

CRANK, which turned 20 years old this month, is a cautionary tale loosely based on my daughter's walk with the monster drug methamphetamine. Before lobbing judgment, please understand we were an upper middle-class family. She and I sang in our church choir together. Gardened and baked together. Hiked and rode bikes together. She was a straight A+ kid, on a fast track to a full ride at the Art Institute of Seattle. Her dream was computer animation. And then she met the wrong boy. One wrong boy, a couple of very bad choices, and her dreams disintegrated.

I was determined to turn other teens away from that path if I could. I also wanted those who'd already chosen that direction to believe there was a way out, support, someone who cared, and urge them to speak up sooner rather than later. And I wanted people who'd never made that choice to develop understanding and empathy for those who had.

The book has done all those things. I know because over those 20 years I've heard from thousands of readers. Here are just a few of the messages I've received:

I'm honored to get this opportunity- to tell you that *Crank* saved my life, opened my eyes to the world I was exposing myself to and rapidly getting drowned in. And then, two years later it did the very same for my little brother who found it in my moving boxes and read it thinking it was a teen book about kids doing drugs. He was doing meth the night he read it, with his at the time girlfriend. They quit the very next day. Thank you Ellen, you've touched our lives forever and I'll always be more thankful than you'll ever know for your books.

My mom did meth throughout my childhood and was in and out of jail all the time. I would worry every single day if she was still alive or using. Until a couple of weeks ago she was still using. After reading *Crank* for the nth time I decided that I wouldn't let my mom continue to use and I wanted to get her help. Your book gave me the courage to confront my mom about her addiction after years and years of sweeping it under the rug and pretending it wasn't there. She is now currently enrolled in an outpatient program and has been sober since her admission and hopefully remains sober. I just want to thank you for writing such great books and wanted you to hear how it has helped me so much.

My mother was kind of like Kristina in your book. Some of my earliest memories are of me getting beat or raped to so she could get her next fix. By the time i was 5, the only thing i knew was abuse. When I got put into foster care, I was kind of like Maya Angelou, I didn't speak, I couldn't find my voice. As I got older I got better but I only spoke when absolutely necessary. I don't know why I picked up your book, but it seemed to be the key to my voice. I found a good friend to talk to, this guy named Joel. The very morning i finished *Crank* i got up got dressed went to his house and for some reason told him everything. It made me feel so good to finally have a voice. You gave it to me. You were like that lady that helped Maya get her voice, but for me. Please stay strong and keep looking out for us, the kids without a voice.

Are there difficult scenes in the book? Yes. Is the book for every reader? No. But for literally thousands of people, *Crank* has been a necessary, even lifesaving read. And most of them

found it in their school libraries. Not elementary schools, but high schools and, yes, some middle schools. Because not every kid has a nice, scrubbed life. Please revisit the last message above. You can't treat every kid the same. Every child's life experience is different. Neither can you treat a sixteen-year-old the same as a six-year-old. This is where parenting begins, and the state has no right to make decisions about what's "appropriate" for every child.

A governmental agency deciding what books we have access to defines censorship. That includes what books our children have access to. This current book banning hysteria began as a so-called parental rights movement. I'm a parent several times over. In fact, I've raised three generations: my three grown children; one I adopted; and three grandchildren, as their legal guardian. The last is sixteen, and still living with my husband and me. Where is my right to allow him to read whatever he wants to, and the ability to find those books in his school library?

Even in South Carolina, human sexuality develops during adolescence. To varying degrees, all teens wonder, think about, experiment with, and hopefully learn to enjoy the experience. Movies, television, video games, and the actual pornography they can easily access on their phones offer overtly visual influences. Books are among the safest spaces to gain perspective about the spectrum of sexual relationships. Please stop underestimating their sophistication and intellectual curiosity. You can't guide their choices with ignorance.