

cj: Can you tell us a little about how The Truth about Truman School came to be?

Dori: Sure...I'd done several books with Albert Whitman (Boxcar Children as well as books of my own), so the people there knew me pretty well...

Dori: They wanted to do a book on cyberbullying, so they asked whether I'd be interested in proposing something....

Lori from x.x.x.176 joined the chat 59 minutes ago

cj: Just a reminder, we don't interrupt the author until she signals she is done with GA for go ahead.

Dori: I was, of course. I knew right from the start I wanted to tell a story about cyberbullying from multiple viewpoints, but it took a little longer to actually find the story...

Dori: Once I got to know the characters, the story sort of took care of itself. GA

cj: Where did you do your research? It fits middle school so perfectly, I wondered if you worked in a middle school?

Beckie Weinheimer: Dori did you research for this book, spend a lot of time on line?

Dori: No, I've never worked in a middle school, but that's my favorite age to write for. I have two children...

Dori: So they were probably my best sources of research. I also spent a lot of time researching online...

Dori: I looked up newspaper and magazine articles and read about actual cases of cyberbullying that were going on around the world...

Dori: It was a little overwhelming to read about, really. Eventually I had to stop reading/researching and start writing. GA

Barb: Dori, How do you get to know the characters?Did you spend time in a middle school or high school?

Dori: I was an active volunteer in the elementary school while my kids were in school...

Dori: I've also gone into one of the local schools and read my WIP to a 6th grade class while I was writing...that was a really interesting experience...

Dori: I would have the teacher read and I would sit in the back and watch the kids to see whether they were paying attention or not...

Dori: then I would pass out a one page sheet of questions for the kids to answer about what they just heard...I did this BEFORE we had any discussion...

Dori: so the kids weren't swayed by what other kids had to say during the discussion...

Hubby: Good procedures, Dori.

Dori: I also facilitate a teen writer's group at the local library. So yes, I spend a fair amount of time with kids.

Dori: GA

Hubby: Were you bullied as a kid?

Dori: No, not really. I was very quiet and shy. I felt ignored. But my husband was bullied at one point. And my older son was, too. So it's a hot button for me. GA

cj: How is the book doing, sales??

Barb: How many of us were bullied as kids - I know I was (and at times still am - bullying is not the exclusive realm of kids

Dori: That's a good point, Barb. Bullying DOESN'T necessarily end with graduation.

Beckie Weinheimer: Not me but I do have one experience of bullying a really annoying teacher's pet girl in sixth grade, and I feel shame to this day

Barb: This is a topic that has appeal for most of us I suspect so glad you wrote this book which brings the issue into 21st century communication

Dori: I bet most people have had the experience of being a bully, being bullied, and/or being a bystander at some point in their lives.

Barb: Your bystander comment really strikes me - I think we all can find ourselves in that category - I know I can.

Beckie Weinheimer: yes, it felt really authentic to me.

Dori: I mean, I think most people have experienced all three. (I certainly have)

cj: Web site? Tell us about it. Who set it up? Who monitors it?

Dori: You mean www.truthabouttruman.com?

cj: YES

Dori: My husband helped me set it up...I monitor it.

cj: Maybe explain as some might not have visited it

Dori: Sure...I like to think of it as a resource on cyberbullying as well as a promotional website for the book...

Dori: There are classroom materials and discussion guides on the website. There's also a forum where people can talk about bullying (or about the book)...

Dori: The forum isn't getting a whole lot of traffic (I imagine it's difficult for kids to publicly post bullying experiences), but it's getting some...

Dori: I do get kids writing to me about their bullying experiences sometimes, though...

Dori: There's also a section on the website called "Where's the book?" It's like "Where's George" ...you know, the game where you register a dollar bill?...

Dori: I've sent out 14 copies of the book (mostly to kids around the country who have written me more than one fan letter) and asked them to read the book, log it on the website and pass it on...

Dori: It's kind of interesting to see where the books travel...one of them started in Utah and is in China now! GA

Barb: Wow - thanks for this Dori and cj - I just checked it out. I am off to a teacher-librarian meeting soon (media specialist to you US folks) and will mention it.

Beckie Weinheimer: Wow that is so cool Dori, do you mind if I copy that idea! I've just been looking at your website, and thought the traveling book idea was so fun

Hubby: THAT'S COOL!

cj: When the teens write to you, are they mostly sharing their stories, or asking for help?

Dori: Wonderful, Barb! I'd love to get the word out about the website.

