

## School Library Journal

**KILBOURNE**, Christina. *Dear Jo: The Story of Losing Leah...and Searching for Hope*. 188p. CIP. Lobster, dist. by Univ. of Toronto. 2007. pap. \$9.95. ISBN 978-1-897073-51-3. LC C2006-905119-4.

**Gr 6-8**—Two 12-year-old best friends lie about their age and get online boyfriends. Leah goes to meet hers and disappears. Distraught, Maxine is encouraged by her therapist to keep a diary. She calls it Jo and writes about her family, her town, and her life after Leah. Although fictionalized, the story confronts the realities of the situation. Maxine deals with guilt; why didn't she tell anyone Leah had an online boyfriend? She works through her anger; why is everyone happy at the holidays? Don't they know Leah is gone? She finds solace in helping with the investigation. When her online boyfriend emails her wanting to meet, the police suspect that he is Leah's killer and Maxine agrees to a dangerous plan that puts her face-to-face with the predator. The novel has a strong message but it doesn't interfere with the storytelling. Maxine is well developed with the unsure voice of a preteen. Though the book stays mainly in her head, the secondary characters (especially Leah and her parents) are equally compelling. In the beginning, the writing is forced but quickly eases into the diary format. It could simply be Maxine herself warming to the idea of being able to express herself openly and honestly. The last pages offer online safety tips for children and their parents. Though the book goes on a little too long, Leah's and Maxine's experiences mirror those of many girls caught up in their own online "love."

—Sadie Mattox, DeKalb County Public Library, Decatur, GA