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Greta Cahill never believed she would leave her village in the west of Ireland until she found herself on a ship bound for New York. Fifty years later, when the Ireland of her memory bears little resemblance to that of present day, she fears that it is still possible to lose all when she discovers that her children—with the best of intentions— have conspired to unite the worlds she's so carefully kept separate for decades.

Greta Cahill never believed she would leave her village in the west of Ireland until she found herself on a ship bound for New York, along with her sister Johanna and a boy named Michael Ward.

Labeled a "softheaded goose" by her family, Greta discovers that in America she can fall in love, raise her own family, and earn a living. Though she longs to return and show her family what she has made of herself, her decision to spare her children knowledge of a secret in her past forces her to keep her life in New York separate from the life she once loved in Ireland, and tears her apart from the people she is closest to.

Even fifty years later, when the Ireland of her memory bears little resemblance to that of the present day, she fears that it is still possible to lose all when she discovers that her children—with the best of intentions— have conspired to unite the worlds she's so carefully kept separate for decades.

A beautifully old-fashioned novel, *The Walking People* is a debut of remarkable range and power.

The Walking People Details

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Author : Mary Beth Keane

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From Reader Review The Walking People for online ebook

Chrissie says

I actually enjoyed listening to this. It was OK, but.....

This is one of those books definitely improved by its narration, very well done by Sile Bermingham! Great Irish brogue, and the different women all sound unique. Still, when you look at the book as a whole, you are left rather flat. What does it give you? A "cute" telling of the Irish immigrant story in NYC. Not the early immigrants, but the ones that came in the 60s. Family life and friendship between workmates. What was the sandhog experience like? The job of the sandhog, digging the tunnels for the water pipes of NYC, that too. Half of the book is about the life of Irish gypsies, the "walking people" and life in rural Ireland. Sister relationships, and aging, serious accidents and who exactly is the true mother, the birth mother or the one who raises a child? All of this is covered - some parts flow better than others, but all these different parts are patchy. There is humor and sadness. The poignant end could have been improved. Was the part about (view spoiler) really necessary? You start in 2007, flip back to the past and then go forward to 2007. The book was OK, and certainly very well narrated.

I have chosen to read this book for two reasons. First of all I really liked Mary Beth Keane's Fever, so I have to read another by this talented author. Secondly, when I listened to the sample of this book by the author I both loved the narration by Sile Bermingham, with her wonderful Irish tone, and discovered it begins with a section about NYC sandhogs. Sandhogs is a term used for the Irish, Italian and West Indian immigrants that first dug the tunnels between Manhattan and Brooklyn. So.... I think illogically that the book may be similar to Colum McCann's This Side of Brightness, also about sandhogs! I loved that book, except for its stupid ending. I know this is all rather illogical; I will not get a continuation of McCann's book, but still it might be good.

Lin says

Was a wonderful buck in the style of Maeve Binchey. The beginning setting of remote Galway in the 50s is memorable and beautifully detailed. Detailed, 3D characters. This book is set over fifty years and is a satisfying story of two sisters. I loved it.

Robin Carlin says

The Walking People may become one of my top 5 all-time favorite books. Even as I write this, I am not sure how to articulate the reasons why I loved this book so much. I was sucked in at the Prologue. I was shocked that every 60-80 pages something would happen that I simply did not expect. I was impressed by the believability of the relationships and the amount of research that must have gone into this book regarding Ireland, the Irish workers in New York, and the evolution of technology. Definitely mark this as your must-read book!

Diane Webber-thrush says

I read this book maybe a year ago, and so many images from it have stuck with me. It is my favorite kind of book: sweeping epic about a culture that I didn't know before I picked up the book, in this case the tinkers of Ireland. The story follows one family from Ireland to New York. It's set in the early - to mid 20th century, but in that part of rural Ireland it was more like the 19th Century.

As a writer, Keane is vivid and lovely. Sentence-to-sentence this is just a beautiful book. Compelling plot and characters too.

Lisa says

This was a well-written and obviously well-researched book about of Ireland of the 1960's and the "traveller" community in general. The opening sections of the book that take place in Ireland are the best in terms of invoking a certain time and place, and developing characters in the Cahill family as well as Michael Ward.

