



## The Gone Away Place

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**From Stonewall Honor author Christopher Barzak comes a haunting novel of love and loss, in which a series of tornadoes rips through a small midwest town, forever altering the lives of those who live there.**

Ellie heads up her high school yearbook, and until the tornadoes come, her biggest worry is how to raise enough money to print them. But since the day when a rash of powerful tornadoes touched down in Newfoundland, Ohio--killing more than half of the students in her school, not to mention dozens more people throughout the town--she's been haunted: by the ghosts of her best friends, by the boy next door, even by her boyfriend. And the living are haunting her too, all those left behind in the storm's wake to cope with the "gone away" pieces in their lives. A chance encounter with one ghost leads Ellie to discover a way to free the spirits that have been lingering since the storm, and she learns that she's not the only one seeing the ghosts--it's a town-wide epidemic.

## The Gone Away Place Details

Date :

ISBN :

Author : Christopher Barzak

Format :

Genre : Young Adult, Fantasy, Contemporary, Paranormal, Ghosts, Magical Realism, Fiction

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## From Reader Review The Gone Away Place for online ebook

### Jim says

I wasn't expecting this book to be one that struck close to home (figuratively and literally). I grew up where these tornados hit, but I wasn't living here at the time, but came to visit after and saw the devastation. Barzak did more than make this about an incident in his childhood, I think he managed to make it a story that rings true for any and all disasters that can affect one or many people.

This story could be read by the the victims of all the mass shootings, the earthquakes, the floods, the wars, anyone who lost a family member, a friend, neighbors, homes, schools, teachers, children. Barzak manages to touch on both the sadness and the hopefulness that is a part of being in this world.

I loved this book -- not just because it made me cry or empathize -- but because it felt like hope was the main focus. Or rather -- getting to hope.

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### Alex says

A story of tragedy and grief, and how we use that as fuel to pick up the pieces. Bravo, Chris.

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### Liz Hill says

This was a satisfying read because it explored important themes - death, loss, grief and survivor guilt-- through the lens of rich and completely believable characters. Ellie's story, as one who accidentally survived a disaster at her school, was amplified through the added dimension of the ghosts. Their existence was deepened by the fact that Ellie wasn't alone in seeing them-- and I loved the fact that the story was not about "are the ghosts real or not?" but "what do the ghosts want and how do we deal with them?" I particularly enjoyed the first person narratives of the ghosts (or their survivors), and the twist of Ellie freeing them through recording their stories. Several times this book could have veered into sappy sentimentality, but it manages to avoid that, and yet convey strong, vivid emotions.

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### Kris says

I've read much of Christopher's work, and I'm always taken by how the tone matches the story. The tender pace here keeps readers where they need to be as they navigate Ellie's deeply changed world with her.

The afterword struck me especially because when the 1985 tornadoes hit, I was dating (briefly) a cute guy who would go on to be a lifelong, dear friend. His uncle's home had been destroyed in the outbreak, and my friend and his family spent the summer rebuilding it. My friend died suddenly earlier this year, and this book lifted the veil and reminded me of how young and wide-eyed we were back then.

This book is about rebuilding and saying goodbye, but as Christopher always does, these very universal human experiences are nuanced and gorgeous and a little cracked. And Christopher writes young people so well that the reader can't help but feel young when seeing through these characters.

## Jeremy Howell says

Following a fight with her boyfriend, Ellie dips out of school and retreats to the lighthouse to brood. She falls asleep thinking of the time they share there together, and the other girl her boyfriend has been spending an uncomfortable amount of time with, threatening an end to those quiet moments.

Ellie awakes to a great storm, and exits to witness an outbreak of tornadoes that essentially level the town. The school is destroyed, taking the lives of her best friends, her boyfriend, and the girl she felt so threatened by.

Later, people in town begin to sight ghosts roaming the town. Before the outbreak, Ellie occupied her time with capturing the true spirit of her friends in candid shots when they didn't know a camera was there. After the outbreak, she finds that the only way to free their souls is to draw the same candor out of them in a recording of what she calls, "their last will and testament." Their stories, told without fear of rejection or judgment. The moments Ellie previously captured in a camera, formed into the spoken word.

*The Gone Away Place* is a raw and honest examination of grief and regret in the light of tragedy. The characters who survived struggle to make sense of what's happened and the ghosts they're seeing. Ellie battles with regret over the last fight she had with her boyfriend, and relief that having that fight is what saved her life. The ghosts must come to terms with their dreams unrealized, hopes and wishes they'd set aside for later that will never come to fruition, and severed relationships that can never be mended.

Those looking for a thrilling climax or stunning twist may walk away disappointed. This is a strict meditation on grief and loss; a character study of those who endure it and the changes it demands. Barzak continues to write some of the most haunting and thoughtful YA out there.

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## Jonathan says

A moving, heartfelt examination of community grief in the wake of mass tragedy, AKA a character study of America in 2018.

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## Ammar Al-Rawi says

Wow. A great novel.

