



Heroic

Phil Earle

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'For the past five weeks I'd prayed that I'd never see my brother's name spelt out in poppies. In the weeks that followed I often wished I had.'

Jammy and Sonny McGann are brothers, but that's where the similarities end. One is calm when the other is angry; one has a plan while the other lives purely in the moment. When Jammy returns from Afghanistan a very different man to the one who left, it's Sonny who is left to hold things together. But just how far will he go to save the brother who always put him first?

Inspired by S.E. Hinton's "The Outsiders" and by the battles facing young soldiers all over the world, this is a devastating novel about brotherhood and sacrifice, from the award-winning author of "Being Billy" and "Saving Daisy".

Heroic Details

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From Reader Review Heroic for online ebook

Anne says

Sonny and Jammy, younger and older brothers, living in a high rise hell, The Ghost, where broken families, crime, violence and drugs are the way of life. These boys (and several of their friends) are not part of the stereotype however and now to raise a family income, Jammy (and friend Tommo) is away fighting in Afghanistan while Sonny is left to fight for himself and the family on home turf, with the support of Cam (Tommo's sister). Both scenarios are tough and uncompromising with the boys living on the edge with little time to think before acting. Both with a team or gang, dependent on their choices.

This was a GRIM read and I felt myself hurrying to get it over with. The Afghanistan scenes reminded me of The Hurt Locker - and then when the boys were being tracked down by the police in Ghost, that claustrophobic feeling returned. The shock of very young boys fighting for our country and what is right, never goes away, whichever war we are in - think Rupert Brooke's, Siegfried Sassoon, Private Peaceful. What raises you above this is that, like the soldiers before them, they have very human feelings and love for their fellow humans: They are striving for the great and good in desperate times and circumstances.

As an adult, you know immediately what is up with the newly returned "heroic" Jammy - most teens might not and so would be devouring the last 1/3 of the novel, told mainly through Jammy, to find a conclusion. I felt the ending and therefore, the reason behind his behaviour, was rushed - the rehab behind closed door (not prison bars) However it did end on a positive note, with both boys' fighting spirit intact and some sort of future within their grasp. I think this is the book to move boys (might struggle with the girls) onto after they have had their fill of stories glorifying war. Powerful and thought provoking stuff.

Shaz Goodwin says

There's a poem at the beginning, 'The Brothers' by Michael Wagg. When I first read it I thought it was something really special and when we get to the acknowledgements at the end, we find out just how special.

Sonny and Jamm's story is told in distinctly different voices. We spend time with Sonny on the Ghost (estate) and with Jamm from the moment he's touching down in Afghanistan. At the point where we leave each brother, we're left with a cliffhanger, not knowing how it's going to work out.

On the Ghost, we have the stereotypes you would expect with crews like the 'Cuda' and we learn from Sonny the commandments Jamm made that keep them safe ... and which he doesn't follow exactly. We have poignant scenes with hearses being driven along the High Street for the returning soliders ...

In Afghanistan we arrive with Jamm and best mate Tommy at the Forward Operating Base and spend time on the hot, draining streets and buildings where the estate rules mean nothing.

In both places, I felt as if I was actually there with them. Earle's writing is so evocative, it engages the senses and you feel the fear and adrenaline alongside our two brothers in their different environments. You feel the community and belonging alongside the loss and distress. I love the way Earle 'shows' us in a few words a depth of feeling.

When Jamm comes home on leave his experiences have scarred him. Sonny is the only one who can see there's something wrong. It doesn't take long for the action to begin and I couldn't predict what would happen. I have to say that the ending was just perfect!

Heroic is a gut-wrenching and heart-breaking novel. It is sensitively written with the underpinning values of family and community – and the lengths those that are closest to you will go to protect you.

Even though I loved Earle's first two novels, Heroic is even better!

I would like to thank the author for providing a copy, and signing it! in exchange for an honest review.

Stephanie (Stepping out of the Page) says

When I heard that Phil Earle had a new book out, without knowing the synopsis or seeing the title or cover, I knew that I had to have a copy. Undoubtedly, Earle is one of my favourite authors. Though he's only released two other books, I absolutely adored them and just from those, I know that he can't disappoint.

After my initial excitement, I calmed down enough to read the blurb of Heroic, I was a little surprised - it seemed quite different to the kind of story that I expected, however when I thought again, I thought wow, this is exactly the kind of thing that Earle would write - something raw and gritty, something almost painfully realistic. Once again, Earle's experience with teenagers and young people shines through and gives the story a true sense of authenticity. Earle and his writing shine a light of truth on society today - both the positive aspects and the more negative ones.

