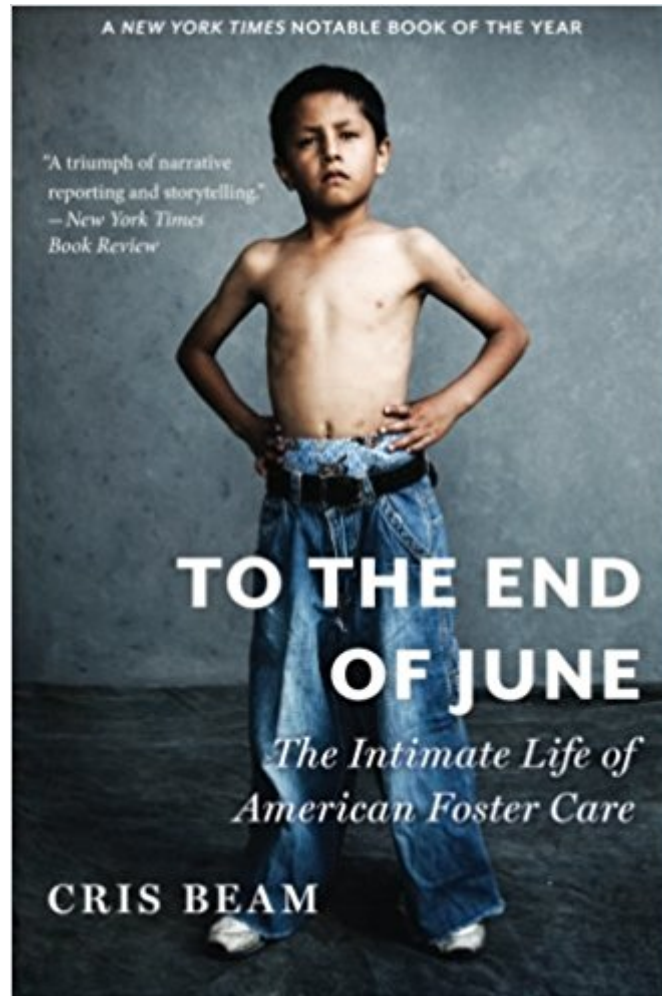




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To The End Of June: The Intimate Life Of American Foster Care



Synopsis

A New York Times Notable Book “Casts a searing eye on the labyrinth that is the American foster care system. NPR’s On Point Who are the children of foster care? What, as a country, do we owe them? Cris Beam, a foster mother herself, spent five years immersed in the world of foster care looking into these questions and tracing firsthand stories. The result is *To the End of June*, an unforgettable portrait that takes us deep inside the lives of foster children in their search for a stable, loving family. Beam shows us the intricacies of growing up in the system—the back-and-forth with agencies, the rootless shuffling between homes, the emotionally charged tug between foster and birth parents, the terrifying push out of foster care and into adulthood. Humanizing and challenging a broken system, *To the End of June* offers a tribute to resiliency and hope for real change. “[A] powerful . . . and refreshing read.”

Chicago Tribune “A sharp critique of foster-care policies and a searching exploration of the meaning of family.”

Publishers Weekly, starred review “Heart-rending and tentatively hopeful.”

Salon

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Customer Reviews

Q&A with Cris Beam Q. Why did you write this book? A. I’m a foster mother and, through my other books and reporting, I’ve spent a lot of time with people impacted by the child welfare system. I was amazed that we could spend more than 20 billion dollars a year in this country on a system that nobody—not the foster kids, not the foster or biological parents, not the social workers, not the administrators or commissioners—thinks is working. I wanted to find

