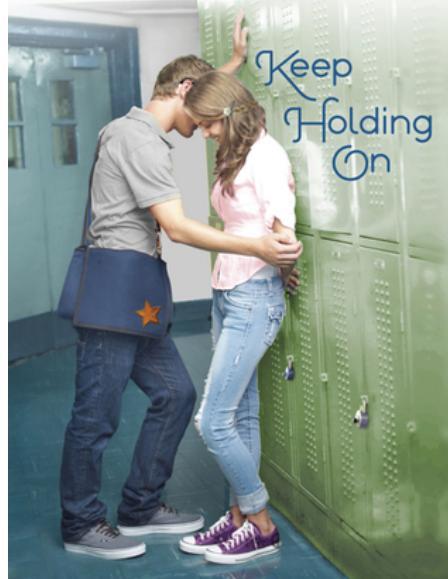


Author of *Something Like Fate* and *So Much Closer*

**SUSANE COLASANTI**



## **Keep Holding On**

*Susane Colasanti*

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# Keep Holding On

*Susane Colasanti*

## Keep Holding On Susane Colasanti

A romantic and empowering book about bullying

Noelle's life is all about survival. Even her best friend doesn't know how much she gets bullied, or the ways her mom neglects her. Noelle's kept so much about her life a secret for so long that when her longtime crush Julian Porter starts paying attention to her, she's terrified. Surely it's safer to stay hidden than to risk the pain of a broken heart. But when the antagonism of her classmates takes a dramatic turn, Noelle realizes it's time to stand up for herself--and for the love that keeps her holding on.

## Keep Holding On Details

Date : Published May 31st 2012 by Viking Juvenile

ISBN : 9780670012251

Author : Susane Colasanti

Format : Hardcover 224 pages

Genre : Young Adult, Contemporary, Romance, Realistic Fiction, Sociology, Abuse

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## From Reader Review Keep Holding On for online ebook

### Jasprit says

Keep holding on tells the story of Noelle; whose had a tough life. Once she had the stable family lifestyle; a big house in a nice neighbourhood, she could invite her friends over when she wanted, a mother and a boyfriend who loved her, friends who wanted to know her and her mother was happy. But suddenly things spiralled out of control, due to unexpected circumstances, her and her mother were forced into a dingy apartment with hardly any money, and just had to live off what they could scrape by. The once respected and approachable mother now no-one wants to know, so she retreated into her inner shell, leaving Noelle to do everything for herself. This is when the bullying starts, having to fend for herself; doing the laundry, and barely having anything to eat, her former friends turn their back on her and the endless teasing and mocking begins.

Keeping Holing On was such a heart breaking read, the second half of the book actually took me longer to finish off compared to the first half because of the amount of times I had to stop to wipe away my tears streaming down my face, so I could read properly and then to constantly clear my kindle with all the tears dripping off on to it. If I were in Noelle's shoes I know for sure I would not have been able to stick it out, day in day out she turned up to school, and tried to hold the facade that her bullies weren't getting to her. And then go home and deal with the crap from her mother; her constant ranting of being a single mother, having to provide for her and Noelle, so they could have a roof over her head, she made me so mad, I've come across some abysmal mothers in YA reads recently but Noelle's mother quickly made her way to the top of my list. She was so wrapped up in her own little self-centred world, that not once did she realise what was going on in front of her. You could say that the biggest trigger of Noelle being bullied was because of her mother's lack of love, support and her attitude. She wouldn't let her have her showers in the morning because it would wake her up and she could only get up at a certain time, (thus came the nick-name rotten egg) she wouldn't drop her off to school if she was late (so she would turn up in a flustered, dishevelled state). Which mother could do that? At times she was so heartless, that I personally felt she had no right to call herself Noelle's mother in the first place.

Sherae; Noelle's friend was such a strong pillar of support. I truly admired her character, she had her own problems to deal with, but she was always there for Noelle, encouraging her to stand up for herself, comforting her when it all got too much and her small unexpected gestures truly sneaked their way into my heart. Everyone needs a best friend like Sherae.

Once I read the blurb, you're given a hint into a major event that happens in the book, but even though you know about it, nothing can actually prepare you for it when it actually happens. I just can't bring to words just how much I was affected by it, or the entire book for that matter. This book keeps you constantly questioning yourself afterwards with endless what ifs, what if I'd done something different that day or actually listened to her for once. But the what ifs can never bring a person back once they've gone, or the endless hurt created over time.

Keep Holding On was a poignant heart wrenching read that brings to the surface how bullying is still a major issue today; it can truly affect individuals so much that they see only one possible way out. But with the right support and encouragement in place you can bring a stop to the hateful bullying. I think Colasanti did a fantastic job with Keep Holding On; she didn't end everything with a pretty little bow, but with a reasonable ending. You should have seen my kindle by the time I finished this book, literally half of it was highlighted with beautiful achy quotes. Despite the sensitive subject matters, I delved into Colasanti's book and formed

such a close relationship with Noelle, her words kept me mesmerised until the early hours of the morning until I finally went to sleep with big puffy eyes.

I truly recommend that you read *Keep Holding On*. It's a breath taking moving book, that will keep you thinking about it for days afterwards.

A big thank you to NetGalley and Penguin group for giving me this amazing opportunity to read this one of a kind book.

I'll end this review by leaving you with some of Colasanti's reasons behind writing this book (taken from Susane Colasanti's *Keep Holding On* twitter chat).

