



## Walk a Crooked Line

*Susan McBride*

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**Walk a Crooked Line** Susan McBride

**A young girl has taken her own life. But what—or who—drove her to it?**

When a teenager's body is found at the base of the old water tower, Detective Jo Larsen is one of the first on the scene. Tragically, it appears to be a clear case of suicide.

But the more Jo learns about Kelly Amster, the more she finds herself needing to understand why the high school sophomore would take that fatal plunge. As they interview family and friends, Jo and her partner, Hank Phelps, begin to fit together the pieces of a dark puzzle. Something happened to Kelly in their small town of Plainfield, Texas—and it sent the young girl straight over the edge.

Haunted by the memories of her own childhood, Jo digs deep into the shadowy corners of a seemingly tight-knit community—to uncover a devastating secret...

## Walk a Crooked Line Details

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Author : Susan McBride

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# From Reader Review Walk a Crooked Line for online ebook

## Sharon says

Being a teenager is much harder than people think. It isn't just school, dates, hanging out with friends at the mall, and dealing with your parents. For 15 year-old Kelly Amster it's far worse. She wants to be accepted by the popular crowd, she wants nice clothes, she wants to go to all the good parties, and she's determined to change herself enough to get those things. But her richer schoolmates have no intention of letting her into their group or even pretending that they acknowledge her. Someone is even posting some mean comments to her Facebook page telling her not to bother being like them, that she's a loser, that she isn't even worth the air she breathes, and Kelly eventually believes these posts. The only thing she can do to rectify things is to throw herself off the old water tower and end it all which is exactly what she does.

Detectives Jo Larsen and Hank Phelps are investigating Kelly's suicide. Jo is sure that there was something more going on in Kelly's life that would make her want to kill herself. The sad thing is that Kelly's mother, Barbara, works as a home care nurse to help people cope with their children dying from cancer and Barbara seems to show more love for these children than she does for her own daughter.

Kelly's best friend, Cassie, is angry at Kelly for wanting to change and become part of the "in-crowd." Cassie was angry enough to burn their friendship bracelet thus ending their relationship.

Kelly is now alone, her best friend is gone, her mother spends more time with other kids than with her, and there's no father around. She honestly believed that death was the only way out of her miserable life. Detective Jo Larsen sees a lot of herself in Kelly since her childhood was horrible too but Jo was strong and fought and struggled and was able to become an adult even though her childhood nightmares are with her everyday of her life affecting every part of it. Jo understood Kelly and is determined to find out who, figuratively, pushed Kelly off that water tower.

As the detectives investigate they discover some information on Kelly's last few weeks of life. She was invited to one of the popular kids' parties and something happened to her there. Something terrible but she thinks that no one will believe her unless she has proof and she does have proof. With it she has the means to destroy one of the richest families in the community but she kills herself before any of the proof can be revealed.

The case is very tricky with everyone hiding information or just outright lying to Jo and Hank. And making things a little more difficult is a rash of dog-nappings going on.

Older dogs are disappearing from their yards. Some are occasionally found crawling along a back road, barely able to move because of broken ribs and legs. These dogs were beaten but were able to somehow escape only to shortly die from their wounds. These poor animals can't speak for themselves so Jo and Hank find themselves trying to find out what happened to them. The detectives are investigating two similar cases; one of an emotionally beaten child who kills herself and the second of physically beaten dogs who die from physical abuse.

Jo is determined to find out who the culprits are and to make sure they pay for the pain they caused both Kelly and the defenseless animals.

"Walk a Crooked Line" is a complicated, well thought out, and a thoroughly exciting story by author Susan

McBride. It is the second in McBride's Jo Larsen series.

Like the first book, "Walk into Silence", this novel is very dark, thought provoking, and a bit uncomfortable at times. It's not for the very squeamish not that there's an abundance of violence here because there isn't but the book does deal with some unsettling aspects of life that not all people care to read about. Ms. McBride does a brilliant job of treating these difficult topics very respectfully for her characters and her readers.

I've read a few of Susan McBride's books. She has a couple of series that are also well-written, cute, and fun. Actually the author does surprise me. Most authors, not all, but most authors, can only write in one style and that's fine especially if their books are good. But Ms. McBride shows her darker side in the Jo Larsen series, a dark side that really isn't shown in her two other other series.

"Walk a Crooked Line" has nice twist that you don't really see coming up and that twist gives it a great ending. Again, not for the sensitive reader but wonderful for mystery lovers. A novel not to be missed.

