



Marching Forward

Greetings and Happy Transition from Winter to Spring . . . almost! California has been exceptionally rainy and cold this year. San Francisco had snow for the first time in thirty-five years! And in Los Angeles we had hail and snow that quickly turned to sleet! Many of the California mountain ranges have had heavy snowfall--- great for the snow pack and future water reserves, and quite spectacular. While winter tends to be a white-and-brown time of year in other regions, for California this is the time of green as you can see in this Central Coast photo.



While the hills and mountains have been receiving their deluge, so have my pages. There's been such an outpouring of new words that the upcoming edition of *What the Heart Knows* (Milford-Haven Novels -- Book One) is a hundred pages longer than the early edition---and that's after editing! Those of us who live in the arid West know it's important to capture rainfall when it comes. That's what I've been doing---capturing the downpour of fresh inspiration that now infuses the new pages. Some elements that would've been introduced later now start earlier. And some fresh ideas sprang up like the lush, green vegetation that now covers the California hillsides. I can hardly wait to share these new chapters with you! I hope you'll be patient until the publisher's ready to release the new book! Just as a good soaking rain is worth the wait, so will be the new book---that's my promise to you!

Editing

Speaking of editing . . . we often use the word "edit" to mean "shorten," or "remove,"--- as in "I should edit myself before I say too much." Though that use of the term is accurate, when it comes to writing fiction, there is MUCH more to the editing process.



If you read my February newsletter you already know I've been re-writing *What the Heart Knows*---and I'm thrilled to report the re-write is now finished! But how to we know it's finished? What did the process entail? There are definitely technical aspects to the editing process---grammar, grammar and grammar---but I won't discuss that here.

Ever think about the difference between Non-Fiction and Fiction? I think about it a lot. I was a journalist and non-fiction writer, and non-fiction is about FACTS. So what's fiction about? Something you make up? No. Fiction is about TRUTH. Facts tend to appear on "dry land" and, even if buried, they're tangible. Truth shimmers beneath the surface of the "water"---say, the sub-conscious---and can be ephemeral. What fascinates me about fiction is perceiving, then depicting, truth. This takes work at the deepest level. It means that both me as the writer, and Vicki Werkley as the editor, must be committed to seeing deeply into the reality being revealed in a particular character or situation. Believe me, if I haven't yet brought a truth to the surface, Vicki doesn't let me get away with it! In this way she's helped me to bring truth to the surface one . . . seashell at a time. (More on the *Secrets of the Shells* in the next newsletter!)

Seismic Resonances

My heart goes out to everyone in Japan! I've been in regular touch with dear friends in Tokyo, where I grew up. They are fine, dealing with relatively minor damage and major inconveniences, stalwart during hundreds of aftershocks, already wrestling with a reduction in available power. Searching out available means of donating, should you be interested, so far I recommend the Japan Society in New York. Without spending any money, what each of us can do is pray or meditate, using our minds to focus on peaceful thoughts as order is reestablished, and using our hearts to truly feel love and compassion for those dealing with various stages of earthquake aftermath in Japan, New Zealand, Chile and Haiti.



California is usually thought of as sitting at the western edge of the North American continent. But it can also be seen as sitting at the eastern edge of the Pacific Rim, or, in seismic terms, the Pacific Plate. California braced for the possibility of tsunami damage, which thankfully proved to be minor. Along the Central Coast, water rose noticeably, some boats were damaged, and the lowest-altitude communities, like Avila Beach, were evacuated.

We seem to be connected, among other things, by fault lines. If we shift to a metaphorical way of thinking, perhaps we can stop focusing on faults in ourselves and in others, and create a larger awareness of forgiveness. Who knows how many things we might heal as a result? (More on this subject in my March 14th blog "Earthquake Healing On the Fault line.")

Geography Of the Heart

California's Central Coast, where my stories are set, at this time of year truly looks like Ireland (in honor of St. Patty's Day) and like Wales. Cambria---which is the ancient Roman name for Wales---is also the name of my favorite real town on the Central Coast, the town upon which my fictitious Milford-Haven is loosely based.

There are amazing geographical resonances and connections for my saga---not only in California, but elsewhere too---and I'd like to share some of them with you. Perhaps they'll inspire your own travel . . . either physical, or virtual, through my books!



Discovering My Heart in Cambria

Have you ever been somewhere that spoke to your heart the moment you arrived? That's how it was for me when I first visited Cambria, California. That was in 1984, when I was invited to perform in a play in this charming town located exactly halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco. (More about the play in a future newsletter.)

Since I grew up in Tokyo, Japan, with a population of many millions, for me it was a complete novelty to be living for the summer in a town of a few thousand. How did population modify people's behavior? In a small town, everyone is visible, where in a large city there's a degree of anonymity. In a city, it can take time and tremendous energy to get a project moving, whether its modifications to a home, a start-up non-profit, or creating a network of friends. All these processes are accelerated in a smaller community. What might've interested me the most was the realization that consequences---good or bad---also happened much faster. Suffice to say I became fascinated and felt I'd discovered a microcosm, a lens, a framework within which to examine the matters of the heart. And so . . . I began writing my story.