*"It felt good to write about the things that made me so sad 20 years ago in *Keep Holding On*. And happy that the book could help others now"*

*"Writing the scenes in *Keep Holding on* that were inspired by my actual experiences was my way of turning negative into positive"*

*"My favourite thing about writing is the opportunity to reach out to teens and hopefully make them feel less alone"*

*"Inspiration comes from everywhere. My own experiences with being bullied inspired me into write *Keep Holding On*. Some actual stuff is included".*

This review and more can also be found on my blog: The Readers Den

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### **Cara says**

Why do I always dislike the covers for this author's books? Hopefully the story makes up for it:)

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### **Drea says**

2.5 stars.

I've been bullied before. It got to the point where I've been suicidal and dreaded going to school. The bullying I went through in middle school is a big reason why I suffer from social anxiety to this day, and the anxiety was so bad, it got to the point where I tried my best to remain invisible in high school, and why a lot of days I was literally afraid to go to school because I was paranoid that people would put gum in my hair or steal things from my locker or laugh at my hair and my clothes and call me ugly, to the point where I ended up dropping out.

I also know what it's like to not have as much money as anybody else. most kids would shop at the expensive stores in the mall, places like Baby Phat and South Pole. I was stuck with Wal-Mart and the Goodwill (which was actually okay with me. they got some cute stuff at thrift stores!). I had bad, frizzy hair, wore glasses, and was generally awkward and geeky.

so I could relate to some of the things Noelle had gone through. I didn't have it as bad as her, but still, there were times where I would be reading and nodding my head, saying, "yep, I've been there before."

so then why didn't I like this book that much? It's not *bad* per say, I've certainly read worse books. I've read YA books centered around bullying, and most of them are super melodramatic and after school special-ish. one good thing about this book is that the bullying seemed realistic at times...but then other times Noelle herself was kind of ridiculous.

for instance: the money thing. she always talks about how there's never any food in the house, and at one point even says that she's malnourished. okay, I get that...so why not just get free lunch. if you're *malnourished*, then why not just forget about what people think and get the damn free food? She says she doesn't want to "subject herself to that kind of humiliation," but she's already getting made fun of for eating things like a lettuce and mayo sandwich. sure, they might make fun of her, but at least she'd have a full stomach.

and that's another thing that confused me. why would the kids at Noelle's school give a rat's ass that anybody has free lunch? I don't come from a super small, super rich town like Noelle, but in my school, nobody at all cared that anybody had free lunch. hell, even the rich kids got free lunch, because free food!

There's also a scene where Noelle talks about how her and her mother had gone grocery shopping with food stamps, and said how the cashier was all friendly and smiles with her mother, and then once he saw they had food stamps, shouted it to the whole store practically...who the hell *does* that in the real world? Also, how does she not have any food in the house when they have food stamps? My parents have food stamps, and trust me, you can get a ton of food with that. at first I thought it was because Noelle's mother was secretly spending all that money on drugs or something instead of food, but nope. (to be fair, though, her mother was pretty awful.)

and then there's Noelle's aversion to buying tampons...what's the big deal? Why is she so embarrassed? Sure, a lot of mom's probably buy their daughters feminine products like that, but I don't see the big deal on buying it yourself. at one point, Noelle is shopping with Sherae and talks about trying to sneak off so she can buy them in secret...why is she so ashamed? Sherae is her best friend, and she's also a girl. I'm sure she would have no qualms over giving Noelle a tampon or something. Noelle trusts her enough to confide in her about her living situation but not to ask for a tampon? Uh...okay.

As I said, though, there are some things that rang very true to me. Like when Noelle is talking about her unmanageable hair and being jealous over another classmate with perfect hair. It seems petty, but as someone with super thick, naturally curly, frizzy hair, I completely know what that's like. I spent almost all of middle school wishing I had shiny, naturally straight hair like all the other girls. (but then I got a flat iron and solved that problem.) I also understood how she felt whenever she sat alone at lunch, because I've been there, and how she would discreetly sneak glances to Julian without him noticing. I've SO done that with many people I've had crushes on.

But although I could relate to Noelle a few times, there were more times where I just rolled my eyes at her, even a couple times when I was kind of disgusted with her. (view spoiler)

there were some things I loved about this book, and that was Simon and Ms. Scofield. Simon is somebody who I definitely would've been friends with if I went to high school with him. I loved his fashion sense, I loved how funny and caring he was, and I loved how he was so unabashedly himself without giving a shit what other people thought of him. Anybody who can confidently walk down the hall singing the Bee Gee's

in a falsetto voice is a good guy in my book. I wish it was Simon who was the love interest instead of Julian. There was nothing wrong with Julian. He was sweet and likable, but Simon just seemed to have much more of a personality.

Ms. Scofield was wonderful, too. I mean, she gives lesson using Gumby and Pokey dolls! I wish she could've been my science teacher. I think I would've actually passed the subject. I love how she's a self-proclaimed geek and totally owns that. Her and Simon didn't seem like fictional characters to me, they seemed like real people, which was why I loved them both so much.

I liked Sherae a lot, too. she was a good friend but I'm not sure why she was never around when the bullying seemed to be happening.

Overall, this book was just okay. Nothing horrible, but it could've been better. In the end, the saving grace were the supporting characters.

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### **Marlyn says**

Hace semanas en una clase mi profesor de Televisión hablaba sobre el bullying, sobre la muerte del chico chileno Daniel, y yo hablé sobre el efecto de las palabras de nosotros en una persona. Nunca sabes como una persona va a recibir un comentario, quizá no sea su tu intención causar sufrimiento pero puede pasar.

