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That's Why I Wrote This Song: A YA Novel Running on a New Road

'I don't even know what I was running for - I guess I just felt like it.' Holden says in J.D. Salinger's, *The Catcher in the Rye*, the YA book that spearheaded this genre.

Realistic YA literature is running, pushing the boundaries and according to Mike Shuttleworth from the Centre for Youth Literature, 'going places it has never gone before'. Search for identity is the driver, in this cutting edge literature that seeks to answer those perennial questions – Who am I? Why am I here?

YA books have been marked, by entering increasingly taboo areas from sexuality in its different forms including gay love, drugs, 'Rebel without a Cause' to the many aspects of the private world of youth. While dark at times, these books are often humorous, satiric, explorative, controversial, out-there literature. To date, my books have been travelling this YA pathway. 'The Cave' is confronting youth male culture exploring male humour, mateship, violence and courage. There are also a few Rave parties and some tattoos thrown in for good measure. 'Butterflies' is female youth culture exploring identity, love, disability, independence.

As an author, YA literature is hard writing as I plunge into the truth of the adolescent world. YA readers know a liar, so my books have to be honest which means that writing them hurts sometimes, is funny sometimes, crushes me at other times and can attract controversy from adults. But there are friends and love and relationships inside the pages, except sometimes, you're alone.

My books are 'running', like other confronting YA books that seek honesty. Part of my honesty, has involved delving into my own life, both now and growing up. It has involved my relationship with my children, Jamie and Tory. It's included extensive research.

However 'That's Why I Wrote This Song' is a new road. It was my teenage daughter Tory Gervay who showed it to me. This road is not a detour. It's a new running track, melding YA literature into lyrics, music, film. 'That's Why I Wrote This Song' is a collaborative work, where Tory writes the lyrics and music that are integral to the story, characters and theme. It's also has the dimension of film, where a young producer translated Tory's song 'Psycho Dad' into a film clip.

The two songs, 'Psycho Dad' and 'I Want To Be Found' written and sung by Tory can be downloaded from the web. The film clip of 'Psycho Dad' scripted by Rachel Guerry the young film maker, can also be downloaded from the web.

'That's Why I Wrote This Song' is about four sixteen year old girls connected through music. For many young adults, music is their voice on their search for identity. 'That's Why I Wrote This Song' is also about the girls' relationships with their fathers and how that impacts on their relationships with boys, each other and who they are. Together the girls create a band, Not Perfect.

To ensure honesty, I researched the youth music scene. It was demanding. I was the oldest person at the punk rock concert in the Hordern Pavilion. I endlessly listened to Eminem and Good Charlotte DVDs, writing notes, dreaming the music, imagining jumping into the mosh pit. Rock music blared from my study and the new ring tone on my mobile phone was a rock song.

However I needed Tory to be part of the process developing her lyrics as I developed my text. The process was fraught with mother-daughter relationship issues. Sometimes it was so happy. Other times, it wasn't. Our relationship was really tested to the limit as Tory recorded her songs for the music producer Tony Buchen in his studios. I was not wanted. We survived.

The lyrics of Tory's songs develop through the book, revealing the journey of the girls, where:

*Why do I feel so alone,
Like I'm standing here all by myself,
When there are people all around,
I am lost but I want to be found*

(From Tory's song, I Want To Be Found)

to that declaration by Pip and Karen for independence from their fathers:-

*You made me feel always scared,
I knew you never cared,
You left me all broken and scarred,
And made our life so hard,
I've got my family,
And I hope you can see,
That I don't want you around,
I've got my feet on the ground*

(From Tory's song, Psycho Dad.)

The film clip was a new dimension that developed when Rachel Guerry expressed interest in translating the book and Tory's song 'Psycho Dad' into film. I have known Rachel all her life. She has always been creative, emotional, passionate and talented, and she identified with 'That's Why I Wrote This Song'. I knew it was right. The film clip by Rachel Guerry involved fourteen drafts of the script and listening to 'Psycho Dad' thousands of times until she internalised the text and music. Her visual interpretation takes the book into new areas of creativity and technology. The film shoot, editing, process were hard and collaborative and important on this new road.

'That's Why I Wrote This Song' has been an amazing journey crossing mediums and bringing the creativity of young adults to the book. Excitingly, it gives options to readers to enter the story through the songs or through the film clip or through the text, then mix them, taking those parts that reach them. I feel like I'm running on a new road with two talented and creative young adults, adding a new dimension to YA literature.