Transcript of Mother and Daughter Book Club Meeting

Discussion of *Crash Course* with Author Tanis Browning-Shelp

Host – Sydney

Saturday, January 21, 2017

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - Okay we’re recording.

**Sydney** - Hello, this is Sydney Shelp. We are doing a recording of the book club meeting.

**Ella** - Video Diary Number One.

**Sydney** - Good luck, Charlie!

**Group** - Laughter.

**Sydney** - So this is, like, a pretty basic question. ***QUESTION: Who did you look up to most in the book, and why?*** Who wants to start?

**Ella** - I can start if you guys want. I liked Emma Sutcliffe because she’s very noble at the end, how she stops her race, and she could have won—it could have been really good for her—but she stops to see if Maryn’s okay and that’s just, you know, very noble. And I think she was very driven because you have to be driven to get that high in the sport. And she was also an honorable person.

**Sydney** - I looked up to her. But I also looked up to the Dad because, like, Maryn kind of roasted him a few times, but he always understood what she was going through. And he forgave her really quickly. And he was just a cool guy…a cool guy.

**Dominique** - I looked up to Emma for the same reason. I didn’t really get that far into the book because my Mom just bought it today.

**Group** - You just bought it today? Busted!

**Dominique** - So, yeah, I couldn’t really get *that* into the characters because I only read, like, a bit.

**Avery** - I’d say Emma for, you know, the same thing. But something she realized…that, like, winning wasn’t everything, and that it’s about people and not just the medals and stuff. I think that was a good realization. It’s what you should aspire to be.

**Phoebe** - Of course, I also looked up to Emma. But, also, I thought that Coach Webber was a really good role model for Maryn. Because he had a lot of confidence in her. And he had really good lines, too, that she kept bringing back to her and using in her everyday life, which I think was really helpful.

**Jill (Avery’s Mom)** - I was going to say the exact same thing. The other thing with Coach Webber is that he got dealt a pretty nasty hand there with the two girls and that’s his reputation…and he could have handled that very poorly. He was also very quick to forgive. Because Maryn could have cut things off sooner. She could have wrapped things up sooner than she did. And he moved past that. I think he understood, you know, given her age and different things like that…different challenges…that she kind of left him hanging for a while, so I liked the way he seemed to handle that. He seemed to take the high road with that situation and trust that it was going to work out. And, so, I liked, yeah, I’m going to say him.

**Nicole (Dominique’s Mom)** - I liked the coach too, but just to add another character, Maryn’s best friend Janey...she was just a good solid friend that stood out. It was partly because she understood that Maryn couldn’t share things with her and she supported her and she stuck up for her when she was being bullied at school. She stepped in and stood up for her.

**Kathy (Phoebe’s Mom)** - I would have to say for me that it was Emma all the way. At the end…I was telling Tanis in the kitchen earlier…that Emma really evoked emotion for me. I got weepy when she helped Maryn during the race because I just thought that was *incredible* that she was so self-sacrificing. I loved that. So, I really looked up to her.

**Jill (Avery’s Mom)** - I don’t know if Maryn would have done the same for Emma.

**Group** - Agreement. No, I don’t think she would have either!

**Kathy (Phoebe’s Mom)** - I don’t know if she would have. But it was great because that’s what really shed the light on things for Maryn, right? That action really let Maryn see what was important. It was a turning point. And really, it was…oh, I just *loved* her!

**Nicole (Dominique’s Mom)** - Maryn was surprised that she stopped for her.

**Kathy (Phoebe’s Mom)** - Maryn kept saying: “Go ahead, go ahead, don’t worry about me.” But Emma didn’t. She said: there’s no way that I would. She knew that she would feel bad about herself if she had gone ahead, right?

**Sarah (Ella’s Mom)** - I liked Emma, but I also liked Janey for the same reasons. I didn’t always feel like Maryn deserved her.

**Kerri (Millie’s Mom)** - So when you started the question, my first thought was Janey, then I thought her Dad, then Coach Webber. It was hard for me because they were all really great. You know, they all brought the story where it needed to go. For me it was the supporting characters.

**Ella** - I have a quick thing to add. I also think that Gil was a good character because he was always pretty supportive of Maryn. I liked when (I know that violence isn’t the answer), but when he stood up for his sister and he punched the guy in the face. I mean some people wouldn’t find it noble, but I kind of did. If you have a good reason to punch somebody in the face, then do it. I just thought he was a really good brother.