Soy de las que piensa que somos responsables de lo que decimos pero no de lo que las personas interpreten. Comencemos a ser mucho más responsables con lo que decimos, con lo que escribimos, con lo que pensamos incluso, que nuestros juicios sobre una persona, sobre lo que come, sobre lo que viste, sobre lo que piensa no tenga eco. No importa lo que pienses o sientas sobre una persona, importa lo que esa persona es, piensa y siente.

La historia de Noelle es simplemente abrumadora, duele en el alma comprender que una persona vive eso, que piensa en la muerte como la única solución a su sufrimiento. Alguna vez escuché que los niños son las personas más crueles del mundo, y quizá tenga que ver con la sinceridad... no estamos acostumbrados a ella. Pero el bullying es mucho más que eso, acosar a una persona, hacerla sentir miserable cada día de su vida, demuestra lo débil como persona que eres.

Para mi la solución a este problema no está en las leyes, está en la educación de las personas, la mayoría de los lectores de este libro son adolescentes que están pasando por eso, o que quizá sean los acosadores o los testigos silenciosos, pero todos son los futuros padres y madres de niños como Carly, enseñemos a nuestros hijos (y a nuestros hermanos) a que el respeto es básico para la convivencia... y que debemos respetar a todas las personas sin excepción incluso a aquellas que menos lo merecen... aunque no es el caso de Noelle, es quien más lo merece...

"El mérito no es ser un luchador incansable, sino en estar cansado y seguir luchando"

#Fuerza

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## **Rachel Maniacup says**

[She may even have stopped Ali, her classmate for committing suicide. (hide spoiler)]

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## **46milestogo says**

This may be the most rage-inducing book I've ever read. EVER. I've only said this once before, but if I could give this book no stars, I would.

Keep Holding On is about Noelle, a girl who is bullied at school for being poor. It's clear that Ms. Colasanti has experienced bullying and I'm sorry that she has.

It's also equally clear that she has no idea what it's like to be truly poor, and as someone who grew up poor, and who works as a librarian in a town where there are teens in the same situation Noelle is, food-wise, this is where I am so insulted by this book that I'm not going to talk it up to anyone other than die-hard Colasanti fans.

How does Ms. Colsanti get the reality of being poor and hungry wrong?

For starters, Noelle complains constantly about being hungry--but she's getting food. It's just not food she WANTS. She gets "mushy" spaghetti and non-homemade garlic bread. She gets McDonalds. She gets hotdogs. She complains about eating carrots because they aren't fresh. And, as someone who has a limited wardrobe, she actually thinks that it's stupid that a teacher doesn't seem to own more than one pair of pants. For real?

There's more:

Noelle makes money babysitting and instead of buying food because she's always hungry (which is repeated almost constantly) and gets made fun of for her school lunches, does she buy food the way someone who is a hungry teenager would? No. On page 79, she has fifteen bucks and buys a shirt. Not food. A shirt. Here's what a really poor and hungry girl does with \$15--buy food and maybe swing by Goodwill/Salvation Army to pick up a cheap shirt.

On page 90, Noelle is humiliated the first time her mother uses food stamps because the cashier doesn't know how to deal with them. She supposedly lives in a wealthy area but even upscale grocery stores like Whole Foods train their cashiers on how to take food stamps. It's not uncommon to get them, especially since the economy is so awful these days.

On page 101, Noelle, who is very hungry, gets food from McDonald's. Her reaction to the food (to her stereotypical awful mother): "You shouldn't be feeding me this junk," I say. -- Yes, because that's what a girl who's perpetually hungry would say. On Planet Never. When you're really and truly hungry, you eat what you can get.

On page 107, there's the complaint about the carrots and why is Noelle so upset? Because they are canned. Again, we must be on Planet Never.

On page 128 Noelle complains that she's only able to take showers at night. This is a hardship how? Try not being able to do anything but use a friend's.

One page 128 Noelle says "I can't eat. Not that a boiled hot dog and lump of revolting potato salad is even remotely appealing." At this point, I'm screaming, ARE YOU FOR REAL?

How did her editor not realize that a truly hungry person would never react like this? And did no one think to calculate or even estimate how much Noelle's mom would get in food stamps each month? Because it wouldn't be a lot, it would be enough to buy food for the two of them. Not good for you food. But food all the same. I suppose we're supposed to just forget about that little fact, or assume that Noelle's mom just simply doesn't use them because she's a horrible person. But you know what? That's not enough for me, not after all the other things that happen.

I loved Ms. Colsanti's first book, and haven't liked the others very much since. But this? It's great for teens who are being bullied. It's a slap in the face to teens who are in the situation of not having enough to eat.

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### **Giselle says**

School was the most difficult time in my life. I didn't have it as bad as Noelle. I have a great family who gave me everything I needed, but my school life was terrible. I was picked on and laughed at for being little. I had a hard time approaching people to make friends. I was even bullied by a teacher who made it a point to humiliate me. I was too young to realize this back then, but I will never forgive her. This all made me lash out and act in ways that made myself unapproachable. Being from a very small town like Noelle, this story hit incredibly close to home. It may not be a perfect book, but it still deserves every single star I can give for the simple fact that this sends a strong message that could help people live through what may be the hardest years of their lives.

Noelle had my sympathy from the very first page. She's an immensely strong willed person to have kept herself together the way she did. She is intelligent and caring. She has a huge heart that has been trampled on, but she never gives up. I admire her will and I think a lot of people could learn from her. Her emotions are vivid. She made my heart break and gave my goosebumps by seeing her finally stand up for herself. Yes she makes some stupid decisions, yes it's obvious to us how Matt is using her, yes her reaction to others being bullied is ironic. It may be hard to understand, but when you can avoid making your life even worse, you do so. We have to realize that this girl is stifled in a life of depression and shame, her irrational decisions are due to an unconscious defense mechanism. We'd like to think someone who gets bullied would help others in the same boat, but I call that wishful thinking.

