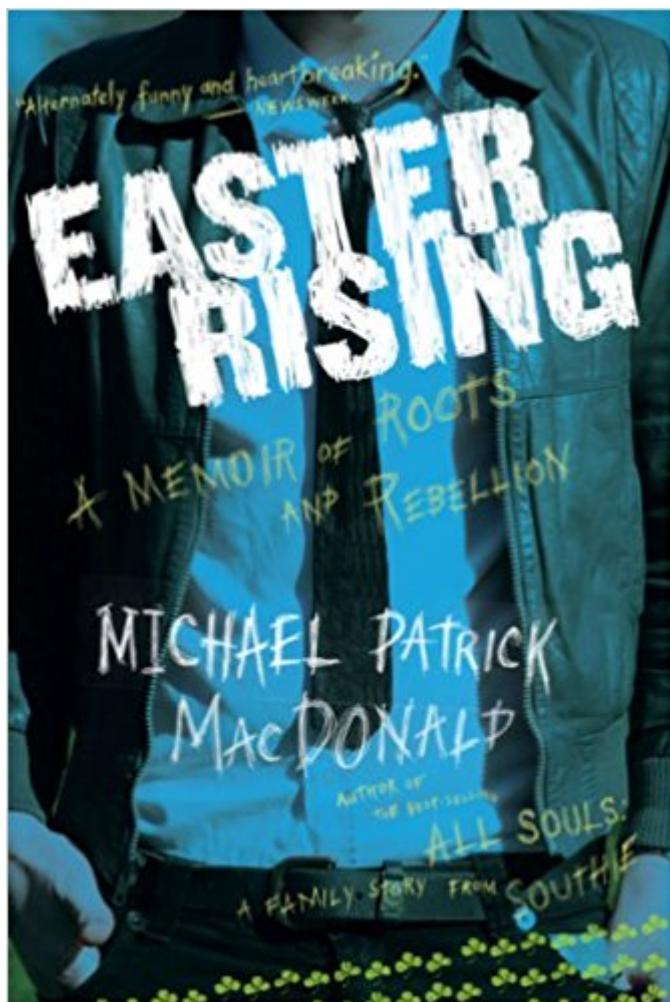


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# Easter Rising: A Memoir Of Roots And Rebellion



## Synopsis

In All Souls, Michael Patrick MacDonald told the story of the loss of four of his siblings to the violence, poverty, and gangsterism of Irish South Boston. In Easter Rising he tells the story of how he got out. Desperate to avoid the “normal” life of Southie, Michael reinvents himself in the burgeoning punk rock movement and the thrilling vortex of Johnny Rotten, Mission of Burma, and the Clash. At nineteen MacDonald escapes further, to Paris and then London. Out of money, he contacts his Irish immigrant grandfather -- who offers a loan, but only if Michael will visit Ireland. It is this reluctant journey “home” that offers MacDonald a chance at reconciliation -- with his heritage, his neighborhood, and his family -- and a way forward.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Michael Patrick MacDonald helped launch Boston’s successful gun-buyback program and founded the South Boston Vigil Group. He has won the American Book Award, a New England Literary Lights Award, and the Myers Center Outstanding Book Award. His published works include All Souls and his highly acclaimed memoir, Easter Rising.

I learned to jump subway fares by tagging along with my brother Kevin and his friends on shoplifting ventures outside the project. Downtown Boston was only three stops but worlds away from Old Colony Project. I was ten, and Southie’s busing riots of the past two years had now dissipated into the occasional scuffle with the police. Still, everyone in our neighborhood always said how dangerous it was to leave. It was still the world against Southie and Southie against the world.

So for me there was a terrifying thrill in leaving the neighborhood at all. The more I snuck on those trains, the more it felt like traveling to another country, like I was a tourist about to see strange lands and stranger people for the very first time. At first our technique was basic. We'd wait at the top of the stairs of Andrew Station until we heard a train arriving, then dart down the stairs, hop over the turnstiles, and bolt for the train's doors. By the time we were lined up at the four turnstiles, the train would be just making its final wshhhh sound, which Kevin said was the air releasing from the brake cylinder. We'd each lift off, hands on either side of the turnstile, and drive our legs over the bars feet first, landing as far out as we could. By the time we landed, the fare taker would be screaming and knocking on his scratched and blurry Plexiglas windows, mouthing what I imagined was "You little fucks!" Right about then I knew we would hear the train doors open with a collective rumble. If we did it according to Kevin's exact timing; if we started running downstairs at just the right moment, when the train was first coming to a halt with a long screech of the brakes; we'd usually make it inside just before we felt the suction of the doors closing behind us. No one ever chased after us in the early days, so we probably didn't have to turn it into the heart-racing caper it always felt like. But it was great each time to feel the breeze of those clackety doors nearly catching my shirt.

