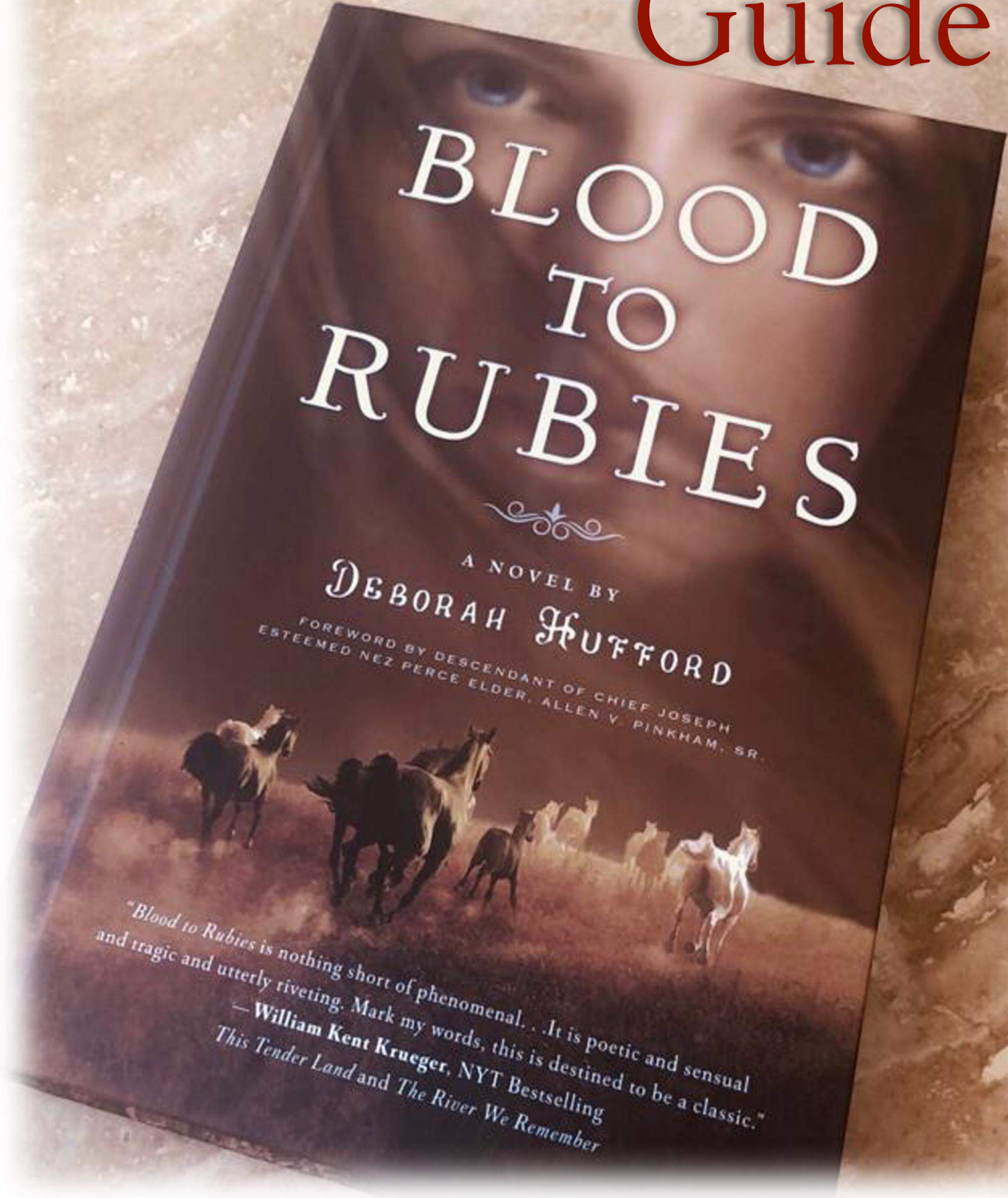


# Group Discussion Guide



## BLOOD TO RUBIES

A NOVEL BY  
**DEBORAH HUFFORD**

FOREWORD BY DESCENDANT OF CHIEF JOSEPH  
ESTEEMED NEZ PERCE ELDER, ALLEN V. PINKHAM, SR.

*"Blood to Rubies is nothing short of phenomenal. . . It is poetic and sensual and tragic and utterly riveting. Mark my words, this is destined to be a classic."*  
— **William Kent Krueger**, NYT Bestselling  
*This Tender Land* and *The River We Remember*

This reading group guide for *Blood to Rubies* includes Book Discussion Questions, Endorsement Questions, Enhancing Your Book Club Experience, How to Make Your Own Spirit Stick, and a Q & A with Author, Deborah Hufford.

The book discussion portion is divided into sections: Fun Warm-Up Questions, The Plot & The Characters, Chief Joseph & The Nez Perce, The Woman Warrior Theme, Nature, Animals & Wildlife, The Images in *Blood to Rubies*, The Relevance of *Blood to Rubies*' Themes Today, and Some Philosophical Questions.

Infused throughout all these sections are suggestions for further reading of posts from the author's popular historical blog, *Notes from the Frontier*, that has more than 100,000 readers and includes nearly 400 posts. These posts are heavily researched and include many images with photo captions that will shed light on some scenes and issues in *Blood to Rubies*.

Happy Reading & Book Clubbing♡

# Blood to Rubies

## Topics & Questions for Discussion

### Fun Warm-Up Questions

1. How thought-provoking did you find BLOOD TO RUBIES? What surprised you most about the book? What was the most fascinating fact you learned?
2. In your opinion, what were the most important themes in BLOOD TO RUBIES? What were some minor themes?
3. Who was your favorite character? What character did you identify with most? What characters did you most dislike?
4. In Chapter 36, *cloven tongues of fire*, a young Fire Bear goes on his spirit quest to seek his wyakin. What would you like your own wyakin name to be?
5. Did any parts of the book make you cry? Did any make you laugh out loud?
6. Do you think this book would make a good movie or television series? Who would you cast in the various roles? If you were the director, what scenes would you want to include in the production?

