

## **Kristina Riggle Q & A for *The Whole Golden World*:**

What inspired you to write this particular book?

I saw a headline in my local paper that read: FORMER TEACHER ADMITS HAVING SEX WITH 17-YEAR-OLD GIRL. How could I not read on? But the most striking part of the story was how the young woman in question – eighteen years old by the time the court proceedings had begun – was seated on the defendant’s side of the court. Not with her parents. This got me thinking from the parents’ point of view, then from the girl’s side of the story, and how different those two narratives would be. Not to mention what the teacher’s wife would be going through.

So, is this novel based on a true story?

No, I wouldn’t go that far. I did follow the case in the paper, but those stories were not very detailed nor numerous, and that case never went to trial because the defendant pleaded guilty. I don’t know any of the private details, nor did I try to learn them. My version is completely made up, as is the setting of my book, Arbor Valley.

Where did the title, THE WHOLE GOLDEN WORLD, come from?

This novel was known as “Book 5” at first. Then one day, driving to the YMCA for an exercise class, the weirdest sunset happened right in front of me. There was a sort of crack between the clouds covering the sky and the edge of the horizon, just at the instant the sun was setting. The light that poured out was astonishing. The setting was as mundane as you can get: a Home Depot, a defunct lumberyard, a railroad crossing. But the light was magic. As soon as I stopped the car I scribbled lines of poetry. I’d already had Morgan’s character writing secret poetry (that is to say, I was writing the poetry) and so I knew I had to use this in the book. And so I did, at a pivotal point in the story, and the title comes from a line in that poem..

Do you relate to a particular character?

I relate to many of them in various ways. Rain, the dutiful yoga-teaching wife, is a peacemaker who thrives on stability and smoothing things over, making it her job to make everyone happy. That resonates with me. Dinah, the firebrand mom, tries so hard to parent perfectly that she sometimes goes overboard. My son is at the point where he sometimes dreads asking me a question because I’m prone to give him an encyclopedic answer just for the joy of responding to his interest, not to mention a nerdy desire to cover all the bases.

As for Morgan, I never went through anything like what she did (thank goodness). But it wasn’t hard to cast myself back to being seventeen and feeling like you have finally grown up and learned everything, only to have adults either treat you as an adult or a little kid, depending on what suits them at the moment. It’s infuriating and unfair in the teen-age mind. That quasi-adult,

shapeshifting stage is a heady and dangerous time, though it's too hard to see that as an adolescent right in the thick of it.

Did you have a particular goal in writing this book, or a point you were trying to make?

No. My books are often topical (I've written about breast cancer, blended families, and compulsive hoarding) but I don't give my novels an agenda, other than this: to make my characters understood. You don't have to like them, but I always hope the reader understands them by the end, even when they behave in ways that seem to be inexplicable on the surface. I approach all of my characters, antagonists included, with compassion. I don't believe my characters are extreme, even if their actions sometimes seem that way. None of them are so different than the rest of us.