Heroic is the story of a gang of teenage boys living in a rough block of flats, in particular the stories of a pair of brothers, Sonny and Jammy. Jammy left his friends when he and another member of the group went to serve for their country in Afghanistan, an experience that would change not only his life, but the life of all of the others around him. I think it was a good idea to read both brothers narration, to see how their thoughts and feelings changed through their experiences. Earle certainly didn't hold anything back with his descriptions of these things - I often felt a little uncomfortable reading, but I knew it was because it was so achingly honest - Earle is writing about things that do happen to and do have an effect on a lot of people.

As you can imagine, war is not a pretty thing, it's not full of happiness. Although war and soldiers are often glorified, the characters and situations in this book are anything but glorified. However, there are some more heartwarming moments, along with loss and the attempts to survive come courage and love. Friendship and support are at the real heart of this book. As Dumbledore would say, "Happiness can be found even in the darkest of times, if one only remembers to turn on the light" and this is a book that first that theory - both Sonny and Jammy go through hell but in the end, they realise they have each other and that gets them through.

I hope you can tell how much I enjoyed this - it is always difficult to put in words how Earle's writing makes me feel. For me, there is nothing better than a realistic book that deals with real issues and this is exactly that. I don't know what Earle is planning next, but I am so excited to find out. If you haven't picked up any of Earle's books, please, do go and pick them up now!

Kirsty says

This is a hard one for me to review mainly because I'm not sure I can quite do this book justice due to the subject matter and how close to home it is to me personally so I'll try in my own way below but do forgive me if I can't quite find the words.

Heroic is the story of two brothers: Jamm and Sonny and follows the boys as Jamm goes off to fight in Afghanistan through to his return to a normal civilian life after his tour of duty is over. The story is heart breaking and insightful and will leave you an emotional wreck by the end. What I liked about it was that the story wasn't over glamourised but told the story of Jamm and his family as it is for so many families with loved ones serving abroad. I thought the scenes of his family left behind waiting for his return were so realistic in the way it portrayed the propagandised news broadcasts which are shown in the UK daily to get people behind a war on terror and in the way in which it showed how the family coped with having to be left behind waiting on edge for that awful phone call. I also felt the way in which Jamm was portrayed after his return from Afghanistan was an invaluable insight into the long term effect serving in such circumstances can have.

In short this book is brilliant, so well written dealing with a poignant subject in a sensitive and respectful way doing justice to the risks those in the forces face everyday to keep us safe. Quite honestly I've been of the opinion for a while now that I will happily read anything Mr Earle puts his name because I know the quality will be top notch and this latest book just confirms that opinion. Excellent stuff and well worth a read.

Tirza Horvath says

I loved this book so much! 1) Because I love soldiers! 2) I love stories about brothers!

At the beginning this book really reminded me of the book called '*Private Peaceful*', I actually didn't mind that at all, because it is one of my favourite books of all! It did become a different story and not something that was copied, and it was interesting too!

So what I thought about the brothers?;

At the beginning Sonny was a little bit annoying and his side of story was a little boring too. While on the other side, Jammy's story was really interesting and I was literally in love with him. Until he came home - well until the second day he was home. He started to treat Sonny very unfairly and nobody understood Sonny and his situation. They also started to blame Sonny for Jammy's problems. So by the end I wasn't in love with Jammy, but I didn't dislike Sonny either! But when the book ended I liked both brothers very much, because they sorted everything out!

Michelle (Fluttering Butterflies) says

This review was originally published at Fluttering Butterflies

I really loved Heroic by Phil Earle. Like the author's two previous books, Being Billy and Saving Daisy, I found Heroic to be a hugely emotional experience as I really fell in love with the characters and their relationships with each other. I love the strong ties of brotherhood throughout the book from men fighting in

a war, between friends and the relationship between actual brothers, Sonny and Jammy.

Heroic focuses on these two brothers, Sonny and Jammy during the months that Jamm is serving in Afghanistan. We get to see both perspectives of Jammy at war, struggling with the heat and missing home. We witness him trying to keep an eye out for Tommo, his childhood friend who joined up at the same time as him and we see him trying to make a connection with one of locals. This part of the story was both interesting and sad, seeing how Jammy thought of home but didn't quite know what to say to them either so that they wouldn't worry. His experiences in Afghanistan involved some really difficult stuff but I was super glad that nothing about what Jamm or his family goes through ever felt over-dramatised.

