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Brian Gallagher

Teaching Guide

By Peter Heaney

RATIONALE AND THEMES

Set in Belfast in 1969 during the summer of simmering tension and sectarian upheaval that augured the 'Troubles' in N. Ireland.

The story treats the themes sensitively and the plot underlines how friendship can overcome prejudice and violence.

The novel examines how fear, ignorance and suspicion can encourage prejudice and offers a solution that promotes an enlightened tolerance.

The plot presents the themes in an accessible way:

- Prejudice
- Sectarianism
- Tolerance
- Friendship
- Loyalty
- Courage
- Conflict & Violence
- Sacrifice
- Bullying

SUMMARY

Maeve and Sammy live in divided communities in Belfast, the boundaries of their experience coloured by prejudice and suspicion. Developing separate friendships with the Goldman siblings, Emma and Dylan – children from a liberated New York Jewish family living in Belfast while their father is on a journalism assignment – they see their own perceptions of each other challenged and they begin the tentative process of building a friendship and understanding.

As the summer of 1969 approaches, tensions, driven by ingrained sectarianism erupt into frightening scenes of civil disturbance on the streets of Belfast.

Circumstance has left Maeve alone and terrified as the pogrom rages around her in her home on Bombay Street at the

Protestant / Catholic interface.

Fleeing her burning home, she is rescued and shepherded to safety by Sammy who risks his life making the ultimate sacrifice to save his friend.

APPROACH

The themes of the story are sensitive and still have a contemporary currency as Northern Ireland attempts to move beyond the years of violent conflict that marked the 'Troubles'.

The story offers a wealth of potential to examine both local and global conflict in the context of Maeve and Sammy's experience.

Directed discussion will create a suitable environment for the pupils to explore and consider the actions from the story and apply these to their own experiences.

This guide follows the structure of the story and the activities are presented in three main sections.

Section 1 Encounters pp17-81

SUMMARY

As sectarianism violence rages through Belfast, the prologue fixes Maeve, trapped in her burning home in Bombay Street, at the mercy of a loyalist pogrom.

With the tone of conflict and division set, the story lapses back four months to March 1969.

Dylan Goldman, a newly arrived American boy, attends football training with his friend Sammy at Wanderers Soccer Club in the heart of loyalist East Belfast.

Dylan's mother has given them both a lift and, anxious to avoid a display of his

mother's artistic eccentricity, they exit the car quickly. However, an encounter with centre forward Gordon Elliott demonstrates the degree of suspicion and antagonism that pervades everywhere in Belfast.

Sammy witnesses this hostility at home from his unemployed father, who resents the Goldmans and the 'fee' Mr Goldman pays him for interviews on the loyalist view of the Civil Rights movement.

Maeve meets Emma Goldman at the Ardara Harrier's Athletic Club in nationalist West Belfast and their friendship begins.

Maeve has lived with her aunt and uncle since her mother died and her father serves in Cyprus with the UN Irish battalion. Her home in Bombay Street radiates contentment. Like Maeve's family, the Goldmans are a warm and generous unit.

Sammy's curiosity to see a Civil Rights protest has created a problem for him. Straying into a nationalist area, he faces unwelcome attention from a street gang. However a decisive pre-emptive strike ensures his escape unscathed while delivering a partisan riposte as he flees.

Sammy and Maeve become acquainted through their mutual friends Dylan and Emma Goldman at a barbeque in their home and their discussions reveal polarised positions and a threat to their fledging friendship. Emma rescues the situation with the suggestion of a friendship pact not to talk about the tension and 'Troubles' at all.

Gordon's antagonism has resulted in him challenging Dylan to a boxing match, which is accepted although it is obvious that Dylan will be no match for him.

Relaxing at home with his mum, Sammy has the opportunity to think about why there is so much animosity in Belfast. He is

about to reveal his secret wish to become a doctor when his father returns from the pub and the atmosphere in the house resumes its normal tension.

Sammy and Maeve are increasingly thrown together as they share the company of their friends Dylan and Emma, enjoying the freedom of their home and using their father's recording equipment to entertain themselves.

