



That's That: A Memoir

Colin Broderick

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How can we know who we are if we do not understand where we came from?

Colin Broderick grew up in Northern Ireland during the period of heightened tension and violence known as the Troubles. Broderick's Catholic family lived in County Tyrone --the heart of rebel country. In *That's That*, he brings us into this world and delivers a deeply personal account of what it was like to come of age in the midst of a war that dragged on for over two decades. We watch as he and his brothers play ball with the neighbor children over a fence for years, but are never allowed to play together because it is forbidden. We see him struggle to understand why young men from his community often just disappear. And we feel his frustration when he is held at gunpoint at various military checkpoints in the North. At the center of his world—and this story—is Colin's mother. Desperate to protect her children from harm, she has little patience for Colin's growing need to experience and understand all that is happening around them. Spoken with stern finality, "That's that" became the refrain of Colin's childhood.

The first book to paint a detailed depiction of Northern Ireland's Troubles, *That's That* is told in the wry, memorable voice of a man who's finally come to terms with his past.

That's That: A Memoir Details

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From Reader Review That's That: A Memoir for online ebook

Karen says

What an incredibly insightful and heartbreakingly honest book. I cannot imagine living in Ireland and facing the daily grind of a Catholic in Northern Ireland. This is a poignant and moving coming-of-age story told with brutal honesty. I was interested in how his life turned out after he came to America but I have read the synopsis and reviews of *Orangutan* and now know this was just the beginning of a life of pain and hardship. Very well written.

Shelly Hammond says

I was lucky enough to win this book in a Goodreads giveaway which landed me a really cool uncorrected proof copy (which is the greatest thing ever in and of itself because I am a true nerd and appreciate such things!). Aside from being quite happy just for that reason alone, I was also very pleased that this book turned out to be a really great book and one that I am so glad that I got the chance to read.

The first thing that struck me about this book was that it started out with a wonderful little history lesson. The first chapter (not a grueling multi-chapter history lesson) gives you just enough information that you get a good idea of historically built up hatred and how it managed to keep on building over the years for one reason or another. I'm simplifying here because, as you know if you read my reviews ever, I am a 'I-am-not-telling-you-the-juicy-details-because-you-need-to-read-it-for-yourself-to-find-out-what-happens-but-I'll-give-you-just-a-little-bit-then-the-rest-is-up-to-you' type of person. I hate reviews that ruin things so I won't ruin anything if I can help it. So, as I was typing there, the beginning gives you a nice bit of history to get you going so that you can be nice and prepared to understand the story.

This book is really unique in that it is told from the perspective of one that is brought up in Ireland at the time of extreme violence and hardship known as the Troubles. Personally, I'd not really heard too much of this myself, just the basic stuff that you hear from the parents/grandparents, passed down but not really much of anything. Having never taking the time to understand it all, this book really opened my eyes and in many ways taught me a lot about the strife that took place.

History isn't all this book is about, of course! Just I'm a bit of a history fan, especially when I'm learning something new so that just stuck out a lot. However, it's also a brilliant coming of age story. The true story of boy who grew up Catholic with a mother that seemed rather overbearing (though, looking back she may have been overbearing and strict but when it's done out of love sometimes we don't see it as harmful) in the middle of a most tumultuous period in Irish history. Through this book the reader travels from the very beginning of, well, history I suppose and then to the birth of the author all the way to the end where a very important choice is made (which I won't give away as per my above mentioned rule).

This is an extremely well written book. The author is an extremely talented writer who is able to make the words on the page seem like they are coming to life. The reader is taken on a journey, the journey the author has already taken, from the safety of their own home (or wherever they may be reading from and assuming they are in a safe location when doing so). This is a great memoir and it has made me realize that at some point I might just have to get the authors other book, "*Orangutan*", and see where that one can take the reader as well.

John says

I don't have a clue how to write a review for this book. I liked it. I don't know how to say that I liked it. To be a little creative, I suppose I'm just going to talk to the author:

Dear Mr. Broderick,

I think this seems like a good way to start a review of your book, though I'm torn on whether to call you 'Mr. Broderick' due to the level of respect I have for you or 'Colin' for how much I feel like I know you after reading your book.

Without getting too lost on this one point, I want to say that in the former case, I want to respect you for all of the crap you've been through in your life. Your mother was tough on you, but you did a marvelous job of making me love her. By the time I reached the end of the book, I...er...discovered a great deal of dust in the room with me. I also found even more dust in the room when you started talking about your friends. You've endured horrid situations I cannot imagine, which is why I know that if we ever were to meet I would just have to keep my distance. You made it clear in the book that you have a certain distrust of other people. I totally got that from your exploration of your life.