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## Judy says

Fictional story about a major tornado that comes through an Ohio area and the tragic events that happened to a group of high school students. Most of the students have died, but Ellie is alive. It's a hauntingly eerie fictional story that will leave you anxious to turn the page.

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## **Sara says**

Even though it's not a long book it took me about two months to finish this, because I had to read it in short bursts--partially because Christopher Barzak's writing is so hauntingly beautiful that I wanted to take time to process it, and partially because the entire book was an emotional sucker punch to the gut. I don't think I've ever read another book quite like this, especially not one aimed at teens, but I think I'll remember Ellie and her friends for a very very long time.

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## **Cherie says**

A great middle grade novel crossing the border from realistic fiction to fantasy with some very prominent ghost stories. After picking a fight with her boyfriend, Ellie Frame cuts school, a decision which saves her life. After a series of tornados (and the resulting aftermath) destroys her school, most of her closest friends and her boyfriend are dead. Overwhelmed with grief, she ends up struggling to accept that she is not okay, and her struggle grows when she sees the ghosts of her friends...but not her boyfriend.

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## **Barbara says**

It has been said that disasters bring out both the best and the worst in humans, and that is clearly evident in this fascinating novel. Clearly, it is hard for the survivors of a natural disaster to go on, especially when they feel guilty for surviving or seek closure with those that have died. While its main themes seem to focus on grief, loss, and recovery, there are interesting supernatural elements in the book too. Ellie Frame is sure that she should have been in her high school along with her boyfriend, Noah, and her best friends, when the tornadoes strike her small town of Newfoundland, Ohio. But she isn't, simply because she fought with Noah over another girl and then decided to skip school. From her safe place, she watches as parts of the town are destroyed. Afterward, as she tries to recover, she begins seeing spirits. Eventually, she figures out that many of these spirits have stories to tell, important memories to share, and if she records them, they can leave the earth behind. Although some passages seem to hint at the ill-will held by some of these spirits toward others, I didn't find that to be true. Instead, I found myself swept up in the stories they chose to share of their bright and shining moments or their most memorable or meaningful times, and I loved how persistent Ellie is in trying to help the spirits go home even while aching for Noah and what can no longer be. If nothing else, the book reminds readers that it takes a lot longer to recover emotionally from a natural disaster such as a tornado than it does to rebuild the buildings that were destroyed there. Having survived Hurricane Katrina back in 2005, I know this to be true. I don't know if I would have liked this book as much without the supernatural elements, but I do know the author captures perfectly the feelings of loss and confusion anyone who was lived through such a catastrophic event has experienced. Picking up the emotional pieces and deciding how to proceed are never easy.

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## **Adah McMillan says**

“The girl who sat slumped over in the folding metal chair in front of me wasn't sure if she wanted to live or die. She couldn't articulate her problem in those words, but after two decades of treating people who've suffered sudden catastrophic loss, I find it easy to recognize the signs. She'd survived when Death came on dark wings and slid his sword through the earth around her. And though she'd survived, she didn't

understand that the sword had cut a wound deep inside her as well, in the most sacred of spaces, and where, unless we could help her, it would fester for a long time.” (Page 65)

Oh my goodness, that was gorgeous.

These are the words of the therapist of Ellie Frame, tornado survivor, in the book *The Gone Away Place* by Christopher Barzak. Ellie lives in the small Ohio town of Newfoundland that was half destroyed by an “outbreak” of tornadoes. The morning of the outbreak, Ellie got in an argument with her boyfriend, Noah, and was so mad and slightly over dramatic that she ditched school to go brood in a lighthouse (Yes, there’s a lighthouse in the middle of tornado territory. Long story.). She dozes off and later awakes to witness her town’s devastation and a gas tank explosion at her school from her safe little hill. All of her closest friends are killed along with hundreds of other victims and... Noah. The boyfriend. Ouch.

At this point, you’re probably predicting, as I did after Noah’s death, that the whole book will be about Ellie mourning her high school boyfriend and fulfilling adults’ stereotypes of teenage drama. If you think this, you’re wrong!

Well, okay, you’re sort-of right. But Ellie isn’t that pathetic. Her levels of grieving are perfectly reasonable, and the story goes beyond the main character’s struggles.

Another thing: if you think this book is realistic fiction, you’re wrong!

Ellie starts seeing ghosts. Real life ghosts. Like, she can touch them and talk to them. The spirits of her friends and other victims are trapped between this world and the supposed afterlife. I won’t go into much detail because this stuff is confuzzling, but basically, Ellie must find a way to help her dead friends! (Cue adventure-movie music!)

Now that you, dearest reader, know the premise and are sufficiently hooked, I’ll get down to the good stuff. As you may have noticed in my opening quote, the author uses beautiful, symbolic language. I also cannot resist a book that capitalizes “Death”. There’s symbolism everywhere from the characters’ representation to the chapter titles.

