Q & A:

A Reason for Hope

1. What's *A Reason for Hope* about?

On San Julian Island, across Puget Sound from Seattle, Tessa Jordan works as a bookmobile librarian, recommending books and poems to her patrons. In her spare time, she cares for a colony of feral cats. But Tessa's simple, satisfying life is shockingly upended after she meets Nick Payne, a respected community leader, and he invites her to dinner.

Far from a pleasant first date, Tessa's evening with Nick leaves her feeling confused and upset. After deep soul-searching, she decides to step forward and accuse him of assault. Her distress grows when local prosecutor Will Armstrong declines to pursue her case, citing lack of evidence. Her main solace is Hope, a courthouse dog, trained to comfort victims through the difficult judicial process. As she lays her head in Tessa's lap, her gentle brown eyes seem to say, *Don't worry. Everything will be all right.*

Will—Hope's primary handler—longs to get justice for Tessa, yet knows how rocky the path will be. It's Hope who, true to her name, shines a bright ray through the darkness. With Hope by their side, Will and Tessa find surprising strength in each other as they learn just how resilient a heart—whether human or canine—can be.

2. How did you get the idea for *A Reason for Hope*?

I began to get the idea for *A Reason for Hope* one afternoon when a neighbor told me about a woman in our small town who'd met a man online and gone for dinner at his house, where he drugged and sexually assaulted her. Soon after I heard her story, I mentioned it at a dinner with my two closest friends, and we realized that we'd all been survivors of attempted or completed assault but had never talked about it with each other. Why the silence? When that question reached out and grabbed me, I knew I'd write a novel about it. Later, as I was mulling over the idea, I met the director of

Northwest Assistance Dogs, which trains courthouse dogs to comfort assault victims through stressful legal trials. A dog with that job fit perfectly into my story.

3. What was your purpose for writing *A Reason for Hope?*

When I first began writing *A Reason for Hope,* all I wanted was to create a meaningful story that would lift my readers' spirits. I wanted to show my main character Tessa's resilience as she fights for justice after being grievously wronged. But as I interviewed experts and assault survivors, I began to feel that the story was becoming more than a novel. For me, it was becoming a cause.

You may not know that an estimated one in five U.S. women have been victims of attempted or completed sexual assault—but only a dismal thirty-seven percent of them report it. Unlike them, Tessa *does* go to the police and then makes her way through the daunting legal process. Though it has changed at glacial speed, thanks to #MeToo and women's solidarity, today there are reasons for assault survivors to hope for justice and support. I want Tessa's fight to be an inspiration. I want readers to know that the fight can be worth it and it doesn't have to be a lonely road.

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 college English, 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, encouraging and guiding me. I owe her to this day for changing my life and leading me to a wonderful career.

5. After writing magazine articles and nonfiction books, why did you change to fiction?

When I finished three nonfiction books, my publisher wanted me to write another that would have been very much like the first two. A contract came for me to sign, but no matter how hard I tried to get myself to do it, I couldn't. I was burned out and needed a change. But to what?

The answer came like a lightning bolt one afternoon when I was walking down Seattle's First Avenue and browbeating myself for not agreeing to write the book that

the publisher wanted. I remember crossing Marion Street, and just as I set my foot on the curb to turn right for the ferry, the thought came to me like a voice from the clouds, *If you don't want to keep writing nonfiction about animals, why not fiction*? In that instant, I knew I'd write a novel, and one of the main characters would be a dog. That thought led me to my bestselling first novel, *An Unexpected Grace*.

I love the freedom of fiction, and I enjoy trying to create something beautiful out of nothing more than my imagination. A novel doesn't require as much interviewing and fact checking as a nonfiction book, and I can let my mind explore without restraints. Once I started writing novels, I knew I was where I belonged.

6. Why do you write about animals?

The answer is simple. There's no way I could *not* write about them.

I was born on October 4, the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi, and I have always been supremely sensitive to creatures. As a young child, I cried so hard when cowboys dug their spurs into horses' sides in western movies that my father had to take me to the lobby. When I grew older, I rescued dogs, cats, birds, raccoons, mice—and any other needy animal who crossed my path.

As an adult, I wrote articles on dozens of subjects for magazines and newspapers but never considered writing about animals. Then I had an accident and injured four disks in my spine. For months unable to work, I lay on my office sofa with Bea, my beloved beagle, loyally cuddled up beside me, and I didn't know if I'd ever be pain-free enough to write again.

When your career is hanging in the balance like that, you do some serious thinking. And I slowly realized that I'd been writing about subjects that had meant nothing to me. I wondered, *what's the meaning of my life?* Bea reminded me that I'd always loved animals more than anything. So why wasn't I writing about them?

I vowed that if I were ever strong enough to work again, I'd align my heart with my career. And that's what I've done in my animal articles, nonfiction books, and novels. I've tried to show how worthy animals are, how important they can be to us, how much they have to teach. And I hope somehow that my work is helping to improve

their lives. I want to give back to the world some of the love and kindness that animals have given me.