

## Saving Our Girls

Of all the women you know, whom do you count as being strong in the face of adversity? Or do you know any who gave up a long time ago and now are basically resigned to the fact that they can do nothing about their situation? How do we raise girls to be capable, confident women? Are we doomed to be a nation that continues to devalue girls, even with all the changes we began to see after the Women's Movement of the 1970's?

Some of our girls are shunned or bullied by other girls, shut out for being different or simply not dressing according to the current norm, usually beginning in the middle school years. It is no wonder, then, that they can often grow up introverted and unable to cope. A young girl close to me is being home schooled because she could not face the cruelty of her classmates. As parents, we need to stand up to situations our daughters face, without such extreme outcomes, and it turns out the library has books that can help.

*Girls Against Girls: Why We Are Mean to Each Other and How We Can Change*, by Bonnie Burton is a teenage guide that explains why it happens, what to do if you're a victim, and the importance of treating other girls with respect.

*Little Girls Can Be Mean: Four Steps to Bully-Proof Girls in the Early Grades*, by Michelle Anthony is for parents wanting to prevent this sort of thing before it starts.

*The Curse of the Good Girl: Raising Authentic Girls of Courage and Confidence*, by Rachel Simmons exposes the myth of the "Good Girl", freeing girls from its impossible standards and encouraging them to embrace their real selves. This is reading for mothers, really good mothers, who check out their daughters leaving for school each morning and aren't threatened by seeing them become strong and independent.

There has been an abundance of fiction lately featuring strong heroines. The recent death of Swedish author Stieg Larsson was a big loss, in that after his Millennium Trilogy there will be no more international crime thrillers with Salander, a fearless foe of "women-hating men." *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, *The Girl Who Played With Fire*, and *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest* feature a rail-thin wisp of a girl who has fought through a lifetime of abuse, both institutional and familial - and survived through iron will and piercing intelligence. Now in her twenties, she is a world-class computer hacker, one of the "just avengers," a complete original. To say she is an appealing feminist shortchanges her. But the books are definitely page-turners.

Moving from a setting in Sweden to the Ozarks is quite a leap, but *Winter's Bone*, by Ozark writer Daniel Woodrell is a "country noir" novel of desperation that was made into an Oscar-nominated film this year. Sixteen-year-old Ree Dolly lives in a backward part of Missouri that's more like a Third World country. She has a father that cooks meth and regularly stays in trouble with the law. Ree has two younger brothers and a mother that has lost her mind and can't take care of herself. When her father doesn't show up for his court date, Ree learns that he put their house and land up for collateral to cover his bond, and they stand to lose everything. All she wants to do is get old enough to join the Army and get out of the Ozarks, with all the madness that is killing the rest of her family. She risks everything to save them because the stakes are so high. She is not a bad person, but knows a lot of bad people and has to make her way through them to find her father. The reader goes from being intrigued at the beginning of the book to being horrified by the time it is done. In light of the current vampire craze, this story is dark and disturbing but rings with truth. We are in solidarity with her every step of the way, and the author holds out hope for this valiant Joan of Arc creature in the end. She definitely deserves a future, and has earned a place right alongside Salander in the world of fictional heroines. They both leave us breathless. These fiction titles are not for the faint of heart, but amazing, believable literature that engages us from beginning to end. When you are done with Ree, find something inane to read, full of sweetness and light, because you will be exhausted.

In the best of all possible worlds, our own daughters and granddaughters will never have to go through the things these girls faced. If they're lucky, they will have what was missing: adults in their lives that care enough and are strong enough to be vigilant. We can't save them from all

pain, but we can learn how to prevent them from suffering pain inflicted by others or inflicting pain on others as they move through life.

That learning can start right here, right now, in the library. Be an important force in the life of a girl who needs you, whether she knows it or not.

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