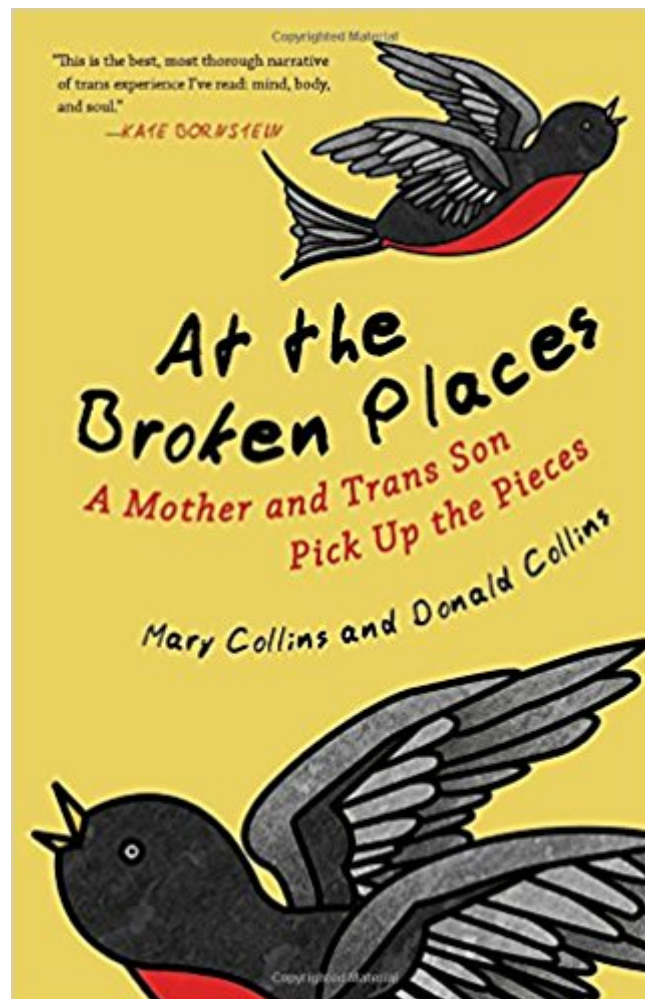


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# At The Broken Places: A Mother And Trans Son Pick Up The Pieces (Queer Action/Queer Ideas, A Unique Series Addressing Pivotal Issues Within The Lgbtq Movement)





## Synopsis

In this collaborative memoir, a parent and a transgender son recount wrestling with their differences as Donald Collins undertook medical-treatment options to better align his body with his gender identity. As a parent, Mary Collins didn't agree with her trans son's decision to physically alter his body, although she supported his right to realize himself as a person. Raw and uncensored, each explains her or his emotional mindset at the time: Mary felt she had lost a daughter; Donald activated his "authentic self." Both battled to assert their rights. A powerful memoir and resource, *At the Broken Places* offers a road map for families in transition.

## Book Information

Series: Queer Action/Queer Ideas, a Unique Series Addressing Pivotal Issues Within the Lgbtq Movement

Paperback: 192 pages

Publisher: Beacon Press (April 25, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0807088358

ISBN-13: 978-0807088357

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.6 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 7 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 8 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #292,124 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #55 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Specific Groups > LGBT > Transgender #112 in Books > Gay & Lesbian > Parenting & Families #122 in Books > Gay & Lesbian > Nonfiction > Transgender

## Customer Reviews

"[An] affecting joint memoir...The book is an altogether invaluable and accessible addition to the growing body of transgender literature." •Booklist  
"A practical resource guide for families who have a transgender child in the mix." •Bay Area Reporter  
"The book is frank, informative, and makes an argument not necessarily for radical acceptance but the simple act of sitting down and having a conversation." •Nina MacLaughlin, *The Boston Globe*  
"When one person in the family transitions, everyone transitions. *At the Broken Places* is a profoundly vulnerable and brave account of a son struggling to be seen by his mother, and a mother learning to see her child as he sees himself. A necessary and beautiful book." •Jill Soloway, creator of *Transparent*  
"This is the best, most

thorough narrative of trans experience I've read: mind, body, and soul. The two conflicting points of view expand the reader's consciousness, placing us smack dab in the middle of the heart of it all. And the heart of it all is the model of two people who, despite deep disagreements, maintain love and respect for one another.

