

Sarah Dessen



Basic Bio

Sarah Dessen grew up in Chapel Hill, North Carolina and attended UNC-Chapel Hill, graduating with highest honors in Creative Writing. She is the author of several novels, including *Someone Like You*, *Just Listen* and *Lock and Key*. A motion picture based on her first two books, entitled *How to Deal*, was released in 2003. Her ninth book, *Along for the Ride*, will be published in June 2009. She lives in North Carolina.

From the critics

That Summer

- “Unforgettable.”- *Publisher’s Weekly*, starred review
- An ALA Best Book for Young Adults
- With *Someone Like You*, adapted into the motion picture *How to Deal*, to be released July 2003

Someone Like You

- Booklist, boxed review “Dessen has written a powerful, polished story.” – *School Library Journal*
- An ALA Best Book for Young Adults
- A *School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year
- A barnesandnoble.com Best Teen Novel of the Year
- Winner of the *South Carolina Young Adult Book Award 2000-2001*
- With *That Summer*, adapted into the motion picture *How to Deal*, to be released July 2003

Keeping the Moon

- Leaves readers amused—and sorry when it concludes.” - *Kirkus Reviews*
- “Teens will just want to cheer.” - *School Library Journal* starred review
- “A down-to-earth Cinderella story...captures that special feeling.” – *The New York Post*
- An ALA Best Book for Young Adults and Quick Pick
- A *School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year
- New York Library Book for the Teen Age, 2000
- International Reading Association Young Adult Choice, 2001

Dreamland

- “Another pitch-perfect offering from Dessen.” - *Booklist* starred review
- “Powerfully written and not soon forgotten, *Dreamland* is the secret story of many contemporary teen relationships...a realistic and finely drawn portrait of a young woman without a strong sense of self-esteem. Compelling reading with contemporary teen

- appeal.” - *School Library Journal* starred review
- An *ALA Best Book* for Young Adults
- An Amazon.com Editors Choice for 2000
- New York Library Book for the Teen Age, 2001

This Lullaby

- “This modern-day romance narrated by a cynical heroine offers a balance of wickedly funny moments and universal teen traumas.” - *Publisher’s Weekly*
- “Dessen...gets every feeling, every touch just right.” - *Booklist*
- An *ALA Best Book* for Young Adults, 2003
- An Original Voices Finalist, The Borders Group, 2002
- A *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize Finalist, 2003

The Truth About Forever

- “Grief, fear, and love set the novel’s pace, and Macy’s crescendo from time-bomb perfection to fallible, emotional humanity is, for the right readers, as gripping as any action adventure.” - *School Library Journal*, starred review
- An ALA 2005 Teen’s Top Ten pick
- A New York Public Library Book For the Teen Age 2005

Just Listen

- “Dessen explores the interior and exterior lives of her characters and shows their flaws, humanity, struggles and
- incremental successes. This is young adult fiction at its best.” ---*School Library Journal*
- “Dessen’s books are engrossing, each one better than its predecessor...Dessen weaves a sometimes funny, mostly
- emotional, and very satisfying story.”---*VOYA*
- A Booksense Top Ten Pic
- An *ALA Best Book* for Young Adults
- A *New York Times* Best Seller
- A YALSA Teen’s Top Ten

Lock and Key

- "Love, life, and all of the above is what you'll find in this new read. Sarah Dessen does it again with this amazing novel that will have you up for hours. Two thumbs up!" --Girls Life
- "Lock and Key is a touching story of moving on but hanging on, accepting love and giving love, told in the quick-paced, flowing style that is a hallmark of Sarah Dessen.--South Florida Sun Sentinel
- A New York Times Best Seller

From Sarah

Hi. I’m Sarah. Writing a bio is alw zmtays a little weird, if only because it seems completely self-absorbed. I have a standard one that I send out, which lists where I got my degree, the names of

my books, all the same boring basic facts. But for this website, I'm supposed to do something more, give a sense of who I really am. So here goes.

I was born in 1970 in Illinois, but all the life I remember I've spent in Chapel Hill, NC. My parents were both professors at the University of North Carolina: my mom is a classicist (which means she knows everything you could ever imagine about myths, Latin, and words) and my dad teaches Shakespeare (which means I'd seen *As You Like It* about five times by the age of 18.)

