

Lisa Luciano

■ Personal

Born in Westchester, NY. *Hobbies and other interests:* Martial arts.

■ Addresses

Home—CT.

■ Career

Writer, technology teacher, and library media specialist. Worked formerly in television production.

■ Awards, Honors

One Book, One Town Fairfield Public Library writing contest winner, *The Chosen Ones*, 2015; Trumbull Arts Festival Literary Competition award winner.

■ Writings

(With Patricia Altmann) *Ready-To-Use Literature Activities for Grades 7-12: With Techniques and Ideas for Using Video in the Classroom*, Prentice Hall Direct (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey), 1988.

The Chosen Ones, Micro Publishing Media (Stockbridge, MA), 2017.

Article contributor to periodicals including *New York Times* and *International Figure Skating*.

■ Sidelights

Lisa Luciano is a writer, technology teacher, and library media specialist. Luciano writes fiction, nonfiction, articles and film scripts. Luciano was born and raised in Westchester, New York. She has taught technology to students in grades 6-12 for over thirty years and specializes in digital literacy. She is the Library Media Specialist at the school where she teaches.

In 2015 Luciano won the "One Book, One Town" writing contest sponsored by the Fairfield Public Library for an essay she wrote on the topic of losing technology. She was also an award winner in the Trumbull Arts Festival Literary Competition in 2015. Luciano has written articles about figure skating for the *New York Times* and *International Figure Skating*. In addition to teaching and writing, she studies martial arts. She is a 4th Dan black belt Tae Kwon Do master, instructor, and referee, and has a black belt in Hapkido. Luciano lives and teaches in Connecticut.

Luciano's *The Chosen Ones* tells the fictional story of a corruption scandal in the world of professional figure skating. Sports reporter Brody Yates thinks his reporting career is over after he is fired from his previous job for dishonest reporting. When he receives a call from his former boss, he sees a chance to reignite his career. At the office of Sam Jacobs, his old boss and friend, he learns that the story is not quite what he had expected. Jacobs plays a voice message that was left on his message machine. In it, a mysterious voice says that the life of a top male skater is in danger, and the athlete will be dead before the end of the Olympics.

Yates is the only male reporter who will take the job, and despite the fact that he does not view male ice skating as a real sport, he sees that this story

could make his career. Yates goes undercover, pretending to be a trainer for male skaters. He quickly learns that despite its sparkly and delicate exterior, the professional skating world has a dark underbelly. The story delves into the lives and careers of numerous characters that represent different parts of the skating world. The reader is introduced to Glenn Chandler, the favorite of the American Skating Federation and reigning Olympic champion, who feels himself crumbling under the pressures to be perfect, both professionally and personally. Rising star Robby Donovan has the most natural talent anyone has seen in decades, but his resistance to being pigeonholed by the Federation puts him in their bad favor, and he suffers for it. Freeman Bennett is also a new talent showing promise, a black man in a primarily white sport, and his arrival on the scene exposes latent racism that permeates sections of the sport.

In addition to the stars of the sport, Yates encounters the helicopter mothers, disinterested fathers, jealous partners, secret lovers, and crooked agents that surround the skating stars. While attempting to uncover the murderous plot, he also discovers the unsavory racism and homophobia that exists in parts of professional male skating.

A contributor to *Kirkus Reviews* described the book as “a breezy, disposable read that will be more at home in adult sections than teen,” adding, “the author clearly knows the worlds of figure skating and journalism.” Kayla King in *YA Books Central* website described *The Chosen Ones* as “a darkly entertaining depiction of the scandal and social issues entrenched in high-profile Olympic sports,” while Emily Butler in *School Library Journal* website wrote, “with so many characters, heavy use of dialogue, and sometimes abrupt scene changes, this novel reads somewhat like a screenplay.”

Luciano told CA: “My interest in writing came out of my love for reading. I had an epiphany one day in high school. I had just finished reading a book about sports (my favorite subject) and when I finished, I thought that if it feels this good to read a book, what must it be like to write one? But the real turning point came when my Journalism teacher secretly submitted a project I had done for his class to a national writing contest. They were looking for the best young writers in the country and to my utter shock I won for the state of New York. The prize was to spend the summer being mentored and trained by professional journalists and novelists. Getting that validation of my writing ability gave me the courage to pursue my dream of becoming a writer.

“My favorite piece of writing has to be *The Chosen Ones*. Every book has a story of its own, inside and out. *The Chosen Ones* is no exception, though I think that its creation, death and re-birth might be a tad more dramatic than most novels. I spent four years writing about figure skating for the *New York Times*. My love of the sport prompted me to produce a series of articles I hoped would help correct injustices that had gone on far too long. Figure skating was golden. The only sport that got higher ratings on TV was NFL football. It was a great time to be a skating fan. I immersed myself in that world. Interestingly, some of the ‘insider’ stories I was hearing were better than most soap operas. Then it hit me. Why not write a novel? It would be my first attempt at it, but I wanted to stretch my writing muscles. I had no idea of the saga that was about to unfold.

“I wish I could say that I struggled mightily to create my magnum opus, but the truth was that it came pouring out of me. The only way I can describe it is that it did not come from me, it came through me. So now the book was finished and it was time to find a literary agent. I randomly picked from the *Writer’s Market* list and sent query letters. Nothing was happening until I got a call from the head of an agency. Little did I know I was talking to the man who had made John Grisham a household name. Just as well that I was blissfully ignorant. I wouldn’t have been able to carry on a conversation had I known who he was. I still remember the brief conversation we had. He said, ‘I have fifty letters on my desk from writers just like you who want me to represent them. Forty-nine of them are going back with rejections. But if your letter is any example of how you write novels, I want to read yours. Send it to me.’ I was dumbfounded. I sent the manuscript. Within days I was offered a contract and signed to one of the top literary agencies. It was surreal and as it turned out, too good to be true.

“He set up an auction. He had so much faith in *The Chosen Ones* he would make publishers fight for the rights to the manuscript. I waited breathlessly for the phone to ring with the news that would not be if the book sold, but who bought it and for how much. The phone did ring. But it wasn’t anything that my wildest imagination could have produced. It was someone from the agency informing me that my agent had passed away suddenly. A deep sadness overwhelmed me not only at the loss of a great man, but also someone who would have been a mentor and a supporter, two things that are vital to a writer’s success. The agency quickly assembled people to take over the

stable of writers, but they didn't share my late agent's passion for my book, so I left and put *The Chosen Ones* on the shelf.

"Fast forward to 2014. The Winter Olympics were coming and I began thinking of the book that almost was and decided I had to give it one more try for the man who believed in me and my work. The publishing industry had changed. I decided to join forces with an independent publishing company, and now *The Chosen Ones* is a reality. It's a story about winning and losing, finding out who you are and what you want and never giving up on your dream. And that is the same lesson I learned from writing the book."

■ Biographical and Critical Sources

PERIODICALS

Kirkus Reviews, August 1, 2017, review of *The Chosen Ones*.

ONLINE

School Library Journal, <https://www.slj.com/> (October 4, 2017), Emily Butler, review of *The Chosen Ones*.

YA Books Central, <http://www.yabookscentral.com/> (December 7, 2017), Kayla King, review of *The Chosen Ones*.