

# Dregs

Contributed by Webmaster  
Friday, 14 September 2007  
Last Updated Tuesday, 06 November 2007

Lauren Smith: What is your book about?

Barri L. Bumgarner: Dregs is about cliques and how much pressure there is for junior high kids to fit in. And Benson and Ryan, two seventh graders who are at the bottom of the social structure, realize that popularity is fragile and the ladder weakest at the top. They develop a plan to show everyone that being popular isn't all it's cracked up to be. What happens as a result shatters everyone's preconceptions.

Lauren Smith: What inspired you to write this story?

Barri L. Bumgarner: I started teaching at Oakland Junior High only a few months after the epidemic of school violence hit Paducah, KY; Jonesboro, AR; and Springfield, OR. So when my first year students were consumed with worry about why this had to happen, I began writing Dregs. I finished it in March 1999, about 25 days before the horrible tragedy at Columbine. I realized this story needed to be told, but in a strange way, I felt guilty for having written it (and then for Columbine to happen), so I put the book in a box and didn't open it until 2004. After having successfully published 2 adult novels, I felt compelled to be part of the solution. I had no idea it would come out 4 days after the worst single day shooting in the U.S. (Virginia Tech).

Lauren Smith: How tough was it writing in the Young Adult market?

Barri L. Bumgarner: Not at all. I taught a Reading Workshop class with ~1500 young adult novels in it, so I'd read all the hot books on the market, had learned to "pitch" the books to teenagers, and I knew what they liked. Because of them, I knew the language, the needs, and the horrible pressure of being a teenager in today's world. When I was finished, I felt I'd written exactly what they were wanting to read.

Lauren Smith: This book addresses a very important topic, what do you hope this book accomplishes?

Barri L. Bumgarner: I've made a documentary about Dregs, and at the end, I've added, "If this book helps just one kid, makes a difference to just one teenager, then it's one child closer to breaking the cycle." In my mind, that's a book's success...not sales, but impact. At a middle school last week, I was speaking to over 100 eighth graders. One boy said, "This book made me realize how hard it is for kids who don't have a lot of friends. So I invited a boy to sit with the soccer guys at lunch Monday. He usually sits by himself." I made a point of letting him know the courage that must've taken and that leading by example is the greatest single thing a teenager can do. He said he'd do it again the next day...it gave me chills.

Lauren Smith: What are some things parents can do to help their teens through the challenges of teen pressure?

Barri L. Bumgarner: Oh, there are so many things...First and foremost, parents need to recognize the signs of teasing and bullying. If their son or daughter displays any of the tendencies of "making fun" of other kids, parents MUST address it. Even the smallest taunts can leave a lasting impression. Also, if you think your son or daughter is the one being teased, talk openly about the insecurities the "teaser" must have. Bullies are usually so completely terrified of being exposed as scared, weak, and fragile. There are numerous websites parents can access, but the key is to talk. Stop using phrases like, "Well, if he hits you, hit him back!" Do parents really believe violence solves anything? Probably not, but some parents don't know any better. Education is the key to solving most issues, but especially bullying. Also teach your children the difference between "tattling" and "telling."