"I received an ARC of this book and voluntarily reviewed it."

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### **Debbie says**

This was my first book by what is a new author to me and it definitely did not disappoint. I will definitely be looking for more of these Jo Larsen books in the future.

This one dealt with a girl, in chapter one, jumping from a water tower. Trying to determine if this girl jumped or was she pushed? And if she was pushed, how was she pushed?

I really liked the characters in this book (not the entitled teenagers, of course) and thought that the writing was done very well. There were numerous suspects in here with a jaw dropping result. About 65% of the way through this book, it took a turn that I definitely did not see coming or was even expecting.

Excellent read for me!

Thanks to Thomas & Mercer and Net Galley for providing me with a free e-galley in exchange for an honest, unbiased review.

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### **marilyn says**

Before I read this book, I made sure to read the first in the series, Walk into Silence. Jo, a detective, Hank, her detective partner, and Alex, her medical examiner boyfriend, return in this book and what keeps me wanting to read about them is that these are good people...not perfect people but good people, with good hearts. I hope that there will be more books in this series.

Walk a Crooked Line is about a 15 year old girl who commits suicide and the detective partners, Jo and Hank, trying to figure out what led her to do so or if she was really murdered. There is another case they are

working on that involves dogs being beaten and killed. I avoid reading books about animal abuse but I'd already read the first book and it was so good, I wanted to read the second book. The abuse is tied into the plot line so a necessary part of the book and the detectives want justice for the animals and their owners just as much as they want justice for the 15 year old girl.

Hopefully more books about Jo and the other characters will be coming in the future because I'll be sure to read them. I really didn't want to put this book down. Thank you to Thomas & Mercer and NetGalley for this ARC.

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### **Kathleen Gray says**

It's no easier being a teen in a small town than it is in the city. This is a topical and sad, in many ways, novel, of the impact of social bullying, abuse, and other things on kids, especially those who desperately want to be liked. Luckily for Plainview, Texas, however, Jo and Hank are law enforcement officers who care. They go beyond to get real answers. I had not read the first book in this series but have read other novels by McBride. It's well plotted and the characters (especially Jo, of course) nicely done. Thanks to Netgalley for the ARC. I'm looking forward to the next one.

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### **Paul Falk says**

Author Susan McBride penned a narrative that shook at the very core of society, the shattered innocence of youth. As much as I was overtaken and felt the urge to turn a blind eye to the blunt reality of our society, I was compelled to read on.

The narrative was well-written with scenes that kept a steady rhythm with the storyline. It held me captive as the intrigue began to build. The main characters, there were two, were both well-drawn.

Fifteen-year-old Kelly Amster took her last step in life. It was off a 130-foot tall water tank and plunged to her death. The suburban town of Plainfield, Texas was left reeling in shock. It had all the sullen impact of another teen suicide including the note, but the question remained as it always does - why?

Somewhere inside Detective Jo Larsen's gut, she felt there was more to this girl's death than what met the eye; something sinister was lurking under the surface. Some that had known Kelly didn't want the investigation to go any further. This only led the detective to become more suspicious and dug deeper when other investigators might have quit. She began to piece together saddening clues which led up to the teen's suicide.

The storyline drew to a close with an ending that left me feeling empty. I expected no less. It tapped into an all too true reality of what many teens are forced to endure today. It's easier to look away and pretend that it's not there, but it is. It was a moving tale, one I would not want to read about again. Its message was delivered loud and clear.

My thanks to NetGalley & Thomas & Mercer for this ARC in exchange for an unbiased review.

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## **Sharon says**

So much in one small book. A suicide leads to more and more complex things left unsaid here to not spoil the pleasure of reading it yourself. I had not read this author before and will now need to go back and read the first in this series.

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## **Smile24k says**

I enjoyed this book. It's a little awkward to use the word "enjoyed" considering the subject matter, but the book was well written and held my interest until the last page and beyond (I read the acknowledgments and the listing of the author's other works). I will be going back to read the first book of the series, as well as some of the author's other works.

Basic Plot: Detective Jo Larsen is trying to figure out what happened to a young girl (Kelly) who appears to have committed suicide. Everyone seems content to treat it as a suicide and move on, except Larsen. Detective Larsen and her partner start looking into what actually happened to Kelly. Was it a suicide and if so, why? What happened to this young girl that made her want to end her life?

