

**WE ARE ALL GUILTY,
AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER,
OF...**



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BAD BEHAVIOUR

LIZ BYRSKI

PAN MACMILLAN AUSTRALIA
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In the first decade of the 'noughties' the bad behaviour of youth casts its shadows on mature and settled present lives. Are Zoe, in Perth, and Julia, in Sussex, its heroes or its demons? If they risk looking back they may discover more than they bargained for and discover that the past can still influence not simply the present, but also the future.

It is 1968 - London simmers with racial tension and in Paris striking students and workers bring the city to its knees. Across the world the political and cultural revolutions are played out in demonstrations and riots. It is the year when ordinary people stand up to be counted and it is also the year of sex, drugs and rock and roll, but not everyone lives at the cutting edge of revolution and radical chic and not all hearts are captive to the politics of the age.

At nineteen Zoë Conran arrives in London to share a damp old house in Kilburn and discovers a life very different from anything she has known in Australia. When she falls in love with Richard Linton at the BBC she discovers that the personal can become unexpectedly and painfully political. And Richard riding high on the spirit of the times struggles with his conflicting desires and burning ambition.

In Paris, Richard's sister Julia, meets Tom, an armchair activist, and falls in love with the man and the revolution, but circumstances will soon propel her headlong into a relationship which she believes will free her from the stifling authority of her parents. Both she and Tom must face the fact that every action has consequences, some of which last a lifetime.

And in a Western Australian convent, 12-year-old Justine, stolen from her mother, struggles to survive the harsh fate of those ostensibly 'rescued' for their own good.

Forty years on, their lives shaped by the events of the latter half of the 20th century, Zoe and Julia are brought together again by the consequences of their own behaviour and by events and desires that echo the struggles of the sixties.

From the turbulence of '68 to the violent events of a new century, this is a story of women and men coming to terms with their past, the decisions they have made, the people they have loved and, finally, with themselves.

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LIZ BYRSKI WILL BE TOURING AUSTRALIA IN SEPTEMBER-

Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth

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LIZ BYRSKI



I was 34 when, in 1978 I read Marilyn French's life-changing novel, *The Women's Room*. I was a sole parent with two young sons and mine was one of the many lives that was changed by reading it. That book had such an impact on me that I wrote to Marilyn French to thank her. I can only remember one sentence from that letter - 'you made me see that if I keep behaving like a doormat people will keep wiping their feet on me'. When I mailed it I never imagined that 30 years later I'd be getting letters and emails from women telling me that my books had changed *their* lives.

After my first novel, *Gang of Four*, was published in 2004 women began telling me that the book had made them think about their lives in a different way. I'd started writing fiction in desperation at the invisibility of older women as realistic central

characters in popular fiction; now women were saying that the books made them feel as though they mattered. One woman who wrote from Williamstown seemed to sum up what others were saying, 'Thanks for shining the spotlight on us,' she wrote, 'I no longer feel invisible'. But the first time I became aware that women were actually changing their lives as a result of reading my books was more than a year later.

I switched on the radio one morning and the breakfast announcer was talking to a woman who had given up her job to go to Peru and work for six months as a volunteer in an orphanage. She said she'd felt inspired to do it after reading my books. I could barely believe what I was hearing but some months later we met and she and others told me about the changes they had made in their lives. Some changes are small and meaningful, others literally are life changing.

At a book signing in Sydney last year a woman told me that as a teenager she had been a State swimming champion and had wanted to become a swimming teacher. She had spent her life instead as a corporate lawyer. But in her mid-fifties, after reading my books she had left the law and retrained as a swimming teacher. It had given her, she said, a wonderful new life.

These days I also hear from many younger women who tell me that the books are providing them with inspiring images of ageing, very different, and more positive than they had previously imagined. But perhaps the biggest surprise is that so many men read and enjoy them and admit to learning something about women from them!

After *The Women's Room*, I read Sue Kauffman's *Diary of a Mad Housewife*, Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying*, and Marge Piercy's *Small Changes* and *Braided Lives*. Those and other consciousness raising novels of the seventies inspired me in so many ways and they fired my love of popular fiction and my desire to write it. I believe passionately in the power of popular fiction to explore challenging issues and convey ideas by telling engaging stories that reflect reality. As a reader it worked for me in the seventies, and now, thirty years later in my mid-sixties, it's working for me as a writer. Popular culture is heavily focused on younger women, but we older women are still here. We have different priorities, different problems, different pleasures and aspirations. We want to read books about women like us, and I certainly want to keep writing them.

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PUBLICITY

From readers:

Thank you for writing books about women 50+, I can't put them down. I don't know if you can imagine what a relief and joy it is to read about women living lives like mine, and being concerned about the same things and finding pleasures that are so much more meaningful as we get older. The depths and richness of your books makes an incredibly emotional journey always for me. Thank you again.

Leeanne, Geelong

I read *Gang of Four*, and then *Belly Dancing for Beginners*, and those books inspired me to give up my job and enrol at university to do a degree in history. Something I've wanted to do since I was 17. I will be 60 when I graduate. My husband is gobsmacked, but he's also really thrilled, yes – you've even helped revive our relationship! More books please – soon.

Maria, Newcastle

I am a 54 year old male and have worked all my life in crisis and counselling as a mental health nurse. Your writing hits so many spots for me when I read your books I want to give them to my wife, my friends, everyone I care about particularly the menopausal men. I appreciate so much your writing, it leaves me deep in thought as to what I need to do for myself.

Bill

Thanks for getting me back into reading, I hadn't given myself time to read but your books have helped me deal with challenging times of late. I am in my early 40s and am going to let *Food, Sex & Money* and *Gang of Four* help me to get through the next ten years when I want a life changing event to happen. The 'I can do it' attitude.

Ann

I can relate to all your characters and they give me courage to do things I've been thinking about for years. I began with taking a holiday alone for the first time, then I learned canoeing, and then I was brave enough to risk getting into a new relationship after 15 years alone. Your characters made me believe I could transform my life. I am 62 and excited about the future. It used to look bleak but now I know it's just what I make it and I'm determined to make it wonderful.

Irene.

I wish I read your books when I was in my twenties. Why weren't you writing them then? It would have helped me to know so much about women. But I'm only 58 so I still have time to get things right and I'm certainly going to try. Thanks for the reading pleasure and the life lessons! I have never written to an author before.

Allan, Bathurst

Thank you for the wonderful books. Although I am only 46 (!), it is such a relief to read books that are not about someone in the 20s or early 30s acting as though their life is over because a fingernail broke.

Janet, Tasmania

I've read them all, and after *Trip of a Lifetime*, which was even closer to my experience than all the others, I thought you must have been looking through the windows of my life and watching me! So now I'm dusting myself off, taking early retirement to do all the things I've always wanted to do. One of those things is finding out who I really am - I'm 57 so I guess I should know by now, but it's never too late to start.

Cassie, Parkerville


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