On the other hand I also feel like I personally know you. You and I went through a lot in your book. I've been reading history after history of Ireland and haven't really felt a thing for the country. While reading the histories, I came to realize that it is a beautiful place with a tragic history. That's as far as I got. However, in the first twenty pages of your book I came to see the history in an entirely new light. Your work made me care about Ireland because you took me on a grand tour of its places and people. By the end of your book I wanted to take up arms with you (no spoilers there) because I could feel your pain. I had learned the details of your country before, but your work showed me its soul. For that I feel that I deserve to call you Colin.

I also want to call you Colin because I think you're a brilliant storyteller. If I can be a bit blunt, you're not the best writer I've ever read (but in fairness I've read some of the best). You get a little too carried away with alliteration in some places, and you almost force a creative phrase here and there. But, Collin, my man—you've got a knack for telling an entertaining story. You can conjure a scene from nothing, and you can make me care about a distant land just by showing me your daily life. Just to take one example, your explanation of Dopey Dick's visit made me see how artificial The Troubles (capitals on both!) were; people stopped and stared and laughed and celebrated this stupid, stupid whale. On the other hand, your explanation of roadside stops and the nightly news of death spawned in me a hatred of the occupiers of your country. Somewhere in the middle of this, you made me realize why you took up drinking, drugs, and girls.

Thank you for taking me on this journey. Never mind if I don't know how to react to you, for your work speaks volumes about your life and your nation. You should be proud of what you've accomplished, as it is certainly one of the best autobiographies that I've ever read. I hope it remains as popular as it seems to now be. It deserves any accolades others are willing to shower upon it.

This has rambled a bit. In short, thank you for sharing.

Best,

-An Appreciative Reader

Marcy says

I received an ARC of this book through the GoodReads First Reads giveaway program.

"That's That" is a book by a man who grew up in Northern Ireland during The Troubles -- a time of tension and violence between Catholics and Protestants, Irish and British. Colin Broderick is one of six children who has to navigate childhood and adolescence against this background and determine his involvement in the conflict as an adult.

I really enjoyed this book. While I knew a bit about this period, my knowledge was quite limited. Broderick's description, while sometimes feeling a bit redundant (there are multiple instances throughout in which he pauses to point out, yet again, that the Catholics went to Catholic bars while the Protestants went to Protestant bars, the Catholics filled up at Catholic petrol stations while the Protestants filled up at Protestant petrol stations, etc.) definitely showed how the activity that was going on with the IRA and the treatment of Catholics impacted people at the individual level. While the first section of the book, which went into the history of the area that led to the situation he lived, was a bit more dense than the rest of the book and at first a bit off-putting (at least to me), the rest of his memoir picked up and was a good read, and there were times that I appreciated that the history was there for me to flip back to and reference if I'd forgotten the significance of a name or location.

I'd rate this book solidly in the 3.5-4 star range.

Bits I liked:

It made perfect sense that he would want to replace one false self with another. Perhaps that was the real mark of maturity, I thought, finally deciding which mask suits you best, and wearing it.

There were a few skinheads from Belfast, but they seemed less dangerous when you saw them out standing by themselves at the bar, and once you got past that threatening husk, they were the sweetest, most vulnerable lads of all. Fear is a wonderful makeup artist.

Charlotte Best says

A good book if you are interested and want to know a true story about a young boy growing up in Northern Ireland during the time when the IRA fought the British for an independent Ireland, in both the North and the South. It is hard to believe that amidst the chaos of war in Northern Ireland, these Irish continued to go on about their daily lives. They raised their families, they went to school they worked, they socialized just like their countrymen in the South, but the 7 counties that belonged to Ireland's Catholics were outnumbered by the remainder of the North's Protestant ruled by England. The fight was brutal and was really my first knowledge regarding religious terrorists. The title, That's that , is a quote used by the author describing the strong matriarch leaders of the family during the late sixties and 70 s. it did not matter how badly the boy begged for independence , he had a strong respect for his Mother, who was not only very religious and strict, but also fearful of losing her children through the casualties of war. When "Mammy " said no, she added her own " and That's That", the children knew that she was standing her ground, and they never challenged

her final decision. You definitely get the impression that it was Mammy who kept her son from being imprisoned, or killed for his rebellious behaviors.

Rand says

Within the past six months I have received three memoirs from the First Reads giveaways program. This one was the last I read and, by far, the best. Not that I spent much thought-time comparing this with those other two memoirs—narratively speaking, this one could hardly be more different, given its scope and focus. It helps that Broderick has a real ear for dialogue, breathes life into his characters and can tell a cohesive story. And what a story it is: coming of age during the climax of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, from the mid 1970s onto the 80s.

