



Men I've Never Been

Michael Sadowski

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There are many men that Michael Sadowski has never been, and they all fill the pages of this honest recounting of his personal failures—a heartfelt memoir that ends on a note of hope.

Schoolboy, athlete, hopeless romantic, family man: such tropes open each chapter of the book, which portrays the multiple personas and professions that Sadowski hoped to adopt, but couldn't. Ultimately, he became a teacher. His recollections of important scenes in his life, set in New Jersey, New York, and Chicago, are interwoven with his attempts to define himself, haunted by what could have been, and by the identities of those around him.

In choosing to focus on achievements he never achieved, the kind of family he never had, and the kind of person he never was, Sadowski produces a relatable tale of struggling with self-denial and rejecting the pleasures of being out of fear, shame, and sometimes both. The book ends on a note of positivity and comfort, leaving an opening for Sadowski to find peace.

Men I've Never Been is rarely proud or boastful; it hides Sadowski's successes in between his constant feelings of incompetence, grounding itself in the realities of the everyday. Sadowski's homosexuality is a backdrop to his memories, and slurs directed at him propel the story forward. When Sadowski tried to prove himself against such slurs, his semi-unconscious choice to either remain in the closet or come out of it became consequential to how he made life-altering decisions. Though the book does not revolve around Sadowski's identity as a gay man, it does show how his identity affected every aspect of his life.

Michael Sadowski's memoir is warm and welcoming—a comfort in a world that is often neither.

MICHAEL ELIAS (March / April 2021)

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