



*Beautiful Boy: A fathers Journey Through His Son's Addictions*  
Reviewed by Madison Rowley (Literary Arts 2024)

David Sheff is a father of an addicted son who battles through the obstacles of addiction; it is between life and death. Nic, Davids's son, was addicted to meth by the age of eighteen. During the first few chapters of the book *Beautiful Boy*, David explains how Nic was a child and the difficulties of going through a divorce at a young age. Nic battled with not knowing a place for his presence during the entire process of the divorce. The judge appointed a psychiatrist to evaluate Nic for a few weeks to analyze his feelings and decide which parent he would see more of. This time was terrifying for David as he had significant concerns for Nic; he stated in the book, “Using her desk to write on, we sign them. Inconceivably, in an instant marked by the scratching of a pen

on coarse paper, *I sign away half of my son's childhood.*” The last bit of that sentence genuinely stuck with me because I am also a child of divorce, and it is a huge reason why I decided to read this book and began to love it. In the book, David says the two connected the most through music. They jammed out to any rock song with a killer drummer, specifically Nirvana, though, whenever they took the scenic route to an area of the bay they could surf at. Music has always connected me and my father like it did for David and Nic. By age three, my dad had gotten me to memorize the lyrics to *These Days* by the Foo Fighters. I would drum my hands against my thighs until they were red while sitting on my pink and black cheetah-print booster seat. I found such a connection between the people in the book because not only is the story authentic and one hundred percent real, but it’s weird to think that other people share the same connections with their fathers as I do. It makes me realize how alike we all are and how we only live this life once with the handful of people we meet.

In the book David added that the psychiatrist decided that Nic would spend the school year with David and the summers/holidays with Vicki. This was the exact position I was in, except with opposite parents. Since my father didn't work because of his disability, he couldn't support us full-time but could pay my mom child support. Seeing my father was always everything to me; seeing him healthy and happy made my heart whole. When reading the book and starting to grow an understanding of Nic and David’s relationship I saw how me and my father were very similar to them, and saw memories of my own being portrayed in a book on paper. When arriving at the airport Nic would turn around abruptly and hug David tightly when they arrived at the gate. David would tell Nic “*Everything,*” and Nic would reply with “*Everything.*” This was their way of saying I love you more than *anything*. Honestly, this melted my heart more

than any sentence I have read. I feel the connection between Nic and David as my father and I; reading a book based on an important topic is a powerful take.

While David is on a date with a new crush, Karen, David hears a song by *The Fine Young Cannibals*, and it automatically makes a great connection between the films *Beautiful Boy* and *Bones and All*. The actor Timothée Chalamet played Nic Sheff in *Beautiful Boy* and years later played the second primary character role in a movie about young cannibal lovers. This made me feel such a rush while reading when I accidentally connected the two.

When David finds himself discovering weed in Nic's possession for the first time, he is initially shocked and angered, then he composes himself and determines what would be best to do in this situation with his child.; David states in the book that "Marijuana helped me feel something when I felt almost nothing, helped me block out feelings when I felt too much. In precisely the way that pot made things both blurrier and more vibrant, it allowed me to feel more and to feel less." This was the exact thing I expected David to write while reading this: The drug makes you feel better because of having nothing to worry about and happy thoughts. But it also pushes back away some of the critical thoughts. When in a sad mood, we'd all do anything to feel better, and when drugs are in our hands' reach, some people don't think twice about using them. Pushing away the "bad thoughts" for a little is *sometimes enough for someone*. My aunt had many times where she had drugs at hands reach and chose them over everything else in the moment. It really struck me when reading the book because I have an understanding of the emotions that come with being an outsider of an addict's life.

When Nic is eighteen, David is concerned about his mental health and use of marijuana. He appears off most days and spends most of them in his room. One night,

when David checks Nic's room, he finds an empty, messed-up bed. Panicking, wondering where Nic could be, he lies restless till five am. I have a very familiar feeling with this worry with my Aunt. She is similar to Nic, and I feel their pain and fear. It never leaves your head, wondering where they could be. "Each time I call, I brace myself for the unthinkable. I rehearse the conversation—the stolid, disembodied voice, and the words "He is dead." I rehearse it to prepare myself. I go toward the thought, pace around it. He is dead." This was earth-shattering to read and made me cry. I also thought that my aunt was dead at times, and I was scared for her life. I was so young, worrying that she was okay, but now that I am eighteen, I can only hope. The more I read this book, the more I relate to it and learn to cherish it close to my heart. After four days of Nic being gone, Nic called David and said where he was. He found him in an alleyway behind garbage in the dark, with the streetlights casting shadows on his face. He looked terrible, his eyes sunken in and skin a pale yellow. It was horrific to see. David held Nic's body weight as he dragged his feet to the car. It was pouring outside, and Nic was covered in rainwater. "That's it, " I say. "There's no choice now." "I know, Dad." Rehab was his only option after getting better.

"It sinks in. God no. I am horrified that Nic has used meth. I had my own experience with that drug, too." David had tried meth as a substitute for cocaine in college. He explained in the book that being high off of meth felt like; "I heard cacophonous music like a calliope and felt as if Roman candles had been lit inside my skull." The descriptions of Roman candles were full of imagery. I wonder how time is perceived on a brain that is on meth. Does time go by faster or slower, or do you feel stuck? Especially when the meth wears off, I wonder if the person's mind mixes up at times since they were in "their world."

David Smith wrote. Summer love was now gone because of the abuse of meth. It ruined people and families, no one felt safe. My Aunt had her fair share of use of meth. It started before I was born and continues to this day, eighteen years later. My aunt grew up in an impoverished household with drug addicts as parents. Her mother (my grandmother) got her hooked on pills by the eighth grade. My grandmother's side of the family has always had drug addicts somewhere in the family home, and I do not blame my aunt for becoming addicted because it is in her blood. I do, however, blame my grandmother for 'promoting' it to her and later getting her addicted to drugs. My aunt started on pills but, sooner than later, became addicted to many other drugs (even one that ended up putting a hole in her heart). I love my aunt so much and still strive to become as lovely as she can be, but growing up seeing her disappear and go to prison multiple times took a toll on me. Growing up/raising someone in the house you live in who is addicted to drugs is so hard on the user and family. I was awoken many times by the police banging on our door to check on my aunt at three am. We usually got these nightly wake-ups to check in on my aunt to make sure she was not high or in trouble. When my aunt lived with us and would disappear for weeks at times, I would always worry if she was alive or okay. I always hoped she'd return home clean and healthy, but I never did. I've spent many hours in the car at rehabilitation centers; Christians ran many, so there goes the "Jailhouse religion" my aunt would go crazy for every time. She's always been a Christian; however, she truly seeks god the most when she's in rehab/prison.