**FURTHER READING:** See [www.NotesfromtheFrontier.com](http://www.NotesfromtheFrontier.com), the author's historical blog, and type in the search function these related posts: Dances with Wolves (Parts I, II, III), The Revenant, Old Yeller, Girls with Guns, The True Story of Katie Elder, Westerns for Dads, Earliest Indians on Film Gunfight at O.K. Corral, The Real Josey Whales, The Real Jeremiah Johnson, Westerns Roaring Back, Daniel Boone, Jamestown, Wes Studi, Horses in Hollywood Westerns, Yakima Canutt (Hollywood's Greatest Stuntman), The First Black Frontier Filmmaker, and more



# The Plot & The Characters

1. Did you find the structure of the book in vignettes alternating between characters and plot to be effective? Why or why not?
2. Much of BLOOD TO RUBIES revolves around the young frontier photographer, Frederick Cortland, and his experiences. Did you like Frederick? What were his strongest qualities? His weakest?
3. What was the most surprising aspect of frontier photography you learned about in BLOOD TO RUBIES?
4. Can you see any ironies in Frederick's work as a photographer in his personal life?
5. Most immigrants and refugees who came to America were fleeing poverty, war, persecution, and injustice. How is the 1800s migration to America similar to the influx of migrants and refugees coming to America today? Would have risked your family and the dangerous journey immigrants and westering pioneers risked?

**FURTHER READING:** See [www.NotesfromtheFrontier.com](http://www.NotesfromtheFrontier.com), to find these related posts: Death on the Trail, The First Wagon Trains West, A Pioneer Diary, Pioneer Christmas Diaries, What Pioneers Packed to Go West, Pioneer Survival Guides in the 1800s, What Pioneers Ate, Tools Pioneers Needed to Survive, Parting of the Ways, Frontier Quilts, Quilting on the Oregon Trail, Pioneer Cemeteries, Sod Houses—Humble Homes of the Prairie, How to Build a Log Cabin, Rabies on the Frontier, The Heartbreaking Tale of Orphan Trains, 1880s Human Hair Funeral Art, 1880s Funeral Technology

6. Likewise, many city-dwellers on the East Coast in the 1800s were escaping unthinkable work conditions and tenement life to go West, as were ex-slaves escaping their former lives in the South. Do you think you would have been one of those to go West?

**FURTHER READING:** Go to [www.NotesfromtheFrontier.com](http://www.NotesfromtheFrontier.com), to view these related posts: Child Labor in the 1800s, Labor Day—Why We Celebrate It, The Triangle Shirtwaist Fire, In Praise of the Working Man & Woman, Ship of the Damned, The Iroquois Theater Fire,

7. What similar personality traits did Sorrel and Flying Horse share? What do you think motivated their relationship?
8. There are several references to "two spirits" in BLOOD TO RUBIES. What differences were there in the way white and Native cultures regarded homosexuality and gender identity? Do you think there is a spectrum of sexuality and gender identity in humans?

**FURTHER READING:** Go to [www.NotesfromtheFrontier.com](http://www.NotesfromtheFrontier.com), to see the following related posts: Queer Tales of the Old West, Gay-iety on the Frontier, Homosexuality on the Range, The Sad Saga of George and Libby Custer's Laundress (Coming Soon!)

9. What character traits do Ransom and Fire Bear share?
10. How did you feel about Ransom's duplicity regarding Sylvia and Sorrel? Do you think it's possible to be in love with two people romantically at one time?
11. The depictions of frontier prostitutes in many movies and series depict often present them as coquettish and glamorous. The reality was far more grim. Did you know much about prostitution in the frontier of the 1800s? What surprised you most?

**FURTHER READING:** Go to [www.NotesfromtheFrontier.com](http://www.NotesfromtheFrontier.com), for the following related posts: Soiled Doves, 1800s Birth Control, Foot Binding & Prostitution in the 1800s, Sex Myths of the 1800s (Part I & II)

12. Do you think that Sorrel's actions at the end of the book were justified? Why or why not? What would you have done, were you in her situation?
13. What do you think motivated Ransom's actions at the end of the book?

# Chief Joseph & The Nez Perce

1. Did you know Chief Joseph's story before reading BLOOD TO RUBIES? What did you learn of his saga from the book?

**FURTHER READING:** Go to [www.NotesfromtheFrontier.com](http://www.NotesfromtheFrontier.com), to see the following related posts: In Honor of Chief Joseph, The Day the Earth Wept, In the Steps of Chief Joseph, Chief Joseph's Terrible Dilemma, Ancient Nez Perce Art Still Flourishes, Angela's Awesome Art & Her Appy, Cappy, Honor Chief Joseph's Legacy: The Chief Joseph Foundation

2. Did you know the significance of the Nez Perce in American history and their relationship to Lewis and Clark? What makes the Nez Perce story especially ironic given their history with Lewis and Clark? Were you surprised to learn of Daytime Smoke, the Nez Perce son of William Clark and his fate?
3. How did the prediction of ancient Nez Perce oracles affect the tribe's regard for change in their world?
4. How did smoking the peace pipe with Lewis and Clark affect Nez Perce history as more and more whites came to their land?
5. Horses, especially Appaloosas, had a big role in Nez Perce life and in their 1,500-mile exodus. Did you know about the Nez Perce and their Appaloosas before reading BLOOD TO RUBIES?

**FURTHER READING:** Go to [www.NotesfromtheFrontier.com](http://www.NotesfromtheFrontier.com), to see the following related posts: The Origin of Appaloosas, In the Steps of Chief Joseph, For the Love of Horses (& Mules!), In Honor of a Magnificent Warhorse, The Most Famous Mustang, Angela's Awesome Art & Her Appy, Cappy, The Comanche and The Horse, Horses in Hollywood Westerns

6. How did the Nez Perce demonstrate that they were an innovative tribe?
7. The brilliant fighting tactics of the Nez Perce in the 1877 War are taught at West Point today. How did the Nez Perce use the land and guerilla tactics to repeatedly outsmart the U.S. Army?
8. What technological and military advantages did the U.S. Cavalry have over the Nez Perce?
9. During the arduous 1,500-mile exodus of Joseph and the Nez Perce, what scenes did you find most powerful? Most upsetting?
10. In Chapter 63, *land of my father's bones*, Frederick notices a very young Nez Perce warrior, Earth Left by the Setting Sun, leaving the Bear Paw Battlefield late at night for Canada. He is badly burned from battle and carries a King Arthur flour sack hanging on his saddle that holds the hooves of a mighty warhorse. Although this particular scene is fictional, that young man and the mysterious flour sack that contained the hooves of a warhorse did indeed exist.

Earth Left by the Setting Sun was Chief Joseph's nephew. He later recreated himself and became world famous as Jackson Sundown. Read more about his extraordinary life and the hooves he carried in the flour sack.

**FURTHER READING:** Go to [www.NotesfromtheFrontier.com](http://www.NotesfromtheFrontier.com), to see the following related posts: The Saga of Jackson Sundown, The Mystery of Custer's Horse Vic, The Saga of Victory, The Continuing Mystery of a Warhorse's Missing Hooves Continues Today (Coming Soon!)

