

With the release of her second novel, **Mackenzie's Secret**, author **S.A. Williams** starts a thrilling new chapter. *by* BILL DONAHUE



They say every man or woman has one good story to tell. Consider S.A. Williams an exception to the rule.

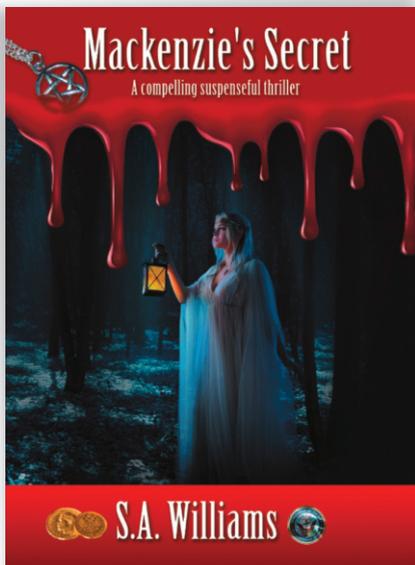
This month, Williams celebrates the release of her second book, a vividly written and exhaustively researched novel called *Mackenzie's Secret*. In each fast-moving chapter, Williams crosses continents and provides an imaginative perspective on crucial moments in world history. From covert military operations in Asia, to the budding romance between two young lovers, to the threat of global annihilation, *Mackenzie's Secret* takes readers on a page-turning ride with more than a few surprises.

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Published through a division of Simon & Schuster, *Mackenzie's Secret* is an able sequel to 2010's *Anna's Secret Legacy*, an ambitious novel that's equal parts World War II love story and suspenseful espionage thriller in the vein of John le Carré. While *Mackenzie's Secret* brings readers back into the lives of her fearless protagonists, Doug and Anna Conyers, the plot revolves around another key character—their strong-willed daughter, Mackenzie—a resourceful young woman who comes into her own at an all-girls boarding school in Paris in 1969, one of the most volatile years in U.S. history.

"It's a story about connections," says Williams, a world traveler who now lives in Blue Bell. "Women like the love story, and men are drawn to the espionage and military aspects of the story. Women account for 75 to 80 percent of all readers, but I'd say my readers are split fairly evenly among men and women."

Williams's first book explores the remarkable power of a mystical substance known as sulfur water that could play a pivotal role in the outcome of World War II. The story centers on Anna, the brilliant young research scientist at the Niels Bohr Institute in Copenhagen, who has discovered sulfur water's hidden potential: Its ability to restore damaged cells, thereby rendering the human



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enduring relationships between lovers, between parents and their children, and among friends both new and old.

Differences aside, *Mackenzie's Secret* shares a lot of its predecessor's DNA: surprising plot twists, memorable characters and plenty of action-packed sequences that keep the reader turning pages. At the novel's outset, Anna is presumed dead following a tragic boating accident, leaving her family to pick up the pieces and carry on with their lives. Mackenzie becomes obsessed with finding the secret formula Anna had hidden away in *Anna's Secret Legacy*—and she's hardly the only one intent on tracking it down.

Throughout the novel, Williams takes the reader to places most American eyes will never see—say, hidden passageways beneath a Parisian chateau, or the rain-soaked streets

body nearly indestructible. In the wrong hands, however, the serum's chemical makeup can be manipulated and used as a weapon capable of ending humanity. Anna finds herself pursued by nefarious forces loyal to Adolf Hitler, who is eager to weaponize the serum in his bid for world domination.

When she returned to the United States and entered the work force, she made a name for herself in the worlds of art and business. In the process, she made lasting connections with Hollywood titans, CEOs of multibillion-dollar corporations and even a few heads of state.

Even so, writing books was “never part of the plan” for Williams; instead, her writings were a natural byproduct of her desire to see her work brought to life on screen. So far, her screenplays have drawn the eyes of film producers and other content creators. She has gained encouragement from some key figures along the way, including the former head of the one of the country's largest media companies. She expects the release of the new novel to continue the conversation.

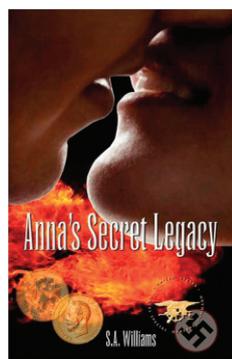
“It would make perfect source material for a movie or TV series,” she says. “After *Anna's Secret Legacy*, I had so many people saying, ‘This would make such a great movie.’ Based on my experience, it's very difficult to break into Hollywood unless you're on the A-list, but this story has generated a lot of interest.”

Williams already has strong ties to the entertainment world. Her love of film started

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The story kicks into gear when Doug, a U.S. Navy Reserve pilot, departs for a mission to gather military intelligence in Paris and Copenhagen. His life becomes upended after meeting Anna at a jazz club in Denmark. They fall in love, all while dodging death to keep the formula out of the hands of Hitler's Nazis in the march across Europe. At the same time, Anna knows the formula may be the key to helping her sister, Britta, who is losing her battle with a grave illness.

Although *Mackenzie's Secret* is rooted in the same world Williams created for her first novel, the books are vastly different. For starters, *Mackenzie's Secret* picks up nearly 30 years after the events of *Anna's Secret Legacy*. In addition, *Mackenzie's Secret* takes a much deeper dive into the emotional bonds that connect us all—the



of Laos in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, or the inside of a famed Gothic cathedral in Chartres, France. She writes these scenes so crisply that the setting becomes a character in itself. There's a good reason why. Although *Mackenzie's Secret* is fiction, much of the story was inspired by events Williams plucked from her own life.

From the Page to the Screen

Readers would likely find Williams as intriguing as her best-drawn characters. Like Mackenzie, the author spent a year at an all-girls boarding school in Paris. In fact, she spent much of her childhood in Europe, so she's quite familiar with the locales in which she drops her characters, from Paris to Copenhagen, and from Brussels, Belgium, to Marbella, Spain.

Williams received her education in the cosmopolitan centers of European culture.

at a young age, and it ultimately compelled her to earn her place in the Screen Actors Guild (SAG). In her 20 years as a card-carrying SAG member, she has worked on the sets of award-winning films such as *The Sixth Sense*, *Philadelphia* and *Silver Linings Playbook*, all of which were shot in the city of Philadelphia. So if *Mackenzie's Secret* does wind up transitioning from the page to the screen, she has a few suggestions for casting.

“I think Hugh Grant would make a great Alistair, and Bradley Cooper would make a great Brother Sean,” she says of two of *Mackenzie's Secret's* most pivotal characters. If things go her way, she may not have long to wait to find out. ■

➔ **MACKENZIE'S SECRET
BY S.A. WILLIAMS**
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