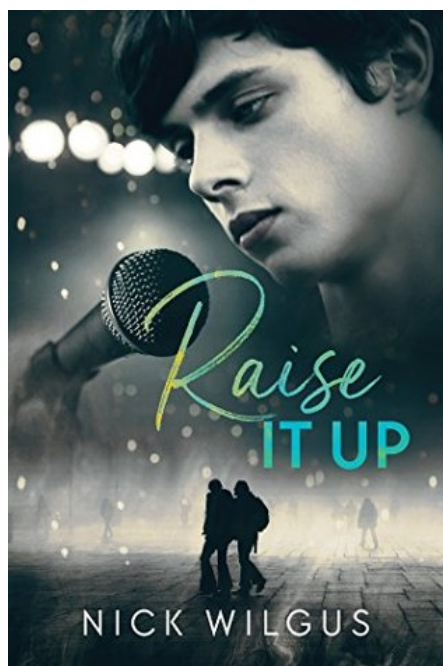




Raise It Up

Nick Wilgus

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Telling the truth might set you free, but only if you're willing to pay the price.

Growing up gay in rural Michigan at the height of the Cold War has taught Cyrus Hood how to keep quiet—about a lot of things. With his mother gone, he fights to keep his family together and care for his little brother, Charlie, whose developmental problems are another secret Cyrus cannot risk revealing. Add to that an alcoholic and paranoid father, and Cyrus's life is rapidly falling to pieces even as he's realizing his feelings for his best friend, Oliver. When things reach their lowest point, it might be Oliver who helps Cyrus find not only his voice but his place in the world and shows him that, when all else fails, love will raise you up.

Raise It Up Details

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From Reader Review Raise It Up for online ebook

Lesley says

Nick Wilgus never fails to make me cry

Momshell says

I pushed this back for a long time, because I new I'd cry and I knew it'd stay with me for days. I must say Nick Wilgus always hits it off the park for me, this was no different.

His characters become tangible, you want to adopt them, love them, embrace and never let go.

Cee Cee is forever. Charlie was annoying, but that was him and it was okay, he was also lovable. Mr. Wilgus made a point. I was like Georgie; totally fed up with the repetitions, and that made me think, imagine, become someone that has to deal with something similar and still love deeply and forgive.

Oliver was hope, his very religious and kind family is also a touch I loved, we are not this or that, we can be this and that.

Beautiful painful story.

Mickie Ashling says

5 + Stars. I was prepared to shed a few tears, judging from my past experiences with this author, but *Raise It Up* knocked it out of the park. Wow. This is the story of Cyrus Hood, one of five kids living under horrible conditions caused primarily by an abusive father. Instead of being crushed by it all, Cyrus manages to hold it together, until his mother dies. Then everything unravels.

This isn't your typical YA novel. The author has created an astonishing character in Cyrus Hood, a brave young man who kept surprising me at every turn. Wilgus is famous for his unapologetic exploration into the darkest sides of the human experience, but this story shook me up more than I expected. It's an emotional, gut-wrenching read, and Cyrus is a character that will stay with me for years. Highly recommended!

Rynn Yumako says

Jesus Christ was this sad and depressing.

Beautiful writing, great tone, but it was incredibly difficult to get through because of the horrible subject matter. It was unsettling, fucked-up and there seemed to be no respite to the pain Cyrus was subjected to. The author didn't shy away from anything, even at times I kind of wish he did, especially in the beginning. Reading about kids being abused in any way always makes me furious and here it was especially true.

Cyrus was just a sweetheart, trying to keep his siblings safe, trying to survive with a horrible, abusive, alcoholic father, with adults trying to tell him what to do, without really helping anything. His patience with Charlie was remarkable and I wish I could say that I'd be the same way, but that would be a big fat lie; most people would have given up on Charlie by then, but never Cyrus. I loved everything about their relationship.

I also liked the coming-of-age/coming-out side of this book, and that the time and place the story was set in made things even more difficult for Cyrus.

I really didn't care for the "romance" in this book, though. I thought Ollie was just too weird, sometimes creepy and incredibly pushy. His and Cyrus' interactions were always off, they seemed really forced, the sudden declarations of love just didn't ring true to me (and I'm not even going to talk about the stuff after they became "brothers"...). That aspect of the book didn't work for me at all and it completely pulled me out of an otherwise gripping story.