## The Woman Warrior Theme

1. Both Sorrel and Flying Horse had warrior spirits and did not fit into the gender norms of their respective cultures. More and more archeological evidence is being unearthed around the world today that indicates women warriors existed in far greater numbers and in far more cultures than we have been led to believe. How has Hollywood and the chroniclers of history written women warriors out of history?

**FURTHER READING:** Go to [www.NotesfromtheFrontier.com](http://www.NotesfromtheFrontier.com), to see the following related posts: Native Warrior Women, Warrior Women Rising from The Dust of History, Woman Chief, Who Killed Custer? It May Surprise You! PART 1, Who Killed Custer? It May Surprise You! PART 2, Women Homesteaders, and more

2. What movies and books can you cite in recent decades that began to recognize women warriors?

## Animals & Wildlife

1. Horses, dogs, cats, pioneer livestock, and wildlife show up often in the book. What were some of your favorite scenes in the book involving animals? What were some upsetting scenes?

**FURTHER READING:** Go to [www.NotesfromtheFrontier.com](http://www.NotesfromtheFrontier.com), to see the following related posts: Creature Comforts, Raising Chickens, Yellowstone's Keystone Wolves, Old Yeller, Wild Burros of the West, Grizzlies: Lords of the Frontier, Civil War Animal Mascots, Sally—The Famous Civil War Mascot, The Magical Bond Between the Badger & The Coyote, Americas First Animal Shelter, Leave It To Beavers, Rabies on the Frontier, Indian Dogs, Buffalo & Indians, Custer's Black Hills Expedition, Veterinary Care on Custer's Expedition, Custer's Dogs, Easter Surprise, Grizzly Adams, How Much Wood Can a Woodchuck Chuck? Bear Whisperer — Spikehorn Meyers, Where Bucking Broncs Go To Die, The Buck Stops Here!, The Strange Tale of the Red Ghosts of the West, The Endangered Black-Footed Ferret, America's Goat-Gonad Guru. **SEE ALSO POSTS ABOUT HORSES UNDER CHIEF JOSEPH & THE NEZ PERCE #5.**



2. How were animals important to the Nez Perce? Can you cite examples?

**FURTHER READING:** Go to [www.NotesfromtheFrontier.com](http://www.NotesfromtheFrontier.com), to see the following related posts: Buffalo & Indians, Every Dead Buffalo Is An Indian Gone, War Bonnets, Magnificent Animal Headdresses, Warhorse Paint, How to Make a Tipi,

3. What differences do you think there were in the regard for animals and for Nature generally between White and Native cultures?

## The Images in BLOOD TO RUBIES

1. Do you think the images enhance the narrative or detract from it?
2. What images did you find most powerful? The most troubling?
3. Did the images propel you in reading the story?
4. Did the images contribute to Frederick's persona as a frontier photographer?
5. Did you learn anything from the images? Did the images ever help you in understanding the action or narrative in the story?
6. Do you feel archival images are helpful in historical fiction?
7. How important do you feel photography and frontier photographers were in telling the stories of the western frontier?

**FURTHER READING:** Go to [www.NotesfromtheFrontier.com](http://www.NotesfromtheFrontier.com), to see the following related posts: Death Photography, Ansel Adams, George Catlin, Earliest Indians on Film, Wild West Mystery Photography, Bawdy Stereoscopes, Vanishing Americans, Alphonse Bertillon (Pioneer in Early Forensic Science), much more

## The Relevance of Blood to Rubies' Themes Today

1. What parallels can you draw between the events of the 1870s and today, especially regarding refugees and diasporas, the environment, species decimation, the rights of women, racial strife, land rights, and the price of "progress"?
2. Native Americans share a general belief in The Seventh Generation Principle, that decisions made today should leave a sustainable world seven generations into the future. How is that principle relevant today?

**FURTHER READING:** Go to [www.NotesfromtheFrontier.com](http://www.NotesfromtheFrontier.com), to see the following related posts: They Were Giants, Every Buffalo Gone is An Indian Dead, Yellowstone's Keystone Wolves, Leave It to Beavers, other posts

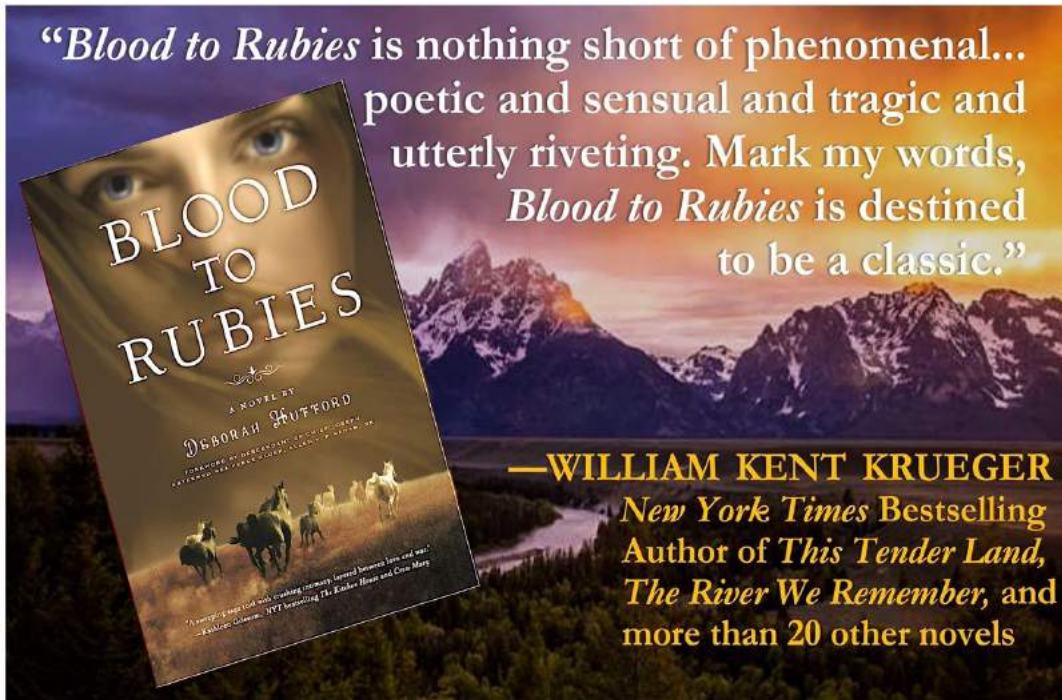
## Some Philosophical Questions

1. There are several scenes in the book of spiritual mysticism. Do you believe in a "spirit world" or spiritual mysticism?
2. Do you believe the genocide and diaspora of Native American tribes during Manifest Destiny were inevitable? Why or why not?
3. Do you feel a person who is cruel to animals can still be a good person? Do you feel that animals have souls?
4. Can vigilante justice sometimes be justified? Why or why not?
5. Do you feel that ethnic groups of people who have suffered genocide in the past by a populace or government should be compensated today? Why or why not?
6. The Judeo-Christian philosophy for thousands of years has held that human beings are the masters of the natural world and hold dominion over all living things. Do you believe this? What passages in the book and excerpts from the media in the 1870s maintained this philosophy as a justification for Manifest Destiny? How does this philosophy differ from the Nez Perce regard for the earth and the natural world?

