



September 3-17, 2020

Dear Reader,

It makes me very happy that *Bad Ideas* has been selected for Together We Read this summer.

It is a novel about a family of girls and women living in a small town whose lives are disrupted – whose whole community is disrupted – by outsiders. And it is about both the good things and bad things that come from these disruptions.

Preston Mills is a fictional town in Eastern Ontario on the shore of the St. Lawrence River. Like many real small towns between Kingston and Cornwall, Preston Mills is flooded when the river is widened in the 1950s to accommodate shipping traffic. Tens of thousands of men came to these towns – most with populations of less than 1000 people – and dismantled them. Houses and churches and schools were moved or demolished or burned to the ground. Even the dead were relocated: dug up and moved to new cemeteries. And then the towns were flooded. I grew up in one of these towns. Relics were everywhere: smashed up foundations, sidewalks and roads that started on shore and disappeared beneath the water. There was a feeling that the town had no center. Or that the center had been washed away.

I knew I had to write about it eventually. And I wanted to think about it from a very personal perspective. I chose to write about a teenage girl living in the town and a worker running away from his own life, in another small town, to work on the Seaway project. This is the story of Claire and Darren.

The second disruption comes in the form of a 1970s daredevil, loosely based on Ken Carter, the Mad Canadian. Believe it or not, Ken Carter built a giant ramp near my childhood home when I was eight years old. It was gigantic. Stories high. He planned to jump over the St. Lawrence River in a rocket car. This was the beginning of a long, alternately exciting and sad saga that both captivated and infuriated people in my hometown. Again, it begged to be written about. And, again, I wanted to explore the impact of this mad event from the perspective of a young woman just going about her boring, vaguely depressing small town life. Just minding her own business. This is the story of Trudy and Jules.

Enjoy the book. I hope it moves you. I hope it feels real and I hope it makes you laugh. And I hope, if you grew up in a small town, it reminds you of people and places you know.

Happy reading,

Missy Marston