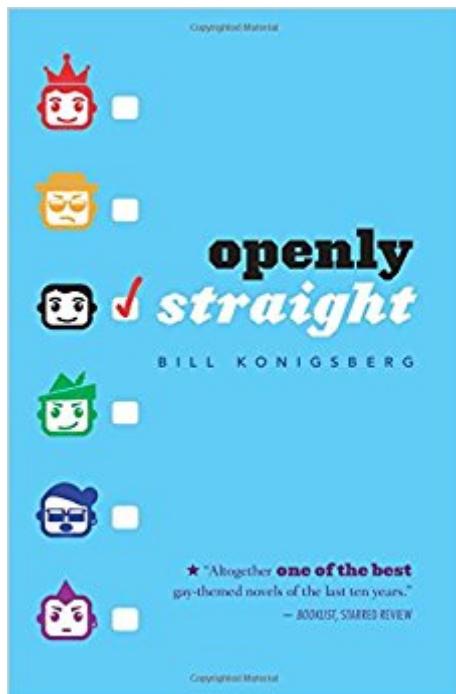


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# Openly Straight



## **Synopsis**

The award-winning novel about being out, being proud, and being ready for something else. Pre-order the companion novel *Honestly Ben* now (out 3/28/17)! Rafe is a normal teenager from Boulder, Colorado. He plays soccer. He's won skiing prizes. He likes to write. And, oh yeah, he's gay. He's been out since 8th grade, and he isn't teased, and he goes to other high schools and talks about tolerance and stuff. And while that's important, all Rafe really wants is to just be a regular guy. Not that GAY guy. To have it be a part of who he is, but not the headline, every single time. So when he transfers to an all-boys' boarding school in New England, he decides to keep his sexuality a secret -- not so much going back in the closet as starting over with a clean slate. But then he sees a classmate breaking down. He meets a teacher who challenges him to write his story. And most of all, he falls in love with Ben... who doesn't even know that love is possible.

## **Book Information**

Paperback: 336 pages

Publisher: Arthur A. Levine Books; Reprint edition (April 28, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0545798655

ISBN-13: 978-0545798655

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.8 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.1 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 185 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #63,472 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #34 in Books > Teens > Romance > LGBT #80 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Gay & Lesbian #424 in Books > Teens > Romance > Contemporary

## **Customer Reviews**

Gr 9 Up-Rafe is gay, but he hopes no one will notice at his new all-boys high school in New England. He's not in the closet exactly. Back home in Boulder, his stereotypically progressive and understanding parents championed his coming out in the eighth grade. Since then, Rafe has been unable to escape being the poster boy for Gay Pride. Tired of labels and limitations, he hides his true self in order to fit in and be just one of the guys. For a while it works, and he plays football, pals around with the jocks, and blends in with the straight guys. His best friend back home is furious with him for changing, and things really get complicated when he falls in love with Ben, the intellectual,

brooding jock with whom he experiments one night. In the end, he just can't keep up the charade, and coming out of the closet for a second time results in the creation of some new friendships, but also the loss of some others. The book is peppered with Rafe's journal entries for a class, the only place where he's honest about his sexuality. His teacher's responses, while encouraging, don't add much to the plot. The book tackles issues of sexuality and coming out from an interesting angle, but at times the central message (honesty is the best policy) is a bit heavy-handed. Recommend this one to fans of Brent Hartinger's *Geography Club* (HarperCollins, 2003), Michael Harmon's *The Last Exit to Normal* (Knopf, 2008), and Julie Anne Peters's *Define "Normal"* (Little, Brown, 2000).-Nora G. Murphy, Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy, LaCanada-Flintridge, CA  
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**\*Starred Review\*** Now a junior in high school, Rafe, who has been out since he was 14, is thoroughly sick of being labeled "the gay kid." So he does something bold: he leaves his Colorado school to enroll in a private boys' academy in New England, where no one knows he's gay and he can be a label-free, "openly straight" part of a group of guys. Does this mean he goes back into the closet? No, he tells himself, not exactly: "I was more like I was in the doorway." But is he fooling himself? Can you put a major part of yourself on hold, and what happens when you then find yourself falling in love with your new (straight) best friend? Lambda Literary Award winner Konigsberg (*Out of the Pocket*, 2008) has written an exceptionally intelligent, thought-provoking coming-of-age novel about the labels people apply to us and that we, perversely, apply to ourselves. A sometimes painful story of self-discovery, it is also a beautifully written, absolutely captivating romance between two boys, Rafe and Ben, who are both wonderfully sympathetic characters. With its capacity to invite both thought and deeply felt emotion, *Openly Straight* is altogether one of the best gay-themed novels of the last 10 years. Grades 9-12. --Michael Cart --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

