



Qtopia: A Memoir of Love, Land, and Liberation

Juda Bennett

University of Wisconsin Press (May 26, 2026)

Softcover \$18.95 (200pp)

978-0-299-35704-7

The road to peace and love is paved with poise and self-discovery in Juda Bennett's coming-of-New-Age memoir *Qtopia*.

Bennett was expected and encouraged by his nuclear family parents to join the military upon his high school graduation in 1971. With the 1960s in the rearview, he instead took a one-way bus ticket to North Mountain Community, a homestead property full of hippies and free spirits. Their burgeoning communal living experiment embraced castaways in rural Virginia.

A gay man coming out in a new decade, Bennett continued to be guided by exploration and a desire for belonging. Seeking personal liberation and camaraderie with his extended family of off-grid characters, he found variations of home in scattered Shangri-Las. Indeed, he hitchhiked and walked his way through both dangerous and delightful circumstances until landing at the Lavender Hill commune in West Danby, New York. Insights into that commune, whose values helped to liberate LGBTQ+ people from the community's burgeoning identity struggles and seek acceptance in broader society, appear throughout, tracing its growth through the AIDS crisis and beyond.

The prose is witty and unflinching in covering Bennett's myriad travels. His road was not always sunny, nor were the pitfalls of fleeting romance healthy. Expressions of affection for, and critiques of, 1970s and 1980s commune life appear to situating effect. As social perspectives shifted, Bennett's own sense of identity became more nuanced and less naive. His tastes evolved, too, helping him discern the right place to stay after his years spent thumbing his way down American backroads.

Qtopia is a revealing coming-of-age memoir about a man's quest to find his chosen family.

RYAN PRADO (May / June 2026)

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