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IBPA Member Spotlight: Mara Purl

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Author Publisher Mara Purl Gets Dramatic for Book Marketing Success



Author publisher Mara Purl (far right) performs with fellow authors at Coalesce Bookstore.

Sometimes the best book marketing results come from thinking outside the box. Author publisher and IBPA member **Mara Purl** followed that logic by getting creative and setting up a performance at a bookstore that was based on her novella, *When Otters Play*. She even went one step further and recruited fellow authors to join her with scenes from their own books.

"I'm both an author and a performer (plays, audiobooks, television dramas) so performing a text comes naturally," said Mara. "Although these worlds tend to be separate, audiobooks bring these worlds together. That insight was step one. For step two, I looked for fellow authors who wrote fiction set in the region where my stories are set. I found three authors (Victoria Heckman, Anne R. Allen, and Sue McGinty), researched their books, and thought each of us had written scenes that could be performed dramatically."

On top of being authors, three of the four are also performers, so not only did they write the source material for the show, but they were also the performers (adding one additional professional performer).

The show was held at **Coalesce Bookstore** in Morro Bay, California. "The event was a total success," said Mara. "All of the participating authors sold out the books we had available at the event. This was good for us, and good for the bookstore who has reordered our titles. Coalesce Bookstore also invited us back for our next 'book drama' in February 2019. The immediate response from the audience was terrific—lots of laughter and fun. We all received excellent feedback on the day, and later as well."

Mara's idea of doing a performance came from trying to break from more conventional book marketing tactics, which have diminished in success. "This whole thought process for me began with trying to think from the perspective of the bookstore owner. In this case, a wonderful, small indie bookstore is very well established in its community, and the town is located in the region where my books are set. So I've done traditional book signings there in previous years, but these have become less and less successful for the bookstore (and for most bookstores) so I tried to think 'outside the box' and imagine what might draw people: a fun event, something live and lively that could only be enjoyed in person. This bookstore also has a small, but perfect multi-purpose event space. I really wanted to support this bookstore, and so did my fellow authors. We're all grateful to have found this win-win scenario."

Mara has three upcoming books in the works: a holiday novella, *When Angels Paint*, her first paranormal novella, *What the Soul Suspects*, and the third novel in *The Alford Haven Novels* series, *Why Hearts Keep Secrets*.



Mara Purl's upcoming book, *Why Hearts Keep Secrets*

Three Questions with Author Publisher Mara Purl

IBPA: It can be difficult for author publishers and independent publishers to get their books carried in a bookstore. What are your thoughts about this?

Mara Purl (MP):

1. In a nutshell, we indie authors are not always perceived as being professionally published. There's confusion about "self-published" versus "indie-published." If we look at the film industry, indie films are never considered unprofessional. They may be considered avant-garde, cutting-edge, even low-budget; but as a whole, indie films are taken as seriously as films released by major studios, so they're separate but equal. However, the distinction between "self" and "indie" is muddled in the book world. Why is this? Non-compliance with publishing industry standards can be an issue. The more we strive for true excellence in creating a work—from editorial to interior layout to cover design to paper choice to CIP block to metadata—the more we can compete. I've spoken with many indie bookstore owners who look to IBPA and to *Forward Reviews* magazine, for example, to help them discover excellent books they should be ordering.
2. Think about how you can solve a problem for your local bookstore. By talking to the owners, managers, or community relations managers, we can find synergistic answers. Performing a drama in a bookstore might not be the best solution for every indie bookstore, but it could work for those that have the space. But perhaps other ideas could work too: I created an event for a colleague who had a book about Pop-Tarts, so we asked if we could serve her homemade Pop-Tarts at the event. People flocked in, enjoyed a treat, and bought a book. We can always do better if we work on solving problems together.

IBPA: Can you list three key lessons you've learned about how one can succeed as an author publisher?

MP:

1. Learn, learn, learn. There are wonderful mentors in publishing and in authoring, and to honor ourselves, and our field of endeavor, we need to avail ourselves of every opportunity to ask questions, read interviews and articles, and attend seminars, workshops and conferences. Why? Because our goal should be excellence, not expedience. Never copy or imitate. Instead, ask and study. There's a distinction between copying someone else's ideas and asking for their help and input. Many people who've been through the school of hard knocks are more than happy to mentor. But those same people will lose respect for you if all you do is try to rip them off.
2. Think synergistically in how to work with fellow authors, and with those who manage book outlets like bookstores and libraries. Think of how you can include them and work together to solve problems and create mutual opportunities.
3. Think deeply about the work you do, and come to understand what you have to say. No one can deliver your unique message but you. But you may not know, at first, what that message is. Also, it will evolve as you yourself evolve. I always like to point out that the root for "author" and "authentic" is the same. (This slogan of mine is on my authors guild web page and is at the core of my speaking and teaching.) The greatest adventure in life is finding your authentic self and sharing it in all that you do.

IBPA: Can you give marketing tips to other indie publishers out there who are hoping to spread the word about their books?

MP: Oh, there are sooooo many, and marketing for books constantly evolves! For example, a few years ago my then marketing partner and I co-created what I named a "double blog tour." It was off-the-charts successful, reaching 17 million readers. But blog tours now have limited success, as people's online reading habits have changed. This is where attending writing and publishing conferences can make the difference, as you can learn the latest and greatest techniques. On the one hand, you need a combination of the latest and greatest techniques. They come and go, but can make a difference if timed correctly. On the other hand, you need that connection to your core messaging, something that remains steady no matter what marketing techniques are popular. When people hear an authentic message, they may not know why, but they know it rings true. That's what will ultimately sell a book, or trigger a speaking invitation.

IBPA: Thank you very much, Mara, for sharing your experience and insight with the IBPA community!

[Click here to learn more about author publisher Mara Purl](#)

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