**Nicole (Dominique’s Mom)** - And he asked his Mom if he could help with dinner.

**Group** - Laughter. We were picturing North and Sydney cutting up the carrots…

**Sydney** - I don’t do that. I get home and dinner is there because of Mom.

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - That’s what I do. But this is *fiction*, people!

**Sydney** - Except that two of the teachers’ names were *real* teachers’ names. Madame Adams and Mr. Smith. Was that a coincidence?

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - I did that on purpose with Madame Adams.

**Sydney** - And Mr. Smith.

**Group** - Who was Mr. Smith?

**Sydney** - He was the music teacher at Hopewell.

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - Mr. Smith was *my* English teacher in high school. It was actually a bit of an homage to him.

**Sydney** - What about that thing at the front of the book that says everything is fiction. Anything else is purely coincidental?

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - It’s interesting to me that some of the grown-ups were picturing our family as they were reading the book because for me it is completely, wildly outside of that…the characters have nothing to do with my kids at all.

**Sydney** - I think *I’m* the Mom and *you’re* Maryn.

**Group** - Laughter

**Sydney** - Except that you don’t have substance abuse issues. Except for coffee, maybe. Are those drops a gateway drug? Do we know? Because Maryn was addicted!

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - Let’s come back to that. For now, where were you planning to go next, Syd?

**Sydney** - ***QUESTION: If you were in Maryn’s situation, how would you have handled the stress and the overload of stuff? Would you have resorted to something like the energy drops? Or would you have figured out other ways?***

**Sydney** - I guess I could answer first. I definitely would have dropped something. I probably would have dropped piano. Because when you do stuff like that, you want to *like* doing it. And maybe she did like doing it. But I think it was that she was doing too many things at such an intense level. So, like when I quit soccer, it was a huge relief because I had more time to do school work and stuff. So, I would have dropped the piano. The coach says that school is the number one priority. So, you could have reduced the schedule a little bit, like, for the mountain biking. Or, if you had a really tough thing the next day that you had to get in, just miss practice. Because it’s not the end of the world if you miss one practice. And maybe you need the rest! Because, clearly, she did need the rest.

**Millie** - I would have done something about piano. But I probably wouldn’t have completely dropped the piano. She was mostly practicing for one part of one song in a recital. But I don’t really know how recitals work. I would have just *not* gone to that recital. And just continued with piano slower.

**Dominique** - My mom told me that Maryn does end up quitting piano, right? Or she’s just going to do it for fun?

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - She’s going to keep taking her lessons, she’s just going to stop the intensive stuff, kind of like what Millie said, she’s not going to do her exams and recitals and stuff.

**Dominique** - Is it just like all that she is busy with is a bunch of intense biking and piano?

**Group** - And school.

**Dominique** - She’s in grade eight, right?

**Group** - She’s in grade nine at the beginning and grade ten at the end. Gil is in grade eight at the beginning and grade nine at the end.

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - They are in a high school kind of like De La Salle that has seven and eight in there too.

**Dominique** - Well, then I would have probably just quit piano, because she didn’t like piano, right?

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - She definitely got frustrated by it.

**Phoebe** - She felt like it was a part of her by then.

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - Janey questions it at one point, asking if she’s so intensely into biking why she does piano at such a hard level. And Maryn explains why, and she does care about it a lot, she just doesn’t know how to give something up, I think.

**Dominique** - Hm, well that’s a tough question. I’m just going to go to Ella.

**Ella** - I would probably say what everyone else is saying. Either quit piano completely and maybe just play at home a bit. Or just have lessons every two weeks or something just to go over songs you’ve been practicing. And sort of tone it down on the biking a bit, if it’s not completely, completely necessary for her to do well in her next race. And if I was her, I’d get a planner. Planners don’t really work for me, but if I was that busy then I would try to plan everything out.

**Avery** - I’m a little bit different. I wouldn’t quit piano. And I wouldn’t dull down the biking either, because she was really determined to go to the Olympics and I think she was really high on that. And she clearly also really loved piano. I know that she was really stressed about it all, but, like Ella said, she liked both of them and I think if she just sat down and figured it out, she might have been able to find a balance of biking to piano that would work for her. I wouldn’t quit either of them. I just think she had to be less stressed about it. Do as much but don’t be like: “I have to win this next race or I might not go to the Olympics!” I think she needed to realize that she didn’t have to win every race or do everything perfect and stuff.

