



Happy Accidents

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In the summer of 1974, a fourteen-year-old girl in Dolton, Illinois, had a dream. A dream to become an actress, like her idols Ron Howard and Vicki Lawrence. But it was a long way from the South Side of Chicago to Hollywood, and it didn't help that she'd recently dropped out of the school play, *The Ugly Duckling*. Or that the Hollywood casting directors she wrote to replied that "professional training was a requirement."

But the funny thing is, it all came true. Through a series of Happy Accidents, Jane Lynch created an improbable and hilarious path to success. In those early years, despite her dreams, she was also consumed with anxiety, feeling out of place in both her body and her family. To deal with her worries about her sexuality, she escaped in positive ways such as joining a high school chorus not unlike the one in *Glee* but also found destructive outlets. She started drinking almost every night her freshman year of high school and developed a mean and judgmental streak that turned her into a real-life Sue Sylvester.

Then, at thirty-one, she started to get her life together. She was finally able to embrace her sexuality, come out to her parents, and quit drinking for good. Soon after, a Frosted Flakes commercial and a chance meeting in a coffee shop led to a role in the Christopher Guest movie *Best in Show*, which helped her get cast in *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*. Similar coincidences and chance meetings led to roles in movies starring Will Ferrell, Paul Rudd, and even Meryl Streep in 2009's *Julie & Julia*. Then, of course, came the two lucky accidents that truly changed her life. Getting lost in a hotel led to an introduction to her future wife, Lara. Then, a series she'd signed up for abruptly got canceled, making it possible for her to take the role of Sue Sylvester in *Glee*, which made her a megastar.

Today, Jane Lynch has finally found the contentment she thought she'd never have. Part comic memoir and part inspirational narrative, this is a book equally for the rabid *Glee* fan and for anyone who needs a new perspective on life, love, and success.

WITH A FOREWORD BY CAROL BURNETT

Excerpt from *Happy Accidents*:

If I could go back in time and talk to my twenty-year-old self, the first thing I would say is: "Lose the perm." Secondly I would say: "Relax. Really. Just relax. Don't sweat it."

I can't remember a time when I wasn't anxious and fearful that the parade would pass me by. And I was sure there was someone or something outside of myself with all the answers. I had a driving, anxiety-filled ambition. I wanted to be a working actor so badly. I wanted to belong and feel like I was valued and seen. Well, now I am a working actor, and I guarantee you it's not because I suffered or worried over it.

As I look back, the road to where I am today has been a series of happy accidents I was either smart or stupid enough to take advantage of. I thought I had to have a plan, a strategy. Turns out I just had to be ready and willing to take chances, look at what's right in front of me, and put my heart into everything I do. All that anxiety and fear didn't help, nor did it fuel anything useful. My final piece of advice to twenty-year-old me:

Be easy on your sweet self. And don't drink Miller Lite tall boys in the morning.

Happy Accidents Details

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From Reader Review Happy Accidents for online ebook

BrokenTune says

I was not a fan of Glee but I did enjoy watching it for the character of Sue Sylvester. You know, the lady who always wears a track-suit and was a bit of a tough cookie:

Anyway, I had noticed Jane Lynch in other roles - she was hilarious in The 40-Year-Old Virgin and Paul. So, when I stumbled across her autobiography, I was intrigued.

It took me no time at all to read this book. Lynch is certainly an interesting woman and I loved that she told her story very openly and with a lot of humour. I take it from her book that this in itself may have been something she may have found hard to do at one point as she did (maybe still does) struggle with anxiety issues and has found it difficult in the past to relate things.

As far as autobiographies go, this one did not try to discuss social or political issues much but simply told Lynch's story and focused about her own journey in what came across as an interesting and very honest account.

Really enjoyed it.

Julie says

So a bout of insomnia last night had me lying there, and rather than stare at the ceiling I picked up this book. I had only grabbed from the library yesterday, but when flicking through it it had made me smile.

I didn't really expect to enjoy it - but I did. Jane Lynch's memoir was quite sweet in fact. A childhood growing up she always knew she was different, and finally as a teenage was able to realise that she might be a Lesbian, but don't worry the books not all about that.

For years she struggled with bit parts in tv shows and movies before making it big in Best in Show, the 40 year old Virgin and of course as Sue Sylvester in Glee. If anyone thinks that living in New York would be like living in Friends, you should read Sue's chapters on living on not much money in crazy shared apartments.

The last part of her story is about her romance and then marriage to her partner Laura and becoming a mother. It was sweet and a true case of love at first sight. The whole book made me smile and I was surprised at how much I enjoyed it. 4/5.

