



# Spinning

*Tillie Walden*

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## Spinning Tillie Walden

Poignant and captivating, Ignatz Award winner Tillie Walden's powerful graphic memoir, *Spinning*, captures what it's like to come of age, come out, and come to terms with leaving behind everything you used to know.

It was the same every morning. Wake up, grab the ice skates, and head to the rink while the world was still dark.

Weekends were spent in glitter and tights at competitions. Perform. Smile. And do it again.

She was good. She won. And she hated it.

For ten years, figure skating was Tillie Walden's life. She woke before dawn for morning lessons, went straight to group practice after school, and spent weekends competing at ice rinks across the state. It was a central piece of her identity, her safe haven from the stress of school, bullies, and family. But over time, as she switched schools, got into art, and fell in love with her first girlfriend, she began to question how the close-minded world of figure skating fit in with the rest of her life, and whether all the work was worth it given the reality: that she, and her friends on the figure skating team, were nowhere close to Olympic hopefuls. It all led to one question: *What was the point?* The more Tillie thought about it, the more Tillie realized she'd outgrown her passion--and she finally needed to find her own voice.

## Spinning Details

Date : Published September 12th 2017 by First Second

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Author : Tillie Walden

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# From Reader Review Spinning for online ebook

## Elizabeth A says

This graphic memoir deals with coming out, growing up, and the fact that after ten years of hard work at being a competitive figure skater, the author realized that she didn't love skating all that much after all.

Figure skating is my fave Winter Olympics sport, and I tend to enjoy sports themed stories, so there is much about this book that I liked. The art wonderfully evokes the feel of the themes discussed, and I enjoyed all the skating stuff. This is targeted at a young adult audience, and that might be my biggest issue with it. It doesn't dive deep enough into any of the themes. We stay fairly close to the surface of this life, and I wanted more. What, for example, was going on with her mother? There isn't much introspection and analysis of the themes touched upon, and while I understand the author is very young, it was all show, and no tell. This happened. Then this. Yes, but how did you feel? What did you think? That's what I wanted more of. Still, I enjoyed enough of what was on the page that I'd read another book by this clearly talented artist/writer. Dive deeper Ms. Walden.

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## Cam (abookeater) says

*A copy was provided by the publisher through Netgalley in exchange for an honest review*

This graphic novel was anything BUT what I expected it to be. I expected something lighthearted and full of fluff but it's definitely no that.

Spinning tells the story of a young girl named Tillie who has been figure skating since she was little. Her story is one filled with loneliness even when surrounded by dozens of girls, which is kind of the lesbian experience when one is very young. She's not the most likeable character around but that's why I felt so connected to her. She's an outsider trying to fit into a world that doesn't fit her. Being a gay and being deeply closeted since a very young age is something a lot of us in the LGBTQAIP+ community go through. I feel like this graphic novels captures that loneliness and pain wonderfully. The fear, the exhaustion, the rejection, the small glimpses of kindness; it captures each and every one of them.

The color scheme projects this melancholy and this sense of longing splendidly. It's not the most expressive art I've ever encountered but I think that was sort of the point. It deals with bullying, PTSD and depression at a young age; topics that are rarely spoken about when dealing with young kids especially young queer kids.

The story does drag on quite a bit since we see Tillie growing up from middle school to high school. It's not a thrilling adventure at all but more like a gentle glide into adolescence. I feel like this makes it stand out more than you would think. Most middle grade and YA books describe adolescence as this big hit moment of your life where every change is instantaneous and impactful. Spinning takes that out of the equation and gets more real; adolescence is just another part of everyday life. The pacing allows you to grow with the MC slowly but surely; making you empathize with her in almost every panel.

It's a story I hope parents won't feel afraid of buying for their kids because these stories matter now more than ever.

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## **Raina says**

Stunning. So stunning I added it as an extra book (#13!) to my booktalking lineup for local middle schools in 2018.

I can't believe how accomplished and mature this feels. It's a whole package. Gorgeous production, brilliant use of color, breathtaking composition...

## **AND THE STORY!**

I (like many, at least when the Olympics are on) enjoy watching figure skating, but don't know much about it as a subculture. On the other hand, when I was growing up, I was a synchronized swimmer for many years, so I totally relate to a lot of the content here.

And the incidental sexual identity storytelling! Loved that it wasn't ABOUT that. Loved the subtlety of the emotion. I loved her reflection about the long aftermath of a brief traumatic incident (view spoiler).