out why. Q. You adopted your foster daughter, Christina, when she was kicked out of her group home at age 17. Christina is 30 now. What is she up to these days? What is your relationship with her like? A. Christina is an adult and she's pretty amazing. She lives in Los Angeles doing HIV outreach and education and goes to college at night. We're very close, we talk on the phone every other day or so. I feel so lucky, really, to have her in my life. Q. You interviewed dozens of children, birth parents, foster parents, agency workers, and others in your five years of research. They all must have changed you in some way, but were there a few who especially stuck with you? A. I spent several years tracking a set of parents in Brooklyn, Bruce and Allyson Green, who were particularly loving and dedicated. They did everything right: they took advantage of all the educational and extracurricular resources available to their foster kids, they loved their foster and biological kids equally, and when the time came, they adopted a girl named Fatimah and had done everything but sign the adoption papers with a girl named Dominique. Both of these girls were 17. Adoption is like the Holy Grail in foster care. In this case though, Fatimah and Dominique panicked. For so long, adoption had been held out as a kind of panacea to all of their prior trauma, and when adoption didn't fix their lives, they ran away, and ended up worse than before. I also followed a single mom in Yonkers named Mary who adopted much older kids, kids who had already aged out of the system and were technically adults. These kids also fell outside the fixed lens of child welfare, but they were helped tremendously by adoption. Sometimes the most creative solutions aren't happening within child welfare itself, but just at its edges. Q. In what ways is the state of foster care in New York City reflective of the state of systems around the country? In what ways is it different? A. New York's child welfare system is an enormous, overburdened bureaucracy with a thousand moving parts, all with different allegiances and poor intercommunication. It's this bureaucracy, rather than one bad director or singular mal intent, which is so destructive. You'll see this Kafka-esque quality everywhere. Also, as with our jails and prisons, child welfare is becoming increasingly privatized—in New York and across the country—and this has both useful, and problematic, implications. As far as foster care implementation, New York is somewhere in the middle: there are cities and states with far higher caseloads or longer delays to family reunification, and there are places that do a better job. Q. About how many children are in foster care in the U.S. this year? A. The last data we have is from July 2012, and there were 400,540 kids in foster care. The numbers have gone down significantly in the last 15 years, thanks to the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act, but the numbers have also changed. We're seeing the youngest kids getting adopted, but more teenagers than ever are aging out of the system with no resources at all. Q. Are there any numbers

on what percentage of kids in foster care are eventually adopted? A. It's important to remember that the central goal of foster care is to reunite kids with their birth parents, and in any given year about half of the kids will go home. The trouble is really with the trauma they endure during the separation, shuffling their way through multiple strangers' homes—on average, for close to two years. There are biological parents who can't or won't care for their children, though, and last year about 50,000 foster kids were adopted from foster care and 100,000 foster kids were waiting for prospective parents. On average, the adopted kids had been in foster care for three years and then waited another year to be adopted. But these are averages: some kids will wait much longer, or never be adopted at all. And these figures don't even include the tens of thousands of kids 16 and older who have given up hope for adoption entirely, deciding to just wait for emancipation from the system as adults. Q. Why don't we hear more about these kids? A. For one, people are afraid to read about child abuse. It's painful and frightening to think about kids being harmed. In reality, though, the vast majority of kids are removed from their families not for abuse but for neglect—and many argue that "neglect" is a code word for "poor." We can look at poverty with a more direct gaze, so this may be a way to open the conversation more. Secondly, there's a kind of fait accompli attitude around foster care and foster kids in general; we don't see it as the dynamic, changeable, and changing system that it really is. Q. Since 2006, Florida's foster care system has been funded differently from other states. Their system was recognized as a possible model for other states by President Obama in 2011. What makes Florida unusual? Should other states adopt their way? Traditionally, and in most states, foster care is funded on a per diem basis: agencies get a certain dollar amount from the federal and state government for every day a child stays in a foster or group home. This financial structure provides a kind of perverse incentive to remove kids from their parents. In 2006, Florida accepted a flat fee, called a waiver, for five years. This meant they only had to remove kids from the most dangerous households and then could spend the rest of the money on things like abuse prevention, drug rehabilitation, and keeping the family stable and secure. Thirty states and counties have now applied for similar waivers, promising a sea change in the way we think about, and approach, child welfare overall. I think it's quite promising and exciting. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Starred Review Whenever newspaper headlines scream about the abuse of foster children, the public is outraged, child protection agencies radically change their policies, and poor children go on living in a hodgepodge of foster care and suffering myriad unintended consequences, according to

Beam, whose background includes a fractured childhood and experience as a foster mother. Here she offers a very intimate look at a system little known to most people. Beam spent five years talking to foster children, parents and foster parents, and social workers, mostly in New York. Her profiles include Bruce and Allyson, with three children of their own, taking in as many as five foster children, and Steve and Erin, fostering a child they want to adopt, whose mother signed away her rights on a napkin. Beam also writes about teens who've been bounced from home to home, some longing for adoption, others sabotaging their chances out of fear, many hoping for promised aging-out bonuses. Beam offers historical background and keen analysis of the social, political, racial, and economic factors that drive foster-care policies, noting the recent swing from massive removals to support for keeping families together. A very moving, powerful look at a system charged with caring for nearly half a million children across the U.S. --Vanessa Bush --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

