



Starting from Here

Lisa Jenn Bigelow

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Sixteen-year-old Colby Bingham's heart has been broken too many times. Her mother has been dead for almost two years, her truck driver father is always away, her almost girlfriend just dumped her for a guy, and now she's failing chemistry.

When a stray dog lands literally at her feet, bleeding and broken on a busy road, it seems like the Universe has it in for Colby. But the incident also knocks a chink in the walls she's built around her heart. Against her better judgment, she decides to care for the dog. But new connections mean new opportunities for heartbreak.

Terrified of another loss, Colby bolts at the first sign of trouble, managing to alienate her best friend, her father, the cute girl pursuing her, and even her dog's vet, who's taken Colby under her wing. Colby can't start over, but can she learn how to move on?

Starting from Here Details

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From Reader Review Starting from Here for online ebook

Teen & Young Adult Zone says

Teen Review

Genre: Romance/Family

Summary:

Colby find a stray dog near her house and through him she learns how to open herself up to new relationships and opportunities.

Review:

This book was very relatable and well-written. It focused on a lot of different issues and was an overall very satisfying book. The characters were very diverse and I thoroughly enjoyed reading it.

People might like this book if they liked:

The Miseducation of Cameron Post by Emily M. Danforth

Reviewed by Bethany

Kat (Lost in Neverland) says

Happiness happy ending of happy level at:

Corny.

After a sudden break-up with her first girlfriend, Colby Bingham is devastated to find out that the same girl she had loved for months dumped her for a boy.

Colby's still dealing with the loss of her mother from cancer two years earlier and the fact that her father is never around because of his job. When she witnesses a dog being hit by a car because of her own actions, Colby and her 'best buddy' Van rush off to the animal hospital to save him. The dog loses his leg but is fine otherwise. Colby instantly falls in love with the stray's 'cow coloring' and deep brown puppydog eyes and claims him as her own, even though she's already poor enough as it is.

The kind veterinarian who did the surgery for free offers to help Colby with training Mo (the dog).

But after having her heart broken twice, first with the death of her mom and then with the girl she thought loved her, Colby isn't keen on getting close to anyone. And that includes her own father, who she still hasn't come out to, or the cute and friendly girl who wants to get to know her.

It's always refreshing to read a book with characters you haven't read the perspective from in most common YA novels. A female gay main character and love interest?

It was certainly a new *experience* ~~Am I blushing? No, that's not blushing. I just rubbed an apple on my cheeks, that's all~~ and a very realistic approach to teen sexuality and culture nowadays; Not everyone's rich or have a nice house. Not everyone is straight. Everyone has sudden sexual thoughts and urges. And everyone loves a cute dog story.

When it's well done, at least.

Good beginning, incredibly slow middle, entertaining but corny ending.
The writing was alright and the story had too much of a happy, everyone-gets-what-they-want-yay! ending.
Maybe that's just me, but I can't stand endings like that.

(view spoiler)

It goes a little like this; Happy happy happy and everything works out!

That. Doesn't. Always. Happen.

This story seriously made me realize how utterly depressing I make my own stories. I just kill off most of my characters (not because I don't feel like writing them but I just can't help it) and leave the character horrifically and sadly alone.

~~Not to mention I always kill off my love interests for some reason. I guess I just either hate love interests or love making my characters miserable.~~

Hehehehe...

However, if you're looking for a happy book with a realistic (kind of) story about how modern gay teenagers deal with relationships, life, coming out to parents, anxiety, etc., then pick up this book.

Though I will warn you, the plot is very, very, slow in the middle, and the ending is so cute and perfect, you might just vomit rainbows and sparkles.

Liviania says

Lisa Jenn Bigelow's debut is the story of Colby Bingham, an independent senior high school student struggling to connect to her family, friends, and girlfriends. She's still reeling from the death of her mother, two years ago, and doesn't feel like she can talk to her father, a trucker who is rarely home.

