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Book Review - Coming of Age in a Hardscrabble World: A Memoir Anthology

Kristi L. Smith

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Book Review - Coming of Age in a Hardscrabble World: A Memoir Anthology

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Off the SHELF

Coming of Age in a Hardscrabble World: A Memoir Anthology edited by Nancy C. Atwood and Roger Atwood (The University of Georgia Press, 2019: ISBN 9780820355320, \$29.95)

Coming of Age compiles 30 chapters from 30 memoirs, each chapter telling a single author's coming-of-age tale. Well-known authors such as Maya Angelou, Tobias Wolff, and bell hooks are included in this anthology, as well as some lesser-known authors. Each author has a unique coming-of-age story, with veins of similarity running between most. Poverty, single mothers, immigration, and feelings of inadequacy are common themes in these autobiographical Bildungsromane.

The editors, Nancy C. Atwood and her son Roger Atwood, have organized these 30 nonfiction stories into nine like sections (e.g., neighborhoods). They have provided critical commentary at the end of each section as well as discussion questions.

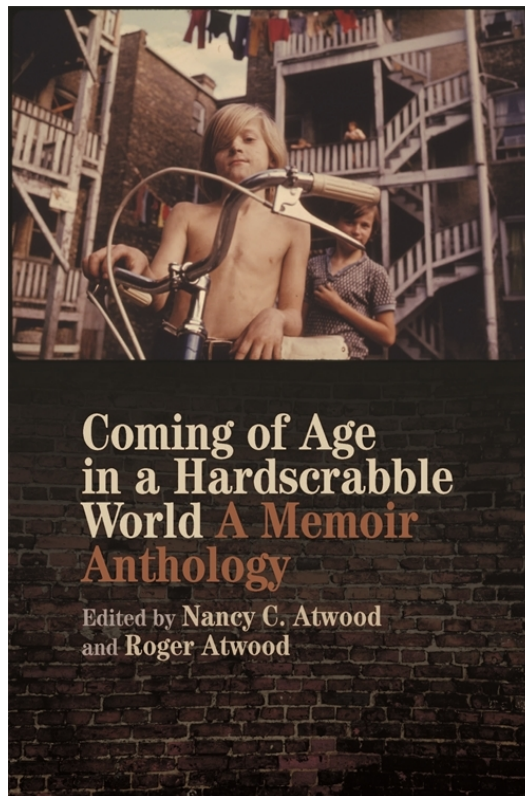
In the chapter "All Over but the Shoutin'," author Rick Bragg describes growing up in rural Alabama during racial segregation under the oppressive rule of Governor George Wallace, a.k.a. Fighting Judge. Bragg describes living in poverty with his alcoholic, abusive father whose heated language was peppered with racial slurs and his mother who tried to protect him and his brothers from the constant abuse. Of his dad,

Bragg says, "...to find what ultimately shaped and softened my own family, I have to reach back into the darkest and ugliest time of my childhood...we have to peel back layers of bad, the last few months we lived with our daddy, the year we went to sleep every night afraid." Bragg has a vivid memory of walking in on his

mom pouring his dad's moonshine down the drain at the kitchen sink one day after school, while thinking, "He's gonna kill you, Momma. He's gonna kill you for that." Momma's response to his dad's anger over the discovery: "don't hurt my teeth." When his dad finally left the family for good, Bragg was shocked at the kindness of an African American sharecropper family who lived less than a mile away. He wondered how one of these families could send their little boy to his house with corn to eat after he and his brothers had thrown rocks at and made fun of them. In the neighboring town of

Anniston, white people beat the Freedom Riders and burned their buses, yet this family had the courage to help a white family in need. Bragg would go on to win the Pulitzer Prize for his work with *The New York Times*.

In 1960, author Sandra Scofield found herself at the University of Texas, Austin at 17 years old to escape her stepfather and stepmother, who preferred she skip college and find work as an unskilled laborer. Never having attended a college football game, she happily accepted an



invitation to watch her college team play on television at an acquaintance's house. While the guys at the party got drunk on beer purchased at a nearby 7-Eleven with a fake ID, Sandra also got drunk for the first time. She decided she'd had enough when the living room began spinning, so she found an air-conditioned room, threw up and peed, and then passed out. She awoke to being raped. Three of the partygoers took turns raping her, while she cried, begged, and screamed, "No!" She was unable to discuss her trauma until several months later when she confessed to her roommate, Darlene. She responded, "...really it was nothing and I would get over it." Darlene had also been raped by half of the high school team for which she had

been a cheerleader. Darlene ended up in the hospital while the boys who viciously took her virginity escaped punishment. Her parents were raising her baby as her little brother to avoid scandal. Scofield would later win a literary award from the Texas Institute of Letters and become a National Book Award finalist.

This title is highly recommended for public and academic libraries, high school media centers, and historical society libraries.

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