

Insider Interview about GIRL ON THE RUN

How would you describe Girl on the Run?

A woman has been living in the shadows her whole life, trusting no one after her father was hauled to jail for a crime he swore he didn't commit. She wrote him but he never wrote back. Her confidence flagged. Her relationships with men have been strained and ragged. Then she meets the man of her dreams. Or is he?

How did you come up with the idea? What came first, character or plot?

I was watching the movie *The Fugitive* with my husband—I love fast-paced thrillers—and I thought: *how can I turn this story on its head?* Answer: *write it with a female protagonist and make her the one running for her life.* Then came the character. I wanted Chessa to be a normal person with no real-life coping skills, a woman who works with costumes and design and who, at times, lives in a dream world. She has no inner strength. She is kind and giving. When she wakes up beside the body of her dead husband and every bit of evidence screams that she did it, her world shatters.

What was the hardest part of research?

I love Lake Tahoe. I spent all my summers there as a girl. I've returned many times with family. But writing a story in a fixed location where you don't live is a struggle. I revisited and took copious notes and photographs, but when I returned home, I realized I still didn't know the names of streets where I intended to set chases, so I pored over Google maps. I drew maps of my own. I checked almanacs, too, to make sure I got the temperature right for the season. I wanted the setting to be as real to the reader as it is to me. I wanted them to feel how cool the nights are and how icy cold the water is.

What makes Chessa tick?

I have a fascination with a character's past—what drives her, what shaped her. In Chessa's case, I was intrigued with the way her world fell apart when her father was sent to jail. She felt betrayed. Did she know him at all? She wrote to him, but he never wrote back. Had he ever loved her? Her mother, a strong and vital woman, remarried but Chessa didn't bond with her stepfather. As Chessa matured, she didn't form good relationships with men and she vacillated between career choices. Who was she? What did she hope for her future? In her twenties she finds a career that makes her happy—costuming and eventually event planning—but she can't seem to find a life partner. Until she meets Zach. Unfortunately Chessa suffers another blow right after they marry. Her mother dies in a tragic accident. Shaken, Chessa allows Zach to make choices for her. When he is murdered and she starts to learn the truth about him, she realizes she has been a pawn her whole life. Learning this is what changes her, what *drives* her. She needs to rediscover her own sense of self. She needs to find her courage.