Back at home we have Sonny and his mom waiting it out and what it's like for Sonny and everyone else back at home doing their best not to worry, to remain upbeat when talking to Jammy even if they're worried sick. Wondering if that'll be the last time they speak together. It's heartbreaking, both situations.

Sonny and Jammy are part of this group of boys living on this estate that have each other's back and I loved the banter and the loyalty between them all. They're definitely no angels, as the book starts off with them all robbing a van of cigarettes and alcohol to sell on for profit, but I just loved the lot of them. Especially Sonny. He's the younger brother, always sort of in the shadow of responsible and level-headed Jammy. And Sonny isn't much like Jammy. He does dumb things and gets caught out for them all the time, but his heart is in the right place. He tries his best to hold things together while Jammy's away and then also when Jamm does come home and Jamm comes back a very different person.

They are some quite obvious acts of bravery that occur in Heroic involving Jamm in the war and it brought tears to my eyes when we finally do learn of what Jamm goes through just before coming home. But what I really noticed while reading this book were the other smaller and more mundane acts of courage that take place all the time. There's the courage of facing the grind day after day, in being the ones left behind or picking up the pieces. There's heroism in sacrifice and in asking for help, in working hard to make things better for those we love, in dreaming for more in life.

I thought Heroic was a really beautiful book. I was surprised by how much I felt for both Sonny and Jamm and their family and friends while reading. I knew that it was unlikely that everything could end happily, but I wanted that for all of them. The last hundred pages or so really had me on edge as everything comes to this dramatic head and things hang in the balance. It is tense stuff and it only works because of how wonderfully these characters are presented and because of how tangible their feelings are and how strong their relationships with each other are.

This is a book that really sucked me in right from the start and put my heart through the wringer. I really very highly recommend it.

Natasha says

Beautiful. That was the first word that came into my mind after reading this book. It was surprisingly touching and brought tears to my eyes. Phil Earle is a phenomenal author and hasn't disappointed me once with his books.

This was beautiful, touching, inforgettable, realistic and absolutely unbelievable. It was so realistic in the way that Phil Earle told it and the way its characters and twists written. I have no words left to describe this

book. I cannot explain it, I can only tell whoever wants to read it, to definitely read it!!!!

This book tells us about the obstacles that two brothers have to face in order to stay a family, with war getting in the way. It explains the traumatic experiences that soldiers experience when fighting and how it can damage their lives, forever. The tests of relationships is told and can bring tears to anybody's eyes. I absolutely loved this book and would recommend it to anyone, as I am sure they would find it a massive page-turner. I cannot say any more, as it will spoil the book, but would definitely tell anyone thinking of reading it to read it.

I loved this book!!!!

Manuela says

I liked this book but it was a little different than what I thought. From the blurb, it sounded like the book would focus on Jammy's returning home being a different man and his brother Sonny stepping up to the plate. While that did happen, it was only later in the book. The first half was split between Sonny in his hometown and Jammy in Afghanistan. I think it was necessary to tell their separate stories to introduce the characters and show what they went through while separated, but I think it was too long, with the result it felt a little dragging in places, especially Sonny's parts, which took the most pages. Also, this caused the second part of the book, the one about Jammy coming home with a lot of issues, to be rushed.

In spite of that, I did enjoy the book. I love to read about siblings being there for each other and I'm interested in stories about soldiers coming back home from war zones, and those parts met my expectations.

Karen says

This book came highly recommended by the Scottish Book Trust and I initially read it as "homework", being a school librarian. However, my thoughts on the book very quickly changed as soon as I began reading, I usually dip in and out of three or four books at any one time depending on my reading mood - this one stayed on top of my pile as the one and only until it was finished.

I can highly recommend this powerful YA novel for anyone to read. It is a gritty, hard hitting read, with strong believable characters that the reader can relate too. The story pulls you in quickly and sits you on a roller coaster of a journey.

Atifa says

Inspired by S.E Hinton's The Outsiders and the stories of young men returning from Afghanistan, Phil Earle's new novel Heroic is the story of two brothers; Jammy and Sonny. Jammy, the eldest, is off fighting in Afghanistan whilst Sonny is left at home on the 'Ghost' estate. Separated, they both fight very different battles on a daily basis, but when Jammy returns home on leave, they must face a bleak reality; soon realising that the "fiercest battles are often fought at home."

