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Mara Purl Maps Out A New Milford-Haven Novel, "Where the Heart Lives" and Offers You A Free Prequel: "When Whales Watch."

By ANNE HOLMES on OCTOBER 31, 2012



We are delighted to **chat once again with Mara Purl**, the best-selling author of the popular and critically acclaimed Milford-Haven Novels which so far have won seventeen literary awards.

As you probably remember, the first Milford-Haven Novel was "[What the Heart Knows](#)." To promote that book's launch, Mara did a virtual book tour and **NABBW was her second stop.**

I've already devoured the new book, "[Where the Heart Lives](#)," and can promise you that Mara has not lost her touch. All your favorite characters are back, plus some great new ones — and as a fun surprise, she takes you backstage at a Doobie Brothers concert.

One of the fun things about the way Mara has approached writing this series is that each novel in the series features a prequel, a short story that enhances the novel. These are available as Kindle downloads.

As a thank you for visiting this year's Milford-Haven blog tour, Mara is offering you a free download of the new prequel, titled "[When Whales Watch](#)." Read it to find out whether or not whales can watch the humans who watch them...



The connection to the whales makes sense once I tell you that in "[Where the Heart Lives](#)," one of the main story lines involves whales, lighthouses and our favorite Milford-Haven artist, Miranda Jones.

Miranda is commissioned to paint two works for the Point Vicente Interpretive Center; and in preparation, she spends a day whale-watching near the [Point Vicente Lighthouse](#), off California's Central Coast.

To download your free copy of "When Whales Watch" [click here](#). Enter your email address in the form provided at that link, and you'll receive a link to download the book in a variety of e-formats. (NOTE: This offer is good during Mara's concurrent live and virtual book tours. That's until November 10, 2012, so don't tarry. Get your free download now.)

Now that you know a bit about the new novel — and how to download the new prequel — let's launch right into the questions I asked Mara — and learn a little bit more about what's going on with the good citizens of Milford-Haven.

Like me, I'm sure you can't wait to catch up with your favorites: Miranda Jones, restaurant owner Sally O'Mally, and environmentalist Samantha Hugo. And who could forget the wealthy father and son duo Joseph and Zackery Calvin, Deputy Delmar Johnson, contractor Jack Sawyer, or the mysteriously elusive journalist, Christine Christian?

Mara, your books are fun reads, with characters who flow from one book to the next in your Milford-Haven series — sort of like a soap opera. As you are a veteran of a serialized television series, I imagine there are reasons for this. Can you talk a bit about how your work as an actress impacts your work as an author?

I really am writing a *serial* story, and I think we get to blame it on performing a recurring role on *Days of our Lives*!

I'm joking about the "blame," of course. But really, I did learn a lot from working on that wonderful show. Though I was hired as an actor, I didn't just memorize my own scenes and focus on my own part (Nurse Darla Cook).

I also spent time watching the scenes I wasn't in, and becoming familiar with the longer form of storytelling practiced in soap opera.

I fell in love with this story structure, then realized I'd actually been introduced to it in childhood because as a family we read and performed Charles Dickens stories. His stories were originally written as serial installments, which he himself read at public performances.

What's maddening about serial stories is that you don't immediately find out all the answers to the burning questions raised at the story's outset. You, the reader, are left "hanging" for a while.

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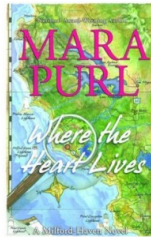
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As the author, I have to be careful to provide just enough—and not too much—frustration and anticipation for the next installment of the tale. One of the reasons I like this structure so much is that it more closely resembles life. Do our own lives actually wrap up neatly in a couple of hours, or even a couple of years? Of course not. Nor would we want them to.

Part of the joy of life is the journey, the ongoing sense of discovery and unfoldment.

That said, I want to reassure readers that the Milford-Haven story *will* conclude. You've probably noticed how popular trilogies are these days. Well, I'm doing something a bit different. I'm writing a pentalogy—a five-book story.

Why five? Because my series begins with a journalist getting herself in serious trouble. And what are the key questions journalists ask? Who, What, When Where, Why. In my series, these will be the "Five Questions of the Heart."



Book one, as you know, was *What the Heart Knows*. And now, book two was just published, with the title *Where the Heart Lives*. Just a hint... "*When Hearts Keep Secrets*" is next.

How do you come up with your characters?

I'd say my characters essentially have three sources.

