



Jane Charmelo

out & about

Author touches on human trafficking through fictional novel

As a domestic abuse advocate, Julie Bonn Blank has heard her share of stories from survivors, and she has used her own experience to help these women deal with their trauma.

Unfortunately, she says, some of those stories also involve human trafficking, and she has authored a book series titled “Guardians of Grace” that deals with that topic, but in way that a mature 14-year-old can handle the fictional story lines.

Bonn Blank, a former Lombard and Glen Ellyn resident, is a domestic abuse survivor herself, so she brings with her a perspective that is infused into the recently released “Innocent Lives,” which tells the story of best friends Cienna and Jasmine, who become victims of human trafficking.

Bonn Blank noted she has been writing since childhood, having published two books, as well as stories and articles for anthology books, magazines and newspapers.

“Although I never took a break from writing, I did take a break from publishing,” Bonn Blank related, and spent time working on her own healing from the trauma of domestic abuse.

She went to work for a non-profit organization in Oregon, where she now lives, as the women’s services director, and worked directly with victims.

Besides working as a practice manager for a veterinary clinic, the author still works part-time for ARMS/Abuse Recovery Ministry Services, where she does marketing and social media, along with leading “the same recovery groups that brought so much healing to me.”

In “Innocent Lives,” Cienna and Jasmine are kidnapped while on a getaway with their families, and end up being thrust into two different situations. Cienna is being held by a man named Mike, whereas Jasmine is being held with other young girls, in what could be considered a house of horrors.

The book takes readers through the minds of what Cienna and Jasmine are experiencing—Bonn Blank said her intention was to describe their situations “with modesty.” In other words, she does not relate their traumatic experiences in graphic detail.

Rather, she continued, the focus is more about “the characters’ reaction to what is going on,” and their thought processes in terms of hatch-



Julie Bonn Blank

ing their respective escape plans.

Cienna, being held by Mike, sees him not just a captor but as somewhat of a savior, who stops another man from abusing her. However, she later learns more about the man, who, at one point takes her from confinement in a barn to living in his house.

Bonn Blank describes her character as assertive, rebellious and persistent, as Cienna patiently plots to escape her captor.

Jasmine, on the other hand, is timid, lacks confidence and is unable to speak for herself, and creates another personality named Bay to cope with her captivity. She also becomes addicted to the drugs being given to her.

Jasmine had come to depend on another girl, Rose, to help her cope with the trauma. However, when Rose is no longer in the picture, she is on her own.

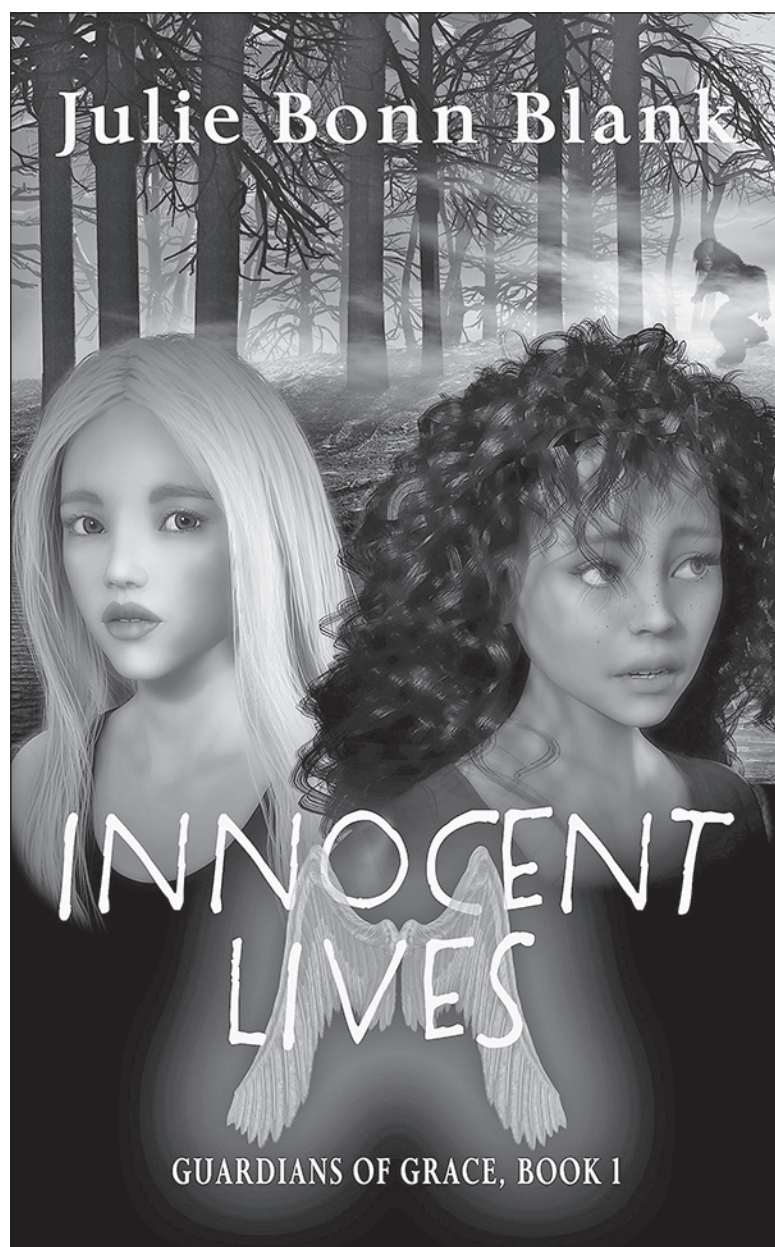
“Innocent Lives” details, too, what the girls’ parents and siblings are going through, along with the police investigation into their disappearance.

Without giving anything away, the girls are rescued, but their lives will take very different paths.

Bonn Blank said she had a story in her head and would start writing the book, then put it on pause.

“It’s been in process,” she continued, saying that it took several years to finish the book. She challenged herself to finish it after participating in NaNoWriMo, which, according to Bonn Blank, “encourages participants to write a novel during the month of November each year.”

The author said that while living in Illinois, she knew about human trafficking, but “Once upon a time



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JULIE BONN BLANK Lombardian

Former Lombard resident Julie Bonn Blank published a book, “Innocent Lives,” that touches on the subject of human trafficking. It is written in a fashion where the focus is on the thoughts and emotions of two adolescent girls who get kidnapped, and the dialogue is suitable for mature ages 14 and up. The author is trying to raise awareness that human trafficking exists within the United States.

I thought human trafficking only happened in foreign countries.”

However, she learned otherwise, discovering that Chicago is a hub for the trafficking of humans.

Bonn Blank also said that after reading a news account of a woman who was trafficking her children, “It became heavy on my heart to continue writing and to help spread the word using the talent that God gave me for writing.”

“I just want people to know. To know is to educate,” she emphasized, adding, “It’s spurring some people to action.”

Reading “Innocent Lives,” Bonn Blank believes, “might just be a ripple in the pond ... then again it might be exactly what one person needs to step out and make an impact.”

Two characters in her book are also the subject of two other books, “Penny” and “Rose,” the author said, and other books in the “Guardians of Grace” series are forthcoming.

“Innocent Lives” can be found through your favorite bookseller or visit juliebonnblank.com for more information.

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