

A trans man's memoir chronicles his journey, which took a major step in Utah

In 'Beautiful Monster,' Miles Borrero retraces his path — which includes a pivotal moment in a Utah movie theater.



(Regalo Press) Miles Borrero, author of the memoir "Beautiful Monster: A Becoming."

By Palak Jayswal | Oct. 22, 2023, 8:00 a.m.

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After graduating high school in Colombia during the era of drug kingpin Pablo Escobar, [Miles Borrero's](#) college years in Salt Lake City were, he said, something of a respite.

And, as he describes in his memoir, "[Beautiful Monster: A Becoming](#)" (to be released Tuesday by Regalo Press) Borrero's childhood in Colombia and his time in Salt Lake City helped him become

Regalo Press), Borrero's childhood in Colombia and his time in Salt Lake City helped him become who he is today: A yoga-loving transgender man.

When Borrero arrived in Utah in the late 1990s, Salt Lake City — deep in preparations for the 2002 Winter Olympics — was “like a budding progressive” place, Borrero said in an interview.



“It was softer” than Bogota, he said, “being in a space where I could have my windows open without bars on them. And if I left my door unlocked, it wasn’t the end of the world.”

Borrero was born in Brazil, but moved to Bogota with his family during Escobar’s reign over the Medellin drug cartel. Escobar was killed in a gun battle with Colombian police in December 1993.

In Colombia, Borrero said, “everything kind of crescendoed [with Escobar] as I was on my way out of high school — so it was a really weird and very interesting environment to live in.”

Residents, Borrero said, were in a constant state of anxiety, waiting for bombs to go off.

“I grew up in a time before cellphones, where we had to be very, very diligent about telling our parents where we were, because if something went wrong, they needed to know where to look for us,” he said.

Growing up that way, Borrero said, was “a very distilling way to step into the moment. ... I was really present a lot of my childhood and teenage years, in a way that maybe other people haven’t had to be.”

A realization in a Utah theater

When Borrero was considering college options, he said, he started looking in Cuba and Spain — but then began exploring options in the United States, specifically the University of Utah’s theater department.

His father grabbed an old VHS camera and recorded what Borrero called “a mess of an audition.”

It was refreshing, he said, to live in Utah, after being in Colombia, where everything was “a slippery slope, where one day could be good and, in the next, people would be digging bodies out of rubble.”

Borrero said he soon realized that living in a state of emergency wasn’t normal. That’s why Salt Lake City feels in many ways like home, he said.

In Salt Lake City, Borrero first saw the movie “[Boys Don’t Cry](#),” director Kimberly Peirce’s true-life drama about the young life and tragic death of transgender Nebraska teen Brandon Teena. The film debuted in Utah at the Broadway Centre Cinemas in March 2000, two weeks before Hilary Swank won an Academy Award for her portrayal of Teena.

Borrero said the movie stuck with him in ways he didn’t unearth until he started writing his book. He said he saw it on a Wednesday afternoon, during the movie’s short run in Salt Lake City. In the theater, it was just him and one other person.

