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by Grayce McCormick | February 20, 2021 | 0 comment

Mara Purl's latest book makes print debut to celebrate World Whale Day



Photo: Dennis Eamon Young

In honor of World Whale Day today, award-winning author Mara Purl released her novella "When Whales Watch" (Bellekeep Books, 2017) in print for the first time.

Whales have the largest brains in the animal kingdom, and Mara Purl wants to know what they're doing with all that knowledge.

In honor of World Whale Day today, award-winning author Ms. Purl released her novella "When Whales Watch" (Bellekeep Books, 2017) in print for the first time, and the Amazon Kindle E-book is free to download today, as it was Thursday and Friday.

"When Whales Watch" is what Ms. Purl likes to call "faction" — made up stories based on facts. The short story takes readers on a thrilling whale watching trip off the Central Coast that goes awry, and brings to light the eerie concept that these immense creatures may be smarter than humans think.

The best-selling author pulled from her own personal experience as a crew member on a Greenpeace voyage to save and clean the ocean.

"The thing about the Greenpeace experience is the only time we saw whales when they were being killed," Ms. Purl told the News-Press. "I don't know what it's like to serve in a war, but I think this is the closest I'd ever come — bloody water and creatures fighting for their lives ... I had a harpoon go right over my head."

"It was a life-changing experience. I can never look at the planet the same way, nor can I look at water the same way."

After the voyage that changed her perspective on the environment and marine life, she began extensive research, finding evidence that sperm whales are not only highly intelligent, but keenly observant, and could possibly seek out their victims purposefully.

"What I wanted to do someday was to write about those whales when they were not under attack. Who are they when they're just at home and how do they behave? What happened with Moby Dick?" she said.

"When Whales Watch" is just one installment of Ms. Purl's best-selling saga, Milford-Haven, which began as a hit BBC radio drama with nearly 5 million U.K. listeners. It then became a book series with 17 million followers in the U.S.

Now, "When Whales Watch" is No. 1 on Amazon in four different categories, and has moved up to No. 54 on the Kindle list. Ms. Purl is still a frequent visitor of the Central Coast, but currently lives in Los Angeles and is working on adding to her series, along with writing a whole new trilogy.

Book three of her series, "When Otters Play," is even set in Santa Barbara.

"We are beginning to understand better what the whales and dolphins have always done," Ms. Purl said.

To explain her fascination with sperm whales' intelligence, she posed a scenario of two humans separated by 1,000 miles in the ocean. If one human sees a ship, they can relay the characteristics of the ship to the other person, but only by communicating with words what the ship looks like.

"However, if you and I are sperm whales, I look at that ship and with echolocation, I can determine every single part within the structure and take a complete ultrasound. Not only can I see everything about that ship; I can transmit that entire picture to you so that you know as much as I know," the author said.

She said she's captivated by the fact that humans are just now approaching the ability to do that, yet whales have been able to do it for as long as they've been on the planet. Sperm whales, too, aren't migratory, so they have the whole ocean at their leisure to travel as they please.

"They go wherever they want in every one of the big oceans. They circle the globe," Ms. Purl said. "They have a whole culture of behavior, some of which is just now being discovered."

"What I hope in the larger sense is that they (readers) are as awestruck as I am by this creature. They seem indulgent of those of us who do not mean them harm."

Her curiosity and wonder of whales and their mysterious lives shines through in her compelling, entertaining tale "When Whales Watch." Her Milford-Haven novels earned her 2019 Top Female Author for Fiction by the Authors Show and more than 50 book awards, and topped multiple best-seller lists on both Amazon and Barnes & Noble.

"It was an honor to write this book and it was an honor to be on the Greenpeace voyage years ago, and I sort of feel like I became a whale whisperer in writing this book," Ms. Purl said. "It was almost a mystical experience — I wanted to be as truthful as I could about this species, so I worked hard to get those technical details correct, but then there's also the spirit of who these creatures are — their immensity, their tremendous freedom, their long memories, their complicated relationships with each other."

"In a way, the sperm whale is as different from us as a creature could be. Some insist they are from another planet."

"When Whales Watch" is free only today as an Amazon E-Book, and the print version can be purchased on Amazon as well. It will be available for purchase at Chaucer's Books starting March 20. "When Otters Play" is currently for sale at Chaucer's.

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