School of Life

Kate McCaffrey is determined not to sugar-coat the big issues facing today's teens. It's one of the reasons, writes Julie Hosking, they love her books.

When Kate McCaffrey was fighting to keep a compromising letter at the start of her novel, she had some powerful allies in her corner.

"When the publisher read it, she said Kate, 'this first bit, that's one of the most amazing lines I've ever read but I think it needs to go.' I said 'no,'" the best-selling author recalls.

"I resisted the urge to cut it during the editorial process many times. She said 'I know that you don't want to get rid of it but I really think it positions you against her as a reader' and I said 'I don't care, you don't have to like me!'

The offending line is in her novel Saving Jazz, which comes just after a prologue that has already left the reader reeling, reads: "My name is Jasmine Lovely, I'm usually (I'm not) and I'm a capitalist."

You can see the publisher's point - such a blunt confession does immediately establish the protagonist as a character to watch. But Jazz was adamant it stay there. As were her Year 10 English students who had made it part of their year's work to read about her life story during that year's subject. Kate says she "just resisted and she went too way, you know, there I was kept running because I needed to know what she'd done. And they even wrote letters to my publisher. Diane McCaffrey, the publisher doesn't think that line out. They just got quite defensive.

"I try to listen to my audience and I've learnt over very well that I've been teaching teenagers for the last two decades. So I have two daughters of her own, Sarahah, 19, a third-year psychology student, who clings on to the mainline in a way, and Willow, 15, who is in Year 10. And she had no trouble globalising volunteers to help organise an intense week - one way they do was by asking their opinions. "We'd sit there and we'd work out what I'd say. "If this could have been the response be this and they'd give me feedback," Kate says. "It was the closest thing to an actual handwritten letter.""The students from Sacred Heart College are naturally flattered to be top billing in the book's acknowledgments - "I do have acknowledgement, it's not all about" Kate laughs. The author has a great deal of respect and realises that each has much to her students' parents to her readers, those are often one and the same, given that her books are on school reading lists (That's what they mean, that would be too difficult."

We're sitting in the little studio at the back of her house because she's been booked to read from her new book earlier in the day. The studio, where her interview is interrupted is dealing with the sudden death of an electricity, the coffee table in front of us is a small but well-stocked bookshelf, including Spanish, Slovakian and Imaginative Translations.

Kate then happily revealed that the Australian covers were in talks with 20th Century Fox, which featured a photograph of a ten-year-old as an illustration. "Everyone loves that cover, the beautiful, the 190, so they decided to redo them all," she says. "My daughter was going to be on the cover of the last one but it was in her school and she was like: 'Mom, it might be a bit weird if everyone's holding it and it's got my face.'

"Kate McCaffrey authenticates some of the territory of her novel successful novel Destroying Avalon, one of the first to tackle cyber bullying when it was released in 2006. "I'll never forget when it first came out and I'm sure it's not just me - I guessed myself and found this guy had posted on this website that he had read this amazing book. I called, he turned out to be the principal of Sunrise Grammar in Melbourne," Kate recalls.

He invited her to speak at the school where they were launching an anti-cyber bullying program. There she met leading adolescent psychologist and former police sergeant Michael Carr-Gregge and veterans of CyberSafe: "I was invited to meet the premier's book award. Michael Carr-Gregge escorted the novel and then it got into the school curriculum. That was 10 years ago and it's just had its 10th reissue.

"The world moves fast, however, and the internet has been a victim of it. If anything, only become more challenging for teens (and their parents). Whanswe Arsenal was a victim, making it easy for the reader to feel empathy. Jasmine Lovely is a masterpiece - though there is much more to the story. Jazz has everything a young girl could want: she's pretty, smart and has loads of friends. Then you sprout's outfit of cool, leaving her teen friends behind and just a real trouble when images start popping up on social media."

"When I went my sister the finished draft she sent me a text saying: feel good. I love was over the head with a slidehammer, she always come with a chill."

Kate says;

"I think it's about being real so I could see we were telling my daughter's story but I'd find something that makes it even more real.

And she does. Kate, who describes herself as a plot-driven writer, might have many tough topics in her novels, including eating disorders, teen pregnancy, drug abuse and suicide, but she doesn't sugar-coat them simply because she's writing for young adults. She's never feared being accused of talking down to her audience or preaching at them.

The 45-years-distressed denim jacket has Larsoned her in hot water occasionally - she tells a funny story about an encounter with a librarian at a women's festival took up帕特《I love the proposed libel use of these words. In fact, there were only a handful in the offending book. Kaye has also helped her players more notably the Australian Society of Family Therapy, which has seen her obsession with their book of the year for older children, most recently for Crashdown. "They gave a speech, saying how much they loved my books and how much the book itself to them because it's a way to connect with these kids who are having issues."

Not that she had a freckled childhood herself. Kate was born in Liverpool, England, and came to Perth in 1982 with her parents Anne and Michael, and older sister Jane when she was five. Kate found the last of the two-pound notes, they arrived with $100 and two suitcases. Within two years they had bought a house in the Down, for $2500. The house manager said to my dad years later, 'I still can't believe you left that money, you had nothing!'" Kate said. "This was good."

She clearly still misses her beloved father, who died almost six years ago; a tattoo on her wrist bears the Gaelic word for daddy, Jose has a matching one. Neither of her parents, who came from poor families, was particularly well educated but both were voracious readers and weekends would often see the family sitting around with a bunch of books. "liked shipwreck and grew up on a diet of bestselling authors - such as - John Betjeman, and then I'll Bond."

Kate says.

She always knew she wanted to be a writer but didn't feel the same way about teaching. She went to UWA to study law but after doing the compulsory lead to her English and fine arts, she decided she'd rather do an arts degree. Unsure what to do next, her mum suggested writing.

"Then said you'd make a fantastical teacher and I said "Surely Mum I'm rather be a police drama. I can't think of anything worse"."

But mother knows best. Following Anne's sage advice to have "something to fall back on", she decided to do the extra year just to qualify as a teacher and, to her surprise, discovered on her first 10-week job that she really enjoyed it. Kate couldn't have known at the time of, because the years in the public and private education systems, all these decades with teenagers, learning from them, reading their essays and dealing with their myriad issues, helped shape her direction as an author.

"Teaching didn't make you rich," she found what some might consider an unfairly rich salary on the Catholic school's principal, Crashdown was launched there and Saving Jazz will be next week.

"I gave him an early draft because I did think you'd read before you saw the launch and he said 'what are you doing this time Kate' and I said 'I don't know what she's doing, the small'" she says. "He said he was too confounded, and aware of this really serious world, but there than also those people, former clients, the conversation, and redolence and hope, which are all great Catholic values."

Her students were similarly inspired by jazz to begin with. "They liked her but didn't like what she's done, but they said by the end they loved her; they said she's not very charming."

"What I mean, I find it quite genuine, no."

"Jazz has read Destroying Avalon and Saving Jazz, but not because I cause but because she doesn't like reading. She said she liked Saving Jazz because "this is the world that I recognize."

" Saving Jazz (Fremantle Press, $20) will be launched at Sacred Heart College, 2052, Tuesday at 7pm, see fremantlepress.com.au with events."

"I'll be there with my daughter, but Willow has read Destroying Avalon and Saving Jazz, but not because I cause but because she doesn't like reading. She said she liked Saving Jazz because "this is the world that I recognize."