Those interested in this part of history should read Nobel prize winner Mairead Corrigan Maguire's book of essays. Or read a memoir by a Protestant who grew up in the same space-time as Broderick. Also, there is the more lyrical & cyclical *Bend for Home*, about a boy who grew up in Ireland during roughly the same time period.

The brutal acts of violence (which were long a part of the everyday impoverished life for Broderick and many others in Northern Ireland) are punctuated by both humor and compassion, all told with a stark honesty.

two excerpts that spoke to me: (view spoiler)

&

I had no template for how any of this was supposed to feel. What amazed me most was that I felt almost nothing at all, or perhaps I did but I had no name to define it. Can an emotion exist without a name? Isn't it the name itself that defines the existence of an emotion? It seemed I was living with the thought of the thing rather than the thing itself . . .

(hide spoiler)]

It is a testament to Broderick's gift as a storyteller that I did not want this book to end (though it is worth noting that Broderick's life story continues in his first book, *Orangutan*). By the last page I wanted to cry but could not because my eyes were dry from having read the last half in one go.

But all things must end

THAT'S THAT.

Allan says

Having already read *Orangutan*, I was aware of Broderick's personality, which I have to admit I didn't particularly like, though I did admire the honesty he showed in that memoir. This book, his second memoir,

telling of his years growing up in Co Tyrone, charts his formative years before his emigration to New York.

This book was primarily written for the US market, given the US English used throughout, and didn't even go on sale in N Ireland for a long time after it was published elsewhere, and I can understand why. Broderick paints a very simplistic version of history which, to a liberal, inclusive person living in NI is depressing, and indeed gets increasingly sickening as the book goes on.

A memoir is a personal recollection of events, yes, but too often in this book, Broderick's bigoted view is portrayed as historical fact, and having read many of the GR reviews, his views are taken as so. His assertion that all Catholics were advocating the IRA campaign in the 70s and 80s is simply wrong-it was only after a ceasefire was declared in 1993 that Sinn Fein garnered any significant votes in the polls-and likewise, his Brits Out solving all the issues in the country flies in the face of polls that show that even a majority of Catholics in NI want to remain as part of the UK.

There is no doubt that many injustices were served upon the Catholic community in NI in the past, but a more rounded notion of what life was like should be taken from books like Malachi O'Doherty's *The Telling Year: Belfast 1972* or Henry McDonald's *Colours: Ireland - From Bombs to Boom*-in both you'll get a working class Catholic's analysis of what went on without the underlying bigotry. As for understanding the conflict here, disregard everything Broderick says in this book and educate yourself with *Making Sense of the Troubles: a History of the Northern Ireland Conflict*, where a fair and very different analysis of some of the events Broderick portrays in the book.

As for the non political stuff in the book, Broderick didn't go up in my estimation much from his later memoir, his mother's desire to over protect him seemingly leaving him with a severe chip on his shoulder. Like in the later memoir, I did enjoy the stories from the everyday aspect of his life a lot more, but overall, as you can probably tell, I've been left with a pretty bitter taste in my mouth, particularly from the latter sections.

Laura says

This memoir of Colin Broderick's childhood, spent in Ulster during the Troubles brought unique insight into a fascinating period of history, simply because it was told from the perspective of a child. I've read several memoirs written about the author's childhood and in most instances it becomes evident that even if the book is about a childhood, it is told through the filter of an adult's perspective. Broderick seems to keep hold of his childish self and write about events from the perspective of the age he was when the event occurred, not as an adult remembering a distorted historical event.

What I found fascinating was he never came across as a truly religious or political person, yet he moved inevitably towards the IRA/liberty movement as he got older. His anger and vitriol spewed at the British and the Protestants seemed more habit-formed than heart-felt. It is as though boys his age at that time realized they had a role to play once they met a certain age and they played it no matter how unnatural it felt to them.

Even more fascinating was the relationship with his mother. I spent equal time hating her for her narrow-minded and conservative child raising skills, feeling a great deal of sympathy for Colin the boy and admiring her tremendously for the strength of will she exhibited and her ability to keep her family all alive during a time when most families lost loved ones to the cause.

I highly recommend this book. As usually, Gerard Doyle's narration is amazing.

Mike says

Not much is known about what Northern Ireland in the 70's and 80's, during the height of "The Troubles," was like. As Broderick himself points out, that narrative of what life was really like for Catholics was tightly woven into the tight nest of British rule. The experience of being under the iron fist of the Iron Lady (Thatcher) and the seething rage over injustices real or imagined makes for a riveting story.

