



CLASS MOM

by Laurie Gelman

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An Interview with the Author

Could you tell us about your background and when you decided that you wanted to lead a literary life?

I have spent my entire career in television. I started as the host of a rock video show but soon transitioned to entertainment reporting. I have always written my own scripts, so the art of writing was not foreign to me. The biggest challenge I had was learning to write fiction.

Is there a book that most influenced your life? Or inspired you to become an author?

I am such a lover of books and good writing that I would never have presumed I could do anything worthy of being published. But once I read *Where'd You Go Bernadette*, I realized that not all novels have to be gut-wrenching. Some can just be funny. And a funny book? That I could write.

How did you become a writer? Would you care to share any writing tips?

I think I've always been a writer in some way or another—from keeping a diary when I was really young, to journaling in my twenties, I've always found that I express myself best through my pen. I think my best tip for writing is to make sure it's a part of your daily routine. Take twenty minutes and write whatever comes to your mind—something that is bothering you, something that made you happy, an incident at work or school. And don't worry what it sounds like. Write as though no one is ever going to read it. That's the way you will find your voice.



What was the inspiration for this novel?

The inspiration for *Class Mom* came shortly after I was fired from being the class mom of my daughter's third-grade class. It was my fifth straight year holding the job, and I definitely had my own way of doing things. Everyone loved my emails and my free-wheeling ways... until someone didn't. When I was asked to leave my position, I was angry and hurt and disappointed, and I channeled that energy into writing a revenge novel! Not really, but being fired gave me the energy shot I needed to write the story.

What is the most interesting or surprising thing you learned as you set out to tell your story?

Writing my first novel was an amazing journey. It took me two years to get the first draft finished and then another six months for all the rewrites the editor wanted. Along the way I learned to be open to other people's suggestions and not have such an ironclad lock on the way the book should go. I also learned that you have to treat writing like any other job. You are expected to show up every day and put your time in. If you don't, you can't expect to ever finish your book.

Are you currently working on another book? Can you tell us about it?

I'm currently working on two books: a sequel to *Class Mom* that will continue Jen Dixon's adventures in the cutthroat parenting world, and a totally different, rather less lighthearted book about a ten-year-old latchkey kid from the 1970s.

***About the
Author***



Inspiration for the Book

The book was inspired by the time I spent as a room mom for my own kids and the rapport I had with my fellow class parents. Many of the emails in the book are based on actual emails I sent to the other parents. Below are some of those original messages—you'll see some look pretty familiar!

Hi, House 44,

It's that time of September again! 3rd-grade curriculum night is next Wednesday, the 23rd from 5:30 to 8:30. We need volunteers to bring some "noshes" for the festivities. Below is a list of what we need. The first 10 people to email me win the chance to deck the House 44 table with mangia y bevi, so hurry with your replies!

sushi

grapes

cheese

crackers

cookies

brownies

water

wine

bubbly water

cups

plates

napkins

recreational drugs (just wanted to see who is still reading this and who has checked out)

Love,

Laurie



Hi,

Thanks so much to the families who have responded, but we still need more volunteers to bring the following things: cheese, cookies, plates, and napkins. Don't be shy!

The good news is 5 families offered to bring wine, so clearly we have quite a hard-partying class!

Thanks,
Laurie

Hi, gang,

Angry, upset? No, disappointed is really what we're feeling at the lack of response to our call for Halloween goodies. Below is what we have and what we need.

We have:

vanilla frosting
2 dozen vanilla cupcakes
gummy worms
chocolate frosting
jelly beans
cupcake decorations
all paper products from me (that's right, I'm taking the easy way out)
The Smiths wanted to bring wine, but I told them it might be inappropriate.

WE NEED:

2 dozen chocolate cupcakes
chocolate frosting × 4
vanilla frosting × 3
decorations (mini M&Ms, sprinkles, small jelly beans)
plastic knives
orange food coloring

*Behind the
Novel*

In the immortal words of the Wonder Pets: "What's going to work? Teamwork!"

Thanks in advance for what I'm sure will be an overwhelming response.

Laurie

Hi, gang,

Just a reminder to those who are bringing things for the Halloween party on Friday. Please send the items with your child that morning.

And no, to those who asked, parents are not invited. I think they are planning some kind of Wiccan sacrificial ceremony using live animals and they don't want us to see it. But Ms. Seiffert has promised to take pictures!

Laurie

Hey, kids,

Because I'm always looking out for fun things for all of us to do...