•Kate Bornstein, author of *A Queer and Pleasant Danger* and *Gender Outlaw*

•"An insightful resource for families, educators, and mentors, *At the Broken Places* illuminates the daily stress of figuring out where one fits, and how to get the world to see you as you see yourself."

•Robin McHaelen, executive director, True Colors: Sexual Minority Youth and Family Services

Mary Collins worked for twenty years as a freelance writer and editor for a range of clients, including the National Geographic Society and Smithsonian Institution. She is currently a professor of nonfiction at Central Connecticut State University. Donald Collins is a trans advocate, writer, and recent cum laude graduate of Emerson College. His culture and commentary writing has appeared in *PopMatters*, *Salon*, and *Next Magazine*, among others.

Extremely well written from the perspective of both the son, Donald and the mother, Mary. I plan to buy two copies for my daughter's high school library: one for the students and one for parents. We all have so much to learn.

From a mother who is trying to learn and understand my son's recent journey into womanhood, I particularly liked both perspectives presented in the book.

Well written and thought provoking.

A MUST HAVE in any GLBTQ or counselor's library, *At the Broken Places* is much more than informative. *At the Broken Places*; subtitled *A Mother and Trans Son Pick Up the Pieces*; is a true dialog between Mary Collins, a single mother losing her beloved daughter, and Donald Collins almost losing his family as he searches to become who he was meant to be. Mary and Donald are able to renew their relationship, but only through much pain relived as they collaborated on this book. The resulting book allows emotion to flow through and pain to be expressed. The ongoing theme throughout the book is the pain of being shut-out or shut-down. Being trans is misunderstood by many people, including by transsexuals. Transsexuality does not need to be binary, yet it is often assumed to be translated as transitioning from male to female or female to male. Anyone who is not

on such a path gets shut out of support groups and medical help. I did not know this, and I assume that most counselors share that knowledge. Parents are supposed to offer “unconditional love and support” without space to grieve the loss of the girl or boy they have loved for decades. Or if you mention fears for the youth or adult child due to a history of violence against transgender people or fear the side effects of the treatments or medication you are shut down as setting up barriers and/or being homophobic. A difficulty seems to be a rigid view of sexuality as binary combined with a US cultural imperative to support the individual rather than the community or family. When you view things as a binary, you are stuck in dichotomies. One side must be wrong in order for the other side to be right. Individuals are supported as the myth of rugged individuality still permeates our culture. The neglected family units cause the difficulties for young people attempting to transition to mount out of control. The family, especially protective parents, could shift their focus from having to self-educate with no resources, to crashing through the “gateways” the medical and governmental cultures set in their way. The parents have the experience to do so if they are allowed to express themselves and get true information about the processes. Having a child turn 16 does not stop a mother from caring about her child and the child should be encouraged to let the parent be involved, even if the parent is no longer in control. I get the feeling that the suicide rate might go down if youths were not encouraged to take control of their lives without support the family could give. But the suicide and violent death rates are horrendous, so any help would be good.

This book takes up one of the last marginalized groups in the world. The depth of their separate and mutual pain is explored in alternating chapters. I found the writing superb with multiple underlined explanations but more importantly expressions of lost and gains as Donald fulfills his gender identity. The inclusion of other parent stories and others going through the struggle of becoming who they believe they are meant to be and their families and friends makes their own story more powerful and yet unique because no one shares all the elements of this transformation. It teaches as well as informs.

The most comprehensive layout of the intricacies of today's Transgender experience. The Collins' offer up their beautiful and ugly truths, giving readers a staggeringly honest look at the complexity of their still developing relationship.

Part memoir, part essay, part handbook, this candid mother / son exchange provides an intimate

portrait of the challenges, confusion, and triumphs many trans individuals and their families experience. Mary and Donald Collins' writing is clear and vivid. Highly recommended.

What a beautifully honest and enlightening book. A must read.

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