



Sample Interview with Kathleen H. Wheeler, Author of *Brought To Our Senses*

In the award-winning novel *Brought To Our Senses*, Elizabeth Miller discovers that aging parents are a family affair when her divorced mother receives a deadly diagnosis and becomes a volatile patient. Forced to work with siblings at odds through the crisis, she learns when all is lost, family begs to be found.

Author Kathleen H. Wheeler is here to talk about her family saga novel.

Q: Welcome Kathleen, and thanks for joining us for this interview. Let's get right to it. Tell us a little bit about yourself.

KHW: I'm just your average Joe living the dream to write and publish a novel, call it my mid-life crisis! Kathleen H. Wheeler is my pen name because you'll find a gazillion Kathy Wheelers out there, *An Abundance of Katherines* another author might even say. So you can call me Kathy like everyone else.

Q: Okay, Kathy, so what's the premise of *Brought To Our Senses*?

KHW: In essence, it's a story about the importance of family and forgiveness. The premise is simple: the intersection of dysfunctional family and Alzheimer's disease, which is a precarious crossroads.

Q: What inspired you to write *Brought To Our Senses*?

KHW: I was inspired by my mother and music.

Q: Mothers are a common source of inspiration, especially for daughters, while music is more unusual. How exactly does music play a part in your book?

KHW: For starters, the book title is adapted from one of my favorite Sting songs called "I Was Brought To My Senses." It evokes the overall mood I'm trying to achieve with the novel, and the lyrics reinforce the narrative. The song talks about the promise of new beginnings through the cycle of relationships broken and mended like the seasons, and the necessary path we must all travel, accepting death to appreciate life more. This song played on repeat in my head as I wrote, so much so that no other title would work once I finished.

Q: What themes did you set out to explore in your novel?

KHW: First and foremost, family relationships and how fragile and complicated those bonds can be. Divorce is another theme running rampant through my story, and how a messy breakup impacts all the other family dynamics. Alzheimer's disease is also a topic of focus, and specifically the chaos surrounding the illness and its influence on already strained relationships.



Q: What's unique about your novel?

KHW: Three things make my novel different. First, it comes with a built-in soundtrack courtesy of Sting. I really wanted to add emotional depth through music to make this narrative sing—resonate and take hold, you know?

Q: Why Sting? What's the connection there?

KHW: Well, I'm a great admirer of Sting's music and his songwriting, anyone who knows me knows that about me. Call it a defining trait or maybe even a character flaw! Music is a personal preference, after all, and I've always connected with Sting's songs since I was a teen. Nothing moves me more than the combination of words and music. I rarely cry at the saddest of books or movies, but I'm moved to tears of joy and sadness by a good song with an emotional story. As I started writing my novel, certain Sting songs popped into my head and pushed me along. Each chapter is titled after a Sting song with lyrics that foreshadow the drama about to unfold. Sting has not endorsed my book, but I have secured permission to quote his song lyrics in my novel.

Q: Okay, that's one unique quality. What else?

KHW: Second, the book tackles the difficult journey through legal guardianship, why that's necessary and how it's accomplished. Legal guardianship is a grueling and frustrating process that I haven't seen addressed through fiction in any of my reading or research.

Q: Legal guardianship? That's basically suing a loved one to be granted custody over them, right?

KHW: You've got the gist of it. You'll hear about power of attorney often with aging parents and elder care. But when a parent won't grant power of attorney, for whatever reason, legal guardianship is the only alternative. It's pretty much the nightmare scenario you want to avoid, but in some cases the only option left, which makes for great drama of course!

Q: What's the third thing that sets your novel apart?

KHW: My novel invites readers along on the full journey of dementia, exploring an individual long before diagnosis, during their decline, and beyond the bitter end. I find that many books and films avoid the whole story, a disservice to all those who suffer such an affliction in my opinion.

Q: Isn't that sort of revelation terribly sad, won't that put readers off?

KHW: There's a lot of fear associated with dementia. I hope to break through that barrier to show that while death is the unavoidable outcome of Alzheimer's disease, that anguish can also be cathartic for those forced to witness it. People dealing with dementia or faced with the prospect of it, whether a patient or a caregiver, deserve to know how it turns out. They also need hope to get through it.

Q: What's the most important thing readers will learn from *Brought To Our Senses*?

KHW: Family means everything. Maybe a reader will recognize they need to give their relatives a break and reconsider their family history in a more compassionate and forgiving light. Most people behave the best they can under difficult circumstances and do hurtful things for reasons that are hard to understand from a selfish perspective. Heroes are never 100% saints, and villains



are never 100% sinners; people fall more along the midline of the spectrum than we choose to believe when we've been wounded.

Q: What's your favorite chapter in the book?

KHW: Tough question, but two chapters stand out for me. Chapter 8—Fragile was the first chapter I ever wrote, everything grew from that first seed. All hell breaks loose and the family gets in over their heads. You know what I mean—the excrement really hits the fan. Everything before and after was conceived from the awful predicament of Chapter 8.

Q: What's your other favorite chapter then?

KHW: Chapter 3—Synchronicity. It's the genesis of the whole story that explains the source of all the problems to come, nostalgic and revealing all at once. I researched and rewrote that chapter many times to make that time period from the Great Depression until the early fifties feel authentic. No matter how many times I go back and reread Chapter 3, I'm always happy with the way it turned out.