While this internal drama was unfolding, so did the external one. First, the town treated my co-star and me like royalty even to the extent of asking us to be part of the annual July 4th parade! Later, when my radio drama "Milford-Haven" went on the air, the town embraced me as one of its own. For more than twenty years, now, Cambria has been my soul's home. It's where I go for inspiration and rejuvenation; relaxation and comradeship; solitude and communing with nature. Some part of every chapter of my books has been written there. And many hours have been spent in researching the region and interviewing its experts in many fields. The town is filled with dear friends and favorite spots, and yet I still find something new to explore during each visit.

Discovering Roots in Wales

Here's another question for you. Have you ever traveled somewhere that seemed to resonate with your own personal history? I had that unmistakable feeling when I visited the original town of Milford Haven (without the hyphen), in Wales. While performing in Shakespeare's "Cymbelline," I had to speak a line as the heroine "Imogen" who receives a letter from her beloved saying, "Meet me in Cambria, in Milford-Haven." Well, I knew that would be the name of my fictitious town!



The real town existed in Shakespeare's day, and I knew it still did, but now it was an industrial port. I couldn't imagine they'd have any interest in an American radio drama about a little California town. That's where I was wrong! The moment they hear that my Milford-Haven was to be broadcast on the BBC, they invited me for a visit. When I flew to London for my press tour to support the radio drama, I therefore planned a trip to Wales as well.

It was late at night by the time I arrived, exhausted not only from the long flight to London, but also by a five-hour train trip. "Is that Mara Purl?" boomed a voice when the train doors opened. The moment I said "Yes," a Klieg light flashed on, video cameras began taping and my astonishing visit to Milford Haven, Wales commenced. On my first morning, I was invited down town . . . to watch a parade in my honor! On the following evening, I attended a reception, also in my honor, where I passed under crossed swords and was "rung" into the room by a gentleman in a powdered wig! Honestly, you could have knocked me over with a silver teaspoon. Thank goodness I'd had a silver tray engraved with "From Milford-Haven to Milford Haven" so I had something to give these dear people! I walked away with the keys to the city, and a permanent bond to this special part of the world. (In the photo I'm holding the silver tray, standing with the Mayor and his wife, and the Chair of the Chamber of Commerce and his wife.)

The punch line of the story might be the most extraordinary part. Several years later, by which time I was married, I longed to share this wonderful town with my husband. Just before our trip, I was talking with my Aunt Madelon, who is one of our family's geneologists. She said, "You know, we have people from there." When I questioned her further, it came to light that my own ancestors were actually from Milford Haven Wales! When my husband and I were in the Mayor's chambers I inquired about the family name of Gough (a true Welsh spelling if ever I saw one). "Oh yes," the Mayor of Milford Haven replied. "One of our former Mayor's was a Gough, and his picture is up there on the wall."

Need I tell you that chills run up and down my spine even now as I write this? I have literally spent several years writing . . . my own roots. Truly what the head didn't know, the *heart* always knew.

Connecting Hearts in Cambria

This past August, I wanted to do something special for my birthday, and dreamed of inviting my closest women friends to join me there. After all, I'm always "preaching" to my readers that, as women, we don't take enough time for ourselves. In hopes one or two pals would join me, I rented a weekend house. Soon nine of my friends let me know they'd be coming, some from across the country, and one all the way from Japan! I had to ask the rental company to find us a bigger house, and they found us the perfect spot.



We arrived from our several destinations and had a glorious series of reunions and introductions. We cooked, we hiked, we shared stories, and we explored the town as I shared my favorite haunts. We drove up the coast to visit the lighthouse and back down the coast to walk the long, curving beach of the Cove. We clambered up the hillside into the Enchanted Forest (yes, it's real!) We exchanged gifts. We cooked some more. We shared some more.

Mary Helsaple and I created a little on-line photo album called "Connecting in Cambria" filled with everyone's photos, musings, and recipes. I printed a copy and love to look through its pages. In fact, we all love this little book so much that Mary and I are collaborating on something similar that will be a BONUS GIFT for those who buy the new edition of *What the Heart Knows* on launch day. (Of course I'll let you know the details when we get closer to September!)

What did we take away from the weekend? That friendship is precious? Yes. That connecting helps us to understand who and where we are? Yes. That women are wildly accomplished and impressive, working miracles every day? Yes! But each of my friends also said they understood, now, why I write my novels. "They're about more than just a good story," said one friend. "They're about how to make your life work," said another. "They remind us to fill up our souls," wrote another a few days later.

Perhaps the biggest gift we gave ourselves was the insight that connecting with each other restored our connection with ourselves. Not everyone can visit Cambria, California. But everyone can visit Milford-Haven. And the advantage is that once you read a Milford-Haven novel, it lives inside you, so you can take it everywhere you go, and never lose again the connection to your own soul.

