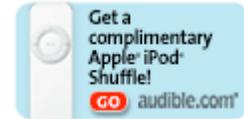


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## Author



### Elisabeth Hyde

#### BIO

Elisabeth Hyde is the author of three previous novels, including CRAZY AS CHOCOLATE. Born and raised in New Hampshire, she has since lived in Vermont, Washington, D.C., San Francisco, and Seattle. In 1979 she received her law degree and practiced briefly with the U.S. Department of Justice. She has taught creative writing in the public schools as well as through Naropa University. She currently lives with her husband and three children in Colorado, where she is at work on her fifth novel.

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[THE ABORTIONIST'S  
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#### INTERVIEW

June 23, 2006

Bookreporter.com's contributing writer Alexis Burling interviewed [Elisabeth Hyde](#) --- author of CRAZY AS CHOCOLATE --- about her latest release, **THE ABORTIONIST'S DAUGHTER**. Hyde



discusses the various issues surrounding the book's controversial topic, and how its strong "in your face" title was decided upon. She also delves into the difficult relationships between parents and children, and attempts to explain her attraction to the depressing and complicated subjects found in her work.

#### Bookreporter.com: Was there something specific that inspired the plot of THE ABORTIONIST'S DAUGHTER?

**Elisabeth Hyde:** It was a number of things that came together. I'd been wanting to explore the issue of abortion in a novel, but it often seemed to boil down to a "will she or won't she" story --- not very interesting, from a literary perspective. At some point I

realized that a much more interesting story could be told through the characters of those around her, people who might try to influence her decision. Parents, boyfriends, counselors, demonstrators --- maybe they have their own agenda, but they're dealing with an independent mind here. Sometimes they may think they're pushing the girl to do one thing, and it leads to something very different. In *THE ABORTIONIST'S DAUGHTER*, the result is tragic.

I'd also reached a point where I wanted to write a more plot-driven novel than my earlier ones, and a murder mystery seemed like a good challenge. And, I was carrying around a couple of very concrete images: that of a woman swimming alone in her lap pool at night with a snowstorm raging outside, for one. In any event, all of this came together with the name "Diana Duprey," whose chosen profession --- and murder --- opened up a Pandora's box of muddy issues, which I welcomed with open arms.

**BRC: The title of the book is very "in your face." Defining Megan as you do paints a picture of her in an instant as someone who has lived a life in which her mom's career may be what people thought of before considering her as a person. Talk to us about the title. Was a "less strong" title ever considered?**

**EH:** The working title for this book was "Rock Paper Scissors" --- a reference to the game Megan used to play with her brother Ben. As a title, it was intriguing and easy to remember --- but it could refer to any number of books out there. I needed something sui generis. When I was on my fourth or fifth draft, I was writing about Megan and flashed on her role as the local abortionist's daughter, and I realized the title had to be nothing but that. I knew it was scary, I knew it was controversial --- but it captured everything about how the town viewed Diana, and how Megan viewed herself.

I floated around some pretty weak alternatives with my editor and agent: "Swimming to France" was one; "A Person of Interest" was another. Nothing was as dead-on as *THE ABORTIONIST'S DAUGHTER*. A good title has to refer to no other book, and it has to be memorable, and --- no less importantly --- it has to be pronounceable, so that if you read a review you can go into a bookstore and ask for it without stumbling over the words! (My second novel was called *MONOOSOOK VALLEY*, and it was definitely a frowner. (Hint: accent on the second syllable; rhymes with "cook."))

In any event, nothing else ever stacked up against *THE ABORTIONIST'S DAUGHTER*. My agent and editor were fiercely behind it, so it stayed.

