

# Growing up in and beyond the grunge era

Bellevue, Washington, author Jennifer Haupt delves into fraught family relationships in her second novel, “Come As You Are,” which follows her 2018 debut “In the Shadow of 10,000 Hills.” In this tale, characters roam across the American West seeking the right place and the right people to call home.

Haupt’s latest work is an ambitious effort, a series of non-chronological chapters told over the course of a quarter century from the perspectives of multiple generations of characters. The novel, which borrows from a song title by Nirvana, traffics in dreams, mistakes and repercussions.

In a Seattle neighborhood in 1987, Skyler, 12, and her sister, Lauren, 13, notice that a boy has just moved in across the street from them. Zane, 14, takes to being alone and likes to play guitar. He’s a bit too much of a misfit for Lauren, but catches the interest of Skyler. Zane soon accepts her presence the way he might a stray puppy. She’s amusing, asks good questions and really likes his music.

Over the next few years, Zane puts

together a band. Grunge is rising in popularity in the Pacific Northwest, and Zane’s group, The Bipolars, soon begins to gain traction. He and Skyler, who have now become close friends, dream of moving to California together, where he’ll sign a recording contract and she’ll be a successful artist. Instead, a terrible accident causes the two to turn to each other for comfort as lovers, and young Skyler becomes pregnant.

As these teens grow to become adults and try to forget the tragedy that changed their relationship, they begin to grapple with new responsibilities. They chase ambitions that evaporate into thin air. They’re faced with regrets and disappointments. And they have to figure out how to move forward.

To tell the young couple’s story, Haupt moves between years and perspectives, offering insight from Skyler’s mother, Carolyn, and in time, the couple’s young daughter. Haupt loads her fiction with sensory detail, documenting smells, textures, sounds. While Zane’s soundtrack is heavy on ‘90s grunge, Carolyn relies on Handel and Viv-aldi. The author captures the essence of

## This week’s book

‘Come As You Are’ by Jennifer Haupt

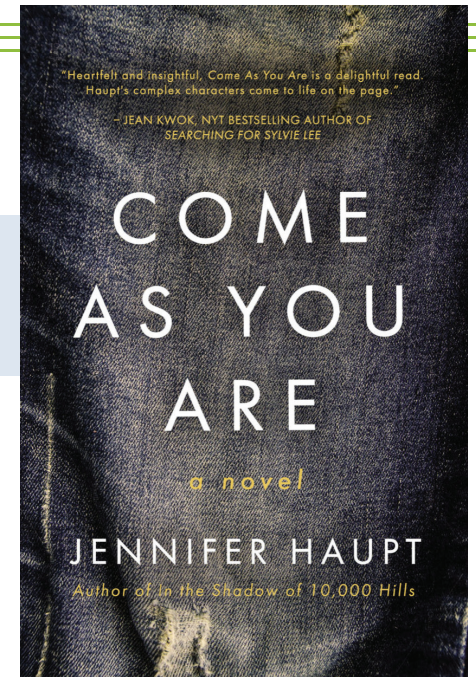
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place as her characters try settling in spots as diverse as Montana, California, New Mexico, Washington and even Belize.

Perhaps even more impressive, Haupt layers the insights of different characters and the juxtapositions of time with almost architectural precision. This is no small feat. Still, readers may wonder whether the story might be served well by a much simpler chronology.

While a measure of healing does happen in “Come As You Are,” an overarching sense of bittersweetness prevails. People can reach out to support and learn from one another, but too often this isn’t the case. Sometimes, signals get crossed when they try.

The music that kept going through this reader’s head while reading Haupt’s book



derived neither from the grunge nor classical genres but instead from folk singer Pete Seeger’s melancholy refrain, “When will they ever learn?”

*The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at [Barbaralmcm@gmail.com](mailto:Barbaralmcm@gmail.com).*

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