Tillie Walden is the very definition of one to watch.

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## **Vanessa (splitreads) says**

The art is gorgeous and I am impressed that the author is as young as my little brother - 21! This book had an interesting mix of subject matter (lesbian author, competitive ice skating) and had a melancholy, mellow mood which I enjoy. I felt like a lot of it was surface-level though and even the really monumental life experiences are rarely explored with much detail. I like my graphic memoirs with a little more introspection.

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## **Patricia Bejarano says**

Me ha encantado este cómic.

Lo primero que tengo que destacar es el dibujo de la autora, me ha apasionado. Y sobretodo, los colores que utiliza.

Y bueno, hablemos de que es una autobiografía de la autora y que eso, a la hora de leerlo, lo hace aún mucho más duro, porque sabes que ella ha pasado por todo eso.

Sí, el tema principal es el patinaje sobre hielo (digamos mejor que es el eje de la historia, pero en sí no trata sobre patinaje...), pero no es lo único que la autora toca en este libro. Lo más importante son los otros temas, como el bullying, la homofobia, los abusos sexuales, la depresión... y un montón de temas importantes.

¿Por qué no tiene el 5? Porque me ha faltado un poco de profundización en algunos de esos temas, la verdad.

Sí, se tocan, pero como que se han quedado muy superficiales en muchos aspectos.

Si vais buscando un libro donde a la protagonista le apasione el patinaje, no es lo que buscáis. Puede que haya mucho patinaje, pero no es de lo que se quiere hablar. Si buscáis un libro que os haga reflexionar, que sea rápido y que a parte, es una joyita visualmente, podéis darle una oportunidad.

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## ? Silvia ? says

WAIT THIS ONE IS ABOUT ICE SKATING AND COMING OUT

please @ arc gods I will do anything you ask

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## Rebecca says

(3.5) I'm uncomfortable with the term "graphic memoir," which to me connotes a memoir with graphically violent or sexual content. However, it seems to be accepted parlance nowadays for a graphic novel that's autobiographical rather than fictional. Tillie Walden's *Spinning* is in the same vein as Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* and Craig Thompson's *Blankets*: a touching coming-of-age story delivered through the medium of comics.

Specifically, this is about the 12 years Walden spent in the competitive figure skating world. She grew up in New Jersey, and when the family moved to Austin, Texas the bullying she'd experienced in her previous school continued. Mornings started at 4 a.m. when she got up for individual skating lessons; after school she had synchronized skating practice at another rink.

These years were full of cello lessons, unrequited crushes and skating competitions she rode to with her friend Lindsay and Lindsay's mother. The femininity of the skating world – the slicked-back buns and thick make-up; the way every girl was made to look the same – chafed with Walden because she'd known since age five that she was gay. All told, she was disillusioned with what once seemed like her whole life:

Skating changed when I came to Texas. It wasn't strict or beautiful or energizing any more. Now it just felt dull and exhausting. I couldn't understand why I should keep skating after it lost all its shine.

Every chapter is named after a different skating move: waltz jump, axel, camel spin, etc. Walden's drawing style initially reminded me most of *This One Summer* by Jillian and Mariko Tamaki, which is also about teens finding their way in the world and shares the same mostly purple and gray coloring. Walden's work is more sketch-like, and also includes yellow on certain pages. The last third or so of the book is the most momentous: between when Walden comes out at 15 and when she gives up skating at 17.

Believe it or not, Walden was born in 1996 and this is her fourth book. She's already won two Ignatz Awards. I felt this book would have benefited from more hindsight: time to mull over her skating experience and figure out what it all meant. The Author's Note at the end struck me as particularly shallow, like this project was about quick catharsis rather than considered reflection. However, the book's scope (nearly 400 pages) is impressive, and Walden is adept at capturing the emotional milestones of her early life.

Originally published, with images, on my blog, Bookish Beck.

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## David Schaafsma says

Tillie Walden is at this writing 21 years old (!), and this is already her fourth book, but this is her first long form work, a memoir about the 12 years she spent figure skating. I have read and reviewed two of her shorter, earlier works, *I Love This Part* and *The End of Summer*, and liked them actually better than this memoir as subtle, atmospheric short stories. This book is almost 400 pages, on a subject she herself never really loved. The moody, shy Walden has few friends, is bullied, though she seems to be (pretty) close to her father. Not so much her mother or twin brother. She likes winning competitions pretty well, she's a technician, but little else about the skating life. She likes a couple coaches along the way, but she seems to like her cello teacher better. So she finally stops doing it, turning to art.

