

SAVE ME

by Lisa Scottoline

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A Conversation with Lisa Scottoline

Like *Look Again, Save Me* is an emotional thriller that examines motherhood and the relationship between mother and child. Why did you return to this theme, and is this a new direction for you?

Although I love being a writer, my most important and cherished role in this life is being a mother. It always came naturally to me, even though it wasn't always easy, especially in the early days, when I was a broke, single mother. (I'm still single but not broke.) Still, I felt I was born to be a mother, and my daughter, Francesca Serritella, and I are best friends and, now, writing partners in our nonfiction books!

Being a mother is all about love, and I'm a love monster. Bottom line, if I meet you, I'm hugging you, case closed. Come to a signing and see.

And now that I'm an empty nester, I've had a lot of time to think about what it means to be a mother. I've learned that motherhood has no expiration date. You never stop being a mother, and you'll do everything you can for your child. I'm fascinated by the lengths to which a mother will go to protect her child, and that's something I really wanted to explore. And also to turn that on its head and see where sometimes protection can hinder, or even smother. I don't think it's all that new for me because relationships have always been the keystone of all my books, and I've written about motherhood before, in *Look Again* and in *Final Appeal*, which won the Edgar Award for excellence in suspense writing. The most special relationship in life is that between a mother and her child, so it's something I plan on continuing to write about, in books to come.

What sparked the idea for *Save Me*?

Everyone asks, "Where do you get your ideas? And you know what? I LOVE that question! It's one of the few I

*"Relationships
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always have an answer to. Yay!

The idea for this book came from a conversation I was having with my best friend, Laura. She's a mom of two sons and somehow we got to talking about if she had one car seat and she had to pick up a friend's child, which child would get the car seat—her own child or her friend's? We yapped about that on the phone for an hour. It was something we really had to think about and would struggle with.

And I knew I had my next novel.

My goal always is to write an entertaining book, but I love the idea of creating a realistic story that will spark conversation, and make people think about what they would do in a given situation. Having a child is such an extraordinary responsibility, and it made me think about what would happen if you were forced, maybe in an emergency, to choose between saving your own child or someone else's.

In *Save Me*, Rose was faced with making an instant decision of whether to save her daughter or her daughter's bully, in a life-threatening situation. It could change her life forever, just like many situations we could face in our own lives. We really never know where life will lead us, do we? You tackle the hot-button issue of bullying from a very different angle in *Save Me*. Why was that important to you?

Many of us have been bullied as children, me included. I was called "rat" since there weren't many Italian-Americans kids in my neighborhood, and the other kids at school teased me that Italians lived in sewers, like rats.

Not funny.

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*"Books
connect us,
heart to heart..."*

I never forgot it, and still feel that sting. But it's gotten worse, in our society. Bullying is a national epidemic that has been exacerbated by the Internet and social networks. Bullying is so damaging to children, and shapes so much of who they become and how they face life. The only thing equal to the pain of a bullied child is the pain of a parent watching it happen to their child. Parents are often in the very difficult position of trying to save their child from a bully. The more I thought about it, I realized that bullying not only affects children. Many adults are the victims of bullying as well, and the impact can be equally damaging. That was another angle of bullying that I wanted to explore. So in *Save Me*, the community of Reesburgh bullies Rose, and her lawyer encourages her to bully others, using litigation as a weapon.

All of your books have women as the star or main protagonists, even your nonfiction column books. Why is that?

When I first started writing, I noticed that in popular books and movies, women didn't get to be the star of the book. We were always the expendable girlfriend or sidekick.

And I missed Nancy Drew!

I wanted my books to feature ordinary, extraordinary women, like those in my life, such as my mother, daughter, and friends, and let them be the main protagonists. And a few years ago, I noticed that there weren't enough female voices in the newspapers, and I began writing "Chick Wit" with my daughter, Francesca. It's a funny, witty look at life as a woman in today's society.

And I missed Erma Bombeck!

The columns have given voice to women everywhere, and have been collected in *Why My Third Husband Will Be a Dog; My Nest Isn't Empty, It Just Has More Closet Space*; and *Best Friends, Occasional Enemies*.



What is your favorite part of being a writer?

