Announcer: The Missouri State Journal. A weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Emily Yeap: It's tough for an author to get published by one of the big five publishers but Ozarks native Nancy Allen, has done it. Allen, who practiced law in Missouri for 15 years, is not only the author of the Ozarks Mystery Series published by HarperCollins, but she has also teamed up with best-selling author James Patterson on a new book. I’m Emily Yeap.

A College of Business instructor at Missouri State University, Allen joins me today to talk about the collaboration and her journey as an author.

Nancy Allen: Mr. Patterson and I are co-authoring a new book. Its title is Juror #3. Now, Juror #3 is a legal thriller, like the legal thrillers that I write in my own series with HarperCollins. But Juror #3, which Mr. Patterson and I are writing for Hachette, Little, Brown, is set in Mississippi and it's got a main character whose name is Ruby Bozarth, and she is a young defense attorney in Mississippi who is a junkyard dog. Juror #3 will be released in hardcover in March of 2018.

Emily Yeap: The project came about thanks to her editor, who used to work at HarperCollins.

Nancy Allen: The editor at HarperCollins is a lovely young woman named Trish Daly and she had discovered me. She had been the one who brought my Elsie Arnold books, that are the legal thrillers set in the Ozarks, and she brought me onboard at HarperCollins. She was the editor for my first three Elsie Arnold books, which are The Code of the Hills, A Killing at the Creek and The Wages of Sin.

Then, after we had edited book three, she called me on the phone about a year ago and said, "Nancy, I'm leaving HarperCollins." I was most distressed because I adored this editor. Then, I was contacted not too long after to say that she now worked for James Patterson as part of the James Patterson team at Hachette Publishing and Mr. Patterson might be interested in writing a book with me if I was interested in writing a book with him. Let me assure you, I was extremely interested because in the world of thriller and mystery books, Patterson is king.

Emily Yeap: Besides Juror #3, Allen's fourth book in her Ozarks Mystery Series, titled A Wolf in the Woods, is set for release on February 2018.

Nancy Allen: It's about sex trafficking in the Ozarks, which is a terrible and serious issue. You know, a lot of people don't think that human trafficking is going on in the heartland, but it is here. Of course, my book is fiction, but it addresses some of those really terrible issues.

Emily Yeap: Ideas for Allen's books come from her previous work experience in the legal world.

Nancy Allen: I was a prosecutor here in Greene County. I handled jury trials for felony cases. In the five years that I was in prosecution, I tried a whole lot of cases. Even though my books are fiction, that time I spent in prosecution gave me a strong background to be able to have the chops, the experience, to be able to write legal thrillers.

Emily Yeap: She enjoys featuring female protagonists in her books.

Nancy Allen: One thing that I like about both my Elsie series and my book with Mr. Patterson is as a reader, I like to read about strong, interesting, female protagonists, and that's true in both of these books. Elsie Arnold is, oh, she is a girl who has all manner of flaws and she's my Ozarks prosecutor. But she's strong and she's tough and she's determined. She is passionately dedicated to seeing justice done in the Ozarks. Now, on the other side with Mr. Patterson, we are writing about a young woman who's a defense attorney. But here, again, she is committed to seeing justice done.

Emily Yeap: So, how does an Ozarks native break through the publishing barrier?

Nancy Allen: It is more difficult than you can even imagine. When I wrote my first book, so I had a book. I sat down and I wrote it and then by the time I wrote the words the end, at the end of The Code of the Hills, I knew that I wanted to be published by one of the big five publishing houses in New York City. But Emily, I didn't have any publishing credits. I didn't have any contacts in the publishing industry. What I had to do was be insanely determined. The first step that I took was to try to get a literary agent. When you don't know anybody in the business, it's not easy to get a literary agent. It took me some time, but I simply wouldn't take no for an answer.

Emily Yeap: To find out more about Allen and her books, visit nancyallenbooks.com. I'm Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

Announcer: For more information, contact the Office of University Communications at 417-836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at KSMU.org.