The writing was also too wordy for me, some things just repeating too many times. The story dragged after the middle point, the characters stood still because of that or went around in circles it seemed. The dialogue was getting on my nerves by the end, the characters and the plot got more and more crazy and unbelievable as the story went on. The whole investigation, the foster family stuff, Cyrus' mood swings, everything really, it just went on too long with lots of over-the-top dialogue and weird decisions. I admit that I skimmed most of the book after about 80 percent.

I'm sad to rate this book so low, but the stuff that I enjoyed about it was miniscule compared to the things that left me weirded out and confused.

Silkeeeeeereads says

Sad

Well, when I review a book, I the first thing I look at is characters. If I feel connected to them. These were heartbreaking characters and I don't know how anyone that reads this book couldn't feel them. The story definitely brought tears, many times. Very well written.

Jeff Davault says

Solid read, but not for the squeamish due to the slow reveal of all the abuse dealt out over the course of our young lead's life. It ends on a solid note of closure regarding those events, and with questions left open if the author chooses to write a companion piece.

Alec Clayton says

This is a compelling read. I could not wait to get to the end and yet did not want to finish it, because I didn't want it to be over. The protagonist, Cyrus, called Cee Cee by his friends, is a 15-year-old gay high school student raised by strict traditional Catholic parents. Taught from an early age that being gay is a mortal sin, he is ashamed and fearful. And that is just the beginnings of his problems. The abuse he and his brothers and sisters must endure and overcome are almost unimaginable, and the adult responsibilities heaped on him because nobody else is able or willing to take them on are crushing. But Cee Cee has an indomitable spirit, and he has help from his best friend, Oliver.

Raise It Up captures your attention from the opening sentence and never lets go until it reaches its inevitable and, thankfully uplifting end. Author Nick Wilgus beautifully captures the voices and spirit of his characters.

Heather Rawlins says

I love this book and it's my favourite book of the year so far. I actually had to look up when the Cold War was and I lived during part of it and I'm sure we discussed in school. I remember learning about bomb shelters and I didn't know that people didn't believe in the holocaust until the last 20 years or so. It definitely was a great story reading a perspective of a kid in a time I actually grew up in too, but from a point of view I just never knew. And that's one of the great things about this story.

I did cry, mostly for Cyrus but really for that whole family. I worried about George's response, but he came through admirably, considering the timeframe.

I never do this, but my favourite line: He stood, paused to turn and look at me. "Don't beat yourself up. Your dad did a great job of that. You don't have to add to it."

I can't wait to see Cyrus and Oliver finish high school, go to college and grow into adults. I really hope there's more to their story.

I've read it twice. Such a great story. I absolutely recommend this book.

Christy says

I almost passed on reading this latest Nick Wilgus book. I adore this author, but his books are, almost always, quite a few Kleenex for me. My good sense won out however, because I knew if I didn't read it I would regret it. An author who can bring out the kind of emotions that this one can has to be treasured because he makes me feel. Society today, with all of its advances, its reliance on technology, its social media obsession (of which I am one of the faithful), has generated more and more distance between all of us, to the point where we are emotionally barricaded to society's pain and suffering. So I'll take the heartfelt pain, the tears, and all of the emotions in between, because they remind me that I'm still alive, and I'm a human being.

Based on the information I can glean while reading, i.e. that Reagan and Bush will be taking office in a couple of months, 'Raise It Up' begins in the fall of 1979 and Cyrus is fifteen years old. This means he is five years older than I was at the same time period. Why is this relevant? Because I grew up in a manner vastly different than Cyrus and his siblings. I have no concept of coming of age in a household with an alcoholic, abusive father (physically, emotionally, and sexually) who doesn't hold a job, and where my mom just died of a massive heart attack caused by catching me singing while wearing a dress and makeup. My younger brother Charlie was beaten by my father with a frying pan when he was four years old and this caused permanent brain damage. There is never enough food, no central heat only a wood stove, and the bills are months behind. Compared to this, I grew up as a Rockefeller. The descriptions are so gritty and haunting that I hurt for Cyrus and his younger siblings.