Cherylann says

I listened to Happy Accidents because Jane Lynch narrated the book. I'm certainly glad I chose the audiobook. I really appreciate the candor with which Lynch discusses her childhood, college years, and early adulthood. There were times when I laughed out loud as Lynch was narrating events from her childhood. I'm sure other drivers thought I was a bit nuts. However, by the time the book moved into Lynch's adulthood, and the elements of her career that she's most known for (Best in Show, A Mighty Wind, the 40 Year Old Virgin among others), I felt as if the candor was lost. It seemed like Lynch was reading her resume. It also made me stop and wonder about what it means to write a memoir. After all, Lynch is still working - she's in her prime- and I'm sure she doesn't want to inadvertently alienate anyone because how do you tell your story without telling anyone else's. We are social creatures, and since we don't exist in isolation, other people have to be part of your memoir. Overall, well worth the listen!

jess says

Jane Lynch says in this interview that she was inspired to write this book by the It Gets Better project, and it shows. This book delves into some of the darker moments of Jane's life, but also takes the reader to the heights of a strangely successful career. From her struggles with alcoholism, her extended period spent in the closet of self-denial, and dysfunctional romantic relationships that continued well into her adulthood, Jane Lynch delivers the kind of alienated, lonely, disturbing story we've come to expect from the Gay Childhood and Adolescence. And then, hold onto your hats, because she starts befriendng important people, experience career success and working through her personal issues. It's really a peaks and valleys kind of story, but lacks the juicy gossip, personal secrets and insane revelations that make memoirs really great. This book is a sanitized version of the story told from a very happy place. Good for Jane Lynch, but there's a certain depth that's missing here. She literally has nothing bad to say about anyone who is currently in her life.

If you have never known someone who struggled with their sexual orientation through their adolescence and young adulthood, Jane's struggles might be enlighten you, but if you've had (or been) a self-loathing, drunk, gay friend, this will seem overwrought.

Regardless, this is a quick and easy read. Jane Lynch is a funny person. I appreciated that Jane delineated between her gender presentation and sexual orientation, exploring the ways that masculinity is constructed in contemporary media through her own experiences and career. Although she does not use academic theories and jargon to explore these issues, she mentions multiple times how many roles she has landed that were written for men and how she got those roles with her hard-ass, arrogant, over-confident faux bravado (*fauxvado!* that should be a word.). She questions why being confident and self-assured are masculine traits, and what it takes to "make it" as a funny lady. Her failures to get (and keep) the girl are kind of awkward and painful, but hey, we've all been there.

I struggled with how many stars to give this book -- I like Jane, and this is a perfectly fine book, but it's really just "okay" to me. 2.5 stars.

Athira (Reading on a Rainy Day) says

I don't usually read celebrity memoirs. For one thing, I don't follow anyone so much that I want to know their life history. Okay, there have been times when I have had this insane schoolgirl crush on some handsome actor (anyone remember the Leonardo DiCaprio craze following Titanic?) but with time, I've come to feel respect for them and nothing more. The other reason is that I don't watch so many TV shows or movies to be able to relate to any showbiz talk. So Jane Lynch's *Happy Accidents* was a first of sorts for me. I don't think reading this memoir is going to make me more eager to try other celebrity biographies, but I'm glad that I tried.

I wanted to read *Happy Accidents* because I love Jane Lynch's role in Glee. I don't think I've seen a more malevolent, cruel, racist and yet sensitive, and funny (without meaning to be) character on screen. That's a deadly combo and would be too hard to pull off, but Jane Lynch does it well. So many of her quotes have become near-pop culture (at least, I like to say that). And I wanted to read more about her, because here was an actor who looked as next-door-neighbor-like as was possible.

In *Happy Accidents*, Jane Lynch talks mostly about her career and her personal life. If you read the first few pages and the last few pages, you can really see that her life has changed drastically. At 14, she yearned to be actor, only to quit a school play out of fright. When she realized that she was gay, she knew that she could never ever tell anyone about it, fearing that it was bad to be so and that people will mock her. By the end, it's amazing how she has catapulted to being a very popular actress, and happily-married to a wonderful woman who she totally met by chance.

What I loved most about this book was that Jane didn't rattle off Hollywood facts and figures or talk so much about Hollywood in itself that I was able to read the book as a regular memoir. Sometimes, you could even be fooled into thinking that Jane Lynch wasn't a popular actress, if you didn't know it beforehand. Even though, I didn't know all the movies/TV shows she had acted in, it wasn't hard following her growth from acting in theater to getting some regular jigs.

But what I loved reading the most was about her personal life. Her relationship with her friends, girlfriends and boyfriends, and how she kept pushing off people and struggled with getting closer to them. Jane also talked about her homosexuality and how she stayed in the closet for a long time, because of her reluctance to embrace or accept it, even though one of her closest friends in high school was also gay; and how she began to distance herself from her family gradually because she couldn't come to admit it to them.

