

Dear Reader:

I am often asked if I try to make readers cry. The answer is no. I wouldn't know how to even if I wanted to, and while I am many things, sadist is not one of them ☺. What I do try to do, in my books, in my life, is give people hope. Not a false saccharine hope that everything will be puppies and daisies and happily-ever-afters, but a grounded-in-truth hope that even in the most challenging of times, there is beauty, there is grace, there is resilience. I write stories like this because I have learned that the most painful episodes of my life did hurt—often a lot—but they also brought me a level of meaning and growth and even joy in ways I never could have anticipated. This understanding makes it easier for me to walk through this uncertain life, and if I can, I would like to pass that knowledge off to young readers, and not-so-young readers.

*After Life* deals with a scenario that terrifies me—and, I expect, most parents—deeply. I am the mother of daughters, one of them right about the age Amber Crane was when she was killed while riding her bicycle home from school. Part of me does not know how any parent survives this, and part of me knows that many do, finding meaning and inspiration from the life cut short, and seeing how that life continues, in memory, and in the ripples—seen and unseen—of one person's insignificant and profoundly important existence.

This was the book I wanted to write, not just from the family's point of view but a community's. Because none of us knows the truly myriad ways that our lives will continue to reverberate and impact people around us, even people we never even knew. It is one of life's beautiful mysteries.

Writing *After Life* brought me much joy and much meaning—and yes, a few tears. I hope it brings at least the first two for you, and if it does induce some crying, may they be tears tinged with love and hope.

Love,

Gayle