

Welcome to Replica Dodge

Natalie Ruth Joynton

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Natalie Ruth Joynton's *Welcome to Replica Dodge* is a memoir about religion, place, and curious spiritual and literal journeys. Written with warmth, candor, and beautifully pensive language, *Welcome to Replica Dodge* follows Joynton from urban Texas to rural Michigan, and from Southern Baptist roots to a purposeful conversion to Judaism.

Raised in a Christian family, Joynton found herself drawn to Judaism while in college. Conversion would require at least a year of focused study and working with a rabbinical sponsor. Although she was initially daunted by the process, particularly when recalling the instant "salvation" of Baptist church services, Joynton committed to a religion she had not been born into but which had become part of her soul.

Following her engagement to a physics professor and Michigan native, Joynton found herself moving from hot, humid Houston to the defined seasons and brisk winters of the Great Lakes region. Now living in the countryside, Joynton noted that there was not much of a Jewish support network or even a nearby synagogue. To add to the sense of displacement, the couple found a unusual bargain for their first home: a farmhouse, barn, land, and a "replica" of the Old West's Dodge City, including a general store, saloon, barbershop, and jail. The former owner had built it himself in remarkable detail and to scale.

From the hushed mysticism of Houston's Rothko Chapel to a glimpse of a fox amid cherry trees, and from the solitary baking of challah to memories of Christmas gatherings over grits and sticky buns, *Welcome to Replica Dodge* is rich with quiet moments, family histories, and reflections on faith, love, and belonging. Cycles of nature align with elements of Jewish and Christian traditions in a memoir that is not so much about the settled past but rather a prologue to a well-earned future.

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