

An Outsider, Out of the Shadows

By **DINITIA SMITH**, *New York Times*, Published: September 7, 2005

TULSA, Okla. - The mystery of S. E. Hinton begins with her genderless name. Her most famous book, The Outsiders, about teenage gangs and alienated youth in Tulsa, Oklahoma during the 1960s, transformed young-adult fiction from a genre mostly about prom queens, football players, and high school crushes to one that portrayed a darker, truer adolescent world. Since it was published in 1967, the novel has sold 14 million copies, 400,000 of them last year alone.

Yet the jacket covers of all her novels over the years, including That Was Then, This Is Now (1971), Rumble Fish (1975) and Tex (1979), have never included author photographs, and she has rarely spoken publicly or in interviews. In fact, some readers don't know that S. E. is a woman, *Susan Eloise*. Those who do know mostly the basic facts: that she published The Outsiders when she was 17, that she lives in Tulsa and has shown horses. That's pretty much it.



The author S. E. Hinton, whose most famous book portrayed a world of teenage gangs and alienated youth, in a pay booth at the Admiral Twin drive-in theater in Tulsa, Okla.

Now Ms. Hinton has allowed her carefully preserved secrecy to be penetrated for the release of a re-cut version of Francis Ford Coppola's 1983 film of The Outsiders on DVD, on Sept. 20 by Warner Home Video. The film will have a limited theatrical run nationally and is opening in New York on Sept. 9.

It's as if Ms. Hinton's image, of a teenage girl who is somehow an authority on teenage life, has been caught in a time warp. But in reality, she's now a sturdy homemaker, either 54 or 56, though she won't give her exact age. She speaks in a gritty Oklahoman accent, and has lived almost all her life in Tulsa, where she is married to David Inhofe, a software engineer. They have a son, Nick, 22, at college back East.

Ms. Hinton won't show a reporter her house, which she described as a red brick ranch, with a pool - in an affluent (wealthy) neighborhood. And she won't show the home where she grew up, either, in a poorer section. "I don't want to revisit it," she said curtly.

But she did acknowledge that she grew up in a working-class neighborhood of worn houses on Tulsa's North Side. She attended Will Rogers High School, where students were divided into groups, including Greasers from blue-collar families or Socs (pronounced SO-shes, from the word *social*), rich kids whose families benefited from Tulsa's oil money and wore wheat jeans and madras and drove Mustangs.

The Outsiders is steeped in that world. Ponyboy, an orphaned Greaser (played in the film by C. Thomas Howell), lives with his two brothers, Sodapop (Rob Lowe) and Darry, the oldest (Patrick Swayze).

"There's layers after layers after layers" of memories, Ms. Hinton said, as she drove past the Admiral Twin drive-in on East Easton Street, where the Greasers flirt with the Soc Girl, Cherry (Diane Lane), to the fury of her Soc boyfriend, Bob. "It just freaks me out." And here is the park, on Jasper Street, where in the film Bob nearly drowns Ponyboy, and Johnny (Ralph Macchio) stabs Bob to death.



Blue madras shirt

Ms. Hinton's, father, Grady, was a door-to-door salesman, her mother, Lillian, an assembly-line worker. "My mother was physically and emotionally abusive," Ms. Hinton said. "My father was an extremely cold man." It's clearly a difficult admission to make, and one she has almost never made. The family attended a "fundamentalist, hellfire, and brimstone" church, she said. "It turned me off to religion."

Ms. Hinton said she was a tomboy, happiest at her grandmother's farm, where her aunt had a horse. She longed for her own horse, and escaped into reading and writing books. (She wrote two unpublished books before The Outsiders.) "When I was writing, my mother would come into my room, grab my hair and throw me in front of the TV," Ms. Hinton said. "She'd say, 'You're part of this family - now act like it.' I hate TV now."

One time, her mother threw her manuscripts in the trash burner, but allowed her to rescue them. "I would tell myself, 'It'll get better,'" Ms. Hinton said. "'Hang on.'"

When she was 15, her father developed a brain tumor. As he was dying, she wrote The Outsiders, inspired, she said, by injustices perpetrated against her Greaser friends by the Socs.

A friend knew someone whose mother was a children's book writer, and Ms. Hinton sent her manuscript to her agent. It was bought by Viking Press for \$1,000. She gradually made money and bought her first horse. Then came writer's block and an intense depression. She met Mr. Inhofe in her freshman biology class at the University of Tulsa, and she said he helped her to write again. With each succeeding novel, her fame grew, fueled by movie adaptations, though she insisted on protecting her privacy.

The Outsiders featured young actors on the brink of fame, among them Matt Dillon, Tom Cruise and Emilio Estevez. Mr. Dillon also starred in the movies of Tex, directed by Tim Hunter, and Rumble Fish, also directed by Mr. Coppola.



Young actors in The Outsiders movie, 1983.

In a telephone interview, Mr. Coppola said he re-cut The Outsiders to be truer to the book, and re-titled the new version The Outsiders: The Complete Novel.

In the original film, Mr. Coppola went quickly to the main action at the drive-in, but he has restored an early scene in which the Greaser characters are introduced one by one as they are set upon by Socs.

He replaced some of the symphonic music with songs by Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Van Morrison and others. "I realized the Hollywood score was holding back the film," Mr. Coppola said. He did keep "Stay Gold," the theme song inspired by Robert Frost's poem "Nothing Gold Can Stay" and sung by Stevie Wonder.

Still, The Outsiders has an **anachronistic** feel, an all-white story about teenagers reflecting the segregated Tulsa of the time. Ms. Hinton said that it hasn't hurt the book's continuing popularity because "today black and minority kids identify with the Greasers" as outsiders. There is, she suggested, a universality in being an adolescent outsider. "My goal from being a child was to have a happy home life," she said. "My husband and I get along great." Their families are in Tulsa, old friends. "We're both **introverts** and it's hard to make new friends." She has her weekly writing group, and says she re-reads Jane Austen annually. For years, she guided hunters on the prairie. Now she rides trails on her registered paint horse, Sage.

Last year, tired of teenage fiction, Ms. Hinton published her first adult novel, Hawkes Harbor, about an orphan raised by nuns who encounters pirates, gun runners and sharks while at sea, and is protected by a vampire. Publishers Weekly praised it as "funny, scary, suspenseful." But The Washington Post called it "a rambling episodic mess." Ms. Hinton attributed the bad reviews to the fact that readers were not expecting a vampire book.

Ms. Hinton said she was fascinated by the paranormal. Her new novel, in progress, is a comedic suspense story about a man who escapes from Oklahoma. He goes to Los Angeles, makes "a ton of money" and "returns to his hometown to see his family," she said. "As soon as he gets there, weird things happen." There are strange lights. A black panther is sighted. "I just make it up as it happens," Ms. Hinton said in her flinty voice.

Anachronistic: a story that seems to belong in another time or a wrong historical context

Introvert: a shy person, or one who is caught up in his/her own thoughts or feelings

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SURVEY: Record important titles, subtitles, bold-faced words, captions, etc.

QUESTION: Write out at least 3 "Who, What, When, Where, Why, or How" questions based on your survey.

1.) _____

2.) _____

3.) _____

READ: As you read, look for and write down answers to the questions from above.

1.) _____

2.) _____

3.) _____

----- QUESTIONS -----

1. What do the letters **S.E.** in the author's name stand for? _____

2. When was The Outsiders first published? _____

3. When did the movie version of The Outsiders arrive in theaters? _____

4. In what 2 ways was S.E. Hinton's teenage life similar to characters in The Outsiders?

A.

B.

5. What is an INTROVERT? _____

6. What is the PURPOSE of this article?