

Review from Ulverston Now, a local free magazine

The author calls this book a memoir, and indeed it is the story of one man's life so far. However it is much more than that, since it is a book which shows that you should never judge anyone by the face they show to the world or the way they live their outer lives.

Many locals will know Jeremy Gavins as Jerry, the no-nonsense go-to dry stone waller, and will be moved by his breath-taking honesty as he reveals the terrible traumas he suffered as a boy, and the lasting effect they have had on his life. As a gay teenager in a Catholic-run school he fell in love with Stephen, a fellow pupil, who returned his feelings. When Jeremy was in tears at the thought of their inevitable separation after they had left school, he told a teacher, who was also a priest, the reason for his grief. The school then blackmailed him with the threat of expulsion and exposure to having 'Aversion Therapy' at a psychiatric hospital.

This therapy was electric shocks, the kind of torture banned by the Geneva Convention, and which left him with lasting damage to his mind and body, damage he has struggled with ever since to deal with.

Yet this is not a 'misery memoir': it is also full of descriptions of how walking in the mountains, nature and the discovery of his natural ability at dry stone walling has helped him cope. Jeremy also describes the therapies he has tried, and explains the concepts of Dissonance, PTSD and Body Memories in a way which is easy to understand. He is also truthful about how, like many men, he tried to deal with his depression by drinking, and about his suicidal thoughts.

Although his individual experience is unique, this is a very timely book when we are becoming more aware of how widespread mental health issues are. Other men, who may not be gay, but also suffer from the effects of trauma and try to hide this because they are ashamed, can read this and realise that other outwardly 'normal' men have similar problems.

Jeremy Gavins shows that courage takes many forms, and that for a man to reveal his inner is as brave as facing any physical danger. As a footnote, he was instrumental in gaining an apology from the Royal College of Psychiatry for the use of 'aversion therapy' on gay men and women.