



Being Fishkill

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Fishkill Carmel fends for herself, with her fists if need be — until a thwarted lunch theft introduces her to strange, sunny Duck-Duck and a chance for a new start.

Born in the backseat of a moving car, Carmel Fishkill was unceremoniously pushed into a world that refuses to offer her security, stability, love. At age thirteen, she begins to fight back. Carmel Fishkill becomes Fishkill Carmel, who deflects her tormenters with a strong left hook and conceals her secrets from teachers and social workers. But Fishkill's fierce defenses falter when she meets eccentric optimist Duck-Duck Farina, and soon they, along with Duck-Duck's mother, Molly, form a tentative family, even as Fishkill struggles to understand her place in it. This fragile new beginning is threatened by the reappearance of Fishkill's unstable mother — and by unfathomable tragedy. Poet Ruth Lehrer's young adult debut is a stunning, revelatory look at what defines and sustains "family." And, just as it does for Fishkill, meeting Duck-Duck Farina and her mother will leave readers forever changed.

Being Fishkill Details

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Author : Ruth Lehrer

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From Reader Review Being Fishkill for online ebook

Margot Harrison says

You know an author has a strong, authentic voice when her 12-year-old narrator starts giving you flashbacks to being 12 years old, dredging up feelings and experiences you'd forgotten.

BEING FISHKILL made me feel like I was back in a rural New England middle school, surrounded by poverty and prejudice that people took for granted. It also reminded me of a book that wrecked me when I was that age, a book that made me happy and then made me cry for hours. (Naming that book might be a spoiler, so let's just say it's generally considered a YA classic.)

When we say that a book "wrecked us" or broached difficult subject matter, it's easy for readers to assume that book will be a somber, difficult read. So it's important to emphasize that BEING FISHKILL is fun and funny and joyful (mostly—not always!). It's joyful because Fishkill's friendship with Duck-Duck is so sweet and real. It's joyful because both girls are hilarious.

And, most of all, it's a joyful read because Fishkill is so upbeat, smart, and resilient. This is a girl who renamed herself into a force to be reckoned with. A girl who is determined to survive whatever life throws at her. She reminds me of the heroine of Dorothy Allison's BASTARD OUT OF CAROLINA: a voice you're going to keep hearing long, long after you close the book.

I received an ARC of this book in exchange for an honest review.

Kathy MacMillan says

Fishkill Carmel is a tough-as-nails heroine with a desperate secret. Christine Farina, better known as Duck-Duck, is the quirky idealist who sees through the tough façade and appoints herself Fishkill's new best friend. What follows is a tale full of poignant moments of friendship, exploring everything from the stirrings of sexual attraction between the two girls, to the nuances of girl bullying, to the ways the system fails those without resources. What I loved most about this book is that it treats Fishkill's struggles with middle school social life with the same gravity it treats her family situation – only fitting, as both are integral parts of a middle schooler's life. Fishkill's inimitable voice – all hardness yearning for softness – comes through from page one, and readers will root for her to find the family she so needs. Just as in the real world, no one gets off easy, and no character is all good or all bad. Prepare to have your heart broken and put back together again by this funny, sad, immersive, and excellent book.

I received an Advanced Reader Copy in exchange for an honest review.

Heidi Heilig says

I'm devastated and uplifted and still teary eyed.

This beautiful debut, following the story of a life changing first-love/friendship between twelve year olds

Fishkill and Duck-Duck, weaves a delicate poetry around the harsh realities of poverty, family, the things you lose and find as you grow up. I've been waiting to read this book for nearly two years and it was worth every second.

Dahlia says

Well, that went ahead and ripped my heart clean out of my chest. Definitely a recommended read for a book with rural poverty. There are a few things I felt were left a little like open-ended mysteries, but they felt true to what the character would know/be able to access. Really interesting to read a YA that is definitely a YA but with a 12-13yo protag, especially since she's sort of exploring her sexuality without even really seeming to realize that's what she's doing. I would so love to check in with Fishkill a few years down the line if that were possible, and that's one of my favorite signs that I really enjoyed a book.

cw: abuse, homophobic and ableist slurs

Lola says

What I like about this book is that it doesn't sugarcoat anything. It keeps it real; it says it like it is; it doesn't hold the bad back. But at the same time, it doesn't dwell on depressive thoughts, because Fishkill knows she has to move forward.

She still wonders about her past, now more than ever, since her mother came back into her life, but she wonders about it more so she can reflect on it than bury herself in it. She's a brave kid. She grew up in a harsh familial environment with a racist, homophobic and violent grandfather who complained about everything. But she and her mother survived it.

