

How we fight for our lives: Black Queer Boy's journey as an outsider of family, fight for the existence.

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Abstract:-

Every memoir is a sort of manifesto; each chapter adds up to the life of the author, who hopes to leave some sort of legacy that, will inspire others to improve humanity. In every field of trade, commerce, and telecommunication are becoming the haste of rapid development at the global level, which brings some paradigmatic change in people's understanding of identity and self-hood. This paper makes a serious effort to trace, map out Black Queer Boy's journey as an outsider of the family searching for his own existence. This memoir also highlights that the black queer boy, Saeed, is aware of the whole discrimination, homophobia, and racism that he goes through all his life and that pollutes everything, and this is the only reason which made him openly awake as a gay black man. In the book, "How We Fight For our Lives", a black youngster named Saeed fights for not only his own existence but also that of the entire human race. This research paper details his struggle.

Keyword:- Memoir, Queer, Racism, Homophobia, Discrimination

The Kirkus Prize winner for non-fiction in the year 2019, "How We Fight For Our Lives" is a second memoir book by Saeed Jones. He was an American poet and writer. His poetry collection, "Prelude to Bruise" was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle award for poetry in 2014. The book also won him a Lambda literary award in 2020.

"How We Fight For Our Lives" the title fight is about the fight for identity against the society, but it is mainly the fighting within the author himself. The struggle of a black man lives in texas with a single mother fighting for his existence. His mother as a Buddhist also struggles with her loving son's sexuality and also with his grandmother's evangelical Christianity. There are a lot of familial differences crafted vividly in the whole memoir.

“Imagine being born into a world where from the beginning, your true nature is under attack and ridiculed from the second you enter life. As you realize you are different to those around you, there is no place to find sanctuary. You become a prisoner to the constant barrage of shaming and disgust thrown your way. School is not a place of understanding, family holds the same negative views of who you are and the world itself holds no safety or place of refuge where you can be nurtured and supported. This is what it is like to be a young gay child in the world.”¹

In the words of Hall W.J. Dawes Hc and Plocek N,

“A growing body of evidence has documented many sexual orientation disparities where LGBT people have significantly higher rates of psychological disorders and behavioral health problems compared to their heterosexual counterparts.”²

According to Will Young,

“If you’re young and sporty then you’re generally sensitive subjects- the arts, reading, theatre, dance etc- is often demonised. This can of course, reflect society as a whole. Aggression on the sports field is seen as fair play: ‘Go on, Take him down! STOP ACTING LIKE A FAIRY’; What are you? Some sort of a Girl!.”³

An American poet and writer, Saeed Jones’ memoir brings thunderstorm through the vast depiction of sex, race and power. It is a coming of age story. *The Black Queer Boy*, Saeed Jones’ journey to fight for our lives, won the Kirkus Prize for nonfiction in 2019.

The narrative begins in May 1998 in Lewisville, Texas and ends in September 2011 in Barcelona, Spain. The reader gets a taste of Saeed’s entire existence in just 192 pages thanks to the book’s flowing sentences that are extremely intellectual, erotic, forceful, heartfelt, and full of vigor.

The story starts with twelve-year old Black Boy Saeed’s life,

“I was twelve years old and I had just finished the sixth grade. Most days, after mom headed to her job at the airport.”⁴

At a young age, he felt remote and depressed due to his skin color. He noticed Cody and his younger brother Sam, white boys, were playing catch in the parking plot. He desired to be part of them, but his colour comparison, continually restrained him from moving and being a part of them, and he continually pretended to them as it was too warm for him to go out.

Saeed's queer identity is hidden from his own mother. His hobby constantly stimulates him to study those books which reveal his sexuality. He reads books like *The Color Purple*, *Tas Baby*, and additionally, *Another Country* by James Baldwin.

"I picked up a worn copy of *Another Country* by James Baldwin, Sat down cross- legged on the floor, and started reading-

Minutes poded into hours. Black people sleeping with the white people. Men kissing Men, then kissing women, then kissing men again. Every few pages, I would look up from the book and peek at our apartment's front door. Mom wasn't home from work yet and I felt like I would get in trouble, if she saw me reading this book."⁵

The child or teenager continuously adores discovering that their mother is lovely and continuously preferred her schedule work. As amid her mother's youthful age, her hair in box braids, her lithe frame draped gown, which was designed by her sister was making her more beautiful and Saeed continuously pleased with her and she was his first diva.

