

What Mr. Mattero Did **By Priscilla Cummings**

Background and curriculum indications, courtesy of Junior Library Guild, 2005:

“Something happened in the music room . . . A teacher did something that we don’t feel very good about.” When Claire and her two best friends accuse their music teacher of sexual abuse, they don’t realize how serious the allegation is, or how many people will be caught up in its wake – including Melody, Mr. Mattero’s daughter, who also goes to their school. Chapters alternate between Claire and Melody’s points of view as the investigation slowly reveals the truth.

Priscilla Cummings writes: “A student scribbles a note or confides in a trusted adult that a teacher has inappropriately touched him or her. It’s a serious matter that must be taken seriously. How many times do we see stories in the newspaper about students alleging abuse? Then again, how often do we see follow-up articles about the same student recanting their stories? Often enough, I say. I have a file folder full of examples, and I wondered: Why? And what happened to the kids and the families in these situations? What happened to the teacher who had been accused? What happened to that teacher’s family? I had a hunch that even when a case was closed, it wasn’t over.

“What Mr. Mattero Did is a story in which three seventh-grade girls bravely come forward to report something bad their music teacher has done to them and the repercussions for all of those involved. I used two different characters to tell the story in alternating chapters: Claire, one of the seventh

graders to allege sexual abuse, and Melody, an eighth grader in the same school who is also the daughter of the accused teacher.

“Of course there was a good bit of research to do before writing this book. First there was a lot of reading – newspaper articles, books, journals. Then there were rounds of interviews with students, teacher, principals, guidance counselors, and social workers, as well as gathering the details by spending several days in middle school, which is usually more fun than work and always an eye opener.”

Priscilla Cummings lives in Annapolis, Maryland, with her husband, John Frece, and their children, William and Hannah. “Time is flying by,” Ms. Cummings says. “My son (and tech support), William, is off to Lehigh University in the fall. My daughter, Hannah, remains at home, a high school junior and a great source of ideas, but most importantly, my first reader – and my most candid critic.”

Ms. Cummings is the author one previous JLG selection, *Saving Grace*.

Curriculum Indications:

Themes: Telling a story using alternating points of view. Accusing your middle-school teacher of acting inappropriately toward you and your two best friends. Trying to keep your stories straight. Being the daughter of the music teacher. Attending the school where your father teaches. Being questioned by the police. Being surprised to hear that the teacher might be fired or even go to jail. Not realizing how serious your allegations are. Volunteering for a riding-therapy program for disabled kids. Helping a little boy overcome his fear of horses. Seeing your father’s story in the news.

Finding out that the teacher's daughter goes to your school. Being harassed at school because of your father. Getting carried away with your story. Worrying that your father will start drinking again. Being excited when he passes a lie-detector test. Being ignored by your friends and neighbors. Worrying that life will never go back to normal. Changing schools and making a new friend. Finding your dad passed out drunk. Feeling guilty about lying and ruining the teacher's life. Attacking a girl who accused your father. Realizing that her little brother is the boy you've been helping at the stables. Having your friend at your new school confess that she is being molested by her stepfather. Realizing that you need to come forward. Telling the police that you lied, but also telling them that your new friend is being abused. Having your father decide not to return to teaching. Trying to reconnect with him. Coping with what happened and moving forward.

Units: School stories. Teachers and students. Sexual abuse. Family. Point of view. Adolescence. Dishonesty. Peer pressure. Identity/self-perception. Friends. Guilt. Ethics. Unintended consequences. Difficult choices.

Subjects: Language arts.

Who: Seventh grader Claire Montague who, along with her friends Jenna and Suzanne, accuses her music teacher, Fred Mattero, of sexual abuse; and eighth grader Melody Mattero, who also attends the middle school where her father teaches music.

What. Each telling her side of the story as they struggle to cope with the huge fallout from the allegations.

Where: Mostly at Oakdale Middle School, at the homes of the girls, and at the horse camp where Melody works with disabled children.