Cyrus grew up with a traditional Catholic mother. The kind who was outraged at the decisions made by the Second Vatican Council which included, but were certainly not limited to, saying mass in English versus Latin and allowing the priest to face the congregation while saying mass. So much of Cyrus's thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about his sexuality, his relationship with his mother, and his thoughts regarding his father, are entrenched in what he has been taught is a sin and an abomination. He suffers shame about his

sexuality, guilt about keeping the family secrets that might have helped Charlie all those years ago, more guilt about being honest about what happened the day his dad took him and his brother John fishing which has now led to his father being arrested for involuntary manslaughter, and massive embarrassment over anyone in the community knowing what has gone on in their home. Again, I was speechless most of the time at the horrors this young man has seen and dealt with.

"I've already made a mess of things by telling them about John John. Daddy told them I was lying about that. And then he told them I was lying about Charlie. What if he tells them I'm lying about this too? I don't want to make it worse now by doing something stupid. I've already embarrassed everyone."

There's a reason I haven't mentioned Oliver or the relationship he and Cyrus have throughout this novel. In my opinion, this entire book is a beautiful character study about Cyrus. He's such a strong young man who has buried himself in guilt, shame, embarrassment, and has always tried to be kind and a good person. He realizes through his journey within the pages that being kind really just means people will walk all over you and take advantage. Oh, he doesn't lose those good parts of himself, he just learns to accept his anger at injustices, his anger at his parents for not being good ones, and by the end, Cyrus is learning to accept everything about himself. Now, Oliver is definitely a part of that, but it's my feeling that Cyrus would have made it there eventually, even if it took him longer by himself.

I didn't cry in this one. Thank you, Nick. But the emotions were definitely there, and very intense. I'm not usually one for young adult stories but this is truly one I can recommend. It's beautiful and ugly, but the beauty within is what rises to the surface.

NOTE: This book was provided by Harmony Ink Press for the purpose of a review on Rainbow Book Reviews

CrabbyPatty says

Raise It Up is set in a small Michigan town in the fall of 1980. Ronald Reagan will be assuming office soon and Bob Seger's *Night Moves* and Rod Stewart's *Da Ya Think I'm Sexy* still get a lot of radio play. To Cyrus (Cee Cee) Hood's parents, Reagan will usher in the One World Government, signaling The End Times. His deeply Catholic mother hates all the Vatican II changes and his father is a firm believer that the Holocaust never happened. But as Cee Cee thinks: "Whether all of it was true or not—well, I had never thought about it. How could it not be true?" We sometimes forget just how isolated people were in the no-so-long-ago past and how easy it was to exist in a bubble of your beliefs.

15-year-old Cyrus' mother has just died, his father is an alcoholic, his older brother George is working to save money to get the hell away from home, 11-year-old Charlie is mentally disabled, little Kay Kay is eight, and Cee Cee feels like he is desperately trying to fight against a raging current. Add in child abuse, child neglect and mental illness and this story just rip your heart out bit by bit:

Weren't your mom and dad supposed to take care of you? How could they let you down so badly? How could you survive, knowing you couldn't count on them, knowing when you needed them the most, they wouldn't be there?

Yet ... Cee Cee loves his Daddy, loves and cares for Charlie and Kay Kay and tries to keep his family together, all the while knowing that no matter how hard he tries to be a good person, he himself is going to burn in hell for being gay; but when Oliver Kowski, the cutest boy in school, tells Cee Cee he think he's beautiful and he loves him, it's an unexpected lifeline.

What follows is a story that could have been maudlin or contrived, but Wilgus crafts together something so beautiful and yet so intensely devastating. This book brought tears to my eyes (and more than a few bouts of sobbing) but Cee Cee and Charlie now live in my head and in my heart. I need to know how Cee Cee's life turns out, I want him to find true love and happiness, I want him to sing "You Are My Sunshine" over and over again to Charlie, telling him how much he is loved. **5+ stars for *Raise It Up*.**

I received an ARC from Harmony Ink Press in exchange for an honest review.

Review also posted at Gay Book Reviews - check it out!

Pachi says

It's not nice to make comparisons, but after the first sides of this story I had to think about one of my favorite movies "Gilbert Grape". The relationship between Cee Cee and his brother Charlie is wonderful and one of the main parts of this story. Beside this there is Oliver and it's very well told by Nick Wilgus how the relationship between him and Cee Cee slowly developed.

It is not a pure love story, because Cee Cee has to deal with much more than with his first great love. This is heartbreaking, but the author understands how to reconcile the reader's heart, like I know it from his other stories.

