



TEA with TESS
Laura Bradbury



CLAIM TO FAME IN OAK BAY
 Author

Tess van Straaten with Laura Bradbury in the library at the Shannon Oaks independent living residence.

Photo by Don Denton

Where did you grow up and who is your family?

I grew up in Oak Bay and I spent a good chunk of my childhood building forts and collecting snakes in Uplands Park. I met my French husband, Franck, on a Rotary Exchange year to Burgundy after high school. We had a lightning-bolt romance and spent many years living in France, England and even Nepal, briefly, but are now happily settled back in Oak Bay with our three Franco-Canadian daughters. We still have three vacation rentals in the vineyards of Burgundy and go over as often as we can.

What do you love about Oak Bay?

I love the natural beauty. I walk our rescue dog, Pepper, for an hour every day around South Oak Bay. I never take it for granted to live so close to the ocean and have so many varied and beautiful places to walk. I love the fact that I almost always bump into a neighbour, friend or friendly fellow walker and have a chat. That sense of community is special. It's also the little things about Oak Bay

that touch my heart. The water bowls people leave out for our local dogs, the adorable free libraries in front of so many houses, the Adirondack chairs on McMicking Point — all those little gestures that show we care about one another.

Why did you become a writer?

I always dreamed of writing and began, but never finished, a multitude of novels in my 20s and 30s. Just before I turned 40, I was diagnosed with a rare autoimmune disease of the bile ducts and liver called PSC. It's untreatable and generally terminal — the only "cure" is a liver transplant. The morning after my official diagnosis, I woke up knowing my entire world had changed overnight. The fear of failing at the one thing I dreamed of doing (writing) was outweighed by the fear of dying with my words still left inside me. I got up, went down to my laptop, and began writing the first book in my Grape Series. I haven't stopped writing and publishing since. My sixth Grape Series book, *My Grape Cellar*, came out in October. Writing's now my full-

time job and my health crisis is what made that happen.

What do you love about storytelling?

I've always been an avid reader, and the ability of books to allow me to live a multitude of different lives always feels like magic. Reading has always been one of my most precious escapes and it became a lifeline for me during those difficult years prior to my transplant. Stories connect us, soothe us, help us, entertain us and teach us.

Who is your hero?

I have two. My mom, who is truly a force of nature and has always shown up for her friends and family, and is precious beyond measure, and my friend Nyssa Temmel, who donated the entire right lobe of her liver to me in a living-donor transplant in 2017 and saved my life. We met at the Oak Bay Fire Hall because she was the Sparks leader for my youngest daughter. It was a miracle made in Oak Bay! We have superheroes living among us. Nyssa is one of them. 🍵