In a nutshell, I enjoyed this memoir. It was an easy read and funny in spots though not reminiscent of Sue Sylvester (because of course, Jane Lynch is so much nicer!) There are a lot of pictures scattered through the book spanning Jane's life from when she was very little to her more recent photos with her wife. There were some repetitions that bugged me occasionally, making me think that the book could have done with some good editing. I loved some of the stories that Jane shared from her life, and appreciated that she didn't get all preachy on the reader, but only stuck to what worked for her. But mostly, I appreciated her honesty in sharing even her innermost fears and desires, and some very embarrassing mistakes without trying to sugarcoat things on paper.

Aneesha says

Not very well written, and lacking credibility (she calls the cast of the L word "phenomenally talented" and the writing on Two and a Half Men "just outstanding"), but I enjoyed this book. (I also read it on a plane so my judgment may have been a bit impaired by low oxygen levels, which tend to make me laugh or cry more.) Basically she was an unreasonable diva when she was young, went through a feminist goddess phase which still lingers, and is now a swell, self-aware person with Midwestern tendencies (like using the phrase "I'm tickled by" regularly). Also, a ton of the "happy accidents" and anecdotes in this book occur on her birthday--Bastille Day--and I read the book while traveling to/from a conference where I spent my birthday selling books for twelve hours. And it felt super cool to be one of those people who buys a new book at the airport!

Katie says

I love Jane Lynch and knew I would want to read this book as soon as I heard it existed. As expected, it was an interesting and quick read--if you like her, I think you'll find her life story to date interesting. I'll always remember just being completely struck by her screen presence and her natural talent at dry humor from the very first time I saw her, which was I think in "Best in Show". That was such a great movie, chock full of talented and hilarious actors, yet she still stood out to me.

The book goes through her sometimes-struggles in her past (although really, for a comedian, she is pretty normal... most of them are train wrecks), and details her rise to fame. I liked hearing about her budding career, because it's so interesting hearing about how various Hollywood projects develop. She comes off as very down-to-earth, although there's a good mix of manicness and impulsiveness mixed in there, too. But you kind of have to be that way to be a comedian/actress! Your whole life is sort of flying by the seat of your pants.

KJ Grow says

Much more than a comedic memoir, Jane Lynch's story is one with real emotional depth, transformation and personal growth. Ultimately, this is a book about saying yes to life and finding joy in what you have - something that Lynch struggled with for years. She is forthright about her years that were filled with competitiveness, anger, friendship and relationship failures, drinking, and low self-esteem. Her missteps and selfishness are cringe-worthy at times, but you root for Jane all along the way. When she emerges as the confident, radiant, joyful woman she is today, you feel like she's been your friend all along, and you can't help but be proud of what she's discovered and what she's done. The writing in this book admittedly isn't great, but the spirit of it makes for a great read.

Erin says

I've moved cities and so am doing all the usual sorts of new city things: buying plants, biking the major routes, joining book clubs. I found a book club on Wednesday, they met on Saturday, and so I put down the interminable Storm of Swords (no, my blogging hiatus has not been caused by depression or misery, but rather the result of GRRMartin not being able to write a concise plot) in order to pick up Jane Lynch's totally terrible memoir, Happy Accidents.

What a waste of a day of reading. To think I might have been two hundred pages closer to done Storm of Swords. Or I might have mopped my floors, or written thank you letters, or stare vacantly into space. I can't even begin to catalogue the ways this book fails. Well, that's not true, I can, and I will. So here you go: While memoirs are inevitably narcissistic this one achieves a spectacular level of naval gazing, borne, I suspect, from the author's occasionally observed (and then hastily dismissed) self-doubt and insecurity. Contributing to this reader's annoyance with the narcissism is the dull account of a life. I'm not one to demand that memoirs only be written by extraordinary people, or by those for whom life has been exciting, challenging or unique; but I do expect a memoir to demonstrate some enthusiasm for the life being described, some general sense that it is worth me reading about. That there ought to be some kind of moral isn't what I mean, more that there should be a anchoring question, much less mundane than: am I loveable? Or perhaps, just as mundane as that but then explicitly asked and curiously examined.

I'm going to stop before I rant too long about the prosaic language, the lack (get this!) of character development and the annoying tendency to assume that the author is the only person for whom life has been Difficult. I'll just say that I'm not going to be returning to this particular book club. Even though all the other members found it terrible, I can't find myself trusting another one of their recommendations. This book exacts too high a price in trying to find friends.

Sean Kennedy says

This is a breezy read that won't take up much of your time, but it will surprise you with its candour. Jane Lynch takes us through her periods of heavy drinking and an acerbic personality which, although they often worked together to mask the pain of struggling with her sexuality, happened to drive people away. Often in celebrity autobiographies they hide these aspects of their personality, but Lynch embraces it and really makes you think that unless you could have poked at her hard shell you would have been running away as well.