**BRC: Towards the beginning of *THE ABORTIONIST'S DAUGHTER*, you write "...but sex was a big commitment,**

**with big consequences, and teenagers by definition were not ready...Diana maintained that anything they said at this point was going to go in one ear and out the other, and they might as well bypass the oh my god sex is such a big deal route and get straight to the matter of contraceptives and HIV protection." This is surely a valid perception, but quite controversial to some, as we're sure you are aware. Why do you think that is? Isn't there a value in treating sex as a big deal, especially when teenagers are concerned?**

**EH:** Of course.

But --- contrary to the warnings in parental advice books -- sometimes parents don't see eye to eye on issues like how to talk about sex with your teenager. Frank is much more traditional than Diana; I can conceive of quite a few bumbling, serious conversations with his daughter about how it's a very special thing between two people who love each other, yadda yadda, with Megan rolling her eyes. Diana, on the other hand, lived and worked in a profession that dealt with the medical consequences of sex every day. I don't think she would have really disagreed with Frank that sex is a big deal; it's just that she figured Megan already understood that, and wanted to make sure Megan was protected.

**BRC: Further down on that same page, you write "Diana could never face up to the fact that she was a parent, not a pal." In your eyes, is it important for a parent to make that distinction?**

**EH:** It's very important. The classic screw-up is the parent who can't set limits, who winks at misbehaviors, and who is afraid of antagonizing his/her child.

But --- as with anything worth thinking about --- it's not always black and white. As the parent of three teenagers, sometimes I'll have a window of opportunity with one of them, where they seek my advice as a friend --- an older friend --- and not so much as a parent. The last thing I want to do is close that window with a stern, wise, experienced parental directive. I think a lot of parents struggle with this: how much vulnerability to reveal, how much confusion, how much regret.

In the novel, Frank, up until the murder, has been content to be the stern parent. (And if you cast them in good cop/bad cop roles, with Diana being the good cop/pal and Frank being the bad cop/parent, isn't it ironic that Megan has the volatile relationship with Diana, more so than Frank?) With Diana gone, however, I think you see him softening up. "How am I ever going to parent this girl myself?" he wonders. He knows he's got to relinquish his old role; but things with Megan are fragile enough that he sometimes feels that either way, he's going to alienate her. Like all of us, he's struggling for that balance.

**BRC: Reverend Stephen O'Connell is a "right to lifer." His son's girlfriend, Rose, is an extremely pivotal character in the story. At 15, she becomes pregnant and then is counseled by two sets of parents with opposing viewpoints. This is a tough situation for anyone to be in, let alone a 15-year-old girl. Her later choices point to her confusion on this issue. O'Connell's first reaction is to reach out to Duprey. In writing the way these two interact, are you trying to show people that reactions to the abortion issue may not be as black and white as what they think?**

**EH:** An excellent question! I think that public perception of the abortion issue as black and white is what has polarized us as a society. The issue of abortion is not black and white, and never has been. I shouldn't generalize, but I'd say probably most women who contemplate having an abortion struggle with their decision. Maybe at 8 weeks they struggle a little less, maybe at 20 weeks they struggle a little more, but they struggle. It was very tough for Diana, who found out with the amnio that the child she was carrying had Down syndrome; ultimately she couldn't terminate the pregnancy. Other women would have decided differently. The only thing about this that's black and white, for me, is that the woman herself should ultimately decide. Not the state.

A while back, Anna Quindlen wrote about abortion in one of her many wise columns: "But this will never be an easy issue to parse. It can't be; instead of fitting neatly into black-and-white boxes, it takes place in that messy gray zone of hard choices informed by individual circumstances and conscience." (*Newsweek*, Nov. 29, 2005.) As she points out, we insult ourselves by leaving the complexities of the issue unexamined. My hope is that *THE ABORTIONIST'S DAUGHTER* will get people talking outside their comfort zones, listening to one another, saying things that maybe they've been afraid to say before in a room that's very, very gray.

**BRC: You express here the strong concern that the Internet is a place to exploit sex. What Megan goes through can easily happen to other young women. Are you writing with an idea in mind to caution people?**

**EH:** Not really; Megan's unfortunate experience just happened. I'll leave the cautionary tales to someone else, although if the novel causes some women to be a little more skeptical of a boyfriend's promises and reassurances, that's fine with me.