The story is told through Larsen's pov through the investigation, so the reader does not really get to go inside Kelly's mind. However, this was handled well and the reader is still able to get an understanding of what was going on in Kelly's life. The basic plot of the story is a timely one with so much in the news about suicide. I think this is a good book for parents of teenagers to read. In addition to suicide, the book deals with cyber bullying, the struggle to fit in, and loneliness. The thing that stood out in this story, and that should be a lesson to everyone, is that this young girl felt very much alone. Pretty much everyone who was supposed to care about this girl failed her.

I know this topic may seem like a major downer, but the book is still an entertaining read, that isn't preachy. Even with the serious subject matter it still reads like an entertaining crime mystery. And, you can easily read it that way without focusing too deeply on the social issues.

Lastly, the remarkable thing about this book is that it is not an edge of your seat type book, yet it will hold your interest. About a third of the way into the book it dawned on me that the book was all pretty much an even pace without a lot of drama. Normally this type of pacing would get boring, but I was invested in finding out what happened to Kelly and Detective Larsen was a likable lead with her own interesting back story. Speaking of Larsen, I love stories with a female lead who is strong and in charge, but who isn't a B-word, and who is still human enough to be vulnerable.

Thank you to NetGalley for allowing me to read and review this book.

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## **Janet Newport says**

Thank you NetGalley and Thomas & Mercer for this arc.

I enjoyed most of this book.... but it was a little "draggy" in parts. Didn't quite understand the point of all the "navel gazing" from Jo Larsen herself, unless the author was just trying to bash me over the head with

another "damaged" hero (ine). I did like how two very different "crimes" lead back to the same group of "bad guys" -- the full spectrum of pathological behavior.

2.5 stars rounded up

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### **Julia Gordon-Bramer says**

I got an advance copy of *Walk a Crooked Line* and all I can say is... wow. Susan McBride knows how to tell a story—and *Walk a Crooked Line* is a story of our times. Ripped from the news headlines, McBride's words are unfortunately all too believable: teen suicide, boys' club machismo, affluenza, rape, cover-ups, parental neglect, social media, cyberbullying, and human and animal abuse. McBride deftly plays with symbols of America splashed across the media; there is even a stolen blue dress with seminal DNA (very Monica Lewinsky, although Monica had it easy, in comparison). This story was riveting and hard to put down. I am not a typical mystery reader, but this book is smart, exceptionally well-written, and creatively structured while asking the big questions about our culture and what makes people victims and perpetrators.

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### **Jennifer says**

Detective Jo Larson and her partner Hank are called out to investigate a missing dog case when they get a call that someone jumped off the water tower. That someone turns out to be Kelly, a fifteen year old girl. More dogs go missing as Jo is digging deeper into Kelly's suicide. Do the missing dogs and the dead teenager have something in common?

I loved this book. After reading "Walk into Silence," I couldn't wait for another Jo Larson book. I loved the characters, story-line and writing style. Jo and Hank have a great working relationship and share a mutual love of junk food. It was great to see Ernie the cat having a wonderful life with Jo. In this book and the previous, we have only gotten to know Jo's mom. Currently she is suffering from Alzheimer's and she never provided Jo with a safe and stable childhood. I think that is why Jo related to Kelly so much and wanted to bring justice to her death. I have a feeling in the next book Jo will start searching for her father.

My least favorite character had to be Kelly's mom, Barbara. She had no reaction to her daughter's death. She gave all her time and energy to helping cancer patients and their families but didn't have anything left to give to her own daughter. The social media comments were just brutal. Amanda cried and showed love over her missing dog than Barbara did for her daughter. Cassie was another piece of work. It's definitely true that girls can be cruel to each other.

The ending was good. The part about the dogs was horrific and hard to read. I didn't guess who was really behind what happened at the party involving Kelly. There were definitely some twists and turns. Bridget, the computer geek who loves Star Wars, was a good addition.

I definitely recommend this book. I couldn't put it down. Hopefully there are more Jo Larson books to come.

Thanks to NetGalley, Thomas & Mercer and the author, Susan McBride, for a free electronic ARC of this novel.

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## **Lou says**

I must admit, Susan McBride is not a crime writer I have come across before but I was drawn to read this due to the synopsis and the cover art which is rather unique. This is the sequel to "Walk Into Silence" which was the first in the Jo Larsen series. With the first in the series being a #1 Kindle Bestseller and having liked the sound of the blurb I was pleased I was able to grab an ARC copy to read.