"I took the consolation in the fact that I came from a woman like her; a woman who read three newspapers every day, who could make everyone in a room lightup with laughter, who would take notes into my lunch box daily, singing off, 'I love u more than the air I breath."⁶

His mother's unconditional love always bothers him. He enjoyed every moment of his mother's company. He knows when the right moment to begin exceptionally critical discussion with his mother is.

Once more, his emotions played a part. When she spoke the words, "AIDS", he imagined them to be the word, "Gay", but it wasn't. When he observes Cody and his buddies having fun in the park, that word is constantly in the air. He also finds it strange to ask his mother these questions now that he has a greater understanding of them. He often looked for novels with LGBT content at the library as well.

"While I was reading a book about defining homosexuality my dick started to get hard. The writing certainly wasn't sexy; the language was outdated and dry, still my body responded."⁷

Every time he read a gay novel, he felt a distinct perspective. He thought the books were amusing, and he noticed that every gay book also dealt with AIDS.

In Chapter 4 of the book, he talks about his grandmother, who lives in Memphis, and how he visits and stays with his grandmother in the second half of summer each year. In the summer of 1999, he also stays with his grandmother and she takes him to Ebenezer Baptist Church every

Sunday. Her changing tone this summer is influenced by the words. His grandmother's loving nature towards him always made him happy; however, when his grandmother's smog before her eyes are gone and she discovers his dirty cutting pictures of shirtless men from his mother's magazine, he became dissatisfied. She finds it very impious for his family and home. So she says to leave his house as the writer apologizes to her but she is in no mood to apologize him. His grandmother next day brings him to the church and in an outpouring of her tension over the child. She, with saeed's hands in her hands, went for the best wishes of the preacher and he-

"Dear god, hear me, praying for one of your lambs. His mother has chosen the path of Satan and decided to pull him down too" fight back God make her suffer."⁸

In his own words, this is how Saeed feels:

"I probably looked like I was crying. I wanted to turn and scream but that I was not my mother's fault." Who the fuck are you? I know you are not talking about my mother."⁹

From this incident, Saeed never want to come back to Memphis for spent another summer.

"I made myself a promise: even if I meant becoming a stranger to my loved ones, even if it means keeping secrets, I would have a life of my own."¹⁰

Saeed imagines himself in his high school having a girl's body. These were the kinds of women these men wanted to sleep with. He also expresses in his poetry, 'My This Women' the distinction between their bodies and the bodies of their beloved.

Two truths finally coded:

"Being Black can get you Killed

Being gay can get you Killed.

Being a Black gay boy is a death wish."¹¹

And one day, if you're lucky, your life and death will become some artist's new 'Project'.

Saeed occasionally experiences the girl's comforting emotions. They could comfortably breathe and felt at ease enough to cry. When Saeed returned home one day, he discovered his mother smoking a cigarette and 'the older 4 younger' chat room open on her computer. Saeed was chatting with the people in the chat room to find answers to his questions, but his mother had also texted one of them to avoid the wrong people. However, Saeed would also learn about himself from the experience. He also applied for part-time position as a librarian but was rejected. He wished to study exclusively gay literature. His curiosity and desires drove him to

seek out and read gay books, but the books' rarity left him feeling frustrated and nebulous about himself. When his cousin Alex pointed out a man and said that there was a man dressed as a woman, Saeed's feelings toward gay men became extremely oppressed. However, Saeed also felt panicked when he thought his mother was making fun of him. He also pretended to see gay men, and when he did, he was even happier. However, Saeed's glimpses into his life, which he hides from other people, somehow make him shy towards the world.

Saeed and his mother have a unique relationship. She didn't inform him when she fell in the parking space, just when she was too sick. Saeed is preoccupied and deeply concerned for his mother's well being. He shows her far too much love and compassion. Even in a different sense, the fact that her mother advised him against having sex without a condom shows how close-knit and cordial their relationship is. The only person who can really comprehend him is his mother. Even Saeed followed her down in the empty parking space to see whether she was all right before leaving her since, he missed her so much.

