

“Prep” Rally

Novelist **Curtis Sittenfeld** educates

Lauren Paige Kennedy about high school, summer reading and Smith Point.

School's out for summer. What does a teacher-slash-bestselling-author do in her spare time?

My main goal is to weed through my files and massive stacks of paper. Then I might reward myself by reading an issue of *The New Yorker* from, say, November 2004.

But back to the grind: What are you working on now, besides your tan?

The manuscript for my next novel, *The Man of My Dreams*, is due soon at Random House and is based on a story I wrote at the Iowa Writers' Workshop. My classmates said, “The story's fine, but you *have* to get rid of that title.”

Prep peaked at #7 on the *New York Times* Best Sellers List. You'd promised your St. Albans students a trip to Hawaii if it hit #1. Will you give them Hawaiian leis, at least?

I actually did buy them leis. I saw fancy ones for \$4 and cheapie plastic ones for 60 cents. I stood there pondering this dilemma because the fancier ones were cuter. Then I thought to myself: *These are for 15-year-old boys. There's a good chance I'll find them on the floor.* I bought the cheap ones.

What would Lee Fiora think of her own success?

She'd be simultaneously embarrassed, suspicious and tickled. If Paramount Pictures makes the movie—they've optioned the rights—the character of Lee is owned by them in perpetuity. As an avid consumer of celebrity culture, Lee would, I'm sure, love the idea of being owned by Paramount—it would make her think she'd never be lonely again.

***The Official Preppy Handbook*: Brilliant or bunk?**

A little of both. When I first came across a copy, I devoured it—but I was 11 years old at the time.

Name two paperbacks you'll take to the pool this summer.

I still haven't read *Middlesex* by Jeffrey Eugenides or *Bel Canto* by Ann Patchett, though I seem to be the last person on Earth who hasn't.

Smith Point: Bush league or classy watering hole?

At my book party there last winter, I looked around and thought, *Do these good-looking 20-somethings in cable-knit sweaters have any idea my novel is about a girl who doesn't fit in among the preppies and is basically a big dork?* But I think most people have an inner dork. And they were all really nice.

Complete the following: “If life is an extension of high school...”

...then kill me now.

Who are your heroes, fictional or otherwise?

Social workers, doctors, nurses—people who help other people in tangible, concrete ways.

Washington is a power base. Was your classroom its microcosm?

My classroom was a power *struggle*, with the constant threat of a *coup d'état*. Alas, my students found me extremely unintimidating.

