



There Goes Sunday School

Alexander C. Eberhart

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In sixteen-year-old Mike Hernandez's life, only one thing is clear: Gay is NOT okay. His family's life revolves around the church, a church run by the vocally intolerant Pastor Myers, so Mike has resolved to spend his life in the closet. His only escape—besides the occasional, anonymous gay make-out session—is his art. He pours his complicated emotions into risqué drawings he keeps in a secret sketchbook. A sketchbook he carries everywhere.

When his sketchbook goes missing in the middle of Sunday school, Mike is sure his life is over. He's going to be outed, ostracized by their community, condemned by the pastor, maybe even homeless. What's worse, the pastor's son, Chris, suddenly seems hell-bent on adopting Mike and his friends and he has no idea why.

When an awkward confrontation with Chris leads to an unexpected kiss instead of a much-expected punch, Mike's world is turned upside down. As their friendship grows and faith is questioned, Mike may be forced to choose between the comfortable life he's always lived and a chance at the love he never thought he deserved.

There Goes Sunday School Details

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From Reader Review There Goes Sunday School for online ebook

Aiyana says

A touching -- and somewhat heart-rending -- story about a closeted gay teen and his struggles to survive in a deeply homophobic religious environment. When the startling possibility of love makes its way into his life, his carefully constructed disguise begins to crumble, and he realizes that he can't remain in the closet forever. The protagonist's confusion and fear are all too believable, but so too is his growth as a character, and the story is ultimately one of hope.

Mayara Marinheiro Martinelli says

Olha eu estava pronta para dar um glorioso 4 estrelas para esse livro até o último capítulo que estragou toda a história!

Mike um menino q é gay e tem pais muito religiosos está no armário e perde seu caderno de desenho q tem desenhos comprometedores q podem estragar sua vida se caírem em mãos erradas e ao mesmo tempo q isso acontece o filho do pastor homofóbico da igreja que ele frequente começa a querer ser seu amigo, sabemos logo q foi ele q pegou o caderno e num confronto Chris o beija e aí temos o desenvolvimento da história, os meninos enfrentam o medo de serem descobertos, a culpa religiosa, um pastor violento, homofobia, são expostos na escola por terceiros, um acidente de carro que foi uma tentativa de assassinato cometido pelo próprio pai contrato Chris e são expulsos da escola pra no final o Chris decidir q só pq ele vai mudar pra outra cidade não podem ficar juntos!! Enfrentam a porra de Deus e o mundo e não podem enfrentar 6 horas de viagem estradas boas!! Com toda a tecnologia para a comunicação q existe hj!! Mulheres viajaram para outro lado do mundo para encontrar maridos q elas conheciam na fucking guerra caralho!!! Que final ridículo!! Para o Chris no fim achar um namorado q nunca apareceu na história e o outro se interessar por um personagem secundário!!!

Andrea says

I loved this book, so much more than I thought I would. I mean, the blurb was intriguing enough that I knew I would enjoy it, but I wasn't prepared for the easy connection and the emotional roller coaster. I don't often literally LOL when reading many books, but this one definitely had me laughing out loud. I even got choked up at times. I felt the anger and frustration. And I could share in the joys.

Clearly I am not a closeted male teenager, but I have many friends who are LGBT and vividly remember them going through a lot of similar situations back when we were in college. I have personally dealt with the hypocrisy of many churches, including stints with some of the fundamentalist types. I have had some of the same thoughts and conversations on different levels. I think that perhaps even without those experiences, this book was so well-written and got so deep into Mike's head and personality, that a lot of people are going to find a way to relate to it.

This book is not going to be everybody's cup of tea. Not everyone is going to like all of the directions it takes. But I think it is well worth the read and is actually quite realistic. Perhaps it could open up a few minds and lead to some important conversations.

I received a complimentary copy of this book in exchange for my honest review.

jazmin says

I did really like this book but I'm not a fan of the ending at all ugh

Carra says

While I don't read a lot of young adult stories, every now and then one will come along with a blurb enticing enough to pique my interest. That was the case with *There Goes Sunday School*—something I was surprised by since I tend to keep away from books where religion plays a significant part. But the premise of this story, and the thought that with the pastor's son involved someone might get their due, I didn't want to pass this one up.