Unfortunately, her mother often disappears and comes back without even a note, so Fishkill is now in the system. She is living with Duck-Duck, who she met at school, and her mother. I adored the relationship between Fishkill and Duck-Duck in its early stages. Then the trope of the girl who finds another best friend to replace the one she already has comes in and their relationship becomes sour. I did not expect that of Duck-Duck, since she did not seem to be the impressionable type. Guess I was wrong.

Although, the focus of this story is really on Fishkill and her mother who wants to gain back custody of her. She's trying hard to be the mother Fishkill needs her to be. I was very interested in reading about her mother's rehabilitation. I wanted to believe that she wanted her daughter enough to change. I could see she loved her, but sadly there exist different ways—wrong ways—to love someone. Plus she should have gone to a real rehabilitation center.

This story moved me quite a bit. Fishkill is extremely mature for her twelve/thirteen years, understandably after all she's been through. I appreciated her candour and reasonable mind. The last thirty pages were, however, strange. Not because they were badly-written, but because it was the wrong way to end the story in my opinion. It did end on a hopeful note, but the main event shocked me because I did not expect it at all. Was it really necessary? I understood why it happened, but my mind kept telling me there was a better way to end the story.

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kelly {BookCrushin} says

I'll write a full review soon but I need to heal after finishing this one. It's one of those books that just hurts but it heals you as well.

Update Full Review on BookCrushin

Monica Tesler says

Being Fishkill is a powerful, devastating, masterful book. I finished it last week, and I'm still picking myself up in pieces.

Linda Williams Jackson says

I'll start this review off with a conversation I had with the author via Twitter DM'ing:

ME: Your book is something special.

AUTHOR: Did you finish?

ME: Just read the last word. Gosh. I have all the feels. I don't want to do anything else today. I just want to sit here and hold the book. But I can't. :(

AUTHOR: Aww - at least you're not like a good half of my readers who say they will never forgive me ;)

ME: Well, I was a little upset. But you really redeemed yourself with the ending. Plus, I accidentally flipped to a page and saw (spoiler). I hurriedly looked away and HOPED it meant something else.... The rest of the book was very hard to read, but you handled it like a boss. You brought beauty out of the ashes. ...your book is the real deal.... I really do hope that it gets the attention that it deserves.

Now, a few words to make this an official review....

First off, Ruth Lehrer can write! Yes, I know that all writers can write, but not all writers write in a way that makes the reader want to read the same sentence multiple times. Not all writers can make a reader laugh and cry at the same time. And not all writers can write something so painful, yet make the reader feel that everything really will be okay. That these characters will eventually heal, and so will we.

Secondly, parts of Fishkill's story were very hard for me to read, so much so that I had to put the book down. I grew up in poverty (minus the abuse that Fishkill experienced), and parts of the story caused painful flashbacks—situations that I had forgotten that I endured. Even more painful is the reality that BEING FISHKILL is a contemporary story, meaning kids are still living in dire poverty like the main character. Note: On the day that I finished this novel, I delivered a trunk-load of food from my church to another local church to stock their food pantry. From this pantry, backpacks will be filled in order for local school children to take home for the weekend so that they won't miss a meal on Saturday and Sunday—non-school days.

Any of these kids could be Fishkill Carmel or a school-age version of myself—a kid who saved half of my school lunch whenever I could in order to take home to my mom who hadn't eaten all day.

Ruth Lehrer painted a true picture of poverty in this novel.

And finally, the reason that some readers might get angry at the author is because she has created characters with whom you become emotionally connected, then she allows reality to come into play. She allows BAD THINGS TO HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE. Much like we do with God, we want to yell at the author and say, "Sure this is real, but you're the god of this story! You can choose to only allow good things to happen to the good people and make bad things happen to the bad people!"

But Ruth Lehrer doesn't do that. She doesn't make it easy for us. She breaks our hearts. She lets us feel that pain. Then she mends our hearts. And she shows us that when life hands us lemons, we can choose to let them shrivel up, or we can add a little sugar and squeeze them into lemonade.

My review is based on an ARC, but I can't wait to get a hardcover of this treasure when it releases in November.

Elly Swartz says

Being Fishkill by Ruth Lehrer, equal parts heart warming and heart breaking. A deeply moving story of one girl's journey to finding family, love and acceptance. Lehrer does an exceptional job exploring the frailty of heart and creating characters we come to love. Deeply. Fishkill and Duck-Duck are truly unique. This is a hauntingly beautiful story. Highly recommend.

