

Dear Superintendent Sebert,

Thank you so much for giving me a chance to say a few words in defense of my book *One Of Those Hideous Books Where the Mother Dies*. I'm sorry that Ms. Wentworth finds my book too sexual in nature. If Ms. Wentworth thinks the book is inappropriate for her own child, then by all means she should not allow her child to read it. But it would be unfair and inappropriate for her to try to force her own personal beliefs on every other family with children attending Theisen Middle School, or any other school in the district.

I agree with Ms. Wentworth that my book is too mature for eleven-year-olds. That's why I asked Simon and Schuster to label the book as appropriate for ages twelve and up. But just because I didn't want my own daughter to read it until she was twelve, that didn't give me the right to prevent all the other children at my daughter's school from reading it.

As the 2010 United States Ambassador of Children's Books, Katherine Patterson, once said, "All of us can think of a book that we hope none of our children or any other children have taken off the shelf. But if I have the right to remove that book from the shelf - that work I abhor - then you also have exactly the same right and so does everyone else. And then we have no books left on the shelf for any of us."

When read carefully, it becomes obvious that my book is sending a message that it is undesirable to leap into having early sex. The main character of my book, Ruby, has barely allowed her boyfriend to get to second base, even though he wants to "go a *lot* further." She muses that "if and when I decide to go all the way/I don't want it to be like it was for Colette./ With somebody that she didn't even care about./Just to get *rid* of her virginity./Like it was dandruff, for chrissake, and sex was *Head & Shoulders*."

Ruby continues on to say, "I don't want losing my virginity/to feel like I'm *losing* something./I want it to feel like I'm *finding* something./I want sex to be amazing./I want it to be life-alteringly wonderful./And I want it to happen with someone I love."

The children at Theisen are going to thinking about sex whether or not they read my book. They will be deciding for themselves under what circumstances they will choose to become sexually active. But perhaps those children who read *One Of Those Hideous Books Where the Mother Dies* will take heed of Ruby's thoughts on the matter and consider waiting until they really and truly love someone before they become sexually active. Perhaps, also, when my readers see how Ruby handles her sexually aggressive boyfriend, they will learn that is important not to allow anyone to pressure them to go further sexually than they want to go.

I won't even bother to refute Ms. Wentworth's other specific claims regarding my book's appropriateness for children in middle school, because that is not really the point. The point is, as Clare Booth Luce so eloquently put it, that "Censorship, like charity, should begin at home; but unlike charity, it should end there." If Ms. Wentworth succeeds in forcing the removal of my book from your library, a very bad example will be set for your students!

Thank you for your time,
Sonya Sones

Hi Jim,

Well, I see that Ms. Wentworth is getting way out of control now - trying to challenge many more books, including another one of mine, *What My Mother Doesn't Know*. She is a menace and must be stopped. I haven't heard her actual complaints about the book, but I have attached a letter in its defense that I hope you will find useful. I would also be happy to attend the hearing for my book via Skype, so that I can defend it more personally. Please let me know how I can help!

Thanks,
Sonya Sones

Dear Superintendent Sebert,

I am distressed to learn that our dear intrepid Ms. Wentworth is apparently not satisfied with simply trying to remove "One of Those Hideous Books Where the Mother Dies" from the shelves of your library. Now she is trying to remove a half dozen more books! And since another one of these additional books, "What My Mother Doesn't Know," is one of the books she is targeting, I would like to say a few words in its defense.

This is not the first time "What My Mother Doesn't Know" has been banned. I find it surprising that she finds this book inappropriate because nothing happens in it except for kissing. Perhaps it seems too sexual to Ms. Wentworth because of Sophie's passionate nature and the way she describes these kisses. But Sophie says she "just doesn't feel ready" to go beyond kissing, and certainly the book doesn't support the idea of teens having sex.

In fact, Sophie steadfastly refuses to let Dylan push her to go further than she wants. I included this in my book to suggest to girls that they should never allow boys to pressure them into doing anything that they don't want to do. Dylan's sexually aggressive behavior is one of the main reasons that Sophie stops dating him. Since so many books make it seem like the norm for teens to be having sexual intercourse, and mine does just the opposite, I find it ironic that Ms. Wentworth wants my book removed from the school libraries.

Perhaps Ms. Wentworth objects to the language used in my book. The only possible words she could find objectionable are a slang expression for masturbation. This phrase is used in a scene where Sophie is talking online to a boy she met in a chat room. The only reason I have the boy use this expression is to warn young girls that internet relationships can be highly dangerous. And when the boy says it, it upsets Sophie so much that she "permanently deletes" him and chides herself for having even considered arranging a face to face meeting with him.

There is one scene in which the lead character, Sophie, is groped. This occurs when an older boy on the street corner grabs Sophie's breast. Sophie has not invited his advances in any way, and her response to his molestation is to chase him down and kick and hit him. This hopefully shows girls that they shouldn't sit silently by if, God forbid, they are ever attacked themselves.

And the other themes in the book - don't judge a person by the way they look, be true to your heart, don't care so much about what your peers think - are fortunately getting through to my readers as well. Don't get me wrong—I don't write to teach kids how they should be living their

lives. But if some of that happens to come through while I'm telling the stories I want to tell, then... well, HOORAY!

Perhaps, after Ms. Wentworth realizes all the positive messages there are for young girls in my book, she will choose to drop her challenge to it. If she does not think her own daughter is ready to read books which deal realistically with teenaged life, that is certainly her choice to make. But what right has she to try to impose her short-sighted beliefs on an entire community?

Students and parents of Fond Du Lac – fight back! Don't allow ignorant people like Ms. Wentworth to rob you of your rights!

Sonya Sones