Q: What's your favorite scene in the book?

KHW: Easy—Teri getting kicked out of high school on purpose. That scene delivers on so many levels: shock factor, victory, and defeat all in one knockout punch. Teri is a deeply troubled teen and my most complex character. The way she deals with her angst is riveting. Writing something so over the top was a blast! I worried about the profanity, but it's absolutely essential as an integral part of Teri's character. She's not just pissed off though, she's incredibly brave too.

Q: What do your characters have to overcome in this story? What challenges do you set before them?

KHW: The main character, Elizabeth, has several challenges. Her external conflict is to care for her mother in the best way possible, which is difficult with siblings who don't agree on what's best. Her internal conflict is to come to terms with the part she played in her family's dysfunctional past and to make amends with her siblings and father. They all deal with the same external and internal struggle too, but from different perspectives and roles within in the family.

The antagonist is the mother of the family named Janice. While causing all sorts of problems for her children, she deals with the heartbreaking reality of dementia. She refuses to go down without a fight, and her denial and hostility stems from fear as much as cognitive impairment.

Q: How long did it take you to write *Brought To Our Senses*?

KHW: I chipped away on this novel for seven long years while the sculpture kept changing shape. I began writing in November of 2008 and completed four different drafts until I felt I'd done the story justice in 2015.

Q: "Write about what you know" is common advice. What elements of this story were you familiar with?

KHW: That's why I decided to write about a family of divorce dealing with dementia. I know all about Alzheimer's disease after seeing my mother through it. And I know about broken family because I grew up in one. Having experienced both, I could see the additional difficulties and



emotional toll this monstrous disease could place on families that don't get along. I knew this killer combination would make a compelling story.

Q: Complete the sentence: People should read *Brought To Our Senses* because ...

KHW: People should read *Brought To Our Senses* because they'll be reminded of the importance of family and the healing power of forgiveness.

Q: What response would you like to see from readers of your novel?

KHW: I'd love to hear a reader say they were so touched by the story that they reached out to a family member that they hadn't spoken to in years to extend a long overdue apology. "I'm sorry" is just two little words that can change everything, yet sometimes people are just too stubborn to take the first step.

Q: What has been the most rewarding aspect of having written this book?

KHW: Just finishing the book has been rewarding for me! At some point along the way I realized what a monumental task I'd undertaken, and many times I wondered if I'd finish the story. It's one thing to say, "I should write a book," and something completely different to actually do it, and do it well.

Also, hearing people say the book helped them to think about their own family in a new and more sympathetic way is gratifying.

Q: Who's your favorite author?

KHW: Jane Austen without a doubt. *Pride and Prejudice* is a masterpiece and the blueprint for family drama, a master study in relationships and social conventions of a bygone era.

Q: Any other particular authors or books that influenced you, either growing up or as an adult?

KHW: I read everything growing up, anything I could get my hands on plus all the books you'd expect like *Charlotte's Web*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Little House on the Prairie*, the Nancy Drew mysteries. I recall reading a bunch of books about horses as a girl—maybe that's a Midwestern thing? I remember reading *Flowers in the Attic* as a teen and thinking, "Man, this is one screwed up family!" But the writers I admire most, as a child and now, are songwriters who tell a touching story or drive a point home with very few words accompanied by music, of which Sting is my favorite.

Q: Okay, so where can we buy *Brought To Our Senses*?

KHW: Once the novel is released, you'll find it at all the major online retailers, from Amazon to Barnes & Noble to iBooks.

Q: What's next for you? Are you writing anything new?

KHW: I'm a first-time author, so I'm still working on getting up to speed with my writing career! I'm mulling things over, toying with some ideas to see what might pan out as a follow up. Whatever I decide, let's hope I can get it done faster than my first novel.



Q: Thanks for your time today, Kathy. How can people find out more if they're interested in *Brought To Our Senses*?

KHW: It's been a pleasure, thank you. You'll find the novel on Amazon or wherever you buy books online. And for more information and the latest news, visit BroughtToOurSenses.com.

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About the Author:

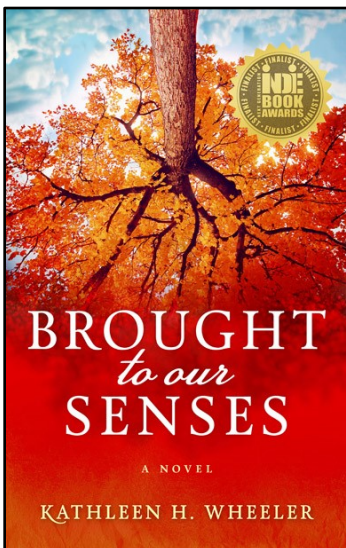


Award-winning author Kathleen H. Wheeler writes stories that sing because she cannot. Her debut novel *Brought To Our Senses* was named a 2017 Next Generation Indie Book Awards Finalist for First Novel.

A graduate of the University of Illinois, she has wordsmithed as a marketing communications professional for ad agencies and corporations since Nike first coined the slogan "Just Do It." Wheeler is a music enthusiast and lifelong fan of a British musician known by a one-syllable nickname. Along with her husband and two children, she calls the Land of Lincoln home.

Learn more and subscribe for news at BroughtToOurSenses.com.

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Book Website: www.BroughtToOurSenses.com
Author Website: www.AuthorKathleenHWheeler.com