



## Holly Cupala

**Tell Me a Secret**  
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Holly Cupala Q and A

*Tell Me a Secret*

***I've heard that your ideas come like lightning bolts. Where were you and what were you doing when the idea for *Tell Me a Secret* struck?***

The year I started writing *Tell Me a Secret*, my close friend's sister died suddenly. We'd known each other since high school. Then, a few months later, we lost our first daughter, Ezri, at birth. I'd been working on some picture books and a middle grade novel before that, but it all suddenly seemed meaningless. I wasn't even sure if I wanted to continue writing. Then a few months later, Justina Chen Headley, friend and writing mentor, took me out to lunch at a writing conference and asked, very kindly, "Are you going to write about Ezri?" It was like she opened a door and gave me permission to walk through it. Right after lunch, we went to Libba Bray's session (she had just released *A Great and Terrible Beauty*) on "How to Shut Off Your Brain and Get to the Heart of Your Writing," and suddenly. . . there it was. The entire idea was right there in my lap. I started writing notes as fast as I could.

***This is your first published novel! What did you do to hone your writing skills?***

I've known I wanted to write since I was very small (my parents can attest to my earliest fiction, circa first grade), but I didn't attempt novels until I penned two teen romances in eighth grade -- this was before I actually experienced teen romance. After I did, it was all about tragic poetry. I continued writing in college while I studied literature. Just as I was about to get my Masters degree and go on for a PhD, I realized I'd strayed from my first love -- so I finished up the Masters and joined the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators, where I went to workshops, joined a critique group, and learned about the market. Honing skills is definitely a process and involves a lot of actual writing: bad writing, a little bit better writing, and finally pretty decent writing. The key is getting to the truth of a character's emotions and the flow of actions and interactions that make sense for the character to grow.

***Rand really admired her sister, despite her sister's rebellious nature. Who do you admire and why?***

I think the people I admire the most are the ones who are comfortable enough with themselves that they can reach out to others. I admire kindness. I admire integrity and spirit. Come to think of it, my own sister is just like that.

***Rand really connects to art when she's stressed -- what do you do when you need to think more clearly?***

Make art, actually! For me, writing is draining and art is filling, so the two activities create a kind of balance. I love to paint and collage and make random stuff with my daughter. I learned to knit when our second daughter was born, and I'm psyching myself up to try making a sweater.

***Part of the proceeds from *Tell Me a Secret* are going toward a special organization. Can you tell us about it?***

We chose to give 10% of the proceeds from *Tell Me a Secret* to World Vision's Hope for Sexually Exploited Girls. I admire the work they are doing with girls around the globe. Even though *Tell Me a Secret* doesn't deal with sexual exploitation, it does deal with women's stories and women connecting with other women, so I felt there was a relationship there.

**Short Answers!**

***Book on your nightstand now?***

Half of my To-Be-Read pile is on the nightstand right now! I came back from the ALA midwinter conference with a huge stack of gems -- among them, *The Heart is Not a Size* by Beth Kephart, *Faithful* by Janet S. Fox, *Before I Fall* by Lauren Oliver, *This World We Live In* by Susan Beth Pfeffer -- next to those I've been reading -- *Chasing Brooklyn* by Lisa Schroeder, *Lips Touch* by Laini Taylor and Jim Di Bartolo, *Going Bovine* by Libba Bray.

***Last thing you do before bed?***

Kiss my little girl one more time, then read a bit from the TBR pile or listen to a podcast (we love Sherlock Holmes mysteries). The very last thing is giving my sweetheart a kiss goodnight.

***Favorite dress in your closet?***

I have this gray lace dress from Anthropologie that I adore -- it's cute, comfortable, and goes with everything.

***Most interesting place you've travelled?***

My husband's family is from India: After we'd been married a couple of years, we went with his parents to visit relatives and some of the sites. The country is incredibly vast and beautiful and varied. We saw everything from slums to palaces to ruins in the space of a few weeks. His family threw a party, and the women danced around me and wrapped me in a red silk sari embroidered with gold. The Taj Mahal perches on the edge of a ravine, and on the day we were there, the backdrop of the sky was misty white with clouds -- it felt like we were on the edge of infinity.

***Favorite website?***

I spend a lot of time at readergirlz, of course! Also visiting friends' blogs (I have a blogroll a mile long) and Twitter to see what everyone is up to. I love CD Baby for music, Sock Dreams for knee-highs and arm warmers, and Etsy for art and fun stuff.

***Sunrises or sunsets?***

Oh, most definitely sunsets -- compounded by the fact that we so rarely see them in Seattle.

***Sunny or stormy skies?***

There are a few months out of the year when Seattle is one of the most beautiful places on earth -- green and clean and almost magical. It makes the rain worth it!

***Comedy or drama?***

I kind of dig space operas. . . which mostly fall into the drama category. Babylon 5, Firefly, the new Battlestar Galactica, old Star Wars! (Confession: you will find more than a few sci-fi references in *Tell Me a Secret*.)

***Salty or sweet?***

My favorite writing fuel (at the moment, anyway) is strawberry licorice from Trader Joe's. It's really quite addictive.

***Museum or theatre?***

Both, whenever I have the chance!