

Mara Purl blazes a new trail

'Days of Our Lives' actress celebrates the release of her first Milford-Haven novel

By Dory Hubert

From Bennington College to *Rolling Stone* and the *Financial Times* to "Days of Our Lives," with playwriting and radio serials thrown in for good measure, Mara Purl's life has been anything but boring.

The Renaissance woman alights at Moby Dickens Bookshop, 124-A Bent St., Friday (Jan. 27), where from 2-4 p.m. she will sign copies of "What the Heart Knows," the first of her Milford-Haven novels.

Born into a theatrical family in Greenwich, Conn., Purl grew up in Tokyo, Japan, and got her first job in television at age 9, in a Japanese series.

At age 14, she marched into a Japanese daily newspaper and proposed a column to the editor, who "just roared with laughter." Nonetheless, he sent her to a press conference that day and critiqued her write-up. He continued mentoring her and finally published a series of her articles about artists, actors and musicians.

After graduating from Bennington, she got a job at the *Financial Times* of London, and also wrote for the Associated Press, *Rolling Stone*, *The Christian Science Monitor* and *Working Woman Magazine*. But acting called her to Los Angeles, where she became a regular character, Darla Cook, on the soap opera "Days of Our Lives."

Having grown up in Japan, she was unfamiliar with soap operas and fascinated by the lengthy, ongoing stories. One summer she did a play in the little town of Cambria, halfway between San Francisco and L.A. She knew nothing about small-town life and "it was as fascinating to me as Bangkok would be to someone from Kansas!"

A Cambrian radio station owner invited her to consider projects for broadcast. She suggested a radio soap opera and he agreed. Purl found the name of her little town in Shakespeare's "Cymbeline" — "Take notice that I am in Cambria, at Milford



Corinne JARA

Former 'Days of Our Lives' actress and acclaimed author Mara Purl



FYI

Book signing

■ **When:** Friday (Jan. 27), 2-4 p.m.

■ **Where:** Moby Dickens Bookshop, 124-A Bent St.

■ **Admission:** free
■ **Information:** (575) 758-3050

Haven." (In this context, Cambria was a medieval Latin name for Wales.)

She got no response after sending scripts to the radio station owner, so visited the station personally and found three bearded

guy in a cloud of marijuana smoke, the new owners, who had no interest in her soap opera. She got the go-ahead, however, after recruiting sponsors, and putting together a cast which included her sister, Linda Purl, whose long acting career includes a recurring

role on the TV series "The Office."

"Milford-Haven" became a hit and, seeking syndication, Purl took a booth at the National Association of Broadcasters convention, where she discovered that BBC Radio 5 had been looking for her. "Milford-Haven USA" became the first American radio serial on the BBC. At one point she was told, "You might want to pop over. It's doing very well." Translation: 4.5 million listeners.

The BBC contracted for several seasons of "Milford-Haven USA" and

"I was very clear what I'd be doing for several years to come," Purl told the National Association of Baby Boomer Women online. Then the BBC Radio 5 network was taken off the air. "My show wasn't canceled," she said, "the whole network was. All of us were shocked, and some of us were devastated." But "as a road disappears, another one opens, or we blaze a new trail."

She got an offer from the London office of Random House for a series of novels based on Milford-Haven, but after ownership changed, Purl was afraid the project would be sidelined if she signed on. Yet, 4.5 million "Milford-Haven USA" listeners knew she was going to do a novel. "The cat was out of the bag," she said.

Purl ultimately became the flagship author of Midpoint Trade's new imprint for women, Bellekeep Books. "What the Heart Knows" is the first of a 12-book series, introducing readers to Miranda Jones, a painter garnering increasing attention, but drawn to small-town Milford-Haven. She moves there and establishes friendships with other local women, who, like her, grapple with the theme of head vs. heart and, needless to say, romance.

"Romance is heroic storytelling.

It's iconic, it's metaphorical.

In a romance, the author is writing about archetypes — heroine, villain, hero, trickster, warrior, queen, witch, knight, princess," Purl said, in an online interview for Bellekeep Books.

In August, Midpoint Trade will release her second novel, "Where the Heart Lives."

For more information, call Moby Dickens at (575) 758-3050 or visit the website, www.mobydickens.com

