

Mara Purl: Finding your happy ending 'in here'

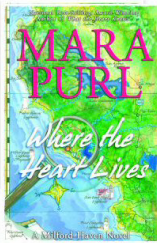
HAPPY EVER AFTER

Joyce Lamb, USA TODAY

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accepted, liked and loved.

So, if the happy ending turns out to be a vital component of living our best life, how do we get there? Asking myself that question is probably what got me started writing *Milford-Haven*, which first appeared as a radio drama. I knew I'd struck a major nerve when the show became the first American radio serial broadcast by the BBC, where it found an audience of 4.5 million listeners.



Author Mara Purl played nurse Daria Cook on the daytime soap opera *Days of Our Lives*. (Photo: Courtesy of Mara Purl)

Mara Purl, whose second novel in her *Milford-Haven* series, *Where the Heart Lives*, was recently published, ponders the notion of happily ever after ... and why it's so important. And perhaps even more important: How do we get there?

Mara: "Happily Ever After." It's the text that ends every fairy tale. And — if we're honest with ourselves — we might admit it's also the subtext that underlies every list of goals and resolutions. Why is this so important? Can't we content ourselves with feeling useful, or earning money, or sticking to our principles?

Not really. What we want is a life that makes sense at the core, that makes our heart sing, a vivid sense of belonging, a certainty that we're in the right place at the right time. We crave that eye-to-eye look that says "I get you and you get me," that heart-to-heart feeling that we can be our authentic selves and still be



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Joyce Lamb, curator of the Happy Ever After blog, is a head-over-heels lover of happy endings. She's also an award-winning romantic suspense author (latest book is *Flash Heat*) and a Money section copy editor.

Send Joyce Lamb a Message

True, *Milford-Haven U.S.A.* was a soap opera, generated partly by my experience as an actress on *Days of Our Lives*. But it was also born of my own tumultuous, multicharactered path to true romance. Because I write from the heart, I had to write authentically about these adventures (and misadventures). And what I've been discovering as this tale evolves into novels, is that my story tends to be a lot more complex than what could fit between the covers of a normal book.

Happily, "normal" in the book world is being redefined rapidly these days, and it turns out I'm writing serial novels just when "serial" has become a hot word in publishing. So, yes, it'll take not one book, but five for the intertwined romances, secrets and mystery to be solved in *Milford-Haven*. After all, "quick fix" wasn't on

the happy-ending list. If there are a few more lessons to be learned and obstacles to be overcome, won't the ending be all the sweeter when finally achieved?

It certainly has been for me, happily married at last. And that's what I have mapped out for my protagonist, Miranda Jones. In book one, *What the Heart Knows*, she has only an inkling of how to reach her goal, but it's enough to get her started on her true path. The thing about the heroine's journey is that it doesn't necessarily start with the clang of a bell. It starts with an inner "call." For Miranda, when she finds the little town of Milford-Haven, her head thinks moving there makes no sense, but her heart knows moving there will spark the new chapter she wants to start. By the time she's winding her way through book two, *Where the Heart Lives*, she's begun to map her emotional life, synchronizing her inner and outer worlds in a way she never imagined before. She'll have to navigate even deeper waters in book three, *Why Hearts Keep Secrets*, before she can reach that happy-ending shore in book five. But along the way, her searching mind will discover mentors and friends appearing as lighthouses to guide her, and her eager heart will evolve its own guidance system that'll work like an inner GPS.

As we fling open our own windows onto the landscape of a new year, let's say we can see our goal in the distance, and also see a few obstacles along the way, which may appear daunting. But how about this for a sudden flash of insight: The landscape isn't "out there." It's actually "in here." The activating agent — like yeast in bread dough — is the realization that we have the power to transform our own experience. How? By listening, watching, learning.

I had so many things to learn before I could appreciate and live the reality of true romance. I wish the same for my characters — that, as they undo their snarls and are humbled by their mistakes — they find their gratitude and earn their joy. And this is my heart-wish for my readers, too. It may take five life-books to get there. But we can all find our happy ever after.

Here's the blurb for *Where the Heart Lives*:

Is the heart smarter than the head? Artist Miranda Jones begins to trust her heart enough to escape from her life of privilege and start over in Milford-Haven, the small town of undiscovered beauty on California's Central Coast. She connects with environmentalist Samantha Hugo, a brilliant PhD 20 years her senior who gave up a son years earlier, and with restaurant owner Sally O'Malley who left Arkansas to create her own dream. Each woman wrestles with her own core issues while balancing demanding careers with the attentions of interesting men. None is aware that journalist Christine Christian has just been murdered while investigating a half-built house.

For more information about Mara and her books, you can visit her website, www.MaraPurl.com.

