

MARY CASANOVA – ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Mary Casanova

Mary Casanova is an award-winning children's author of novels and picture books. Many of her books stem from her life on the Minnesota-Canadian border; yet some of her stories have taken her as far away as France, Norway, and Belize for research. Whatever the setting for her books, Casanova writes stories that matter--and stories that kids can't put down.

Her book awards include: American Library Association "Notable," Aesop Accolades by the American Folklore Society, Parents' Choice "Gold" Award, Booklist Editor Choice, and two Minnesota Book Awards. Her books frequently land on state children's choice book master lists across the country. "The greatest reward for me," Casanova states, "is when a young reader tells me she or he loves one of my books. For me, it's all about communicating writer-to-reader through a character and story."

Casanova grew up in a family of ten children in St. Paul, Minnesota. In a bustling camp-like atmosphere, Casanova found that writing became her voice. "Words are my paintbrush," she explains, "my way of exploring the world around me."

Now, with 19 books published and many more under contract and forthcoming, she divides her time between writing and traveling. Nationally and internationally, at schools and conferences, Casanova shares her love of writing and reading with children and adults. Visit her website at www.marycasanova.com

Her newest novel, *The Klipfish Code*, makes use of Mary's on-site research in Norway. The story explores an important facet of Norwegian history through the experiences of Marit, a 12-year-old Norwegian girl who finds a way to fight against the 5-year Nazi occupation of Norway. Marit and her brother Lars are separated from their parents (who are working for the Resistance) and sent to live on an island with their gruff grandfather and school teacher aunt. During the course of the story, Marit's aunt is one of the Norwegian school teachers that gets sent to a concentration camp for refusing to integrate Nazi propaganda into her classroom. With potential danger waiting every turn, Marit finds a way to help the Resistance and eventually reunite her family.

Mary's series, *Dog Watch* (Simon and Schuster) is based on her northern Minnesota village where dogs are allowed to roam free—as long as they don't get in trouble. If they get in trouble, they earn a sticker on their page at the village clerk's office; too many stickers and a trouble-making dog must remain at home. "I never know where the next story will come from. It's a delight when the stories come right from this corner of the world I call home." She makes her home in a 100-year old house on Rainy Lake with her husband, Charles, and their three "above average" dogs and spends free time with their horses, Jay and Midnight.

MARY CASANOVA ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN

Ever since high school—when I discovered the power of words—I wanted to be a writer. In required essays and in my journal writing, words were my paintbrush, a way of interpreting the world and exploring my thoughts. I found my voice and discovered my dream of writing books for children.

When it comes to writing for children, I'm passionate about two things: writing books that matter and writing books that kids can't put down. I want kids to pick up my books and enjoy reading them from cover to cover, page by page, chapter by chapter. I strive to hook them firmly, like a fish on a line, and pull them all the way in.

For me, growing up was like going to camp. With seven brothers and two sisters, I was always outdoors. In the winter, we had our own ice-hockey team, and in summer a ready group for playing tag off the pontoon boat. I water-skied, sailed, camped, and rode my horse everywhere. We had every kind of animal over the years, including a Shetland pony who loved to dump his least favorite riders (not me), and a killer Canada goose who protected his turf by leaving welts on our legs. Every summer, we crammed into our station wagon and headed "up north" to the cabin. In the north

woods, I loved the spicy pine air, the loon's song, and the squawk of the great blue heron. It was during those early trips north that my feeling for nature was seeded.

My parents were masters of benevolent neglect, giving me strong wings of independence and roots firmly established in unconditional love. Family life was not perfect, however. As a young girl in a largely male-dominated household, I struggled to be heard above the myriad of other voices. I did not understand or accept the bravado of hunting when a deer carcass hung from our garage rafters, but speaking out was difficult for me.

I now live on the Minnesota-Canadian border, where I see eagles, otters, moose, black bear, and wolves. At one time, I thought this remote location would make it more difficult to establish myself as a writer, but now I see how much my environment has influenced and shaped my work.

If it's true that writers should "write to express, not to impress," then nowhere is this more important than in writing for children. They are the toughest critics, demanding first and foremost a good story. It's the writer's responsibility to write honestly, from the heart, and to give something of lasting value to the reader. Every writer offers a unique perspective, a unique gift; if expressed clearly enough, true enough, it is a gift of story that a young reader will remember for a long time.