



## The Closest I've Come

*Fred Aceves*

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## **The Closest I've Come** Fred Aceves

Marcos Rivas wants to find love.

He's sure as hell not getting it at home, where his mom's racist boyfriend beats him up. Or from his boys, who aren't exactly the "hug it out" type. Marcos yearns for love, a working cell phone, and maybe a pair of sneakers that aren't falling apart. But more than anything, Marcos wants to get out of Maesta, his hood—which seems impossible.

When Marcos is placed in a new after-school program for troubled teens with potential, he meets Zach, a theater geek whose life seems great on the surface, and Amy, a punk girl who doesn't care what anyone thinks of her. These new friendships inspire Marcos to open up to his Maesta crew, too, and along the way, Marcos starts to think more about his future and what he has to fight for. Marcos ultimately learns that bravery isn't about acting tough and being macho; it's about being true to yourself.

## **The Closest I've Come Details**

Date : Published November 7th 2017 by HarperTeen

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Author : Fred Aceves

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## From Reader Review The Closest I've Come for online ebook

### Lilly (Lair Of Books) says

Just finished this one & it's looking like a 4 star read for all of the positive elements Aceves weaves into a very hard life lived by our MC. Told in first person POV, The Closest I've Come is raw & uncensored giving Marcos' voice & narrative life. This is a review I will really enjoy writing :)

**UPDATE: Full review can also be found on Lair Of Books:**

**<https://lairofbooksblog.wordpress.com...>**

### **PLOT**

The Closest I've come follows Marcos Rivas' life course in a rough neighborhood /violent household & the motivation he finds to want to get out. For Marcos, the daily grind is made up of getting up for school & hanging out with his boys after school to avoid having to go home. Life at home isn't easy & he is met with either his mothers silence and closed doors or her boyfriends fists. Mentally checked-out, Marcos' mother is an alcoholic who doesn't really have much of any relationship with him. Marcos himself would love to play the role of over protective son however, the truth is that internally, more than anything he wishes she would show any signs of caring for him. Life outside his home isn't exactly the best either but in his community he has developed friendships that have become a safe place to turn to. Academics have never really been Marcos' main focus & with no one in his corner rooting and or encouraging him to apply himself, he hasn't given much thought to life after High School. He believes that Maesta is the end all be all for him and many other teens like him. We come across teachers who provide Marcos with the confidence he needs & who most of all, believe in him.

At times, The Closest I've Come was difficult to read because of the violence Marcos experiences at the hands of his mothers boyfriend. It seemed like all the odds are set against this kid & with nothing really inspiring him & his own home being so volatile, I wondered when he would catch a break. With little to no money whatsoever, we see our MC try to earn cash the right way by cleaning parking lots but we also see one of his friends who is a straight A student go about it illegally by delivering drugs. Having myself lived in for many years what was considered a "ghetto" neighborhood, the reality is that too many bright futures are dimmed before they even get a chance to begin. There were so many tough themes in this book paired with positive reinforcement from Marcos' educators that I found myself rooting him on in realizing that he is valued.

### **CHARACTERS**

We see a tremendous amount of character growth take place within our MC Marcos which is perhaps the strongest aspect of The Closest I've Come. Aceves wrote Marcos' character in first Person POV which allows the reader to really get into his thought process. From the way he views his barely existent relationship with his mother to how he handles rejection, Marcos isn't a confident cocky teenage boy. His physical appearance is something he is always hyper aware of because he lacks funds to buy clothes or pay for grooming. Something as simple as a haircut could boost his confidence briefly & a lot of the time he didn't get the end result he was seeking but the effort was there. I LOVED this character & how humble he is the core, he definitely had me in his corner the whole way through. We meet some of his friends from around his neighborhood, mostly through visits to the courtyard to shoot hoops. There's a sense of loyalty from these guys that I've seen for myself in neighborhoods where most don't have it to make ends meet. I enjoyed one particular scene where one of the guys sets up shop on his stoop to cut hair for a couple of dollars, very much like a brotherhood. Although we meet many of Marcos' acquaintances, they aren't as fleshed out as

our MC but nonetheless they serve their purpose in giving the reader a picture of what Marcos has in his life. The friends he has don't really know how bad his home life is but I was glad to see them rise to the occasion when he really needed them.