Broderick's book is, in a word, a masterpiece because it is a vital cultural artifact of Northern Irish life for anyone with Irish blood coursing through their veins. That goes double for those in the "southern counties!" The book doesn't read like a stuffy history lesson; it is a classic coming-of-age autobiography packed with humor and insight into life inside a large Irish brood. It's like "Angela's Ashes" for the rest of us.

He is brutally frank about his flirtations with alcoholism, drug use, and the bitter resentments of family and country that bring him within reach of the IRA. He is a flawed hero but a hero nonetheless, bravely sharing his soul with the reader. I cannot recommend this book highly enough!

Sean says

A memoir of growing up catholic in Northern Ireland during the 70's and 80's, right in the middle of the Troubles. The author was an angry, violent kid with an overprotective mother and strong family ties to the IRA. It was interesting, but didn't knock my socks off.

Donna says

5 stars because I would read this again.

During the last 6 months, I've read more autobiographies than I ever have before. I've enjoyed almost every one of them. I enjoyed this one too. This one, however, has got to be one of the best written autobiographies/memoirs that I have ever read. I'm not talking about sentence structure or grammar. This seemed like it was written with a very eloquent hand. It brought a glaring light to the stressful/angst ridden circumstances within this book. The descriptive style was extremely vivid and rich and I'm not referring to pointless detail that just adds word count. This was nicely done.

The author was Catholic growing up in Northern Ireland in the 70's and 80's. It was rich with political/religious strife in that area. The deep divisions between the Protestants and the Catholics and the government and the people seemed like this would have taken place in a far distant century in the past and not just 25-35 years ago. The circumstances affected him in significant ways.

I liked the telling of his boyhood. It was kind of humorous. Then it gets a little more serious as he matures and he begins to put the puzzle together around him. I liked the frankness in this. It caused me to wonder what I would do if I were in the same situation.

My #1 rule when reviewing autobiographies is to not judge the person, even if I don't care much for their personality. It is their story to tell. I can't say whether I like Broderick or not, but I certainly feel like I

understood him. It was poignant and touching.

Molly Ewing says

Broderick's memoir is an unflinching look at how growing up Catholic (and all that implies) in the war zone that was Northern Ireland affected his heart soul dreams and values.

Meg says

Reminded me of Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*. Great read.

Sarah says

I've said it before and I'll say it again: I have a very hard time reviewing memoirs. It goes against everything I believe in to play the role of critic in relation to someone else's cathartic process. What a person experiences in their life is their own— I have no right to judge or rate or appraise.

That said, I can speak to other things: the general topic, the writing style, other itty-bitties of literary structure and content organization. Not the things that mean the most, but the things that I can evaluate on a more concrete level.

The topic was an interesting one; there seems to have not been much press or publicity related to political conditions in Ireland in the 1970's and 1980's ("The Troubles"). Or at least not as much as other international wars and upheavals. It's fascinating and troublesome to learn about the political climate and religious battles that took place (are still taking place) in that iconic, green landscape.

The writing was simple and easy to read; the book flew by in a blink. It maybe started off a bit slow, but picked up toward the final chapters and ended on a powerful and poignant note. The moral of the story (as I perceive it, of course) is that violence always leads to more violence and, in the end, we will inevitably kill ourselves and those we love if we continue down that path. If we don't choose peace, we choose our own demise.

Nancy Kennedy says

Colin Broderick grew up Catholic in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. This memoir about his childhood leads inexorably to that fork in the road: Will he join the fight or will he walk away?

After you read Mr. Broderick's memoir, you will see what a courageous choice he has made. You will understand his rage, his escape into alcohol and drugs, and his desperate desire to flee the constricting confines of his home, no matter where -- or what -- he is fleeing to.

Mr. Broderick's mother, Claire, is the iron gate against which her son repeatedly hurls himself. She nixes nights at the dance, girlfriends, shushes his commentary on the evening news, rails about his drinking. "Because I said so, and that's that," she says, ending every argument. But his mother's boundaries will not hold, and Mr. Broderick eventually breaks out on his own, making his own choices, and they are mostly dangerous ones.

In some ways, the author writes about an Irish upbringing that is timeless. Except for references to current events and rock bands from the 70s and 80s, you could easily be reading along in Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*, as Mr. Broderick also writes about the brutality of Catholic school teachers and the poverty of a council house upbringing.

But around the scenes of violence and hatred, Mr. Broderick weaves a wistful tale of lost innocence. Here is how he so powerfully frames the tremulous journey to adulthood:

"We lose our childhoods by degrees. Inch by inch, time and circumstance steal the last of our innocence. Some of it will fall away unnoticed; some it will be ripped forcefully from our fingers, other morsels of it we will bury in shallow graves, until only the shadow of youth exists, drifting in our wake like an abandoned ghost."

Take the journey with Colin Broderick... you'll be glad you did.
