

A CONVERSATION WITH BRIAN MALLOY

What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

I taught at the University of Minnesota, and many of the creative nonfiction pieces from my students focused on discovering that their boyfriend or crush was gay. Some of these pieces were funny, others poignant. Often the friendship survived, which I found intriguing. That's what inspired me to write *Twelve Long Months*.

What research did you undertake in writing *Twelve Long Months*?

I held focus groups with high school students active in Gay/Straight Student Alliance and with freshmen women at the University of Minnesota. I wanted to get their perspective on how sexual orientation was discussed (or not) among teens and understand the range of reactions gay students can expect when they come out.

One of the settings in the book is Columbia University, a place I have never visited. I visited the Columbia website and blogs by students. I took a virtual tour of the campus and researched the New York neighborhood where it is located. I also researched academic requirements and course offerings.

What do you hope readers take away from the book?

That friendship is every bit as important as romance.

What do you like most about *Twelve Long Months*?

Most interesting to me was taking a working-class teen from Le Sueur, Minnesota and putting her in a privileged, big city setting. At first she is intimidated by her new surroundings, but eventually she comes to appreciate both places she lives.

What has your journey as a writer been like?

I had always wanted to be a writer, but didn't get serious about it until my brother was diagnosed with cancer. We had a long talk about dreams deferred, and he encouraged me to make time to write. I dedicated my first novel to him.

It was a challenge of the first order to get my work published. I could not get an agent to represent me, so I ended up selling my first book myself. Today I still represent myself.

How does being a Minnesotan inform your writing?

I moved to Minnesota in 1978, so I do feel like a

native, although I am originally from Philadelphia. Weather plays a role in all my books, informing the story's mood and atmosphere. My first novel is entitled *The Year of Ice*. For my second novel, I wanted to include the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, a place I love and visit often for solo trips. My partner is from Le Sueur, and I have visited it often. I wanted to create a rural sensibility for *Twelve Long Months*, and turned to Le Sueur for the setting.

How do you enjoy spending time when you're not writing?

I love making solo trips through the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, reading, and spending time with my dogs.



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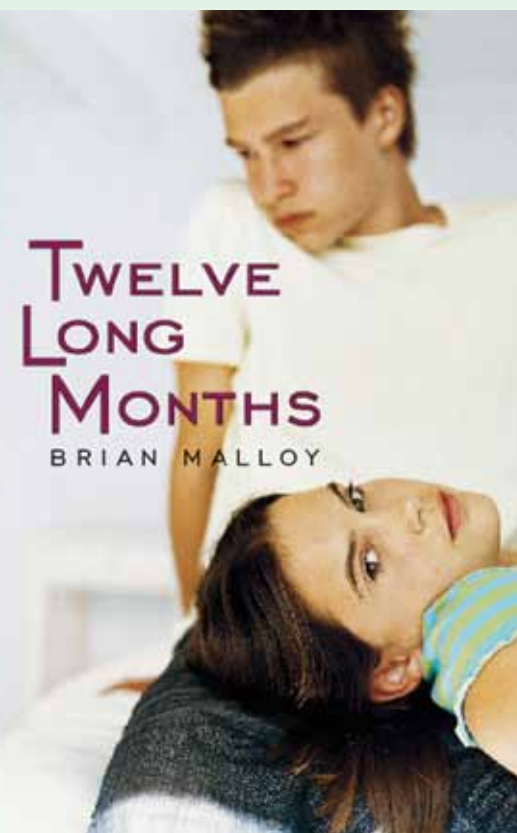
A Reading and Discussion Guide Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards

21ST ANNUAL

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Twelve Long Months

by Brian Malloy

SCHOLASTIC PRESS/SCHOLASTIC, INC.

Twelve Long Months



SUMMARY:

Molly Swain is hopelessly in love with Mark, the only thing she finds of interest in their small Minnesota town. She starts to wonder if she and Mark will ever be more than lab partners, and then she discovers they will both be moving to New York following high school graduation. In New York, however, Molly discovers that Mark has been keeping a secret, and it turns out she's not his type at all.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the book's themes?
2. Have you ever been in a situation like Molly's? Did your unrequited crush and you remain friends, or did the relationship end?
3. In what ways do Molly's opinions of Le Sueur and New York change and/or stay the same over the course of the novel?
4. What is your opinion of Mark, and is he a good friend to Molly?
5. Molly is embarrassed that she fell for a gay man, while Lily is embarrassed that she is dating a white man. How are their situations similar, and how are they different?
6. All of the "E"'s experience boyfriend troubles. Who do you think handles her relationship the best? Who handles it the worst?
7. How might the story be different if Molly and Mark went to school at a Minnesota college campus instead of Columbia University?
8. As an author, do you think it would be easier or harder to set a book in two or more locations, instead of just one?

9. What is your opinion of Simon, and do you initially believe his version of events or Mark's?
10. What do you think lies ahead for both Molly and Mark?
11. If you wrote a book for a teen audience, what would you choose for the theme and title?

About Brian Malloy

Originally from Philadelphia, Brian Malloy is a resident of Minneapolis. He is adjunct faculty in the MFA programs at the University of Minnesota and Hamline University, and serves as Education Director for The Loft Literary Center. Brian has also taught creative writing and literature at Emerson College in Boston. He published two novels prior to *Twelve Long Months*:

Brendan Wolf, 2007

The Year of Ice, 2002

For more information about the author and his work, visit www.malloywriter.com.



Photo by Scott Strebler



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