

Flamer, Mike Curato

A book banned by manufactured outrage.

The fourth most banned book of 2022 is the story of a 14-year-old boy about to enter high school and is largely set in a week in a Boy Scout Camp (the author is and Eagle Scout).

The writer describes bullying, anxieties, body image insecurity (and more bullying), questions concerning the books protagonist's sexual orientation and a lot of self-doubt. The story ends with contemplation of suicide that was prevented by an outpouring of support from friends.

The book is written in a cartoon/graphic style with relatively little text. It is notable for its lack of anything explicit, in either words or pictures. I did not see any description of sex. The word that comes to mind is innocuous. Which is why it is puzzling that it has been banned so widely. Perhaps all it takes is that the subject matter is a gay person and it is the gayness itself that is so objectionable.

I can imagine that the experiences described are some of the most common that young gay men encounter, shame, bullying, questions about who they really are etc...

As with other books of this genre the motivation to write it was that the author did not have a book like this to read, that he did not have a book about himself. The value is in that people like him can come to understand they are not alone. And that is at least a small antidote to suicide that is much more common in the LGBTQ+ community. The other value this book brings is to the rest of us who will come away with an additional bit of understanding of what some gay children go through.

Not a literary masterpiece or an exciting read but still worth the time to do so.