Riot images from Derry in the Sunday papers prompt fear for Maeve as she questions her uncle and aunt on the injustices of the current system.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **(Read pp20):** Gordon dislikes Dylan because he is different and does not 'fit in'. Do you think it is important to 'fit in'? Can you describe the things that you do / say / wear to 'fit in' to your own groups? Do you think that trying to 'fit in' can affect the way you think or feel about things?
- **(Read p36):** Sammy would like to be a doctor but feels that his hopes are limited because of his background. Do you think it is fair that the opportunity to be what you want can be curtailed by where you live? Is working hard or being clever always enough to secure what you want?
- **(Read p44):** Mr Doyle is a fluent Irish/Gaelic speaker. In Northern Ireland many people speak other languages (Polish & Chinese) and everyone can speak English. Do you think it is a sensible use of public money to continue to promote the use of Irish and Ulster Scots? What benefit do you think there is in encouraging people to use these languages?
- **(Read pp 47&55):** Dylan is struggling to understand his identity and where his 'home' is. Do you think that your 'home' is really a place? Northern Ireland is 'home' for many people and each see it differently. How do you think that your 'home' helps to create your identity? What do you think it means to 'be from' a particular place?
- **(Read p79):** In 1969 only people who paid rates could vote. This meant that the unemployed and many Catholics had no vote. Do you think it was reasonable to insist that everyone had a vote? At present you need to be 18 to vote? Is this reasonable? Are 16 or 17 year-olds incapable of making sensible decisions? Who do you think should be allowed / prevented from voting?

ACTIVITIES

1. Bombay St. Blazes (Read p14)

Today when violence happens anywhere we hear about it immediately from different media sources and we are able to comment online on many of these sources.

Could you create a 30-60 second podcast from Bombay Street to inform the world about what is happening and then add 5 – 10 comments from different people to show a range of reactions?

2. Roughly Contested (Read pp 28-29)

One of the sports reporters from a Belfast daily has watched the race and intends to write a short report for the next edition to capture the sense of excitement.

The report will include a short interview with Mr D and comments from the winner and some of the other contestants including Maeve and Emma.

Can you help her to write the report?

3. OMG! (Read pp30-31)

As Maeve and Emma chat, their conversation includes phrases that are unique to their own cultures, e.g. 'cool' & 'header'.

These help to add colour to their language.

Could you compile a list of sayings that you use and add a short explanation for them?

4. Dear Diary (Read pp34-35)

Emma keeps a diary and always makes an entry for any special days. Today was a special day. She has met Maeve and her parents have agreed to her joining the running club.

Do you think that you could create her entry for today with all her comments and observations on everything that happened?

Remember, Emma likes to add illustrations to the margins of her pages.

5. Differences (Read pp22-24 & 39-41)

If Maeve and Sammy were to spend the evening unobserved in each other's home, what do you think would be the three main differences that they would most notice?

How do you think that these observations might help them understand each other

better?

You could add a comment for each difference they notice to explain what they learned from it?

6. What do you see? (Read pp57-60)

Both Maeve and Sammy have difficulty accepting each other's explanation for the explosion and Dylan's plea seems trivial to them.

So Maeve and Sammy decide to explain without interruption to Dylan and Emma why they think the way they do.

Both sit down quietly and Sammy begins to speak first.

Could you write the speech that each of them delivered?

7. Civil Rights (Read p70)

Sammy's father resents the Catholics demanding civil rights. One of the reasons for the community tension is that no one has ever tried to define an agreed list of rights that everyone should enjoy.

Can you read the UN list of Human Rights and pick ten that you think are essential. Can you rank your choices and add a brief explanation for each of your choices.

You can work in small groups for this activity and you will be able to find resources on the site below.

www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/

8. An Evening with Sammy / Maeve (Read pp71-74)

The author, Brian Gallagher, has decided that he will include a short description of an evening that either Dylan spent with Sammy or Emma spent with Maeve.

Can you decide which one he should choose and write a brief description of what happened during the evening?

What do you think Dylan or Emma learned from the experience?

9. The Tape (Read p75)

When Emma played their recording, they all enjoyed the piece. However, as she let the tape run on they realised that they had recorded over an interview that her father had taped with Sammy's father. In silence they listened to the questions and answers.

Do you think Sammy was embarrassed or if he was forced to defend his father in front of the others?

Can you create the scene and everyone's reaction to the questions and answers?

10. Photo Montage (Read p78)

When Maeve saw the images in the Sunday papers, she was frightened. At school that week they had been creating collages for art and her teacher had given them homework to create an interesting collage from the Sunday papers.