If you like books that really show the conflict and confusion of characters who are exploring their sexuality, you've definitely found the right book. The author does a fantastic job at showing Mike's struggle with what he's been taught to believe, and what he feels in his heart and head. It came across as a realistic portrayal of what teens go through, with Mike's internal battle and his legitimate worries about his family, friends and church. I was even more intrigued by the views Chris had (considering his current thoughts on the subject of religion align closely with my own).

I liked Mike's closest friends well enough, though I was not a fan of the overly casual drug use among them. I was also a fan of Mike's sister and how supportive she was, as well as Chris's mother.

This was a great coming of age story, an exploration of one's sexuality, and falling for someone for the first time. It was a 4.5-star read for me, and I'd definitely recommend it. While it is classified as young adult, I'd caution that with some sexual content, profanity, and the drug use that this should be for ages 16+, and I'd consider it more of a mature young adult story. And while I might have been personally disappointed at part of the ending, it really is an accurate representation of how things go with those first loves.

Ash Rocketship says

This was a charming enough read with fun, if not particularly complex characters. I think this is probably a book written for the kids and young adults who really need it -- ones who are dealing with similar religious and sexuality conflict -- and is maybe just a little too heavy-handed for the ones that don't. I never had any of that conflict (I mean never, none, absolutely zero) so while I understood and empathized with Mike and Chris' pain and anxiety, it didn't resonate the way I think Eberhart really wants it to. This has a pretty emotionally satisfying resolution with a... sort of weird climax that I wasn't expecting, and a hopeful ending, but the writing was a little bland and juvenile for my tastes and I got so tired of Mike nervous-stuttering that I developed a reflexive eye roll, but no read is a waste! Also I know that this book is going to bring some real comfort to readers who need it and that always makes me really happy.

Peter Wright says

This was a wonderful book to read. I grew up in a very Christian household, expected to attend church every weekend. I was the one that hid the latest novel I was reading inside the leather cover I bought for my bible and read it while hiding up in the balcony of my church during the service. I then went to a Christian college where I struggled with what my faith says about my sexuality. So yeah... this book really felt like a look at my life. Except I'm not a great visual artist like Mike (I'm a writer, not a drawer), I'm probably not nearly as good looking as he is (nor was I in high school) and it took me a LOT longer to feel more comfortable about being gay.

There was a lot I enjoyed about this book - the references to church-related things, the well constructed characters, the story. The writing was the kind that draws a reader in easily. There was a lot of humor and sweet moments that made me think, I-swear-I'm-not-going-to-cry.

The only complaint I had about the book was how sometimes the characters felt too confident. These are teenagers and most teenagers don't have things so neatly figured out. Of course, the gay characters go through a lot, and there are moments of doubt that they go through, but most of them seem to have everything figured out. Yes, lots of teens ACT like that, but in reality they don't have much of anything truly figured out. Far too often, these characters felt like everything was working out for them too neatly - even the gay characters. Sometimes, the gay kids felt like they were confident in the sexuality, but then they wouldn't be. It was slightly inconsistent for me, but not enough to make this a bad book - NOT BY A LONG SHOT! Another minor complaint was the way characters would make pop culture references that in reality they probably wouldn't make. Have teens in 2018 actually seen the movie American Psycho? Probably not.

I swear, I loved this book! I really did! I think Alexander Eberhart is a fantastic writer and I look forward to reading all of his books.

Ulysses Dietz says

There Goes Sunday School
By Alexander C. Eberhart
Seven Sisters Publishing, 2018
Five stars

“The flowers are in bright contrast to the dark background.”

