

Romance Junkies

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- ♥ Latest News
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- ♥ Casting Heroines by Joining a Gym, by Guest Author

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Mara Purl Speed Interview

August 03, 2011 By: Romance Junkies Category: Speed Date Interview, Latest News



First, can you let us know what projects you are currently working on?

I'm working on book two of my Milford-Haven Novels, which is titled *Where the Heart Lives*. It picks up the story where we left off at the end of book one, *What the Heart Knows* (to be published in hardcover next month, September.) I'm also working on a short story that squeezes between the two books.

1a.) What does your writing schedule look like?

I generally write four or five hours a day, mostly in the morning, though I sometimes take my laptop to a café or library and write some more in the afternoon, depending upon my event schedule, or on the amount of research I need to do for a particular storyline. When I'm working through a novel with my editor, we work for several hours one day a week.

1b) Do you have to plot or do you write as it comes?

Some of both. But because I write a complex storyline involving several main characters, I really have to carefully track where everyone is and what they're doing. Just as I did when I created my serial radio drama, I created a "show bible" or "book bible" that tracks scene to scene, day to day, where each character is and what conversations they're in. I will say, though, even with all the planning and plotting, sometimes my characters will surprise me. As I get into the depth of writing a segment, and talk it through in detail with my editor, I might realize, Hey! Samantha isn't going over here, she's going over there!

2a.) How long does it take you to write a book?

Until now, it's been taking me a year to write each novel. But with my new contract, I'm on an accelerated schedule so I'm writing two a year. Yikes!

2b) Have you ever developed writer's block? What do you do to overcome it?

Is there such a thing as writer's block? What people call "writer's block" might just be what I think of as a normal part of the writing process. By that I mean that sometimes a particular resolution isn't ready to emerge, or a certain plot twist isn't yet ready to start spinning. If this is the case, though, something else in the story is ready to go forward. So I shift my focus, and keep listening. For me the metaphor is often a river. Sometimes it's gushing, sometimes meandering; sometimes frozen on the surface, sometimes swirling off into eddies. So I look at the story, observe it closely as though I'm sitting on its river banks. I listen to the flow, let it speak to my heart. Something is always moving.

3a.) Do you feel that a romance novel needs a "Happily Ever After"? Why or Why not?

Well, traditional romance structure means a romance novel must have a happy ending. Otherwise it's not a romance. Romance is a fantastic genre, which is why it has always made sense to me that it has millions of readers. Romance is heroic story-telling. It's iconic, it's metaphorical. In a romance, the author is writing about archetypes—heroine, villain, hero, trickster, warrior, queen, witch, knight, princess. . . . Yes, it's larger-than-life, and can seem so exaggerated that it's not quite believable. But to the soul within us, it is not only believable, but uplifting. We all have these larger-than-life emotions and dreams inside us. What are we supposed to do with them? How are we to manage them? Romance novels allow these feelings to flow, to connect, to resolve.

What I write, however, is Women's Fiction—a larger, more encompassing genre, which includes romance as a category, but allows for other forms. Mine is also a Women's Fiction Series, which makes it even less traditional, in that not all the storylines conclude in each book, some relationships and issues remain unresolved until later in the series.

ABOUT



Are you interested in contributing to our blog? It's a new area we are just starting up. If you are interested in contributing send an email to the Blog staff at blog@romancejunkies.com

AUTHOR BLOGS

- ♥ Beth Ciotta
- ♥ Butterscotch Martini Girls
- ♥ Catherine Stang
- ♥ Ciar Cullen
- ♥ Debbie Wallace
- ♥ Denyse Bridger
- ♥ Ginger Simpson
- ♥ Isabelle Kane
- ♥ Jaci Burton
- ♥ Jena Galifany
- ♥ Jenyfer Matthews
- ♥ Jess Dee
- ♥ Karen Erickson
- ♥ Leila Brown
- ♥ Meagan Hatfield
- ♥ Melissa Lopez