His met with different boys of his age and lived with them at a hostel. He came across them, but one thing which haunted him all the time is when he introduced himself to the other guy at the hostel.-

“It shouldn't have been that easy to un become myself. The lies and omissions to roll off my tongue and I got more confidence: I stopped mumbling and shuttering. I began meeting people's eyes, shaking their hands confidently, and introducing a person who I wasn't exactly, all while smiling. It felt good, like the first sip of an ice-cold beer after a long, hot day. I could be this person. I knew exactly how to be him. The kind of man who always feels the need to make it clear he swing that way. Lewisville had raised me well.”¹²

He lives far from his mother, his family. He became aware of his true affections for her. They talk to one another at least once every week. They occasionally only want to hear each other's voices because they care about each other so deeply. It was a burden lifted on him because being gay was actually a strain on his society and also for his mother. He committed never to tell his mother what he hadn't told her. He was ashamed of being gay, although he had not revealed himself to her as a gay man.

“And then I did exactly what I thought all people who love each other do; I changed the subject; I changed myself; I erased everything I had just said; I erased myself so I could be her son again.”¹³

He is worn out from living in one flat with his mother and Knigsley. He enjoys living in Kentucky since he was able to discover his genuine self there amid the tempo of college life. He began his day in the poetry workshop. In the late afternoon he participated in a speech and debate competition. After dinner and the library, he finally found a guy to enjoy and forget about it same night. This was his daily regimen, which he cherished-

“I wasn’t ashamed of my sex life, exactly, but this didn’t feel like enlightenment either, sex was simply what I did between classes or debate practice to get by, or at least buy some time. I buried myself in the bodies of other man so I could feel something other than the depression that was rolling in like a fog bank.”¹⁴

“It felt good to be a secret, waiting to be unearthed.”¹⁵

He was quite good as a child and excellent in his academic pursuits. He texted his mother once a day and called her once a week. He also received the prestigious multiple national titles in speaking. In his first few artistic workshops, he was struggling. Because of his many excursions to the library, when he said he had read Lucille Clifton’s work, he meant that he had read every single volume that was accessible, not just a select few poems. If the university president happened to pass him while crossing Lamphis, he would greet him by name. According to this instruction, he behaved like the bright, dazzling, sparkling model of a college student. However, he managed to control himself into the kind of young man that his mother had always dreamed he would become. His inner heart declares

“None of this had any bearing, though, on how I felt when I was alone. Standing in front of the mirror, my reflection and I were like rival animals just moments away from tearing each other limb from limb.”¹⁶

“This is what I thought it meant to be a man fighting for his life. If America was going to hate me for being black and gay, then I might as well make a weapon out of myself.”¹⁷

His own feelings which he can’t be able to convert with any one tells,

“I tried to read my face but its language was inscrutable. I didn’t look interesting. I didn’t look like a man who was screaming behind his smile. I just looked drunk, stoned and sweaty.”¹⁸

He made friends with a woman named Esther during his journey to Europe. Esther is a few years older than his grandma, but he was able to communicate more easily and warmly with her than he could with his grandmother. After the death of his mother, he spoke with Grandma on

the phone and the relationship grew stronger. Even once, when his grandma told him,” I sure do miss that woman.” He is struck by how heavy her voice is. She speaks with a sorrowful tone in heart. Now, Saeed claims,

“I sure do miss that woman for the first time in years. I wished- I could hug – really hug- my grandmother. I wished mom could have heard the love in her mother’s voice just then.”¹⁹

Saeed constantly beat himself up and regretted being gay. He transforms his anxious, dreary and depressing emotions into more creative ones. He used his free time to read poetry and utilize the paper as a shield and his pen as a weapon.

Jones knew he was gay from a young age, but it took him years to come to terms with who he was and to find the courage to be open about it. His autobiography makes clear that he was acutely aware of how racism, homophobia and discrimination operate in this society and how they taint everything, which made him mindful of the potential repercussions of being an out gay Black guy. The struggle he went through and the journey he took to discover and define his identity following each significant transition are at the core of this book. And it has a wild heart that is bursting with need and that is compelled to share its humanity with everyone.

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