the poem for Joe. She’s taking steps that will propel her into the future when she’s suddenly clobbered (not for the first time) by the realization that she has a future and Bailey doesn’t. It’s agony for her and it occurs to her that grief is forever, that it will be with her always, step for step, breath for breath, but she also realizes in this moment that this is true because grief and love are conjoined and you can’t have one without the other. Grief is always going to be a measure of the love lost. She thinks, “All I can do is love her [Bailey], and love the world, emulate her by living with daring and spirit and joy.” Every time I come across this paragraph, I think to myself, Well there it is, the whole book crammed into one paragraph! So for me the ideas in that paragraph kind of ring out, but every reader will take something different from the novel and that’s what I want, that’s the magic of it all. Reading is such a wonderfully personal and private affair.

What are your favorite parts of the writing process? What were your favorite scenes to write in The Sky Is Everywhere?

I have two favorite parts of the whole process. I love the beginning, the first draft, when I’m totally lost inside a story, so immersed that my fictional life overtakes my real one. I love the madness of that, when the story is pouring out and I feel this compulsion to get it down before I lose it. It’s fevered, euphoric, like a mad love. And I also adore the later stages of revision, the last draft, when I’m playing with words, fiddling endlessly with this and that. At that point, I kind of just stare zombie-like at my computer screen for days living inside a particular sentence or scene or section trying to make it better, to make it come alive. It’s a total blast. I think my favorite scenes to write were the ones where Lennie was falling in love. One of the wonders of writing a love story is you get to swoon right alongside the characters. I love that kind of tumbling rapturous emotion and trying to find language for it. I also loved writing the family scenes with Big and Gram and others around the breakfast table—the two of them were a lot of fun to spend time with, what came out of their mouths always surprised me. And . . . actually I think I have a lot of favorites!

Do you have any tips for aspiring writers?

Yes. Read, read, read. And write, write, write. Also, remember that what makes your voice as a writer unique is the fact that you’re you, so don’t be afraid to put yourself on the page, to reveal your passions, sorrows, joys, idiosyncrasies, insights, your personal monsters and miracles. Only you can be you and only you can write like you—that’s your gift alone. If you have the writing fever, just keep at it—writing takes a ton of practice, patience, and perseverance—make sure to ignore the market and don’t let rejection talk you out of your dream. I love this quote by Ray Bradbury: “Yet if I were asked to name the most important items in a writer’s make-up, the things that shape his material and rush him along the road to where he wants to go, I could only warn him to look at his zest, and see to his gusto.”

Have you begun working on your next project? If so, can you give us any hints?

I am currently hard at work on a new YA novel about twins Noah and Jude. It’s really two novels in one and it alternates between: Noah’s story, which takes place when the twins are fourteen, and Jude’s, when they’re eighteen. It’s full of secrets and lies and heartbreak and romance and love and very strong passions. Both narratives revolve around a very charismatic and mysterious sculptor who changes both the twins’ lives, and they, his. I’m excited about it—fingers crossed!

JANDY NELSON received a BA from Cornell, an MFA from Brown in poetry, and another MFA from Vermont College in writing for children and young adults. A literary agent for many years, she is also a published poet. The Sky Is Everywhere is her first novel. Jandy lives in San Francisco.

For more information about Jandy, please visit www.jandynelson.com.
Throughout the novel, Lennie writes on anything and everything and leaves these poems scattered around the town. Do you think this is an effective way of showing the reader Lennie and Bailey’s relationship? How do these poems ultimately bring Joe and Lennie together? What is the significance of Lennie’s scattering these poems?

Writing can be a form of therapy for some people. Do you think these poems are Lennie’s way of finding an outlet for her grief? If so, what makes you think it works? Doesn’t work?

A major theme of this book is Lennie’s discovery of her sexuality. Do you think this is depicted realistically? Do you think this is tied to her grief or do you think the two are unrelated?

When Sarah hears about Lennie and Toby’s relationship, she’s upset by their actions. Do you agree with Sarah’s reaction or should she have reacted differently, knowing Lennie and Toby’s situation? What is your opinion on Lennie and Toby’s relationship? Do you find it forgivable or heartless?

During one of her encounters with Toby, Lennie realizes, “I’m sure a shrink would love this, all of it.” (pgs. 146–147) What does she mean by that? Do you agree with this assessment? Discuss whether you believe Lennie’s actions in wearing Bailey’s clothes and hooking up with her boyfriend are an act to keep Bailey close or to gain the life her sister had.

Lennie’s actions hurt Joe very deeply, on account of his relationship history. Do you think his reaction is extreme or understandable? Why do you think he forgives Lennie in the end?

Lennie and Bailey were extremely close sisters. Do you really believe no competition existed between them? Why or why not?

Lennie and Bailey’s absent mother is a large part of their lives. Ultimately the mystery leads Bailey to search for her. Why do you think she leaves Lennie in the dark about this?

Who do you think is a stand-in for Lennie’s real mother—Bailey or Gram? Why do you think Lennie decides not to continue with the search? Do you think she’ll be content?

Consider the role music plays in the novel. How is this a crucial part of the story? Why does Lennie purposefully throw the audition for first chair? How does music help her to heal? Is it just the music that draws Joe to Lennie or something more? How does it shape her relationship with Joe?

The novel is saturated with grief. Each person touched by Bailey in the novel—Gram, Big Lennie, Toby, and Sarah—grieves in distinctly personal ways. Define their grief and how each character learns to move on, if at all. Do you wish any of the characters had worked through his or her grief in a different way? How would you have acted in their situation?

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A Q&A with author Jandy Nelson

Music plays a large role in Lennie’s life. Why did you feel this was an important addition to her character? What made you want to include music in the book in the first place?

You have an MFA in poetry. Is this why you decided to make Lennie a poet in the novel?

No, it was always Lennie’s story I wanted to tell and always from her point of view. I wanted the immediacy of first person, to really be able to follow her closely emotionally and psychologically over the course of the story. That image I had of her scattering poems was incredibly persistent; it chased me everywhere until I sat down to write her story. I had lost someone very close to me years earlier and I wanted to write about that kind of catastrophic, transformational life event. I wanted to explore some of the intricacies and complexities of grief, but I wanted to explore them through a love story— or two really. I imagined a story where joy and sorrow coexisted in really close quarters, where love could be almost unwieldy as grief. James Baldwin said, “When you’re writing you’re learning, something which you don’t know.” I think there were things I wanted to explore and discover, and writing Lennie’s story helped me do that. She really took me over. What’s odd is that despite the subject matter, and even though many days I typed with tears falling onto the keyboard, writing this novel was an incredibly joyful experience, one of the happiest times of my life.

What do you want readers to take from this story?

It’s funny, there’s a paragraph toward the end of the novel in Chapter 35. Lennie has just told Rachel she’s going to challenge her for first chair and she’s running through the woods on her way to write