

A CONVERSATION

Maggie Stiefvater

Author of
Shiver

Questions & Answers

Q: *What inspired you to write Shiver?*

A: I would like to say that I was inspired to write *Shiver* by some overwhelming belief in true love, but here's my true confession. I wrote *Shiver* because I like to make people cry. I had just finished reading *The Time Traveler's Wife* by Audrey Niffenegger for the second time, and I cried for the second time. I should tell everyone now that I am not a big crier at books. I am kind of a serial career non-crier actually. If you look up shadenfreude on Wikipedia, you'll see a picture of me with a snide smile on my face. And so the fact that this book had made me cry not once but twice, and not just cry but storm around the house doing the seven stages of grief, it really kind of inspired in me this desire to do the same thing to other people. And so with *Shiver*, I wanted to write a book that would make someone sneak a peek of it in their cubicle, and then mascara would run down their face, and they could shake their fist at the sky and curse me to the heavens.

Q: *Have you always had a fascination with wolves?*

A: I haven't always had a fascination with wolves, but I've always been kind of animal crazy. When I was a child, I spent hours and hours watching those animal programs on National Geographic. And if my parents ever wanted to get me out of the house, they just sent me outside and told me that there were animals walking around in the woods for me to look at. So it was nice to write a book that had so much of a connection with nature.

Q: *You are the mother of two young children. Has being a mom changed you as an artist?*

A: Being a mom really hasn't changed me as an artist. It doesn't change my subject matter, but I will say it has definitely added to the time crunch. I used to just doodle and do art all the time, and now it's very much squeezing it in between. But one of the most rewarding things about being a mom is that I've been able to teach my kids from the ground up art and music and writing. My daughter's already starting to read, which is very fun, and she's already incredible with a pencil, so I'm very much looking forward to seeing the way she turns out.

Q: *What writers have inspired you?*

A: I have been inspired by so many writers over the years. I always had my nose stuck in a book as a kid and even now I always have a book in my hand. But I have to say, if I was going to pick a few out of a hat, I would go with Diana Wynne Jones because I love that she writes fantasy that is funny. It's serious, the plot is serious, but her characters realize how ludicrous the situations are that they're in, and they comment on it. I love Susan Cooper because she's great at setting mood. I love M.T. Anderson's use of voice, he's just fantastic and humbling. And then Jane Yolen is like a classic for all fantasy writers, she does a great job of putting folk tales into her stories. I do have a bunch of adult books that I enjoy as well. I obviously love *The Time Traveler's Wife*, and I recently read *Crow Lake*, *Year of Wonders*, and *The Secret Life of Bees* and I've enjoyed them all immensely.

Q: *You are an artist, a musician, and an author. Which came first—writing, music, or art?*

A: I first started working as an artist about two years after I got out of college. When I graduated from college, I went straight to work for a federal contractor, a desk job, and they were great to me, they loved me, I was like their mascot, but I just couldn't stand working in an office. I just hated it. And so one day I went in and said, "I'm sorry, this is my two-weeks notice, I'm quitting to become an artist." And of course, I hadn't been an artist before then and I don't think I was very good then either, but I just decided that was the way to go. And so my boss looked at me and he said, "Well, Maggie, when you want your job back, when you can't make a living, it's always here for you." And you know what, I made my living in that first year and never looked back, and I will never ever have a job with a cubicle.

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Q: Does your work in one affect the others?

A: When I was a teen, I thought I would have to choose between my writing or my music or my art, but it turns out it's a difficult juggling game but I can do all of them. Like right now, when I wrote *Shiver*, I got to do some fan art as well of my own, I sketch wolves a lot and I got to write a piece of music for it as well. So I like to think that it's like "The Blind Men and the Elephant". Does anyone know that poem anymore? The one where it's the bunch of blind men who all have a different part of an elephant that they're feeling and they're guessing what the animal is. And eventually they come to the conclusion that it is actually an elephant. I feel like my writing and my music and my art are the same way, where they're all describing different sides of the same animal.

Q: Since art is so important to you, what are the sights and sounds that surround you while you write? Do you listen to music? What did you listen to while writing *Shiver*?

A: While I'm writing, I absolutely have to have music playing in the background. I just cannot focus without music to keep me grounded. Otherwise all I think about while I'm sitting there at the computer is how I need to do my laundry or walk the dogs or I really need to eat some of that cookie dough I just made. So, to keep my butt in the chair, I play music. And it can't be just any music, it has to be a soundtrack that I've picked out beforehand during the plotting process that kind of underlines the mood that I'm trying to make with the book. And so with *Shiver*, when I was plotting, the song that first really inspired me with the mood was The Bravery's "The Ocean." It's this incredibly, incredibly sad song that has bittersweet lyrics about losing your lover. I also listened to mix tapes that had Snow Patrol and Joshua Radin and a bunch of other acoustic singer-songwriters on them.

Q: What are you working on now?

A: Right now, I'm working on the sequel to *Shiver*, *Linger*, and I can't tell you anything about it because anything I say would give away the ending of *Shiver*. And then I'm also working on a little side project, which is kind of like *Shiver*, it's a love story with touches of the paranormal and I think that people who like *Shiver* will like it as well.

Q: What do you like best about writing young adult fiction?

A: One of the things that I really like about young adult fiction is that you can explore the relationships between teens and their parents. I definitely think that teens are a product of their parents. You either end up just like them or you consciously make the decision to be unlike them. And so with Sam, I wanted to show how it was that he turned out to be so sensitive and creative. So I showed Sam's adoptive parents, Beck and the Pack, and they're all very creative and supportive, so he grows up in that loving relationship which turns him into who he is. Grace, on the other hand, is very independent, and it's not enough to just say that she's independent, you have to show why she is and so when you look at her parents, they're very absent, so basically Grace has been raising herself.

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