



Just Beneath My Skin by Darren Greer

About the author:

Darren Greer grew up in several towns in Nova Scotia, including Greenfield and Liverpool. He studied literature at the University of King's College, Halifax, as well as Carleton University, Ottawa. His first novel, *Tyler's Cape*, was published in 2001 to critical acclaim and was on the bestseller list of the *Halifax Chronicle-Herald*. *Still Life with June* was nominated for the Pearson Readers' Choice Award at The Word On The Street, Toronto, in 2003 and was the Winner of the 2004 ReLit Award.

Source: Publisher's website (www.cormorantbooks.com)

About this book:

Selected for One Book Nova Scotia 2015

Winner of the 2015 Thomas Raddall Atlantic Fiction Award (East Coast Literary Awards)

Shortlisted for the 2015 Jim Connors Dartmouth Book Award (Atlantic Book Awards)

Shortlisted for the 2015 ReLit Award

In the small town of North River, every day that goes by bleeds into the next. Poverty begets hopelessness, hopelessness breeds violence, violence causes despair. The only way to change fate, a minister tells his son, is to leave.

The minister's son, Jake MacNeil, chooses to ignore his father's advice. Only when he realizes what has become of his life — working a grueling dead-end job, living with a drunk, friends with a murderer — does he decide to make something of himself. But nothing comes without a cost: in choosing freedom, Jake abandons his own son, Nathan, to the care of the boy's abusive mother.

June 2016



Years later, a reformed Jake comes back for Nathan, to finally set things right. But in North River, everything comes around again; and when a dangerous figure from the past becomes hell-bent on dragging the new Jake “back down where he belongs”, three generations of MacNeil men must come together to pay the full price of hope.

Gritty, unrelenting, yet peppered with Darren Greer’s trademark poignance, *Just Beneath My Skin* is the work of an author at the height of his game.

Source: Publisher’s website (<http://www.cormorantbooks.com/>)

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think are the author’s feelings toward his characters? What were your feelings about them? Do you like them, fear them, pity them...?
2. What role does memory or nostalgia play in the story?
3. Each chapter alternates the first-person perspective it is told from, quickly switching from Jake to Nathan and back with often short chapters. How does this affect the narrative? What parallels and contrasts between their experiences did you notice? Was there ever a moment when you mistook one narrator for the other? Do you think this was intentional on the part of the author?
4. How significant is the setting of this story in North River, Nova Scotia, with mentions of Halifax? How might the story change if it were set elsewhere?
5. Nathan attaches a special significance to his middle name, Alexander. What is the importance of names in the novel? Does your own name have a special story attached to it?



6. What was Jake's relationship with Johnny Lang? Can you think of other characters in literature who remind you of Johnny?
7. There are many references to nature in this story, such as the woods, the river, the fish and other animals, the fire, and even an eclipse. How does nature affect the mood of the narrative?
8. One of the recurring themes in the book is the saying "like father, like son." How does this phrase reflect the various father-son relationships within the novel?
9. Nathan and Jake both seem to have negative feelings about Carla. What role do women play in this story? What might this book look like if written from her perspective? How might it change the story if Jake or Nathan were women and the story was about mothers and daughters instead of fathers and sons?
10. Ultimately, do you think Jake was a good father to Nathan? Why or why not?
11. The book ends on a dramatic note. Were you surprised by the ending? Did the narrative style have any influence on how you felt the story would end? What do you think happens after the book ends?
12. What do you think is the significance of the title *Just Beneath My Skin*?
13. Would you recommend this book to a friend? Why or why not?

Source: *One Book Nova Scotia* (<http://1bns.ca/>)

Other formats available at Halifax Public Libraries:

- eBook

June 2016