

Walking Fish

Joanne Bodin

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On the surface, *Walking Fish* is the story of a woman's journey to reconnect with her estranged daughter. The novel focuses heavily on the universal experience of loss as the reader is shown glimpses into the lives of characters with beleaguered pasts.

Bodin's protagonist, Talia, dreams of the walking fish, an image that well represents the book's characters, all of whom find themselves in situations where the need to adapt to new environments is crucial to their development. When Talia discovers that an erstwhile acquaintance may be the biological grandfather of her longtime partner's grandson, she must choose to put their interests before her own and confront memories of circumstances that led to her being labeled an unfit mother.

Walking Fish could have easily taken a turn for the histrionic, but Bodin manages to avert the melodrama that saturates films dealing with like subjects. As the knowing Talia reflects on her life, "It all seemed so insidious, so melodramatic, like an episode out of a daytime television soap opera," so Bodin does not fall prey to the allure of sensationalism.

This accessible novel will engage a general audience, but Baby Boomers may find themselves more adept in reading between the lines. Bodin's academic backgrounds in philosophy and education shine through as the text proves even more fulfilling for the existential questions it raises than for the story itself.

The author addresses many modern issues, including psychological labeling. When a character who's a college student explains that she has autism and obsessive compulsive disorder, the reader is privy to a truly contemporary response by the aforementioned young man: "OCD. She has OCD just like me." Here Bodin raises the correlation between labeling and identity formation, asking the reader to question many aspects of our society, which further adds to the richness of the text.

The notion of a walking fish is a call to action for characters that need to generate major change in their lives. Coping with loss allows the novel's characters to achieve personal growth as they learn to accept their situations. What remains is the choice to adapt.

MARK DANOWSKY (February 18, 2011)

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