

## A CONVERSATION WITH BRIAN FARREY

### What inspired you to write *With or Without You*?

I was interested in writing about how we, as individuals, change. I knew I wanted to write about two things that had the power to transform lives: art and AIDS. I brainstormed a few different ideas, not thinking a single project would include both. But around the time I started writing about a young gay artist, I read an article about how AIDS education is almost non-existent for today's teens and that's when the idea clicked to weave both art and AIDS into a single story. In doing so, I ended up writing (inadvertently) about a third power that transforms: love.

### What research did you undertake in writing your award-winning book?

I grew up in the 80s during the height of the AIDS crisis but it wasn't until I read Randy Shilts' fantastic *And the Band Played On* as research for this book that I learned what was really going on at the time. And, of course, I got to take several trips to Madison, Wisconsin—a city I love—and chalk it up as research. Most of the locations I mention in the book are real, while a few I made up for dramatic purposes. But the real locations were visited, photographed, and noted in a journal.

### What interesting challenge did you encounter in writing the book?

When I'm drafting a book, I tend to write *everything* that comes into my mind, figuring I'll sort it out later. The first draft of *With or Without You* was especially long and unwieldy and the challenge was to pare out the parts that, while interesting, ultimately didn't move the story along. I cut tons and tons of character backstory that just wasn't necessary. As things left the book, other things came to the foreground. It's so interesting to start out writing one thing and then, at some point, the book takes over and you find yourself taking new directions you hadn't considered. The challenge for me is often letting go of my original idea of what the book is "about" and letting the book choose the path.

### What was your journey to becoming a published author?

I suspect you could ask any of my elementary school teachers who remember me and they'd tell you that I was a writer from a very young age. It most likely stemmed from the fact that I was an avid reader, throwing myself into anything and everything I could read. I spent much of my time writing short stories throughout middle school. This was followed by some "Doctor Who" fan fiction

novellas (yes, I'm owning up to it) in high school. I mainly dabbled with screenplays in college. Thing is, I've pretty much always been writing. It was when I enrolled in Hamline's MFA program that I thought I might actually try to get it published.

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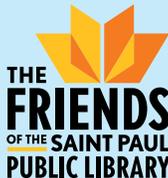
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### How does being a Minnesotan inform your writing?

There is an *amazing* community of writers who write for kids in Minnesota. You can't throw a stick without hitting one. People are very supportive of one another and that can be very energizing.

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## 24TH ANNUAL MINNESOTA BOOK AWARDS

### Young People's Literature Winner

Category sponsored by Sit Investment Associates



*With or Without You*

by Brian Farrey

SIMON & SCHUSTER

# With or Without You



## SUMMARY

Best friends Evan and Davis have helped each other through homophobic bullying and every other challenge high school had to throw at them. But after graduation that friendship becomes strained from two directions as Evan struggles to tell Davis about his secret, long-term boyfriend Erik, and Davis gets caught up in a mysterious fringe crowd.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the book's main themes?
2. Throughout the book, Evan offers several reasons for hiding his relationship with Erik from his family and friends. When have you hidden a relationship (or something) from someone you care about and why?
3. Davis's attempts at being popular (joining clubs, etc.) often derailed if they weren't immediately successful. When have you given up on an endeavor too early, or when have you stuck with something too long?
4. Despite seeing several red flags, Erik continues to trust Evan for most of the book, until he's forced to realize Evan hasn't been honest with him. At what point would you have lost trust in Evan?
5. Davis joins the Chasers because he thinks it will make him popular and powerful. What else might he have done to gain popularity or power?
6. Many of the characters face the pressure of choosing between doing something to please someone else and doing what's right for them personally. Talk about the different ways the characters handle this choice.
7. Self-expression comes in many forms throughout the book. Discuss how the main characters choose

to express themselves and which of their methods you would or wouldn't choose.

8. Evan discovers that one of the bullies who has tormented him his whole life is in the closet. Discuss reasons why someone in the closet would act out violently against someone who is openly gay.
9. Evan and his sister, Shan, hated each other when they were younger but grew to have a mature relationship as they grew older. Talk about how you relate to siblings or other family members and how those relationships have changed over time.
10. If you wrote a book for young readers, what topic would you choose, and what would the book be called?

## ABOUT BRIAN FARREY



*To get to where he is today, Brian Farrey's career path took this route: student, stock boy, waiter, college TV program director, local TV news promotions producer, community theater executive director, bookseller, community relations manager and publicist. He currently acquires young adult novels for Flux. Brian holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Hamline University and lives in Saint Paul with his husband.*

**Learn more about the author at [www.brianfarreybooks.com](http://www.brianfarreybooks.com)**



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