So why read this? Do you need to read 400 pages about why Walden quit skating? I think you should at least consider it, because first and foremost it is gorgeous art, where more is told from the deft, closely observed images than the words themselves. We get a real picture of who Walden is, and she tells it like she is. It's not a highly analytical story, but this isn't her purpose. She shows and lets you decide what to make of it.

This is a story for quiet, unhappy girls, I think, and those who strive to understand them. It feels honest if not thrilling to read. And maybe most centrally, it is a coming-out story for the lesbian Walden, who depicts crushes and connections with mostly women in her early life, and her first relationship in middle school. This is, finally, compelling, rendered by a wonderful young artist.

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### **Krista Regester says**

Incredibly beautiful.

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### **Cece (ProblemsOfaBookNerd) says**

This was beautiful. Absolutely beautiful.

TW: depression, sexual harassment, homophobia

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### **First Second Books says**

Figure skating was Tillie Walden's life. She woke before dawn for morning lessons, went straight to group practice after school, and spent weekends competing in glitter and tights. But as her interests evolve, from her growing passion for art to a first love realized with a new girlfriend, she begins to question how the close-minded world of figure skating fits in. *Spinning* is a poignant and captivating graphic memoir that captures what it's like to come of age, come out, and come to terms with leaving behind everything you used to know.

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### **Calista says**

The cold from the ice rink seeps out of this book. Tillie has created a mood here and also she has shared her childhood. Getting up at 4am every morning, how do people do that? Tillie has shared her story openly and

honestly, all her falls and all the times she soared. I love that she included her cello lessons here. Lessons are a place we grow up in, this little weekly bubble.

Tillie also told her coming out story and what that was like. I think she was 14. It feels very honest in the retelling of the story.

Something I find interesting about the art is Tillie seems to look the same in ink at all ages. Maybe her legs are drawn longer, it's hard to tell. I actually really love this as I don't know that we really age inside our heads. I think inside we are mostly ageless. The art is lovely and it's black and white with a solid color like yellow thrown in here and there. This is simply me, but I like full color novels. Yet, the art tells the story so well. I think it conveys her feelings well, so it works here.

First Second has done it again with a lovely memoir about ice skating. It was really neat to get a look into this world I only know from TV and the Olympics. Lovely piece of Art. Thank you.

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### **Korrina (OwlCrate) says**

Really moving story that made me shed a tear. I absolutely loved the art as well.

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### **Lola says**

This book held my attention completely.

Sports books are not necessarily rare, but those with figure skating and synchronized skating? And a graphic memoir at that? With LGBT themes?

It was gorgeous. The author may only be twenty-one (and I believe she started this book when she was a bit younger), but she's got talent to behold and admire.

Not only that, but the melancholy atmosphere fitted the main character, AKA the author, entirely. It follows Tillie from age ten to age eighteen. Her experience on the ice, at school, with friends and girls. Interesting, really.

BUT, and this is a huge but, as it cost the author two stars, very few themes are profoundly explored. I don't feel as though she left important parts of her life out, but it's as though she'd rather solely present facts, without analysing them.

Like the time she was sexually assaulted, or the friends she lost abruptly and didn't go back to, or why in hell she kept waking up at 3-4 am to do something she only complains about. And her mother... we barely see her... once? They have a bad relationship that is never developed.

It's obvious to every reader that Tillie does not actually love ice-skating. Yeah, she loves winning and being alone on the ice, but not the training and not the competition part. Most shocking of all, she says she has no passion for drawing.

That it's just something she does because when she starts to draw something, she "has to finish it." (Also because she's good at it obviously.)

This isn't a book about a girl's passion for ice-skating, which is unfortunate. But it is about a girl's coming-of-age and being forced out of the closet. It has depth, as we really feel like we can read inside the author's mind, but once again, many subjects were not developed enough.

Next time, I guess. Still recommending it, as it is very interesting and a quick read.

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## **Cecelia says**

4.5 stars. I'm very confused about how there are so many "eh" reviews because this book is GORGEOUS. Just tactically, the feel of holding this book in your hands is so \*satisfying\*. A lot of reviews said the pacing was "off", however I thought it was extremely relatable to how we remember our own childhoods and own our traumas.

Tillie Walden is only 21 (!!!!) and she crafted this book with such bravery and honesty. I wouldn't necessarily say it follows a traditional story arc, but the memoir is real and beautiful and will relate to many different audiences.

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