



Contact:  
Rhalee Hughes  
rhalee.hughes public relations + marketing  
212.260.2244  
rhughes@rhalee.com

## SUSANE COLASANTI Q&A

<b>Place and date of birth:</b>	New Jersey, May 1, 1973
<b>Favorite teen novel:</b>	<i>The Outsiders</i> by S.E. Hinton
<b>Favorite pen:</b>	Gelly Roll Lightning
<b>Motto:</b>	Dream big
<b>Most treasured possession:</b>	My stuffed koala bear, Chez
<b>Favorite movie:</b>	<i>Garden State</i>
<b>Favorite song:</b>	<i>Clarity</i> by John Mayer
<b>Favorite show:</b>	<i>The Office</i>
<b>Senior quote:</b>	"It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye." – <i>The Little Prince</i>
<b>Favorite cupcakes:</b>	Sprinkles and Crumbs
<b>Favorite game:</b>	Skee-ball



**Keep Holding On** by Susane Colasanti; Viking; Hardcover fiction; \$17.99; On Sale June 14, 2012;  
224 pages; Ages 12 and up; ISBN: 978-0-670-01225-1

**Q: Fans and critics of your work have been declaring that *Keep Holding On* is your best book yet, describing it as a “must-read book for all teens.” Tell us about it.**

**Susane Colasanti:** *Keep Holding On* deals with the consequences of bullying. It's about a girl, Noelle, who is neglected at home and tormented at school. She feels trapped in her small town. She feels like no one understands her completely, including her best friend. She's in a bad relationship and doesn't have the confidence to be with the boy she really loves. But Noelle discovers that she's not as isolated as she thinks. And that she has the power to make the changes she's been waiting for.

**Q: Is it autobiographical?**

**SC:** This book is not an autobiography. However, it's my most personal book yet. The story was strongly inspired by my own experiences with bullying. I was a total outsider in junior high and high school. In *Keep Holding On*, I wrote about some really embarrassing things that I would have been mortified to admit back then. Some of the things that happened were so humiliating that I have only recently started talking about them to friends who have known me for many years. Writing *Keep Holding On* was a way to reach out to teens who are dealing with the same issues.

(over)

**Q: Why did you decide to write it now?**

**SC:** Like Noelle, I couldn't wait to graduate and move away. I thought that my real life wouldn't start until I got to college. Now I know that there are things I could have done to move toward creating a better life instead of waiting for something to happen. Writing this book was my way of letting teens know that their real lives are already happening, and that there are ways to improve their lives right now.

Writing about some of the painful times I endured was not easy. But I felt like it was something I had to do. The thing is, I'm not embarrassed anymore. If I survived those experiences, then there are lots of kids out there trying to survive those same experiences today. Which means it's time to speak up. Hopefully, *Keep Holding On* will help readers feel less alone.

**Q: Were you worried about how it would be received?**

**SC:** I worry about every book! But I'm hoping that my own experiences will resonate with readers. I know how it feels to be relentlessly tormented. I know how it feels to be constantly anxious at school and at home, to feel like you'll never fit in, like no one will ever understand you. And like you will never find someone who will love you. *Keep Holding On* was my way of turning a negative experience into something positive. I want this book to help people feel less alone; if it does, then everything I endured will have been worth it.

**Q: How did the title for *Keep Holding On* come to you?**

**SC:** Coming up with good titles isn't easy for me. I usually find it easier to write an entire book than to think up a winning title. When I'm working on a new book, I have a corresponding notebook that goes with it. Each notebook has a page where I brainstorm titles. *Keep Holding On* was one of the first titles I wrote down. All of my titles are three words, with multiple connotations. *Keep Holding On* reflects the relationship between my main character and her soul mate; it also reflects the tone of the story. I'm sure you know which song inspired this title (note: Avril Lavigne's "Keep Holding On").

