

William Harbron

From: Barry Lyga <barrylyga@mac.com>
Sent: Tuesday, October 31, 2023 11:19 AM
To: William Harbron
Subject: Boy Toy hearing
Attachments: Psychiatric Services.pdf

Hello, Dr. Harbron,

Through the vagaries of the internet, I've been made aware of the hearing tomorrow night to determine the fate of my novel, BOY TOY, in your district. First, I would like to thank you for the letter you wrote to Julie Porter in early October and your comments therein. Unlike Porter, you actually understood the book.

I wanted to bring two things to your attention, one minor, one significant: Porter claims I did not consult with psychiatric experts when writing the book, but of course she couldn't know that. In fact, she knows nothing of my writing process. Indeed, for all she knows, the book was based entirely on personal experience.

It wasn't. It was based on in-depth research. It was based on discussion with abuse survivors and law enforcement officials.

Porter claims there is no value to the book: I have received communications over the years from teens who've told me how helpful the book was to them in understanding their own abuse or that of a peer.

Since Porter feels it necessary to refer to a psychiatric professional in her screed, I'll do the same: Writing in the December 2008 issue of PSYCHIATRIC SERVICES, David S. Heath, a psychiatrist at Cambridge Memorial Hospital and a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, wrote:

"Together, the reader and Josh discover the truth—particularly the **psychological** truth—of how that pivotal event happened. [emphasis mine]" And: "All the subtitles [sic] and ambiguities of adult-child sexual relationships are explored in a tasteful understated fashion."

He goes on to say more, praising the book. I've attached a PDF of the original piece.

Now on to the minor matter... Porter takes particular issue with the subtitle to Boy Toy, claiming that it is inaccurate and misleading. But...

There is NO SUBTITLE to Boy Toy! The text she cites is the title of my first novel. It's literally the publisher stating that I also wrote this other book. A very common publishing practice!

Honestly, someone who can't understand the vagaries of cover copy has no business judging an entire novel.

Thank you again for your kind and thoughtful words about my book, and best of luck tomorrow night.

Best, Barry

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tice know that it is very difficult to describe the changes that practice has on one's cognition. In meditation, describing the impact of behavioral change is more possible. The author tries to do both.

The delightful, but promiscuous, Ross provides food services for movie crews. He is popular and successful in his career. He has many love relationships and is teased in his apartment building for the numbers of women seen coming and going. Ross is the type of man who never makes enemies with ex-lovers. His main offense is snoring, due to a blockage in his sinus passages. He finally decides to have the surgery to correct the problem. He fears he will die, and his self-centeredness is fully revealed. Ross has his surgery to unblock his sinuses and in the process meets nurse Iliana. She is unlike any of Ross' previous women, many of them actresses from the movie crews he feeds. The two fall in love. Ross also has a sister named Bonnie, who is even more self-focused. Bonnie becomes suici-

dal whenever her love life is off kilter, so she is frequently suicidal. She has a beloved son, Bryce. Ross is a devoted uncle to Bryce. Ross's good nature is abundantly clear with his nephew.

The story unfolds from here. The novel is interesting on many levels. It is well written, and that is a pleasure in itself. The clinician will find the characters coherent, and their conflicts and how they manage life challenges unfold with verity. Psychotherapists with serious meditation practices might find this book somewhat frustrating, knowing that it is difficult to describe the impact that meditation has on mind states. The author does a good job with the main character, who mediates struggles with the impermanent nature of all arising phenomena. The book will appeal to anyone practicing psychotherapy. The characters struggle with life crises and transform their lives with affirming resilience—here with the use of meditation. The novel affirms the helpfulness that meditation can have in healing.

ion. There are ambiguities in Josh's feelings. At first he feels very special and grown up; he imagines that he is seducing his "hot" history teacher. Fascinated, the reader watches all this gradually unfold, like a slow-motion train wreck. The dialogue is particularly good: authentic, smart, funny, and convincing, especially the transcripts of his sessions with his psychiatrist. It is only by the last chapter, with the help of Rachel and his own brave confrontation with Mrs. Sherman after she is released from jail, that the damage done to Josh and to his ability to relate to his peer group—especially girls—becomes clear. The fiendish cleverness of the sexual predator is brilliantly portrayed without a sexual scene ever being described. It is all done by inference. Mrs. Sherman has turned him into a seasoned Lothario with a teenager's body and mind.

Only after his own efforts and the tender mature support of Rachel—illustrated in some wonderfully touching love scenes—does Josh fully heal. The book ends on an upbeat note with Josh getting into an Ivy League school. This book, besides being a good read, provides great insight into sexual abuse of boys and would be of particular interest to those working in that field.

Boy Toy

by Barry Lyga; Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007, 410 pages, \$16.95

David S. Heath, F.R.C.P.C.

Although this novel is about the sexual molestation of seventh-grade student Josh Mendel by his history teacher, Mrs. Sherman, it is not a serious, grim documentary type of work. There is no explicit recounting of the victim's experience. The author, Barry Lyga, has a light touch and *Boy Toy* is a treat to read. The main character, Josh, is the typical male adolescent protagonist, cast in the same mold as Holden Caulfield and Adrian Mole—highly intelligent and full of amusing wry insights into the sad state of the adult world. Gluing the novel together is baseball. Josh is a high-school baseball star, as are his best friend, Zik, and his girlfriend,

Rachel. The book is replete with baseball statistics (Josh is also a math wizard), images, and metaphors.

The plot is told in a very clever way. The reader and Josh are both in the dark as to what really happened that night of spin the bottle with Rachel—both age 12. Acting like a libertine twice his age, he rips off her clothes and starts to do things to her that have been taught to him by his seventh-grade teacher, Mrs. Sherman. Together, the reader and Josh discover the truth—particularly the psychological truth—of how that pivotal event happened. Effortlessly, the novel flits back and forth between Josh as a 12-year-old and Josh as an 18-year-old about to graduate.

All the subtleties and ambiguities of adult-child sexual relationships are explored in a tasteful understated fash-

The Learners: A Novel

by Chip Kidd; New York, Scribner, 2008, 258 pages, \$26

Robert Feder, M.D.

This is the second novel by Chip Kidd, a graphic artist turned author. The book describes the experiences of Happy during his first job as a graphic artist at an advertising firm in New Haven, Connecticut. This is a continuation of Kidd's first novel, *The Cheese Monkeys*, which recounts Happy's education at a state university. Kidd's training as a graphic artist is evident throughout the book, starting with its unique self-designed cover. Typefaces and layouts in the book

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