But when the book shifts to New York and moves forward in time, the same lingering over details fades, and the details that do exist (i.e., watching *All in the Family* on TV in 1986) didn't ring true. Character development wanes, and I was left with too many questions at the end of the novel.

Anita Johnson says

This is an interesting look at rural Ireland in the late 1950's. Greta and Johanna Cahill, 14 and 16, board a ship to New York, accompanied by Michael Ward, a tinker's son. The long journey affects their lives forever. Over the next 50 years, Greta grows from the "goose" of a girl who could barely see into a woman who manages her family and working life while zealously guarding a secret that threatens to ruin her family.

The author did an outstanding job with research and with creating characters who become so real to the reader. I would have liked more resolution at the end but not all family situations, even in books, can be tied up with a red bow.

Julie Christine says

I loved Jeanette's review of this book and I'm grateful for her recommendation. It is lovingly crafted novel by a writer who respects language, phrasing, who writes carefully but with joy.

There was an otherworldly, almost dreamlike quality to the story set in Ireland (and I loved revisiting in my mind's eye one of my favorites spots on earth- the west of Ireland); Keane's storytelling here reminded me of two of my favorite Irish writers: Edna O'Brien and Niall Williams. Greta's unsentimental coming of age in New York kept the narrative moving gently but solidly. I thought Greta's turning away from "home" and her scattered family rang very true; she was a young woman seeking stability and a sense of place. Her new surroundings gave her structure and independence and a sense of self denied to her by the poverty and

isolation of her home. Michael, her love and partner, provided the connection she needed to remain forever with one foot in Ireland.

It was the latter third of the book that story turned a bit predictable and plodding. Years later, Greta and Michael live in the suburbs, living a dull American dream. The characters of her grown children had little substance and the dramatic conclusion felt cliched. It read more like Anne Tyler or Jane Hamilton- a little too Oprah-esque for me. When I felt what was happening, I just wanted to hit rewind and leave the story at its peak.

I do look forward to reading more by Keane- there are not enough authors out there who rely on well-chosen words and interesting characters rather than plot gimmicks to create a story.

Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says

This is Mary Beth Keane's first novel. I sincerely hope it doesn't turn out to be her only novel.

The prologue is dreadfully boring, which is unfortunate, but it's less than 20 pages. Aside from that, this book really captures a lot of truth about the immigrant experience and the flavor of Irish life. If you have Irish immigrant heritage (which I do not), I'd say this is a must-read, or at least a must-try.

The first half of the book takes place in Ireland, describing the poor rural upbringing of the characters. The second half covers their lives after they come to America and gradually assimilate. There's not a lot of excitement in the book, but the writing is excellent and the story grows on you. It's very subtle. I didn't notice how much I had come to love Greta and Michael until I got to the very end and found myself getting a little weepy and drippy.

This is certainly not an Irish jig. More of a slow waltz that could use a little more of everything. A little more sweet, a little more bitter, a little more spice. However, it's clear that a great deal of deliberation and care went into the writing. I'm looking forward to more from this author.

Corinne Edwards says

While I've read a host of books about early 1900s immigration, *The Walking People* is a story about a different generation of immigrants -the Irish who came to America in the early 60s. Greta's family lives in a tiny, nearly abandoned town in Western Ireland, near the sea and not much else. Life during Greta's childhood was much the same way it had been for hundreds of years, they were warmed by a turf fire and ate by candlelight. "Tinkers" or "Traveling People" walked the highways and made a living by doing odd jobs, staying in camps along the way. Greta's early interactions with these Traveling People will reverberate and result in relationships that last her lifetime.

The Walking People is about, first and foremost, family. What we do for them and what we inadvertently do to them - and not just the children we raise, but the family we were raised by. Greta's very close relationship with her mother and sister, and how that relationship changed, influenced so much of the way she lived her

life. I was sometimes frustrated by the choices she made while at the same time I was sympathetic to why she made those choices. She's an interesting character, this Greta, naive and yet wise - thoughtful and stubborn, and I think Keane did an excellent job of rounding out all her characters. I think I liked reading about the family Greta grew up in more than I liked reading about the family she raised, but maybe that's because I just liked reading about life in Ireland more.

