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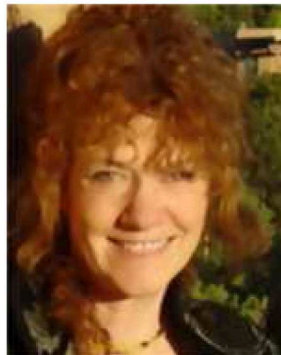
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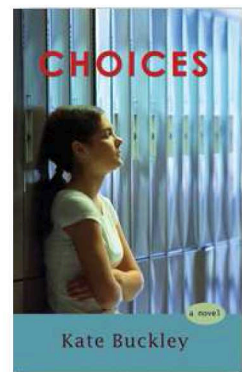
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Kate Buckley

Choices, A Young Adult Novel by Kate Buckley

A teen girl breaks all the rules and finds her life spinning out of control when binge drinking, date rape, and teen pregnancy collide. Choices is a compelling, bumpy coming-of-age journey that hurtles an over-protected girl into turmoil and confusion. The many sides of the reproductive rights issue come together in Choices, a story voiced with respect, sensitivity, heart and emotion.



TSP: I'll say this, Kate—you have courage! In your novel for young adults, CHOICES, you've taken on one of the most controversial subjects today. The book deals with date rape and its result, the choice of whether to go through a teen pregnancy or terminate it. And, all the difficult and complex issues surrounding such a scenario. Yet, as is true with most difficult subjects, these are topics that must be examined and discussed. Tell us how you came to writing CHOICES. What was the seed of this idea and how did you research it? How did you decide upon your approach?

Kate Buckley: The genesis for CHOICES came out of a short article I read in the *LA Times* more than a decade ago. A Planned Parenthood facility in the San Fernando Valley had been under a constant barrage of protests and picketing by Operation

Rescue. Women who wanted to enter the clinic had to pass through a gauntlet of demonstrators blocking the entrance. One afternoon, a mother brought her pregnant fifteen year old daughter into the clinic ... the startled doctor did a double take when he saw the woman. "Didn't I see you in the picket line last week?" he asked. She looked him in the eye and said, "This is different, this is my daughter." So, the story of an anti-choice woman whose teen daughter gets pregnant was at the heart of CHOICES.

I was working as a screenwriter in Los Angeles at the time and wrote a synopsis of it for a TV movie but when I pitched it around Hollywood, none of the networks would touch the subject matter. Too controversial, they told me ... what about the sponsors, the religious right, Reverend Falwell? "Do you have anything on infidelity?" they asked, "That's a good sell." Years later, I couldn't shake the story idea from my mind and by the time I decided to write CHOICES into a novel, we'd already been through five years of Bush administration setbacks to women's reproductive rights. It seemed like an even worse time than the mid-90s to write such a book but I started writing anyway. The story became the daughter's, not the mother's, and it just flowed.

TSP: Did marketing CHOICES present any special obstacles? How are you bringing this book to your readers?

Kate Buckley: Pro-choice groups like NARAL and NOW are excited about the book and have been very supportive. I have done a lot of events and fundraisers with them. CHOICES was in Book Expo America at the Javits center last year and it has won awards and contests.

TSP: And what kind of reception have your readers and reviewers been giving you? Any surprises for you? Are your readers all female, or are any young men reading it too? And what do you hope your readers will take away from this book after they read it?

Kate Buckley: I have had amazing responses from teens and parents and school counselors alike, and good reviews from *Ms. Magazine*, *Readers Views*, *Kirkus* and others. Readers have thanked me for writing this story and tell me it always generates a lot of discussion and healing. It will be used in the tenth grade health class of Santa Fe Preparatory school next year, and I will go to the school to co-facilitate classes. I am meeting with the superintendent of Santa Fe public schools about doing a "PEN in the classroom" series next year. Not only will we read CHOICES and generate discussion about the issues, but an English teacher and I will engage teen girls in a writing workshop, encouraging the expression of their unique voices and experiences. PEN will publish a chapbook of their writing at the end of the program.

CHOICES will also be in the health curriculum of public high schools of Ketchum, Idaho and is currently being used in a teen empowerment program there for survivors of sexual assault. CHOICES is a recommended read on Mariska.com which is Mariska

Hargitay's site for teen girls generated by her popular TV show "Law and Order: SVU." Mariska does a lot to help victims of sexual assault and also founded The Joyful Heart Foundation, dedicated to women and girls who have been raped and helping them along the road to healing and empowerment.

Estimates vary, but research shows that date or acquaintance rape accounts for about 70 percent of all sexual assaults. Because these rapes occur by someone a girl knows, someone whom she trusted, many of these violations are not reported. Often the girl blames herself for drinking or doing drugs, for putting herself in the situation, for what she was wearing, or for sneaking out. Even though she knew and believed she could trust the boy at the time, the girl believes, on some level, that she was "asking for it" or "got what she deserved." Without help and support it can be very hard for a teen to pull herself up and out of the resulting depression and self-loathing because she has trusted and now feels like a fool. When events like these are buried, they may wreak havoc on a girl's psyche and developing personality for years. I hope that reading about the journey of the girl in CHOICES will help girls realize that there is light at the end of the tunnel when something like this happens. That she can heal and learn to trust herself again.

TSP: Can you tell us a little more about your own background and how it has prepared you to write CHOICES?

