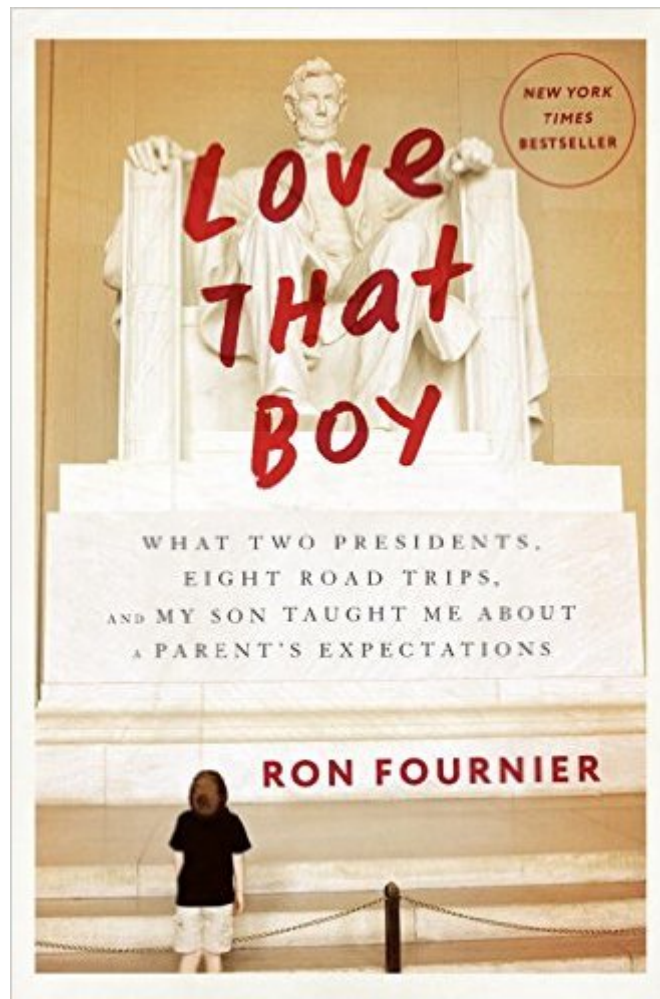


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Love That Boy: What Two Presidents, Eight Road Trips, And My Son Taught Me About A Parent's Expectations



Synopsis

Tyler and I inch toward the Green Room, in line with blow-dried TV anchors and stuffy columnists. Heâ€™s practicing his handshake and hello: â€œItâ€™s a pleasure to meet you, Mr. President. Itâ€™s a pleasure to meet you, Mr. President. Itâ€™s a pleasure to meet you, Mr. President.â€• When the couple in front of us steps forward for their picture, my teenager with sky-blue eyes and a soft heart looks up at me and says, â€œI hope I donâ€™t let you down, Dad.â€• What kind of father raises a son to worry about embarrassing his dad? I want to tell Tyler not to worry, that heâ€™d never let me down. That thereâ€™s nothing wrong with being different. That I actually am proud of what makes him special. But we are next in line to meet the president of the United States in a room filled with fellow strivers, and all I can think about is the real possibility that Tyler might embarrass himself. Or, God forbid, me. LOVE THAT BOY is a uniquely personal story about the causes and costs of outsized parental expectations. What we want for our childrenâ€”popularity, normalcy, achievement, geniusâ€”and what they truly needâ€”grit, empathy, characterâ€”are explored by National Journalâ€™s Ron Fournier, who weaves his extraordinary journey to acceptance around the latest research on childhood development and stories of other loving-but-struggling parents.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Ron Fournier's third child, Tyler, was diagnosed with Aspergers when he was 12-years-old, a late start on the road to treatment that fills Mr. Fournier, a White House reporter and political columnist, with guilt. "You slapped a label on our negligence," he thinks when a doctor finally diagnoses Tyler.

"All the signs we missed or ignored over the years: clumsy, impulsive, loud and no social graces." After the diagnosis, Mr. Fournier's wife suggests that he take Tyler on a trip to visit historical sites dedicated to our nation's presidents, one of Tyler's obsessions. This book follows the father-son travelers on that trip, interspersing personal anecdotes with reportage about parental expectations and disappointment. You don't have to have a child on the autism spectrum to appreciate what Mr. Fournier says about the way parents either consciously or unconsciously harbor high -- and most often unobtainable -- goals and hopes for their children. As Garrison Keillor says in his Lake Wobegon monologues "all the children are above average," a statement that of course is statistically impossible. But we laugh at that line all the same because it takes a swipe at our parental pride. Mr. Fournier's career as a reporter and columnist is clearly evident in this book. It reads like an extended article, his personal story winding through a sea of observations, factual reportage and interviews with other parents. For me, the personal story was the most compelling and my interest flagged when it was interrupted by the other elements in the book. It's as if Mr.

It is an article of faith with me that everyone has a story, and has a right to tell that story in their own way; for those of us who choose to read memoirs, I believe that one's critical response should mainly relate to the success the author has in terms of communicating honestly his or her reality in an effective way. Not being an accredited psychotherapist, I try to refrain from judgmental evaluations. However, when the author's narrative goes beyond personal experience and draws generalizations concerning cultural and sociological issues, this offers different challenges to the reader in terms of response. Ron Fournier's "Love That Boy" bears the somewhat cumbersome subtitle: "What Two Presidents, Eight Road Trips, and My Son Taught Me about a Parent's Expectations." Because unlike Fournier and a number of other parents he referenced in his narrative, I never had "great expectations" for my children's accomplishments, during the early chapters of this book I found myself subliminally responding, "Oh, for Pete's sake, how foolish can you be?" Of course, in a real sense, this was Fournier's basic premise. Throughout the course of what he termed his "Guilt Trips" -- the eight road trips mentioned in his subtitle to visit the presidential libraries of past presidents as well as interviews with Bush and Clinton -- Fournier was trying to make up for what he perceived as his previous neglect of his son prior to Tyler's Asperger's diagnosis. He continuously focuses on his "expectations" that Tyler should be a typical sports-oriented, popular and socially adept kid, with above average intellect and ability to perform in school and achieve a degree from a top-tier college.

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