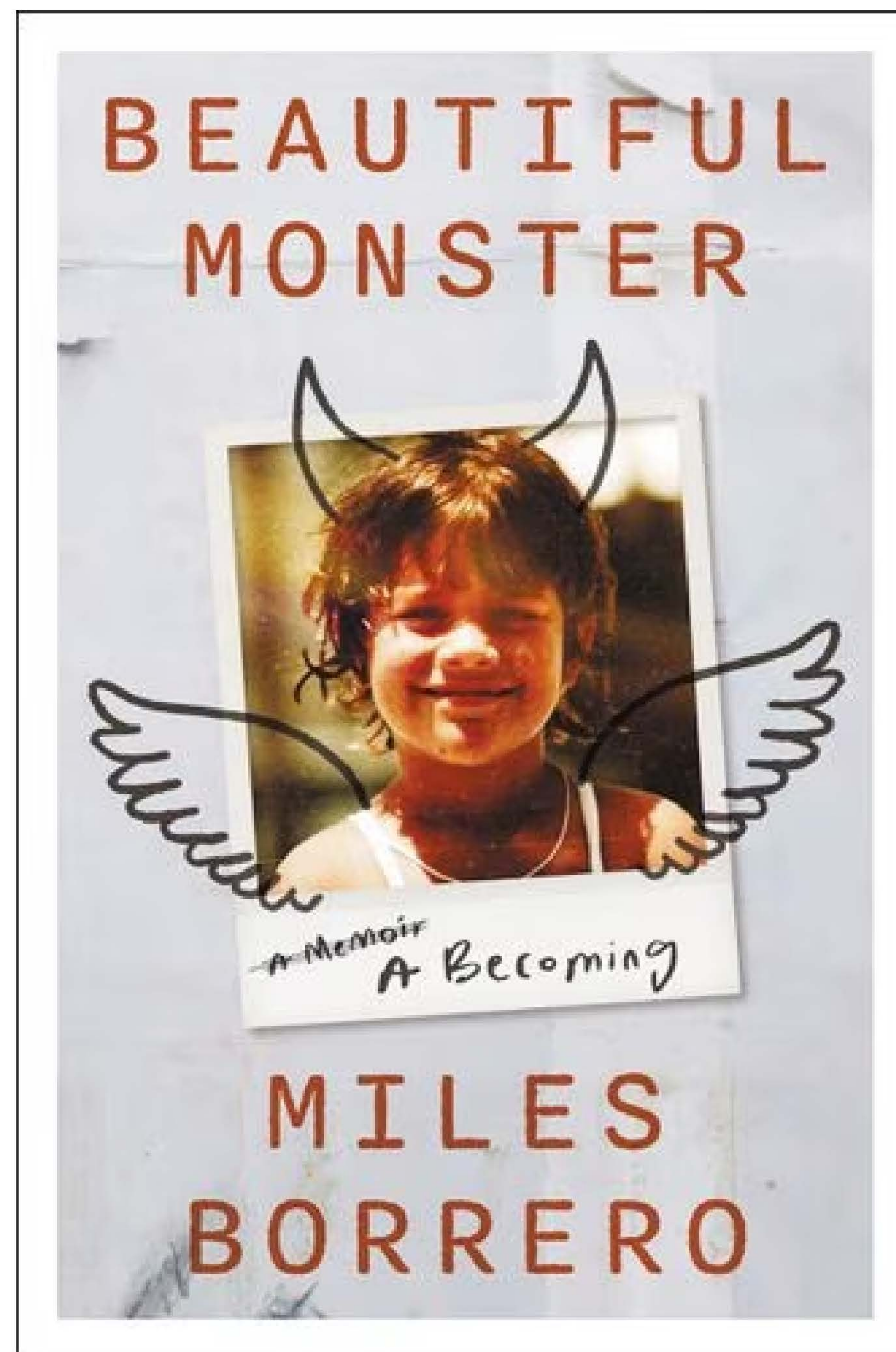
“I just remember being just awestruck, like my brain couldn’t understand what I was experiencing. I found it really shocking,” he said. “I don’t think I could even really process or articulate [it], but I just had never seen me represented up there [on a screen].”

He said that feeling turned dark by the movie’s conclusion, which depicts Teena’s rape and murder.

“By the time I got to the end of the film, ... that moment of ecstasy and ‘aha’ left me entirely, because I was, like, ‘Oh, this is what happens to people like Brandon,’” Borrero said. “When I think back on it, I have a muddy pit in my stomach about it.”

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Borrero said “that realization, that something and someone so beautiful could come to such a horrendous end,” was something he buried deep down for years.



(Regalo Press) The book jacket for Miles Borrero's book, "Beautiful Monster: A Becoming."

‘We’re all transitioning’

Years later, Borrero said, his parents gave him their blessing before he chose to have “top” surgery and start taking testosterone. It was a decision, he said, that had been brewing in different ways for years.

“As my dad was ill and nearing his death, it just started feeling more and more urgent, to be honest with them about who I was,” Borrero said. “I felt that that might be clarifying for them. [It] felt like he deserved to know.”

Before telling his parents, Borrero wrote about his life experiences in a series of essays on a blog.

“My idea was to compile some of those essays into a little book,” he said. “When I started compiling them, I just realized that the story that needed and wanted to be written was a different story.”

Around the same time, he said, he started seeing his sweetheart, Sarah — who, he learned on their first date, was a poet. A few days after that date, Borrero gathered the courage to share his writing with her.

“When she read it, she was like, ‘There’s something here. Like, you have to keep going,’” Borrero said. “It was a confirmation that I needed, that there was something there that needed to be expressed.”

A memoir, he said, “is kind of like an evolution of a human being.” That’s why, he said, he hopes there’s something for everyone in the book.

“My hope was to write something that was beautifully written, that could really explore the depth of the human condition,” he said. “We’re all transitioning all the time. A transition like mine, the lens is a lot more focused, but I don’t think it’s any different in a lot of ways than other things that people go through.”

His hope for the book, Borrero said, is “that it offers the immensity of what that is for a trans person, and also the sort of small, wonderful little details that are so human that everybody can relate to.”

Miles Borrero is slated to talk about his memoir, *“Beautiful Monster: A Becoming,”* in [an onstage interview](#) on Nov. 9, 7 p.m., at the Dumke Auditorium at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts, 410 Center Campus Drive, University of Utah campus, Salt Lake City. Robert Scott Smith, assistant professor in the U.’s Department of Theatre, is scheduled to moderate the Q&A. A book signing will follow. The event is free.



pjayswal@sltrib.com
X Follow @palak_jayswal

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