

Foreword Review JUVENILE NONFICTION

Becoming Who We Are: Real Stories About Growing Up Trans

Sammy Lisel, Editor Hazel Newlevant, Editor A Wave Blue World (Jun 4, 2024) Softcover \$16.99 (144pp) 978-1-949518-26-9

With memoir entries for transgender youths by transgender people, *Becoming Who We Are* is a comics anthology about the process of becoming yourself as a transgender person. It includes essential representation along with a life-affirming message: you may feel isolated, but you are not alone.

By a lineup of transgender illustrators and writers, both award-winning and breakout independent talents, the book tells nine transgender people's stories of coming into their identities. While Rebekah Bruesehoff, the youngest contributor, is still in her late teenage years, most others reflect on their childhoods from the vantage of adulthood, with glimpses of what comes next in terms of careers to personal lives when one is living as their authentic self. Some stories touch on difficult childhoods featuring poverty and neglect—circumstances beyond children's control. Each person's trans identity is affected by such problems, as their abilities to focus on self-actualization are delayed amid the pressures of survival.

Unified by soft palettes, hand-drawn styles, and a cozy aesthetic, the anthology moves through contributors' childhoods into their presents. Each entry distills a complex life story and a sense of rich personal identity into a moving yet simplified arc of figuring out what it means to be human. They emphasize the breadth of transgender experiences and the needs of young audiences, focusing not only on people from a variety of identities under the transgender umbrella, but on diversity in people's cultural, economic, and racial backgrounds. There's power in the depiction of transgender people in rich and poor homes, accepting families and rejecting ones, white and BIPOC spaces, and communities both urban and rural.

In the comic anthology *Becoming Who We Are*, transgender origin stories are just as difficult and beautiful as anyone else's.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (May / June 2024)

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