I've been writing, in one way or another, for as long as I can remember. I was always a big reader, mostly because my parents were. I used to get frustrated with my mom because she bought me books for Christmas when what I really wanted were the gift my friends got, things like sweaters and jewelry. But I did love to read. When I was eight or nine my parents gave me an old manual typewriter and a little desk in the corner of our den, and I'd sit there and type up my stories. I was the kind of kid that people always sighed over and said, "She has such a wild imagination," which usually meant "I wish Sarah would try to stick to the truth." I have a tendency to embellish: I think it's just a weakness of fiction writers. Once you learn how to make a story better, it's hard not to do it all the time.

In high school, I was lucky enough to have a big group of girlfriends that have really inspired a lot of the stories in my books. I'm still close with my friends from that time, so it's never very hard to put myself back into that place, that voice. Also it doesn't hurt to still be living in my hometown, where it's a given that I'll bump into people I had homeroom with, or guys I had big crushes on, while I'm pumping gas or buying stamps. It makes it hard to leave high school behind entirely, which is a good or bad thing depending on what day you ask me. I attended college at UNC, where I studied creative writing and graduated with a degree in English. (Which means I can quote small parts of many Great Works. Comes in handy occasionally, like at cocktail parties.) I'd been on the five-and-a-half year college plan, and when I graduated my parents were hoping I'd settle down and get a Real Job so they could stop worrying about me. But instead of doing the whole resume/pantyhose thing, I decided to stick to my job waiting tables at the world famous Flying Burrito restaurant and try to publish a novel. At the time, I had only one very bad book I'd written my senior year of college and the beginnings of another one. Luckily, my family was supportive and I spent a few years living in a ramshackle little house where I wrote during the day and did the restaurant thing at night.

Three years after graduating, I sold my first book, *That Summer*, but it wasn't until a year after that that I got offered a teaching job and left waitressing for good. I still miss it sometimes, though. It was a great job for a writer. Endless conversations to eavesdrop, tons of material, and fast money without ever taking work home. Plus, free Mexican food, the best perk of all. Now, I've published seven books, all for young adults, which you can find more about on this site. I never really intended to be YA writer, but the second book I showed my agent she thought had a strong teenage voice, so she sent it off to an editor at Orchard Books, who bought it. Even though it was in a way accidental, I've found that writing for teens suits me. I do short stories, and other novels, that are for an older audience, but again and again I am brought back to the stories of high school. Maybe it's because so much happened to me then that I'm not finished yet telling everything. My senior quote was from Pink Floyd (okay, I was a bit of a burnout---I spent a lot of time in the parking lot, whatever, let's move on) and it pretty much summed up my future, although I didn't know it at the time. It was: "The time is gone, the song is over, thought I'd something more to say." It turns out that I did.

The books I read when I was teenager, the good ones anyway, have stuck more in my mind than anything since. I still love books, but while I couldn't tell you complete plots of novels I read even six months ago, I do remember even the smallest descriptive details from Lois Lowry's *A Summer to Die* or Judy Blume's *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*. I think it was because back then books were still somewhat new to me, and when I found an author who seemed to say just what I

was feeling, it really struck me and resonated. I hope that my books do that for the people who read them: I think it's the best thing to which any writer can aspire. I've also been lucky enough to teach writing and see my students find their own voice. Teaching was great for me, because I got to show people how writing can really change the way you see not only yourself but the world. I've found in my own life that if my writing isn't going well, not much else will. It is the one constant, the key to everything else. Now that I'm writing full time, I have my good days and bad days. But I'd rather be doing this, even on the worst days, than anything else.

As far as my other life, my non-writing life, I live in the country with my husband, my daughter, and two very spoiled dogs. I like to work in my garden---although I have not yet perfected the art of keeping everything alive----and, in my weaker moments, shop. I have a bit of an addiction to the Gap clearance rack, to be honest. I have this strange need to buy huge quantities of black pants. How many pairs of black pants does one person need? (Obviously for me, the answer is 11 and counting. But I digress.) What else can I tell you? I love Starbucks mochas but they make me way hyper. I subscribe to too many magazines. I make a mean bean salad. I could go on, but the truth is, my books are much more exciting than I am, and that's a good thing. It's always more fun to make stuff up anyway.