

Flocks

L. Nichols

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In the revealing and honest *Flocks*, L. Nichols offers a unique, intelligent perspective on finding one's niche, overcoming confusion over sexual identity, and reconciling oneself to a well-meaning but rigidly traditional religious family.

The book's title refers to the groups of similar people that young people identify with as they work to forge their own identities. For Nichols, who grew up in a Southern Baptist community, the primary group was the church. As vividly shown in the book, he made many attempts to bury his personal uncertainty by becoming fully immersed—literally, through baptism, and figuratively, as an eager and devoted member. But Nichols ran with other flocks too, taking advantage of academic opportunities to expand his horizons significantly.

Nichols charts a course of self-discovery—a winding path strewn with hazards but always lit by fierce intelligence. Nichols finally identifies as a trans man; as monumental as that self-realization is, *Flocks* is much more than just one person's story. Nichols handles both his parents and the church with depth and unblinking analysis, recognizing that each, though flawed, contributed positively to the creation of the happy, successful father that he is today.

Nichols is an effective storyteller, and though the message of personal confusion can seem repetitive at times, there are creative touches that make the book more than a typical, narrative-based memoir. They include the depiction of Nichols as a rag doll with button eyes throughout the book, as well as several illustrations that make use of scientific and technical drawing skills, with graphs and formulas emphasizing his emotional distance from other people. *Flocks* is a generous glimpse into the most personal of issues, shared by an author who knows how to look at a situation from every angle.

PETER DABBENE (September/October 2018)

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