I'd take a deep breath in relief, and then in expectation. If the train we hopped came from the suburbs, it would be one of the brand-new modern ones, carrying all whites. But if it had come from Dorchester it would be one of the old, rundown ones and filled with blacks. I would go off by myself to grab a seat and silently take in all the newness, black or white. But my brother Kevin seemed interested only in "getting the fuck in, and getting the fuck out" back to Southie. To him we were on a mission, and he was all business. He'd make me stand up so that we were all sticking together. He'd keep us huddled around him while he told us what to do and what not to do around all these dangerous blacks and goofy-looking white people from the world that was not Southie. And he'd whack me in the head every time I snuck a glance at the people he was talking about. But after a few minutes our huddle would fall apart. As we tried to keep our feet firmly planted on the bumpy ride, I always seemed to have the worst balance, flailing backward and sideways with the train's chaotic twists and turns. I didn't mind, though, as long as I never hit the floor. Riding the trains was my favorite thing to do even before the trips with Kevin. Ma always told us we should want to go places, like Dorchester or Jamaica Plain. "For Chrissake, don't you wanna see the world?" she said. On my eighth birthday she took me all the way to Park Street Station and put me on the Green Line to Jamaica Plain, where Nana would be waiting at the other end to take

me out for a birthday dinner. The old trolley looked like it was the first one ever built, with bars over square windows that opened. Best of all, it had a driver's booth at both ends ; I guessed that was so it didn't have to turn around at the end of the line. That seemed like the greatest day in the world, being trusted to get on a Green Line trolley all by myself. I kept thinking that to drown out how nervous I was getting. I sat in the backward-facing driver's seat and waved to Ma on the platform while I pretended to myself that I was the conductor. Ma disappeared from view, and I distracted myself by trying to think up an excuse for why I was driving backward. But before I could, all the excitement and the backward driving made me puke out the window into the blackness of the tunnel. I went to sit in a normal remaining seat, to pretend like nothing had happened. On the forty-five-minute-long journey, I let my fears get the best of me, though, and imagined that I would end up on this one-way trip forever and never see my family again. Worst of all, I was soon the only passenger remaining. When the train came to a final screeching halt, the driver shut off the engine and the lights and barked, "Last stop! Arborway!" while packing up his things like he was going home. My heart was in my mouuuuuth until I saw Nana waving and running across the ghost town of a train yard. The sight of Nana was unmistakable, always in a loose navy blue polka-dot dress, shoes you saw at drugstores, and a flowered kerchief tied snugly under her chin. "For Chrissake, you look like Mother Hubbard," Ma would snap at her when Nana complained about Ma's miniskirts and spike heels. For me though, Nana's old-fashionedness was calming. And this day the sight of her was more comforting than ever. I hopped off the trolley stairs in one leap. Nana greeted me as she always did, not saying hello but spitting on a napkin that seemed like it had been in her purse forever and rubbing it into my cheeks until they hurt. Nana talked about rosy cheeks like they were the most important thing in the world for people to see. "We'll go for a wee supper now," she said in that Donegal way that made everything sound like both an exclamation and a question. Well over my fears, I greeted her by saying that riding the subways was just about the greatest thing in the world and that I couldn't wait to do it again. Going home from fare-jumping trips with Kevin and his crew was easier than the trip out. We'd walk from Filene's to South Station and press the red stop button hidden near the ground at the top of a wooden escalator so ancient-looking that Kevin convinced me it was from "colonial days." After we pressed the button, the escalator would stutter in its climbing motion and then come to a rolling stop. That's when we'd run down the steep and treacherous steps into the station exit. Each wooden step was about one foot square, and I always wondered if people were skinnier in colonial times. At the bottom of the escalator was an unmanned