- They come from a combination of real-life experience and pure imagination, which is probably true of most authors.
- And thirdly, they came about because of writing parts for the specific actors who first appeared in my radio drama, upon which my novels are based.

I had an outstanding cast of professional actors and wanted to write parts for them that would challenge them, and also show off their remarkable talents. The more I wrote for them, the more the characters took shape. (You can find a complete cast list at Milford-Haven.com)

Of course I *imagine* all my characters, rather than specifically patterning them on real people. But I'm certainly fascinated by human behavior and by human potential. I observe people's choices and reactions and notice their foibles and triumphs.

I love bringing these qualities to life in a way that makes them accessible. I want my readers to either nod their heads in recognition or shake their heads in disbelief. Either way, I've presented something truthful and touched a nerve!

You include a "Cast of Characters" list at the end of each book. Do you actually start the book with this cast in mind?

Yes, definitely. This novel series is about *them*. It's a character-driven story so the more we understand about this cast of characters, the more we care what happens to them.

There's a core list of major characters. But then in each book there are also smaller characters who pop up and come into the story for shorter periods of time. You never know when they might reappear.

What readers will notice, if they haven't already, is that through each book the characters grow and develop. Some embrace this sense of growth, and move fast; some resist it, and move slowly.

This is an important theme for the Milford-Haven novels—the sense of growth and unfoldment, and how each character manages it within him or herself.

Is there a town in Coastal California that you used as a model for Milford-Haven? If not, how did you conceive of your town?



There is indeed a real town that inspired Milford-Haven. It's the small town of Cambria, California, just about halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco. I spent a summer performing in a play there, and became enchanted by the people and the lifestyle in this small, artistic town. And I felt

that a small-town structure would be a perfect "lens" for telling a multi-character interwoven story.

This is one of the reasons there's a magnifying lens on the book cover for *Where the Heart Lives*. Though the geographic scope of a town like this is small, I feel this can mean the story goes deeper. Instead of spreading out, it sinks in and makes us focus on what really matters. It takes us to the "core" or the "heart."

As for the name of my fictional town . . . "Cambria" is a Welsh name, so I looked at the map of Wales.

There's the "map" image again. I found a Welsh town called Milford Haven (no hyphen), which had existed there since Shakespeare's time.

It has a remarkable, rich history of its own, and I visited there while my original radio drama was being broadcast on BBC radio. The townspeople gave me a parade and a reception in town hall! Astonishing.

Well, as you can imagine, I'm now doing research for a historical novel that will connect the old Milford Haven with the new.

Do you have a favorite Milford-Haven character? Who and why?

In a way, they're *all* my favorites! But I feel closest to the three women who are at the core of the books.

Sally O'Mally is the salt-of-the-earth waitress-restaurant-owner who's had a tough life but always fights back and creates something wholesome.

Samantha Hugo is the dedicated PhD environmentalist who's haunted by the son she gave up years earlier, and by the long-ago failed marriage she keeps over-analyzing.

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And my protagonist, **Miranda Jones**, the wildlife artist, who's beginning to trust her heart more than her head. I played "Miranda" in the radio show and have always felt close to her.

**Tell us about the Doobie Brothers – how did they get into the book?
Will any other "real people" show up in future books?**

The Doobie Brothers are good friends in my real life. I met them years ago when I was invited backstage by a manager friend.

Friendships developed in particular with three band members and their wives. And later, I did several recordings with John McFee and Keith Knudsen, and co-wrote songs with Keith and with Cornelius Bumpus.

A few years ago, the Doobies had a big concert at the Hollywood Bowl as a fundraiser for veterans. It was such an inspiring event!

I asked if I could write a fictional version of the concert for my radio show. Their reaction was, "Cool! We're gonna be in a radio drama!"

That was so much fun. My characters went "backstage" and my 4.5 million listeners had the virtual experience of being both backstage and on stage with the band.

As I approached this part of the story in the novels, I again asked the Doobies if they'd mind being included. This time they had the same reaction. "Cool, we're gonna be in a novel!"

These guys are utterly remarkable musicians in the first place, and have amazing longevity and stamina to match. They've been on tour and in the recording studio for decades, and their music gets better every year. What a joy and a privilege to have them in my novel!

As for other "real" people appearing in my stories . . . it's entirely possible! After all, Milford-Haven is the little town with infinite possibilities. . . .

(NOTE: "Where the Heart Lives is published by [Bellekeep Books](#), an imprint with Midpoint Trade Books.)

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