Dori: Sure, Beckie...steal away! :)

Dori: Both, CJ...sometimes they tell me about difficulties they're having and they ask me to help...I've had a couple tell me they saw themselves in some of the characters in my book and didn't realize the effect they were having on other people...

cj: Do you tell them how to trace the harassment?

Dori: That's exactly why I wrote the book in multiple POV...I think a lot of times these aren't "bad" kids. They aren't necessarily TRYING to be mean...they just don't realize how someone else is going to respond...

Dori: Not to mention online communication is so difficult sometimes...we've got emoticons, but they don't substitute for facial response, tone/pitch of voice, body language etc. Sometimes words by themselves look awfully cold.

Barb: I so agree Dori - when we are young we have NO idea how our words or actions affect others. That's what I like about your main characters - Zebby and Amr - they are so real!

Dori: I told one girl to talk to her parents about going through the Internet provider to trace the harassment. (She didn't want her parents to know she was being bullied.)

Dori: Thank you, Barb.

Beckie Weinheimer: how sad, about the girl, but good she has you to confide to, Dori.

cj: I think it is yahoo that offers a set up that whenever your name is used on the Internet, you are notified. Does anyone know about that?

Barb: No

Dori: Well, a lot of times they tell me their story and we e-mail a couple of times, but then they I don't hear from them again. So most of the time I don't know whether the situation is getting any better or not.

cj: Parents can track for there kids with it

cj: their kids

Dori: Is that like a google alert on yahoo? Or is it something else?

cj: I am not sure

Dori: I use google alerts myself, but I don't do anything with yahoo.

cj: Could you explain a google alert?

Dori: It's something you can set up so you receive an e-mail telling you when whatever-you've-set is mentioned online. For instance, I have mine set up so I get an alert when my name or any of my book titles are mentioned online or in newspapers. GA

Hubby: Have the middle schools in your area discovered your existence and your book, or do you have to travel to another state before anyone pays you any attention?

Beckie Weinheimer: I get them too, you find out interesting things being said about you or your book you might not find out about otherwise. Back to the cyber bullying, I think it is such a mixed bag for the kids if they tell their parents they might lose their privacy online, parents looking out for them or not allowing them on

Dori: Ha! Good question, Hubby. The libraries know of my existence. I've done programs at several of the libraries. In fact, I was pleasantly surprised how open some of the kids who showed up to one of these programs were...

cj: Beckie, there isn't any privacy online--it is public space

Dori: Most of these kids didn't know each other, but they talked very openly about bullying and cyberbullying at their respective schools. There were a couple of older ladies in the audience who were shocked to hear such things went on.

Dori: GA

Dori: Exactly, Beckie!

Dori: And sometimes they just plain don't want to admit that it's happening. They're embarrassed and don't want their parents to know for that reason.

Beckie Weinheimer: yes, it's a public space but parents rarely travel to the same spots as their children, its a private world away from the parents

cj: I think the allure of the Internet can be overwhelming--and most of us forget it is public space

Dori: Most of us aren't even aware of just HOW public it is.

cj: There aren't many parents who can keep up with their kids on the Internet or phone texting

Dori: What you say online doesn't ever really go away. Kids need to be more aware of that.

Barb: Agree cj - I know I can't

cj: Instant messaging and cell phone are the cyberbully's most used tools

Barb: Well those tools are in some way so anonymous.

cj: that's what people want to believe--but most everything can be tracked

Dori: That's true, cj (about keeping up with your kids on the Internet). I have told my children that I CAN check their e-mail and their web history any time I want and to be aware of that.

Barb: Thanks for that reminder cj - and Dori I have no idea how to do that and I suspect many parents are like me

cj: Beckie, I was thinking about what you said--school is a private world away from their parents too

cj: Back to the book. I thought Sarah was an interesting character her not talking--brilliant. Where did you get that idea?

Dori: At least when the bullying happens at school, they get a break when they come home...

Dori: But this online bullying occurs 24/7...there's no escape!

Dori: Actually, Sarah was a late addition to the book. She wasn't in the first draft at all...

Dori: My editor thought we needed one more character...a "weird" character. (Or a character everyone thought was weird, but nobody really knew much about.) Enter Sarah!

Dori: Hmm...there have been a couple of kids who have asked me whether I'm going to write a sequel to this book...

Dori: I've told them not this time (I've done sequels to two of my other books). The story is pretty much done at the end. But perhaps Sarah's got a story??? I'll have to think about that. (And if I do, I'll remember where I was when I first got the idea!)