Most books that I read on War are about either World War I or II so to have one set partly in Afghanistan and in the present day was refreshing, but also brings to light the terrible reality of modern-day warfare and its horrifying consequences back home.

The narrative begins by alternating between the two brothers and two locations, the Ghost and Afghanistan. However, once Jammy returns and his temperament becomes increasingly uncontrollable, the situation more and more dangerous; the narrative is solely from Sonny's perspective. Throughout the story we have been inside Jammy's head and understood what was happening to him. But now we are faced with being outsiders- struggling, just like Sonny, to piece together what has happened to his brother.

Heroic explores the strength of familial love and loyalty. Jammy and Sonny aren't always on the best of terms with each other, but in moments of crisis they come together with a fierce strength. Phil Earle's writing is realistic and vivid, evoking scenes in both Afghanistan and on the Ghost effortlessly.

Phil Earle is clearly a skilled writer, immediately drawing his readers into his story. He pulls us through heart-stopping dusk patrols in Afghanistan, violent confrontations between gangs and an adrenaline-filled chase across an estate. His scenes go from moments of utter despair and grief, uninhibited anger and crippling guilt to sudden relative calm; leaving us, at long last, with hope.

4/5 stars. Heroic is an unforgettable read, I can't fault it. Highly recommended. Also worth noting that Phil Earle is one of the nicest authors ever- perhaps he deserves the extra star just for that?

Emma says

Review by Shelly

This is the first book by Phil Earle that I have read and I wasn't sure at the start if I was going to enjoy it. The two main characters, Sonny and Jammy, take turns to tell their story although we get more of Sonny than Jammy and to be honest I found it hard to warm to Sonny as he really didn't have any redeeming features. Here is a boy who has lived his whole life in the Ghost, a block of flats that are looked down at by the other residents of the town. He doesn't work and thinks it's OK to get by on scams with his friends. It's not until his brother come back from Afghanistan that he starts to change and becomes more of someone I could relate to.

I think this was my problem with this book, I just couldn't seem to relate to anyone. None of the main characters were very likable although Jammy was the one person who I did feel a bit of empathy with. His tour of Afghanistan was very well written and drew me in and I could have done more of that plot. When he comes home you know he will self destruct and I felt that this part was a little rushed especially the end where he gets the help he needs.

I really don't think I am Phil Earle's target audience and although the book is very well written I have to say that it wasn't for me which is a shame as I really was looking forward to reading it.

Jane says

Loved the raw gritty realism of Heroic and it's intensity and emotion.

There needs to be more books with characters like Sonny, Jammy, Tommo and Cam, ordinary kids trying to survive in a bleak environment with few choices. These teens represent huge numbers of our disaffected youth. Earle unzips their hoodies and reveals their confusion, fear, vulnerability, loneliness, anger, humour, courage, loyalty, weakness and strength. Each individual's struggle is heroic though Sonny's and Jammy's

take centre stage fought out on their grim estate and the battle-streets of Afghanistan.

Sally Flint says

Heroic Philip Earle

This was a great read. Aimed at lower or upper secondary. It is about kids living on a rough estate and how there is a real sense of caring amongst them, a kinship that runs deep. Two of the elder youths go to Afghanistan leaving a gap in the crowd behind. Their friendship is explored as they cope with being young soldiers. One is killed and the other has post traumatic stress disorder. It is a real book of survival. I was completely enthralled by it, and gained a sense of what it might be like to be living out in the desert. The soldiers are little more than children and made me think of the soldiers who had fought in Vietnam. Loved both the style and the message that came through in this book. The cover will put off girls which is a shame as they would love it.

Heroic by Phil Earle

My rating: 5 of 5 stars

Heroic Philip Earle

This was a great read. Aimed at lower or upper secondary. It is about kids living on a rough estate and how there is a real sense of caring amongst them, a kinship that runs deep. Two of the elder youths go to Afghanistan leaving a gap in the crowd behind. Their friendship is explored as they cope with being young soldiers. One is killed and the other has post traumatic stress disorder. It is a real book of survival. I was completely enthralled by it, and gained a sense of what it might be like to be living out in the desert. The soldiers are little more than children and made me think of the soldiers who had fought in Vietnam. Loved both the style and the message that came through in this book. The cover will put off girls which is a shame as they would love it.

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Sinéad O'Hart says

Sometimes, it's the books you buy on a whim that can turn out to be the most meaningful, and the ones you'll treasure for years. 'Heroic', by Phil Earle, is one of those books for me.

