

Memoir on coming to terms with oneself

‘Wife | Daughter | Self’ ponders mortality and regret

Portland-based Forest Avenue Press has been in business for nearly a decade. Its mission of publishing “literary fiction on a joyride” — along with the occasional memoir — continues.

The press’ publisher is Laura Stanfill, who launched the Main Street Writers Movement in 2017. It’s centered on the idea of building a strong literary ecosystem by supporting a region’s local authors, literary organizations and businesses.

Such a movement seems almost prescient. It’s no secret that, as we begin to claw our way out of a global pandemic, small and local businesses everywhere need our support more than ever. That means eschewing Amazon and instead infusing local economies with much-needed dollars

This week’s book

‘Wife | Daughter | Self’ by Beth Kephart
Forest Avenue Press — 252 pp — \$16

— in part, by patronizing local booksellers.

Forest Avenue’s latest offering is one of those “occasional memoirs” it confesses to publishing.

“Wife | Daughter | Self” is by Beth Kephart, an author who has written more than 30 books and has been a National Book Award finalist. She has received both a prestigious fellowship for The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage and a National Endowment for the Arts grant.

Despite all of that, Kephart still grapples with self-esteem, some of the identities she has assumed and the roles that have been thrust upon her.

“I write to find out what I know, or if I know, or if I might know sometime soon,” she confesses in this memoir, which flows like stream-of-consciousness.

But don’t be fooled — Kephart’s collection of sentences, paragraphs and essays is actually a carefully curated deep-dive into key relationships that have shaped, aggravated, challenged and nurtured her. These writings reflect on her interactions with her husband and her parents — especially her widowed father — and her perception of how they perceive her.

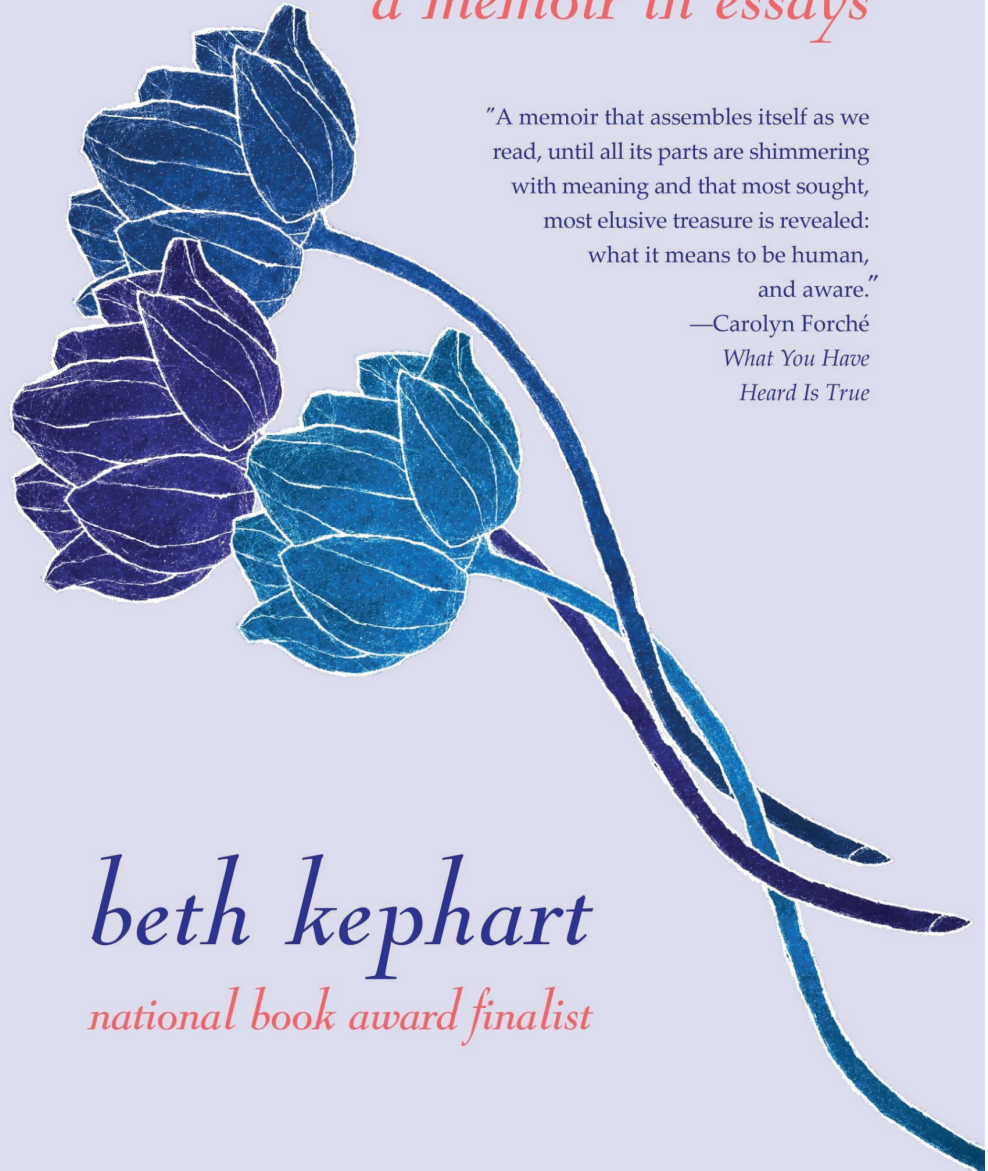
Ultimately, it comes home to roost within her own complicated, conflicted self. Sometimes Kephart is her harshest critic — she is the ineffectual daughter, unworthy partner, inadequate mother, unsuccessful writer and teaching fraud.

Kephart captures these thoughts, pins them down and dissects them.

It can be difficult to read her searing self-assessments — but that’s probably because they’re relatable. Just because we can’t be the ideal, why do our imaginations often veer toward self-loathing?

In examining not only her own choices, but also those of other writers and artists she admires, Kephart invites readers to con-

wife | daughter | self
a memoir in essays



“A memoir that assembles itself as we read, until all its parts are shimmering with meaning and that most sought, most elusive treasure is revealed: what it means to be human, and aware.”

—Carolyn Forché
What You Have Heard Is True

beth kephart
national book award finalist

Author Beth Kephart ponders mortality and regret in her memoir ‘Wife | Daughter | Self.’

template their choices too.

Kephart shares in precise detail some of the formative moments of her childhood. She recalls make-or-break-or-bend lessons as a wife and her experiences in serving as her father’s primary caregiver.

She ponders mortality and regret, and wonders how, in what she calls “the fragility and scorch of this present time,” she (and we) might proceed.

Kephart discovers that some answers have been lying within reach all along. But “Wife | Daughter | Self” also proposes that it is still valuable to question and that seeking to “become” is best a lifelong quest.

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