Do you think that you could help her to make a collage from the riot pictures of Derry?

(The links below have some interesting images.)

contact.photoshelter.com/gallery/-/G0000eaXGnX5RBQo/

cain.ulst.ac.uk/melaugh/images.htm

www.rte.ie/archives/exhibitions/1042-northern-ireland-1969/1048-august-1969/320410-rioting-reaches-peak

Section 2 Developments pp84-157

SUMMARY

Sammy's father is angry at the concession of 'one man, one vote' and, becoming belligerent to Sammy, strikes him before his mother can intervene.

Emma and Maeve manage to coax Mr D into revealing that he has entered them both for the next race.

Buckie, the football team coach, becomes aware of the planned boxing match and forbids Dylan and Gordon from pursuing it any further, much to Dylan's relief.

At their post match burger feast Sammy learns from Dylan's father that the political situation is deteriorating and further trouble is anticipated.

Maeve has received a letter from her dad, confirming that he will shortly be home on leave and she is delighted at the chance to spend time with him.

Sammy tries to engage his father with a question on the change of Prime Minister and, although sober, his father sours the exchange with a display of bitterness and prejudice, making Sammy realise that if discovered, his friendship with Maeve would be impossible.

Emma and Maeve stand nervously at the start of the race. Everything goes to plan, however Emma has the stronger finish and is now concerned that her win will affect

the dynamic of her friendship with Maeve.

Gordon is still intent on bullying and threatens to injure Dylan in training. He is annoyed that Dylan's style of play makes him look clumsy.

Mr Goldman has interviewed Sammy's dad again for background loyalist opinion and Sammy tries hard to counter his father's rudeness.

When Dylan and Sammy implement their plan to dissuade Gordon from further bullying, he reluctantly agrees when faced with their combined resolve.

Maeve's joy is palpable as she shares a day out in the Mourne with her dad and friends; however when Sammy falls and injures his ankle a trip to the hospital confirms it to be only a sprain.

Sammy confides to Dylan that if his father discovers he spent the day with Maeve there could be a furious reaction.

Dylan discreetly outlines the problem to Maeve's dad and they agree that only Dylan will escort Sammy home.

Their discretion proves justified as Sammy's father vents his anger on Dylan, and Mrs Taylor has to intervene to soothe her husband's temper.

Emma is deeply touched by Maeve's declaration that she is her best friend as she consoles her now that her father has returned to his unit in Cyprus.

Sammy's parents have been invited to Mrs Goldman's art exhibition and Sammy is surprised at his mum's determination to accept the invitation in spite of his father's hostility.

Sammy's mum is a little lost at the art exhibition and when she is introduced to Maeve's aunt the two women are immediately able to relax in each other's company.

As Emma is explaining that they are going to Spain for holidays shortly, the genial atmosphere of the exhibition is shattered when a brick from a riot outside shatters a window, scattering glass across the floor.

DISCUSSION POINTS

□ (Read pp85-86) Anger is a corrosive and powerful emotion, capable of distorting how we see things. Sammy's dad seems to be continually angry. Why do you think this is? If Sammy was able to analyse his father's mood swings, what might he find? What advice could you give to Mr Taylor to help him deal with his feelings

in a less destructive way?

- (Read p92): George Orwell once said that sport 'is war minus the shooting'. What do you think he meant by this? When Buckie gives the team a motivational talk before the match, is this what he has in mind? Do you think it is a healthy way to think about sport?
- (Read pp105-107): Emma knows that Maeve really wanted to win the race yet she made every effort to beat her. Should she have let Maeve win? Would this have been honest? Should it have been enough for Emma to know that she could have won? Why do you think it was so important for her to win? Do you think that winning is all that ever matters? What would you have done?
- (Read p145): Mr Taylor argues that they would be 'fish out of water' at the exhibition. Do you think that he has a point? Should people only attend events where they are comfortable? Are there events where you would feel uncomfortable but would still like to try? How can events be made inclusive and accessible for everyone, and should they be so?
- (Read p155): Sammy's mum and Maeve's aunt seem to relax in each other's company at the exhibition. Do you think that women generally will accept each other's position more easily than men? Why do you think this is so?

ACTIVITIES

1. No Bill! (Read pp86-87)

Sammy's mum normally acquiesces to her husband, especially when he has been drinking. This time, however she confronts him over his behaviour.