My favorite part of being a writer is connecting with people. While this may sound ironic, as writing is such a solitary profession, I see it completely differently. Books connect us, heart to heart, and that's why they're so important. I always say that a book isn't completed until it's read, and that's because a book means something different to each reader, depending on who they are and what they've experienced. So, in effect, we write each book together, author and reader!

Cool, huh?

Nothing is more rewarding to me than getting out from behind the desk, and meeting, talking with, and hugging readers. I write for them, and they definitely help inform my writing. And I love feeling that I am tied to all of them, and everyone is tied one to the other. That's what being fully human is all about, and my heart is full, with gratitude, to all of my readers, every day.

So thanks.

And love.

xoxoxoxo

*About the
Author*



An Original Essay by the Author

“Write What You Feel”

People say you should write what you know, and while I agree, I think that doesn't go far enough.

I think you should write what you feel.

Don't feel bad if you didn't know this, because it's taken me almost twenty years and twenty books to figure it out.

Call me slow on the uptake.

Let me explain what I mean by write what you feel. I'm what's known as a people person. I love people, and so it's no surprise that characterization and relationships between people are the strongest part of my novels. That's where my heart is.

That's what I feel.

Relationships between girlfriends, women and men, and family members populate every page of mine, and I like it that way. I try to write an entertaining story with a fast-moving plot, but what I want you to remember, when you close the book, is the people between the covers. Not to get too English major-y on you, but the fact is that characterization and plot are the same thing.

We are what we do, after all.

So to stay on point, it occurred to me that when I look at my life, the most important relationship to me, and the one that abides time and even space, is my relationship to my daughter, Francesca.

In other words, it's all about the mother-child relationship.

“Characterization and plot are the same thing.”



I love her more than I can say, and I'm in the words business, so I should be fired. And as she's grown up and moved out, I've gained a new perspective on her that makes me want to write more and more about that relationship. Paradoxically, now that she's moved out, I think about her more. I see us with new eyes. And as our relationship has changed and grown to one between two adults, I still remain her parent, no matter how old she gets.

Motherhood has no expiration date.

I used to think that I felt our relationship so intensely because I'm a single mother and she's an only child. In fact, I remember that she came home from grade school one day and asked this priceless question:

"Mom, if I'm an only child, does that mean you're an only mom?"

Uh, yes.

But now that I'm a new empty nester, and comparing notes with all of my girlfriends, I've come to the conclusion that the intensity of the mother-child bond doesn't turn on how many children you have, or if you have a hubby or not. It's inborn, and cultivated, both, and it powers most of my thoughts and hopes, worries and fears.

Feel me?

(As the kids say.)

So it makes sense that later in my life, which is now, I'd turn to writing more and more about the mother-child relationship. I'd written about it in *Final Appeal*, which won an Edgar, but hadn't returned to it often in the past, for one very practical reason—in a suspense novel, you need a mom

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getting herself in trouble, and if she did that with a kid, you wouldn't like her much.

Neither would I.

I needed a fictional sitter, and you know how hard those are to come by.

I returned to moms and children in *Look Again*, and I think the strength of the bond between a mother and her child gave the story an enormous force and emotional power.

If I don't say so myself.

And I think the same is true of *Save Me*.

It's intense, the story of a woman who tries to save her child, tries to save another, and finally, ends up saving herself. I think all mothers will find themselves in this book, and wonder what they'd do if they were in its heroine's shoes. And if you're a mother, you could be in her shoes. Tomorrow, or the next day. We never know where life will lead us, but we mothers know we can cope, and lead, and nurture, and love. Because that's our job, to me. Sometimes I feel as if I were put on earth to be a mother.

I feel it.



Ideas for Book Groups

I am a huge fan of book clubs because it means people are reading and discussing books. Mix that with wine and carbs, and you can't keep me away. I'm deeply grateful to all who read me, and especially honored when my book is chosen by a book club. I wanted an opportunity to say thank you to those who read me, which gave me the idea of a contest. Every year I hold a book-club contest and the winning book club gets a visit from me and a night of fabulous food and good wine. To enter is easy: All you have to do is take a picture of your entire book club with each member holding a copy of my newest hardcover and send it to me by mail or e-mail. No book club is too small or too big. Don't belong to a book club? Start one. Just grab a loved one, a neighbor, or friend, and send in your picture of you each holding my newest book. I look forward to coming to your town and wining and dining your group. For more details, just go to www.scottoline.com.

