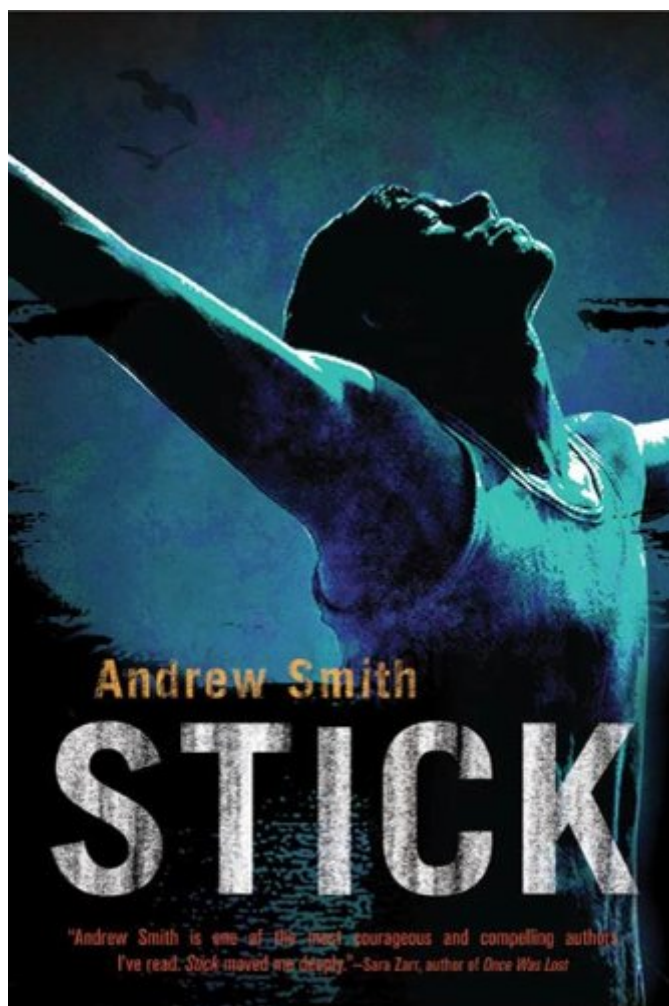


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Stick: A Novel



Synopsis

Fourteen-year-old Stark McClellan (nicknamed Stick because he's tall and thin) is bullied for being "deformed" — he was born with only one ear. His older brother Bosten is always there to defend Stick. But the boys can't defend one another from their abusive parents. When Stick realizes Bosten is gay, he knows that to survive his father's anger, Bosten must leave home. Stick has to find his brother, or he will never feel whole again. In his search, he will encounter good people, bad people, and people who are simply indifferent to kids from the wrong side of the tracks. But he never loses hope of finding love — and his brother.

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Customer Reviews

This book was so good, I was doing my Lamaze breathing during some parts because they were exquisitely written, yet incredibly painful and dark. This book will haunt me for a long time, but that's okay because I've never read anything quite like it. The characters are so well-formed, my heart so invested in their actions, I so desperately wanted to meet them and hug or stab them,

accordingly. Stark's devotion to his brother and his determination to navigate through the hell of his life, while at the same time hating himself so intently, made my heart feel like an anchor while I read. I wanted Stark to be saved. I wanted him to thrive. I wanted him to love. This is a tale of the ugliest and most beautiful moments in life wrapped up in one 13 year old boy, and it's incredible. Everyone should read this book, it's life-altering.

Some books bitchslap you with sentimentality, some punch you in the boobs with longing and heartbreak, some books feel like a good one-night stand that leaves you with the disgusting aftertaste of regret, self-loathing and the fear of herpes... okay, I think I'm getting sidetracked now... and some books hurt you in places you didn't know could hurt while lying in bed reading by yourself. The blurb is pretty upfront, and true enough, this was not an easy read. I really thought I was going to DNF this at 15%. I've NEVER DNF-ed a book just for being too much. And I've read my share of too much. In truth, what Stick and Bosten went through, the abuse and the violence that went on inside and outside that house, usually puts me off. Because more often than not, I feel like I'm being emotionally manipulated into crying (I'm looking at you, Reason to Breathe). But placing this in the context of a deformed thirteen year old boy dealing with the complexity of puberty and the terrifying changes that comes with it, layered with the simplicity of his relationship with his brother... It worked. The first half of Stick portrayed the lives of the McClellan brothers in Point No Point, Washington through the eyes of Stark "Stick" McClellan and his brother Bosten. Stick has one ear, one best friend (Emily) and a lot of abuse thrown his way. His brother, Bosten keep the wolves in school at bay but when they're home, there's no one between them, their parents and St. Fillan's Room. Their father may have beaten them into believing they are less than who they are, that this was the norm in every household, but they still got each other. The second half deals with the aftermath of Bosten running away from home after their father found out that he's gay. Stick embarks on a lonesome roadtrip as he tracks his brother back to California, the place where they learned that kindness and love didn't come with rules and punishments through their Aunt Dahlia. I may have to admit into liking the first half better than the last despite the persistent twig branch I had in my eye while reading through it. I felt the narrative flowed, tension was evenly spaced and Stick's sexual awakening provided simultaneous charm and entertainment reminiscent of Ryan Dean in Winger. I always get a massive feels erection with stories reflecting relationships with brothers. Romantic and erotic relationships feel very pedestrian and easy but translating the depth and texture of that bond between brothers while displaying each as a person distinct from the other? It takes a very tempered hand to get that right, I feel. Not to sell this one short on the romance

