



About **If I Could Tell You:**

Reading age: 13+

As Kelly Marshall approaches her 16th birthday, she grapples with all the usual pressures: friends, school and, especially, sex.

In this turmoil, she turns to her late mother's schoolgirl dairies. What she finds there is not the comfort she seeks, but horrific descriptions of sexual abuse by Kelly's grandfather.

Unaware of the depth of feeling that her lifelong friend, Simon, has for her, Kelly turns to the sexy, good-looking John Schroeder, whose attitude to study is rather less intense than her own and who is

keen to have sex with her.

What should she do? And what about Simon? More than ever she craves for a mother to turn to.

Kelly must come to terms with her mother's dark secret, hoping that hidden somewhere in the dairies are the answers to her own pressing problems.

Reviews of *If I could tell you*

"Kelly Marshall thinks trying to sort out her adolescent feelings is loaded with problems but the discovery of her dead mother's diary and its explicit descriptions of sexual abuse by Kelly's grandfather helps her put life in perspective. Difficult-to-put-down reading and an appealing cover. A set of teacher's notes is available on application to the publisher. Year 9-10 (age 13-14)" ***Around the Bookshops Secondary Edition*** August 1997

"I finished *If I Could Tell You* in one sitting after meeting the author. Her real-life story is sensitive, compelling and a darn sight more relevant than some of the novels in the curriculum when I went to school." Jacqui Kerr-Bell ***Northern Advocate*** 17 Sept 1997

"...very likely to engage the sympathy and understanding of teenagers...a useful book for teachers, counsellors or parents...Perhaps most convincing is the weird disjunction between Beth's ordinary family life and the frightening times when parents cannot be relied on. Beth can be full of self-assertion and rage, protecting herself successfully from her father. At other times there are signs of misery and self hatred, and the reader fears that she is becoming a well trained victim...Small wonder that fifth form readers reported very positively on this book..." Rose Lovell-Smith, ***NZ Herald***

"..worthy of study - it has a dual plot, strong characters and strong style..."

Sunday News

"...The story is a cracker, in terms of the narrative and the setting and the liveliness of the story... It's really super...As an English teacher, I know that literature is very important and I know that we need touchstone literature that enables children to read about their world and their lives and from that to go on to read about other worlds and other lives. And this one of those touchstone books...." Stuart Middleton, Secondary Principal, Auckland College of Education

"A powerful and sensitive story." **Listener Women's Book Festival.**

"Written alternately in the present tense and in diary extracts, Tania Roxborough has presented with compassion and empathy, a believable novel which tackles a highly emotive topic - in a no-nonsense manner it conveys the tragedy of incest and the strength of its victims. The diary entries reflect the vocabulary and point of view of the young girl writing them.

This is not a negative book at all - there is a lot of strength and determination and at the end both Kelly and her mother are stronger in spirit despite their personal losses - though for the reader a box of tissues will come in handy. The author needs commending on her insight and courage in writing this novel which will no doubt cause considerable discussion and will hopefully make it into the right hands." Julie Harper, Manager of Jabberwocky Books, reviewing for Magpies.

"Life for Kelly becomes much more complicated when she retrieves a wine box of papers from the back of her father's wardrobe. This box contains the diaries of her dead mother. For Kelly is at the crossroads of life where boyfriends, awakening sexual desire and conflict result in her need to be once more mothered. But there is no consolation of an actual mother in Kelly's life (though Dad and older brother are protective towards her) so Kelly goes in search of her mother through the diaries. But the diaries reveal a deep and disturbing secret. Her mother was sexually abused by her grandfather. This knowledge challenges Kelly. How could fathers be like this? Parallel to this search for understanding is the need to work through her own dilemmas. The dialogue is natural, the events believable, the story intriguing. With a title that is problem orientated and when a book is prefaced by a publishers' note that teacher's notes are available upon application to the publisher, then the scene could be set for a bibliotherapeutic novel with little to recommend it. Fortunately, this is not the case here. Psychologically speaking, the development of characterization rings true, the ethical dimension is explored through both events and the character's response to these events. Through her mother's diaries and her own experience, Kelly learns the true value of her being. She has indeed been 'mothered'. The ending is quite poetic but leaves the reader the gift of hope. Highly recommended for teenage/young adult readers. JMCK **Reading Time** Vol 41. No.4

"Tania Roxborough, better known for her drama publications, explores in this short novel the sensitive issue of sexual abuse and a teenager's awakening sexuality through the parallel stories of Kelly, a 16 year-old seventh former (sic), and her mother, Beth. The dual narrative is accomplished through Kelly's discovery of her mother's diaries, written as a young teenager, extracts of which provide the reader with Beth's story first hand.

Beth died tragically when Kelly was 12, but it is only at the age of 16 that she discovers the diaries and reads of her mother's horrifying childhood at the hands of an abusive father and unconcerned, drunken mother. Kelly herself is experiencing the typical adolescent confusion about her own identity and awakening sexuality, all of which is explored through her relationships with Simon, a close friend, John, her new boyfriend, and Cherie, a bully with whom she has on-going problems. Her family is loving and supportive, in stark contrast to the type of family Beth had to endure, and provides a good balance for the more negative relationships.

Through the linked stories of Beth and Kelly, the author touches on a number of issues to which many teenagers would relate, such as school, bullying, friendship, peer pressure and sex. The dual stories are told simply and at times perhaps too superficially, with resolutions to some very serious issues being handled a little too glibly. However, much of the novel offers a springboard for in-depth discussion about the issues raised, though this would have to be handled with a great deal of sensitivity by a teacher.

The poems written by Beth in her diaries poignantly reveal the depth of her trauma and are well worth close examination. There is also an unusually illuminating moment in the novel (I had hoped for more of these!) when Kelly and her father are discussing the revelations in the diaries. He says to her: "You funny old thing Kelly, sometimes it's cathartic to mourn the evil men do. It shows you're still alive; you still have a conscience and that you can still love." This would certainly spark a challenging exploration of the novel's pivotal issue. A word of caution, though. The explicit language and sexual reference may need to be a consideration in the choice of the novel as a class study. The teacher's resource which is available for purchase with the novel suggests that it is suitable for form four or form five students and includes a number of recommended activities, written using the English Curriculum achievement objectives, but I would recommend strongly that teachers read the text before making the choice. Form four students may not have the necessary maturity to cope with the material in a class setting, though the novel could certainly be offered for individual study to interested students and may prove useful to guidance counsellors in schools." Lesley Shepherd
e:mag mid year 1998 AATEL

The book, *If I could tell you*, by Tania Roxborough is a really awesome book, dealing with all the usual teenage pressures. The main character, Kelly Marshall, is coping through her teenage years without a mother, and finding it hard. She lives her life with the support of her father, older brother, and best-friend-since-birth, Simon Hassell, who to her is no more than a friend.

Kelly starts reading her mother's diaries, and finds out some disturbing things that went on in her mother's teenage years. Things turn bad, when Kelly, a little vulnerable, starts

going out with the school rebel, John Schroeder. The only thing on John's mind is sex and Kelly doesn't see it. Predictably, Simon the courageous best friend, jumps to the rescue and heroically saves the day, making everything come up roses.

This book is written really well and uses the usual teenage language, so its easy to follow. I really enjoyed it because its about people in my age group, dealing with the same sort of things. The ending leaves you wanting more to finish it but is still good. I would recommend it to all my friends as I think it's really cool.

(Reviewed by Erin Smitheran - Young Fiction - NZ Writers' Website
[www.nzwriters.co.nz])
