

BROWNING-SHELP, Tanis

**Maryn O'Brien Series: *Crash Course*** (978-09953360-1-8) 2016. 186p.; ***Crushed*** (978-0-9953360-3-2) 2017. 215p. Dog-Eared Books. Gr. 5-10. Pbk. \$12.99 ea.

Rating: G

Tanis Browning-Shelp has begun a new Canadian series. Her main character, Maryn O'Brien, is a sixteen-year-old elite athlete, with the talent and drive to become an Olympian. Her supportive parents and baseball playing brother have a busy calendar, and Maryn expects high-level performance from herself in her piano, her academics, and her competitive biking. Her best friend Janey is a steadying influence, but she is dealing with her parents' possible divorce. Her coach is excellent at setting Maryn's practice schedule, and creating a great club environment for the team; he also understands her psychological and physical needs.

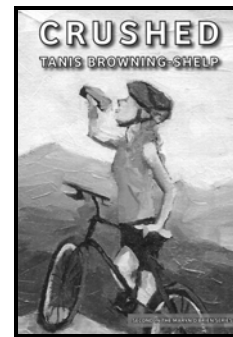


In Book One, when Maryn finds there are not enough hours in the day to achieve all her goals, she begins taking energy drops, against her coach's advice and against the school's rules. She is caught by two new girls in the club, and they threaten to expose her. They blackmail her into silence, and accuse the coach of sexual interference, in order to convince their parents to let them drop out of mountain biking.

In Book Two, Maryn begins a romantic relationship with Liam. It is a first time boyfriend-girlfriend for them both, and they have a hard time balancing their feelings with their responsibilities. For example, Maryn bails on a father-daughter weekend in order to be the good girlfriend and cheer on Liam at a rowing competition. She also stays up too late texting, begins to fall behind in school, and starts skipping practices. When her performance in competition exposes the lack of training, she is deeply

disappointed, and learns her lesson. As her father puts it, "*Just like with your racing, you struggled at times...but you never gave up on any of it. And, best of all, in time, you discovered the importance of being true to yourself.*" (*Crushed*, p. 215)

These books have enough mountain biking plot line and lingo to engage the enthusiast, but not so much that the themes are particular to that sport. Browning-Shelp has kept the chapters very short, so that the books are accessible to a wide variety of young readers. The plots deal with important issues, but the characters and dialogue fall somewhat flat in comparison.



**Thematic Links:** Elite Athletes; Mountain Biking; Time Management; Family Support

Patricia Jerney