



Book Club Book of the Month April 2021

***Growing Up Disabled in Australia*, edited by Carly Findlay OAM (Black Inc Books)**

Summary

Compiled and edited by writer and appearance activist Carly Findlay OAM, more than forty writers come together in this rich collection of stories from a group whose voices are not heard often enough; those negotiating disability in their lives. One in five Australians has a disability, and disability presents itself in many ways. This collection of writing draws on the breadth of experience of those living – and growing up – in an Australia where disability is and continues to be heavily underrepresented in media and literature. Blending memoir, non-fiction, and poetry, writers from all over Australia share their experiences of disability, ranging from physical disabilities, chronic illness, visual and hearing impairment, mental illness, and neurodiversity. The result is an illuminating reading experience that goes a long way in reshaping the conversation we should all be having about disability in our shared communities.

Contributors include Paralympian Isis Holt, Dion Beasley, Sam Drummond, Astrid Edwards, Sarah Firth, El Gibbs, Eliza Hull, Gayle Kennedy, Carly-Jay Metcalfe, Fiona Murphy, Jessica Walton, and many more. Western Australian writers are brilliantly represented with outstanding contributions from senator Jordon Steele-John, Sandi Parsons, Patrick Gunasekera, Jordan Steele-John and Marla Bishop.

About the Editor

Carly Findlay OAM is an award-winning writer, speaker, and appearance activist. Her first book, a memoir called *Say Hello*, was released in Australia in January 2019. Carly works part-time as Melbourne Fringe's Access and Inclusion Coordinator and writes on disability and appearance diversity issues for news outlets including *CNN*, *ABC*, *The Age*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, and *SBS*. She was named one of Australia's most influential women in the 2014 Australian Financial Review and Westpac 100 Women of Influence Awards. She has spoken at the Sydney Opera House, Melbourne Writers Festival, the University of Western England, Melbourne University and has been a regular on various ABC radio programs. She also organised the history-making Access to Fashion – a Melbourne Fashion Week event featuring

disabled models. Carly identifies as a proud disabled woman and currently lives in Melbourne, Australia.

Questions for discussion

NB: Please be mindful that not all disability is visible or disclosed, and keep respect central for those you share spaces and conversations with on these topics.

1. In her introduction, Carly Findlay advises she took an “intersectional approach when selecting the work.” How well do you feel she managed to achieve this in the selection of writing?
2. Findlay also tells us that some writers chose to use a pseudonym for their work, “such is the stigma or fear of speaking out about disability.” How did this make you feel about how disability is perceived in Australian society?
3. The collection blends an ambitious selection of work, covering memoir, essay, non-fiction, poetry, a graphic novella, and other experimental forms. In your opinion, how well does this work? Would you have preferred the collection to be more uniform in its approach?
4. In ‘Falling in Love, Fanfic, and Bone Fusion’, Kit Kavanagh Ryan says: “Annie had cerebral palsy too ... We were matched up at school as fellow crips for years, and we hated each other’s guts because of it.” Olivia Muscat echoes a similar sentiment in her work ‘Selected Epistles’ with “Just because we’re both blind doesn’t mean we will be friends.” Why do you think people are so eager to place disability as a connector between individuals above the actual person and their personality?
5. The writing throughout the collection spans different generations, with some writers reflecting on their experiences while others write about living it in the present. What sense did you get that attitudes towards disability have changed in Australia, if at all?
6. Many of the writers speak in detail about their experiences with the medical profession and the ways their disabilities have been seen as ‘problems to be fixed’ above all else. What are your thoughts on how some current medical models and approaches position disability as a ‘problem’?
7. In her work, ‘Catching Meaning’, Natalia Wikana says: “Social media has helped me accept myself, and learn from other disabled people about ableism.” What role do you think social media, and to a larger extent social media activism, plays (positive or negative) in developing our understanding of disability and ableism?
8. Which stories have stayed with you after reading, and why do you think these stories have stuck in your mind especially?
9. The collection is based on the Social Model of Disability* which “challenges the physical, attitudinal, communication and social environment to accommodate impairment.” How has your understanding of this model grown through reading this collection?

10. How has this collection shaped or changed your ideas of disability across our communities more generally?

**More information about the Social Model of Disability can be found on the People with Disability Australia (PWDA) website: <https://pwd.org.au/resources/disability-info/social-model-of-disability/>*

If you liked this book you may also like...

Say Hello by Carly Findlay, Harper Collins, 2019

Show Me Where It Hurts by Kylie Maslin, Text Publishing, 2020

Music Our Bodies Can't Hold by Andy Jackson, Hunter Publishers, 2017

Growing Up Aboriginal in Australia, ed. Anita Heiss, Black Inc Books, 2018

Growing Up Queer in Australia, ed. Benjamin Law, Black Inc Books, 2019

Growing Up African in Australia, eds. Maxine Beneba Clarke, Magan Magan & Ahmed Yussuf, Black Inc Books, 2019