

BATHROOM TALK

We go to great lengths to keep public sanitation a private matter

When we think of the achievements of Western society, the toilet is not the first thing that comes to mind. Maybe it should be. "Water-related diseases" — a polite euphemism for excreta-related diseases — kill more children than HIV, tuberculosis or malaria, as journalist Rose George reminds us. More, even, than warfare. George's new book, *The Big Necessity: The Unmentionable World of Human Waste and Why It Matters*, is devoted to reminding us how important sanitation is, showcasing unorthodox

crusaders for public health in places like India, China and South Africa. About George's vocabulary: She uses a fine, four-letter Anglo-Saxon word that is banned by most newspaper style books, except in newsworthy quotes. This early frankness is followed by an unembarrassed examination of people like India's "manual scavengers," on the lowest level of the caste system, who collect and dispose of human waste, and are considered so unclean that even their shadows can't be touched. *Bloomberg News*

BOOKS

Life on Fifth Ave.

Author switches from *Sex and the City* to *Wealth and the Avaricious*

BY REBECCA FIELD JAGER

Given the economic crisis in the U.S., some authors would be uneasy releasing a novel about a bunch of privileged and/or avaricious characters who live in, yearn to live in or will stop at nothing to live in an absurdly priced New York City co-op. Especially since there's a Wall Street rogue in the mix.

But not Candace Bushnell.

Rather, the 49-year-old writer, whose newspaper column inspired the wildly successful *Sex and the City* franchise, considers her fifth novel, *One Fifth Avenue*, timely. In fact, she's confident it will ride the wave of a new interest in the rich.

"There's this kind of secret society of the super rich," she says leaning forward as if about to divulge the entrance code. "I'm interested in exploring that a little bit. I mean I wouldn't want to write a whole book about just those characters, but..."

She is perched on a couch in the Pink Suite at the Park Hyatt Toronto. The decor of the room, created for Breast Cancer Awareness month, is much like Bushnell herself: feminine yet strong, bold and contemporary. Despite having spent the day doing interviews, photo shoots and a book signing at the nearby Indigo store, Bushnell is perfectly put together, from the top of her honey-blond head to the tip of her Balenciaga-clad toes. And much like Sarah Jessica Parker's rendition of her alter ego, Carrie Bradshaw, she packs tremendous presence in a tiny frame.

Not all the characters in *One Fifth Avenue* are as wealthy as the hedge-fund manager in the penthouse who is ruthlessly trying to make his way into the billionaire club. But most are well off, if not quasi-famous. Still, money doesn't mean class. A fly on the wall would beg to be swatted if only to get away from all the jealousy, backstabbing and opportunism that runs rampant through the landmark Art Deco building.

But, as Bushnell points out, 'tis the stuff of good fiction.

"It's human nature. There are some people who are greedy, and there are some people who want status, and there are other people who just want happiness," she says. "In terms of writing a novel or a movie or anything, the basic premise is you have to have characters who want something."

Bushnell finished the book in July, but the seeds of the story were planted 30 years ago just after she'd moved to New York. A student living in near squalor, the then 19-year-old used to stand outside One Fifth Avenue in awe.

"It was a building I would walk by and say, 'Oh gosh, I'd like to live here one day.' So you wonder, what kinds of people live there? And I would see people coming in and out, well heeled, so to speak. It's a building where a lot of creative people live, a lot of artists and writers and painters and actors and musicians."

As it turns out, Bushnell and her husband of six years, Charles Askegard, a dancer in the New York City Ballet, live in a 1,200 square-foot apartment nearby. They chose it, says Bushnell, because it was the only



COLIN O'CONNOR FOR NATIONAL POST

"In terms of writing a novel ... you have to have characters who want something."

place they liked, had a good vibe and that they could afford. It seems improbable that an author whose work has spawned two television series (Bushnell's 2005 book, *Lipstick Jungle*, is in its second season on NBC) has difficulty finding affordable housing but, hey, it is the Big Apple.

"Living in New York, one certainly sees how the price of real estate has gone up to unimaginable levels. Who can afford a \$20-million apartment? I mean, how do you have that much money? But people do." For those who don't, Bushnell's advice is straightforward. "You have to look after yourself in a practical way. You have to have a real estate budget."

While such prudence is often the hallmark of a childhood fraught with economic hardship, Bushnell grew up in the affluent town of Glastonbury, Conn., where she spent a lot of time riding horses and visiting the

public library. The children's section was an ideal place for Bushnell and her two little sisters, Alyssa and Deirdre, to create characters and make up stories.

By the time she was eight, Bushnell knew she wanted to be a novelist. And she has no qualms about penning chick lit. "I just try to do the best version of me that I can do. I mean, I can't actually write in a different way, I've tried to, but this is the way that I write. So I accept it. It is what it is."

And it's working. Bushnell's latest coup is a deal with HarperCollins to write a young adult two-book series about Carrie Bradshaw in her high school years tentatively titled *The Carrie Diaries*. Asked if she thinks that a teenage character from decades ago — before cellphones, text messaging, YouTube and social networks — will resonate with a teen-

ager of today, Bushnell asserts that some stories are timeless.

"I watched *Little Women* on TV a couple of weeks ago and they didn't have technology then, but it's a great story. A great story is a great story."

On Dec. 1, Bushnell will turn 50. She sees the 50s as a time when women can succeed. "They let go of rigid ideas of what it is to be a woman. I think that when one is young, one worries that, oh, you know, I have to achieve all these things by a certain age, but that actually isn't true. You just have to make the most of where you are at the time. And that's what I plan to do."

