

76°F / 59°F

Tomorrow



Monday



Tuesday



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[Tween Book a Treat That Rings True – Sandra Coopersmith](#)



To paraphrase Kermit the Frog, it's not easy being tween. Fortunately, "Lucy and CeCee's How to Survive (and Thrive) in Middle School" captures that angst with abundant humor laced with just the right amount of wisdom.

Consider this a literary alert to those whose daughters, granddaughters or nieces belong to that fascinating subset of humanity aged 9-14. Even if your tween's reading ardor equates to "I'd rather be poked in the eye with a stick," she will be captivated by this edifying and entertaining trek into the challenges of middle school.

Written by Kimberly Dana, a former resident of Culver City who currently lives in Nashville, TN, the book, published in April of this year, includes a variety of tween experiences such as skater slacker boyfriend crushes, BFF shopping trips to the mall and BEE (Bitter Eternal Enemies) text wars. Dana, a middle school teacher for over 15 years with considerable time in the trenches of tweendom, enjoys the synergistic relationship with the students she teaches to write who, in turn, provide her with insight into their world.

"It's an honor to teach and influence future generations," she said. "I've worked in the business world and although it was valuable experience, adults don't make me laugh like kids do. Kids are the emotional truth-tellers of the world and they keep it real."

Teaching and writing came naturally to her.

Dana explained that "my mother is a teacher and my father is a writer, so I was heavily influenced by my parents. But the truth is, I love teaching and I love writing. They are my two passions, and the fact that I am able to share my love for the written word with kids makes me very fortunate. My author motto is **LOVES TO WRITE FOR KIDS – LOVES FOR KIDS TO WRITE**. That pretty much sums it up."

Her success as a writer is not likely to prod her into leaving teaching, as "tweens are such a daily inspiration, I would hate to give them up. They are my muse because they are actually experiencing the themes I write about: Self-Identity, Growing Up, Adolescence, Peer Pressure, Cyberbullying, Friendships, Cliques, First Crushes. As much as I love writing, I don't plan on quitting teaching anytime soon."

So what do her students, their parents and school administrators think about all this?

"My students love having an author for a teacher and see it as an inspiration for their own journey into publishing," she said. "Parents and administrators couldn't have been more helpful or encouraging." Adding that the book "was actually the centerpiece for the Back to School feature in Nashville's 'The Tennessean,'" she commented, unsurprisingly, that "it's been a good year!"

In reflecting upon the changes she's observed in her teaching career, Dana noted that "the greatest change in education is the pervasive use of technology. A teacher has to make a decision to either snub or embrace it, and I've chosen the latter. For instance, I allow my students to use their iPhones and iPads, etc. to read and do research. Many will submit phenomenal PowerPoint presentations in lieu of the written book report or write a text conversation between two literary characters. If used correctly, technology is an amazing portal for learning."

Dana believes the most important thing she's learned as a teacher is "we are all learners. The key is to find what we are passionate about. I think the same is true of writing. We all have a story to tell; therefore, we're all potential writers. The secret to writing and publishing is the 'stick with it' factor.

Lots of people want to write, but few are willing to do what it takes. Perseverance is key.”

She’s a prime example, as the story of her successful emergence as an author is truly one for the books.

“It was a crazy year in that I had three books released within a span of six months,” Dana said. ‘Pretty Dolls’ (Tate Publishing, 2011) was my first book. It’s a children’s picture book about Gracie, a homely doll who teaches glamorized dolls that true beauty lives in the heart. I went on NBC to interview and as a serendipitous consequence, ‘Pretty Dolls’ has been embraced as an anti-bullying tool by teachers across the country and even won Best Children’s Book of the Year (Reader Views).

“Next I had my e-book ‘Cheerage Fearage’ released by Wild Child Publishing, which is an amazing e-book publisher located here in Culver City. ‘Cheerage Fearage’ has also won awards for Best Young Adult Book by Readers Favorites and the New York Festival of Books. Then ‘Lucy and CeCee’ came out a month later, snagging honors from the New York and San Francisco Festival of Books Each book has a special place in my heart and I’m blessed to have a trifecta of children’s, middle grade and young adult books published and received so favorably.”

A glance at the table of contents of this latest book reveals 34 chapters with titles such as “The 4-1-1: How to Handle Gossip,” “How to Survive Gym,” “Passion for Fashion,” and “Who Are You? Cliques and Labels.” The book’s structure, in which the girls offer advice interspersed with diary entries, texts and emails, makes it a fun as well as a practical read.

This is an invaluable guide not just for tweens but those who love them and who, having once upon a time been denizens of that world (albeit now a radically altered one with different technology, garb and jargon), will experience several twinges of recognition and empathy.

And more adventures involving outgoing, boy-crazy Lucy and bookish, insightful CeCee may well be forthcoming. “I really fell in love with these two girls so I’d like to write a sequel where they go to high school or maybe even a corresponding boy version,” Dana said.

The book has garnered several glowing reviews.

BlueInk Review’s Starred Review described it as “. . . packing useful information into a fun, frothy read . . . Any sixth grade girl who’s facing middle school as if it were a firing squad will find great comfort here. Both entertaining and useful . . . a winner.”

Midwest Book Review found that it contained “. . . plenty of humor and adventure . . . not to be missed.”

Clarion Reviews lauded it as “. . . a fast-paced, funny, and insightful book that will serve to clarify typical teen lingo and behavior for adults and give guidelines to tween and teenage kids who are having trouble navigating the middle school milieu.”

Kirkus Reviews gave a thoughtful thumbs up to the strength of character possessed by Lucy and CeCee: “. . . But while the girls’ teachings are often amusing, what really makes Dana’s book exceptional are the girls themselves. The girls’ approach to more sensitive issues such as cyberbullying and peer pressure to drink or do drugs is intelligent and responsible. Lucy and CeCee’s target audience may consist solely of tweens, but this is a book that can educate readers of any age.”

“Boys bully physically but girls go for the psyche, which is much more dangerous,” Dana emphasized. “Cyberbullying is detrimental because it’s done in the dark under the adult radar, and everything on the Internet is written in pen. I wanted to write about cyberbullying because I’ve seen the devastating consequences firsthand. With the Internet as the perfect, covert dispatching medium, cyberbullying is rampant and I wanted to do my part to help educate tweens and adults alike.”

One can be generationally removed from Lucy and CeCee, but their experiences still resonate. Bullying, peer pressure, crushes – they’ve always existed and will likely continue as long as kids have to cope with the myriad challenges inherent in transitioning from childhood while figuring out how to fit in without sacrificing their core identity, a template for a lifelong process.

“The universal experience I wanted to really capture and hone in on is the crossover from parents to peers taking precedence in a tween’s life,” Dana said. “It’s scary and thrilling at the same time, but a necessary part of growing up.”

Asked if she has advice to offer parents of tweens to help them facilitate their kids’ middle school journey, Dana responded, “Yes, read my book – LOL! Middle school is an evolution process, so I would advise parents to be involved without being overbearing. Help with projects. Keep up correspondence and communication with teachers. But most importantly, be your tween’s ultimate cheerleader! They feel it and it makes a difference.”

Dana hopes her readers will see her book as “a big hug that tells tweens it’s going to be okay! Middle school is a journey and it might be difficult at times, but you will make it.” And in creating and depicting their adventures, crises and resolutions, she has served her demographic well.

For this entertaining and edifying entry into the netherworld of middle school, Dana scores a solid A.



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