Remaining calm, she tells him what she thinks of his actions.

It is a short conversation as she demolishes each of his protests and arguments.

Could you continue the dialogue for the conversation you think they may have had?

2. Back to the Future (Read p96)

When Prime Minister Terence O'Neill resigned in 1969, the situation in Northern Ireland deteriorated and the 'Troubles' became inevitable.

If you had the opportunity now, with the benefit of hindsight, to write him a letter warning him of the consequences of his actions, what arguments would you use to

convince him to stay and help persuade both sides to step back and avoid the violence that has affected so many people?

www.bbc.co.uk/history/troubles

www.bbc.co.uk/history/recent/troubles/the_troubles_article_01.shtml

www.smithsonianmag.com/people-places/Getting-Past-the-Troubles.html

3. Flashback (read p 103)

Sammy has approached Buckie and told him about the boxing match in order to prevent Dylan from getting a beating. He was unsure of Buckie's reaction and very cautious of how he told him.

The author initially decided not to include their conversation but has now changed his mind.

Could you help him to write the short conversation that Sammy had to manage the information and ensure that Buckie prevented the fight?

4. The Race (Read pp104-106)

Unknown to Maeve and Emma, the local Falls Community radio station has sent a reporter to record a commentary on their race. The race is being broadcast live in the Belfast area only.

Do you think that you could make a short (60 sec) podcast of the race commentary to create a sense of the excitement for the listeners?

The reporter will have gathered a little background information on the competitors and might ask a few questions of the winner.

5. The Nationalist (Read pp115-116)

That evening Mr Goldman listened to the recording he had made with Sammy's dad. Then he listened to one he had made earlier in the day with a man from the nationalist Falls Road area. It was just as angry and resentful.

As he listened, he was surprised at how similar they were.

Do you think that you could create the angry interview that he had with the man from the nationalist side?

6. Dublin Day Out (Read pp120-122)

Maeve is delighted to see her father again and is looking forward to spending time with him in Dublin.

There are so many places that he

remembers and things that she would like to do.

That evening she and her dad plan the 'perfect' day out in Dublin.

Do you think that you could help them to plan their perfect day, what do you think Maeve would like to do and see?

irishfireside.com/2013/02/25/my-perfect-day-in-dublin/

www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attractions-g186605-Activities-Dublin_County_Dublin.html

7. Mr Taylor (Read p136)

Dylan has to give Mr Kennedy a brief, accurate and convincing description of Sammy's dad without being offensive, in order to persuade him not to escort Sammy to the door to explain the injury.

What do you think he said? What arguments did he use to persuade Mr Kennedy and how did he counter Mr Kennedy's objections?

Could you recreate the conversation they had?

8. Dear Dad (Read pp142-144)

Maeve feels better after talking to Emma and decides to write a letter to her father. She realises that he too will be feeling sad that they are separated again and might need to be cheered up.

She wants to tell him how much she enjoyed his visit, what her friends are doing now and how Emma has helped her.

Could you help her to write the letter to him?

9. Orangefest (Read pp151-152)

Sammy has taken Maeve's view and questions seriously and has decided to produce a short pamphlet for her on the Orange Order and the July celebrations.

He wants it to include pictures and information on the history of the order and why he thinks it is a positive influence for his community.

Could you help him to produce a simple (one fold) pamphlet?

www.belfastorange.net/index.html

www.grandorangelodge.co.uk/twelvth2013

10. The Leaflet (Read p156)

Sammy's mum is thrilled to be at the exhibition and she has taken one of the promotional leaflets as a souvenir because it has an illustration of Belfast in it that she

likes.

The leaflet also has a short biography and picture of Mrs Goldman along with a description of the theme of the exhibition (*Landscapes*).

Do you think that you could make a copy of the leaflet she took?

Section 3 Endgame pp160-220

SUMMARY

On holiday in Spain, Dylan and Emma debate the sensitivity of sending cheerful postcards to Sammy and Maeve as Belfast spirals into violent anarchy, when their father announces that he must return to cover the deteriorating situation.

On a fishing trip Sammy is chilled by his father's assessment of the developing trouble and declaration of the role that he intends to play.

