

A PAINFUL SECRET

Ask me no questions. Linda Phillips, Peter Ringrose and Michael Winter. Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., 1990. 204 pp., \$5.95 paper. ISBN 0-13-050568-4.

In recent years, startling Canadian statistics about the sexual abuse of children have come to light. The 1980 Parliamentary Report of the Committee on Sexual Offences Against Children and Youth found that as many as one in two females and one in three males are victims of "unwanted sexual acts" at some time in their lives, according to Mary Wells' study *Canada's law on child sexual abuse: A handbook* (Ottawa: Department of Justice Canada, 1990). Apparently, four in five of these incidents occurred when the victim was either a child or a youth.

Ask me no questions is a fictitious story about sexual abuse within one family. The book is written for young adults. Three people have successfully combined their talents and expertise to write the novel. The co-authors are Linda Phillips, an Associate Professor of Reading Research at Memorial University, Peter Ringrose, the Executive Director of the Public Legal Information Association of Newfoundland and Michael Winter, a writer currently working with the Writers' Alliance of Newfoundland. The story is told in the first person, conveying a young woman's perspective on this important social issue.

Leslie Tunney's father sexually abused her from the time that she was three until she was a young teenager. When she is thirteen-years-old, Leslie finds the courage to insist that the abuse stop. After Leslie's rebuttal, Mr. Tunney turns to his younger daughter, Susan, subjecting her to sexual abuse instead. It takes two additional years, and the near suicide of the younger sibling, before Leslie finds the courage to tell her best girlfriend's mother about the abuse.

Leslie keeps the abuse a painful secret for many years. When people ask her how she is doing, she never replies with how she really feels. Hence, the novel's title with its corollary: Ask me no questions - I'll tell you no lies. Leslie finds tremendous emotional relief when she eventually tells her story. She also receives both emotional and practical support from many people, including her mother, several close friends and numerous helping professionals. The novel does not conclude with a happy ending at the point of disclosure, rather it realistically portrays the long and sometimes difficult process of the family's split, the court appearances and group therapy for Leslie. *Ask me no questions* presents a great deal of information about family incest without preaching to the young reader. The novel conveys an empathy for all the family members, insight into the emotional consequences of abuse for the victim, and an authentic representation of the legal action and helping structures available to adolescent abuse victims.

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