone there, but because I wanted to be prepared when I met someone I liked and who liked me backEven though I tend to gravitate toward boys, I'd recently begun to consider myself pansexual.	
	"Will you teach me how to make out?" I asked her. "Sure," she finally agreed. She leaned in, and before I realized it we were kissing! Too bad she was really aggressive. I almost gagged when I felt her tongue hit the back of my throat, and I pulled away to the sounds of all the kids in the room yelling and whistling.	
176	"Mom," I whispered. "Mom, wake up." "Huh?" she said, opening her eyes and looking around, confused. I felt bad—I could tell she'd	



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	been dead asleep, not just lightly snoozing. "I French-kissed for the first time," I said. "Twice. With two different girls." "Did you have a good time?" she finally asked. "It wasn't that great," I said, crawling into bed beside her. "Good night."
184	I was, too. I wish I'd known what he was really after before I'd kissed him goodbye behind one of the cabins. Thank God it was just a little pop kiss, with no tongue.
201	It was at this point that I realized how badly I needed to pee, but I was led into a room and asked to record a short video talking about the importance of marriage equality, since it was looking more and more likely that the Supreme Court was about to make same-sex marriage legal in all states.
203	Her message was definitely valid—the latest number from the US Department of Justice reported that almost 40 percent of transgender inmates are sexually assaulted—but I didn't think she delivered it the right way, especially on such a day of celebration. Sure, there is always more work to be done when it comes to activism and advocacy, but I also think that a party should just be a party, and insulting the host isn't going to help a cause.
210	Sam, the guy who'd once called me a chick with a dick, started hanging around me a lot and hinting that he'd love to be on TV with me

Profanity	Count
Dick	3