*BTR*

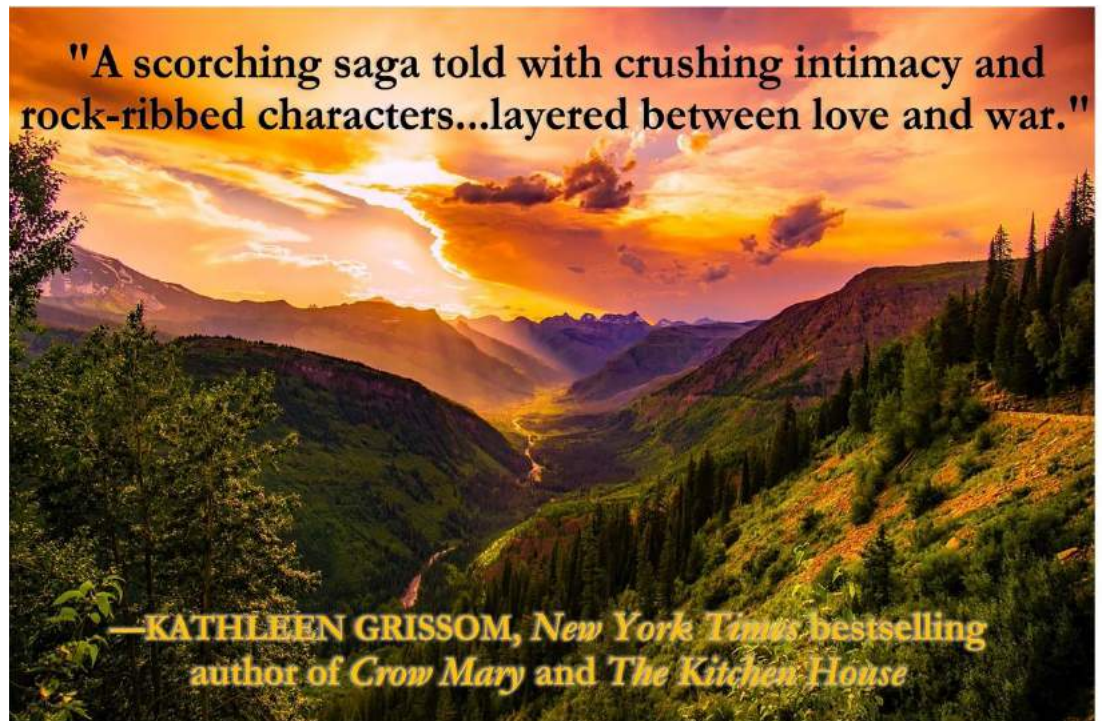
# Blood to Rubies

## Endorsement Questions

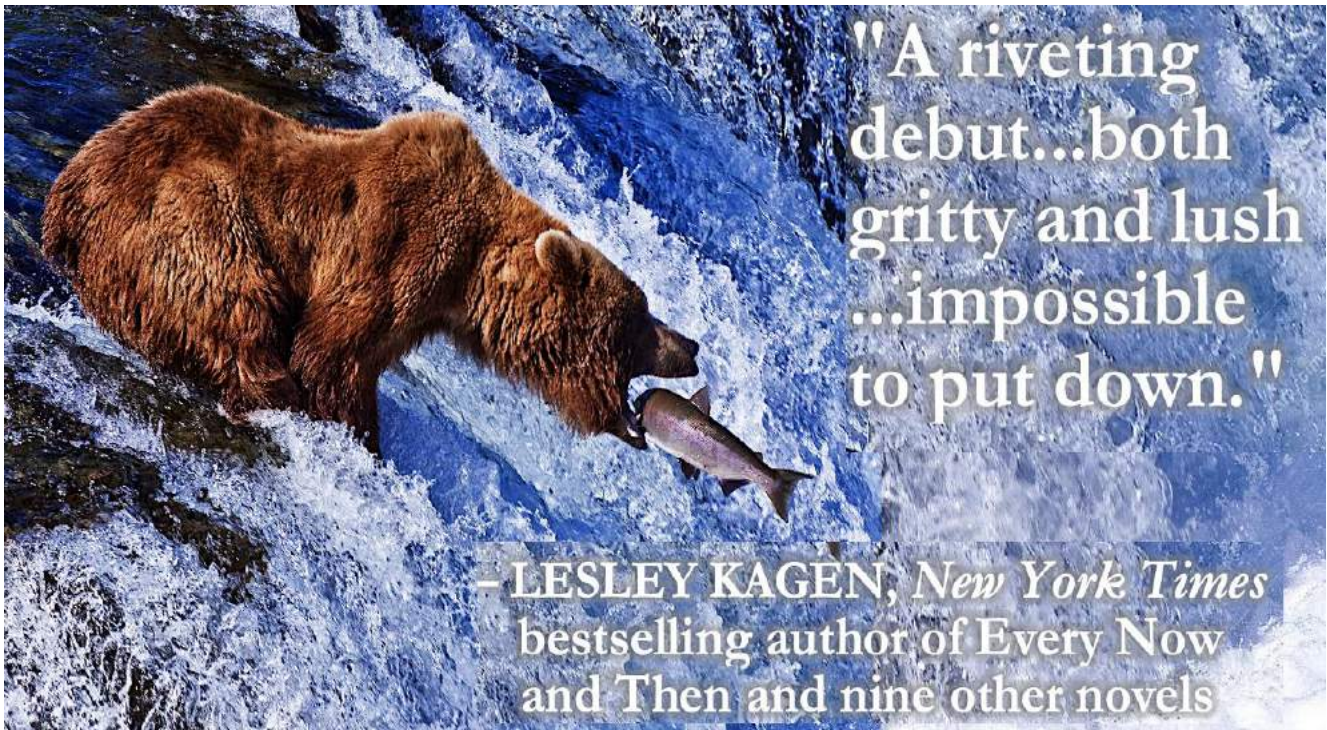


New York Times best-selling author William Kent Krueger called *Blood to Rubies* "poetic and sensual." Can you cite some passages or scenes that are poetic or sensual? Do you find any similarities or differences in writing style or themes between William Kent Krueger's books and *Blood to Rubies*?