THE ENTIRE THIRD GRADE IS HAVING A POTLUCK DINNER! (Parents only.)

Apparently people are already sick of their own classes and want to branch out. And since word has got around about all the wine we serve at House 44 events, naturally everyone wants to party with us.

Party Details:

When: Friday, November 13, 6:30–9:30 p.m.

Where: Megan's house

Please sign up to bring something to eat or drink!

We need appetizers, dessert, soft drinks, and, of course, wine (red and white).

Please specify in your reply what you are bringing (it should be enough for 8 to 10 folks).

It will be a great way to reconnect with friends from other classes.

Let us know as soon as you can what you think you can bring.

Thanks,
Laurie

Hey, gang,

I have decided on what to give the teachers for the obligatory homemade holiday gift. We are going to put together a CD of the kids' favorite songs. We are also going to get the kids to decorate a page of the liner notes with their name, song title, and whatever else they can squeeze on a 5 × 5 piece of paper.

WHAT WE NEED FROM YOU is to send us the name and artist of your child's favorite song. Actually, ask them for 2 because we may have repeats. It does not have to be a holiday song—it can be anything they like from the radio or an old CD that you listen to at home. It will be helpful if it is available on iTunes. PLEASE get this info to me as soon as possible so we can download the music and burn the CDs.

If it turns out to be a really cool CD, we will offer to make copies for the parents at a nominal fee... maybe.

Thanks,
Laurie



*Behind the
Novel*

Hello, fellow parents!

Long time no blah blah!

Big big news! Our children are going to have a compliment party ("You're cute"; "No, YOU'RE cute!").

Apparently they save them all up to give at school because we don't see too many around our house.

They're going to have an ice-cream sundae party on February 10th, so of course we need to provide the stuff. (I know, I know, when exactly ARE they learning anything?)

I will bring the ice cream, but we need the following toppings:

chocolate sauce
caramel sauce
sprinkles
gummy bears
plain M&Ms
whipped cream
marshmallow topping
and of course the Smiths will bring wine

NO NUTS!!! (meaning no nuts and no parents allowed)

Please let me know in a timely fashion what you are willing to provide.

No, no. Don't thank me. It's my reward for being class mom.

Laurie xo

Have you missed me?

Just thought I'd remind you about the 3rd to 4th grade transition meeting for all 3rd-grade parents tomorrow night at 6:30 in the library.

Any doctors in our house who would like to bring Xanax to share are welcome to. I don't know about you, but I'm very stressed about this whole thing. Do I dress differently for 4th grade? What if I don't know where to go? What if the older mothers are mean to me?

Anywho we're also coming to the end of the year and I'm kinda sucking wind on gift ideas for the teachers. We were thinking (and by we I mean me) about large white coffee mugs that the kids could all write their signatures on and then we have it glazed. I'm not really looking for opinions, just letting you know that all evidence to the contrary, I'm still on the job.

Spreadin' the love as always...

Laurie

*Behind the
Novel*



Recommended Reading

What Alice Forgot

Liane Moriarty

I happen to love the way Liane Moriarty writes and I have been a fan for years. *What Alice Forgot* is not one of her bigger hits, but for me it was one of the most clever stories I have ever read.

Major Pettigrew's Last Stand

Helen Simonson

The title of this book is what made me pick it up with knowing anything about it. It was such a pleasant surprise to find a sweet story about finding love later in life.

The House on the Strand

Daphne du Maurier

I love me a good time-travel book. Daphne du Maurier seamlessly takes her characters back and forth from medieval times to present day all while trying to solve a mystery. I have always thought this book did not get the respect and regard it deserves. It is one of the most compelling stories I have ever read.

The Rosie Project

Graeme Simsion

I love a book that can make me laugh out loud. *The Rosie Project* is most definitely one of those. The adventures of Don Tillman, a brilliant but socially challenged professor, are written with delightful humor as the author takes you inside the head of someone with Asperger's who just wants to understand the human condition.

Beautiful Ruins

Jess Walter

There is something so charming and disarming about this story of love lost and found. Jess Walter's prose is so rich with vibrancy that the 1960s Italian coast

comes to sun-drenched life as much as modern-day Hollywood does.

Where'd You Go, Bernadette

Maria Semple

A simple story brilliantly told, with so much wit and humor. It quickly became one of my favorite books of all time, mostly for its palate-cleansing ability to make me laugh after reading a book that made me cry.

