

## NEXUS: A BOOK REVIEW OF *SPILLING OPEN: THE ART OF BECOMING YOURSELF*

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Recently, I was moved by reading the following book:

*Spilling Open: The Art of Becoming Yourself*

by Sabrina Ward Harrison

Published by New World Library, Novato, California.

Most books about adolescence are written from the outside. Scholars study youth and report their findings. Or adults reflect on their youth or their work with youth and present their stories in hindsight.

A few books about adolescence are written from the inside. Young people describe their life as it is occurring. Done well, these books hear and see adolescence. Readers can feel what it is like. This book is one of those.

In *Spilling Open: The Art of Becoming Yourself* Sabrina shows us “her life in progress as she is growing into herself.” She writes, “We are all facing choices that define us. No choice however messy is without importance in the overall picture of our lives. We all, at our own age, have to claim something, even if it is our own confusion.

She spills open, not with a call to the reader for sympathy or acknowledgement of her expertise simply because she is a youth, but rather with a call to being young as she experiences it: open, vulnerable, willing to take risks, searching. She writes:

*“I find myself comparing, a lot—thinking “Oh I should be more like her.” He is less like him. La. La. La. But when I let go of the world all around me and breathe into me as I am—I can love much more truly, completely. When I can accept myself, I can accept the ones around me more fully.”*

One doesn't have to read too far before realizing that the central themes of adolescence are all here—the search for self, the longing for love, sex and acceptance, the expanding mind and world view, the paradoxes, the real and imaginary audiences, the desire to be different from yet like others. What makes the book unique is the way she addresses these themes in her own handwriting, words, drawings, colors, and photos. *Spilling Open* is a rich collage of what it's talking about, internally consistent in presentation and words, the author real and present in her expression of who she is.

Every page has something to offer. Here are a couple of samples:

On pain:

*"I talked to Nana this morning, she has such good things to say about living. She said I should take care of the pain I'm feeling, the same way I should take care of the scrape on my knee. She said give it air and sun. Don't pick at it. Let it heal. So I shall imitate my knee. The scar on my knee will become part of my story. A memory of falling on the ground—and falling in love."*

On love:

*"I sat on the bench outside of class today and talked to Jon. I read to him from my journal. It was the part about the accordion player I was watching on the street last weekend. He said that an accordion is such a perfect metaphor for love. Because you are always opening and closing, shifting and getting air. And that's how the music happens."*

Each saying is accompanied by a drawing or photo or piece of clip art and surrounded by rich colors. There are no page numbers. The author seems to say, adolescence is not a linear process and neither is this book. Read straight through or bounce around and sense my search for order among the random experiences of my life. I bounced around and found one surprise after another.

One can never tell the whole story or paint the entire picture in one book, but she has selected the brush strokes that paint her portrait as she sees it, and in so doing gives us a wonderful glimpse of herself/us. Her book moved me as an adult, and I believe she will appeal to the inner voices of passion, longing, and hope that reside in young people as well. I use the book in classes along with a video tape series by Sadie Benning, who filmed her adolescence as it occurred, to give the students a feel once again for their own adolescence and the challenges faced by youth who are creative and sensitive. They love it.