

Martha O'Connor
Talks about writing **THE BITCH POSSE**

I began writing **THE BITCH POSSE** because I was tired of the books being marketed to women. Pretty pastel covers, sweet-as-cake endings, all loose ends neatly tied up. Instead, I longed for a book about the girls I remembered from growing up, girls like the one I had been. Girls with multicolored hair and pierced noses, who would cut school and head to Chicago in combat boots and miniskirts, Pixies t-shirts and ripped fishnets. Girls who ditched P.E. to grab a smoke in the parking lot, who carried around poetry books and wrote about death and hate and high emotion, things that mattered.

What had happened to my old girlfriends over the last fifteen years? Were they married with kids, like me? Working “normal” jobs with “normal” lives? How often did they think back on our old days? Did they ever stare longingly at jars of Manic Panic Atlantic hair dye? Did they still write poetry, still write songs?

These questions brought me to Amy, Cherry, and Rennie, who are all aspects of the girl I was in high school—drunk with life’s heady perfume, yet in some ways profoundly depressed; daring, yet terrified of her own shadow; awkward, yet brimming with fatal self-confidence. And they are all aspects of the woman I am now—ready to kill and die for her children, yet terrified by the powers of the outside world to harm them; grappling with her inner demons despite her frequent delusion that she’s “just fine”; and fighting to remain true to her creative vision in spite of what is expected of her in today’s candy-sweet, pink-covered, “chick lit” kind of world.

I wrote the first draft of **THE BITCH POSSE** in six weeks, and as I did I unearthed the question: What makes a friendship *real* and not just the superficial back-and-forth that’s pervasive in human interaction? What exactly was at the core of my story?

I found the answers when my husband ended up in the hospital with a very serious blood and bone infection. His roommate was a 350-pound, nine-time ex-con who had done time for murder named Moses Slaughter. Moses had spent time in Soledad, San Quentin and darker places than you can imagine, but had turned his life around. With oddly prescient words and actions, he helped our family through a very rough time. By the end of my husband’s twelve-day hospital stay, Moses revealed himself to be the most generous, kind, and loving person I have ever met. He had given us a simple and beautiful gift: his friendship.

Suddenly everything clicked; redemption was the key. *Just how far could my three girls descend before they became unforgivable?* The answer is as far as you can fathom, and farther. There is hope for everyone. I learned that lesson from a nine-time ex-con, and it’s one I’ll always be revisiting.

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