AUTHOR WEBSITES

- ♥ Anara Bella
- ♥ Beth Ciotta
- ♥ Catherine Stang
- ♥ Ciar Cullen
- ♥ Debbie Wallace
- ♥ Denyse Bridger
- ♥ Ginger Simpson
- ♥ Isabelle Kane
- ♥ Jaci Burton
- ♥ Jane Toombs
- ♥ Jena Galifany
- ♥ Jenyfer Matthews
- ♥ Jess Dee
- ♥ Karen Erickson
- ♥ Leila Brown
- ♥ Meagan Hatfield
- ♥ Melissa Lopez
- ♥ Mimi Riser
- ♥ N.J. Walters
- ♥ Pamela S. Thibodeaux
- ♥ Renee Knowles
- ♥ Samantha Storm
- ♥ Shara Lanel
- ♥ Shirley Tallman
- ♥ Terry Odell
- ♥ Tory Richards

My novels are most definitely romantic—and early editions have won several romance awards. Yet the love relationships don't conclude the way readers might expect. They're full of surprises and complexities.

3b) Have your characters ever taken a turn on you and changed personalities?

No, because I don't believe people actually can change their personalities. But it may appear that someone has changed for any number of reasons. Some characters are pretty awful in book one. Cynthia, for example, seems to be nothing more than a greedy, grasping social climber who only wants Zack for sex and money. She's gorgeous and sexy, but most of my readers are not on her side. Later in the series, however, we begin to find out why she acts the way she does. Readers may never fall in love with her, but at least they might have some compassion for her.

3c) What was your most challenging character to create and why?

My most challenging character so far is Wilhelm, because he's abusive. He's slimy, entitled, manipulative, and utterly selfish. He couldn't care less what his wife needs or feels, or what rights she actually has. So trying to get inside his head and write his scenes is very difficult. I do it, though, because this kind of behavior does exist in the world, and I want women to know how to free themselves, and perps to know they can't hide forever. My best friend and I served on boards and did celebrity events for many years on behalf of victims of domestic violence, so this is an issue I care about.

4a.) Have you seen changes in your writing since you began writing?

Ohhhhh my goodness, yes!!! First of all, I've written many different kinds of forms: journalism, essays, scripts, short stories, poetry. Each of them requires its own mastery, and within each of those disciplines there's been a learning curve and progress. After my first job as a reporter at age 14, I eventually became a professional journalist and wrote for the Financial Times of London, Rolling Stone, and the Associated Press, to name a few. As a script writer, I wrote over 100 radio plays, wrote several screenplays, one of which was optioned by Fox, and have written two plays for the theatre. But narrative voice in fiction . . . that has been the biggest challenge, and the most satisfying way of writing for me. It was what I always knew in my heart I wanted to do. But I had to wait for experience and maturity before it was time to embark on the fiction-journey. And my novel-writing itself has grown tremendously with experience, and with the help of a brilliant, committed editor.

4b) How about in the writing industry?

The writing industry has many facets, and there are many ways to make a living as a writer, though none are easy! If we're talking actually about the publishing industry, it has changed tremendously over the past 20 years, but also over the past 10 years, 5 years, and 1 year. It's morphing at the speed of light in terms of technology and format. But at the core, we humans are story-tellers and we must have our stories.

Some people believe the publishing industry is diminishing, and that it's because people are no longer reading. I can tell you for sure, exactly the opposite is true! We are reading constantly, on every possible platform: computer, phone, tablet, e-reader, magazine, hardcover, soft-cover, you name it . . . we're reading on it.

Americans who do read for pleasure are avid readers who take their experience of reading seriously. To me, books are not so much "things" to buy, as they are invitations into other worlds. Once a reader begins to hear about a world that intrigues them, they find a way to gain access, whether by buying a hardcover book, or downloading to an e-reader, because they know access to that world—like the world of Milford-Haven—will bring something special to them.

4c) What do you feel are the best changes that have happened?

A greater ability to find a specific audience. Women's Fiction, for example, a century ago, was a tiny category of books written by women, and as such, was often dismissed. Now, however, Women's Fiction is fiction for women, and the category has 55 million readers! With the many internet techniques available, it's now possible to find these readers, and provide them with what they love.