This line brought tears to my eyes when I read it, and to understand why, you need to read this beautiful novel about a teen boy's coming out in a conservative Christian community in today's America. By the time I got to this line, which could seem to be a random bit of description of a hipster coffee shop in Atlanta, Alexander Eberhart's careful, deft writing had captured me, heart and soul. This is a book where I laughed out loud—when my eyes weren't burning. There are no accidents here, and Eberhart's sure hand keeps the narrative moving forward quickly, even as he hooks you with carefully placed lines that draw you back to the unsolvable dilemma that Michael Hernandez faces in his life.

Michael is a half-Mexican sixteen-year-old, the middle child of an affluent family in the outer suburbs of Atlanta's sprawl. It is clear he is much loved, and his relationship with his parents is warm; but Michael feels

his parents' love is conditional, based on their continued ignorance of his gayness.

As in all YA stories, Mike has two sassy best friends, Jackie and Tanner, who attend both his conservative Christian church and the expensive private Christian academy where they are classmates. Jackie and Tanner are rebels, but they're also straight, so they can afford to be. Mike loves them, but assumes that they, too, love him back only so far as they are ignorant of who he truly is.

Then Chris Myers enters the scene. The son of Mike's fire-and-brimstone pastor, he surprises everybody who assumes that the Pastor's Kid is automatically endowed with a bulletproof faith. As Mike finds himself drawn to this smart, funny, troubled boy, he finds his own carefully-built chamber of secrets threatened. He has no faith in the love of those around him for his gay self.

"There are no happy endings for me, not with Chris, not with anyone. Abominations don't get those, do they?"

This is not a short book, but it kept me on the edge of my seat throughout. The greatest surprise of all is that, in the end, it is Christian love that wins out. Eberhart has given us a book where modern Conservative Christianity's mistakes are not used as a means to dismiss its fundamental truth: God is love. Eberhart achieves something important and necessary in this book, and he does it with literary flare and emotional maturity.

Bob Silverstein says

This is a true but tragic depiction of how gay kids, even today, face bigotry and hatred, especially from the so-called 'Christian' community for being who they are and who they love, and how it affects their mental well-being. In the story, Mike sums up the Christian hypocrisy in his face-off with his Christian school principal when he says, "I'm referring to the very same book that condemns homosexuality in the Bible. They go on to say a whole lot of things are 'abominations' including, eating shellfish, wearing jewelry, cutting your hair, getting a tattoo, and harvesting honey. Why is this one thing different?"

I'm always surprised when an author invests his time to write a quality piece of work and then doesn't bother to give that work a going over to make sure it's as perfect as it can be. In the book's Acknowledgment, the author says the book has gone through "a final round of edits". He needs a new editor. There are literally dozens of instances of missing words, misspellings and scrambled word order. Call me a grammar Nazi if you want. It's my pet peeve.

So, great story but one star off for poor editing.

If anyone is interested in reading more 'gay .vs religion' stories, I highly recommend Mason Dodd's two powerful interconnected books, "Aaron's Story" and "Braden's Story". (Read them in this order.)

Caroline says

WOW, this book was soooo much more than I expected. It was so full of emotion I was laughing one minute

and a sobbing mess the next. This really was a beautiful story of young first love, teenagers trying to be teenagers within a very religiously strict community. The storyline is focused on the emotions of the characters, their psychological challenges, their feels, the result is an amazing book.

Coming to terms with your sexuality is hard for everyone but being gay in a community that refers to you as an abomination could be nothing more than horrendous. Mike and Chris have both been struggling alone, even after they find the other is experiencing similar confusion they still struggle with what is right and wrong.

Reviewed for Amo's Book Corner.

I received a copy of this book in return for an honest review.

NeverTooManyBooks says

I should have hated this book.

I've been known to lament long and loud about books that drag you through all the angst and drama, then fail to reward you with an appropriately solid HEA. And *There Goes Sunday School*'s ending would best be described as hopeful, rather than happily ever after.

And, if the name didn't make it clear, it's about growing up gay in a conservative religious home and community, and my previous experiences in this particular reading sphere have left me wary of dull, heavy handed and often depressive novels that are about as subtle as a brick, generally don't speak to me, and aren't my cup of tea.

But this book....this book. I loved EVERY SINGLE THING about this book.