She has people in her life who would love to help her. There's her best friend, Van, who is practically her brother. The teacher in charge of the school's GSA often tries to check in with her. When she takes in a stray,

the local vet takes Colby under her wing. But Colby can't seem to keep herself from pushing her people away instead of just letting them care for her.

STARTING FROM HERE is the type of story that can easily get frustrating. But Bigelow writes Colby with a great deal of empathy. You can see what she's thinking and why. Colby's decisions are reasonable from her point of view, even when they're remarkably stupid decisions. And honestly, what teenager hasn't made stupid decisions, especially in the absence of adult supervision.

The romance is integral to the story, but those just looking for romance might be disappointed in STARTING FROM HERE. The book begins with Colby's closeted girlfriend Rachel dumping her - and immediately palling around school with her new boyfriend. Colby's hurt, insulted, and unfortunately still in love. When she meets someone new who is definitely interested, she's not sure if she's ready for another relationship - particularly since her crush isn't out to her (religious) parents. Of course, Colby may be out and proud and school but she's not out to her father either.

I really enjoyed STARTING FROM HERE. It's a fantastic contemporary that delves deep into the life of its protagonist. It deals with grief and heartbreak, but it's ultimately optimistic - if you can't tell from the title. It tackles complicated issues in complicated ways, and throws in a sweet three-legged dog for good measure. I suspect it will appeal to fans of Laurie Halse Anderson.

Kelly says

This was really sweet!

Colby's girlfriend Rachel just broke up with her, and to make matters worse, Rachel's already found herself a boyfriend. Colby wants to avoid Rachel now, and she does so by spending as much time with best friend Van as she can, while also avoiding ally meetings. One afternoon while out with Van, a stray dog wanders toward them, and when the dog becomes spooked, he's hit by an oncoming car. It's then Colby knows she needs to take this dog under her care, even if it means telling a few lies.

Bigelow's debut is a novel about relationships -- about the relationships between people, especially family and friends, and the relationships between humans and animals. Colby is a lesbian, and there's a sweet romance that buds between her and another girl. But it's not an easy relationship. Colby isn't necessarily a sympathetic character; at times, she's completely selfish, she tells lies, and she uses a lot of excuses to get out of responsibilities she has (to herself and to other people). The relationship between Colby and her father is fantastic, even if it's not easy. It's not easy because neither Colby nor her father are easy people. Both have things they want, and both realize there are things they need to do in order to succeed for themselves as individuals as themselves as a family without mom. The grief sits heavy between them, but it never defines their relationship.

One of the big elements of the story I loved was that Colby comes from a lower class family. She lives in a trailer, and her friends do not. But this is never, ever a big deal. Colby likes that her friends live in houses, but it's never a thing pointed out to readers. It's just reality; it's just how these people live and interact. It doesn't define them as one thing or another (as in, Colby CAN interact and befriend people who have more money and it's not a big deal).

This book is sweet without being saccharine. It's a fairly clean read (there's one scene between the girls

where Colby mentions that Amelia put her mouth in a place no other girl had had her mouth) and I'd be comfortable handing it to younger teen readers. But because there is so much here, it's a book older teen readers will enjoy, too.

My only reservation is that at times, it felt like there were a few info dumps, especially in regards to the death of Colby's mother. But those spots are not too lengthy, and because the book itself has a swift pace, it's not a deal breaker.

Pair this one with Michael Northrop's *Rotten* for the obvious: a relationship between a teen and their new pet dog. But there's also a LOT of interesting parallels where it comes to social class, family relationships, and more. Although the voice isn't as strong and although there aren't as many hurdles to jump in terms of acceptance of Colby's sexuality, I can see readers who enjoyed this book also enjoying Kirstin Cronn-Mills's *The Sky Always Hears Me*.

Joseph says

Review on my blog!

Heidi says

Short, sweet and very heartfelt YA. It's your basic coming-of-age type story - angsty teenager dealing with friends, family, school, romance - but with an LGBT angle (and not just the main character - her best friend also is gay, and her group of friends forms their school's gay/straight alliance - so lots of opportunity to explore LGBT youth issues). The story touches on a lot of other issues, too, like class/money and the death of a parent.

