



Small Mercies, by Eddie Joyce
Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy, October 2017

In 2017, the *New York Times* chose Eddie Joyce's debut novel, *Small Mercies*, for its Big City Book Club. The online book club discusses books that relate to life in New York City. *Small Mercies* takes place on Staten Island, the least familiar New York borough. Intrigued, I decided to give Mr. Joyce's book a try.

Small Mercies centers on Gail and Michael Amendola, an Irish-Italian American couple who have lived on the same street in Staten Island for 40 years. Through good times and hard times, they had raised their three sons there. Gail, nee Maguire, initially was attracted to Michael because he was the polar opposite of her alcoholic father Sean. Michael's parents were Italian immigrants. His father Enzo had hoped that Michael, an only child, would one day take over his Italian market. Michael, to his father's disappointment, wants no part of the market and becomes a New York City firefighter instead.

Growing up, the three Amendola brothers take different paths. Peter, the oldest, always striving to gain his parents' attention, becomes a corporate lawyer in Manhattan. Middle son Franky drifts from one thing to another. His idea of a plan is to make through to tomorrow. Bobby, the youngest son, is their mother's favorite; he follows his father to the NYFD.

As *Small Mercies* continues, its story is told from the view point of alternating characters, including the sons and their wives. While the action takes place within one week, the story meanders back and forth from past to present, which keeps readers on their toes.

Mr. Joyce skillfully depicts life on Staten Island, where people "lived their entire lives on a slab of land large enough that they forget it's an island." That said, I feel that some of his characters are rendered ethnically stereotypical. All things considered, however, *Small Mercies* was an earnest choice for the *Times'* Big City Book Club.