One unique thing about this novel that I appreciated, was its use of time periods. Typically, I am annoyed when we start at the end and then move backwards, because I feel like it rips out the footing from under the plot to already know how the story ended. But somehow, in the *Walking People*, this device just completely intrigued me. Even though I knew that certain people would end up being together, I was thrilled to discover how it all happened. So three cheers for that.

I think that for a debut novel, *The Walking People* is pretty darn amazing, even if the end left me feeling somewhat hanging. If you can overlook the sometimes harsh language, I think you'll appreciate this story that takes you from one side of the Atlantic to the other, down beneath the streets of New York City and back, and leaves you pining for an Irish home that you never even had.

Faith says

Wasn't sure I would enjoy this book as much as I did *Fever*, the fascinating story of Typhoid Mary, but *Walking People* was very well written. Its vivid portrayal of both Irish and American life beginning in the late 1950's and continuing to the present was fascinating. Stories about emigration usually focus on much earlier periods in history, so this book covers an era not often described. The characters are well drawn and I was quickly caught up in their struggles to adjust to a new and very different life when they left very rural Ireland to move to New York. The ending was somewhat abrupt with lots of loose ends left for several of the main characters, but it was still a most enjoyable read. I will be looking for future works by Mary Beth Keane.

Christin says

While Keane's book takes a bit of background to get into, the reader is soon immersed in the world of an Irish family during the 1950's to the present day. While the time era sounds recent and fresh, there is no connection of the rural Irish family to the trendy American ways across the ocean. As the family endures love, adventure, excitement, and heartache the reader follows the generation across the ocean to America, land of opportunity. Greta and her sister, along with a friend make their ways in the new world, succeeding more than any of them could imagine and finding themselves along the way. Family love and friendships triumph decade after decade in this classic novel of family hope, perseverance, and love. "*The Walking People*" is an excellent read.

Paula Margulies says

A stunning debut novel! This book is a must-read for anyone who likes novels about Ireland and transatlantic travel. *The Walking People* tells the story of Greta Cahill, her sister, Johanna, and a boy named Michael Ward. The three of them come to America from a small town outside of Galway during the 1960's. The story

covers the early years on the Irish coast with the travelers, or "walking people," New York in the 1960's - modern day, the Irish immigrant experience, and the sandhogs who built the New York water tunnel system. This is a seamlessly written and fascinating story of family, love, and, of course, the secrets that bind and tear them apart.

J.S. Dunn says

3.5 There really ought to be half-stars available...

A touching story and well written. But. After the first 100 pages, its glorification of the mundane and prosaic bits of daily life becomes grating and tempts the reader to skip sections, though in doing so other important bits of the story might be missed. If all the minute details were semiotic it would be one thing, but the style became simply tedious.

For those who know little or nothing about Travellers, no doubt this novel is a surprise. Predictably, this particular narrative leaves out the other half of the story, the not very glamorous aspect.

Bill says

Imagine a story of children growing up in a poor rural area of a developing country, dealing with suspicions across ethnic divides, and intrigued by the arrival of electricity in a nearby town, who eventually migrate to America and make their lives there. Such a story could be full of clichés and stereotypes. But this author, instead, tells a story that is so unique and whose characters are so specific to themselves, and writes it so fluidly, that it is authentic. It must be real, even if it was imagined. In telling the stories of these people, the author conveys every level so well - the personal loves, ambitions, and heartaches, as well as the history and cultural differences.

So here are some of the surprises. The developing country is Ireland in the 1950s. The ethnic divide is between Catholics and Tinkers - a minority which seems to be for Ireland what the Roma are to Central Europe. The two sisters and young man who migrate to America create a triangle unlike anything you have read before. The author moves seamlessly between the characters' different perspectives so that you can, at once, believe and share the Catholic suspicion of Tinkers and then believe and share the Tinker suspicion of Catholics. On finishing the book, I felt I understood better what it means to lose a husband, have your children grow up and move away, to be abandoned by a sister, experience the onset of Alzheimer's, to dig a tunnel 700 feet underground, to try to stay warm by a peat fire and, ultimately, to make difficult choices and live life fully.

What more could you ask of a book?

Saleh MoonWalker says

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