

FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS OF
Green Valley

JULY 2021



Storyteller



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By Corrine Casanova | Photos by Mikel Conrad



The life of a storyteller can be intriguing. I'll let you in on a secret: there's a storyteller in our midst. Meet your neighbor, Jeannie Neill (pen name JD Neill). I love her storytelling ways. She shared with me the following: she hated the cold in England—the country of her birth. After a holiday in the sunshine, she spent two years in Italy and traveled on to teach English in the Middle East. There, she found a vibrant lifestyle, with no indication the country was on the brink of civil war.

That's when she was held captive in Beirut, Lebanon, where she feared for her life. As a captive, her sense of normality and sanity came through keeping a diary. The written word was an escape and would become her future as a successful Indie author. Fleeing the civil war, like many before her, she discovered America, the land of her dreams. There, she contributed occasional articles for a west coast magazine, produced some theatre before a spell back in Europe to package, and promote films. A friend suggested she reinvent one of her spec scripts, and after a lengthy gestation, in 2019, her first novel *Disintegration* was born. *Chameleon*, *Unraveling*, and *Loophole* followed in 2020. *The Shattering Effect*, *Downfall*, *The Jailbird's Daughter—A Memoir*, and *The Captive* were all written in 2021. And she's not stopping there. She's working on her next book, which is a

collection of short stories.

Being hidden away during the pandemic, writing has once again proved to be a salvation. Fortunately, the ideas continue to present themselves, percolate, and refuse to leave, until they are given life—on paper.

Jeannie and her Australian husband, Tom, moved to Green Valley when her son, Stephen, and his wife, Chelyn, had their first child. They lived in the Las Vegas area, and she couldn't imagine living that far away from her son and his family, which has now grown to include two grandchildren, Sterling and Sawyer. They moved across oceans to be near them.

And she's getting noticed from fans across the globe, including the United States, England, France, Italy, and even Japan. But, there's a big local angle; she wrote all the books while living in Nevada. Considering over 80 percent of people that want to write a book never do, I was curious what prompted her to write at such a furious pace. The pandemic provided her an opportunity for doing so. And yes, she's a natural storyteller.

She explained how living in Beirut, Lebanon was the most marvelous experience up until the war. And when the war came, they became trapped in their home and held for three months. The electricity was turned off,



and then they turned off the water. Ultimately, it ended her marriage to her first husband. She explained, "I mean, we were essentially trapped and bitter. We were at each other's throats. I coped by writing in my diary as I wanted to remember forever what was happening. I kept this diary for decades and attempted to turn it into a movie script. I worked on it, but it just sat there. And then a friend said to me at the beginning of COVID, why didn't you turn it into a novel? And I thought, you know, I could try that. So, my first book was born.

Nevertheless, writing a novel is very different from writing a script. There was a lot of work involved. I spend about eight hours a day writing. I wake up, make myself a cup of tea, go back to bed and start writing. About 11 am my husband, Tom, and I go for a swim when it's good weather. Then, we have a late breakfast, and I go back to writing until we break for dinner. If I haven't done enough, I write some more. With a career path as an Indie author, I'm involved in every aspect of publishing, including hiring an editor, book cover designer, interior designer, and marketing my book. Sometimes I wonder why I choose to do this, but when people tell me they enjoy the stories, it feels fabulous. In novel writing, authors are often referred to as pantsters or plotters. Pantsters fly by the seat of their pants when writing while plotters create an elaborate outline of their book. When I write, I let my characters take over because, although I have an idea of the story, I never know where it will end up. Sometimes, it goes in a completely different direction than I had imagined. It is almost a mystical process."

To learn more about Jeannie and discover her latest books, visit her website at jdneillbooks.com or visit Amazon.com. You may also find her at a book signing at one of your favorite local bookstores.



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