1. Cam Scott was an officer in the army. Why did you choose that as the career for your hero, and how did that make him unique?

I have a brother-in-law who was in the navy. He was a drill sergeant and could snap out orders with the best of them. I’ve heard him talk about shipping out for long stretches and leaving his wife and three children behind. This is a really common fact of life for military deployments. Then my brother-in-law said, he’d come home and immediately “take charge” of the family.

Well, they didn’t really need him to take charge. His wife had been alone and in charge for months. He even knew he was doing it, and yet he had a difficult time not being a drill sergeant at home. They went to counseling to get through it and developed a routine to get used to him being home. It seemed to work. But being in charge of people to the extent a military officer is, isn’t something that’s easy to set aside. I enjoyed exploring how a soldier might struggle to become a civilian.

2. Gwen Harkness found herself in the mother role for two orphaned children, but fears having to give them up. What made you decide to write about this part of the plot?

I knew a foster mother. She had children come and go, and some stay for years, some end up being adopted. I saw her struggle to understand that her part in those children’s lives is to care for them with the goal of usually reuniting them with their parents. This was almost impossible for her. She, in fact, finally quit being a foster mother because she’d fall so in love with the kids that came into her care. It’s a hard thing to keep your heart open and bring a child into your life, and yet not let it tear you apart when you have to let the child go. That’s something that I knew I wanted to include in this story.

3. Unlike the first book in the series, a big chunk of The Reluctant Warrior is strictly inside a bunkhouse. How do you make a book adventurous if you can’t go anywhere?

I knew what I wanted to do with The Reluctant Warrior. I felt like I had to trap Cam Scott in a tight place with his children for them to ever get along.

And the challenge was daunting. I literally buried Cam, Gwen, and the children (and everyone else) under a snow drift. I even burned down the only other place they could live. I broadened the earlier part of the book by following the bad guy and a second big bad guy around, so we weren’t always trapped inside. I tried, within my little bunkhouse, to clear out the crowd by sending all the men outside to do chores . . . and by having my “adventure” be the relationship with the children and with Cam and Gwen. There are lots of sweet, poignant, and funny little moments in the book that are as entertaining as the galloping, roping, and riding shootouts I usually have. And in the end, I have the running and screaming and shooting enough, I hope, to satisfy everyone.
4. Do the snow drifts really get as deep as you portrayed around Lake Tahoe in the winter?

Well, there are ski slopes all over. And I checked the depth of snow online. They said last winter’s snow depth was twenty feet. That’d bury a cabin, not even counting blowing and drifting. So I decided I had the seriousness of the winter weather pegged about right.

5. How did you pick such a remote area to set a book?

I started with Lake Tahoe. I wanted that beautiful lake in one of my books. But the more I read about the area the more fascinated I was. The Comstock Lode silver rush in Virginia City? The Donner Party? The California Trail that was torn out of the wilderness in the gold rush to California? I had so many ideas for stories by the time I got done with basic research that I couldn’t wait to get started writing!