The side characters, though some more than others, have a big a role in the story as well. From her best friend to the bullies, these were plucked out from real life with real problems of their own. I also found her mother very convincing. She's a horrible parent figure, but unlike some other books I've read it didn't feel exaggerated for the sake of the story. It felt like a realistic situation where the parent is just as lost as the child. It's sad, but more often than we realize there are kids who raise themselves, do their own laundry, don't get enough to eat, etc. It's horrible. It really is.

Being a very short book it packs quite the punch; the story is packed full of emotional highs and lows. Like I said it's not perfect, some things could have been fleshed out - like her friendship with Sherae, her relationship with Julian, and the ending which I felt was a bit implausible or too good to be true. In real life things don't

usually turn around so quickly. Nonetheless, the story is touching. It could definitely help give some kids hope and I think this is what matters in the end.

Yes it's true, things get better. What happens in school doesn't matter when you're older. If only this was easy to believe when you're a teenager. I commend Susane for taking her experience and writing such an encouraging story. It takes courage, I know just by writing this that it IS embarrassing to admit you were bullied, but you know what? Don't ever be ashamed! This is what defines who we become, and I would not change a thing about my life today!

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For more of my reviews, visit my blog at Xpresso Reads

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## Best says

### THIS REVIEW ON B'S BOOK BLOG!

*A digital copy of this book was provided by the publisher and NetGalley for review.*

I read the first of Susane Colasanti's book, *When It Happens*, in 2008, and I loved that book. That was the first one and I've never read any more of her books after that, but *When It Happens* gave me the impression that she must be quite a good writer. (Although later on when I tried to re-read the book in 2010, I got so annoyed I just gave up, and I couldn't recall why I loved it in the first place, even though I really *did* love it in 2008.) *Keep Holding On* is the second book by this very same author that I've read. I was really excited when my request got approved, hoping I would like it like I did the first novel. But readers, I regret to say that this book didn't impress me.

*Keep Holding On* is about Noelle Wexler, a sixteen-year-old ninth grader, who lives a difficult life. Noelle and her mother lives in a rich area, but they're poor. There's rarely anything to eat at home, which results in only scraps of food she brings to school for lunch. She has clothes just enough to wear to school every day, and nothing more. Bullies enjoy bullying her. No one sits with her at lunch. Her one and only best friend isn't always around. Her boyfriend keeps her as his dirty little secret. Her mother neglects her. She's disgusted with her life. The environment around her and the treatment she receives make her believe that she's no good for anyone. And when Julian Porter, her other love interest, shows that he likes her, she pushes him away because she believes that once he gets to know her and her messed up world better, he'll stop liking her and leave anyway. Every day Noelle fights to keep holding on, looking forward to that one day when she leaves this town and can really be who she wants to be. But until then, she has to survive high school first.

My first reaction was to give this book three stars, but I had a lot more problems with it than with those books I have actually given three stars to, and this book isn't as enjoyable. But maybe that's to be expected because of the heavy themes in this book. (Although I believe that however heavy the themes may be, a book *can* be a great read providing it's written well. That implies something about this book.) But I thought I'd settle with 3 stars anyway because it touched a very serious and important topic that is bullying. But then... I started thinking about something I like about this book... and none came up. Seriously. Usually I can find something to like in even the most boring book and give them two stars. *Keep Holding On* is by no means boring, but the fact that it has nothing that I can say I like about it makes it even worse than being boring. But it didn't enrage me like those I've rated one star, and I hate giving one star. I've been sitting here contemplating what to do with this book, and I've changed my decisions at least four times now. (Please forgive my obsession with rating.) And finally I decided to rate it two stars. It wasn't an enjoyable read but I

don't hate it enough either. I don't know why I'm telling you this, but I feel like it's important that you know my feelings for this book weren't easy to pin down.

Noelle gets bullied a lot in school mostly for the fun of the ones doing it. Hurtful words are thrown her way and she even gets physically hurt. However, I felt little sympathy for her. I mean, I did feel sorry for her and don't want her to live like that, but she's not a very likable character for me. I can understand where she's coming from. I've been there, I've felt humiliated by not having as much money to pour down the drain like everyone else, not having clothes as fabulous, not having a house as gigantic, not living a life as perfect.

These things haven't changed. It used to bother me so much when I was young, and it still bothers me a little from time to time, but I don't spend all time thinking (and whining) about it like Noelle.

Even though my situation probably wasn't as bad as hers, I know where she's coming from. She's poor and humiliated; she's insecure about herself and finds it hard to believe that anyone might be interested in her or even believe compliments. I feel for her, but she's difficult to like, what with her saying how much her life sucks all the time. Apparently she's too proud for free lunch even though she qualifies. Of course, she prefers to have her stomach growling for the whole school to hear rather than to get free lunch because she'll never "subject herself to that kind of humiliation." Girl, why do you care? Shouldn't your priority be keeping your stomach satisfied to survive? Is this really the right time to be so-- forgive my language--snobbish? She says her mother isn't a mom, and a part of the reasons is that she doesn't buy Noelle the stuff she needs like tampons and toilet papers. Okay, I understand that it's wrong of her mother to not do that, but really, if she doesn't buy you tampons, buy them yourself! Don't just let your blood stain the chair just because your mother doesn't buy you tampons. It's a lame excuse. And honestly, I don't understand what point the blood scene really tries to make. It just bothers me.

