



Say What You Will

By Cammie McGovern

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John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* meets Rainbow Rowell's *Eleanor & Park* in this beautifully written, incredibly honest, and emotionally poignant novel. Cammie McGovern's insightful young adult debut is a heartfelt and heartbreaking story about how we can all feel lost until we find someone who loves us because of our faults, not in spite of them.

Born with cerebral palsy, Amy can't walk without a walker, talk without a voice box, or even fully control her facial expressions. Plagued by obsessive-compulsive disorder, Matthew is consumed with repeated thoughts, neurotic rituals, and crippling fear. Both in desperate need of someone to help them reach out to the world, Amy and Matthew are more alike than either ever realized.

When Amy decides to hire student aides to help her in her senior year at Coral Hills High School, these two teens are thrust into each other's lives. As they begin to spend time with each other, what started as a blossoming friendship eventually grows into something neither expected.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Q&A with Cammie McGovern

Curtis Sittenfeld is the bestselling author of *American Wife*, *The Man of My Dreams*, and *Prep*. Recently, she sat down with fellow author Cammie McGovern to chat about Cammie's debut YA novel, *Say What You Will*. Read the resulting interview below.

Curtis: You've written several well-received novels for adults. Did you consciously decide to shift to writing a YA novel, or did you write the novel you wanted to write and it turned out to be YA?

Cammie: It's impossible to be a parent, reading aloud to young kids and later on, sharing books with your teens, and not be tempted to try your hand at writing it yourself. That said, *SAY WHAT YOU WILL* originally started out as an adult mystery. Amy was much the same: a highly intelligent, very disabled young woman who disappears a few weeks after her graduation from Stanford. The problem was: it never worked. The only part I liked was a relatively small subplot where one of her helpers—Matthew—talks about the year they spent together in high school and how he felt like Amy was the best friend he'd ever made. For no reason that I planned, he was her only helper who hadn't gone to college and was far less successful than the others, but—somehow—he was the most appealing thing in the book.

So I started over and wrote a bunch of new scenes with Amy and Matthew back in high school. Talking honestly. Getting to know each other. Once I picked this path, it clicked into place quickly and I wrote the book in about eight months. I tell this story because I so appreciate when writers admit how LONG it takes them to find a story that works. It's an arduous process that only looks easy after you've finished the book. I also have to add, very happily, that I've fallen in love with YA and now have no plans to write anything else!

Curtis: Along the same lines, did you specifically want to write about characters with disabilities? Did you intend to overturn certain stereotypes (for instance, that being disabled makes one uninterested in sex)?

Cammie: I'm interested in writing about characters with disabilities, in part, because I live with one (my eighteen-year-old son, Ethan, has autism) and partly because the smartest thing I did after he was diagnosed was help start an organization called Whole Children that runs recreational programs for kids, teens, and young adults with disabilities. In the last two decades, the lives of kids with disabilities have changed dramatically. Thanks to mainstreaming, the majority are attending public schools with supports in place and aides to facilitate. What this means—I think—is that today's typically-developing kids are more aware of people with disabilities than their parents were, but they don't necessarily know them any better. I suspect much of the time, the kid with the disability is still a mysterious presence in the back of the classroom with an adult aide by their side and a very few kid-friends. I wanted Matthew to be like I would have been: fascinated by that person, and scared of her, too.

The other staggering change for teenagers with disabilities is that there are so many more of them now. According to the 2012 US Government Disability Statistics, there are over 1.2 million teenagers between the ages of 16-20 who identify themselves as living with a disability severe enough to affect their future independence. Over a million! This is the largest minority group in America and, I'd have to wager, the most

underrepresented in books, movies, TV shows, and popular culture. I'd love to see that change in the coming years.

Now that I've gotten to know MANY teens with disabilities, I'd have to say, yes, they defy all stereotypes, including one of the biggest ones: That they aren't interested in relationships and sex. The more I've read on the subject, the more I realize, with educated, supportive assistance, the happiness factor goes up exponentially when teens with disabilities have loving, supportive friendships of all kinds. This is what Amy intuitively so much better than her mother and why she fights so hard to establish a real relationship with Matthew.