**Dominique** - If she is really, really focused on getting to the Olympics, she could do home schooling.

**Phoebe** - First of all, for me, I could really relate to Maryn because I put a lot of things on my plate…I wouldn’t be doing the mountain biking at such a competitive level. But if I was Maryn, and I was so determined to go to the Olympics, then I think I would have to cut down on piano because I feel like she enjoyed mountain biking more, and that school was important to her, so piano was kind of the one underneath both of those. So, I think I would cut down on piano—still play it for fun—but not, like, consistently with all the exams and, yeah, the recitals.

**Avery** - I just have one more point. I think, maybe, she could have also talked to her teachers about it.

**Sarah (Ella’s Mom)** - Well she did get an extension on one thing.

**Avery** - Well, yeah, but I think if maybe at the beginning of the year she said: “I am really, really into this kind of stuff. It takes up a lot of my time. And I just want you to understand that.” Then maybe the teachers could have been more flexible with her and realized that, oh, if you’re a couple of days late, then they might understand. I know it depends from teacher to teacher because some of them might understand and some might be, like, “no you have to hand it on time, so figure it out!” But you have to communicate with the teachers and say this is the deal and maybe the teachers could suggest plans or extra study time that they could figure out.

**Phoebe** - I think another level of stress was added to her when she wasn’t respecting the rules with the energy drops and she wasn’t telling anyone. So, I think if I was her, I would have just told people my problem at the beginning to get that out of my way and release that stress. Because the other people around you, they could have really helped her out. It would have released another level of stress.

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - You guys are so together. Some teachers have said that they would like to use some of the themes in the book as discussion points for students. I’ve been amazed at the smart, sensible, open-minded approaches you guys are suggesting in our discussion. Lots of good ideas have come out. ***QUESTION: Are there other topics that you think would work as good discussion points for teachers and students?***

**Jill (Avery’s Mom)** - Bullying.

**Kathy (Phoebe’s Mom)** - For sure the bullying, yes. Phoebe and I were talking about the main themes earlier tonight. And I think balance for me is the biggest thing I take away from the book. Because that is a huge issue for kids today. Like, what I see, especially in our neighbourhood, everybody is so involved and there’s so much going on and what do I do?…And they feel this pressure to perform and do well. So, I think balance is huge.

**Jill (Avery’s Mom)** - When to ask for help.

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - Family was a theme, friendship…

**Sarah (Ella’s Mom)** - Communication…

**Sydney** - Did she have other friends?

**Group** - Joe, Liam, Omar (he was more Janey’s cup of tea), Lydia…

**Kathy (Phoebe’s Mom)** - Winning at any cost. You don’t necessarily get so fixated on the end goal that you forget about everything else. And so *not* having to win at any cost. And that’s what Emma taught her very easily when she decided to help her.

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - That is the crux of the title *Crash Course*. It was in that moment that she got schooled.

**Kathy (Phoebe’s Mom)** - Yes for me that was really evident. It felt like that was the point in the novel where it brought it all together for Maryn.

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - Yes, learning from your friends. It’s interesting for me to hear how drawn you all were to Emma.

**Sydney** - She was so nice.

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - Okay, to return to the idea of discussion points for teachers and students…what are some other themes or topics that might inspire discussion?

**Jill (Avery’s Mom)** - Another theme is addiction.

**Kerri (Millie’s Mom)** - The energy drops were something that seemed so benign.

**Kathy (Phoebe’s Mom)** - It was good the way you showed, in a subtle way, how the drops were so mood altering. And she seemed to realize it after she’d stopped them how much they had been affecting her. She didn’t realize it during, which I think is actually very realistic. Once you get a distance from it, you can see how it’s affected you. I thought that was really well done.

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - So that could be something that kids could learn from and talk about.

**Kathy (Phoebe’s Mom)** - Totally.

**Jill (Avery’s Mom)** - Somebody was joking earlier about them being a gateway drug. But you could see that maybe it starts with energy drops, then it goes to pills…

**Sydney** - Like pain killers.

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** – Or like caffeine pills.

**Sarah (Ella’s Mom)** - I did caffeine pills. It was, like, play sports…do homework…

**Ella** - Mom, were you addicted to caffeine pills?

**Sarah (Ella’s Mom)** - No. I was not Maryn, I can tell you that, but I do remember one night taking caffeine pills and lying there until 7:00 in the morning because I couldn’t sleep.