NYT bestselling historical fiction author Kathleen Grissom's new book, *Crow Mary*, is also about a brave Native woman named "Goes First," later referred to as "Crow Mary." Did you find any similarities in content or writing style between *Blood to Rubies* and *Crow Mary*? Between the challenges that *Crow Mary* and *Flying Horse* faced?







"A riveting debut...both gritty and lush ...impossible to put down."

- LESLEY KAGEN, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Every Now and Then* and nine other novels

*New York Times* bestselling historical fiction author, Lesley Kagen, described *Blood to Rubies* as "gritty and lush." Can you find examples of such passages in the book? Did you find the juxtaposition of the contrast effective? Why or why not? What photographs did you find most shocking? Most heartwarming?

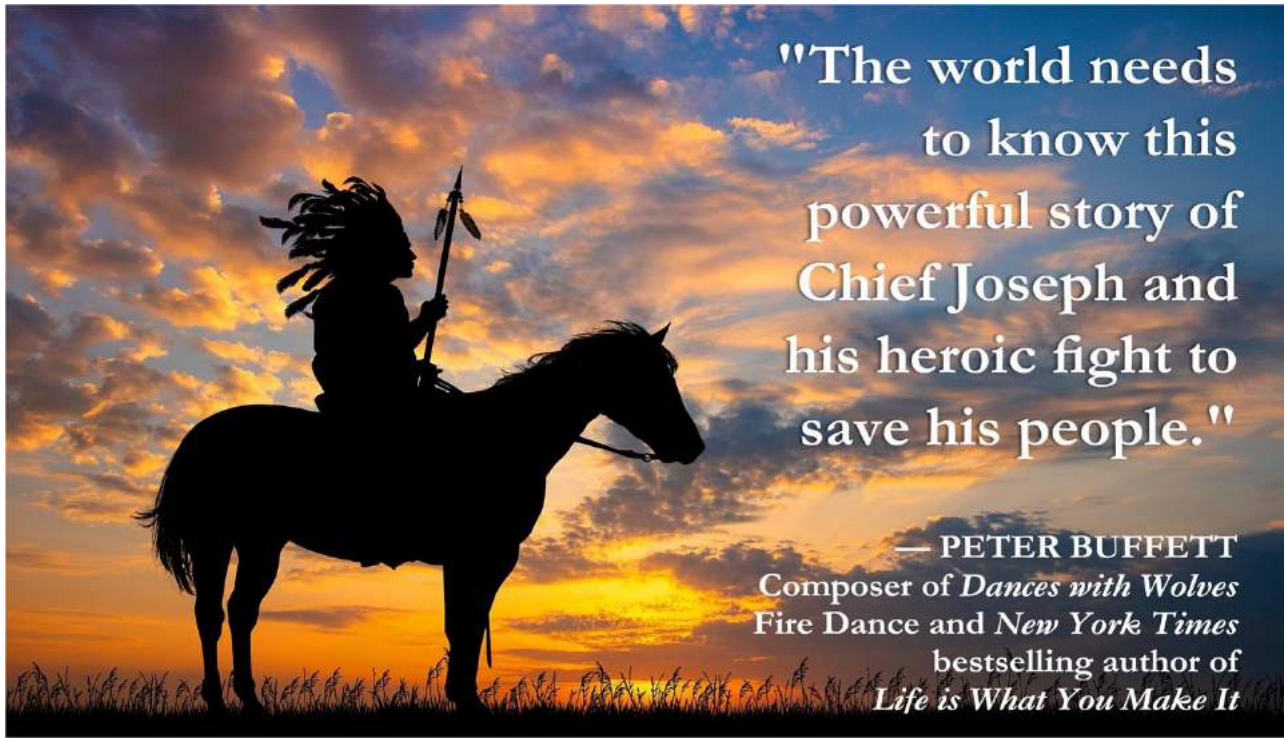


"Fluent and raw! An old west story laid bare in graceful, poignant and blindingly honest language. Deborah Hufford is an author to watch!"

-DIANNA RODSTAD, *USA Today* Bestselling and Award-winning Author of *You Belong Here Now*

*USA Today* bestselling author of the powerful novel, *You Belong Here Now*, Dianna Rodstad, called the writing in *Blood to Rubies* "blindingly honest" and "raw." In fact, two reviewers—independent of each other—have described *Blood to Rubies* writing style as "honest" and "raw." Why do you think that is?