The writing throughout was superb. It could easily have been a sympathetic tear-jerker of a novel, but instead of travelling alongside Mike and feeling *for* him, we travelled *with* him on his journey.

And yes, to be a bit harsh, the teenage characters were at times ineloquent, short-sighted and melodramatic whingers, but frankly this was part of what made this novel full of win. They felt REAL. In a way you rarely find in Book Teens™.

I even loved the non-HEA ending.

In fact, my one and only complaint was a few instances of said teens having those awesome snarky comebacks immediately to hand, in the way you often find in Book Teens™ but much less often in real teens. But it was well tempered with dozens more instances that resonated perfectly.

This is the kind of book that makes you want to be able to give six stars out of five. Go forth and read, my friends, this one will treat you well.

Additional goodness:

If you do enjoy it (and are of an age to be reading on-page sex), try *Collide* by J.R. Lenk. It's like the slightly

grittier, slightly more grown-up relative of this book. It's similar in tone, minus the religious aspect, and another six star read I adored.

Happy reading!

Michael says

A solid coming out story set in the south which is really a testament to the strengths and failings of family and friendship. Mike and Chris are unlikely to find happiness in their very religious families and in the Christian school they go to, but they won't let that stop them, will they?

It is well written, with great characters people can relate to and care about. I wanted to see novels written about Jackie and Tanner, the best friends, and of Davy the swimmer/barista.

This takes a potentially unrealistic turn near the end with Chris' dad, showing us extreme homophobia in one of its forms, but it serves as a plot point and we get it. It might have been out of left field in that there were no other scenes like that in the book to make it a realistic choice.

I like how it wraps up for us. It's a nice read about finding yourself and sticking to it despite obstacles and tragedy. It's about finding love in friends, chosen family, and making peace with your bio family.

Laura Hernandez (TheVoluptuousBkDiva/YABkDivas) says

This read about coming to terms with one's sexuality had me laughing at times and crying at others and boy did I cry!!! The author's writing style had me relating to the storyline and the beautiful characters as the struggles were realistic.

{I requested a copy for reviewing purposes and made no guarantee of a favorable review. The opinions expressed herein are unbiased and my own.}

Martina McAtee says

This is one of my favorite books ever. Even though the book was about a boy coming to terms with his sexuality and faith it was actually so weirdly relatable. I laughed out loud and sobbed during some points. Such a great book!

Michelle says

There Goes Sunday School is a relevant and poignant story about two boys' first real love in a conservative Christian community. For years, Mike has been unable to truly own and celebrate the truth about himself—that he's gay. Now, at 16, he's surrounded more than ever by violent sermons of damnation and questions

about his faith.

This isn't just a story about a boy coming out; it's a story about exploring the role faith plays in accepting yourself, your relationships with others, and the way the world accepts (or rejects) you. Mike is truly needed in LGBT YA- for all the fact that he's fictional, he represents such a real group of young men and women who live in states, communities, families where being who they are is something nerve-wracking and dangerous.

Mike and Chris have an adorable chemistry, and the way they fumble through their feelings for each other is something that all YA readers can relate to regardless of sexuality. They joke around with each other, sneak the occasional drink or joint with friends, they have adventures where they explore new places and people watch. In short, they're just real teens.

Chris is very sweet, and I found him easy to like. He's truly got a good heart, and his dream is the same as most people- to just love and honor who he truly is inside. Growing up in an even more dangerous situation than Mike, he's very secure in what he wants for himself, and I really admire the bravery that he has to make that happen.

Mike is a bit snarky, and there were so many times that I just wanted to reach into the book and give him a hug. For every ounce of Chris's bravery, Mike is just as scared. He's lost, and there are some beautiful moments where he starts to find his way through his relationship with Chris and how Chris challenges him.

For me, 400 pages flew by; I couldn't believe how quickly I devoured the book. There Goes Sunday School is so rich in themes, and I love how one book can approach so many difficult topics- religion, love, sexuality, fear, identity- in a way where you're not just being entertained by a story, but you're also being challenged to think about lives that are different from your own.

I'd love to see what Eberhart works on next.
