

# A Street Punk Crashes the Red States

an interview with novelist Katia Noyes



**Q: Have you always wanted to be a writer?**

**A:** No, I always wanted to be the girl with the most cake.

**Q: So what happened?**

**A:** My life as an earnest, experimental dance performer ended, and I had to find another way to sell my soul.

**Q: When people ask you to describe your book, what do you say?**

**A:** It's a road novel about a young street punk. She leaves San Francisco to work on a farm in Nebraska and ends up stealing cars and having all kinds of adventures. It's the reverse of most literary pilgrimages. Unlike the usual story about a young person coming to California, it's about a vagabond's pilgrimage to the middle of the country.

**Q: Is the main character in *CRASHING AMERICA* based on your life experiences?**

**A:** We both left home early, got arrested for "Being Beyond Parental Control," and ended up relying on our own inner resources.

**Q: Does it bother you that readers always want to know whether your characters are based on real life?**

**A:** As a reader I find myself, just like everybody, wondering what parts of a story are "real." Does an author have the authority to write about her content?

**Q: Do you think you have the authority to write about a 17-year-old street punk?**

**A:** Somehow, yes. I know her better than I know myself, perhaps because I'm basing her on memories of what it felt like to be her age and younger. I've gotten distance from that time so I can see her in context. Although I had a "normal" childhood, I started leaving home whenever I could at about age 13. What I remember is that I wanted to connect and become close to every person and every place I went.

**Q: Would you call your main character, *Girl*, innocent?**

**A:** Maybe. I didn't want to write about another cynical, ironic hipster. I wanted a character who felt deeply, who saw the beauty in the world, and yet was incredibly at sea as to how to be a human being.

**Q: She's so unpredictable. For example, she steals. . .**

**A:** Yes, I've met many people who feel that the world owes them stuff. There are these holes inside and stealing is a small way to try to get it back. In *Girl*'s case, it's also a way to connect with the people she meets. She knows that people leave her life as quickly as they came in so she needs to take some token from them while she can.

**Q: Did you have a lot of crazy on-the-street experiences?**

**A:** Yes. Lots of crazy stuff. I was just thinking last night about an old friend—hiding with her on the staircase of a flea-bag hotel on Mission. We must have been about 13. We were stranded at 3AM with no money. When a woman left the hotel with her date, she saw us and offered us her room for the night. I remember her kindness, her voice. . .

**Q: That reminds me of Girl's list of truths. She says, "Always talk to strangers. They will be the ones who will help you in the end." One of her other seven truths is, "Love dreams will choke you with tighter hands than loneliness." What's that about?**

**A:** I remember a time when I had no understanding about love. That's what I think is true about Girl. Girl makes do, without believing she needs much from anybody. I felt the same way, was much tougher as a kid than I am now. But it occurs to me as I say this, that I was probably fooling myself, just like Girl.

You know, this was the most difficult thing about writing from Girl's point-of-view. Consciously she never wants to admit vulnerability, so her needs and desires only came out in the story in sudden flares. And when that happened, I would be so relieved to finally see it, and yet it would kill me because it was so raw.

**Q: Can you talk about how you came to write CRASHING AMERICA?**

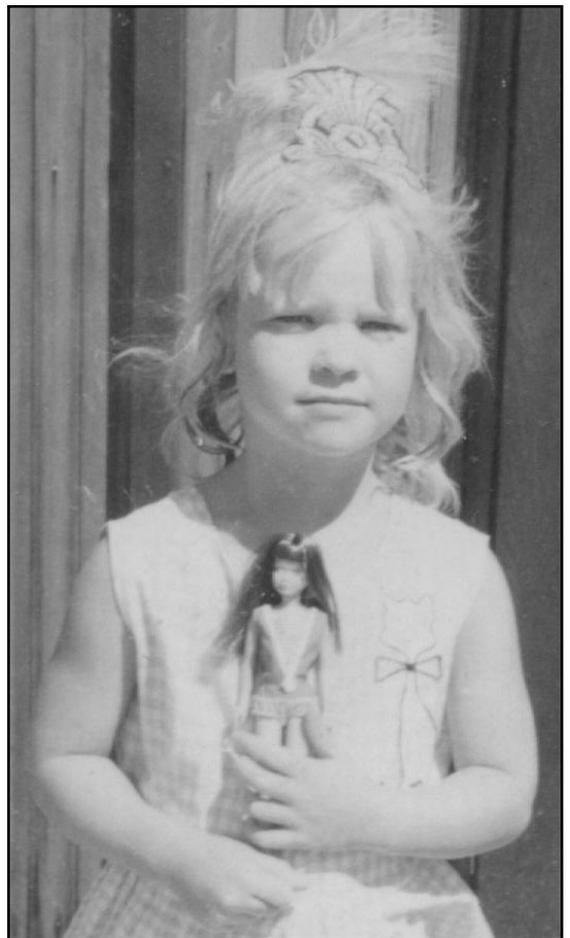
**A:** The book started as non-fiction. I had this idea that I wanted to write about the meaning of home. Even though I'm third-generation Californian, I'd never really understood what it meant to belong to place. So I started interviewing local people about whether they considered San Francisco home. No one I knew had been born here—San Francisco is so transient. I had a romantic idea that I could find something different in the open prairie of the heartland. So I took a trip to Iowa, South Dakota, Minnesota, Nebraska, and then ended up out in the South as well—Louisville and Memphis.