*Openly Straight* by Bill Konigsberg, A Standalone LGBT YA Romancel chose this book because I read the excerpt and it sounded dissimilar from any other romance book I have read. I was hoping for an interesting new voice for life as a young, gay man. This book provided that perspective and considerably more. Rafe Goldberg was tired of being "the gay kid." He came out when he was 14 years old to wonderful parents and a welcoming community in Boulder, Colorado. His mother was very involved in a gay rights group and he began speaking to high schools about

coming out and being proud of who you are. However, Rafe was starting to feel like no one saw him when they looked his way. He was concerned that he was nothing but a label in the eyes of others. So for his junior year of high school, he decided to transfer to an all-boys boarding school in Massachusetts. He wanted a fresh start. In order to see what life would be like without labels, he made the decision not to admit that he was gay. This seemed like a wonderful choice when he was fitting in like he never had before. But close friendships started to conflict with his goals. He began to wonder if he could really put a major part of who he was on hold. I did not expect to feel so much emotion when I began to read this book. From the very first paragraph, I was laughing out loud. Before I knew it, my heart was broken and I was in tears. I think it says a lot about the authors' skill as a writer that I was pulled into the story without even being aware it was happening. I was invested in Rafe and how his life would turn out. After finishing, I struggled to keep it in my hand when all I wanted to do was launch it across the room. As much as I fell in love, I also felt lost. I consider myself lucky that I read this book when I did. The sequel, Honestly Ben, will be available on the 28th of March. I for one, will do everything in my power to have that book in my hands. This book can be read by younger teens and adults alike. I give this book 5 stars. I have already recommended it to friends and family.

Actual rating 3.5 stars. I really loved the perspective in this novel and its discussion on the importance we place on labels, and the type of people we are without them. I found the friendship/relationship growing between Rafe and Ben adorable. How some people you can just click with, and others are doomed to simply remain superfluous. It was a great character study in friendships. I've heard a lot of people complain about the ending. I actually found it poignant. The object of this novel was about Rafe finding himself and learning the importance of the labels he'd let himself get classified into. Life is messy, it's coloured with other people's perceptions, there is no clear black and white and it's an ongoing journey. I feel this was set up at the beginning of the novel and then commented upon at the end, comparing where Rafe ended up to where he started. Very cerebral, loved this aspect. The friendships were great too. How Rafe felt freer to be himself by metaphorically going back into the closet. I get the whole thing about people constantly seeing him in a certain way. "generally speaking we all do that. They are identifiers that help us to relate to the world at large. But they certainly not all we are. The more you get to know someone, the more they deconstruct the labels you have put on them. It was wonderful to read a novel about a gay youth experience that didn't involve single parent families, or unsupportive families, violence and discrimination,

there were some elements of bullying and heterosexim used to illustrate the differences between a gay perception and a straight one. The whole book felt positive and informative about friendships and how to find your comfort zone with the outside world. The relationship between Rafe and Ben was like a slow burn. It grew organically and was introspective. It was as if they both decided to take the blinkers off and come at their growing feelings in a different way. I found it refreshing. A little unrealistic, because I've yet to meet a teen who approaches the world this way. But I appreciated it for what it is. Claire Olivia is cute too. Wise beyond her years. Like most of the cast in this book they are all proficient at character studies of those around them. I also got some great writing tips from Mr Scarborough's critique of Rafe's writing "pushing him to think about the motivation behind his prose. Also the different forms of writing " a short story compared to free writing (stream of consciousness) it can only serve to enrich my own journey. The humour in this novel is fantastic. Many times I was chortling so loud I sounded like a misfiring hairdryer! The characters have a dry sarcastic wit that translates well off the page. The only downside, and the reason I'm not awarding top marks is because I felt like I wanted more from this novel. More meat. While highly philosophical, I found myself yearning for more plot, more story. As it stands this novel is fantastic, but as a reader, that sense of needing substance is not a great thing. It's speculative, adorkable, and even educational, but not filling. I'm definitely keen to read on in this series " with a novella ("Openly, Honestly") and a second book recently published "Honestly Ben," you can bet I'm going to be diving in as soon as I can. I also will be adding some of Bill Konigsberg back catalogue " his writing style is effortless, introspective, and deliciously hilarious. Dude " you've made me a fan!

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