

# A Q&A with Susan Lewis

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**Jim Lynskey is a real person who started the Save9Lives foundation. Why did you choose to include him as the only nonfiction character in the book, rather than create a fictional stand-in?**

This novel, though a work of fiction, was inspired by real events and real people. I was introduced to Jim Lynskey, the founder of the Save9Lives campaign, by my stepson, Luke, who was the same age – 22 at the time of writing. As I came to know him and to learn what it means to be so young and unable to live life to the fullest I was, as any of us would be, deeply moved by the sadness and frustration of his condition. Apart from speaking with him at length, I was able to listen to recordings of him discussing prognoses and procedures with his surgeon and could only begin to imagine how terrifying it must be to have such conversations at any time of your life, but most particularly at his age. I felt it was important to feature him in the book as himself in order to lend authenticity to the story and hopefully to bring a far greater sense of caring and understanding to those in need of a transplant.

**Did you do a lot of research before writing *One Minute Later*?**

There was plenty of research. Apart from all the reading and watching of videos, I spoke to cardiologists, heart technicians, heart surgeons and specialist nurses, all of whom helped me to create a strong and – I hope – believable story. I have tried hard not to weight the book with medical terminology

and anecdotal histories; what matters most, I feel, is not the condition itself, or showing off how much I learned about it, but the people who are affected by it.

**What is your writing process like? Do you have a different approach to each of your books?**

My process is generally the same with each book. I decide on the subject first – this is often plucked from the news, a story or situation that resonates with me in some way, and that I think will matter to others. Then I give a huge amount of thought to the kind of characters I feel will best tell the story. More often than not, I write from a female perspective using my main protagonist to engage with the reader on as many levels as possible, whether through age, background, emotions, ambitions, challenges of a legal or medical nature – the list goes on. There is so much that connects us as people and I feel quite strongly the need to bring that into a book.

**Was it a challenge to balance the three perspectives of Vivi, Shelley, and Gina? Whose narrative came to you first?**

Every book presents its own set of challenges, but that's what makes writing so exciting and rewarding for me. Taking on three major characters can actually be easier than trying to make one character keep everything going. Moving between stories makes time-lapses simpler to communicate, and often allows the characters to breathe and come back with more energy and purpose when their chapters are up. Vivi was always going to be the most important of the three in this book and it was definitely her personality and circumstances that drove everything along. She came to me first and as I got to know her she all but took over my life. Not unusual,

especially in a book where the subject matter is so vital. I honestly had no idea about Shelley until suddenly she was there, on the page, and as soon as she was I realised how needed she was for perspective and plot.

**Did you have any specific goals in mind when you set out to write the stories of Vivi, Shelley, Gina, and Josh?**

My goal, or intention, for this book was the same for any book I write – primarily it's to take the reader on a journey they really want to be on and stay on. I believe fiction can play a huge part in bringing awareness to important issues – and I hope that *One Minute Later* will open eyes, minds and hearts in unexpected and valuable ways. Books can also make someone feel less alone or misunderstood if they are personally affected by the subject I've written about. That means a lot to me, it's like reaching across a divide to the very heart of a reader. And I love it when my characters make me laugh – which can come at me so unexpectedly that I actually frighten the dogs with my sudden bursts of hilarity.

**How did you decide to end the book the way you did?**

I considered several options for ending the book and even wrote one of them, but it simply wasn't right. I feel the way it ends now was the only way it could go to make the story matter, and to bring home just how important organ donation is.