Jennifer Davin:
This is Jennifer Davin at the Library of Congress. Saturday, August 30th will mark the 14th year that booklovers of all ages have gathered in Washington, D.C. to celebrate the written word at the Library of Congress National Book Festival. The festival, which is free and open to the public, will hold evening hours for the first time ever this year in its new location, the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, D.C. Hours will be from 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. For more details, visit www.loc.gov/bookfest. And now it's my pleasure to introduce mystery writer Anne Hillerman, whose latest book is titled "Spider Woman's Daughter," published by Harper. Thank you so much for joining us.

Anne Hillerman:
Oh, it's my pleasure. Thank you for having me.

Jennifer Davin:
And you've pulled off something fairly nervy, if I may say so, picking up your father's extraordinarily successful mystery franchise, where he left off, and keeping it going with characters that readers have come to know and love. Did you find that daunting in any way, trying to remain true to these characters, and to your dad's tone and voice?

Anne Hillerman:
Well, yes, I did. For me, the challenge wasn't so much the characters as it was the expectations of, oh, the millions of fans that my dad had accumulated over his 30 years of writing. As I was starting out on "Spider Woman's Daughter," I kept thinking of those people, and how they loved those characters, and just really hoping that I would be able to come up with a book that would satisfy their expectations, as well as my own expectations.

Jennifer Davin:
I know that my reaction, when I realized that Jim Chee and Joe Leaphorn might solve crimes again, was really one of delight. And reading the book, I felt my expectations, rather, were fulfilled. How are long-time Tony Hillerman readers receiving this book?

Anne Hillerman:
It's been very well-received. I've been absolutely delighted at the e-mails that I've gotten from fans. And they start out saying, "Oh, when I heard your dad died, I was so sad, because I thought this is the end of those wonderful characters who I loved. And then when I saw your book, I thought, hmm, do you think, is this going to live up to my expectations?" But a lot of people have said they -- my main character is Bernadette Manualito, who dad had just used as a -- sort of as a girlfriend/gopher. And I have developed her into a real detective. And a lot of the response I've gotten have said, yay Birdie. People seem to be really delighted to see a woman character come to the forefront in the series.
Jennifer Davin:
Well, it's interesting that you bring that up, because I was going to say, you've developed this character, Bernie Manuelito, into a character as strong and sympathetic as the male Navajo police. Talk about that a little bit, because, you know, she was kind of a background character, but she is the central character in this book.

Anne Hillerman:
Oh, I'm glad to talk about that. I was really lucky that dad hadn't done much with her. I think often when people try to continue a series, it's hard to find a way into it. And my way into it was to really let Bernie finally solve the crime. Dad had introduced her, oh, maybe 10 or 12 books into the series, fairly late into the series, and mostly just used her as a supporting character. But he had -- he was bringing her up, letting her in each book act like more of a policeman, so really it was a natural progression for me to finally let Bernie be the one to solve the crime.

Jennifer Davin:
Mm-hmm. Part of what is so compelling about this whole series of novels, of course, is the window it opens into another culture, sort of within our own. How much of this has been absorbed from your own youth in that part of the country, and how much has to be researched?

Anne Hillerman:
Oh, that's a really interesting question. I would say the -- oh, how can I put this -- sort of the feeling of the Navajo world was something I absorbed as a girl growing up out here, listening to dad talk to his Navajo friends, making some trips out to the reservation with him. But when it comes to actually writing details, even though "Spider Woman's Daughter" is fiction, I had to get the details right. And so that involved doing a bunch of research. I love research. My background is in journalism, and I think, for me, one of the real temptations was to let the research go on and on and on, and kind of steal time away from actually crafting the fiction itself. So, like I said, I love to research. I loved the opportunity to learn more about the Navajo people and their culture. And a lot response I've gotten from fans has been very appreciative of that.

Jennifer Davin:
Well, what are you working on now?

Anne Hillerman:
Well, I was lucky that my contract with Harper was for two books. So now, I'm working on the second novel that has Bernadette Manuelito as the main crime solver. It's, again, set on the Navajo reservation, part of it in the Shiprock, New Mexico area, and part of it up near the Arizona-Utah border in Monument Valley.

Jennifer Davin:
Sounds really fascinating, and I'm looking forward to getting my hands on this. [laughs]
Anne Hillerman:
Oh, thank you.

Jennifer Davin:
Write quickly.

Anne Hillerman:
I'm finishing it now, so it'll -- usually, it takes about a year from the
time the manuscript is done until when the book comes out.

Jennifer Davin:
Oh, well, I guess my wait will be a little longer, then.

[laughter]

Jennifer Davin:
We've been hearing from mystery writer Anne Hillerman, who will appear on
Saturday, August 30th, in the Fiction and Mystery Pavilion at the
National Book Festival at the Washington Convention Center. Thank you, Anne.

Anne Hillerman:
Thank you.

Female Speaker:
This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress. Visit us at
loc.gov.

[end of transcript]