because I found his and Emily's moments delightful in their innocence, warming the corners of my heart that have been frozen by their horrible parents. That particular exchange they have when Stick tells her what goes on in his house? Like getting shanked right in the aorta. The second half wasn't bad but with Bosten missing from the picture, I felt the story lost a bit of its balance. Some scenes felt too expository for me with some characters not serving any purpose in the bigger picture that was *The Evolution of Stick to Stark McClellan* (I don't get the point of April, for instance). There were good, intense moments that had me praying for certain things NOT to happen (my imagination can go to the dark and f***ed up place in a certain setting) and one moment when I felt the tear-pushing just got too obvious Stick singing himself happy birthday while alone in the car? Oh come on, you're above that pay-grade Andrew Smith. Anywhere else I would've cried foul, but this time I'm just chalking it up as a slip. The last 25% felt this side of rushed and for something as gritty as the first half of this book. The heavy handedness on pounding the recurring theme things happening and things changing started as an annoying paper cut that eventually grew to a mammoth bleeding gash on the face. There came a point it became impossible to ignore anymore. These were small issues I had with the book, but what cost this book my esteem was the idea of Aunt Dahlia coming across too Poppins-esque, I think I was bothered by that, more than her turning up out of nowhere in their lives after having suffered so much. I like the imperfect and uneven edges in my books, the splinters make them more acceptable as realistic fiction. Aunt Dahlia just felt too smooth and California was just too much of a perfect yang to Washington's yin. *Stick* is a tough book, yes, but I find myself drawn to these kinds of stories, pushing my boundaries and expanding my horizons as a reader. I'm going to step over my boundaries and aggressively push this to anyone who has read and liked or disliked *Reason to Breathe*. They drive different messages across but they intersect at certain points. And in those points, this is the book that that one aspires to, but will never be.

Interest in Book: Because Andrew Smith is awesome? Heh. Ok, you need more than that. I get it. Well, I'm a huge fan. I think Andrew's imagination is incredible and his way of telling a story is exciting, personal and poignant. It was no different with *Stick*, a pretty powerful story about a teenage boy trying to accept himself as is, and the strong bond between brothers. Characters and World-Building: The world-building occurs within *Stick*, for the most part, as he struggles with his deformity and accepting that he is unique in other aspects of life, as well. He lives with his abusive parents and older brother, Bosten, out in the boonies. *Stick* and Bosten are very close, as they've had to support each other through the abuse and lack of support from their parents. They pal around and enjoy their time away from their parents as much as possible. They trust each other,

which is vastly important in their world. Stick's best-friend, Emily, makes no issues about Stick's deformity and treats him normal, whatever normal is. In a nutshell, Bosten and Emily mean the world to Stick and represent stability and unconditional love. It's obvious that Stick is beginning to develop more-than-friendly feelings for Emily, but his relationship with her remains so innocent. There is one scene they have together that could have led to a sexual encounter, but it was so simply beautiful and innocent. They were just spending time together and enjoying one another's company. Society constructs how we view things and puts pressures on people regarding many topics. It's amazing to see how people act when those societal messages are not present. Stick's parents are abusive and the reader is witness to some of the torturous, horrific experiences the boys endure. You are also slowly presented with other dysfunctional family dynamics that make your heart hurt. When Bosten's father discovers that he is gay, Bosten knows he must leave if he is to survive. Stick sets out to find his brother, and refuses to let his brother self-destruct. For all the saving Bosten did for Stick throughout his childhood, Stick saves Bosten in a big way in the end. Of course, it doesn't hurt that the boys have an ally in which they can turn to. Someone who loves them unconditionally and steps up to the plate. This character made my heart sing with happiness. So selfless, so welcoming and trusting and compassionate. In the beginning, Stick stays in the background, being the third wheel with his brother and friend. Slowly, Stick transforms. His life experiences fuel a fire. He becomes adventurous, sticks up for people he cares about. He remains non-judgmental and forgiving, regardless of his ugly past experiences. His growth was profound and it hits you like a ton of bricks. Lasting Impressions: Andrew Smith can tell a story! He used a really intriguing, creative way to convey Stick's hearing issue. It was brilliant and I truly enjoyed how it added to the experience. Family seems to be a central theme in Andrew's stories, especially strong bonds between brothers. I enjoy his perspective, as well as experiencing sibling bonds, as I grew up an only child. This book has heart, soul, pain, love. It's full of ups and down, but in the end, the characters overcome personal odds in a big way. Favorite Quote: "I never understood what jocks did for boys other than make us follow rules. They were supposed to protect our balls, Mr. Lloyd explained, but I'd seen at least a hundred guys who wore jocks and got hit in the balls, and it always seemed to hurt just as bad as if they had their balls hanging out and fully exposed. I mean, a shot to the balls is a shot to the balls, pretty much no matter what you're wearing."

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