

Michelle Obama's *Becoming* on Goodreads:

Look, I'm not a happy crier. I might cry at songs about leaving and missing someone; I might cry at books where things don't work out; I might cry at movies where someone dies. I've just never really understood why people get all choked up over happy, inspirational things. But Michelle Obama's kindness and empathy changed that. This book had me in tears for all the right reasons.

This is not really a book about politics, though political experiences obviously do come into it. It's a shame that some will dismiss this book because of a difference in political opinion, when it is really about a woman's life. About growing up poor and black on the South Side of Chicago; about getting married and struggling to maintain that marriage; about motherhood; about being thrown into an amazing and terrifying position.

I hate words like "inspirational" because they've become so overdone and cheesy, but I just have to say it-- Michelle Obama is an inspiration. I had the privilege of seeing her speak at The Forum in Inglewood, and she is one of the warmest, funniest, smartest, down-to-earth people I have ever seen in this world.

And yes, I know we present what we want the world to see, but I truly do think it's genuine. I think she is someone who really cares about people - especially kids - and wants to give them better lives and opportunities.

She's obviously intelligent, but she also doesn't gussy up her words. She talks straight, with an openness and honesty rarely seen. She's been one of the most powerful women in the world, she's been a graduate of Princeton and Harvard Law School, she's had her own successful career, and yet she has remained throughout that same girl - Michelle Robinson - from a working class family in Chicago.

I don't think there's anyone who wouldn't benefit from reading this book.

Source: Goodreads

Rick Prashaw's *Soar, Adam, Soar*:

Ten years ago, I read a book called *Almost Perfect*. The young-adult novel by Brian Katcher won some awards and was held up as a powerful, nuanced portrayal of a young trans person. But the reality did not live up to the book's billing. Instead, it turned out to be a one-dimensional and highly fetishized portrait of a trans person's life, one that was nevertheless repeatedly dubbed "realistic" and "affecting" by non-transgender readers possessing only a vague, mass-market understanding of trans experiences.

In the intervening decade, trans narratives have emerged further into the literary spotlight, but those authored by trans people ourselves – and by trans men in particular – have seemed to fall under the shadow of cisgender sensationalized imaginings. Two current Canadian releases – *Soar*,

Adam, Soar and This One Looks Like a Boy – provide a pointed object lesson into why trans-authored work about transgender experiences remains critical.

To be fair, *Soar*, *Adam*, *Soar* isn't just a story about a trans man. It's also a story about epilepsy, the medical establishment, and coming of age as seen through a grieving father's eyes. *Adam*, Prashaw's trans son, died unexpectedly at age 22. Woven through the elder Prashaw's narrative are excerpts from Adam's social media posts, giving us glimpses into the young man's interior life as he traverses his late teens and early 20s.

But Prashaw makes choices that render the narrative difficult to read, in particular his insistence on using Adam's former name (an appellation that, among trans people, would be known as his "dead name") and feminine pronouns to refer to Adam at any point before he announced his true gender at age 17. Combined with Prashaw's tone when referring to many of Adam's other choices about his body and relationships, the narrative veers far closer to paternalistic than paternal: judgment about relationships, budgeting, and body modifications infuse parts of the story that could have been framed through the lens of a young person's independence and individuation. We don't get to feel the fierceness of pride and sweetness one might expect when Adam is able both to find work while trans (remarkable considering the high rate of unemployment among trans people) and retain jobs while living with active epilepsy.

The loyalty and love of Adam's friends eventually get a chapter, but this doesn't happen until Adam has died – a literary choice that further underscores the ways in which *Soar*, *Adam*, *Soar*, though putatively the story of a teenager's journey through transitioning, is in fact Rick Prashaw's book, not Adam's. The searing and intensely felt final third, in which Prashaw is free to write from his own experience as a grieving father, is beautifully observed in heartbreaking, granular detail. I imagined tearing out just those pages to offer as a balm to parents I know who are awash in the same intractable, inconceivable undertow of pain and loss.

In contrast, Lorimer Shenher's *This One Looks Like a Boy*, which traces Shenher's own considerably emotional journey through transitioning, is much stronger and more interesting. Told in a linear fashion and reaching back to Shenher's earliest memories of gendered experiences, the book grapples with how starkly the author's insistent, internal sense of his gender identity was at odds with the gender expression required by his circumstances. This story reveals itself over the span of decades, from grade school through Shenher's work as an investigator for the Vancouver Police Department, including brief but harrowing references to the case of serial killer Robert Pickton, on which he was a lead detective for a period of time.

Using finely observed detail and spare, unadorned prose, Shenher answers many common questions about trans men's experiences with unflinching honesty. So many of Shenher's experiences – including struggles with alcohol and complicated relationship narratives – feel searingly true, almost to the point of being painful to read. Shenher remains thoughtful toward the end, discussing the ways that living as a man reshaped his interactions with women. Like

many of us, he struggled to re-learn gendered expectations and bring his feminist ideals into his new embodiment.

Shenher's descriptions of how hard he worked to please or soothe the people in his life by pretending, even to himself, that his name and the use of incorrect pronouns or gendered attribution didn't bother him clang noisily against Prashaw's choices (and justification of them) on the same topics in *Soar*, *Adam*, *Soar*. Where Prashaw imagines, Shenher reports – and does so movingly.

Source: Quill and Quire