

Brotherly Love

Richard Yaxley

I wanted to write about brothers. I don't mean my own experience, nor do I mean writing in a hokey, folksy manner about boys chiaccking together. I mean: the phenomenon. The flux of being brothers. Determining the dynamic, the way brothers are.

I mean the way they can ignore and trick and hurl abuse and punch on but then, a minute later, defend each other with an absolute conviction of muscle, vitriol and, if necessary, blood. I mean the constant, simmering resentment of being forced to share rooms, rituals, families and histories; the bitter scramble for top place in the presumed apex of a mother's heart; the need to be different to each other and their father while at the same time being praised by each other and their father.

That weird feeling of never being in control as you slide back and forth along a tightrope that stretches between slashes of pain and circles of affection.

My novel, *A New Kind of Everything*, published by Scholastic Australia in February, features the Gallagher brothers. Seventeen-year-old Carl and fourteen-year-old Dinny are dealing with the sudden loss of their father in a car accident. At a surface level, their methods of grieving are as far apart as their characters. Carl is aggressive, independent and filled with a violent anger for his father. Dinny is lost, pliable and manifestly uncertain about what his relationship with his dad ever was.

Yet, as much as they are a study in contrasts, so too are they the same in that, ultimately, it is the love that they feel, more so than their often instinctive actions and reactions, that defines them. Carl and Dinny have a deep love for each other and for their mother – and, they come to realise, for their father. This was what I discovered as I was constructing the novel; that the exploration of grief that I had planned to write became, by necessity, an exploration of familial love, because it is that love in its many forms which makes us grieve as we do. The two are utterly intertwined.

In Ann Patchett's wonderful novel, *Commonwealth*, Theresa believes that the genuine measure of a life is how well we cope with the inevitable series of losses that all lives bring. Carl and Dinny lose a great deal in my novel: their father, of course, but also determinations about their futures and the chance to properly understand their past and its intricate engagement with their father's hitherto untold story. With his death comes the difficult realisation that their imprint upon the Earth is instantly lightened and so it will remain. However, despite all of that, and the many challenges tossed up by the narrative, the brothers never lose each other.

In *Commonwealth*, when her daughter Holly reminds Theresa that she 'got through' the grief of losing her first-born, her mother responds: 'We all did, I guess, in our own ways. You don't think you're going to but then you do. You're still alive. That was the thing that caught me in the end: I was still alive.'

Alive to love, I think she means. And to love again, and again, until we are no more.

Reference

Anne Patchett. 2016. *Commonwealth*. Bloomsbury, London, p. 286

Website:

[Richard Yaxley](#)

Social Links:

[Facebook](#)

[Twitter](#)

[Instagram](#)

Buy Links:

[Scholastic Shop](#)

[Readings](#)

[Riverbend Books](#)

[Dymocks](#)

[Angus and Robertson](#)

[QBD](#)

[Booktopia](#)