**Sydney** - There’s some kind of drug that a lot of high school students use. What is it? Is it speed? They use it to study.

**Sarah (Ella’s Mom)** - Yes, that is an intense drug, Speed.

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - Maryn needed *sleep* to fuel her activities. Okay, Sydney, did you have any more questions for the group?

**Sydney** - ***QUESTION: Do you think that Stephanie and Julie deserved to…***

**Sarah (Ella’s Mom)** - To burn in hell?

**Sydney** - I was going to ask ***if you think they deserved a more severe punishment?***

**Jill (Avery’s Mom)** - I think they deserved more than they got.

**Sydney** - Because when you get accused of something like that…even if you get cleared…it sometimes never goes away. Parents might ask is this really safe for my kid to be with this man?

**Sarah (Ella’s Mom)** - Parents might not send their girls to be in that club. They might choose to do something else.

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - They kept it contained, though. It didn’t get out.

**Kerri (Millie’s Mom)** - But it could have gotten out.

**Sarah (Ella’s Mom)** - Are there girls that are that mean?

**Sydney** - No, that’s insane.

**Ella** - I don’t think so.

**Phoebe** - Not that I’ve encountered yet.

**Kathy (Phoebe’s Mom)** - I’ve encountered people like that.

**Kerri (Millie’s Mom)** - I think they do exist. I’ve heard from parents at other schools. Maybe not to this intensity.

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - So, just to clarify, what did you think of the consequences?

**Sarah (Ella’s Mom)** - I thought it was believable that the coach chose not to press charges.

**Jill (Avery’s Mom)** - He just wanted to put it behind him.

**Kathy (Phoebe’s Mom)** - I thought there should have been more consequences. I wasn’t sure what, but it just seemed that fifty hours of community service…

**Sarah (Ella’s Mom)** - She was no longer the Editor of the newspaper. In that kind of world that was a lot.

**Phoebe** - And their parents would likely discipline them as well.

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - I’m getting a sense that you didn’t find Maryn very likeable and maybe you can’t even relate to some of the decisions she made. ***QUESTION: Were you still interested in her story?***

**Sydney** - I say things like: “I would just do this and I would just do that,” but, when I really think about it, I probably would have done similar things to Maryn. Well, not the energy drops, of course.

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - No, of course not. Noooo!

**Sydney** - I didn’t know that energy drops were a thing. I just thought they were drops to make the water taste good.

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - There was a real-life case of some kids chugging energy drinks here in Ottawa.

**Kerri (Millie’s Mom)** - Weren’t they Red Bulls that they were chugging? I’ve heard kids say: “It was *just* a Red Bull!” “It’s not just a Red Bull! It’s like three cups of coffee in there or something!”

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - They were pounding back the equivalent of twenty coffees. And in a growing body, that can be dangerous.

**Kathy (Phoebe’s Mom)** – Maryn…you know why she is likeable? It was all the subtext. So, she would get pissed off at Gil, but then she’d be upset with herself. Right? I found that likeable. She had some introspection, even though she couldn’t, you know, in the moment be who she wanted to be, she was able to reflect on it and say I wish I could be more like that. She is aspiring to be a better person. She just can’t—it was her outward behaviour—it wasn’t ideal, I agree. But she was likeable to me.

**Sydney** - She was just really intense.

**Phoebe** - I found her relatable with her problems of being really busy. I think that’s just me personally, but I think that’s very probable at our age group right now. I think that was very relatable, the overall problem of having too much on her plate.

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - It’s where she came from, for me. She’s an amalgamation of all of you guys. I tried to write this book for you guys, but it took me too long. ***QUESTION: Do you think this book is appropriate for your age group?***

**Kerri (Millie’s Mom) -** It’s totally appropriate for their age.

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - It only takes about three or three-and-half hours to read this book. I thought you would find that beneath you. You’ve been reading such massive books!

**Kathy (Phoebe’s Mom)** - But we never finish them! It was actually perfect that way. It wasn’t too onerous. It was really enjoyable. Even though it was a quick read, there was lots of content and lots of substance.

**Nicole (Dominique’s Mom)** - It was a good chapter book.

**Sarah (Ella’s Mom)** - I just finished teaching a bunch of third years. They seem to have a really short attention span. Did you keep your chapters short for this generation of readers?

