

The lives of teenage girls

Just Kidding
Myrna Kostash
Douglas Gibson Books

review by **Dragos Ruiu**

This book is not kidding. Parents shouldn't read this book, it will scare them too badly.

Just Kidding is a new book about teenage girls by Myrna Kostash, an Edmonton writer. In this book she covers all the major aspects of the life of a teenage girl. It is amazingly comprehensive.

To research this book, the author talked to girls from Edmonton, Vancouver, and Toronto. Together, all the interviews piece a composite view of what life is like for a teenage girl in a large Canadian city. The most amazing thing about this book is sheer volume of information Ms. Kostash has been able to integrate in one book.

It is a veritable cornucopia of facts, almost an entire sociological study. The private information about each individual girl's life included almost makes one feel like a voyeur.

Penny likes androgynous men. Jodi likes "running my lips over his forehead... I like thighs. I like Karl's naked bum." George, "to her infinite surprise" got pregnant at thirteen. Ruth lives for Edward Gorey sketches and her next hit of MDA. Carla and Sharon are inseparable and rely on each other for fashion advice. And so on...

By peeking into the private lives of teenage girls you begin to get a feel for the world of a teenage girl. Ms. Kostash talks to girls ranging from mondo rich, attending a private school, all the way to the other extreme — girls that have been in and out of shelters since they were nine years old. With facts, case studies, and analysis, eventually all the pieces fall together. You finish reading with an idea of what a generic teenaged girl wants, and worries about.

The unfortunate point is that interspersed with the wonderful (and sometimes horrific) anecdotes and facts there are feminist

diatribes and jibes. But what am I supposed to know anyhow, I'm a man. I'm the whole problem, right?

A little while into the book you learn to skip the last paragraph of each chapter. Inevitably, the last paragraph sums up the feminist impact. There were points in this book where I had to force myself to keep reading. The feminist jargon gets layered on too thickly sometimes.

It will weary male readers to be lumped quickly into one category. Generic evil, screwing around, lying, and generally exploiting — that is the only side of males visible in this book. With all the effort expended on looking down on men, the book manages to make it a predominant topic.

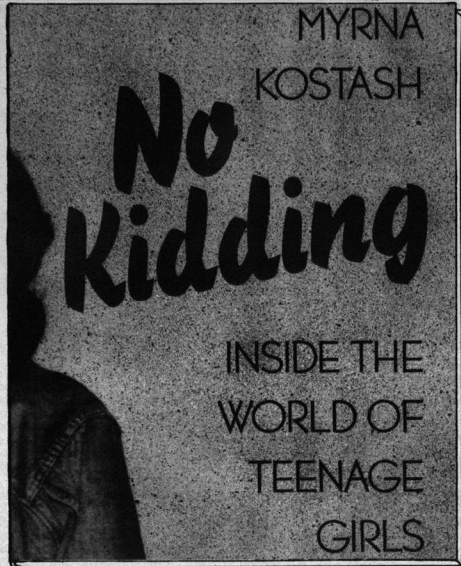
Despite the sometimes inflammatory slant, the author has really done her homework. She backs all her sociological assumptions with statistics from relevant studies. She has talked to social workers, teachers, child psychologists, parents, and even school cops.

She talked to girls about school, work, boys, parents, sex, boys, friends, entertainment, boys, music, hanging out, careers, and let's not forget: boys. There are very interesting explorations of the various families, and backgrounds, and how they affect the world views of teenage girls.

A major conclusion of this book was one made obvious by what Ms. Kostash's interviewees didn't talk about: parents. This book is not about families. It is about the real lives of teenage girls, and unless the families are particularly fascist, abusive, or incestuous, they don't rate highly as an influence.

The book also takes considerable care to examine where each girl's life is headed: what happens when they grow up, and how the choices made now will affect them. There is a lot of study of our society, the job market, and where all this will end up when these teenagers stop being teenagers.

A large part of the book chronicles what teenagers go through searching for jobs and



Warning: Feminist!

viable futures, and the pitfalls that have befallen some. There are some blunt examples of girls who are rapidly heading into a dead end.

This is really a fascinating book, and the harsh reality contained in it will probably shock most of the innocent, naive parents out there. It won't help adults be better

parents, but teenage girls who read this book will benefit. This should be required reading for any teenager. It will help them to know what is going on in the real world, and to realize that there are others out there with exactly the same problems and situations with which they are struggling.

I'm giving my copy to a teenager I know.

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