I felt like this book doesn't come out strong enough. It didn't make my heart ache. Sure, it made me upset that bullying is going on, but that's about it. It's hard to feel emotionally invested with a book when you don't like the main character. Especially when the events in the story feel unbelievable. Here's a list:

- 1) (view spoiler)
- 2) (view spoiler)
- 2.1) (view spoiler)
- 2.2) (view spoiler)

On top of all that, I wish I could at least say I liked the writing, but no. It annoyed me to no end. The narration jumps from one thing to another and form these unconnected parts of storytelling; from the present to the past that don't really connect but seems to happen because it's what Noelle randomly thinks about at the moment. It's all tell and no show. I can't describe it but I felt like the writing prevented me from getting into the story. I felt like I didn't know the other characters well enough. And another thing that bothers me is that the story doesn't start off well for me. I have a thing for opening sentences and opening scenes and this one just disappoints me. Yes, the first page was where I started feeling unimpressed.

I really hate to give any book one lonely star, and I never imagined I'd give it to a book written by Susane Colasanti. I'm sorry. I just didn't like it at all. I won't judge her, though. Maybe this book is just not for me. I'm the minority here 'cause most people on Goodreads think this book is great. But for me... is this book heartbreak? No. Is it moving? Yeah, a little. I respect that the author wrote this book about bullying, which is also dedicated to Tyler Clementi who was a victim. I respect that she reaches out and wants to help. There are useful resources at the end of the book that tell you where you can get help from.

Although I didn't like this book, and I didn't like Noelle, I wish her the best. Noelle really has this belief that

anywhere is better than where she is and she has her heart set on anywhere but here, and I hope that when she leaves this town one day, she's going to leave all the bad memories behind and that she's leaving it for a better place. No one deserves to be bullied, and no one really has the right to subject anyone else to it. Personally I'd say fight back, but you can do that or you can keep holding on. Don't give up. And like Noelle says, "Eventually, you'll find a real place that feels like home. [...] And you'll be so happy you held on long enough to make it there."

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## Rose says

This is a difficult review for me to write, probably on a few levels because I don't think there is a person who isn't touched by the subject of bullying and how damaging it can be to anyone subjected to it, whether they're young or older. I have to applaud Susane Colasanti for reaching out to kids/teens who are bullied or abused, and writing a book that focuses on the life of a teen who feels that her world's crashing down on her.

Unfortunately, I wish I could say that this was a better book to expound on the matter. It wasn't - I thought it was mediocre in its overarching presentation, even considering the age group it's intended for. While I think there are people who might appreciate the thematic that Colasanti builds within Noelle's situation without necessarily questioning some of the transitional points that the book takes, I couldn't overlook them because it threw me out of the book quite a few times as it went on. After a certain point, it didn't feel realistic anymore, but rather a heavy handed message that touched base on quite a few issues, but didn't have the emotional punch that perhaps other books who've tackled the subject of rape, child abuse, and bullying have had. The presentation felt haphazard and quite jarring (in a negative way) as the book went on. It's a shame because the story does start on a strong note and has some gripping moments that resonated with me long after I put the book down.

Noelle is a 16-year-old girl who has a very tough life; she comes from a poor family. Her mother is neglectful and wants nothing to do with Noelle, her boyfriend wants to constantly keep their relationship a secret, her teachers and classmates seem to overlook blatant showcases of bullying against Noelle, and she's ridiculed for her poverty. Noelle is fortunate because she has a friend (Sherae) and a potential love interest (Julian) who are looking out for her, though they have issues of their own and Noelle sometimes pushes them away so as not to show how bad her situation really is.

Here are my specific qualms about the book: I felt on one level it tried to take on too many subjects at once without really delving into them. As I mentioned previously, Colasanti deals with not only the overarching theme of bullying in the book, but also touches base on issues of rape, child abuse/neglect (in the case of Noelle and her mother), and suicide (I'm not going to spoil it for anyone, but it isn't shown with much dimensional sense of grief). For a book that tries to incorporate these elements and the moral lines that are crossed, it doesn't develop them by showing. It may be a case where I think Colasanti tries to take on too many of them within a certain amount of pages, and the message delivery is mechanical rather than natural. It tells the reader what conclusions to draw, rather than having the revelations and events speak for themselves.

Another thing - the blurb of this book says this is a romantic story: not by a long shot. The romance in this is *very* underwhelming. This disappoints me because Colasanti actually developed teen relationships quite well in her previous books, even on the romantic end. This book had me asking "What the heck happened?" as far as that was concerned. I don't think it was a measure of the focus on the tough subject matter because she's written books that had a decent balance between the tough subject matter and the relationships between her

characters. In previous books of hers I've read, I noted that maybe if the tough subject matter was delved into a little more, the book could've come across better in points. Often times, it had to do with very little backstory (even in my favorite book of hers).

Here, it's a focus on the negativity and not on the organic nature of the relationships. They felt very loose, even among the secondary cast, and there were a few characters I liked seeing among that cast in a positive way, but it had a disconnect. Julian, the primary love interest, is barely within the story for a while and there's very little development or focus on his and Noelle's relationship. Granted, it is established that he's nice to her, and that she likes him and he likes her, but I wanted to know more about Julian than what was offered. Who was he as a character? What attracted Noelle to him? It's with this same hollow presentation that the guy that Noelle was with at the time (Matt) was using her in their relationship. The twist that came with Matt trying to keep their relationship a secret wasn't surprising, but I felt it didn't pack as much of a punch as it could've if the relationship structuring was deeper. I also didn't like that Noelle's self worth was contingent on whether Matt (or Julian) liked her. I'm not saying that doesn't happen to some teens on behalf of their self esteem issues, but it wasn't developed in this book. At the very least, I liked that Noelle's friend had enough sense to tell her how wrong this was, but the story didn't show Noelle's emotional shifts enough to have this hit home.

