

Q&A WITH MICHAEL BYRNE, AUTHOR OF *LOTTERY BOY*



Can you outline the story of *Lottery Boy* for us?

Lottery Boy is about a twelve-year-old boy nicknamed Bully (because of his Staffordshire bull terrier dog) who goes to live on the streets of London when his mum dies. He

finds a winning lottery ticket tucked in the back of the last birthday card his mother gave him, but with only five days left to claim his prize, Bully must find someone old enough whom he trusts to cash in his ticket for him. Unfortunately, the wrong half of London hears about this, and Bully and his dog are chased across London town while the clock ticks down.

***Lottery Boy* is very cinematic in its portrayal of London. In one scene, Bully spends a night trapped in the barrel of the guns outside the Imperial War Museum. What inspired or influenced the setting of *Lottery Boy*?**

In my twenties and thirties I lived in London, in the West and the South. I never really visited the attractions, so I tried to imagine what it must be like to be a homeless boy on the run, seeing Buckingham Palace, Big Ben, and London Zoo while just trying to stay one step ahead of your pursuers. I now live outside London, and whenever I catch the train into Waterloo I'm struck by how focused everyone seems, in a very simple way, on the train they're catching, or the people they're rushing to meet. And if you're not part of that, London is sometimes a strange place to be. I tried to put that sense of alienation into the book.

You're a former English teacher. How did the experience influence the characters in *Lottery Boy*?

I taught in London schools for several years, and occasionally I would come across a boy of twelve or thirteen, sometimes older (and it was nearly always a boy), who wasn't just being naughty or difficult. He didn't really seem to be there in a socialized sense. At the time, I dealt with it as well as I could, managed the situation rather than the child. It was only after I stopped teaching, really, that I started to think: How did you get like that? I was also struck generally by how some children, if they don't blossom into young adults, can become like little old men, stuck in a groove, suspicious of new experiences and new territories, and I suppose that fed into Bully's character.

What message do you hope readers will take away from this book?

I hope readers take away the idea that kindness is an underrated virtue, and perhaps that what seems like the answer to all your problems can sometimes just be the beginning of a question about who you are and what you want out of life.

Can you tell us anything about what you're working on next?

I'm working on a story about a boy whose imaginary friend seems to know more than he imagines. That's all I'm saying.

#lotteryboy



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