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Tour time is my favorite time of year because I get to break out my fancy clothes and meet with interesting and fun readers around the country. The rest of the year I am a homebody, writing every day, but thrilled to be able to connect with readers through e-mail. I read all my e-mail, and answer as much as I can. So, drop me a line about books, families, pets, love, or whatever is on your mind at lisa@scottoline.com. For my latest book and tour information, special promotions, and updates you can sign up at www.scottoline.com for my newsletter.

Lisa Scottoline



The Wednesday Evening Ladies' Literary Guild of Mineola, New York, submit their photo for Lisa's book-club contest.



Reading Group Questions

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1. *Save Me* explores the mother and child relationship, at its heart. What do you think defines a mother? How is a mother and child relationship different than any other relationship? Look at other forms of culture, like art, for example. How many depictions are there of mother and child? And how many of father and child? Are we discriminating against fathers, or diminishing them, by all this talk of the mother-child bond? And by doing so, do we create a self-fulfilling prophecy?
2. In *Save Me*, Melly is the victim of bullying because of a birthmark on her face. Do you think bullying is different today than years ago? Do you think that the bullying is getting worse, or are we just hearing more about it because of the Internet? What do you think parents and schools should do to help curb bullying? What kind of punishment do you think is appropriate for the child who is doing the bullying? What about those who watch and say nothing? Are they, or aren't they, equally as culpable? Do you think that school programs and curricula that build up self-esteem and a sense of community will really make a difference?
3. Rose experienced her own bullying at the hands of the angry parents, which gave her a new perspective on what Melly was going through. Do you have any experience with bullying between adults? In what ways are adults better equipped to deal with bullying than children? What impact can bullying have on adults, and what can adults do if they are faced with a bully? What impact does adult bullying have on children?
4. Rose steps in to defend Melly against her bully. Do you think it was a good idea? Why or why not? How do you think a parent's involvement hurts or helps the situation? At what point do you think parents need to involve themselves in the situation? What steps would *you* take to help your child if he or she was being bullied, and how far would you be willing to go?

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5. What impact do you think a physical blemish has on a child, and how do you think it affects his or her identity, family relationships, and contact with the outside world? Take it a step further: What about physical disability, like a child in a wheelchair? Or learning challenges, that aren't so visible? Or how about discriminations based on race, religion, or sexual orientation? Melly's father reacted very badly to Melly's birthmark. What did his reaction make you feel about him?
6. Many of Lisa's books center on single mothers or blended families. Do you think the love of one great parent is enough to sustain a child through life? Does it take a husband, too? Or a village?
7. As Rose found out, volunteering comes with risks. The book makes clear that this is a problem in the law of many states, maybe even where you live. What do you think of the laws in terms of protecting those who volunteer their time? What changes, if any, would you make to the Good Samaritan laws to protect volunteers?
8. How did you feel about Rose keeping her secret past from Leo? Did you understand her reasoning? Did you agree or disagree with it? What impact do you think Rose's past will have on her marriage as she moves forward? Do you think she will ever really be able to escape what happened? Will he forgive her for not telling him? How do secrets impact intimacy in our lives?



9. Rose was called a “helicopter”parent, a term often used in today’s society with a negative connotation. What separates helicopter parenting from good parenting? What kind of parent do you think Rose was? What mistakes do you think she made? Do you think she was a good mother? Do you think she favors Melly or the baby? Or treats them equally?

10. How did you feel about Amanda in the beginning of the book? Did your opinion of her change by the end of the book? What do you think causes children to be bullies? Under what circumstances would you ever feel bad for the bully? In punishing a bully, do you think his or her personal circumstances should be taken into account?

11. What did you think of Rose’s lawyers’ strategy? Did you agree or disagree with it? Why or why not? Do you think they were just passing the blame, or do you think the school had a responsibility in what happened? Do you think that litigation is another form of bullying? Do you know anybody who is sue-happy?

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