Dori: GA

cj: I thought her being silent gave her back some power--I really liked that

cj: Have there been any negative comments or threat of censorship about the book?

Dori: Exactly. She sees herself as weak, but she's actually pretty strong. No one can make you speak if you don't want to. (And sometimes NOT speaking is a good choice.)

Dori: Well, I was in the library the other night and an acquaintance stopped by my table. She's a teacher (she's also very conservative) and she mentioned she'd read my book and liked it, but...

Dori: she couldn't see using it in her classroom because I mentioned lesbians.

cj: I thought that might be happening.

Dori: But that's about it. I tried to keep the book very clean because I want it to be used in the schools. You could say I censored myself...

Barb: I missed that - amazing what people do see in a book

cj: IT is such a small part of the book

Dori: But it's interesting when I do programs and parents and kids show up together...kids tell me things are worse than how I portrayed them...and parents tell me "I didn't know things were this bad."

cj: that is really true

Barb: Hmmm!

Hubby: When you are writing any kind of book, what's the hardest part?

Dori: It IS a small part of the book, Barb...but in my mind it's an important part of the book. In middle school it seems like that's one of the worst things you can do...suggest that they might be gay. Whether they're gay or not, why is that such a terrible insult?

Barb: Sorry guys but I have to leave for my teacher-librarian meeting. Great to talk with you. See some of you in San Antonio

cj: You make a point in the book that I believe, cyberbullying doesn't happen nearly as much as bullying, in fact cyber b is usually part of the 24/7 bullying

Dori: Of course, I know why...that age is all about figuring out who you are. Bye, Barb! Thanks for coming...

cj: Bye Barb See you are ALAN

Dori: That's a difficult question, Hubby...and I think it varies from book to book. With The Truth About Truman School, I struggled with those multiple points-of-view and moving the story forward with all those voices...

Dori: With my current project, I'm struggling with emotional resonance...

Dori: And the one I had to set aside to finish this current project (I'm going final edits), I'm struggling with voice. Each book brings its own challenge, I think. Do you write, Hubby?GA

Dori: (working on final edits, not going final edits)

Hubby: I try to, sometimes.

Hubby: Mostly I edit my wife's writing.

Dori: She's a writer?

Hubby: I'll let her tell you about it.

cj: Dori, Hubby is mine and he is having fun!!

Dori: Ah! :)

Hubby: :-)

cj: Hubby is Don Gallo

Hubby: I've been outed!

Dori: Hey, I know that name! I have several of your anthologies.

Hubby: Great! Thank you.

Dori: Actually, CJ told me that a while ago.

cj: Do you have any idea how your book has been selling?

cj: I ask because I think all MS kids AND staff should be reading it?

Dori: I know it's selling well enough to have more than earned out my advance in the first royalty period. THAT was nice!

Hubby: Good for you.

Dori: I'm pleased...I think Albert Whitman is, too. :)

cj: Great!

cj: Are there any more questions out there?

Dori: Hey, I just got an e-mail from a friend who said she couldn't get in here. I wonder why not? She just said "it didn't work."

cj: Matt? Are you with us?

Lori: I've been quiet tonight--just enjoying eavesdropping. :)

Hubby from x.x.x.142 joined the chat 5 minutes ago

cj: tell her to try <http://www.chatzy.com/104996215967>

Hubby: I just signed off and signed back in without any problem.

Dori: That was the URL I gave her.

Hubby: I clicked on the link on the ALAN web page below your photo, Dori.

cj: Well, we only have three more minutes, any closing comments from anyone?

Dori: Well, that happens sometimes.

Dori: Thanks for having me...it's been fun!

Hubby: Thanks for the book and for chatting, Dori. Best wishes.

Dori: Are these chats archived?

Lori: Well, I hope that this book makes a difference. It targets a great age for this sort of thing. Maybe with more awareness--and some discussion between kids and their parents, we can end some of the bullying!

Hubby: 'Nite.

cj: Dori, I am so glad we were able to reschedule, Thank you so much for allowing us to talk with you.

Lori: Thanks, Dori.

Dori: I like to think so, Lori! It's nice that people are talking more about bullying now. We didn't talk about it when we were kids...it was just the way things were.

Lori: See you in San Antonio, CJ (and Hubby).

Dori: I'm glad we could reschedule, too!

cj: See you Lori

Dori: Good night everyone. Thanks for coming.

cj: FYI ALAN does not have any CHAT scheduled for November due to conference or December due to the holidays. Be well all

cj: And thank you again Dori