



I Wish I'd Written... Counting Stars

By *admin*

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Article Author:

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I Wish I'd Written

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Malachy Doyle chooses David Almond's **Counting Stars**.

Malachy Doyle on a book that is so good it sets the standards he is aiming for?<!--break-->

Every novel by David Almond is astonishing, but **Counting Stars**, a collection of short stories based on his childhood, moved me to tears. I'd loved **Skellig**, adored **Kit's Wilderness**, but this one had an even more powerful effect. It's not surprising really. We both grew up in a large Catholic family in the 1950s, we both lost a parent at the age of twelve, and David writes so beautifully, so tenderly of those experiences, with such a lack of indulgence or sentimentality, that I almost couldn't bear to read on.

It's an extraordinary collection, powered by memory and imagination, of poverty, family love and the strength of community. The characters encounter temptation, mystery, joy and bereavement, but the author's humanity shines through, such that it is always a life-enhancing, rather than a depressing read.

I came across **Skellig** when I was first attempting to write for a young adult audience. It was so good that it nearly put me off the idea, but I decided to carry on. **Counting Stars** sets the standard I'm aiming for. Reach for that star, Malachy. Reach for that star.

Counting Stars by David Almond is published by Hodder Children's Books (0 340 78480 6, £4.99 pbk). Malachy Doyle's latest book is **Cow**, ill. Angelo Rinaldi (Simon & Schuster, 0 689 82786 5, £9.99 hbk).

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