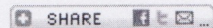


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# The Truth from *Pretty Little Liars* Author Sara Shepard, M.F.A., '04

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The bus ad shows four teenage girls smirking, hinting of scandal. They're the cast of *Pretty Little Liars*, a new ABC series set in the tony suburbs of Philadelphia. *Liars* premiered in June and has been a smashing success with new episodes set to air this fall. The hit series sprang from a series of books by author Sara Shepard, who received her M.F.A. in fiction from Brooklyn College in 2004.



Sara Shepard on the set of *Pretty Little Liars*

"I had always been a writer," Shepard says, "but I was working at more of a journalism job. As lots of people did after September 11, I decided I was going to make the most of my time. So I decided to go for an M.F.A."

A professor at her undergraduate college, New York University (NYU), encouraged her to look at Brooklyn College. Attracted by the stellar faculty, particularly Michael Cunningham (who had just come on board), affordable tuition and great location, Shepard applied and arrived at the College in Fall 2002.

Despite juggling full-time work with classes, Shepard thrived. She fondly recalls taking her craft to the next level with professors Cunningham, Ernesto Mestre-Reed and Jonathan Baumbach. She says that one exercise in particular stands out.

"[Baumbach] had us writing extra chapters for *Lolita* and *Love in the Time of Cholera*, a fun way to instantly get creative and connect the books and write in the author's voice."

Around the time she graduated, Shepard got the opportunity to work on *Pretty Little Liars* with Alloy Entertainment, a book packaging company. Alloy pairs writers with plots, and has come up with many successful teen-friendly series (among them *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*, *Vampire Diaries* and *Gossip Girls*).

"It was an idea Alloy came up with after asking me about my background. I explained that I'm from the suburbs of Philadelphia—it's seemingly perfect, but underneath it's really not. They pitched *Perfect Little Liars* as a *Desperate Housewives* for teens."

*Pretty Little Liars* took off, culminating this year with the TV show that Shepard describes as a "being a lot of fun. It's been really great for the books and has generated new readers and enthusiasm." She even scored a cameo on the show, playing substitute teacher Mrs. Shepard.

In addition to her booming young-adult fiction (YA) career, Shepard established herself with the literary writing she honed at Brooklyn College. Her first novel, *The Visibles*, was published in 2009; she has another one coming soon, tentatively titled *Everything We Ever Wanted*, and is currently at work on a third. Clearly, her decision to shift her focus to her personal writing was an inspired one.

