

AN AUTHOR MALIGNS: THE VICTIM RESPONDS

My name is Nancy Seaman and for 52 years I lived a private, ordinary life as a law-abiding citizen, dedicated teacher, and devoted wife and mother. But on May 10, 2004 a tragedy thrust me into the public spotlight. On that fateful day, a verbal altercation with my abusive husband about my plans to leave our 31-year marriage turned violent. I defended myself against his final assault on my life with unintended and deadly consequences. My husband was dead, I was charged with his homicide, and my family was shattered, but the worst was yet to come.

Before the ink was dried on my husband's death certificate, a ruthless author named Joyce Maynard descended upon us like a vulture in her relentless pursuit of interviews with me and my loved ones for her tawdry true crime book about my case, entitled "Internal Combustion". She had no respect for our privacy, no compassion for our misery and heartbreak, and no empathy for our profound loss. Maynard only expressed frustration and vindictiveness when I rebuffed her numerous attempts to secure an interview. In her final letter to me, she threatened to make her book an "unflattering portrayal" unless I agreed to cooperate with her. The tone of her book is proof that she followed through with her threat.

No one is immune from tragedy. It can befall anyone, and unfortunately any unscrupulous writer like Joyce Maynard who is motivated solely by greed and a quest for notoriety can write about it. Joyce Maynard was unable to secure interviews with me or those who knew me well. She never met me, never spoke to me, and she knew nothing about my life, character, or accomplishments, but that did not stop her from writing about me as if she had.

The Detroit Free Press review of her book rightly panned it, criticizing Maynard for having no input from the person she was writing about, and the review further suggested that Maynard's writing was influenced by the bitterness she felt over the breakup of her own marriage. The review characterized Maynard's writing as "parachute journalism" where she "dropped in, read some news clips and maybe a few minds", and based her book on "superficial interviews" with one son and my husband's mistress. Joyce Maynard's book was thin on research, short on facts, thick with innuendo, and lacking in credibility or objectivity. She wasn't interested in providing her readers with a factual account of the events or an honest portrayal of those touched by the tragedy. Maynard didn't care that her insensitive and inaccurate portrayal of a family she knew nothing about compounded our grief or that her dishonest portrayal of me could jeopardize my pending appeals or quest for commutation. Joyce Maynard's intent was not to enlighten the public about the tragedy of an abusive relationship, but rather to capitalize on the sensationalism of a high profile case and fatten her bank account with profits from a book which she misrepresented as factual and duped the public into buying. Like an ambulance chaser, Maynard's goal was to be the first on the scene and profit from a tragedy. Her warning to me that there would only be one book written about this subject and it was going to be her book told me all I needed to know about her true motivation.

Joyce Maynard's book does not accurately portray my life or my character. Without input from those who knew me best, how could it? Maynard's book doesn't describe how I remained a devoted, loving, and faithful wife despite 31 years of my husband's

physical, verbal, emotional abuse and infidelity or how my purchase of a condo five months before the tragedy was my attempt to peacefully leave the marriage. Her book contained no description of my love and devotion for my two sons, my extended family, and friends. She fails to mention my service to the community, my passion for teaching, or my generosity.

Joyce Maynard's book failed to acknowledge that I was an award-winning teacher who was nominated for "teacher of the year" or that I received an award from Governor Jennifer Granholm for encouraging and promoting cultural diversity in my classroom. She failed to mention that my Master's thesis on Non-Violent Conflict Resolution in the Classroom was the cornerstone of my teaching philosophy. Had Maynard done her research, perhaps she would have discovered something about my true character - that teaching was my passion, not just a career; that I always kept food in my classroom closet to feed those students who came to school hungry and unable to concentrate on their studies; that I was den mother to a group of Cub Scouts; that I took time out of my personal life to attend my students' dance recitals, basketball, baseball, football games, and other extra-curricular activities; that I developed teaching aids to help students who had learning challenges; that I co-chaired the School Improvement Team and served on my school district's assessment and reading/writing committees; that I spent hundreds of dollars out of my own pocket at the beginning of each school year to ensure that each incoming student was welcomed with all new school supplies; or that I spent thousands of dollars of my own money over the course of my career to ensure that my classroom had the most innovative and creative teaching resources to enrich my students' educational experiences. Maynard made no mention that my teaching successes turned non-readers into readers, non-writers into creative writers, that I

accommodated all learning styles, and that I developed and nurtured a love of learning in those students who previously hated school. No, Joyce Maynard, you knew nothing about the person of whom you chose to vilify.

Our First Amendment right guaranteeing freedom of speech is our most coveted and protected right, yet it is a double-edged sword. That Constitutional right that affords citizens protection from persecution for expressing their viewpoints unfortunately also protects unscrupulous journalists like Joyce Maynard who cloak themselves in the protection of the First Amendment while they write their tawdry books which smear, slander, and besmirch those most vulnerable and defenseless in their hour of crisis.

Society has a thirst for sensational stories rife with salacious and titillating details, so journalists like Joyce Maynard will always exist. But, the public can use its spending power to hold these journalists accountable and deny them from profiting when their conduct compromises the integrity of the journalism profession.

Nancy Seaman

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