I was given an arc for my honest review.

Christine Grecsek says

Being Fishkill left me utterly shattered at a rest area on Interstate 84 in New York, ironically not far from the Carmel/Fishkill exit (fortunately my partner was driving.)

Fishkill, Duck-Duck, Molly - the vivid characters Ruth Lehrer has created - are now a part of me too and I'll always be grateful to Ruth for the introduction.

Bridget Hodder says

BEING FISHKILL is powerful, moving, sometimes harrowing, and always deeply felt, with language so beautiful that it comes as no surprise when you learn the author is also a well-respected poet.

This is a novel I've heard buzz about for years, and it's published by Candlewick. So I was a little nervous when I received my ARC of it at last, not sure anything could live up to my expectations for it.

But it far exceeded my expectations. In fact, the story, the characters, the way it made me feel, were all so unexpected, it transcended anything I could have imagined.

I know this praise sounds over-the-top.
It isn't.

The prose is effortless in this book; the pages fly by. Yet somehow, author Lehrer has created a protagonist who comes to life so completely, you can't stop thinking about her even after the book ends. You want to call her up to check in, to see how things are going, to find out what she's up to and whether she's okay.

But I just know she's going to be okay. Anyone who could handle the unrelenting abuse and neglect that Fishkill's life has thrown at her so far, with the determination and spark she's shown, is going to triumph.

Just like this book does-- it triumphs.

Highly recommended.

Kristin says

I didn't know I haven't written a review for this one considering it is one of those stories that really touch me. The story is really moving, realistic and doesn't sugarcoat anything. It is so lovely and rich and also so very painful. You'll see hard truth and it utterly wrecked me. The writing was so beautiful and lovely. The way the writer told the story was beyond perfect. I laugh and I cried(well angry too!). It was so very painful reading it but it's what we need to see. It's the truth about life and poverty.

I couldn't help but admire the strength of Fishkill. Oh how I love her character. She is a survivor. She had nothing and nobody in a harsh cruel place and she still manages to come through, she still manages to be upbeat, smart, and resilient. Reading this story, makes me sad that reality can be so cruel and unexpected. My heart breaks again and again and again. Seriously. I don't think my heart had any large enough piece to break by the end of the story. This story really made me think of how bad things always happens to good people. But that's it, bad things happens and we have no control over it. Duck-Duck was a very lovable and sweet character. Molly was even sweeter. Their interactions between them were very sweet and lovely and also hilarious at times.

I don't know what else to write without any spoilers. It's such a beautiful story that I want everyone to read without any outside influence added post reading it. So..yeah, I know it's going to be a tough ride but it's an eye opener and also totally worth it.
Highly recommended.

Sri says

my whole heart hurts

Jeff Zentner says

Y'all, this book is absolutely extraordinary. So beautiful and real and gritty and wrenching and filled with

heart and humor. If you liked THE ABSOLUTELY TRUE DIARY OF A PART-TIME INDIAN or KIDS OF APPETITE, I think you'll like this.

S.M. Parker says

This novel is phenomenal. BEYOND phenomenal.

I fell in love with the fierce 12-year-old Fishkill on page one and my love for her never dissipated. Even now, long after I've closed the book, Fishkill stays with me. She is vibrant and strong and so full of life. She is unlike any other character I've met in a book and for that reason alone you should pick up this debut. There are a million reasons why you won't be able to put it down.

Lehrer's debut novel is an intricately woven tale of rural poverty and the will it takes to survive abuse and neglect. Her writing ensnares you as you learn the story of a young girl who endures a loveless childhood—and see her wrestle with the enormous leap of faith it takes for her to trust people after a lifetime of being disappointed, and worse. Lehrer gets rural poor right. The isolation, the systemic lack of education and access, the hunger and need. Being Fishkill is not an easy novel to read at times but it is an important one. It will change you. The two main characters—Fishkill and DuckDuck—are two of the most inspiring, brilliant, REAL kids I've met on the page. You will love them. You will cry for them.

It is hard to write a review for this book because it is so lovely and so richly crafted, but it is also painful. There is truth on the page. Hard truth. This book utterly wrecked me. I was stunned by its beauty (both language and story) and I couldn't put it down. I wouldn't put it down. Lehrer has crushed my heart into a million pieces and I will never forgive her for it. Okay, I will. But I'm not ready yet. I am left with a voracious hunger to read whatever Lehrer writes next.

Do yourself a favor and read this book. It is a triumph.