'Heroic' is the story of Sonny McGann, primarily, though his brother Jammy is the other main narrative voice in the book. We read three or four chapters in Sonny's voice, and then three or four in Jammy's, and so on – the story unfolds through both their perspectives. Sonny and Jammy have grown up on the Ghost, a high-rise housing estate somewhere in London, the focal point (and only un-graffittied part) of which is a large statue of the soldiers at the centre of the housing units. This outsize memorial was raised to

commemorate the men of the area who've given their lives, down through the years, in the service of the Army, and it's often mentioned – as a meeting point, as a reference point, as a grounding image, and, finally, as an emotional focus – throughout the story. Life on the Ghost is not easy – fathers are absent or abusive, mothers are worked to exhaustion, unemployment among the young is rife, drug and alcohol abuse is rampant. In order to escape his life, and earn some money to help his mother keep the family together, Jammy enlists in the Army, and is deployed to Afghanistan along with his best friend and neighbour, Tommo.

Sonny is left to face the cauldron that is the Ghost. His sections of the story tell us of his struggles to keep away from crime and drug abuse, his love for Cam (the sister of Tommo), and his everyday life, full to the brim of frustration and rage. He wants to help his mother by trying to get some sort of job, but she wants him to stay at school; they both know, in any case, that being labelled as 'a kid from the Ghost' will make him unemployable, so their arguments are, in some ways, moot. His future looks grim, and his life is hard – it's leavened only by the presence of the beautiful, gentle and compassionate Cam, whom he loves deeply. However, Cam – as a sister of one of 'the gang' – is supposed to be out of bounds; her relationship with Sonny must therefore be kept secret, and it is a huge source of stress for them both. Sonny's friends are struggling as much, or more, than he is, particularly the enigmatic and troubled Hitch, and their efforts to carve out a living for themselves is painfully described.

Interspersed with this brutal vision of life, we read about Jammy's experiences in Afghanistan. He does his best to take his friend Tommo under his wing, trying to keep him safe and sane amid the dust and terror, and he struggles with the reasoning behind their presence in Afghanistan to begin with. He learns the hard way about the drawbacks of trying to win the 'hearts and minds' of local people, the brutality both of the war and of the regime they are, allegedly, there to fight, and how risky it is to become close to the people you're trying to protect. A scene in the middle of the book involving Jammy and an Afghani child almost literally stole my heart out of my chest and broke it; I had to close the book, put it aside, and weep for a good ten minutes. It is one of the most powerful scenes I've ever read, made even more harrowing by the fact that similar events happen every day in reality. Eventually, Jammy returns from Afghanistan, but what he's been through, and what he's seen, mean that the man who comes back to the Ghost is not the same man who left. Jammy's struggles to reintegrate, to slot back into life with his family and community, are unashamedly examined. The book particularly takes us into the heart of his relationship with Sonny, and how the brothers seem to have lost something precious that once bonded them to one another.

'Heroic' pulls no punches. It is a visceral novel, full of pain and anger; the characters' rage spills forth from the pages and their tightly-bounded lives struggle to break free from between the lines of text. I didn't just read this book – I lived it, I breathed it, I felt the strictures of the Ghost and the front-line both. I willed the characters on, frustrated by Sonny's immaturity and pigheadedness as much as by Jammy's inability to admit he needed help, horrified by Hitch's struggle with heroin and Cam's experiences at the hands of her father, and deeply moved by the love between them all, and their willingness to do whatever it took to save one another from destruction. Having said all this, I don't mean to imply that 'Heroic' is a bleak book – it isn't, really. The desperation and pain of the characters' lives is always counterpointed with their love for, and devotion to, one another. You could almost say this is a book about brotherhood – not just the blood ties that bind Sonny and Jammy, and which end up, in a way, being weaker than the ties between Sonny and his friends, and Jammy and his comrades – but the brotherhood, or the family links, that bind all of us together, wherever we live or whatever we face in life.

In short, this book is a marvel.

For a fuller version of this review, plus lots of other kidlit/YA/reading/writing-related stuff, check out my

Beth says

This book was very very good. I loved the way the 2 boys shared the story with similar thoughts and feelings which they are both having on seperate sides of the world. I think Cam has to be my favourite character - caught between them and with how much she has to cope with in her life which just gets worse as the story goes on. The descriptions of the warzone and then of the estate were excellent and believable and I could hardly put it down. This is the first book I have read by this author but it definitely will not be the last. Recommended!