I Feel Bad About My Neck

Nora Ephron

No one can say it like Nora Ephron. Women of a certain age will howl at her simple observations about growing older. She can take the most bland of subjects, say, what's in your purse, and turn it into a whip-smart and hilarious essay that speaks to the fears and frustrations in all of us.

Bossypants

Tina Fey

I like to think that if I ever meet Tina Fey we will become instant best friends. Since reading *Bossypants*, I'm convinced we are soul sisters. But I have to believe that just about everyone feels that way after reading her hilarious recounting of growing up Greek and geeky. Her real-life, coming-of-age adventures lead to some uncomfortable and cringeworthy moments for the reader, but knowing how it all turns out for Tina in the end keeps you from feeling too sorry for her!

*Keep On
Reading*



Reading Group Questions

1. Do you think anyone could get away with writing the kinds of emails Jen writes to her fellow parents?
2. Do her emails help or hinder her ability to be an effective class mom? Why?
3. Jen pokes fun at Shirleen the allergy mom. Does she cross a line here?
4. Jen bumps into her high school crush on curriculum night. Do you have a Suchafox in your past? What would you do if ran into them in similar circumstances?
5. What has been your funniest experience in a parent/teacher conference?
6. Do you think Jen should have been fired?
7. Jen's flirty texting with Don starts out as harmless. At what point does it get out of hand?
8. Max's birthday party is the scene of a penultimate moment in the book. Have you ever had a drama at a kid's birthday party?
9. Jen has a unique relationship with her daughters, Vivs and Laura. Why do you think she is so close to them?
10. Do Garth and Nina make a good couple?



A Sneak Peek at the Sequel to Class Mom

To: Parents of Mrs. Randazzo's 3rd-Grade Class
From: JDixon
Date: 8/28
Subject: Guess Who's Back?



Hello, my fellow 3rd-grade parents,

Welcome to hump year! That dreaded year smack-dab in the middle of K-6.

Despite taking last year off and pledging that they'd have to drag my cold, dead body back into the PTA, I have returned once again as your class mom. I had a very nice sabbatical, thanks for asking, and I think we can all agree that Asami Chang did a great job flying solo last year. The fact that she now refuses to even discuss her experience on the job says more about you than about her.

You've all had me as class mom before, so I'm not going to bore you with the usual stuff, but below are the things you really do need to know:

- My birthday is still April 18th.
- I have switched to Juice Generation in an effort to lessen my need to caf up. So any exparte meetings will no longer be held at the Starbucks near school. Oh and I'm going to be grumpy as hell.
- Read the school's @#\$% email.
- It's still my way or the highway. Nothing has changed.

Did I miss anything? Oh yes, curriculum night is October 11th. I'll be soliciting for food and drinks very soon.

*Special
Extra!*

As always, response times will be noted.

See you next Tuesday!

Jen Dixon

P.S. Our teacher, Mrs. Randazzo, would like you to answer the following questions about your kiddos and get them back to her ASAP. I personally think it's none of her damn business but whatever. Her email is wrandazzo@WHT.edu.

Questions:

1. In what way has your child changed the most in the last year?
2. What would constitute a successful 3rd-grade year for your child? What do you most want him/her to learn?
3. What out-of-school commitments does your child have? Are you happy with the amount of time that he/she spends on extracurricular activities?
4. Is there anything else that I should know about your child?

To: WRandazzo
From: JDixon
Date: 8/29
Subject: Questionnaire

Hello, Mrs. Randazzo,

Here is all you need to know about one Max Dixon.

1. *In what way has your child changed the most in the last year?*

He stopped picking his nose and he finally started pooping in the potty. He makes it there about 74 percent of the time, which is 6 percent better than his father, but you'll still need to keep an eye on him.

2. *What would constitute a successful 3rd-grade year for your child? What do you most want him/her to learn?*

Learning the alphabet once and for all would be a huge win. And he really needs to understand the difference between narcolepsy and necrophilia to avoid any future embarrassment.

3. *What out-of-school commitments does your child have? Are you happy with the amount of time that he/she spends on extracurricular activities?*

I don't really know what the hell he does after school, but he's out of my hair for a good four hours and that's enough... unless you know of an after-dinner program. If you do, I'm all ears!

4. *Is there anything else that I should know about your child?*

He doesn't like to be looked at in the eyes but don't look away either. And be careful how you speak to him. The medication has done wonders, but it sometimes wears off too early.

Thanks! See you on curriculum night.

Jen

*Special
Extra!*