The biggest problem I had with this book was the overt message delivery. It's somewhat heavy handed in its presentation throughout the book, particularly in the last third of the novel, where the story felt rushed to reach a conclusion and tie things off on all the threads established. After a certain point, Noelle becomes more of a message giver than a teenager going through all of these tough issues and coming to terms with them on her own. There's even a point where Colasanti mentions Tyler in the book - and for those who know, the book is dedicated to the late Tyler Clementi, who committed suicide following acts of brutal bullying on the part of his sexuality. On one hand I'm glad Colasanti mentions it because it shows a current event that had a significant impact on many people in the brutality of bullying and what it could lead to, but at the same time it also felt like a bit of fourth wall breaking in the way that it was presented. I think kids/teens or anyone reading this book would still recognize the brutality and be able to make the connection of how bullying is wrong and how hurtful it is without being told repeatedly. Showing is one thing - and I think the parts where Colasanti shows what happens to Noelle and the abuse she endures (the part where Olivia threatens Noelle's hair made chills go down my spine). But I was so put off by the overt message/lesson delivery that it lessened the impact of the events.

And speaking of the ending of the book - no one recovers from bullying or what Noelle went through that quickly. I couldn't get behind how easy the resolution of events came in this novel. It didn't feel realistic and I think it was at that point where it lost quite a bit of impact with me, among other considerations.

I definitely like and support Colasanti's writing and books, but unfortunately, I didn't like "Keep Holding On" - I think there are much stronger examples of YA literature that show bullying in very gripping ways while giving a realistic portrayal of events and relationships in an even manner. I can see where others might like it because it touches base on the tough details and for what it's worth, the book has its moments of impact. For me, it just didn't have the emotional resonance and progression given its subject matter and the heroine who has to rise above the negativity.

Overall score: 2/5

Note: I received this as an ARC from NetGalley, from the publisher Penguin Young Readers Group/Viking.

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### Aj the Ravenous Reader says

*"If I'd stopped believing that my life would eventually get better, I don't think I would have survived high school."*

If you can survive high school, you can survive practically anything. It probably sounds too much but for someone like Noelle, neglected by her own mom and bullied by half of the popular kids in school, high school life is indeed a test of faith and patience. For her to keep holding on despite everything takes much courage, hope and strength of will.

*"In case you haven't noticed, there are other people in the world and their lives suck too."*

Though I wasn't a huge fan of the clipped style of writing with too many periods and couldn't closely relate with Noelle during the first half of the book, this is still one of those necessary books that I would encourage teenagers to read for inspiration and valuable life lessons.

With the bonus cute romance and a super dorky but thoughtful teacher, Ms. Scofield (my favorite character in the book), and other characters to adore like Simon, Sherae (I may have misspelled her name) and Julian, the entire reading experience was still very worthwhile. It's a book that encourages teenagers to speak up when things are becoming seriously tough. It's a book that makes teenagers understand that they don't have to be alone and that people do care.

*"I have to trust that there are people in my life who actually care about me. And I have to let them help."*

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### Julianna Helms says

**Quick Reaction:** This book was so *real* that it plagued me like the bubonic. A drastic comparison? Not really.

~~Honestly, I've been through what Noelle's been through. I still am, sometimes. But I'm more like Simon—I don't give a darn. I really don't care what others think of me. And that's what I love about this book—Noelle's character transformation is so believable and complete that I can't point out a single flaw in it.~~

~~This is the book to read if you hated high school. This is the book to read if you loved high school. This is the book to read, whether or not you're in high school.~~

**Actual, full review:** Original is here. (Note: Due to copy-and-paste, formatting and links have been lost.)

The picture you see above is a rainbow-spewing fish. It's a blurry picture, as I took it with my webcam up close, and it's not colored. I assure you, though—it is indeed a rainbow-spewing fish.

"Um, Juli," you might be thinking, "What the heck does a freakin' fish have to do with Keep Holding On?"

That's a great question. And so allow my quasi-philosophical explanation to fathom for a second or five.

Our lives are blurry. They pass by us faster than we realize and slower than we desire. Things don't work out right; they turn upside-down; colors degrade to black; brightness fades to a dimmer white; what was once a promise is now a dread. Through it all we're still fighting to find a better life, and even if that means sacrificing certain values, most of the time we are willing to do it.

So why, then, is bullying such a problem? And suicide?

I have been bullied. My friend has been bullied. In fact, this generation's (and I believe what I'm saying is accurate, considering I am in this generation) idea of "bullying" and such is so drastically different from our parents' that if an adult saw some of the jokes we share, they'd probably be appalled. But that's just how evolution works, isn't it? To slowly progress and then stop and then progress and then backtrack and go on and on in this never-ending pattern, always dependent on something else?

Keep Holding On is like a giant stop sign screaming, "WAIT! STOP! DON'T YOU SEE WHAT YOU'RE DOING? DON'T YOU SEE WHAT'S HAPPENING?" Susane's words leap off the page in an array of promise and hope, desperation and authenticity. She's encapsulated a common teenage life into one of the shortest--yet fullest--books I've ever read. And the entire transformation of Noelle's character is so believable and complete that I am in awe of Susane's obvious understanding of both the topic and her talent.