## **WRITING & FINAL THOUGHTS**

Told in first person POV, *The Closest I've Come* is raw & uncensored giving Marcos' voice & narrative life. Own Voices, Fred Aceves the author, is Latinx & he was raised in a poor working class neighborhood just like the one he brings to life in this book. From the dialogue between Marcos and his friends in the streets to his stream of consciousness on life after High School, our MC is raw & uncut just like the world he lives in. Many who come from similar backgrounds will find this book to be very relatable. To those who don't, *The Closest I've Come* is a insiders look to a reality that exists in our real world. Not only do we get POC representation but we also see socioeconomic diversity when Marco meets & befriends a HS student from a wealthy background. The challenges Marco has in his life are going to resonate with others & that is one of the biggest reasons I am happy to see this narrative hit the shelves.

**\*HUGE thanks to HarperTeen, Edelweiss, and Fred Aceves for the eGalley copy of *The Closest I've Come* in exchange for an honest review.**

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### **Ms. Yingling says**

E ARC from Edelweiss Above the Treeline  
Definitely a Young Adult book. The language and situations that indicate this begin early on.

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### **Read InAGarden says**

*The Closest I've Come* is a remarkable book with a very authentic voice. Marco lives in the projects with a mentally absentee mom. For the past year his mother has allowed her physically abusive boyfriend to live in the apartment. She knows that Brian abuses Marco but does nothing to stop it. But Marco is more than his home life. He's a product of his neighborhood, Maesta, and his crew. Just about any urban inner-city youth reading the novel will see similarities between their circumstances in life and Marco's. As a sophomore, Marco is too young to be hired for most jobs but he needs money in order to have any kind of game with the girls. Not wanting to go the way of drug dealing, he and his friends try to interest neighbors in car washes, lot cleanings, and anything else that would give them enough money for a hair cut. Then Marco is picked for a special program at school for students who show promise but lack scholastic skills. Also in this program is Amy, a girl Marco thinks could be his girlfriend - if he worked up the courage to talk to her.

*The Closest I've Come* can work as a novel for many readers but it will also work well as a teaching piece for book clubs. While the cover is a beautiful illustration, a more cutting edge, urban, pictorial cover would allow this novel to be appreciated by more teens.

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### **Teenreadsdotcom says**

THE CLOSEST I'VE COME by Fred Aceves is a unique book. I've been reading young adult literature for as long as I became a reader and --- I think a lot of people would agree with me here --- most of the time it's

in the female's point of view. At this point, I can't remember the last time I read a book that was in a male's perspective.

The male perspective is just an eye grabber. *THE CLOSEST I'VE COME* follows Marcos Rivas' search for love. Right from the beginning, we are introduced to an innocent and sweet character in a horrible situation. With an emotionally distant mother, who sits back and watches her boyfriend physically abuse Marcos, and an overwhelming sense of solitude, Marcos is just searching for someone to believe in him. The closest thing he has to that is his group of friends from the same neighborhood, the Maesta.

It was so interesting to read Marcos' conflicting relation to his "ghetto" neighborhood. While he acquainted himself with those of the same origin as he, he wanted nothing more than to escape that lifestyle. It's a recurring conflict where he feels the most understood and connected to those who grew up and look the same as he, yet we see him struggle to disassociate himself with the Maesta. At first, Marcos isn't able to separate where he is from and who he wants to be. Reading from his perspective allowed me to understand his struggle with his identity. Oftentimes it even made sense. Marcos' struggle is one I heavily identified with, whether it's because I'm a teenager or because I'm a first generation high-school graduate, the internal conflict with people's low expectations has never been so heavily highlighted in any book I have ever read. How does someone succeed if it seems as though the world expects them to fail?

It's funny because no matter how open-minded people seem to be, unfortunately, there are still some stereotypes we fall back on --- whether consciously or not. Marcos isn't a "don't judge a book by its cover" example, his "cover" being baggy jeans and too big shirts. No, Marcos is a victim of unfortunate stereotypes, it shouldn't matter where he lives, who he's associated with, or the type of clothes he wears. Except it does, and he lets other's perspectives of him affect his self-worth.

What I found most interesting about Marcos was how insecure he was of himself, yet how humble and honest his actions were. He saw his straight A friend fall into drug dealing and saw him get the things he couldn't even dream of getting, yet he still attempted to get money through sweeping parking lots.

Throughout his journey, there was nothing I wanted more than to reach in and yell "hey, I get it! You're not alone!" Alas, I couldn't and instead, I got to be immersed in the story of a wonderfully crafted character. If you're looking for a coming-of-age story, this is for you. If you're looking for a diverse read, this is for you. If you're looking for amazing character development and intriguing storytelling, this is for you. If you don't know what you're looking for, Fred Aceves does and he does not disappoint.

Reviewed by Sabina Z., Teen Board Member

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### **Amy Layton says**

All I can say is wow. I've gushed to this book so many times to so many people, and I honestly hope that I convinced them to read it through my word-tumbling, fast-paced explanations. I was so impressed with this book, and I can't wait until Aceves' second (if he's already writing one...I hope so, though)--I'll be the first in line to buy it!