*The Gone Away Place* gets you questioning your freaking EXISTENCE. While reading during Journalism, I kind of over analyzed and convinced myself I wasn’t alive unless someone acknowledged my presence in this world. No one talked to me for about twenty minutes (which, thinking back, makes sense since I was reading), so I had a mini existential crisis. It happens all the time; don’t worry.

The only big problem I had with this book is the author’s frankly wussy attempt at diversity. One of the ghost friends told the story of her gay brother’s rejection from her Christian family. It was sad and all, but I felt like Barzak was just crossing “queer characters” off his diversity checklist. Same deal with the only character he explicitly mentioned was not white. He went all out with Japanese traditions and symbolism for a chapter or two and then continued with absolutely no racial diversity. Sure, this takes place in a conservative small town, but you can’t just toss in a gay character and a Japanese character for a bit and ignore them the rest of the time. The story could have survived without them, and it could have also benefited from their further involvement.

If you don’t mind this lack of diversity and enjoy depressing but exquisite writing, *The Gone Away Place* is the book for you. The story itself is entertaining, and it also encourages readers to tell their own stories. In the Author’s Note, Barzak says, “In this new world where we’re experiencing more frequent extreme weather events due to a changing climate, and natural disasters continually threaten, it seems we should brace ourselves for more challenging times, not just as individuals, but as communities, both local and global. We will need one another to recover and to grieve all that we have lost and may still lose. It is my hope that this book might serve to make others experiencing tragedies of this kind feel less alone as they find their way forward in their own stories.” (Page 294)

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## **Jenny Ashby says**

I finished this book yesterday and have been mulling it over, trying to make a decision about what I think the main theme is, a way to sum up my feelings about it, and how to put into words all the things it is. What I

have decided is that *The Gone Away Place* is too many things for me to put one word on it because the scope of emotions and thoughts in the book is awesome. However, the closest I can come to summing up the book for me is the word "grief". People think they know what grief means but that is too small a word and too easily dismissed to encompass all the subtleties Barzak infuses his story. Both my parents have died so I know some things about grieving but I couldn't have listed all the components of grief if asked. As I read the book and have continued to reflect on it, I realize that there are so many parts that contribute to the aching feeling of grief and they are included in *The Gone Away Place*. Here are some of the threads wound up in this book:

Several of the ghosts are longing for the future they will not have now. They tell Ellie about their plans - reconnecting with a brother, getting out from a sibling's shadow, beginning college. All of them delayed their own happiness because they knew they would soon be able to begin the lives of which they dreamed but now that opportunity is gone and I could feel the loss in reading their stories. When someone we love dies, all of our future dreams with that person die with them. It's not just the person themselves we are missing, it's the experiences we were going to have with them as well.

Regret is such a huge part of grieving. There will always be something you wish you had done differently with a loved one after they've died. For Ellie, her last conversation with Noah is haunting her and, since she has seen several ghosts but not him, she appears to have real evidence that he is holding that against her. Tied in with that is the idea that death puts things into perspective and makes us re-evaluate our priorities. Ellie now sees that her problem with Noah was not a big deal in the big picture.

Preserving someone's story is important. Once someone is gone, their story dies with them. Ellie finds that capturing those stories is the key to helping a ghost move on. Even her best friends tell her parts of their lives Ellie didn't know about. Remembering someone's story - things they did and what they thought - is their legacy so capture those memories while you can.

And on the theme of personal stories... Ellie's counselor talks about the disruption in Ellie's story and how she needs to find a way to continue it, possibly in a new direction. That was such a great visual for how your life begins to mend itself after a death that I stopped to let it sink in and then, to see if I could analyze what changes I'd made in the direction of my life. How often does a book cause me to stop reading and just let its message settle into me? Powerful!

Finally, there is hope. Ellie is given such a gift in that she has the chance to talk to her friends again before they move on. I haven't had that kind of encounter with a dead loved one, but I can still identify with the feeling of hope those meetings in the book gave me. Because as bad as grieving is, there are also so many moments when you see something or hear a piece of music or remember something about that person that makes you smile and makes your heart fill with love and happiness that you had that person in your life in the first place. Ellie talking with her friends brought those warm feelings to me while reading the book and it felt completely at home as a part of the grief.

*The Gone Away Place* is a deep story that presents itself almost as an adventure or horror novel - tornadoes! angry ghosts! Take time to read it and really experience the full range of what it has to offer.

Also - holy crap, is that cover terrifyingly beautiful!

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## **Elad says**

Another enthralling entry in Chris Barzak's growing library of stories about grief and the transformative power of loss. While *The Gone Away Place* spends most of its time dealing with ghosts, it's the survivor who is the focus. It's her journey through the tragedy that shocked her town but spared her life. The regret, the pain, and the proxy suffering is tangible on the page. When she begins to interact with the ghosts of her friends, it's even more touching and real. Filled with incredibly constructed sentences and compelling characters, *The Gone Away Place* is a must read that you will find impossible to put down and impossible to forget.

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## **Christopher says**

Another completely biased review.

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