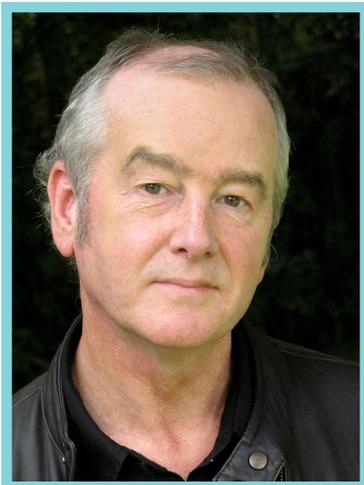


THE TIGHTROPE WALKERS

A Note by Author David Almond



The Tightrope Walkers has lots of connections with my own life. I lived in a house rather like Dom's when I was a boy. My own father fought in Burma during World War II, just like Dom's. Miss Fagan, Dom's

first teacher, is based on my own first teacher. I remember her kindness, and the beautiful way she shaped letters and words with chalk on the blackboard.

I knew many people who worked in the shipyards that lined the banks of the river Tyne in the '60s and '70s. I worked in a shipyard myself for a couple of summers when I was a student. I cleaned tanks, just like Dom, and it was one of the most terrifying experiences of my life. We had a tramp in our town, rather like Jack Law, and he was a romantic figure to me, living his life of nonmaterialistic freedom in the hills above town. The bookshop, Ultima Thule, was a real place, and Ginsberg and Ferlinghetti really did visit and read. And I partied on the beautiful Northumbrian beaches, and listened to Joni Mitchell, and grew my hair, and dreamed of California and love and peace.

The book is fiction, of course: a merging of memory and imagination, truth and lies. I never knew a boy quite like Vincent McAlinden, but he

does have similarities to some real people, and of course to elements of my growing self. I never knew a Holly Stroud, but again, she has elements of girls that I admired and maybe loved.

The book was often very difficult to write. Sometimes the words came fast and true. At other times, making the book was like making a ship, putting it together rivet by rivet, weld by weld. As I wrote, I entered the world of the '60s and '70s, and felt the harshness of the shipyard world, its toughness and strange beauty. I felt the joy of partying by the cold North Sea with people I loved. At times I felt like a teenager again, yearning for life and freedom, learning about myself, about books, about language, about the weird connections between hate and love, violence and peace. I grew close to my characters. They felt very real to me. I feel that their lives continue somewhere, now that the book is done, and I wish them well.

DAVID ALMOND has received several major awards, including the Hans Christian Andersen Award, a Carnegie Medal, two Whitbread Children's Book Awards, an Eleanor Farjeon Award, and a Michael L. Printz Award. He is known worldwide as the author of *Skellig*, *Clay*, and many other novels, stories, and plays. With Candlewick, he is the author of *The True Tale of the Monster Billy Dean* as well as *The Boy Who Swam with Piranhas*, illustrated by Oliver Jeffers; *The Savage*, *Slog's Dad*, and *Mouse Bird Snake Wolf*, all illustrated by Dave McKean; and *My Dad's a Birdman* and *The Boy Who Climbed Into the Moon*, both illustrated by Polly Dunbar. David Almond lives in England.



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