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Songs of Myself: Episodes from the Edge of Adulthood

Diane Scharper
Diane Scharper, Editor
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Culled from the collegiate fruits of a required freshman writing course, this collection of 38 student memoirs illustrates challenges, tragedies and revelations of those who stand at the threshold of adulthood and contemplate their lives.

Diane Scharper, freelance writer and writing instructor at Towson University in Baltimore, Md., assigned a paper which required both creative and critical writing, one spawned by her challenge: “Write about the best or worst thing that has happened to you.” The intense passions and fears of these young adults were soon evident.

These memoirs are written with varying degrees of maturity and talent, but all share the common thread of transition. Without any formal topics set before them, the students? works centrifuged to eight common categories (each launched with a page of student artwork reflecting the topic), including terminal illness and death, pregnancy and second chances beyond near-fatal accidents.

Topics ranged in objective severity from the agonizing self-doubt shrouding a teen’s abortion to an overweight girl’s taunting throughout her formative years. Yet all are colored with the inherent seriousness of teenage voices.

With a target audience being of high school or first-year college students, Song of Myself may lend a sense of comfort to teens who are feeling alone with their turmoil, confusion or frustration. The book may also be of interest to parents who seek insight into present-day youth related issues, often uncomfortably beyond the bounds of child/parent confidences—such as drug use or teen pregnancy. Additionally, Scharper, in her introduction, presents her collection as a model for fellow teachers interested in expanding student interest and proficiency in writing by allowing them to write from what they know best—themselves.

KAREN WYCKOFF (September / October 1998)

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