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - They came out rhythmically, like music.

**Sydney** - It’s not necessarily my attention span all the time. But when I finish reading a chapter, it keeps me motivated. And when I can read five more chapters, it seems like I’m going places!

**Phoebe** - I thought it was nice to have short chapters because I felt like I was progressing more and that I was getting closer to the end.

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - You know what’s hilarious. I was on a personal deadline at one point to write a chapter a day. So maybe *that’s* why I kept them so short! To be serious, though, the chapters just came out that way. It must have been a natural rhythm for me.

**Kathy (Phoebe’s Mom) *- QUESTION: Do you tentatively map out your story?***

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - Yes, I do. But sometimes things still end up going in unexpected directions.

**Jill (Avery’s Mom) *- QUESTION: Do books two and three take place a year later? Two years later?***

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - Book two begins three months after book two ends. By the end of book three, she is 17. The next book is called *Crushed*. Maryn falls in love.

**Group** - With Joe?

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - I’m not saying.

**Group** - Awwwwww!

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - The idea is…what happens to all of Maryn’s focus and her drive when, all of a sudden, she’s ‘head over heels’ in love. Each book is an obstacle that gets in the way of her Olympic dream.

**Jill (Avery’s Mom)** - ***QUESTION: Do we ever find out if she makes it to the Olympics?***

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - You’ll have to read the next books to find out.

**Kathy (Phoebe’s Mom) *- QUESTION: How do you create your space and time for writing?***

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - I’ve been trying to carve out the perfect chunk of time, believing I have to get ‘in the zone’…But I’ve learned that even if I just do short bits of work it starts to work in my head. If I’m working on it, my brain is working on it. Once I learned that, I got more satisfied with the shorter bursts of time. If I only had two hours, I would still sit myself down and try. For me, writing by hand in a notebook pulls from a deeper place. With experience, I learned that the writing will eventually come. Once you can trust that, it will come again.

**Anna (Mei Mei’s Mom)**, who couldn’t attend tonight, sent in a question about how I write dialogue. ***QUESTION: Dialogue in books always catches my attention because it is something I don’t myself work with—people speaking to each other in print. How did you do it? Did writing the dialogue come naturally?*** The narrative, descriptions, etc. that part I understand. But if I were a writer, I think I would have a very hard time making dialogue readable, (perhaps an odd thing to say), natural and flowing. You did it very well Tanis. It really works.

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - It would be helpful for me to find out from you if the texting and phoning seemed authentic to you. Was it ringing true? Was it believable?

**Ella** - One time you said # true, when they were texting. That didn’t seem believable. I don’t know anybody who uses hashtags when they’re texting.

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - I think it was # lame and I think it was supposed to be ironic.

**Sydney** - How was it used ironically?

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - It was Janey making fun of hashtags.

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - Books are a point in time. You have to decide where to cut things off. When I started writing this, hashtags were being used. But now hashtags aren’t cool. Do kids actually talk on the phone anymore? The cohort I was talking to (when doing my research for the book) said they were back to using the phone.

**Sarah (Ella’s Mom)** - I think it was realistic. For my son’s age group, they text and if it’s an emergency they call.

**Dominique** - I always call Avery if I’m walking alone I get paranoid. We have code words.

**Avery** - One time my phone was dead and I was just walking along in the dark going, like, “ah ha?” Just so it would look like I was talking to somebody.

**Sydney** - One thing I noticed was that you wrote 2nite. But it’s a hassle to type 2nite. So maybe that wasn’t realistic. If you write 2nite you have to switch keyboards, so that doesn’t happen.

**Jill (Avery’s Mom)** - Some people use emojis like crazy.

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - Every time I use an emoji my son asks me what is *that* supposed to be? He doesn’t use them or like them. He’s 17.

**Avery** - Technology is changing so fast. In 20 years, this will all be retro. There will be no texting.

**Sarah (Ella’s Mom)** – We’ll just have to *think* stuff and then people will get the message.

**Tanis (Author and Sydney’s Mom)** - In my book, I’ll have to write: “Then I *thought* to him . . . grunt.” (That grunting noise was the sound of me thinking.) I have learned a lot from you tonight. I appreciate you letting me do this… letting me share this with you.

**Sarah (Ella’s Mom)** - I think we should have a Mother and Daughter Book Club picture.