**BRC: Despite her profession, Dr. Duprey decided to carry her son, Ben, who was born with Down syndrome, to term. Describe your motivation for creating that dichotomy in Diana.**

**EH:** It's the ultimate dilemma, I think, for any woman who undergoes genetic testing. What do you do with the results? And

what happens if you and your partner disagree? At first glance, people might suppose that a woman like Diana would have no qualms terminating the pregnancy. But she does. Part of the reason is that she's already carried a baby to term, and given birth, and I can see that being determinative for her. Maybe, too, it's because of her age; if she'd gotten that news at the age of 21, would she have decided differently?

I went into my own amnio with very mixed feelings, praying that I'd fall within the statistical probabilities and not have to face the dilemma. (In fact, I was so focused on that issue that when the technician told me she saw "not one baby in there but at least two," I just about fell off the table. It was twins.) It's possible that my husband and I might have disagreed, like Diana and Frank, and then I don't know what would have happened. I think I wrote about Diana and Frank to reassure myself that it wouldn't necessarily derail a marriage.

There's a wonderful memoir about the decision to carry and give birth to a child with Down syndrome, called *EXPECTING ADAM*, by Martha Beck. The book gave me tremendous insight into a mother's emotions --- and into the personality of one particularly lovable child.

**BRC: In the process of writing this suspense story, were you worried that some of your readers might be offended by the controversial topic of abortion?**

**EH:** Aware, yes; worried, no. Abortion is one of the most socially divisive issues in America. I wanted to write about it on a very personal level, from very different points of view. A good novel can take the political and bring it down to a personal level and make people think outside the op-ed box. That's what I've tried to do.

**BRC: As a writer, you tend to confront controversial subjects. Here, you tackle abortion. In *CRAZY AS CHOCOLATE*, you dealt with mental illness and the suicide of a mother. What draws you to write about hard-hitting issues?**

**EH:** Remember *SOPHIE'S CHOICE*? Styron's novel dealt with one of the hardest-hitting issues of all time, and it's one of my favorite books. I like darkness, I like tragic irony; hell, I like depressing subjects! They're the most meaty and complicated. You put your characters in these terrible situations and they bare themselves emotionally. It's a tremendous gift of discovery, to learn from your characters as you write about them. I'll get to a scene and wonder what Diana would do here, how the Reverend could possibly think that way, why on earth Megan would assume she could get away with this.

**BRC: You have lived in New Hampshire, Vermont, San Francisco, Seattle, Washington, D.C. and Colorado. Do you**

**prefer one location over the others?**

**EH:** I love the west. It's big and empty and wild and new and extreme for me, and it fuels a passion for place I never experienced when I lived on the east coast. Colorado is about as far east as I ever want to live, and it may actually be a little landlocked for me to think of as a permanent home. Someday, my husband and I may have to move back to the Pacific. It's got a magic that no other place has for me, in the US at least.

**BRC: Do you prefer to read a specific genre of books? What's on your reading list right now?**

**EH:** The funny thing about having written THE ABORTIONIST'S DAUGHTER is that I'm not a huge devourer of the mystery genre. My favorite contemporary authors are Anne Tyler, Richard Russo and Ian McEwan, to name just a few. I loved Turow's PRESUMED INNOCENT, and so admired the literary qualities he brought to his page-turner. I was aiming for that with this novel --- complicated characters in a page-turning plot.

Right now I'm reading SUITE FRANCAISE, the novel by Irene Nemirovsky, which takes place in France during the Occupation. An incredible book, written without time or distance to process the events. I can't wait to read TERRORIST by John Updike and EVERYMAN by Philip Roth --- as soon as I heard it chronicled a man's medical records, I thought: this is the book for me! (I'm a hypochondriac.) Oh yes, and anything about river runners and the Colorado River, as part of the research for my next novel.

**BRC: What are you working on now and when can readers expect to see it?**

**EH:** I'm currently working on a novel that takes place during the course of a rafting trip down the Colorado River. It will be published by Knopf, hopefully two years from now.

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