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The Power of Transformation

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Jared Schneider

The Power of Transformation

Change. Conversion. Renewal. *Transformation*. The diverse concept of transformation plays an enormous role in each and every person's life, and this was certainly no different for the Maines family featured in Amy Ellis Nutt's *Becoming Nicole*. But what transformation occurred? The answer to that question is multifaceted and different for each member of the Maines family, but ultimately, each of them adapts and transforms over a number of years, leading eventually to a family stronger and more whole than ever before. In addition, the increasing occurrence of stories like the Maines' displays that the definition of the "typical" American family has in recent years become more inclusive and diverse than ever.

The most obvious transformation that occurs in the family is that of Nicole, who begins life as a biological boy named Wyatt. It is important to note that Wyatt's transformation into Nicole is almost entirely physical, *not mental*. There is no internal transformation from boy to girl; she always knew she was a girl, even from a very young age. When Wyatt's father would insist that Wyatt did not want to wear feminine shoes or, indeed, *be* a girl, Wyatt would determinedly respond, "Yes, I do" (Nutt 26). Although Wyatt's transformation into Nicole is largely physical, that does not diminish the separate mental transformation into true happiness that occurs later. Following her physical transformation, Nicole is finally complete and happy; she can be the person she always knew she was. After the sex reassignment surgery, Nutt says, "There was no confusion anymore when [Nicole] looked in the mirror. She'd solved her own great riddle" (259). Nicole's physical transformation into her true body and her subsequent

mental transformation into wholeness plays a significant role in the transformation of this “typical” family and serves as a catalyst for the other transformations.

The transformation of Nicole’s father, Wayne, is no less significant. Prior to the transformation of Wyatt, Wayne was a traditional conservative man. As Nutt describes him, at Cornell he was “just about the only promilitary conservative on a liberal Ivy League campus” (10). This outlook on life causes a considerable amount of tension upon the discovery that Wyatt is not a typical masculine boy. This tension is so significant that “sometimes Kelly was afraid Wayne would leave her because she was ‘allowing’ Wyatt to act like a girl. . . . The bottom line was, she couldn’t count on Wayne” (39). But this initial reluctance to accept Wyatt is what makes Wayne’s transformation remarkable. After years of hardship, Wayne finally comes around to fully accepting his daughter. Nutt notes that when Nicole’s parents start to give talks, “Wayne embraced the role, perhaps in part to make up for all the time he’d spent ashamed, embarrassed, and confused about having a transgender daughter” (217). This is why Wayne’s transformation is so significant! He not only changes his lifelong outlook, but he makes up for it by speaking about transgender issues. This transformation, just like Nicole’s, contributes significantly toward the family’s collective transformation.

The transformations of Kelly and Jonas are subtler than the others, but still essential. Kelly, when faced with Wayne’s lack of support, transforms from a typical mother into a restless researcher and guide for her child. Jonas, meanwhile, transforms from a typical twin brother into a guardian for his sister, filling the needs of his family whenever necessary. All of these individual transformations converge to cause a collective transformation of the family as a whole. Nutt puts it succinctly and accurately at the end when she says of the family, “They’d

spun the stories of their lives. And when it was all unspooled it all made sense, and then knots in their hearts were freed” (259). Thus was the transformation of this seemingly extraordinary American family complete.

But was the Maines family truly *extraordinary*? Interestingly enough, families like the Maineses have become increasingly more typical in the United States in recent years. Whereas in the past, the typical traditional American family was almost exclusively a dominant father married to a homemaking mother with some children, *now*, that definition has become ever more inclusive. Father-father and mother-mother households are becoming increasingly common, as well as families with strong, independent women (much like Kelly Maines) and children like Wyatt, who in the past would have been regarded as abnormal. While those less traditional families are certainly not the current *definition* of the average family, they are becoming more normalized than ever before. Amy Ellis Nutt’s *Becoming Nicole* therefore shows not only the awesome power of transformation, but it also reveals that our society is one of constant change, and that right now, our conceptions of ideas such as the “average” American family are changing, renewing, converting, and *transforming* at every moment alongside us—and I’d say that’s a good thing.

Works Cited

Nutt, Amy Ellis. *Becoming Nicole: The Transformation of an American Family*. Random House, 2015.