

Book Review: Letters from the Inside by John Marsden

By Rachel Loveday

John Marsden is a successful author from my native Australia, who is well known for his uncanny ability to step into the shoes of adolescents and tell their own and unique story with raw and powerful honesty that any reader, anywhere in the world can relate to as soon as they set their eyes on page one.

Well, John Marsden's work has that effect on me and *Letters from the Inside* was no exception.

We are introduced to Mandy; a 15 year old, who has an older sister, a "creepy" brother, a dog with no name and overall, a pretty good life. She initiates a pen pal friendship with Tracey; who has a horse, three dogs, a cat, comes from a wealthy family and by appearances, her life seems idyllic.

The friendship between these two girls is established quickly and is full of curiosity and excitement. But as the letters mount and time progresses, we are later exposed to their raw and all-too-tragic and painful world which includes; domestic violence, secrets, lies, hopes, fears and dreams for better lives.

Mandy's "creepy" brother turns out to be violent and often uses Mandy as a boxing bag for his rage. She constantly lives in fear of him and no-one believes her when she asks for help.

Whilst Mandy opens up to Tracey about her dangerous situation, Tracey continues to brag about her perfect life, which causes a rift early on in their friendship, but they still persevere with the hope of a strong life-long friendship which is constantly tested, especially when Mandy discovers the truth behind Tracey's "idyllic" life, which turns out to be the complete opposite of what Mandy and the readers have been lead to believe.

John Marsden's work forces you to read between the lines to find the truth, foreshadowing constantly present in the background.

All these characteristics, followed by the heartbreaking and unexpected ending, made *Letters from the Inside* a joy to read, and I strongly recommend will be a joy to read for all ages, especially for those who are the same age as the two very powerful and real protagonists.