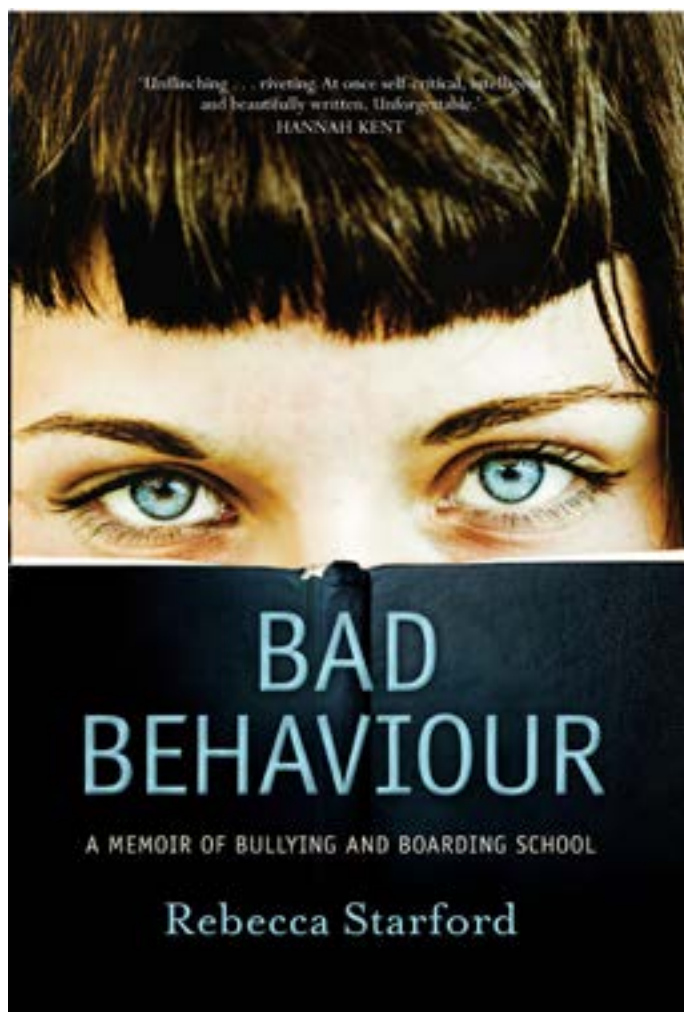


ALLEN & UNWIN



READING GROUP NOTES

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About the book

It is night. They move with such stealth they could be almost floating along the road. I can't see faces, just the outline of their movement. But when the moon drifts out from behind a cloud, bathing the road in an urgent sort of light, I see how they're all gazing up towards me. 'They're coming back,' I murmur. I turn to Kendall, and she puts her sewing aside, eyes on me. They never waiver.

It was supposed to be a place where teenagers would learn resilience, confidence and independence, where long hikes and runs in the bush would make their bodies strong and foster a connection with the natural world. Living in bare wooden huts, cut off from the outside world, the students would experience a very different kind of schooling, one intended to have a strong influence over the kind of adults they would eventually become.

Fourteen-year-old Rebecca Starford spent a year at this school in the bush. In her boarding house fifteen girls were left largely unsupervised, a combination of the worst behaved students and some of the most socially vulnerable. As everyone tried to fit in and cope with their feelings of isolation and homesickness, Rebecca found herself joining ranks with the powerful girls, and participating in various forms of bullying and aggression. Increasingly horrified at her own behaviour, Rebecca soon found herself excluded from this group and subjected to bullying herself.

Bad Behaviour tells the story of that year, a time of friendship and joy, but also of shame and fear. It explores how those crucial experiences affected Rebecca as an adult and shaped her future relationships, and asks courageous questions about the nature of female friendship.

Moving, wise and painfully honest, this extraordinary memoir shows how bad behaviour from childhood, in all its forms, can be so often and so easily repeated throughout our adult lives.

About the author

Rebecca Starford is the co-founder and publishing-director of *Kill Your Darlings* and an editor at Text Publishing. She has written for the *Guardian*, *Age*, *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Australian* newspapers. She was a founding member of the Stella Prize steering committee. *Bad Behaviour* is her first book. Rebecca lives in Melbourne.

Author, Rebecca Starford, on writing *Bad Behaviour*

After an unhappy break-up with a girlfriend, I started thinking about my relationship with women – and that path lead me back to Silver Creek, a year of my life that I had shut away, relatively unexamined. Only when I started to let memories creep out, did I start to think this could be something I could write about, which developed into the belief that I had to write about it.

I've been writing *Bad Behaviour* for around three years. I first imagined writing an essay about bullying, drawing on these experiences, but the ideas grew bigger than this, and I realised I had to expand it into book form, drawing heavily on my own experiences. The only research I really did was a subterfuge visit to the Silver Creek campus, which is detailed in the memoir, in order to confront many of these memories and the past."

For discussion

- ☞ Consider the author's experiences of bullying and being bullied. Where does bad behaviour come from - how does it start, what fuels it? And how and when does it end?
- ☞ Why do you think Rebecca tries so hard to win the affections of Portia? What power does Portia hold over her and the other girls in the dorm?
- ☞ "When I read over the letter, I begin to forget what actually happened and another memory starts to form, taking shape like my words on the page." (p. 23) Discuss the ways in which the author uses writing, both deliberately and unconsciously, to manipulate her memories of Silver Creek.
- ☞ "This is where it started. Here – at Silver Creek. This is where the fear began. And it was of my own making, not anyone else's." (p.189) How does fear impact Rebecca's relationships with others and with herself? What is she afraid of?
- ☞ "You don't see anything clearer up here... You only see yourself, stripped back, bare." (p.56) What does the author learn about herself through revisiting her childhood at Silver Creek? How does going back help her move forward?
- ☞ How does Rebecca struggle to come to terms with her own sexuality? What challenges does she face, both within herself, and from others?
- ☞ Consider Rebecca's relationships with girls throughout her life. How are the relationships of her childhood echoed in her later adult relationships with women? In what ways are they different?
- ☞ How do the adults in Rebecca's life, particularly her parents and Miss Lacey, influence her development through childhood and into adulthood?
- ☞ Discuss the importance of forgiveness in Rebecca's story

Suggested further reading

Laurinda – Alice Pung

Kill Your Darlings (literary magazine founded by Rebecca Starford)

Lord of the Flies – William Golding

Prep - Curtis Sittenfield

The Secret History - Donna Tartt

Bully for Them: Outstanding Australians on Hard Lessons Learned at School - ed. Fiona Scott-Norman

How to be Happy – Dave Burton

Suggested further reading (cont ...)

A List of Things That Didn't Kill Me – Jason Schmidt

Tomboy – Liz Prince

Two Boys Kissing – David Levithan

Bully for You – Fiona Scott-Norman

Fat Angie – E. E. Charlton-Trujillo

Some Girls Are – Courtney Summers