Kate Buckley: I worked with the Los Angeles Commission on Assaults Against Women in a program called TAPP: Teen Abuse Prevention Project. We went into the public schools (seventh through twelfth grades), providing information and facilitating discussions with teens about domestic violence, sexual violence, alcohol and drug use. I also worked in a Burbank middle school co-facilitating a seventh and eighth grade girl's support group for two years. Young teens don't have long life experience, they don't know that feelings are ephemeral and can pass. They don't understand how to help themselves cope with traumatic events through listening to others and expressing themselves in a supportive, caring environment like the support group Kara goes to in the novel. I saw real changes and emotional growth happen for the girls in the group I facilitated over the course of a school year. In my MA program I wrote my thesis on mothers and adolescent daughters, separation and individuation, how mothers can mentor their daughters into womanhood and heal some of their own adolescent issues in the process. In Santa Fe, I administrated a science-based Life Skills program for three years in the public middle schools. It was amazing to me to see how many challenges these sixth through eighth graders were already handling in their young lives. The program proved to be very informative and helpful for them.

TSP: As a woman's rights activist, a feminist, a facilitator of support groups for girls who have survived sexual molestation and parents' divorces, what is the message or messages you most want to convey to the general public, men and women alike? What would you say to those who believe that women's liberation as a movement is a thing

of the past?

Kate Buckley: There are so many images, TV commercials and shows, Web sites and the like, that normalize objectifying and sexist attitudes against young girls. Sometimes I think we need to experience a whole new ‘consciousness raising’ movement similar to what emerged for women in the 60s and 70s.

My hope for CHOICES is that it will help and empower teen girls, that it will foster healthy relationships between teens and their parents. Relationships based on love, mutual respect and open communication. I hope the novel encourages teens to think critically, that Kara’s story will raise consciousness, not only about cultural mores and topical issues, but will make readers think twice before judging other people’s choices from the outside.

A lot of date rape, sexual assault and relationship violence is going on in our world. It is still a major way to suppress women and girls. Emotional and verbal shut down neither empowers nor heals. Our culture doesn’t really encourage girls to speak out. It is perhaps more subtle today, but there is still this sense that “nice” girls are caring and considerate.

I hope that readers of CHOICES will realize that if they, or their friends, have been sexually violated they should speak about it and seek help – from a school counselor, a parent, or other trusted adult – and never keep it a secret or blame themselves. A girl’s ability to make peace with a painful and traumatic experience comes out of being responsible for her own process and self. Acceptance, compassion and self-love have to come from a girl’s understanding of who she is and who she is becoming. In CHOICES, the support group becomes a safe haven which allows Kara to feel accepted for who she is and to stop judging herself for what has happened to her. Ultimately, she recognizes Jake’s culpability and gives herself a break.

TSP: Kate, how do you feel about the objectification of women today? I recently watched a hockey game on a sports channel with a male friend and saw a commercial for shaving gel in which women were portrayed as, well, they were in miniature and dressed in green shirts and white hot pants and were sucked up a man’s nostrils ... let’s just say it ...women as snot, laughing and dancing cheerfully all the way up that big male nose. What kind of message does this convey to girls and women in our society ... is this just harmless entertainment, a bit of comedy? Or should we be paying more attention to this kind of portrayal of women? And if so, why?

Kate Buckley: I haven’t seen that commercial ... and hope not to! Certainly it doesn’t sound harmless, nor does it sound entertaining. I doubt you would see that same commercial with the genders reversed. Objectification and sexism are, in my opinion, alive and flourishing in America today. I hope that women will respond to ads like this, and write letters to the offending companies – stir up some dust!

I really admired the way Peter Segal spoke out about the Disney version of “Horton Hears a Who”, I think it was called “Horton hears a Sexist” in which the Mayor of Whoville had 96 daughters...and one son, who ultimately saves the day. In the original Seuss story, there were NO sons, the youngest daughter saved Whoville as Seuss wrote it. Segal has three daughters. I hope he was not alone in complaining about the way this story was altered to make a boy the hero. The movie is enormously popular and millions of little girls are seeing it, many of them never having read the original book.

TSP: What can we do as parents, as teachers, as human beings, to make this a safer world for young women, women of any age, really, to live and thrive?

Kate Buckley: One way I feel our government has really failed our teens in America is by promoting and funding “abstinence only” education. It’s great that 15 states have now rejected the federal Title V matching funds for these programs in favor of comprehensive sex education. The fear-based, medically inaccurate “abstinence only” programs proved to be highly ineffective, both in delaying sexually activity among teens and preventing teen pregnancies and have resulted in a rise in the teen birth rate for the first time since 1991 and the increase in the number of girls between the ages of 14 and 19 who have sexually transmitted infections is staggering.

A ‘teen pregnancy pact’ was just discovered, along with seventeen pregnant girls, at a high school in Gloucester, Massachusetts, affordable birth control has been suppressed, eleven states are trying to push bills into state legislative sessions that will create ‘equal rights for embryos’ in hopes of overturning of Roe vs Wade – none of these things bode well for the future of our young women. With any luck, the proverbial pendulum is going to begin a swing back in the other direction and sometime soon! I really hope that parents, teachers and concerned human beings everywhere will get involved and be actively engaged in making efforts to keep safe, legal reproductive choices available for girls and women. If we want their futures to be healthy, bright and empowered, it is imperative.

TSP: Thank you for your thought provoking and important work, Kate.

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