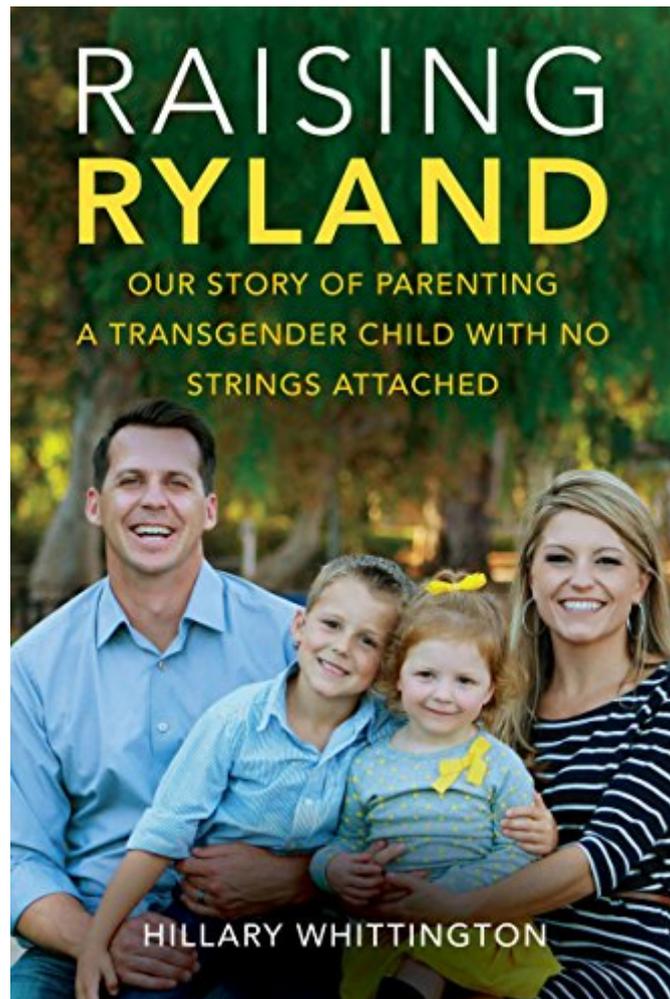


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Raising Ryland: Our Story Of Parenting A Transgender Child With No Strings Attached



Synopsis

This powerful, moving story—which has already touched more than seven million through a viral video created by the Whittington family—is a mother's first-hand account of her emotional choice to embrace her transgender child. When Hillary and Jeff Whittington posted a YouTube video chronicling their five-year-old son Ryland's transition from girl to boy, they didn't expect it to be greeted with such fervor. Beautiful and moving, the video documenting Hillary's and Jeff's love for their child instantly went viral and has been seen by more than seven million viewers since its posting in May 2014. Now for the first time, they tell their story in full, offering an emotional and moving account of their journey alongside their exceptional child. After they discovered their daughter Ryland was deaf at age one and needed cochlear implants, the Whittingtons spent nearly four years successfully teaching Ryland to speak. But once Ryland gained the power of speech, it was time for them to listen as Ryland insisted, "I am a boy!" And listen they did. After learning that forty-one percent of people who identify as transgender attempt to take their own lives, Hillary and her husband Jeff made it their mission to support their child "no matter what. From the earliest stages of deciphering Ryland through clothing choices to examining the difficult conversations that have marked every stage of Ryland's transition, Hillary Whittington shares her experiences as a mother through it all, demonstrating both the resistance and support that their family has encountered as they try to erase the stigma surrounding the word "transgender." In telling her family's story, she hopes she can assist the world in accepting that even children as young as five, can have profound and impactful things to say and share. What emerges is a powerful story of unconditional love, accepting others for who they are, and doing what's right, regardless of whether those around you understand it.

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Customer Reviews

Hillary Whittington talks with Andrew Solomon Andrew Solomon is the author of *Far From the Tree* and *The Noonday Demon*, among other books. Andrew Solomon (AS): How were you able to know for sure that your child was authentically a boy and that he wasn't just a girl going through a neurotic phase? Hillary Whittington (HW): As a stay-at-home mom, I had a very close relationship with Ryland starting from birth. After his deaf diagnosis, I spent hours teaching Ryland ASL, and after the cochlear implant surgery, teaching him to speak. Around his third birthday, which was after having over a year of sound, he started telling us, "I am a boy." We laughed initially, thinking it was just childhood confusion, but over time Ryland persisted with a very masculine presentation. To him, being a "tomboy" wasn't enough. Typically, tomboys are not ashamed of their bodies or being seen as a "girl" in the public eye. Additionally, our original beliefs that this may just be a phase were changed as his expression and discomfort continued to strengthen. Ryland began to show signs of shame and sadness when anyone saw him as a girl and if mistaken for a boy in public, he lit up and stood taller. As a mom, I knew there was something deeper going on inside of my child. AS: How was having a deaf child similar to or different from having a trans child? When you have a child who has two marked differences, how do you decide which one to focus on when? HW: Without a doubt, having a deaf child prepared me for having a transgender child. When we decided to go forward with the cochlear implant surgery, I knew the Deaf community did not agree with our decision. I prepared myself for the backlash, but remained strong, as I felt we were doing the appropriate thing for our young child. By the time we figured out that Ryland was also transgender, I had become very experienced in facing the objection of others. Certainly, it was now a much larger community who would potentially question our decision to support Ryland as a boy, but once again, I knew we were doing what was best for our child. Ryland has been very successful in the use of his implants and does very well with his hearing. Due to this, most of our focus has shifted to supporting his being transgender and educating the world on what that means.

AS: What has the role of faith been in your journey to acceptance of your child and your fate? How different would your experience have been if you hadn't had faith behind you? HW: Honestly, I was angry with God in the beginning. It seemed cruel that Ryland was faced with yet another tough challenge in his young life. I felt even more betrayed when many of our critics identified as Christian. I realized I had a choice: I could throw away my faith entirely, or be the example of a loving and kind Christian. I must show others that it can be possible to have faith and also support your child as either transgender or gay. I believe wholeheartedly that we were chosen to walk this path and my God loves everyone, regardless of their gender identity or sexual preferences. If I didn't have faith in my life, it would be much more difficult for me to understand why we were chosen to walk this path. AS: How did you get from so much sadness to a place of such celebration? Do you feel like the love that informed the painful aspects of this process is the same as the love that brought you through it? HW: Once I was able to come to the understanding that Ryland could still have the opportunity to live a very happy, prosperous, and fulfilling life, an enormous weight was lifted from my shoulders. I realized that life truly is what you make of it, and at the end of the day, if the Ryland is happy, I am happy. In the grand scheme of things, it is the differences we have as human beings that makes us unique and should be celebrated, and Ryland is the child he is because of his differences. If we were to sit around feeling sorry for ourselves, or our situation, the world would respond to us negatively.

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