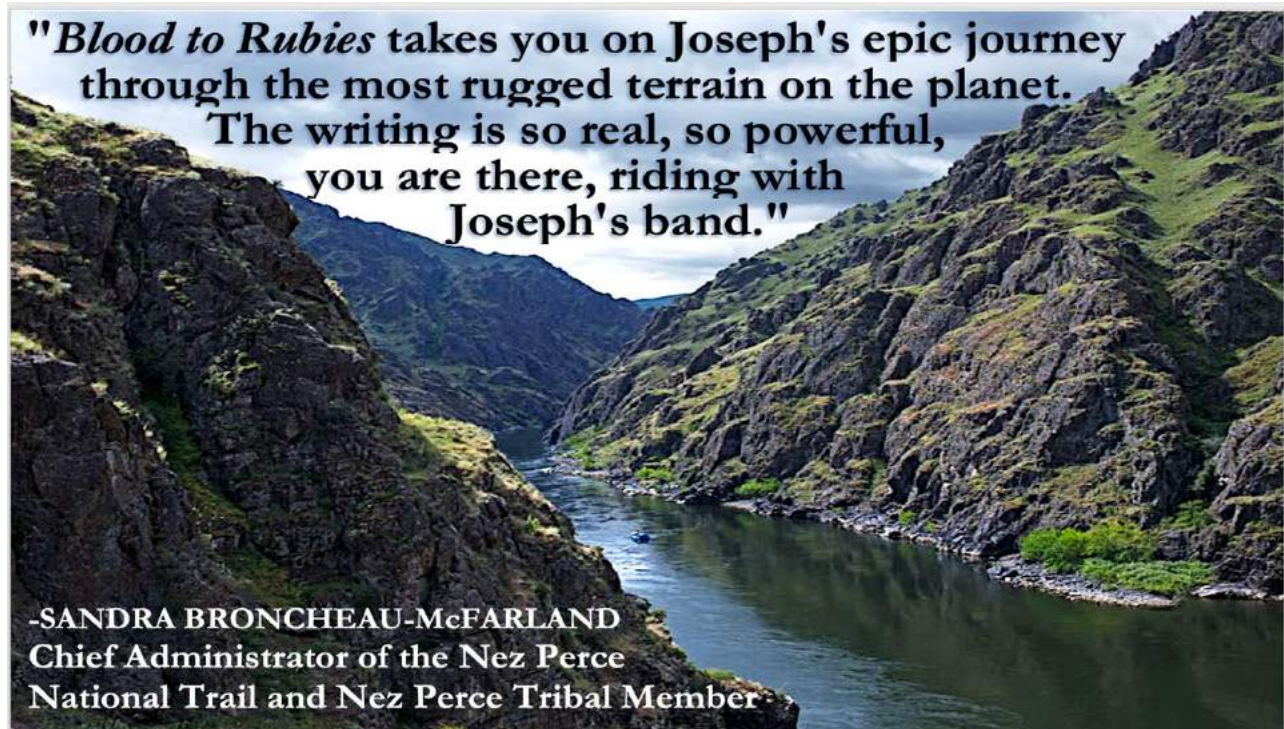




"The world needs to know this powerful story of Chief Joseph and his heroic fight to save his people."

— PETER BUFFETT  
Composer of *Dances with Wolves*  
*Fire Dance* and *New York Times*  
bestselling author of  
*Life is What You Make It*

Peter Buffett, the famous composer of *Dances with Wolves* and *500 Nations*, calls *Blood to Rubies* a "powerful story" that "the world needs to know." The founding South Dakota Film Commissioner, Gary Keller, who also scouted for both of Kevin Costner's productions, sees striking parallels between *Dances with Wolves* and *Blood to Rubies*. Do you see similarities?



**"*Blood to Rubies* takes you on Joseph's epic journey through the most rugged terrain on the planet. The writing is so real, so powerful, you are there, riding with Joseph's band."**

-SANDRA BRONCHEAU-McFARLAND  
Chief Administrator of the Nez Perce  
National Trail and Nez Perce Tribal Member

Chief Joseph's excruciating exodus and the legacy he left behind are legend among the Nez Perce and many history lovers. Did *Blood to Rubies* give you a clearer understanding of the clash between Native and white?





## Enhance Your Book Club Experience!

Book clubs have long been creative in making their gatherings unique, sometimes echoing the themes, costumes, characters, or food featured in the book they are discussing. Here are just a few ideas your group can try:

- 1. INVESTIGATE WHO THE ORIGINAL INDIGENOUS INHABITANTS OF YOUR LOCALE WERE** There is a movement across the North and South American continents to recognize the original indigenous inhabitants of the land we live on today. Some municipalities, companies, schools, and universities are acknowledging the original inhabitants of the land they occupy today. With a little help from your local historical society or librarians, you can discover who the original inhabitants were of your locale or neighborhood. Do independent research and discuss your findings with your group. You may be surprised by what you discover, as I was to learn my daughter's elementary school was built on land that was once a central council and powwow grounds for the Potawatomi Indians!

2. **CHOOSE YOUR FAVORITE WARRIOR WOMAN!**

*Blood to Rubies* in part is about a young Nez Perce woman who becomes a warrior to help save her people. For the *Blood to Rubies* discussion session, each book club member can choose a little-known historical female character or story to share briefly with the group as a way of celebrating female bravery and women warriors, so often overlooked by historians. (See my blog post, *Warrior Women Rise from the Ashes of History*, at [www.NotesfromtheFrontier.com](http://www.NotesfromtheFrontier.com) for some ideas.)

3. **CRAFT A SPIRIT STICK TO SHARE WITH YOUR BOOK CLUB**

*Blood to Rubies* mentions the exquisite beading of the Nez Perce and their beaded umbilical pouches created for their infants. Like many Native tribes, the Nez Perce decorated items to be used as talismans or to conjure strength and seek spiritual guidance. "Spirit sticks" were and are used in Native and Nez Perce cultures as talking sticks to aid in council, walking sticks to find the way, medicine sticks for healing, prayer sticks for spiritual guidance, water sticks to find spring water, shaman sticks, and as markers for sacred places. They petition the spirit world, make offerings, allay bad spirits, request strength, bring peace.

Book club members can try their hands at creating their own spirit sticks, then share them with the group. Explain why you used the materials you did and what significance they have to you personally. Your spirit sticks can also double as decorative book markers! See below for ideas and the Nez Perce spirit stick I was inspired to make for my dear friends who helped me on my writing journey.

## About Spirit Sticks

In the 1960s, during the Pan-Indian Movement, dreamcatchers became extremely popular. Other young people across the continent who were seeking their own spiritual awakening often looked to Native cultures in their quest. And they adopted dreamcatchers as well.

Today, spirit sticks are gaining popularity among non-Natives and teachers who incorporate a craft project for their children to teach them about Native American spiritualism. On the next page are examples of spirit sticks made by children that are wonderful.





Spirit sticks can be made of any materials—beads, buttons, shells, yarn, paints, old jewelry, findings. Often materials are chosen for their spiritual or experiential meaning and are very personal. See below a spirit stick design I created as a bookmark and to give to my dear friends and literary colleagues who have helped me on my writing journey. I used materials meaningful in the Nez Perce culture and included a piece of parchment on which I explain the symbolism behind the materials I used.





## *About This Handmade Spirit Stick/Bookmark*

I fashioned these spirit sticks as humble gifts for dear friends and writing colleagues who were gracious enough to help me on my writing journey to publish *Blood to Rubies*. To make them, I chose natural materials that had special cultural meaning among the Nez Perce.

**DOGWOOD** Spirit sticks are usually made of wood chosen for its spiritual qualities. This stick is dogwood from my own backwoods in Wisconsin near the shores of Lake Michigan. Dogwood is used by the Nez Perce to show respect, provide spiritual protection, and to promote peace and kinship.

**LEATHER** Leather was integral in Native life. The cow leather I am using is definitely NOT culturally correct! It's made from an old sofa we retired after our two huge English Setter rescues wore it out. (The sofa was too large to fit out the door, so my husband chain sawed it down to size, accidentally shortening my drapes!) I couldn't bear to waste the sofa back's pristine leather and saved it. Who knew I would someday be making bookmarks for my author friends to celebrate the publication of my debut novel!

