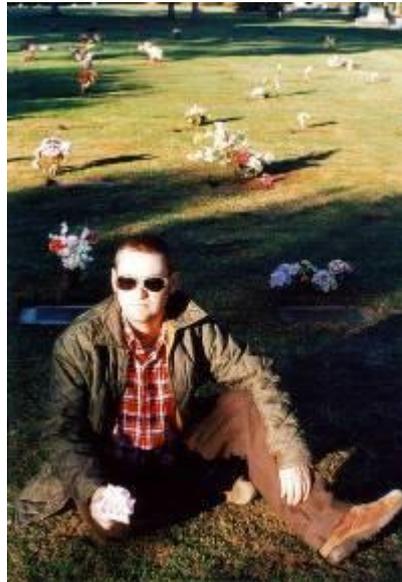


## An Outsider's View

**Anywhere But Here, a collection of short stories by Dallas Angguish, transcends the parameters of gay fiction, reports Peter Hackney.**

Toowoomba, Queensland, does not conform to the image of Australia's "beautiful one day, perfect the next" tropical state. Situated high in the Great Dividing Range, it's a cool-climate city of churches and schools, subject to rolling mists and even, on occasion, a dusting of winter snow.



Likewise, Dallas Angguish, a son of Toowoomba, does not fit comfortably into the genre of gay fiction, despite his work being promoted as such. Rather, his new book, *Anywhere But Here* – a collection of short stories – concerns universal themes, only occasionally touching on "gay".

"I don't write about stuff that's just of interest to gay people, so I'm not sure that I can be put into that box," Angguish tells SX, speaking about his new - and first - book. "I write about things that are of interest to me as a person. I'm a member of the gay community, so sometimes that relates to gay issues, but I'm a member of many communities and lots of other things influence me too ... communities are also based on families, on geographic location and on religious lines. For instance, I'm a Buddhist and I was a monk for five years, so that's a big part of my identity."

Still, Angguish says that being gay has been beneficial to his writing. "I do think that being gay does give you a certain viewpoint," he opines. "I think that gay writers have a unique opportunity given that we're often on the outside of things, which makes us keener, sharper observers."

It's this "outsiders" theme that pervades *Anywhere But Here*, the stories in which are divided into four distinct sections: 'America Divine', 'The Wild West', 'Continental Breakfast' and finally, 'Anywhere But Here'. While a compelling read throughout, it's the final section of the book, based on the life of Angguish himself, which is the strongest. That this is the case is unsurprising, given that Angguish has felt a keen sense of being an outsider for much of his life.

"I've always been an outsider. I was mercilessly teased at school, growing up in Toowoomba," says Angguish, who now lives in rural NSW. "It was a very homophobic place, and I was openly gay. I'm just one of those people who finds it very difficult to pretend otherwise. But looking back, even though it was horrible at the time, it's given me strength and helped me develop capabilities and ways of dealing with things that I might not have otherwise."

"And it's given me great stories," he adds with a laugh. "If only the bullies who tormented me knew that they actually did something positive for me!"