



Sophie Duffy

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Dear teachers

**F**ORGIVE THIS OPEN LETTER but I must thank several of you at once. You have all influenced my writing, in one way or another.

Firstly, thank you to my brother, Rhys, for teaching me to write my name. I can remember the fat crayon's smell, the greasiness in my hand, the slipperiness as I made marks on paper. The mystery of those magic symbols that *somehow* conveyed meaning. And let's not forget you also taught me to bowl overarm and ride a bike. Thanks also go to you, Peter, the oldest of us three siblings, for introducing me to the silly humour of *The Goodies* and *Spike Milligan*. I treasure this.

Thank you, Mum and Dad, for the bedtime stories, the book tokens, the library visits. And for the adventure in the early seventies, the newsagent's in Torquay where we lived above the shop. An Aladdin's cave of sweets, tobacco, buckets and spades, where all the world came through the door — the Cockney war veteran, the Glaswegian factory workers, the posh vicar who robbed the bishop's vestments and silver chalice and ended up in prison. All this was inspiration for my first novel *The Generation Game*.

Thank you to my best friend. I was a quiet child, an observer, but with you, Merryn, I could be bold, leaping into imaginary worlds of ponies, ABBA and Björn Borg. Then, as we got older, scaring each other with ghost stories during sleepovers, sharing the dirty bits of Shirley Conran at the back of the science lab.



Thank you to my first teacher, Sister Marie Joseph, for reading us Bible stories every day, shining a light on a world of conflict and drama and complex family relationships like no other. I still bring flowers to your grave. And to Miss Medland, for encouraging me to write stories, for favouring the world of fiction over verbal and non-verbal reasoning. For the smile when you saw your name in the acknowledgements of *The Generation Game*. For befriending me on Facebook, reminding me how far I've come.

But to you, Mrs B, long since gone, I wonder why you couldn't even look me in the eye when given the news that my lovely dad had died by suicide. It was the end of my childhood. I was ten. I should be fair to you, after all the seventies weren't exactly equipped to help a child like me. Only books could do this. Mary Poppins, Scout Finch, Maggie Tulliver — you were my refuge.

I pinballed my way through secondary school and then there was you, Mr Milne, my English O Level teacher. You enabled me to tap into that creative spark hidden deep inside me. Inspired by Jilly Cooper and Jackie Collins, I wrote love stories which, despite being an Oxford graduate, you tolerated. You paved the way for me to join the Romantic Novelists' Association many years later.

Thanks to all of you for making me the writer I am today, for my love of the domestic, the family, the eccentrics of this world. We are all connected, and I hope that through my books someone, somewhere, will learn something.

Best wishes and fondest regards,  
Sophie Duffy