**SWEETGRASS** Sweetgrass is considered sacred in the Nez Perce culture, known as "Mother Earth's Hair." It has deep spiritual, medicinal, and ceremonial properties and is used in smudge pots, in purifying and healing ceremonies, chewed in talking circles to aid honesty, or as a talisman to ward off evil or negative spirits. Sweetgrass is often braided to signify body, mind and soul. (I was so inspired by *Braiding Sweetgrass*, by Potawatomi author, Robin Kimmerer.) I attached a sweetgrass smudge stick that can be burned to enjoy its calming aroma. Or keep it on the spirit stick and enjoy its glorious natural balm.

**FEATHERS** Feathers are considered gifts from the heavens, bridging earth and sky of the Great Creator. They bring with them the power and virtue of the creatures from whence they came and a connectedness to the earth.

**SHELLS** The Nez Perce lived in the rich Northwest Columbian plateau that emptied into the Pacific. Shells were favored Nez Perce ornamentation. The most famous Chief Joseph portrait, by Edward Curtis (one of 70 archival images in *Blood to Rubies*) shows Joseph with large shell earrings.

**BEADS** Nez Perce women and some two-spirit men were known for exquisite beaded tribal designs. They used natural materials originally, then seed beads and pony beads traded with white fur traders.

**PAINTED SPOTS ON STICK** The spots on the dogwood stick signify the pride of the Nez Perce, their Appaloosa horses.

*I hope you use this spirit stick bookmark and the sweetgrass smudge in peace and good health. Your help was so precious to me on my writing journey. Now, with a new kidney, a publisher and the help of so many generous folks like you, I can realize my life dream. Thank you again.*

*Deborah*

# Examples of Genuine Native American Spirit Sticks

(Including Talking Sticks, Prayer Sticks, Dance Sticks, Medicine Sticks, others)



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# Q & A with Author Deborah Hufford



**Q: What inspired you to write *Blood to Rubies*?**

A: I grew up as an Iowa farm girl with lots of critters, loving the land and Nature. My childhood horse, Sundance, was my world. I rode him bareback on Iowa country roads and in the river valleys, exploring old stagecoach traces, pioneer graveyards, abandoned mines, buffalo wallows. Because I loved horses I knew about Appaloosas. One of my favorite places to ride was a winding

country road that spilled into a vast river valley. Across the expanse on the sweeping hills, a band of Appaloosas grazed, led by a spirited leopard stallion. Even though I was in Iowa, not Idaho, my child's imagination was not limited by geography. The horses, I imagined, belonged to Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce. That was the seed of my future novel.

**Q: What is your writing process?**

A: I remember the first sentence I wrote of my novel, although at the time, I didn't know what it would become. I wrote first in vignettes—character sketches, scenes. landscapes. As with many writers, characters began to take shape and, miraculous as it sounds, they began to write themselves. It truly felt as if I was channeling a muse. Dynamics between vaguely sketched characters began to crop up. I knew I wanted to write about Chief Joseph and his struggle, about Appaloosas, about the frontier and the land. So, to sum it up, I didn't have a process. Haha!



I sort of backed into it. I will say that I had a strange avoidance regarding writing fiction. I attended grad school at the University of Iowa and taught Writer's Workshop students at the Center for the Book letterpress printing and designed and hand-printed Writer's Workshop posters. I was exposed to the greatest authors in the world and read many of them. But it was such a rarefied world, writing fiction was like Shangri-la, beyond me. I became a career magazine writer, editor and publisher with very good credits. But I didn't have the courage to try fiction. Then, when I had my daughter and was diagnosed with kidney failure, I began writing snippets. Nothing like the threat of mortality to force you toward your dreams!

**Q: Your writing journey has been a very long, hard struggle, especially with kidney failure and a resulting heart attack? What kept you going?**

A: With kidney disease hanging over me like the Sword of Damocles, I didn't know how much time I had. I felt an urgency to start writing. I wrote haphazardly at first, letting my muse inspire me toward a vague goal, writing characters and scenes within the most barebones plotlines.

I remember the day I realized I had accumulated 100 pages of writing, disjointed as they were. That was at least a third of a novel! That's when I began writing in earnest, organizing my writing, plotting out the story, researching dates, events.

At one point I laid out hundreds of pieces of paper on the living room floor, piecing together a sequence and double checking dates for historical accuracy. I think historical fiction is one of the most challenging genres, so much research and diligence is required to braid historical accuracy with fictional and real characters, and a narrative woven within a framework of both fact and fancy. I did nearly two decades of research and writing.

Then about two years ago, my kidney disease degraded to end-stage kidney failure. I was put on a donor list. Four family members volunteered to donate and did testing but all were rejected. At that point, I was worried that I wouldn't make it. So many people die of kidney failure before they find a donor.

I made my husband and daughter promise me that if I didn't make it, they would still try to get my novel published. Then, last October, my husband was finally approved, after making a Herculean effort for nearly a year, changing his lifestyle and diet to lower his blood pressure. The very same day my husband was approved as my kidney donor, I also found a publisher. Miracles do happen!





**Q: Why did you choose to include archival images in your novel?**

A: My research was exhaustive and many of the books I purchased or checked out at the library had so many wonderful archival images. Those images became an organic part of the story for me and made the nonfiction books and the facts I researched come alive. Today, using images in fiction is unheard of. Extremely rare. But I began to question why that should be, especially for historical fiction, when there is a wealth of images from at least the last two centuries.

Also, my main character was a frontier photographer who goes West to escape the Civil War draft and finds himself in the middle of another conflict—the Nez Perce War of 1877, the nation's last Indian war. I had looked at so many stunning photographs by frontier photographers, from William Henry Jackson to Edward Curtis to Timothy Sullivan to Ansel Adams. Chief Joseph, who plays a major role in my book, was one of the most photographed Native Americans in our history. His integrity and dignity just emanate from the page and go straight to your heart. I wanted readers to be affected by the images as part of the story as I had, to absorb their power.

I also hope that the images in my novel might attract new readers to the historical fiction genre. Each of my 65 chapters features a poignant or striking black and white image as a chapter header that is illustrative of that chapter's narrative. For those who have never considered reading fiction, maybe the photographs will serve as accessible and interesting entrée points to the writing? I'm anxious to hear from readers, to see if they are as inspired by the images as I am. And if the images enhance their reading experience? 🙋🏻🙋🏻



FIVE

WESTERING MUSE



FREDERICK WAS BORN in St. Joseph, Missouri, the westernmost supply point for the Oregon Trail. While the frontier town of St. Louis was dubbed "the gateway to the



TEN

MOTHERLESS CHILD



SEAMUS AND SORREL Lanning had become father and daughter by fate, not birth. Sorrel's true parents, Patrick and Bridget Cleary, were Irish immigrants from Donegal.