This book incarcerated me. I'm out at dinner, eating hot pot with my parents, waiting for the food to arrive and reading this and BAM it's like everything I try to forget just drowns me again. I was addicted and terrified of Susane's words. They crippled and crushed and dared me to hope. They were so real I could barely stand it. Of course, my situation is not even close to how badly Noelle gets treated, but I can relate to her, and I even pronounce it almost impossible to not relate. There are some feelings that are too hard to ignore--too rare to be immune to--and one of those is sympathy. Sympathy and a eagerness to understand. (Though again, some people's qualities and actions continually surprise me--though they shouldn't. I should probably be used to them by now.)

Funny. I'm more like Simon--I don't give a darn what you think about me--I just live life because I don't think there's a point in wasting it on not-being-awesome. But we all have times when we just sink until we can't breathe, and Keep Holding On is it. It's beautifully heartbreak and tragically sweet, subtly raging and fabulously daring. I'm in love with it and Noelle and Julian, and this book gives me so much strength--so unbelievably much--I'm still rocketing around on a I-CAN-DO-ANYTHING! high.

Life's weird. Life's stupid and gorgeous and obnoxious and endowing. Keep Holding On will guide you through the storms and find the rainbow. Maybe you'll even see a fish on your way there. A rainbow-spewing one, at that.

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### **Lauren says**

I had higher hopes for Keep Holding On than what the book delivered. I was hoping for something more along the lines of Saving Francesca, Life Without Friends, Fat Kid Rules the World or Feeling Sorry for Celia. All of these books deal with tough life stuff without meandering into after school special territory. Celia cooked herself dinner which Noelle desperately could have learned to do for herself. I grew up in a

"whatever you want to fix" childhood. I was also nicknamed "laundry girl" by my mom because that was my chore. I speak from experience that this is a needed skill. It was terrible her mother neglected her, and I understand the tension she felt but, still her expectations reminded me of the book *Coraline*. "Why don't you go ask your other mother if you want pancakes?"

I hate to be unsympathetic but, you have to suck it up and fend for yourself. By sixteen you should start learning life skills.

Noelle, please go buy your own tampons. You are sixteen years old. You even had a previous embarrassing experience of bleeding on the seats. Periods come once a month. This story might have been better served had it been set when she was younger. It explained her low self esteem problems that her mother treated her that way but, it did not help the general helplessness in other areas.

*Keep Holding On* resembled the film *Pretty in Pink* with shades of *Seventh Heaven* mixed in with a *Sweet Valley High* book where Elizabeth helps a girl from the wrong side of the tracks.

I get that low self esteem and depression are frustrating issues. From the outside looking in people appear to have better lives than they do. This is an aspect we did not miss from Noelle despite reading the book from her perspective. She was wholly self absorbed throughout. This is exactly what her mother's problem was. They were clearly a lot alike if Noelle bothered to consider things from another point of view.

(view spoiler)

Noelle was a character whose entire problem was needing to fit in to the exclusion of all else. For an example, she doesn't take advantage of school lunches because she was embarrassed. When I was a youngster I was socially awkward and ignorant about things like social class. I bragged that I did not have to pay for my lunches and got them for free. I was a pretty stupid kid. I'm more like Haverchuck from Noelle's favourite show *Freaks and Geeks* going through my life oblivious and doing what I want to do. This girl watched this show obsessively, and didn't remember that awesome scene of Haverchuck and the grilled cheese sandwiches? Do your own thing. People will always hate and will always try to stop people from doing what they want. You can't make them happy.

She did think the 'Lady L" song was meant to be romantic. That was not how I took Nick and Lindsey's relationship at all. I did like the *Freaks and Geeks* shoutouts nonetheless.

If I could I wish I could give each adolescent the gift of perspective.

- 1] If no one likes the bitchy girl terrorising the school then she isn't actually popular. [I got this from my older brother when I was in school. He was right on.] Popular means well liked.
- 2] If they don't want to be seen with you in public then dump them.
- 3] If someone threatens to kill themself if you dump them just be glad you got away from that manipulative control freak. Who knows what else they'd do? [Also advice from my brother]
- 4] No one is paying attention to you because everyone is too busy trying to deal. [I got this from my girl Buffy.]
- 5] It doesn't actually change after highschool... guys like the Walden guy are still going to be in the workforce.] Bullies who don't finesse their cruelty end in jail but, most are just as nasty as they were in highschool. Everyone else is just trying to live their lives.

Noelle had very unrealistic ideas about the role adults play in society. Her inner monologues about adults who could have done something felt more like the author shaming teachers. Teachers have a tough enough time in American schools. We all wish we had a Melina Marchetta as a teacher in highschool but, the best most of us got were hippies that played Paul Simon live in Africa tapes while waxing our career opportunities at Taco Bell. I'd personally have liked a teacher like in *Mean Girls* as well.

Noelle was kidding herself that she'd help any kid when she turned her back on poor Ali. This girl never once put herself in someone else's shoes. This ended up being how I knew she was depressed. Depressed people are blind to everyone else. The book was very vague that she had a cutting box or meant to kill herself.

I found this particularly disturbing since having that as an option is not helpful despite what Noelle thought. I hated my mother for putting that out there as an option with her joint suicide proposals. I think it made my own depression problems much worse.

Yup, doing your own laundry, cooking and grocery shopping is normal. Right? It's not? Oh well. I lived. I think the best thing families and people can do for themselves is stop comparing themselves to others. It's always different on the outside.

I liked the sentiment this book was going for but, it didn't top the infamous scene from *Pretty In Pink*.

"I hope they shrivel up and fall off"

"You hope what shrivels up and falls of?"

"Her breasts... Miss Deeds."

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## **nick says**

### **Read more of my reviews at Nick's Book Blog**

Tackling a subject such as bullying is like walking on hot coal. Such books need to be able to evoke strong emotions in the reader and at the same time spread an important message. I finished reading this book yesterday and my feelings for this book are still very conflicted.

