

Book review

Because Everything is Right but Everything is Wrong

Category: Book Reviews / Children & Youth

Author: Erin Donohue

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Publisher: Escalator Press, NZ

ISBN: 9780994137241

Audience: For Youth, For Schools & Education



Summary: Young adult fiction about a teenager going through and coming to terms with mental illness

Writing young adult fiction that is both accessible and thought-provoking can be difficult to achieve, yet Erin Donohue gets the balance perfectly right with her debut novel *Because Everything is Right but Everything is Wrong*.

The book follows Caleb, a teenager in his last year of high school, and his experiences going through and coming to terms with mental illness. It's a raw and at times unexpected journey, yet it manages to connect on a level that feels incredibly relatable and authentic. Set mostly at his high school, there's an early sense of familiarity to Caleb's world and the fears and challenges he faces. Donohue taps into that relatability, then delves deep into Caleb's experiences, taking her readers with her.

One of the things I liked most about the book was the fact it didn't try to explain away or attempt to justify Caleb's feelings. In fact, there's a scene where Caleb tries to find a reason for what he's going through – everything on the surface is "right". As Caleb says, "I keep searching for the reasons why I feel this way. It's like a checklist. I have the basics: food, shelter, money, clothes. I have a family that loves me and friends to hang out with... I keep checking and checking, surely there must be something".

Instead of trying to explain or make sense of Caleb's feelings, the story simply explores them. Donohue writes as Caleb in the first person and in a poetic style that powerfully captures his experiences. When Caleb's depression and anxiety get particularly bad for example, his thoughts are scattered and broken up on the page, drawn out through huge spaces between words or a single word per line. It's a clever literary device, but more importantly, it's effective. It expresses those moments when our thoughts are not fluid narratives; moments of fear, dread and disconnect.

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Because Everything is Right but Everything is Wrong is a beautifully written and important book. It transports its readers into Caleb's world and holds them there, allowing them to empathise with his character in a way that feels very honest and very real. I would absolutely recommend this book.

[Listen to an interview with the author, Erin Donohue](#)

Reviewed by Nicola Corner, Communications Assistant at the Mental Health Foundation

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