And that is the danger of the closet, as it really fucks you up. Not that the outside world doesn't do it either, but the capacity for self harm and self medication increases - as Lynch shows when she turns to alcohol for comfort and pushes people away so she gets rejected on her own terms.

The first half of the book is insightful and courageous. And it seems Lynch gets her happy ending despite everything. This is a much recommended memoir - Lynch's own answer to the "It gets better" project.

Lillian says

Expectations: A book that would have me laughing aloud without pause.

Reality: The only time I laughed was when she listed her favorite Sue Sylvester quotations.

I was initially bothered by the lack of funny, but I pressed on. Soon, I felt meagerly captivated by Jane's struggles. Though I wasn't 100% enthralled in the beginning, I stuck around because I've always been curious about how one gets to be so successful (which is not without incident, as it happens). I like advice from wise owls, so that was this book's saving grace for me when I was unhappy with its seriousness.

The "happy accidents" theme reminded me of a Steve Jobs quotation: "You can't connect the dots looking

forward; you can only connect them looking backwards." Jane had no idea that doing low budget off-off-off-off-Broadway productions would lead her anywhere; she acted because it made her happy. She had no idea that going into a different cafe versus her usual cafe would lead her to conversing with a director, who gave her a role, which would in turn put her on another director's radar, and so on and so forth. That's not to say that luck got her where she is today: she worked tirelessly to propel her natural talent into the business.

As a young person with my entire life and career ahead of me, I can only hope that with hard work, exuberance, and a fair share of happy accidents, when I'm Jane's age, I'll know the same happiness she knows.

Shelley says

In the language of tumblr, GPOY!!!! That aside, I have a massive girlcrush on Jane Lynch, who is totally awesome, and this really just cemented it. She's funny, she's articulate, and she's screwed up in ways I totally understood. (Me: You do that, too? Wait! And that? Yes! Now, how did you FIX yourself?!) I loved reading about her marches up and down and around the theater and movies and Hollywood and Chicago stages. By the time she got to the Glee stuff, I mostly just skimmed - I was more interested in her personal life. (And since it's her current job, there clearly wasn't going to be any dirt. He's nice, she's nice, he's sweet, he's amazing, blah blah. We know. Please write a new chapter in ten years.) But yeah - Jane Lynch = Awesome.

Kate says

When I heard Jane Lynch was writing a book I couldn't have been more excited! I think she's a truly fantastic comedian and brings so much personality to every role I've ever seen her play, so I can't wait to read this book when it comes out.

I'm really glad I read this book! Out of all the "celebrity memoirs" out there, I must admit that this one has been my favorite so far. I liked how Jane's tone/personality really came through every page from beginning to end. I thoroughly enjoyed how down to earth she is about her success and open about her past. I liked that she's human and had hurdles to overcome to get where she is today and isn't afraid to admit it; in fact she embraces it.

She holds nothing back in this memoir and I really enjoyed everything from her childhood scrap book pictures, to her 2nd City/Steppenwolf days, to her full time gig as Sue Sylvester in Glee, to finding the love of her life and becoming a mother. I'm really glad Jane found her happiness and I hope one day I too can find mine.

Crystal Starr Light says

Bullet Review:

After some somewhat "meh" biographies, I've hit upon one that really impressed me - not to mention, completely changed my first impression of Jane that I got when I started! I went from cringing at the

overdramatic, pretentious teenaged Jane to sympathizing and appreciating her candor and honesty.

Not the funniest book and still not as good as Tina Fey's Bossypants, but Lynch's "Happy Accidents" is an insightful, endearing, brutally honest book that warmed my heart and makes me want to watch everything she's been in.

Recommended for fans of Jane Lynch (duh), Glee, and any young gay or lesbian or ally. Hell, just let me leave it at "recommended".

Michelle Wegner says

I have been following Jane Lynch's career for some time now, considering SHE GREW UP ONE BLOCK AWAY FROM MY HOUSE IN DOLTON, ILL! She actually gave her street address in this book from when she lived in Dolton, and I realized that I must have delivered newspapers to her house and went begging for Christmas paper girl tips there as well. We also attended the same elementary, jr. high, and high school. It was fascinating to hear about our little corner of the world from her perspective. All of my catholic friends attended St. Jude, the church her family was active with. Some of the stories from "our" high school really made me giggle. Although I went to those schools about a decade after her, I recognized many names and places she spoke about.

It was fun to read about her "rise to fame". I really enjoyed this book. I feel like we'd have so much to chat about if Jane and I sat down for a chat. :)