gate that was often left wide open. But even if it was chained and padlocked, you could push out one fence post to make a gap, just enough to slip through. It usually took a bit of teamwork, but it was a cinch. Kevin was the scrawniest and could slip through without anyone's help, so he'd go first and pull on the gate from the other side. One day I discovered an even better way to get back home to Southie. Kevin was inside Papa Gino's, pulling a scam he'd recently perfected. When the cashier called out a number, Kevin would wave a receipt from the trash, all excited-like, as if he'd won the lottery. His performance was so convincing; or maybe just distracting; that he'd walk away with a tray full of pizza and Cokes. Okie and Stubs would distract the waiting customers even further by asking if anyone knew where the bathroom was. I was outside on Tremont Street, playing lookout; for what I didn't know; and daydreaming that Kevin would get a whole pizza pie. But Kevin cared more about scamming stuff for everyone else than for himself, and I knew he would give away his only slice if that's all he got. While I was supposedly keeping watch, I spied groups of black people gathering nearby and then disappearing through an automatic door to a steel shaft sticking up from the sidewalk. As soon as one cluster of mothers, teenagers, and babies in strollers disappeared through the mystery door, more groups would gather around, press a button, and then loiter at a slight distance. They tried hard to look inconspicuous by rubbing their hands together or jumping up and down in one place as if they were cold, but I knew by their watchful eyes that they were just looking out, like I was supposed to be doing. The door opened, and again the busy sidewalk turned empty. I walked closer and saw through little steamy windows that everyone was squeezed like sardines onto an elevator and then whisked away to some place below Tremont Street. I pressed the button and waited for the elevator to come back up again so I could investigate. "What are you, a fuckin' losah?" Kevin screamed down Tremont Street just as the doors opened and more people looked around before hopping on. He was running toward me with a single slice of pizza, yelling at me for always wandering off. "You were supposed to keep watch!" he barked, grabbing me by the collar. Okie and Stubs were running behind him, pizzaless. They seemed like they thought they were being chased, and I told them to follow me. We squeezed into the elevator and pushed our way to the middle, surrounded by whole families of black people. Kevin punched me for staring up at them, even though there was nowhere else to look but up. In the end I would get high marks for finding a whole new and simpler method for getting a free ride home. The service elevator led from the street right into the subway system, beyond the conductor booths, and we all filed out nonchalantly. That day I earned the only slice of pizza Kevin was able to score. In the days that followed I was so proud of

my find I put the word out all over Old Colony Project about the new way to get home from downtown. That pissed Kevin off ; he said the more people knew, the sooner the MBTA would cop on and shut us out. For a time the elevator was the one place in Boston you could see my neighbors from Southie squeezed into a small space with black people. A key was required for the elevator to work, but the keyhole was always turned sideways, in the on position, either because it was broken or because some transit worker was doing us all a favor. Kevin and his friends didn't care about leaving Southie except on scamming missions ; they never went just to wander. And I could never get my own friends to leave the project, so it wasn't long before I was venturing alone to see the strange lands and strange people beyond Southie's borders. Copyright © 2006 by Michael Patrick MacDonald. Reprinted by permission of Houghton Mifflin Company.

Very disappointing after being bowled over by "All Souls". This is basically a rehash of "All Souls" with a few interesting elaborations, his visits to Ireland being the best. Having grown up in New England and lived in Cambridge and Boston from '97-'09, and having once been a fan of Punk rock, this book seemed like it had potential. But it didn't tell me any more about Boston than "All Souls" and the parts about Punk rock just made me realize what an empty bunch of baloney it is, just a lot of frustrated city kids letting off steam. If Punks had any guts they'd leave the city and live in the country, which is actually what one of the author's older brothers and mother did by moving to Colorado. And the author's experiences in rural Ireland also showed how healthy and wholesome country living can be. You get the feeling in a lot of places in this book that the author is just dumping every little detail he can dredge up so as to stretch the material out, i.e., just churning out filler. This also has the unexpected side effect of making me wonder about the author's love life. He documents so many picayune sneezes and hiccups in his life, the total absence of any reference to any kind of personal romance is quite a glaring omission. I don't need to know about his love life but it does seem a little hypocritical to be so secretive.

You don't have to be Irish to love these memoirs by Boston's own, MickPaddieMack. I recommend that you read them consecutively. While they are graphic and evoke extreme emotion, the stark reality of growing up in the Southie projects is for real. No matter how bad your childhood, you will get down on your knees and praise heaven that what you got wasn't this. You will howl out loud laughing and sob wrenchingly, often within the span of one perfectly-penned sentence. These are not books to be read in public. Unfortunately, I did just that on two long plane rides in a middle seat.

My aisle seat mate thought I was clearly unhinged, while the window seat mate patted me on the arm and asked me if I was feeling all right. I spent most of the flights in the bathroom so I could howl and sob in relative peace. I assure you these are books you will never forget. The only bad thing about them is the way you feel when you finish. You want to find Michael and ask him to be your BFF, to update you on his and his family's lives, and to hold you and never let you go.

good read

Mike can write and remember in a way that lingers. Great read.

I had read "All Souls" a few months back and had ordered this book(easter rising) shortly after finishing "All Souls" but I did not get to it until now.I enjoyed this much as much as the first. I am not Irish (actually Italian)but the stories are so similar to ones I had heard.If you grew up back east, and can track your relatives to Europe, you are sure to enjoy this book

Excellent coming of age story set in Boston. The author also wrote ALL SOULS, a candid, informative view of family life in South Boston during the 1970's busing and drug crisis. Michael Patrick MacDonald writes from the soul. He's easy to read and hard to forget.

incredible story and beautifully told!

Its a great book & it made me miss my old home townÃƒÂ¢ÃœÃœ thank you

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