

## SELF-ish: A Transgender Awakening

**Chloe Schwenke**

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*SELF-ish* is Chloe Schwenke's memoir, following her journey from a male upbringing to life as a woman. From reflections on identity to the reactions of coworkers, family, and friends, this candid account walks an exhilarating, excruciating tightrope between living for oneself and living in harmony. Schwenke holds a mirror to society while interrogating herself; "self-ish" becomes an inspired call to authenticity.

Schwenke spent years working in architecture, advocacy, human rights, and with the Obama administration as one of its three transgender political appointees. Thematic chapters highlight an international career punctuated by terminations; facets of the transgender community, in which individuals situate themselves at different points within and outside of the gender binary; Quaker faith; memories of two marriages, alongside parenthood; and Schwenke's process of becoming Chloe.

Schwenke's acceptance of the fact that living as a man no longer worked is portrayed in gradual increments, unfolding with natural ease. As intense as many of the emotions surrounding her decision are, events that would seem extraordinary to an outsider are treated with deep consideration. Her voice is marked by a compelling mixture of confidence and humility.

Introspective forays mingle with accounts of people who helped along the way, even with well-timed words or gestures. The book firmly grounds Schwenke's transformation as one that could never have taken place in isolation. Her ex-wife stands out as a continual positive force, while colleagues in Africa prove resoundingly accepting amid social, religious, and cultural differences. When discrimination and other negative encounters take place, they're narrated with the benefit of hindsight and with hope for the future.

At times circuitous in its approach, and populated with figures who sometimes appear and quickly recede, this graceful, tender exploration of identity across decades is a potent reminder to honor oneself through every experience.

KAREN RIGBY (LGBTQ+ 2018)

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