



***Maybe I Will* by Laurie Gray**

Why I Wrote ***Maybe I Will***

Maybe I Will started with a poem I wrote when I was in high school about finding the character that is really me. The poem is included in Chapter 13 and called “My Character.” I’m a member of a local Society of Children’s Book Writer’s and Illustrator’s critique group, and when I had shared that poem, one of my writer friends said, “It seems like there’s enough there for a novel.”

I started thinking about the Shakespeare quote that “All the world’s a stage,” and decided to research character by reading *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*. In the process I became quite enamored with Shakespeare and intrigued by the fact that all of Shakespeare’s characters, even the women, were played by men, because women were not allowed on stage as actors. Shakespeare explored this gender bias quite comically in *As You Like It*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Twelfth Night* by having the women characters disguise themselves as men, so that the male actor had to act like a woman posing as a man.

At the same time, I was working as a deputy prosecuting attorney handling juvenile sex offenses, and as I was deciding which cases to charge and specifically what crimes to charge, I often found myself questioning my own gender biases and asking myself if I would feel differently about a case if the gender of the suspect and victim were reversed. There were many cases similar to what happens to Sandy. If Sandy is female, then there’s almost a presumption that she consented to the assault absent evidence that she was prepared to fight to the extreme of her own death. If Sandy is male, then we prefer to think of it as “hazing” rather than sexual assault or assume that Sandy must be gay.

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That's when I came up with the idea of writing the novel in the first person and never identifying the main character as male or female. I wrote the entire book with both genders in mind, testing each scene and dialogue with Sandy as both. Overall, I found Sandy to be very human and realistic regardless of gender. This struck me as especially powerful since the one thing that I've learned by working in the area of sexual assault is that it is an assault, and it's not about sex. Sex is just the weapon used to control and manipulate a victim, inducing fear, shame and, too often, silence. I wrote *Maybe I Will* to break the silence that persists with regard to sexual assault and gender bias.

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