Detective Jo Larsen is first on the scene when the body of a teenager is found at the bottom of an old water tower. It appears to be a clear cut case of suicide. However, as Jo learns more about Kelly Amster she feels she needs to find out why a teen with her full life ahead of her would take her own life in such a way. Jo and partner, Hank Phelps, begin to delve deeper into the youngsters private life. Haunted by the memories of her own childhood, Jo digs deep into the shadowy corners of a seemingly tight-knit community—to uncover a devastating secret.

The story is heartbreaking and features themes that some readers may wish to avoid - namely, abuse, neglect and bullying. I found "Walk a Crooked Line" to be a very emotional and tough read but one I enjoyed a lot.

Many thanks to Thomas & Mercer for an ARC. I was not required to post a review and all thoughts and opinions expressed are my own.

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## **Sandy \*The world could end while I was reading and I would never notice\* says**

EXCERPT: She should have been on her way to her first period class, learning Spanish or Algebra or whatever it was that fifteen year old sophomores studied these days. She should have been complaining about the cafeteria food, deciding whether she wanted to try out for the fall musical, dishing on the latest boy band, and forgetting the combination to her locker.

Not waiting for the van to take her to the county Morgue.

ABOUT THIS BOOK: A young girl has taken her own life. But what—or who—drove her to it?

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But the more Jo learns about Kelly Amster, the more she finds herself needing to understand why the high school sophomore would take that fatal plunge. As they interview family and friends, Jo and her partner, Hank Phelps, begin to fit together the pieces of a dark puzzle. Something happened to Kelly in their small town of Plainfield, Texas—and it sent the young girl straight over the edge.

Haunted by the memories of her own childhood, Jo digs deep into the shadowy corners of a seemingly tight-knit community—to uncover a devastating secret...

MY THOUGHTS: Reading Walk A Crooked Line by Susan McBride is a bit like eating Weetbix. You know what you are getting, and there's not much you can do to make it any tastier. There is really nothing



remarkable or memorable about this read. It was a good middle of the road detective story, with perhaps a little too much introspection on the part of the (predictably damaged) lead female detective. Other than that, there is nothing wrong with the story but, it has all been done before and will, no doubt, be done again. So, Weetbix again tomorrow?

Thank you to Thomas and Mercer via Netgalley for providing a digital ARC of *Walk A Crooked Line* by Susan McBride for review. All opinions expressed in this review are entirely my own personal opinions.

Please refer to my Goodreads.com profile page or the 'about' page on [sandysbookaday.wordpress.com](http://sandysbookaday.wordpress.com) for an explanation of my rating system.

This review and others are also published on my blog [sandysbookaday.wordpress.com](http://sandysbookaday.wordpress.com)

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## **Smile24k says**

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## **Cindy ~ SnS Reviews says**

Detective Jo Larsen is more than just a cop. She is a crusader for victims whether that be for a murder victim, a suicide or an owner of a stolen dog.

As with the first book this book centers on the victim – what brought them to the point of their death. The subject matter of this book is an all too familiar one. Abuse, neglect and bullying in all forms leading to suicide.

Jo Larsen and her partner Hank Phelps have two cases that land in their laps. One is the recent death of a teenage girl by jumping off of a water tower and the other is a string of missing dogs. Jo having been a victim herself growing up shares grief with both the survivors and feels the pain of the victims. Her being able to relate makes her resilient and determined to find out the truth. The heartbreak of what the victim went through and the uncaring and insensitive and cruel disregard for her even by those closest to her.

A sign to me if a book is good if at the end you feel something and you certainly do by the end of this one. Even though each of the books in this series are heartbreaking I look forward to the next.

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## **Jessica Woods says**

Ensnaring the reader on page one, *Walk a Crooked Line* begins with a teenager jumping from the local water tower. Detective Jo Larsen and her partner Hank Phelps receive the call as they are investigating a stolen dog. Jo begins investigating and cannot help but draw parallels between her own childhood and the teenager's. The case seems to center around affluent teenagers that appear to be up to no good. The secondary case of the missing dogs seems to tie in and big money is trying to put the case on hold. The story moves smoothly and quickly, drawing the reader in and leaving you emotionally invested in justice for Kelly who has been mistreated by everyone in her life. This book is a pure whodunit for mystery lovers. The mystery steals the show in the book not clogged up by excessive backstory or secondary plot lines; the story plays simply and engagingly for a great read that will leave you coming back for more of Ms. McBride's books. A great read to escape reality on a long day. To be noted, this book is the second in the series and I did not read the first (I plan to go back and read it now). I did not have any trouble keeping up and the book can be read as a standalone without any worries. My voluntary, unbiased review is based upon a review copy from Netgalley.

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