New Plot Line – A Teaser from Chapter One

So you've been hearing about the NEW content in the NEW edition of *What the Heart Knows*. . . . I figure it's time to share at least a HINT of what to expect. . . .

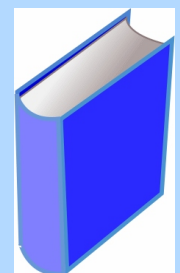
One thing that has never before appeared in the *Milford-Haven Novels* is a connection to Japan. (This would've come later, but now comes sooner.) During my childhood I enjoyed many different kinds of art lessons, including a study of sumi-e, the ancient art of Japanese calligraphy. Well, oddly enough, my protagonist Miranda Jones is a painter who's decided to expand her repertoire to include sumi-e as well. But, as we many things she does, she practices this art a bit differently. Where most calligraphy brushes are designed to be held in one hand, hers need both hands, both arms, and some good strength in back and thighs to wield!



Did I make up this technique? No! I am very fortunate to have among my friends the artist **Barbara Bash**. Barbara created her "Big Brush" technique and I became absolutely intrigued when I watched her create art that later graced the CD cover of her musician husband **Steve Gorn**. (Steve just won a Grammy, by the way, for his work on the beautiful album "*Miho*" by the Paul Winter Consort!) You might enjoy taking a peak at Barbara's amazing video! It might prepare you---at least a little---for the upcoming surprises in Chapter 1 of the new *What the Heart Knows*!

Answers To Your Questions

- 1 – Will the content of the books be the same as in the early editions?
 - No! In honor of you, my readers, I've added SO much new material to *What the Heart Knows*, that you won't want to miss the new pieces.
 - Yes! The basic story remains the same, a tale of artist Miranda Jones and her career and romance; a tale of Milford-Haven and its good (and bad) citizens; a tale of Santa Barbara and its beautiful people; a tale of journalist Chris Christian and of her mysterious murder.
- 2 – Will you still be able to purchase books online?
 - Yes! We'll be sending you all the information you need for ordering.
- 3 – Will e-book editions be available?
 - Yes! Bellekeep will be publishing the Milford-Haven Novels in e-book form for all platforms, so you'll be able to get versions for Kindle, Nook, Sony Reader, iPad, and whatever your favorite e-reader happens to be.
- 4 – Will previous readers enjoy any special benefit from having bought the early editions?
 - Yes! Over the next couple of months, I'll be announcing some of the special things we're creating just for you.

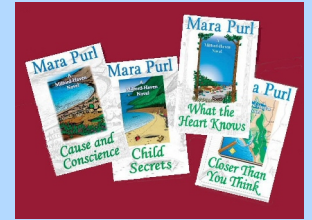


Early Editions

Are they still available? Most are . . . in very limited quantities. If you're a collector, and want to be sure you have these early editions for posterity, now is the time to purchase them! Visit Haven Books, and click "Order".

Here's the list:

What the Heart Knows (Sold Out)
What the Heart Knows - Audio Book
Closer Than You Think
Closer Than You Think - Audio Book
Child Secrets
Cause and Conscience
Christmas Angels
Christmas Angels - Audio Book



Blah Blah Blogging

My new publisher asked that I begin to blog weekly. "Horrors!" I thought at first. "How can I possibly write my books and blog?" That was the first hurdle to overcome. As it turns out, the discipline of writing a brief 300-word essay once a week is very helpful. But now for the next problem: how could I possibly write about "Blah-Blah-I-Myself-Me-My-Books-My-Books" every week?? I'd get bored to death and you'd start hitting the "delete" button.

So I had to figure out what I really wanted to write about, and this also turned out to be easier than I thought: leadership and transformation. Or---to be more accurate---how and where do I fall short of leadership and transformation? And how can I laugh at myself about it, and then do better?

If you'd like to share this part of my journey, you can read or subscribe at MaraPurl.WordPress.com The first four are "Re-write the Narrative of Your Heart," "Presidential Aspirations," "Don't Miss Your Leap," and "Recapture One Hour of Daylight." As you can gather, my topics tend to be tied not only to what I'm working on but also to the calendar, which gives us all a background of relatedness. The most recent is "Earthquake Healing on Fault line," with ideas about sending healing thoughts to Japan.

You're a vital part of this journey. As you help me progress, I hope perhaps I can help you progress too. Not one of us is truly alone. *We're on this journey together. I hope you'll join me and find yourself in . . . Milford-Haven!*



Next Month . . . L.A. Times Festival of Books

More on this fantastic annual event in next month's newsletter. For now, here's a heads-up that the Milford-Haven Novels booth this year will be **#922**, and that we will be doing something VERY special in the booth! Also please note that this event---the largest book festival in the U.S.---has moved from the UCLA campus to the USC campus.

