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Un-caution-ary Tales

Quit Nursing to Write Science Fiction Novel

Deborah Jackson [44]

NOVELIST

Orleans, Ont.

LIFE BEFORE THE LEAP For 15 years, Deborah Jackson had a routine: three or four shifts a week as a nurse at the Civic Campus of the Ottawa Hospital, with the rest of her time devoted to caring for her family – husband Brian, a computer analyst, and their daughter and son. She worked in thoracic surgery for 10 years before switching to the hospital's dialysis unit. The shifts were fast-paced and stressful, but she loved the camaraderie with her colleagues, while the nature of her work let her really get to know her patients – what books they'd read, their dreams and regrets. Their conversations made her realize she didn't want to retire after doing the same thing day in, day out, year after year. She wanted to do something totally different.

TREMBLING AT THE BRINK Admittedly, the prospect of giving up a steady job and income to become a writer – of science fiction! – was daunting. Jackson's parents were horrified: *How could she?* They loved that she was a nurse, such a noble and useful calling. Still, Jackson's husband and children believed she had talent and they backed up that belief by supporting her every way they could think of.

LIFTOFF! On the brink of her 40th birthday, Jackson took the plunge, starting to research and write what would become *Ice Tomb*. Set in 2015, it begins with the discovery of a hot spot under the Antarctic ice where there shouldn't be one, some very old dead bodies and the disappearance of a scientific team that had been sent to investigate.

But, as Jackson quickly learned, "writing wasn't the only challenge." She had to read up on quantum physics so her prose would sound authentic. She had to find a publisher – a tiny firm in Virginia called Invisible College Press that specializes in subjects such as UFOs and conspiracy theories. And she had to do all the marketing and publicity herself.

Ice Tomb was published in September 2004. It didn't shoot up the bestseller lists but that's not why Jackson wrote it. She did it because she felt she had to, and that sense of accomplishment is the best reason of all.

THE VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDE Since then, Jackson has settled into writing full-time, producing a children's book called *Time Meddlers*, about time-travelling kids searching for a missing father. Right now, she's working on three other books, and she

does a lot of public speaking in schools about fiction writing. One of her main messages to students is that it's important to follow your heart. "It's like, you make decisions when you're young but they might not be the right ones," she tells them. "Sure, there have been ups and downs since I quit nursing. There are critics who hate your book, while writing can be lonely, sitting in your office all by yourself with a computer screen in front of you."

"Authors don't make very much money," she continues, "but that's not the point, is it? And it's a great boost hearing from fans, who tell me they learned something."

--Lisa Fitterman
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