Noelle is a poor girl going to a school with rich kids. She is bullied on a daily basis by students at school and no one really knows the extent to which the bullying goes to. Things are not much better at home, as well. Her single mom cares about nothing but herself and as a result, there's basically never anything to eat. Soon a dramatic event at school forces Noelle to gain confidence and stand up for herself.

Noelle was one of the most confusing main characters I've ever come across. Part of me felt total sympathy for her, while the other part wanted to admonish her on several occasions. Although she was a smart and independent girl, she often baffled me with a couple of her poor decisions. She complained about how she had no food at home endlessly. However, at school she qualified for free lunch, but she refused to subject herself to such an "embarrassing" scenario. Honestly, I didn't see the logic behind that train of thought of hers. Would you rather eat or starve? If I were in her situation, then I would have chosen the former. People who are starving don't care about humiliation. They care only about filling their stomachs. One other thing that struck me with her was the fact that she used \$15 to buy a top instead of using that very money to purchase something to feed herself. She could also be very shallow at times, especially when it came to Ali, a fellow bully-victim. The girl was friendless and once attempted to talk to Noelle, but Noelle, knowing that Ali was yearning for friendship, dismissed her. In a way, that was hypocritical on her part. Despite all of the above, part of me also felt pity for her. She wasn't in a very pretty situation and some of the things that the bullies did to her was downright cold and heartless. Her voice was definitely raw and poignant. Her doubts, insecurities and pain were crystal clear and left my gut wrenching. I liked the fact that she shed her lack of self-esteem and gained some self-confidence, although it did take something major for that to happen, towards the end of the book. One character that truly won over me was Sherae. She was a fabulous and very devoted friend. Always there for Noelle, Sherae was the kind of person who was present to take Noelle in her arms whenever she would crumble down no matter what she was dealing with herself. Unlike the other kids at school, she didn't make assumptions about her friend and simply supported her by trying to make her happy.

What I loved most about *Keep Holding On* was the potent message it sent out. It's something important and I think that bully-victims can benefit from. In my opinion, it could maybe help them gain courage. Personally, I thought the bullying itself was well-illustrated with Noelle's feelings being intense and honest. The driving force that led to Noelle standing up for herself was heartbreakingly honest, but the aftermath felt too rushed and seemed unreal. Part of me felt like all of Noelle's problems resolved way too fast while what I really wanted was for her to undergo a slow healing process with the aid of the people who loved her. Susane Colasanti manages to summon all sorts of emotions ranging from sorrow to blood-boiling anger in a way that makes the reader appreciate the book even with its flaws.

*Keep Holding On* might not be a perfect book, but it does deserve to be hyped because of the valuable lesson it spreads to teenagers and parents alike. I definitely think that it's a book that's truly worth reading.

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### **Melannie :)** says

Very cute, but very expected. Not saying that "expected" is bad, though. The book is all about standing up for yourself and dealing with your insecurities and accepting you for who you are, weird and all.

I think it's a great book for tweens. The writing is easy and fast-paced. Although I have some complaints because this book might as well be called a series of unfortunate events because that was all it was, a range of situations in which a teen girl was bullied and the correspondent expected reactions. It felt like a bunch of unfortunate events put together instead of a book, or a story, you know what I mean? It just lacked depth. And sometimes it felt more like a lecture than anything, for example, all those words Noelle says at the end, when she gets all inspirational? Way cheesy. And the romance was nonexistent. Julian is supposedly in love with Noelle (he actually dropped the L word, no kidding) but there's no relationship build-up and we never get to see what is that makes him love her.

But I still think it is a good book for teens, and I hope they get more of it than I did. And I am 100% on board of this anti-bullying train, and it's awesome that YA authors are taking a part and writing stories that could possibly help teens everywhere.

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### **Regina says**

This book is not an easy read nor a light read, but it is a fast read. Maybe it was fast because I could not put it down. I started it one a Tuesday and finished it very early Wednesday morning. I needed to know what would happen and I felt completely invested in the characters. The audience targeted for this book is definitely young adult and the subject matter is mature young adult. But I think it still can appeal to adults, it appealed to me. This book rocketed me right back to my high school years. Susane Colasanti has a talent to put the reader directly in the main character's shoes and make the reader feel -- feel the torment, pain and joy that Noelle is going through.

Noelle is a neglected child. The neglect leads to serious grooming problems and this causes her to be a bully target at school. Colasanti captures perfectly what it feels like to be bullied, what it feels like to be helpless.

Many times in this novel I was on the verge of tears for Noelle.

My only complaint about this novel is that in a way it read like an after school tv special. I do understand the author had an agenda when writing this book and that agenda is a good one. But the after-school-special-like feel of the book, pulled me out of the story occasionally. My other complaint is the tying together of the neglect and the bullying. I do see the connection, particularly in this book and it was done well but parental neglect is not the only cause of bullying. Children can be targets for a variety of reasons, but I don't feel like the author was saying this was the only reason Noelle was a target. Noelle's victim situation is clearly tied to her mother's neglect, which is a heartbreaking situation in itself without the bullying. One last thing about the book, I found it unrealistic. I know Colasanti was trying to instill hope and pass along a message that things get better -- which they definitely do! I am just not sure that things get better while still in high school. In the end, the messages of not backing down, seeking help, reaching out to friends and teachers, not giving up and not surrendering power to bullies are excellent ones.

This was a quick read, an inspiring book and emotional connection. I recommend this book for all high school kids and adults who are interested in this subject matter.

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