This book discusses lots of topics that I'm familiar with only theoretically, such as being poor, in a domestically difficult (to say the least) situation, and a woman who's allowed and expected to be emotional. However, as a sidenote, I will say that I legitimately know that I know how it feels like being a punk(-esque) teenager named Amy (but to a certain extent, to be fair).

Aceves writes with an engaging voice that makes you root for Marcos at almost every turn. And when you're not rooting for him, you end up obsessively reading so that you can read about him making a Realization.

I love how this book discusses drug-dealing, friend-zoning, and friends-being-friends-ing. It's just so good.

Also, for any of you from the Pacific Northwest, our favorite Barefoot Bandit snags a mention!! (Honestly, I called my mom about this and she hollered for a straight minute). Though it might be a reference lost on some people, it was a really, really great one that made me laugh so hecking hard.

I only wish I had better words to describe how much I loved this book to you all. It was fun, engaging, and very Real in terms of what so many people are dealing with. It's honestly refreshing to read about this perspective in a YA novel, and I hope this continues the trend that's slowly making its way to the surface.

Review cross-listed here!

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### **Robin Herrera says**

Really liked this book - lots of character growth, which I think is important to see. You can admit you're wrong, or that you've made mistakes, and the world doesn't end.

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### **Dahlia says**

Sped through this in a couple of hours today and loved it. This book has endless amounts of Voice and I'm so thrilled to see more coming-of-age stories centering teens of color. After reading so many great ones by WoC lately (CALLING MY NAME! THE EDUCATION OF MARGOT SANCHEZ! I AM NOT YOUR PERFECT MEXICAN DAUGHTER! to name a few from this year), I'm glad to see some coming up for boys too, as the number of YAs centering boys of color not written by Matt de la Pena, Walter Dean Myers, Bil Wright, Jason Reynolds, Lamar Giles, or Adam Silvera are frighteningly low. (And I mean, we're talking looking at the last couple of *decades*.) My real favorite thing about this book, though, is that for Marcos, coming of age means learning how to shed toxic masculinity (among other things), and damn if I wouldn't kill to see that in more books, period. Definitely recommend to fans of WHEN I WAS THE GREATEST.

cw: racial slurs, child abuse

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### **Curtis Wu says**

This is the first YA book I've read in a couple of years, so please take this review within that context.

To me, there are two strengths of this book that stand out and set it apart from the lion's share of YA literature. The first is the author's ability to forge moments of genuine connection between Marcos and the adults around him. Marcos Rivas, the main character, recognizes the ways in which the adults around him fail to connect with the teens they parent and teach. Rather than allow himself to be passive in the face of those failures, he offers his own perspective on the world, and allows the adults to accept or reject it. For those adults who accept Marcos' perspective, they have the opportunity to offer him wisdom in return. The

conversations between Marcos and the adults in his life manage, for the most part, to avoid becoming after school specials or cynical demonstrations of the unbridgeable gulf between race, age, and class.

The second strength is the way friendship takes precedence over romantic love as the primary relationship examined in Marcos's life. Parent, teacher, and romantic relationships do appear in this book, but Aceves reserves the majority of his words for consideration of what it means to be a friend, from life-long friends to new friends, and what it looks like to navigate the grey zone between friendship and romance.

One aspect of the book that I feel could have been given some greater depth is the way Marcos interacts with law enforcement. With the ascendance of *The Hate U Give* as a YA novel and movie, the characters' interactions with police officers and people in authority felt a little flat and served more as a plot device than an authentic depiction. Given the amount of time Aceves spends to build up Maesta as a realistic setting, the depictions of law enforcement's interactions with the neighborhood members bounce inconsistently between them being helpful or bigoted depending on how the plot requires them to behave.

However, I found that this last quibble does not detract much from the overall story and theme. It's hard to sell a book about toxic masculinity to teens when it is presented as a book about toxic masculinity. *The Closest I've Come* finds a way to tell a story that honors the difficulty of being a young man, while also suggesting that men can be supported and empowered to find the deep connections that can bear them through those difficulties.

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### **Ernesto Cisneros says**

This is a book every Latino teen has to read. The world building and characters are authentic and will draw you in.

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### **Mona says**

Marcos Rivas lives in Florida, and he's the poorest of the poor, living in the poorest apartments in town. Knowing that his mom would rather buy liquor than him a new pair of tennis shoes is a kick in the gut. But knowing she'd choose her abusive, racist, criminal boyfriend over him makes him feel things no kid should have to feel.