Birthday partywise, the woman once known as a princess of the New York nightlife has no big plans.

"I'll probably get together with a little group of my girlfriends and we'll drink champagne."

Weekend Post

CHICK LIT

One Fifth Avenue

Candace Bushnell
HarperCollins
416 pp.; \$27.95

BY LAURIE MUCHNICK



CANDACE BUSHNELL

Forget sex. What concerns everyone in Candace Bushnell's new novel is real estate. As the book opens, Louise Houghton, a Brooke Astor-like society matron living in a grand triplex atop the stately pre-war tower, dies in a freak accident on her terrace. Enid Merle, a Liz Smith-like gossip columnist, wants Mrs. Houghton's penthouse split up, so her nephew, Philip Oakland, a Pulitzer Prize-winning writer who also lives in the building, can buy the bottom floor.

But Mindy Gooch, the bitter co-op board president who makes only (only!) half a million dollars a year in her dead-end job as a media executive, won't allow the penthouse to be divided. If she has to live in a first-floor apartment that used to be a warren of servants' quarters, why should Philip be allowed to move up?

This all begins entertainingly enough, with Bushnell's usual attention to the details of Manhattan society. "Mindy was one of those aggressive New York types," she writes, "as tightly wound as two pieces of rope. You never knew when the rope might unwind and hit you." But after a while, a book in which everyone can be described in one sentence begins to wear thin.

And there's another drawback: Bad timing. While Bushnell drops a few mentions of the softening real estate market, her book is feeling very dated all of a sudden.

Bushnell tries to have a good time with her villains, but she isn't quite funny enough. There's potential in Lola Fabrikant, a breast-enhanced 22-year-old, but she's too odious to get many laughs.

Underpinning the entire book is a wellspring of anxiety. Everyone (except the saintly Annalisa) is jostling for position, trying to get ahead or at least hold on to what they've got. The character who comes to life most is the one hanging by her fingernails, Mindy Gooch, who finds a perfect 21st century outlet for her dread in the form of a blog, *The Joys of Not Having It All*.

Bushnell has set up a classic confrontation between old and new money, old and new media, old and new New York. The doings at One Fifth Avenue are even chronicled by a Gawker-like Web site, *Snarker*. Unfortunately for Bushnell, New York changes so fast that it seems to have gotten away from her.

Bloomberg News

WELCOME TO THE 2008 International Festival of Authors!

<p>LOUISE PENNY TUES. OCT. 28, 8:00 P.M. BRIGANTINE ROOM SAT. NOV. 1, 12:00 P.M. LAKESIDE TERRACE</p>	<p>C.C. HUMPHREYS FRI. OCT. 31, 8:00 P.M. STUDIO THEATRE</p>	<p>ANDREW MILLER SUN. OCT. 26, 12:00 P.M. LAKESIDE TERRACE TUES. OCT. 28, 7:00 P.M. BURLINGTON ST. LUKE'S CHURCH</p>	<p>SIMON MONTEFIORE SUN. OCT. 26, 12:00 P.M. LAKESIDE TERRACE TUES. OCT. 28, 8:00 P.M. LAKESIDE TERRACE</p>	<p>DERFLA MURPHY SUN. OCT. 26, 4:00 P.M. STUDIO THEATRE SAT. NOV. 1, 4:00 P.M. BRIGANTINE ROOM</p>	<p>MARK BILLINGHAM TUES. OCT. 28, 8:00 P.M. BRIGANTINE ROOM</p>	<p>JOHN BRADY WED. OCT. 29, 8:00 P.M. FLECK DANCE THEATRE (formerly the Premiere Dance Theatre) SAT. NOV. 1, 12:00 P.M. LAKESIDE TERRACE</p>
--	---	---	--	---	--	---

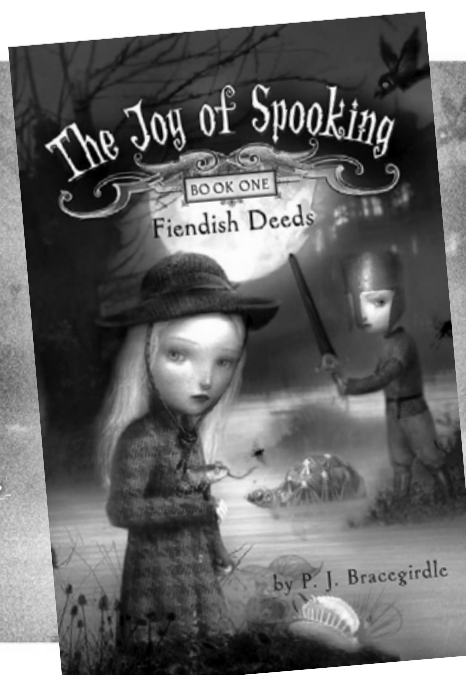
*MAEVE BINCHY - The Voice of the 2008 International Festival of Authors!

McArthur & Company
www.mcarthur-co.com

Time to start spooking!

P.J. Bracegirdle's *Fiendish Deeds*, the first book in the *Joy of Spooking* trilogy.

AVAILABLE EVERYWHERE STRANGE AND INTERESTING BOOKS ARE SOLD



Meet the author
Thursday October 30th, 4pm
Babar en Ville
1235 avenue Greene
Westmount, Quebec
Costumes welcome!

Enter the world of Spooking
at www.JoyofSpooking.com