

# A Series of Small Maneuvers

By **Lisa Britton**  
*Go! Magazine*

**W**hen Eliot Treichel worked at the Eugene Public Library, he brought home lots of books to his daughter.

And he noticed a trend: so many books told the story of “boy saves girl.”

“I wanted to write something against that,” he said.

“A Series of Small Maneuvers,” a young adult novel he published in 2015, is the very antithesis — it is, instead, the story of a teenage girl who experiences an unimaginable tragedy and must save herself.

He started the book in 2013 when his daughter was a young teenager. The next year he was accepted for a fellowship at Fishtrap in Enterprise.

“That year’s theme had something to do with rivers and water,” Treichel said.

I recently read “Small Maneuvers” when it was mentioned in Treichel’s biography for the online writing workshop he taught this month through Fishtrap.

Here’s the synopsis from the back cover:

“After the devastating loss of her father on a canoe trip meant to bring them closer together, fifteen-year-old Emma Wilson finds herself alone on the river in the southwestern desert.”

I chuckled through the first few chapters, often reading passages aloud to my kids, who are well accustomed to outdoor adventures and could identify with Emma, the main character.

For instance: “Our hike was going to take longer than the half day he’d said it would, because they always did.”

And: “We were leaving to go look for an old homesteader’s cabin that my dad had read about on some online forum.”

Not long into the novel, though, Emma experiences the immense loss of her father and through sheer will she must navigate the river on her own to find civilization and help.

Emma captured my heart. She is a strong-willed teenager who must learn how to navigate her new reality where no one



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can quite understand what she experienced on that river.

Treichel grew up in Wisconsin, and attended Prescott College in Arizona. He is now on the English faculty at Yakima Valley College in Yakima, Washington.

His first real job was being a whitewater kayak instructor.

His pursuit of writing came by chance at Prescott when one of his classes was canceled, and his friend suggested a creative writing class instead.

“Something clicked in that



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Eliot Treichel

class,” Treichel said. “I had a tremendous teacher.”

The idea for his novel came during a multi-day backpacking trip in the Grand Canyon when he encountered a family hiking with two small girls.

“That got me thinking about kids in the wilderness — what if the parents got hurt?” he said.

While writing the novel, he said he “did what fiction writers do: imagine things and empathize with the characters.”

He set the story on a river

because, he said, “I’m not good with plot.”

“If you start someone at the start of the river, they have to get to the end,” he said.

Treichel published a short story collection prior to “Small Maneuvers,” and has a new book in the works.

He also may return to Emma’s story.

“I’m eager to have more stuff out in the world,” he said. “I will go back to Emma at some point and see where she is.”

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