This story made my heart ache. It also made me cheer for Marcos and the decisions he ultimately made. In this screwed up world, sometimes things do turn out all right, which is why I wholeheartedly recommend this book to anyone seeking the light at the end of the tunnel.

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### **Teri says**

2.3

I wanted to like this book. All the reviews are so positive and I had such high hopes....

I found the big thing the positive reviews are on is that it is a coming of age story with a latino main character. This is true and that is great. However, fitting into that one category is not enough to make the

book great. This book is like if a 90s after school special and Dangerous Minds/ Freedom Writers got together and had a baby. Poor minority kid decides to turn his life around because one teacher gave him a chance and a string of problems all arise one at a time to be dealt with by a quick change of attitude and the a long reflection on the error of the previous ways. I don't have exact quotes, but there was one part when he was playing basketball with his friends and said something like "My game was dope. But you know what else was dope? Getting my act together and doing well that last semester of school."

I did enjoy the character idea and appreciated the focus on his situation. I think the presentation of how one problem can seep in to create a multitude of other issues was done well. Being poor is not just about not having money, but about not having time because of your preoccupation with getting money and about what things are and are not available to you because of resources or appearance or society, etc.

Unlike other reviewers, I didn't feel there was a whole lot of character development and maturity. The problems arose one at a time and tended to all be dealt with in the same exact manner (inner dialogue leads to the 'I've been looking at this all wrong!' eureka moments). At the end of the book he has different ideas than when it started, but only on those specific things that were addressed. There was no extrapolation of what he 'learned' to larger perspectives or situations. For example, he learned not to judge people on their looks because Zach and Amy were actually pretty cool and not what he expected. Even people who look like they have it together have their own personal battles to be fighting. Except then he fails to utilize this lesson in any future interactions with any other newly introduced character.

Ending on a better note, my favorite part of the whole book was when he was thinking about what kind of person he would be if he didn't feel the constant pressure of other people expectations. Like if he was just alone and free to be himself, who would he be? I thought this was very interesting because it made you think a bit and admit that you maybe don't know yourself quite as well/as much as you think you do.

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## **Fisher says**

This is a funny book with some serious times . The author is Fred Aceves and this is his first ever novel. Marcus the main character in the story is a boy who is around the age of 15. Who is skinny, poor and likes to play basketball with his boys. He hangs out with a group of friends from his neighbor hood. Who deals drugs, play basketball and look for jobs for money. His mother works at Walmart. She gets about minimum wage but Marcus's step dad Bryan spends it all on alcohol. Marcus and his step dad don't get along all that well. Marcus comes to school some days with bruises on his body and under is eyes from his step father abusing him. Marcus is also trying to get a girlfriend named Amy who is nothing like him. The only things they have in common are being poor and having an ass of a stepdad. His friend is trying to get some extra money by selling some drugs but it doesn't go the way he wanted it too.

The environment of the book is set in Florida in a little town called Masea in the hood. Over time throughout the book Marcus realizes that he needs to get his life together so he can move away from his town and leave all of his problems behind.

Fred Aceves did an excellent job on this book for being his first novel. This is based on the author's childhood and what growing up was like for him. I thought that Aceves did I great job with his friends and were they came into his story and with the setting of the book.

This is one of my favorite books of all time. It is a very fun read with a lot happening in the story. It makes you laugh at times and makes you think too. It is not a very long novel to read and it is a fast pace. The author Aceves tells the story straight forward. There is a lot of profound language and there is drug abuse in the book. That's why this is one of my favorite books.

The only thing I would change throughout the whole book is the ending. The ending did not have anything to do with the book it just showed how close him and his friends were. I recommend this book to people above

the age of 12 or students in high schools because of the drug abuse and the profound language. Otherwise this is a very fun read, with all of the ups and downs it has and all the surprising moments it has, this book will surely be in your top ten reads of all time. It is a real eye opener and makes you question the author after reading The Closest I've Come. I can not compare it to any other book because it is Aceves first book he has written. This is still a excellent book.

Harper Collins Publisher 2017

320 pages

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### **mads&#x1f338; says**

This book is the cutest thing in the world! Between a harsh family life and the hope to find true love, the main character has to cope and adapt to a new culture once he leaves his racist, and abusive step dad in order to take control of his life. I love the love story and accurately portrays living in a Latin type ghetto. Ugh such an amazing book!

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### **Brandi says**

Great #ownvoices story! Especially loved that educators were portrayed in a positive light. When Marcos realizes that we (educators) probably really do care, I'm all like, "uhh...yeah, we ain't in this for the money."

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### **Karen says**

a strong 3.5 stars

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