FIFTY THREE

A GOOD DAY TO DIE

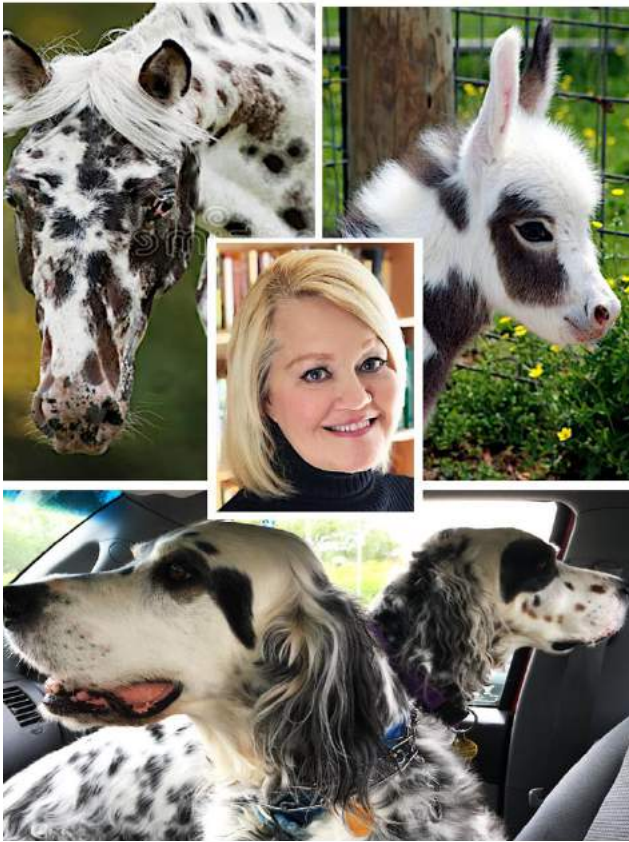


WHEN LOOKING GLASS and other chiefs joined Joseph, the Nez Perce had five consolidated bands numbering about 750 people, including 200 warriors, and 3,000 horses. They headed east to the ancient Lolo Trail through the mountains,

**Read more about my images in my article for *Historical Times Magazine*, at: [www.DeborahHufford.com/IntheNews/HistoricalTimesMagazine](http://www.DeborahHufford.com/IntheNews/HistoricalTimesMagazine)**

**Q: Blood to Rubies includes many animals as minor characters? Why?**

A: I love animals is the short answer! And I think most historical fiction readers love animals, too. I grew up an Iowa farm girl with all kinds of critters and was always bringing home injured wildlife. I've always had horses, dogs and cats.



Now, I live out in the country near the shores of Lake Michigan, where we have so much wildlife. I feed our resident crows, wild turkeys, deer and their fawns, squirrels, chipmunks, rabbits, mink, raccoons, fox, turtles, snakes, coyotes, bobcats, opossums and many, many types of birds. We have a frog pond and an ancient back woods that has old-growth oak that were never cut down by the pioneers. So much wildlife resides there.

We live on a road that was once a major Native American path along the shores of Lake Michigan. We've found arrowheads in our back woods. Within a quarter of a mile of our home are three log-and-stone pioneer cabins and stone fences that date back to the 1850s. I'm

immersed in Nature and wildlife and pioneer and Native American history and the spirits of those who tread on the land long before me.

All my animal characters just trotted into my story and stayed. Wildlife and pets were so much a part of Native and pioneer life on the frontier, I had to include them. They are essential to the story.

I owe a lot to the animals in my life, especially my childhood horse, Sundance. While I was writing *Blood to Rubies*, my dogs and cats were always with me, sleeping at my feet or on them. They are a part of me.



**The top image is of my two rescue English setters, Howie and Reggie. The gorgeous Appaloosa and darling donkey foal are not mine, but I wish they were. I hope someday—if I sale enough books — to have a spotted donkey and another dream horse, a leopard Appaloosa-Arab mix I will ride on the Chief Joseph Trail Ride. At right is my "dogged" editor, Reggie, pointing out a typo in *Blood to Rubies*.**

## Q: What advice do you have for aspiring writers?

A: Don't be afraid. And don't wait to start. You never know how much time you have on this earth.

If it intimidates you, start with snippets and vignettes like I did. And don't be intimidated by all the books and blogs and podcasts and writing groups that tell you how to write, or worse yet, how to write a *best-selling* novel! There is so much noise out there, you can get lost in the cacophony. Not to say there aren't good writing books and coaches and blogs out there. But the amount of advice can be overwhelming. The most important thing is to start. Put words on a page.

Another caveat about writing: if you want to write a book because the notion is romantic to you or you think it's a way to fame and immortality (or— god forbid!—*fortune*), just forget it. Write because you love it. No other reason.

Since Hemingway and Fitzgerald and Harper Lee and Willa Cather, Americans especially have fantasized about writing the Great American Novel. It's in the American zeitgeist. And many people think it's such a romantic idea. Newsflash! Gone are the days of sending a manuscript off to your editor & publisher, sitting back with your feet on the desk, smoking a cigar and sipping a bourbon, waiting for the world to shower you with literary accolades.

Today, over two million books are published a year. And, according to many reputable sources, more than 90% of those titles never sell more than 100 copies. (In fact, recently a Penguin Random House/S&S antitrust trial revealed that out of their 58,000 trade books published a year, half sell less than a dozen 🙄) Add to that the fact that book publishing today is in such turmoil, the majority of books never find a literary agent or a publisher. If you are lucky enough to find either and do complete a book, don't think the hardest part is over. Not by a long shot. I have been gob smacked by how much work marketing a book is. And, from what I've observed, the bigger the author, the harder they work!

But there's good news for aspiring authors today too. There are many types of publishers sprouting up today: university presses, small and medium-size independent publishers, hybrid publishers, specialty and trade publishers, and self-publishing. They provide all sorts of options for getting your book published.

But I always go back to the reason you write. Write because you love it. And don't let the noise of others and the outside world make you cower. Then the hours, years, life you spend writing will be worth it. As Shakespeare wrote:

*"Our doubts are traitors and make us lose the good we oft might win,  
by fearing to attempt."*