

1. Why did you choose to write about Pete Seibert?

I didn't grow up near mountains but I love to ski. The first time I strapped on skis was at a childhood friend's house and I careened down a hill in her backyard in Cincinnati. Later I took ski lessons in Michigan. When our daughter Cate settled in Denver, I knew I wanted to write a book with skiing in it - plus drama and adventure. During trips to Colorado, I learned about the 10th Mountain Division. I switched gears and decided to write about the 10th at Camp Hale and in Italy. But how to draw the reader into a time long ago and far away? When I ran across Pete's autobiography and read about his New England roots and founding Vail, I said *Bingo - that's it. There's my ordinary kid who later serves in the 10th. I can tell the story of the 10th Mountain Division through the life of this one remarkable person.* I loved Pete's perseverance in realizing his dream. I loved that he was one of the Greatest Generation, like my dad - growing up during the Depression, serving his country, and then moving ahead into a bright future in peacetime. And by writing about Pete Seibert, I could experience his ski racing, training at Camp Hale, climbing Riva Ridge, etc. via my imagination.

2. Six of your books, including SKI SOLDIER, are about World War II. Why are you drawn to this time period?

I was born after World War II. But my father and many of the dads of my friends had served in the war. One was a pilot who was shot down and was a POW, one was a tank commander, one was a medic, one landed on Omaha Beach,

etc. As a kid, I was totally unaware of this. These dads never discussed their wartime service or experiences. In college, as a history major, I wrote a research paper, *The European Response to Hitler: Resistance Movements in Holland, France, Denmark, and Germany*. I was fascinated by this time period. Since then, I've been a lifelong student of World War II. Some of my books are fictional and others are nonfiction. All come from my interest in portraying ordinary people who have resolve and courage in wartime situations. Pete Seibert was an ordinary kid who grew up to achieve something extraordinary. He's one of my heroes.

3. Did you go to Colorado or Italy as part of your research?

Yes. This book has been written over a decade. I made trips to the Denver Public Library to go through primary sources in the 10th Mountain Division archives. One September, I went to Florence, Italy with my husband and drove a few miles south to visit the Florence American Cemetery and Memorial. I wanted to find the grave of a 10th Mountain medic from Michigan, Roy Hanson, who'd served in the 85th regiment and who was killed in action. Roy doesn't appear in Pete's story but as I stood by his grave, surrounded by rows of white crosses, I thought about the American soldiers who hadn't returned home. I wanted to write this book for them as well as for myself. We also drove north into the mountains to Vidiciatico, explored the village, and had lunch with an innkeeper, Bruno Bartolome, who has close ties to the 10th. Notebook and camera in hand, I looked across a valley with

wonder. There was rugged Riva Ridge in the distance. The peaks were green at that time of year, not white, but I pictured them covered with ice and snow. I still have a sketch of a map that Bruno drew for me and there are now ski areas in the surrounding Apennines.

On one Colorado trip, I stayed near Vail and rode with friends in a jeep to Camp Hale and the surrounding area. The base was torn down in 1965 so I couldn't see actual buildings but there were plaques with historical information. The land now belongs to the U.S. Forestry Service. What do I look for on these research travels? Small details which I think will interest young readers. I carry those visual images in my head. I also take photographs, maps, and postcards back to my desk and try to find the right words to describe them. Frederick Forsyth, an English novelist who writes thrillers, once stated: "When it comes to locations, there's no substitute to going there to see for yourself." As a writer, setting is very important to me because it helps me bring young 21st century readers into the story.

Several times I had lunch with Morrie Shepard and his wife Suzie in Colorado. We also corresponded by phone and email. As Pete's childhood friend from Sharon, Massachusetts, Morrie was a rich source for details about Pete's early life. He even autographed my ski poles. When he passed away in the fall of 2017, I felt as if I'd lost a true friend.

4. Why are primary sources important for today's readers ?

I think primary sources put readers *there* - in that time. In *SKI SOLDIER*, kids can see what the attack order for Riva Ridge looked like. They can read words - as quotes - by people who were *there*. They can view an actual telegram - rather than just reading in the text that a telegram was sent. They can see drawings by a soldier, sketched in the midst of war. Some of the primary sources that I used were audio recordings - so I could *hear* Pete Seibert's voice and Percy Rideout's voice. That's thrilling for a researcher or for a "study-er" as a kindergarten student called me during a recent school visit. I love that word! I'm not a student of history but a study-er.

5. Why is learning about the 10th Mountain Division or Pete Seibert relevant for today?

Right now, 10th Mountain soldiers are on active duty and serve our country. They're on patrol in war zones around the world. Learning about the early 10th, and the intense training that those soldiers endured, is important for young readers whether they're skiers or not. This is part of our history as a nation. It's a chapter to celebrate and to be humbled by. Pete's personal story is relevant because of his determination in overcoming obstacles - recovering from horrific wounds and then moving ahead to reach a lifelong dream. I hope kids are inspired by his resilience and his passion for skiing. I hope that they, too, can overcome their own obstacles and find a passion for something in their own lives. Veterans of the 10th

Mountain served as pioneers in the modern ski industry. Their love of the outdoors led to innovation and a rich legacy. And always, I want young readers to experience the same “WOW!” that I did in learning about the 10th Mountain Division and Pete Seibert’s life story.