Curtis: Your sister is the actress Elizabeth McGovern, who's currently starring as Cora Crawley in Downton Abbey. What kind of home did you grow up in that turned out two successful artists?

Cammie: We grew up—along with our older brother, Monty, who is a math professor at University of Washington—as the children of two teachers (our father was a law school professor, our mother a high school English teacher). Our house was full of books and even though I was a secret TV addict as a child and not a particularly voracious reader, the effect was still the same—books, and the conversations they inspired, were valued above everything else. My sister was an early inspiration because she was bold and self-confident about wanting to be an actress at a very young age, even when our parents were frantically steering her in other, more practical directions. She was also very kind about my writing before I had any discernible talent, mostly because I don't think she liked standing alone in the artistic spotlight. (She might be an actress for a living but she's a surprisingly shy one, and doesn't relish the limelight. I'm a much more social creature than she is.) Mostly I learned from her early example that to become an artist takes a certain self-confidence—and not a showy, arrogant kind, but a quiet one lodged deep within one's heart that this is, very simply, what you want to do. I suspect our parents, while worrying about these impractical career choices, also, in their own way, cheered them on: Our mother is a wonderful writer herself. Her letters are witty and full of warmth and finding one at the bottom of a drawer can instantly transport me back in time. Our father, in a different incarnation, should have been an actor himself, as any of his friends who were in his "Shakespearean Play Reading Group" can attest. I think they're all still recovering from the surprise of him showing up to the first meeting dressed as King Lear complete with a towel cape and a cardboard crown.

From School Library Journal

Gr 9 Up—Amy has cerebral palsy, and has spent the past 17 years with walkers, voice boxes, and adults. She's gone through school at the same pace as her peers but without friends or socializing. When one of her classmates, Matthew, challenges her cheerful facade, Amy realizes she's missed out on developing true peer relationships. So for their senior year, Amy asks her parents to pay classmates to be her companions instead of her usual adult aids. She begs Matthew to apply, and the two embark on a friendship that addresses Amy's limitations, Matthew's own disorder, and all their secrets—all except the one they really need to share. Both teens struggle with their realities and limitations, and a love soon develops between them. The harsh reality of high school social dynamics are authentically portrayed. The main characters are well developed, though secondary characters are little more than background noise. Recommend to fans of John Green's *The Fault In Our Stars* (Dutton, 2012) and realistic fiction with a love story angle.—Natalie Struecker, Rock Island Public Library, IL

From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review It isn't that words fail Amy: she has plenty to tell, and her wry and witty mind is unaffected by her cerebral palsy. Her speech, though, is incomprehensible, so a talking computer speaks for her. To move in her body, she requires a walker and a helper to assist her between classes. But she is fiercely independent, and for her senior year, she has decided that students her own age will be her school aides.

Maybe that will help with the one area she has struggled to master her whole life—making real friends—as she prepares to transition to college. Matthew, stunted and isolated by his obsessive-compulsive disorder, signs on to assist Amy and inadvertently embarks on a self-improvement project that she passionately encourages. As they lean on each other and their relationship deepens, even as they each inch toward independence, Amy and Matthew test the boundaries of their self-determination and their friendship, much to the disappointment of Amy's worried mother. Exhilarating and heartrending, McGovern's YA debut has a similar odd-couple camaraderie as Rainbow Rowell's *Eleanor & Park* (2013) and the raw exploration of disability in R. J. Palacio's *Wonder* (2012). With a smart, proud, and capable protagonist eager to take her life by the reins, this novel is stunning. Grades 9-12. --Lexi Walters Wright

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Anh Huckaby:

Now a day folks who Living in the era everywhere everything reachable by talk with the internet and the resources included can be true or not involve people to be aware of each details they get. How a lot more to be smart in receiving any information nowadays? Of course the answer is reading a book. Studying a book can help persons out of this uncertainty Information particularly this Say What You Will book because book offers you rich info and knowledge. Of course the knowledge in this book hundred per cent guarantees there is no doubt in it as you know.

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