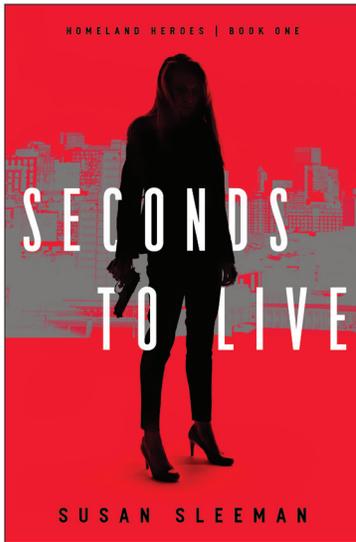




QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH SUSAN SLEEMAN



Seconds to Live

HOMELAND HEROES #1
by Susan Sleeman

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1. Would you tell us about *Seconds to Live* and where the idea for this story and the HOMELAND HEROES series came from?

I have written over forty books and have come up with the idea for each one on my own, but *Seconds to Live* broke that mold. I was in discussion with my agent and a fabulous Bethany House editor about a potential romantic suspense series I was proposing to write, and the editor wasn't thrilled with my idea. So he offered one of his own: What if a hacker compromises the WITSEC (Witness Security Program) database and starts selling or auctioning off the data, putting witnesses' lives in danger?

Wow! I began researching and discovered that when the clock is ticking on criminal activity conducted on or facilitated by the internet, there is no team to call other than HSI—Homeland Security Investigations unit. This state-of-the-art center offers cybercrime support and training to federal, state, local, and international law-enforcement agencies.

With a group so talented and interesting, I knew I could create a romantic suspense series featuring men and women working behind the scenes to keep our country safe from internet threats—men and women who don't make the news but who I consider heroes. And from that, the HOMELAND HEROES series was born.

2. Can you share why you chose to write a series like HOMELAND HEROES, which features law enforcement and military professionals?

First, I have tremendous respect for the men and women in law enforcement and those who serve in our military. Day after day. Hour after hour. Second after second. These men and women are prepared to pay the ultimate price. To lose their lives for innocent people. I am able to live my life—to go through my day—always knowing that if a crisis arises, they are there for me.

And my second reason for writing about law enforcement is that I am fascinated with forensics and love reading about and researching the latest in forensic technology. And equally fascinated with tools and procedures that law enforcement and the military use to maintain law and order and also provide the evidence needed to bring criminals to justice. So writing police procedurals is a direct offshoot from my interest.

I have attended two local police citizen academies and also am blessed to have been selected to attend the elite FBI Citizen Academy, where night after night for weeks I not only learned about FBI procedures, but also received a firsthand understanding of the generous hearts of law-enforcement professionals. And as a bonus, I was able to go along on a police ride for a full shift, and even got to go to the FBI's firing range and shoot rifles and handguns with agents, plus blow up bombs with the bomb squad. I even got to push the plunger and detonate one of the explosions. Talk about an exciting and memorable day!

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3. What one thing would you like readers to take away from reading *Seconds to Live*?

I write to share God's Word in such a way that when readers see the characters struggle with their faith walk in the story, they will stop and look at their own struggles. Then discovering the way the characters overcome their issues will resonate with the readers.

I often share what I am going through at the time. Not intentionally, but it works its way into the plot, and not until I set aside the rough draft of the book and then come back weeks later to begin edits do I see how I have incorporated my issues.

I've been faced with some difficult health issues of late and wondering where God is in all of the pain and difficulties. And I have learned that trusting God, even when all seems lost, is the only way I can survive. And not only survive, but thrive. Sean and Taylor have to learn the same thing in *Seconds to Live*.

Sean succinctly declares their struggle in this quote when he talks to Taylor: "We have the same problem, you and I. We can't trust ourselves, because we can't trust others or God. We spout the words. Go through the motions. But actually trusting? Nah, we don't succeed."

4. What's next in the HOMELAND HEROES series?

Book 2, *Minutes to Die*, releasing in August 2020, features a very scary plot. Not only because millions of people could die if the RED team fails, but because the plot is based on something that actually does happen in the real world.

In *Minutes to Die*, terrorists are smuggled into the country in a shipping container to unleash a plot putting millions of lives in danger. The RED team must figure out the terrorists' target and stop them as the clock counts down to the anniversary of 9/11. The targets the team consider in the story are very real targets in today's world, and terrorists are actually smuggled into the country in shipping containers. Also, we like to think that our computer-controlled infrastructure is safe, but is it really? *Minutes to Die* provides a thrilling read while at the same time sheds light on this danger.