

## Q & A for “About” and Media Kit

### **1. What is *Earnest* about?**

*Earnest* is about a wise and loving yellow Labrador retriever, who is upset when the couple who adopted him break up. He makes known his opinion about their sorry situation any way he can. Besides fighting over custody of him, they fight over the future of a historic Victorian house – and whether it should be saved, or demolished and replaced with a new commercial building. The book sheds light on a contemporary dilemma: Should we preserve the past or welcome the future?

### **2. How did you get the idea for *Earnest*?**

Many years ago I read about a San Diego couple who divorced and got into a legal battle over their pointer-greyhound mix. All the newspaper articles focused on the people, but I kept wondering: What about the *dog*? How would the bickering influence her life? What could be done to protect her? I tucked those thoughts into the back of my mind and hoped someday I could write about them.

As for historic preservation, a facet of the story, I used my own experience. My husband and I renovated an old Victorian farmhouse that everyone advised us to tear down. To me, however, it was like a living thing, and I didn't have the heart to demolish it. Like Anna, a main character in *Earnest*, I can almost feel the spirits of people who lived in the house for the 120 years before I did.

### **3. What was your purpose for writing *Earnest*?**

As with all my books, I wanted to show the importance of animals in our lives. I believe that they can heal us, guide us, teach us, and enrich us in countless ways, as *Earnest*

certainly does for his people. I wanted him to show readers the potential depth and beauty of the human-animal bond.

#### **4. How did you become a writer?**

Many years ago I met a magazine writer in a California art gallery. At the time I was teaching English in a university, and she suggested I use my writing skills to freelance, as she had done. Though I'd won a prize for an essay in sixth grade, I'd never thought of being a writer. That wonderful woman became my mentor. I owe her to this day for changing my life.

#### **5. After writing three nonfiction books, why novels now?**

Years ago I had three novels published under a pseudonym; but writing magazine and newspaper articles enticed me away from fiction because they were easier and quicker and interesting to research. Later, my love of animals led me to write nonfiction books about them. But I always missed the freedom of writing novels, and I love trying to create something beautiful from my imagination. So getting back to fiction was a natural step in my career.

#### **6. Why do you write about animals?**

Because I love them. And because so often they are treated badly. I want to take up for them and show their sensitivity, importance, and worth. I also want my life to make a difference for them, and writing about them seems to be the best way I can make that difference. I don't think I could *not* write about animals.

#### **7. How did you become an animal advocate?**

All my life I've been supremely sensitive to animal suffering. I was born on the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi. As a tiny child, in western movies I cried so hard when cowboys dug their spurs into horses' sides that my father had to take me

to the theater lobby. All my adopted animals deepened my sensitivity even more – especially Bea, a beagle who came from a medical lab. Given my nature, I couldn't help but take injured wildlife for emergency care, feed hungry creatures who crossed my path, and volunteer for animal organizations. Animal advocacy has been engrained in me since birth.

### **8. Do you have pets? Dogs? Cats?**

I've always had dogs and cats, including once a feral colony of kitties. But a few years ago Logan, my beloved German shepherd, and Phoebe, my beloved beagle, died in the same month. I was devastated, and for the first time in my life I had no animals. My husband and I grieved for over a year. Recently, however, we adopted Bridget, who was found starving in the San Bernardino desert and brought to Seattle by the Washington German Shepherd Rescue. She is a joy! I'll never go for longer than a couple of weeks again without an animal in the house.

### **9. Do you believe that animals have feelings?**

Absolutely. No question about it. When I first started writing about animals, however, many experts told me that animals had no emotions and did not even think! Determined to show those experts wrong, I collected thousands of stories of animal kindness, loyalty, and courage. To me, the stories added up to data in a small field study, which proved that animals do have feelings and they act on them. Now most experts seem to have come around to recognize animal emotion, and much research is being done. Views have changed. Thank goodness.

### **10. What have you learned from animals? How do animals teach us?**

I have learned so much from animals about compassion, loyalty, courage, resourcefulness, generosity, fortitude – my list could go on. For example, three years ago when Logan, my German shepherd, was recovering from surgery, he lay on his bed for weeks without complaining and showed courage like none I'd ever seen. I swore to myself that if I were ever in a similar situation, I'd try to be as noble as he was. If we open our eyes, we can see that animals are constantly teaching us by setting examples.