I need to say something more about this story, but I will do in German. My English is not enough for all I want to say.

Ich muss hier noch erwähnen, daß es drei Punkte gibt, wegen denen mir die Geschichte noch mehr ans Herz gewachsen ist, als sie es sowieso schon aufgrund des Hauptcharakters ist.

1. Ich liebe den Film "Gilbert Grape"! Johnny und Leo sind das Brüderpaar überhaupt für mich. In "Raise it Up" entsprechen Cee Cee und Charlie diesen beiden, weshalb ich die Geschichte schon nach den ersten Seiten ins Herz geschlossen habe.

Damit komme ich zum 2. Punkt:

Elton John durfte ich zweimal live erleben. Einmal Open Air im Düsseldorfer Rheinstadion. So etwas vergisst man nie. "Your Song" war immer ein ganz besonderes Lied bei diesen Konzerten. Welche besondere Bedeutung es in "Raise it Up" hat, rührt mich auch jetzt noch zu Tränen. Die Momente mit diesem Lied konnte ich mir richtig gut vorstellen.

3. spielt "Raise it Up" zu Beginn der 80er Jahre, die mich zu dem gemacht haben, was ich heute bin. Daher kann ich vieles, was Cee Cee beschäftigt so gut verstehen. Es ist für mich etwas ungewöhnlich eine Geschichte zu lesen, die zugleich ein Zeitzeugnis meiner Jugend ist. Da könnte ich mich alt fühlen, aber das tue ich nicht, denn durch die Erzählung habe ich das Gefühl von damals wieder bekommen. Das was mich und die Welt damals bewegt hat.

Neben der Handlung an sich, sind dies die Dinge, die diese Geschichte für mich zu etwas besonderem machen.

Russell Sanders says

With *Raise It Up*, author Nick Wilgus has presented finely drawn characters, a plot full of twists, and enough food for thought to feed our brains for days. He tells the story of fifteen-year-old Cyrus Hood, a boy who, when the story begins just before Christmas of 1979, has endured the sudden death of his mother and the

lunacy of his abusive father. Wilgus guides us through Cyrus's life over the next year or so as the boy tries to keep his torn family together and make some sense of the events he has experienced and is experiencing. This is a compelling novel, one that is hard to put down. I feel a special affinity with Wilgus, for not only does he use the effects of organized religion as one of his themes—a theme I return to over and over in my own novels—but he shows us there are what I call “good souls” in this world, ready to help those in need. That motif of “good souls” is prevalent in my novel *The Book of Ethan*. So feeling like writer-brothers, I embraced *Raise It Up* wholeheartedly. I reveled in Cyrus's journey, cheered for him, shed tears for him, and was happy for him when he comes through his ordeal whole and pretty much healed. Do not, however, get the idea that *Raise It Up* is an entirely “feel good” book. Cyrus's story is harrowing, and his emotional journey is complex. But that's what makes a good novel, and *Raise It Up* is definitely that. Wilgus is a fine writer, and this is a fine, fine book.

Vivi says

4 stars!

Raise It Up is an heartbreaking story, that takes place in 1980 and has characters you're bound to love and feel lots for!

It's the story of **Cyrus Hood**, a 15 year-old boy who, even though he knows it is *sinful*, can't help but have feelings for his friend, **Oliver Kowski**.

“I loved Oliver. That was the truth of it. Loved him desperately. But... it was wrong. It wasn't just that I would go to hell. It was that people like George and everyone else would think I was a pervert.”

Cyrus' family life is troubling and hard. And things only get worse when his mom suddenly dies.

Cyrus' dad can't be trusted to take care of Cyrus and his 2 younger siblings - **Charlie** and **Kay**- and his older brother - **George** - just wants to get far away from it all.

How will Cyrus and his family survive?!

And what will happen when people start asking questions about Cyrus' family and past?

Some dark, well kept *secrets* just might come out...

How will Cyrus cope with all of this?!

Read the book to find out ;)

I liked this book. It really messed with my feels.

Most of all, I loved Cyrus and Charlie; and the brotherly bond between them.

My heart broke for Cyrus... for all the mess his family life was; for all the suffering he had gone through; for all the hopelessness he felt and all the certainty he had, that he'd be going to Hell for the sin of being gay.