These small birds would warn the miners of toxic fumes with their smaller resistance and rapid decline. Foster children as our most vulnerable members, warn us of the changes of national issues such as unemployment and health care. These are children who have no other safe options than state care. This book explores the larger issues, but illustrates them with individual stories of children in different phases of the system. Infants come with their own vulnerabilities, but also with the most options. As desirable objects for adoption, the rights and advantages of preserving the family must be weighed against the hope of a new permanent family. As the child ages, so do their options and the memory of the birth family becomes more compelling. Finally, a child "aging out" at 18 or 21, runs great risk of leaving shelter with no meaningful back up or preparation. They are less likely to be prepared for independence, and they lack that great American fall back of moving home. A society must be judged by its treatment of the least of its citizens. In this case, the outcome of our endeavors is vital to the whole country. It behooves all to consider the facts and opinions presented in this book. The author's prose enables the reader to undertake the task with pleasure. The characters are fascinating and present conundrums that have left me pondering well past the last page.

This is a great book for anyone considering foster care, especially if you want to foster older children and teenagers. It may scare you away because of the honesty, but it also emphasizes the need this age group has for stable, loving foster homes who will truly stick with a kid. The interviews with the social workers, the teens, their biological families and their foster families helps to give insight from

all perspectives. My only negative is that Cris Beam wrote entirely from the point of being in NYC and dealing with the foster care system in NY. I would really like her to expand her work to be more inclusive of other states - maybe highlight what is working in some places? Or at least explain systems in other states that may be more applicable to families reading this book. I had a hard time relating some of the practices to where I live in Illinois. But overall, this is a very worthwhile read and I hope that the author continues exploration in this field.

This is a well-written, engaging exploration of an important issue. Anyone who works in the areas of education, social services, youth services will find this to be a worthwhile read. These issues are troubling and there are no easy answers, but the author shares from her experiences with several children and foster parents who are on the front lines struggling to find solutions. I am an educator in the NYC public schools where the effects of the poor performance of the foster care system is heart-breaking to see. While this book makes it clear that there are no quick fixes, it helped me understand more of the nuances and ultimately made me more hopeful.

Tautly written and engaging exploration of the issues with Foster Care in the US. Through character narratives, Beam deftly shows how the current system is broken and negatively impacts the lives of the children it is designed to protect and serve. Understated but very clear, the book captures incidents that are so outrageous it is painful to grasp that they are commonplace. This book should be read by anyone in child welfare, anyone thinking of becoming a foster parent and anyone who works with children who have suffered the indignities and humiliations of the foster system.

After reading the rave reviews of this book I was very disappointed by the time I got through the first chapter. The book read OK but the content was presented in a somewhat disjointed and choppy manner making it at times difficult to follow the author's argument. I would also caution readers that Ms Beam's representation of New York's child welfare system does not represent what child welfare looks like in other localities. It is tragic that our society needs child welfare professionals and a foster system and it is not hard to show the tragedy woven into the selected stories presented here. It is also very easy to stand at a distance and throw rocks at such a complex and fraught system and Ms Beam does that very well. In several instances she attempts to present the problem in terms of liberal and conservative politics, trying clumsily to make people believe only liberals care about children. I work in this system and I am deeply offended that anyone would suggest that any of my colleagues, no matter their political leanings, would not do their absolute best for a child based on a

political philosophy. The fact is there are not many options available for abused and neglected children. They have already suffered severe psychic injury before the intervention of the child welfare system. Given our present understanding of psychology and the human brain, some of these children will never be healed. It appears her underlying theme is that unconditional love will heal any and all children. It is easy for the general public to believe this simple myth and Ms Beam does child welfare professionals and foster parents a grave disservice by suggesting this is so. I gave this book two stars instead of one simply because there are a few paragraphs scattered throughout the book that show the dilemma faced by child welfare professionals and the limited range of options open to the children in the system. I bought this book to add to the library at our agency but I will not be placing it there. There is simply too much information presented with an agenda here to make this a realistic view of what these children face.

I have been a CASA (court appointed special advocate) for about seven years and I learned so much about the children I serve. This is the best presentation of the issues with the foster care system in this country I have read. It also gave me great insight into the feeling of the children caught in the system. A must read for everyone who cares about these children and unfortunately their numbers are growing.

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