In short, Colby, the main character, is struggling with a whole mess of things (schoolwork, regular work, her mother's death from cancer, her mostly absent father, the girl who dumped her for a guy), and then she adopts this stray dog and her transformational love for Mr. Mutt becomes a catalyst for/lens through which she sees everything else happening in her life. It's a quick but worthy read, and Colby is a wonderful character. I really wish there had been more LGBT stories like this when I was her age.

Arminzerella says

When Colby's mother passed away (cancer), she left a hole that couldn't be filled. Colby's father dealt with his grief by taking responsibility - he took a job as a cross-country trucker - to support his remaining family (Colby). And Colby was left alone in their tiny trailer. The alternative - living with her aunt while her dad was away - was impossible (they did NOT get along). Not an ideal situation, but Colby was able to deal with it because she had a great girlfriend (Rachel), a great best friend (Van), was involved in her school's very active and supportive LGBT Alliance group, and was holding out the hope that her dad would (some day) take a job that allowed him to stay home with her. When Rachel breaks up with her, and Colby cuts all of their common social ties, it doesn't leave her many opportunities to spend time with her friends. Then her dad says he's going to buy his own rig - which means he doesn't EVER intend to fully commit to being her dad. Colby's grades are dropping, and she just doesn't care. Things are going to get much worse before they

get better, but at least Colby has Mo – the dog she and Van rescue after Mo is hit by a car.

Colby is a bit prickly (she has good reason to be), but she's absolutely devoted to Mo and Van, and the other people she loves. She makes a lot of mistakes, too, but her heart is in the right place, and she's not afraid to eat humble pie when the occasion warrants it. I liked the characters in this book, and although Colby is gay, this isn't just a book about coming out. That's just one element. This is also about dealing with grief and family problems, and falling in love, and being a responsible dog owner, and making new friends, and moving on. Lovely, and a fast read.

Cass says

I won a copy of this book in a First Reads giveaway.

Review originally posted on my blog.

I broke one of my very strict reading rules by entering the giveaway for this book. The blurb for *Starting From Here* starts off with:

Sixteen-year-old Colby Bingham's heart has been broken too many times. Her mother is dead, her truck driver father is always away, and her almost girlfriend just dumped her for a guy.

Normally any mention of a) a dead mom, b) a newly straight ex-girlfriend and, to a lesser extent, c) an absent dad, is enough to send me running for the hills. Or clicking over to a different book page on Goodreads. You know, whatever fits the circumstances. I'm the girl who gets text messages from friends letting me know when the books they are reading contain any mention of Mom Death (MD), even if I've never mentioned any intent to read those books. You could say that I'm a bit more sensitive about that topic than your average Jill.

Based on that, I probably should have passed on this little book. The thing was, uh, I really liked the cover? (I have the best reasons for choosing books.) So I entered the giveaway and I won and I read it and, luckily, I only cried a little.

There is a lot more to Colby's story than the death of her mother—I'll get to that in a minute—but I want to talk a bit about the way that loss is presented in this book. The struggle with the grief and absolute awfulness of losing your mother as a teenager as described in *Starting From Here* is amazingly realistic and honest. For instance, Colby didn't come out to her mother before she died, and when Colby has this conversation after she starts to date a new girl:

“Well, congratulations, Colby. You deserve a nice girl.”

“A nice girl,” I repeated. “Who are you, my mother?”

The words just slipped out, and I felt a little jolt in my gut, like an elevator dropping two inches. I wanted to believe that Mom would like Amelia. I wanted to believe she'd be cheering for me, too. But I didn't know—and I never would. (p. 185)

I maaaaay have teared up a bit there. The mentions of her mom and the pain of missing her were the highlight of the novel for me, partly because they bear a resemblance to my own experience, but mostly because they capture those emotions so well.

