

# Sky Author Interview with Ondine Sherman



## What was your motivation in writing *Sky*?

I hope *Sky* will inspire youth to engage with some of the most important animal protection issues of our time. Young people are often passionate about making a difference in our world and can truly make a difference when they get involved. We see evidence of this today with the teenagers who are leading the global climate action movement. I believe this generation of youth are our most valuable change-makers and will help be instrumental in making our world a kinder, more compassionate place for animals.

## What experiences and sources did you draw on in creating the character of *Sky*?

*Sky* is an entirely fictional character but, as I was creating her, I felt like I started to embody her in some small way through her trials and tribulations. It's quite a wonderful feeling to be so connected to your characters and to think and dream of them all the time. To get in the head of a teenager, I drew

a lot on my own past experiences as well as my teen daughter, Jasmine. Neither of us have ever been through what *Sky* has, but there are whispers of both our personalities, if you listen closely.

## How is *Chirp* such an important character in the text?

I have always loved books and movies where the protagonist is an animal, as I could imagine the world from their eyes. I didn't want *Chirp* to be just a 'thing' but a character of her own with emotions and preferences. Now that I have my own rescue-chickens, I can see first-hand that each one is different and unique. They are wonderful and often misunderstood animals.

## The need and drive to gain social approval for *Sky* drives an important element of the plot. Why is this so?

We are all driven by the need of social approval, for good and for bad, it is often the main force that influences our decision making. Social pressure is even stronger when we are young and still searching for ourselves and our identity. *Sky*, like all of us, needs to navigate the narrow path between fitting in and staying true to what she believes. It's not an easy task but extremely valuable.

## Why does *Sky* find public activism to be such an effective method of expression?

There are many ways one can make a difference and effect change in our society. Public activism is one important tool in our box. By standing up in front of her peers and being authentic, vulnerable, and passionate, *Sky* was able to communicate her message and be heard. Public activism such as speeches, rallies, protests and demonstrations, can be extremely

powerful and have created real change throughout history, in all our greatest social justice movements.

### **Explain how *Sky* might be used as an example of a citizen of democracy registering disagreement, seeking support, and making changes.**

We are extremely fortunate to live in a democracy and that comes with privileges such as freedom of speech as well as duties. Part of our responsibility as citizens is that when we see injustice we must speak out. Although it may seem difficult, history has shown that it often takes only a single person, someone with passion and conviction and tenacity, to start a movement to create change. *Sky* is a regular teenager with no extraordinary resources or skills, but she is an example of what can be achieved when we do not accept the status quo - great things can happen.

### **In what ways do you think *Sky* had an impact on the world around her? How might this encourage other young people to believe in themselves?**

By standing up for what she believes, *Sky* is not only able to change the life of Bella and Chirp, but also reduce the suffering of thousands of others. There are many ways young people can make a difference in their community, be it writing an opinion piece for their school or local newspaper or sharing a meaningful artwork. We all have the ability to influence others and become an example to those around us. Sometimes we don't even realise it at the time, but our words or behaviour has significantly altered someone's perception.

### **Reflect and comment on the writing process for *Sky*. In what ways did you use language to achieve your desired outcome?**

*Sky* has many people in her life and not all of them see the world as she does. I love writing dialogue as it allows me to explore differing opinions and allow my characters opportunities to discuss and debate opposing views. Conflict can drive people apart but it can also often lead to deeper understandings and creative resolutions.

### **In what ways does *Sky* explore themes of animal protection?**

*Sky*, like many of us, loves animals very much and before the book begins, she already knows a lot about animal protection issues. However, when she starts working on her high school agriculture project and meets Chirp, her experience deepens. *Sky* finds herself grappling with some of the biggest ethical issues of our day – the industrialised exploitation of farm animals.

My next book, *Snow* (released July 2019), is set in Alaska and will continue the animal protection theme as *Sky* faces new and exciting challenges

### **What message and impact would you like to see *Sky* have on young people?**

I am delighted to hear young people respond to *Sky* and find themselves pondering the animal issues she is faced with. It is only through engagement and critical thinking that we can tackle the complex issues of our human-animal relationship and navigate pathways to real and lasting change.

