

★ A Brief History of Oversharing: One Ginger's Anthology of Humiliation

Shawn Hitchins

ECW Press (Sep 5, 2017)

Softcover \$14.99 (240pp)

978-1-77041-326-9

Hitchins's mix of raw emotion and salty hilarity works beautifully.

It takes a special kind of person to write a play-by-play description of masturbation that is simultaneously hilarious, repulsive, and sweet. That person is Shawn Hitchins.

Hitchins is a Canadian comic perhaps best known for organizing the first Ginger Pride event in 2013, where he led hundreds of redheads through the streets of Edinburgh, Scotland, politely demanding respect for the “red, orange, and pale.”

His book is at turns bawdy and beautiful, exploring what it was like to grow up as part of what he calls “the placeholder generation,” coming of age in a time when the previous generation had been decimated by the AIDS epidemic and the sweeping tide of marriage equality had not yet begun.

Though Hitchins exposes some of the most intimate events in his life, from the moment his father cruelly outed him to an old family friend to the tornado of emotions that come with agreeing to be a sperm donor for lesbian friends, there is never a sense of self-pity or wallowing.

Each event has its place, with a lesson learned, a relationship defined, or an insight gained. And in between these heavy moments is some seriously funny stuff.

No one knows Hitchins's flaws better than Hitchins himself, and nothing is off-limits. He freely admits he'd cut someone for the hint of hidden treasure, that he searches for four specific signs of psychopathy whenever he enters someone's home for the first time (hint: remove the price tag from votive holders before he arrives), and that he plays a demented game of “Cancer? Not Cancer” with his dermatologist every six months.

Hitchins has a gift for telling outwardly repulsive stories in a way that actually draws people in. He doesn't gloss over hard times, but he does counterbalance them with a self-deprecating, snarky humor that trades tears for laughter. He's not kidding when he says he's oversharing, but somehow he makes the mix of raw emotion and salty hilarity work.

CHRISTINE CANFIELD (September/October 2017)

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