

Last year I wrote a novel for girls aged nine to fifteen years, entitled *Tracy*. This was in part a result of an approach by someone who was concerned about the dearth of good modern literature for this age group. The book aims to help the girls with their feelings and dilemmas, while encouraging the kind of thinking and relating that gradually leads to the development of their creative potential in areas such as art, music and languages. Throughout the book there is emphasis on the benefits to everyone of the girls' attempts to discuss a wide range of their feelings and dilemmas, which leads to a developing understanding and mutual regard between them and their parents, friends and a range of other people. The context is Tracy's summer holiday spent with her cousin, Flora, helping at the bed and breakfast business run by her aunt (Flora's mother).

The guidance this book provides to girls of this age group arises solely from the story – a story of the practicalities of life and its dilemmas that surrounds many young people.

Main areas interwoven into the dialogue are as follows:

The description and enactment of the complexities of Flora's difficult and very intense feelings and reactions around the subject of her largely absent father, and the gradual development of a route that improves her situation. The girls learn much of value from an elderly friend, and they all benefit from the mutually caring conversations they enjoy together.

Tracy learns much about the complexities of running the bed and breakfast business – laying tables, serving food, cleaning, office work, and dealing with a leak in the roof.

Other subjects explored or touched on include periods and menopause, changing body image together with food and weight, clothes and makeup, drug issues, alcohol, smoking, and boy/girl issues including intimacy and consideration of sexual impulses. It is clear that Flora was not really ready to become a young woman until her feelings about her father were addressed.

Broader social issues include care of the elderly, the understanding and use of restorative justice, and the use of a neighbourhood barter scheme for skill sharing.

The undertaking of Tracy's first solo train journey is described, and the care of the injury she sustains to her hands in a fall from a bike is detailed.

The role of Mary (one of the peer group) as carer to her infant brother is explored in some detail, as are the effects of this upon her. As she becomes more conscious of her position she is able to re-establish herself as a daughter rather than a 'mother' in her family.

'Tracy' by Mirabelle Maslin is published by Augur Press www.augurpress.com