Charlie was an innocent, sweet, sweet child. I loved him lots too... all the way through the book I really

wanted him to get some help and be okay and happy.

This book really did make me feel lots and even cry a bit.... it has these really upsetting and heartbreaking moments, and you can't help but root for Cyrus, Charlie and Kay... you just can't help but want them to be safe, taken care of and happy.

And I really loved reading about Cyrus singing! ♥... I'm glad he was able to :)

? ? *“When you’re at the end
And you need a friend
I’ll be there to raise you up.*

*When the world is cruel
I’ll be your fool
I’ll be there to raise you up.”? ?*

What I didn't like very much was that, well, I didn't love Oliver...

And I think the romance between Oliver and Cyrus happened way too fast. At one moment, they were attracted to each other and on the next moment they were already declaring their Love for each other... and this all in a time where being gay was a mortal sin for most people! I just wanted to see/read more moments between them before they declared their feelings to each other.

The ending, also, could have been longer and more detailed, though I think it was okay.

Overall, this was a good, full of feels, heartbreaking tale of a gay boy living in the 80's, who goes through lots and lots until he accepts who he is and finds his place in the world.

The Novel Approach Reviews says

I really loved this novel. I have never read this author before, but I must tell you that I will be remedying that in the near future, as I have already begun to check out his backlist. Nick Wilgus writes with a truly distinctive voice—one which is genuine, compelling and rich in emotion. *Raise It Up* is not an easy story to read. With physical and sexual abuse running as concurrent themes, and restrictive religious overtones, you will be constantly amazed at how our hero, Cyrus, manages to survive. It is a brutally honest story that never sugarcoats the hell Cyrus navigates and manages to survive in. But despite all that, Cyrus creates a loving existence for his two younger siblings, and claws his way out of despair over and over again.

Cyrus is a keeper of secrets—some so dark and unimaginable that when they finally begin to spill out, the people who hear them are horrified. He is barely fifteen when his mother dies of a sudden heart attack, something for which Cyrus blames himself, leaving the family in complete and utter disarray. With a drunken, paranoid father who is prone to acts of violence, and an older brother who wants nothing more than to earn enough to escape their deplorable life, it is up to Cyrus to care for his brother Charlie, and sister, Kay. One of the many secrets Cyrus holds is just what happened to Charlie many years ago that left him with the cognitive abilities of a four year old.

With the burden of keeping his little family together, the last thing Cyrus needs is an attraction that the church calls perverted and a mortal sin. But fellow high school sophomore and best friend Oliver is just so kind to Cyrus and likes him—more than he should. Secrets are funny things, and we can hold them in for

only so long before they become an unbearable weight. Cyrus finds himself at a breaking point, and when he finally has no choice left, he must reveal things that will tear his family apart.

There was such strength in Cyrus. Despite the idea that he was absolutely crumbling inside, and walking the edge of a precipice so deep it was frightening, this young man did everything he could to keep his family safe. I was overwhelmed by how deeply this novel affected me. I could not put it down and yet dreaded what I might read next. But through it all, despite the many horrors Cyrus had to endure, he clung to the love he had for his brother and sister. We got to watch Cyrus blossom as Oliver drew him out and helped him understand that the church was not always right and should not be the judge and jury of their sexuality, and that no matter what was buried in the past, the two of them could survive it if they loved each other enough.

I could go on and on—this novel was just brilliant. *Raise It Up* by Nick Wilgus may not be an easy read but it is so worth the effort. Ultimately, love triumphs in this novel. It beats back the dark secrets that threaten to destroy, and lets in much needed healing and light.

Reviewed by Sammy for The Novel Approach

J says

Wow, this was quite a read! The main character in this book is a 15-year old boy who is trying to hold his terribly dysfunctional family together. He himself has been the subject of abuse by his father, witnessed a horrible crime also committed by his father, knows that he is gay and saw his mother die from a heart-attack when she saw him wearing her lipstick and one of her dresses. So, needless to say this is a gritty, sometimes hard to read story (with a few tears) and my heart just ached for this poor boy and his siblings.

But our author Wilgus has such a way with words and characters that I couldn't put the book down. The story is set in the late 1960's in Michigan with lots of heavy traditional Catholic values voiced, in both bad and good ways. Nobody is totally evil (except maybe for the boy's father) but everyone seems to have grey areas of good and bad that just made everything so dynamic. So glad I found this author and book.