The real focus of *Starting From Here* is Colby's relationships with her father, who is absent most days of the week for his long-distance trucking job, and Mo, a stray dog she adopts after she saves him when Mo is hit by a car. Through taking care of Mo, Colby begins the healing process and meets her new love interest, Amelia. Colby's best friend, Van, is struggling with being a constant baby-sitter for his nephew and trying to have a social life. The Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) at Colby's school is planning a dance. Oh, and Colby also has a complicated friendship with the local veterinarian, who has marital problems.

Needless to say, there's a lot going on here, and it takes away from the best parts of the book: the handling of grief after Colby's mom's death, father/daughter relationships, and Colby's rediscovery of herself through Max and Amelia and Van. The writing is stilted at points and sometimes reminded me of the writing you might find in an early 1990s YA book, but overall, I was satisfied and glad I took a chance on a book with the dreaded Mom Death.

Grade: B

Recommended: Particularly for the deft handling of Post-MD emotions, but also as a solid YA novel with a variety of LGBT characters. Oh, and there's an endearing dog who doesn't die.

siyao says

i thought a novel about a gay girl adopting a three legged dog and becoming a vet's mentee/daughter figure would resonate more with me but it was just. nice. that's all.

Dahlia says

This was cute. I think there was too much time dedicated to the romance Colby couldn't get over and not enough to the new one, but there was a lot of sweet stuff in here, a lot of queer representation, a good "mom substitute" subplot, and a pretty damn cute 3-legged dog.

anna (readingpeaches) says

3.5 ?

listen i wanted a cute gay contemporary romance & that's exactly what i got!! with a proper amount of angsts, two girls being adorable and flirting, some family drama and teen drama, and a DOG mixed in.

Kayla Eklund says

Starting From Here is a great LGBT novel. The novel accurately portrays what it's like to be an LGBT high school student. I could definitely relate a lot to Colby. We went through a lot of similar situations in our high school careers. I thought it was cool that her school had an LGBT alliance. I wish that my school would have had one when I was in high school. It would have made things a lot easier. I felt a lot of pity for Colby. The only thing that seemed to be going right for her was her best friend Van. That was until she found Moe. Moe was her turning point. She became a lot happier. Towards the middle/ending of the novel, she became a selfish brat which quickly became annoying. I'm glad her attitude ended fairly quickly. Her attitude improved in the end, and mostly everything worked out for her. My favorite character was Van. He was kind, loving, sweet and funny. Colby was blessed to have a great best friend. I was glad Colby ended up with who she ended up with in the end. She needs someone that will treat her great. I will definitely read more of the author's work in the future. I think everyone should read this book so they can grasp what it's like to be different from everyone else.

Sissy Van Dyke says

The thing I liked most about this book is the same thing that I liked least: it was an accurate depiction of what it is like to fall in love, come out, and be rejected in high school. This book brought me back the angst and excitement of my own high school coming out experiences.

Colby had three advantages that I didn't in high school: 1) A truck, 2) A most excellent friend: Van, and 3) an unconditionally loving dog: Mo. She also has a great father who provides the added benefit of leaving her alone for days at a time (if only!).

I really enjoyed this book, and I think it was a wonderful first novel - the first of many, I hope!

Karyl says

Really fabulous coming-of-age story. Colby is a high school junior whose mother died of cancer, and whose father is always gone, working as a trucker. She thinks she is in love with Rachel, who has recently dumped her for a boy. In the midst of all this pain, she rescues a dog that has been hit by a car and is gravely injured, though she feels inside just as broken as her dog had been. The novel focuses on Colby's growing up, on her finally starting to let people in, and to be open and honest about who she is and what she needs. I enjoyed the fact that while most of the teen characters were gay, it was just another descriptor, like the fact that Amelia has hazel eyes. And it was heartening to read a novel in which the teens are strong enough to be out. Maybe things are getting better, maybe people are becoming less mean. One can hope.

Highly recommended.

Maureen Connelly says

Colby was such a sympathetic figure. How could you not love someone who takes care of a stray? She makes plenty of mistakes, but she learns important lessons by the end.
