

"Vivid, distressing, and all too real."—*Kirkus Reviews*

Give a Boy a Gun

DO NOT CR



TODD STRASSER

About Gary

Mrs. Searle and Gary moved into the house next to ours the day before second grade began. So the first time I actually saw him was at the bus stop. He was kind of quiet, but friendly enough. Some of the kids at the bus stop would play soccer in the street in the morning. I was glad when Gary came along, because I wasn't into that, and with Gary there it gave me something to do. We'd mostly talk about stuff like Magic cards and video games and what we saw on TV.

If you want to know the truth, I think Mrs. Searle was a little overprotective. I guess because she was the only parent. She always wanted to know where Gary was going, and would he be warm enough, and

Each day people wielding guns kill 64 people, rape 33 women, rob 575 people, and assault 1,100 more.

junk like that. Gary would just roll his eyes.

Until Brendan came along, I think I was pretty much Gary's best friend. The thing about Gary was that mysterious part of him that you never knew. It was like something he kept hidden and private. I can't explain it, but I could feel it when I was with him. He'd just get quiet and you knew he was a dillion miles away. I always thought maybe it was something about his parents getting divorced.

—Ryan Clancy, a friend of both
Gary's and Brendan's

Gary Searle was a very sweet little boy with slightly reddish brown hair and big, round eyes. He was polite and quiet and always did what he was told. I do recall that some of the children teased him about his weight. But you know how kids are at that age.

—Ruth Hollington, Gary's fourth-grade
teacher at Middletown Elementary School

I didn't move to Middletown until fifth grade, so I didn't know Gary before that.

After we started hanging out, he'd sometimes talk about what it was like when he was younger. About the divorce and how completely nasty it was, and how after it was over, his dad just left and never paid child support or called or anything. That was a huge thorn in Gary's side. He just couldn't get over that.

—Allison Findley, Gary's on-and-off girl-
friend at Middletown High School

It was an ugly divorce. All that yelling and fighting. Arguing over money. Gary was caught in the middle, and sometimes I guess I used him to get what I thought I needed. What we both needed. It's a terrible thing to put a child through, but I didn't know what else to do. —Cynthia Searle, Gary's mother

"As parents, teachers, and other adults look for ways to reach out to young people, some see a common thread in the disappointments and isolation students experience when they lose a sense of place, lose a parental figure, or lose a girlfriend."

—*Christian Science Monitor*, 5/26/99

Gary was enormously bright. You wouldn't know it, because he was one of the quiet ones; never raised his hand. I noticed it first in math. He almost always did perfectly on his quizzes, unless he made a careless mistake. But the computer was the real tip-off. I wanted to do a class Web page. Gary volunteered to do it. No matter what the problem, he seemed to know three ways to fix it.

—Stuart McEvoy, Gary's sixth-grade teacher
at Middletown Middle School

A lot of kids play computer games and junk, but it was different with Gary. The thing about him was he was on [the computer] all the time. I'd call his house and he'd answer with this faraway voice, and I'd know he was on-line. He'd sound weird because there'd be this split-second delay in his conversation, and those typing sounds. Like he was doing two things at once. Then one day I was over there, looking over his shoulder. He had three instant message screens open and was chatting with someone different in each one. *And he*

was on the phone. That's when I realized that when I called, he wasn't doing two things at once. He was doing four. —Ryan Clancy

I brought [Gary] to a psychologist. I hoped he'd let out a little of what he was feeling. She said he was guarded. I don't think she ever got close to what was going on in his head. It's obvious now that none of us did.

—Cynthia Searle

I'll give you an example of how bright Gary was. After the first month of sixth grade I got a message one day to call his mother at work. I remember the phone call because she seemed reluctant to say exactly what was on her mind, but I finally got the impression that she was wondering why I didn't give more homework.

"The outcasts, obsessed with violent video games and intrigued by German rock music and Nazi culture, also had pastimes as wholesome as baseball; they were part of a tight circle of friends, earned top grades, held jobs and looked forward to life after graduation—factors that no doubt reassured their parents."—*New York Times*, 6/29/99

For as long as they can remember, Brendan and Gary have been mercilessly teased and harassed by the jocks who rule Middletown High. But not anymore. Stealing a small arsenal of guns from a neighbor, they take their classmates hostage at a school dance. In the panic of this desperate situation, it soon becomes clear that only one thing matters to Brendan and Gary: revenge.

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★ "Both haunting and harrowing, the book deserves a wide readership, discussion, and debate."—*Booklist*, starred review