Sammy and Maeve have grown closer and met regularly on neutral territory to share and swap books. Maeve's Uncle Jim has found work in Donegal. He is reluctant to move away but with Aunt Nan and Maeve's insistence he reluctantly accepts the offer.

At their homecoming reunion, Dylan and Emma distribute the presents they bought and try to assume a sense of normality, however they all realise that it is simply a matter of time before the growing tensions fragment their world.

Emma has waited up for her father and his news confirms her worst fears. Violence has spread from a contentious parade in Derry and community violence has erupted on the interfaces in Belfast. Emma fears for the safety of Maeve and her family.

Sammy is distraught about the danger Maeve might face as he listens to his father describe how the violence has escalated.

Sammy's dad has returned home, gloating about his role in the street violence and mocks Sammy's concern about Maeve, goading him into attempting a dangerous rescue attempt.

Dylan and Emma are frustrated at their inability to help Maeve and when their mother overhears their plans to rescue her she is horrified and firmly rejects any suggestion that they attempt a rescue.

Hugging his mother for a final time,

Sammy bolts for the door to attempt to rescue Maeve from the cauldron of hatred and violence that swirls through the interface on Bombay Street.

Picking his way through the warren of side streets that weave between the Falls and the Shankill, avoiding the pitched battles, Sammy finds Bombay Street ablaze. Sickened, he rushes forward to find Maeve.

Crouched in her hideout under the stairs, Maeve listens with mounting alarm to the splintering of the room outside as the fire seizes control of her home and she realises that she must attempt an escape.

Stumbling into the street, spluttering, Maeve faces fresh danger when she is spotted by one of the arsonists. However Sammy has seen her too and punches her assailant to the ground before they flee together down Bombay Street.

There are armed groups everywhere burning houses and Maeve leads Sammy through the little side streets as they head for safety.

When a car explodes, Maeve escapes most of the lethal blast that takes Sammy's life.

Recovering in hospital, she is visited by Dylan and Emma. Belfast is exhausted after its orgy of violence and the army are now on the streets to restore order.

The friends try to comfort each other and resolve to remember Sammy, each in their own way as their lives pick up momentum again and they sadly take their leave of Belfast.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **(Read p167):** Rumour and speculation can distort the facts in any situation. What part do you think they play in a tense situation? How do you think they have affected the escalation of the situation in Belfast? How would you control the spread of rumours? Why do you think that people seem to be willing to accept rumour without any evidence to substantiate it?
- **(Read p169):** Maeve and Sammy still hold true to their own beliefs; however they no longer see the labels 'Taig' and 'Loyalist'. How do you think this has happened? How do you think that their friendship was able to grow, despite them holding opposite views?
- **(Read p186):** When you give people labels e.g. Taig, Prod, enemy, do you think that makes you see them in a

particular way? How do you think that using a label to describe someone influences the way we behave towards them? Sammy uses Maeve's name, rather than a label, when discussing her with his family. What does this tell you about how he thinks of her?

- **(Read pp189-190 & 197-198)** Dylan and Emma's mum is horrified when she learns that they plan a rescue attempt for Maeve and categorically forbids it. She is concerned for their safety and will not put them at risk, even for Maeve. Do you think that she is right? Is it reasonable to put your own safety first in every situation? Do you think this is a positive or negative aspect of her character?
- **(Read p211):** The street rioting has caused mayhem and tragedy for many people. It is very difficult to control or reason with a crowd of protestors who have become a mob. When people are called onto the street to protest and violence follows, who do you think is really responsible? Is it the person who is rioting or the group who organised the protest? Is it enough for the organisers to ask people to be peaceful even if they suspect there might be violence?

ACTIVITIES

1. Sammy's Dream (Read p169)

Sammy and Maeve exchange their dreams because they are comfortable in each other's company.

Each of us has dreams of what we would like the future to be.

Can you describe your own dream of what you would like the future to hold for you?

You can share your dream with the class or seal it in an envelope and put it away for a few years before reading it again.

2. Battle Zone (Read pp183-184)

When Emma leaves the room, her father reveals the true picture of what he has seen to his wife. It is a grim picture.

Do you think that you could recreate the conversation they shared, outlining the horrors he witnessed and her reaction to what she heard?

3. Target (Read p188)

When a shot is fired, there is always a target. This could be a son, husband, wife or friend.

When Emma hears the shots she tries to imagine the worry of a mother, wife

or friend who hopes it is not aimed at someone they know.

