

Predators lurk on the Web

Book teaches students about Internet dangers

By SARI BOUDREAU

ST STEPHEN - Students at St. Stephen Middle School are learning about Internet safety through the words of the daughter of a St. Stephen woman.

Christina Kilbourne, daughter of St. Stephen resident Elizabeth Kilbourne, wrote the novel *Dear Jo*, about the dangers of Internet predators.

"It's such a reality check. The kids are all coming away from it saying 'spooky'. I think every child and parent would benefit from it," said librarian Stacey Dow

Before provincial rules came into effect banning chat rooms in the schools, Dow did not allow them in

the library. She said students tell her they are allowed to chat online at home, and only their friends can access their information, which is what the girls in the story also thought.

"I'm uncomfortable with it, and the teachers said, 'If you're uncomfortable, then don't do it,'" Dow said.

Dear Jo is the story of Maxine, a 12-year-old girl who, along with her best friend Leah, becomes involved with a boy they met in an online chat room. They don't know they are chatting with a man who pretends to be a teenage boy. He gains their trust through online chats, then arranges to meet Leah.

When Leah disappears after going to meet her online boyfriend, Maxine spirals downward into a deep depression.

At her therapist's suggestion, she begins writing in a diary. She calls it a journal, or "Jo" for short. In it, she pours out her feelings, trying to sort out all of the confusion.

From a boy's point of view, Grade 8 student Trent Mitchell said he thought the book was good and the ending surprised him.

"I really got into the story. I've known about dangerous stuff, but I didn't know that you can actually end up dead. I learned what really can happen," said Mitchell.

Dow said that the students liked the book and she thinks it may become a regular part of the Grade 6 curriculum.

"Three Grade 6 classes are already doing it. I think that Grade 6 will do it each year. The teachers were really excited about it," she said.

Many of the students who have read the book are also excited about it. Grade 7 student Caroline Coon said she thought it was kind of strange to find out that situations like the one in the book are real, although she wasn't surprised by the ending.

"I already knew you aren't supposed to go into chat rooms and give out your name and address and stuff. I learned that when I was young. It's

hard to believe kids have never heard of that kind of thing happening. It has, and probably still will," said Coon.

Spencer MacKnight, a Grade 8 student, also said that although he was hoping for a happy ending, he wasn't surprised when it wasn't. He said he is careful when online, only chatting with friends he knows and not giving out any personal information online.

"Don't give out your name. Don't tell how old you are. Don't tell your number or address. It's weird how they can figure stuff out," said MacKnight.

Coon said she visited one pre-teen chat room once, monitored by her mother, but she isn't interested in doing so in the future.

"I was taught never to go in chat rooms, never to talk to people I don't know, things like that. I don't want to end up talking to some crazy psycho maniac," said Coon: .

Kilbourne will be at a Fall Craft Fair at the school, on Oct. 20 from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., with copies of *Dear Jo*.