**Q: Before you became a writer, you were a high school science teacher. Did that experience factor into your writing?**

**SC:** My teacher life influences all of my books. Realistic fiction is my thing, so I want my books to feel as real as possible. Finding inspiration from real life is one way I try to accomplish that goal. Actual experiences from my time as a teacher, details from my classes, and even some students have inspired scenes and characters in my books.

**Q: How did you go from being a science teacher to becoming a bestselling teen author?**

**SC:** You know those people who seem to be able to do lots of things effortlessly? Like they can have a career and kids and organize bake sales and still find time to write books on top of everything else? Yeah, I'm not one of them. I wrote *When It Happens* and *Take Me There* while I was still teaching. I was hoping that I could keep being both a teacher and an author. But doing both was just too exhausting for me. I like to bring 100% to whatever I do. In 2007, I made the switch from teacher to full-time author. Deciding to resign from teaching wasn't easy. Ever since the start of my horrifying teen years, I've known that my purpose in life is to reach out to teens. I want to make them feel less alone and maybe even help them improve their lives in some way. By writing books, I can reach way more teens than I could as a teacher.

**Q: Who was your favorite author when you were growing up?**

**SC:** When I was little, I adored Shel Silverstein's books. *Lafcadio*, *The Missing Piece*, and *The Giving Tree* (which still makes me cry every time I read it) all had an enormous impact on me.

(more)

When I was older, I fell in love with books by Judy Blume and Louise Fitzhugh. But it wasn't until I read S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* that I thought about writing my own teen novel. I wanted to help teens the way that book helped me when I felt so alone. I could totally relate to how Ponyboy felt that he would always be on the fringe. Those authors all inspired me and I am eternally thankful.

**Q: When did you know you wanted to be a writer?**

**SC:** When I was 16, I thought more seriously about writing. The thing is, I had already decided to be a science teacher when I was 12. I didn't get the memo that you could be more than one thing. I've always loved science, especially astronomy and physics, areas I studied in college. Then I went to grad school to become a physics teacher. But the longing to write was burning inside of me. My first book, *When It Happens*, was inspired by my own experiences during senior year of high school. The story would not leave me alone. I just had a feeling that people would want to read that book, so I started writing the first draft in grad school. The book was published 10 years later.

**Q: How many times did you get rejected by a publisher with your first book?**

**SC:** The first draft of *When It Happens* got about eight rejections. It was even rejected by my publisher! The first editor who read it included some feedback in her rejection letter. I applied her suggestions to the revised manuscript and submitted it again. It was rejected again. The same editor read it a second time and provided even more feedback. I refused to give up. I revised the manuscript and submitted it again. Fortunately, a different editor read it and wanted to work with me. The manuscript went through a few more revisions before I signed a contract with Penguin. I'm so happy I never gave up!

**Q: What was your childhood like?**

**SC:** You may have heard of my hometown: Middle of Nowhere, New Jersey? It's a small town deep in the woods with a population under 2,000. It's one thing to be older and go back and appreciate nature and all, but growing up in the country was beyond boring. I couldn't wait to move to a big city with lots of things to do. That's why I love living in New York City. All of the bookstores and coffee shops and museums and concerts and green spaces...it's an amazing place. And somehow I always knew it was my true home.

**Q: What is your favorite thing about writing for young adults?**

**SC:** The hope is that my books might help readers in some small way. When I was a teen, books were my friends. They were always there for me. They could make me feel better after a hard day at school. My favorite characters were people I wished I could have been friends with in real life. Those friends on the page soothed me and showed me a way to escape. I want my books to do the same thing for my readers.

**Q: So far, what has been your most gratifying moment as an author?**

**SC:** Every time I get to meet a reader is the best moment for me. When I'm sitting at home all day working alone, I can never be sure that what I'm writing will make an impact on anyone. It's not until I hear from my readers that I can find out if what I'm doing is actually working. Communicating with them online is awesome, but seeing them in person is even better. I'm beyond excited for every book event...and hope that there are many more to come!

For further information, please contact: Rhalee Hughes  
rhalee.hughes@publicrelations + marketing  
212.260.2244 or rhughes@rhalee.com