I met teenagers and farmers and stood alone in the open plains. To my surprise, I didn't feel the deep connection to family and place that I was expecting. Farmers were committing suicide, young people felt stranded, whole towns were boarded up. I found a type of displacement that felt very familiar.

**Q: There are so many opposites that come together in the book: blue state VS red state, runaway VS farmer, queer desire VS marriage, god VS punk.**

**A:** The media has divided the country into red and blue camps, but we are more interesting than that. We may be fractured as a country, but the interesting thing is how we are fractured on the *inside*. I wonder if we all contain the same broken pieces and longings.

**CRASHING AMERICA** RELEASE DATE: September 2005  
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**crashingamerica.com**

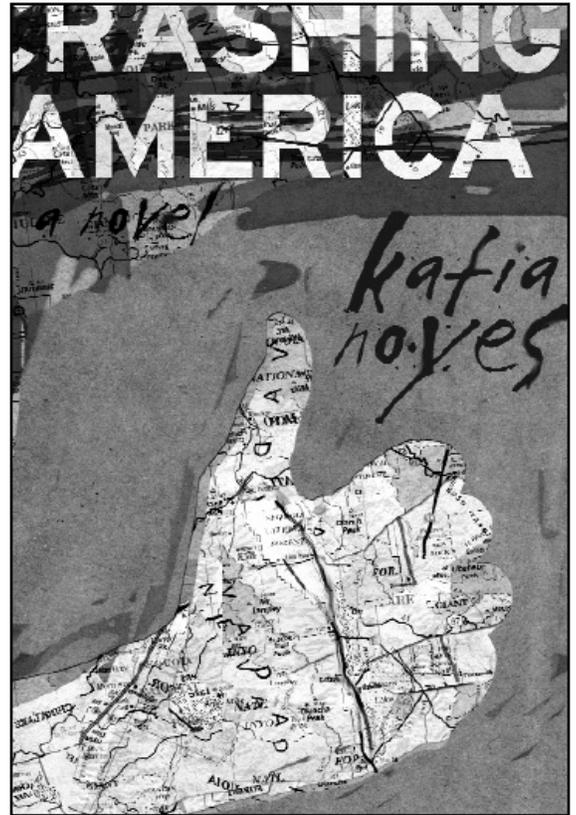


# CRASHING AMERICA

**A**fter a sudden loss, a seventeen-year-old vagabond flees San Francisco, hell-bent on chasing women and adventure. When an old friend challenges her to work the harvest, the cornfields of northern Nebraska flicker with idyllic promise.

Can she bury her demons and find a place of belonging?

CRASHING AMERICA is a road story about seeking the still point on a moving highway. With language both ferocious and lyrical, Katia Noyes' debut novel connects a restless street punk with the forgotten people of the open plains to create a vivid map of the fractures in the American psyche.



**Michelle Tea**, *Rent Girl*:

“I’m madly in love with this book! Noyes takes us on a fearless queer adventure, using a dashing slangy language all her own.”

**Matt Bernstein Sycamore**, *Pulling Taffy*:

“If you’ve ever gotten lost and then found your way, and gotten lost and then found your way and gotten lost (and then maybe found your way?), *Crashing America* gives you the road map. It’s about trying to die without growing old, or trying to grow up without dying.”

**Jewelle Gomez**, *Don’t Explain*:

“Katia Noyes is a fresh writer with an old soul.”

**D. Travers Scott**, *One of These Things is Not Like the Other*:

“In our times of rigid red or blue identities, Noyes’ mashup of bohemian and rural offers refreshingly complex shades.”

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