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1/20/08

Guest Blogger: Kate Buckley

Hi everyone!

My name is Kate Buckley and I am a writer and author of a young adult novel called [Choices](#). Mariska's organization, The Joyful Heart Foundation, will be using my book in some of their teen programs and they connected me with Mariska.com. I'm thrilled to be able to write a blog here.

I remember very clearly my own teen years, how complex and sometimes confusing all the responsibilities, choices and situations that life presented felt to me. Raising two adolescents on my own, after a divorce, kept me connected not only to teens and their culture but also made me aware of how our culture continues to bombard girls with disempowering messages: about how they should look, how much they should weigh, what they should be wearing...and all the endless messages about how to be 'cool,' perfect and attract boys. So much pressure. Sadly, this hasn't changed all that much since I was a teen!

The genesis for my book, Choices, came from a short article I read in a newspaper over a decade ago while living in LA. A Planned Parenthood facility in the San Fernando Valley had been under a constant barrage of protests and picketing. Any woman who wanted to use the clinic had to pass through a crowd of demonstrators blocking its entrance and calling her names. One afternoon, a mother brought her fifteen year old daughter into the clinic. The doctor did a double take when he saw the woman. "Didn't I see you in that picket line last week?" he asked her. She looked him in the eye and said "This is different, this is my daughter." Years later, that newspaper article wouldn't leave my mind and I decided to write a book about it. But, once I began the writing, the story became the daughter's, not the mother's, and I knew I had to tell it from the teen girl point of view. The story of fifteen year old Kara just flowed out of me and I finished the book in five months.

Kara makes some pretty bad choices for herself in the novel. She lies, she sneaks out, she breaks promises and suffers some serious consequences as a result. But there is also a lot of hope in this story and Kara figures out good ways to help herself by its end.

I have always been interested in empowering teen girls. I began by working with the Los Angeles Commission on Assaults Against Women (LACAAW) working with their program to prevent sexual assault. We went into the middle and high schools in LA to offer resources and education about sexual assault and sexual harassment to teens.

LACAAW is now called Peace Over Violence and they are still doing this work with young people in the public schools, as they say "One on one, one by one." I also administrated a three year drug and alcohol abuse prevention project in the middle schools of Santa Fe, New Mexico, where I live now. I heard so many stories about difficult and risky situations that young teens were facing, in their homes as well as in school.

Someone once asked me in an interview why I used date rape in the story of Choices. Research indicates that date rape, sometimes called "acquaintance rape," accounts for about 70 percent of all sexual assaults. These rapes occur with someone a woman or girl knows, someone whom she has trusted. Many of them are never reported. When date rape happens, girls often blame themselves—because they were drinking or doing drugs, because they put themselves into a risky situation, or even for what they were wearing. In the story, Kara knew Jake and she believed she could trust him. Afterwards, she blamed herself and thought that she got what she "deserved."

If a young woman has trusted someone and feels responsible for being assaulted, a date rape can lead to depression and self-hatred. In Choices, Kara is afraid to tell anyone about her rape and for a long while is even unable to admit to herself that she's been raped. That's why I used date rape in Choices. I wanted to show what can happen in a real life situation and how a girl can navigate her way through and out



We want to know



of tough circumstances by getting the help she needs.

Girls who have been sexually violated should always seek help – from a school counselor, a parent, or other trusted adult. Keeping rape a secret or blaming oneself is not a powerful choice. At several points in the book Kara says that she “hates” herself. Sometimes girls turn their bad feelings inward, like Kara does in my book. Not talking about what was troubling her led Kara into shame, self-blame, depression—a kind of freezing of her soul. Culturally, girls are not encouraged to speak out. They begin to worry a lot about what other people think as early as the fourth grade. There is still this sense out there that “nice” girls are caring and considerate, that they should put others needs before their own.

When I wrote my thesis for my Masters degree program, I decided to do something about mother/teen daughter relationships. I created a mother-daughter support group in which I was a participant/observer. We met weekly and explored ways to help moms and their teen daughters relate better. Each week we talked about what was going on in the mother/daughter relationship, presented a new topic and had issues to work on the following week. After seven weeks, we found that open, caring communication, good listening skills and sharing memories of their own girlhood with their daughters proved to help make the sometimes difficult transition period from teen girl to young womanhood a more healing experience for both the daughters and their mothers. Writing that thesis was a learning experience for me, too, and helped me in my own relationship with my then thirteen-year-old daughter. Someday, I’d like to turn that thesis into a non-fiction book to help other mothers and daughters.

I wrote Choices because I wanted to help empower teen girls to think for and care about themselves. Inside, and out. My hope is that reading about Kara’s very difficult and emotional journey will encourage girls to think about the choices that they are making, every day, and about being good to and loving toward themselves. I’ve been asked many times whether Choices will ever be translated into other languages. I hope one day to make that happen.

Mariska’s site does a terrific job of offering resources, books to read, self-help tips, guest blogs, “ask Mariska,” et al. There are so many inspirational and effective suggestions about ways to empower oneself in our sometimes challenging world on this website. It makes me glad to know there are people who care; who want to help and empower women and girls. I’m also happy I was invited to contribute to this site and its visitors. It is a privilege. Please visit my website [www.KateBuckleyBooks.com](http://www.KateBuckleyBooks.com) where you can find out more about my book, Choices, and my work as a writer.

And always remember that it’s your life, your choices...try to make good ones for yourself. You deserve it!

All the best, and I hope everyone is having a great 2008 so far!

Kate

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