She decides to write a short poem to show their thoughts.

Can you help her to compose the poem?

www.poetry4kids.com/blog/lessons/how-to-write-a-cinquain-poem/

www.poetry4kids.com/blog/lessons/how-to-write-a-haiku

4. Wall of Sound (Read p193)

Maeve hears the roar as the barricade is breached. It is a sound that she will never forget.

Do you think that you could create a short (60 sec) sound file or podcast to capture the mood of the sound and the terror that she felt?

(You can find some sound clips on this site)

soundbible.com/tags-scary.html

5. Guernica (Read p195)

Pablo Picasso created a famous painting of the village of Guernica after it had been bombed to show the utter futility and devastation of war.

Look carefully at his picture to see how he uses the splintered images to make his point.

Do you think that you could create a similar one to represent what was happening in Belfast?

What images of Belfast would you use and how would you fragment them?

(You can use the links below for images and to see Picasso's painting.)

www.oneonta.edu/faculty/farberas/arth/arth200/guernica.html

www.rte.ie/archives/exhibitions/1042-northern-ireland-1969/1048-august-1969/320448-belfast-riots-aftermath

www.google.co.uk/search?q=belfast%201969, select "images"

6. The Mob (Read p206)

The mob that Sammy saw had many faces, each filled with a hatred that looked hellish in the light and smoke from the burning buildings.

They are forever seared into his memory.

Do you think that you could create a montage of the faces to represent what Sammy saw?

7. Sammy (Read p208)

Following Sammy's death, Mr Goldman

decides to dedicate his final report from Belfast to his memory.

Ha has been moved by Sammy's courage and sees him as a symbol of hope amidst the wreckage of sectarianism and violence.

Since you now know Sammy as well as anyone, can you help him to write the report?

8. Refugee Letter (Read p212)

Two months have passed since Sammy died and Maeve now feels that she can reply to Emma's letter.

They have been living in a refugee camp since being burnt out of Belfast.

In her letter she looks forward and adds some entertaining stories from the camp.

Could you help her to write the letter?

9. The Memory Box (Read p214)

Emma suggests that one way for them to honour Sammy would be to create a memory box for him.

Each of them will add three memories that only they have of Sammy. These could be an object or a description.

What memories do you think that each of them contributed?

10. The Voice (Read p214)

When she is alone, Maeve switches on the recorder and waits patiently until she hears his voice.

She has no idea what he has said, but she is moved beyond admiration for Sammy as the recorder clicks off at the end of the recording.

It is only a 30 second piece but it is incredibly powerful

Could you recreate the contribution that Sammy made?

CLASS PROJECT

Although the story is historical, the Northern Ireland situation is still very much contemporary.

It might be interesting for the students to attempt to create a timeline of the developing situation in Northern Ireland, identifying the major events from 1969 to 2013.

They could use the 5 x W & H matrix (Who, What, When, Where, Why & How) to identify reasons why things developed as they did.

They could make a list of the changes that have happened and what still needs to be achieved.

They could decide on a single piece of advice for each of the participants to ensure continued progress towards peaceful reconciliation.

VIDEO

You can see Brian reading the prologue from *Stormclouds* here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYW8d-F-ydk

About the author, Brian Gallagher



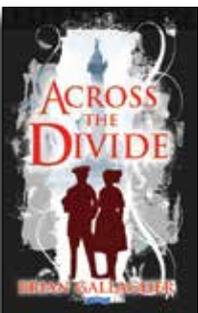
Brian Gallagher was born in Dublin. He is a full-time writer whose plays and short stories have been produced in Ireland, Britain and Canada. He has worked extensively in radio and television, including on *Fair City*, writing many dramas and documentaries.

He collaborated with composer Shaun Purcell on the musical, *Larkin*, for which he wrote the book and lyrics, and on *Winds of Change* for RTE's Lyric FM.

His has written four widely-praised adult novels, and in more recent times he has concentrated on historical fiction for older children

He is currently working on a new novel.

Outside of writing his interests include travel, tennis, music and hill walking. He lives with his family in Dublin.

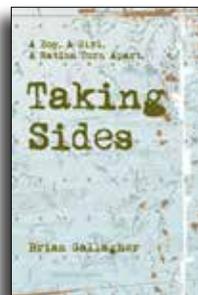


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