



Wife | Daughter | Self: A Memoir in Essays

Beth Kephart

William Sulit, Illustrator

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Beth Kephart's multifaceted memoir *Wife | Daughter | Self* is about the relationships that shaped who she is and how she sees herself.

In these exploratory essays, Kephart writes about her marriage, her husband, her aging father, her students, and her son. Each entry peels at the truth of who Kephart is, giving glimpses of different parts of her life, until larger pieces of the entirety she chooses to show are visible. Though they are not always chronological and at times are tangential, the entries explore and explain how family ties shape and define women.

The memoir first tackles Kephart's identity as a wife; this is its shortest section, and also its most distant, though it includes portions of tenderness. In exploring Kephart's role as daughter, the book is more compelling, tackling what family means, and what it was like for her to care for her aging father, with the increasing demands and complex emotions that such care brought. The section is poignant and present, the book's most forthright and complete work. In exploring her self, Kephart again touches on her roles as a mother, a teacher, and a wife—still often addressing her being in relation to others.

The book evinces an eye for detail, though sometimes its prose is restrained. The book hits its stride when writing about Kephart's father's decline, about how their relationship evolved over time, and about the emotions involved in both. Glimpses of her childhood complement her present day well, adding depth and nuance to her story.

Wife | Daughter | Self is a resonant memoir in essays, in which Beth Kephart stops to wonder how others shaped her, and how the bonds of family make her who she is.

JAIME HERNDON (March / April 2021)

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