5.) What do you feel it takes to be a writer? What are three elements that are a must to be a writer?

One—writing is not only something to do, but something to be. It's a world-view, a way of looking at life. When I look at people and situations, I look through the lens of story, which means I look for beginning (what started it), middle (how is it being sustained), and end (how it resolves.) I'm looking for character development in people, I'm looking at what motivates, what inspires, what disengages a person. If you're not fascinated by people and their choices and behavior, I'm not sure you can be a writer.

Two—discipline. Whether you really feel like writing or not becomes irrelevant. It's about sitting in that chair, and putting something up on the screen or down on the page. And that means daily, or close to it.

Three—patience. Writing is not a quick thing. We hear about people writing books "overnight." Hmm. Really? I suppose a book that has built up inside can suddenly pour forth. But then begins the editing and the re-writing. So no matter how you slice it, writing is something that requires patience and persistence. It needs to simmer and coalesce. It needs to get polished and cut, like a diamond, before it's ready to be set, or published.

6.) How did you celebrate the sale of your first book? Who did you call first?

I think I did a little dance around my office, whooping and laughing and making faces. Then I opened the book to inhale the aroma of the pages. Weird, right? But every author I know does the same thing! I called my husband, my sister, and my best friend. Wahoo!

7.) What do you feel is a must in a hero? How about a heroine? Is there anything that drives you nuts about a hero/heroine when you read?

Joseph Campbell helped our whole culture understand the hero and the hero's journey. (I had the pleasure of working for Joseph and his wife Jean Erdman at their theatre The Open Eye in New York when I was a college student.) The hero—even if he's a reluctant hero, like Han Solo—must ultimately embark on his journey, find his courage, and slay his dragons. Louis L'Amour's protagonists are great examples of this classic hero-journey. If they don't take on the journey and measure up to the task, they're not participating in the hero's journey. A heroine does exactly the same thing: she faces her challenge and conquers her fear. We not only love these characters, we need them, because they encourage us to identify our own dragons and inspire us to conquer our own fears.

There's more than one hero in my Milford-Haven Novels. At the outset, the one we meet first is Zack. And he drives me crazy! He wants to succeed and have his comfortable, wealthy life, but he doesn't really want to do the internal work, figure out his inner conflicts, and act with integrity. Argh! Through some hard lessons, though, he'll begin to learn. . . .

8.) What age is your inner child? Why did you pick that age?

I actually think of myself, and most people, as having multiple ages. Spiritually? Maybe 20. Intellectually? 70, with a life-expectancy of 200. Physically? 40. Emotionally? Some days 60, some days 6.

9.) What book are you reading now? What is next to be plucked off your TBR pile?

I'm reading Diana Gabaldon's *An Echo in the Bone*, the seventh in her Women's Fiction/Historical Fiction series. Also reading Margaret Coel's *Killing Raven*, the ninth in her Wind River Mystery series. Also listening to the audio book *Likely to Die*, the second in Linda Fairstein's mystery series.

FUN

1.) What are your favorite TV shows? Which shows could you do without ever watching?

Favorites are *Lost*, *NCIS Los Angeles*, *Law & Order* (the original). Can't abide most "reality" TV because it's so clear it actually has nothing to do with reality.

2.) What is your favorite part of summer? How about your least favorite?

Love the sound of crickets at night, the thousands of colors of green sparkling water and soft clouds, peaches iced-tea, bright blue skies, Brazilian samba music, colorful cotton skirts and halter tops, swimming. Could do without sitting on a towel sweating at my desk, baking in my car on the LA freeways, smog inversions.

3.) Do you read the Sunday Comics? Which is your favorite?

Non Sequitur; Baby Blues.

4.) Do you have any websites that you are addicted to and visit regularly?

Several I use for research, but no addictions.

5.) What is your favorite flavor of ice cream? Do you prefer it in a bowl, on a cone or straight from the carton?

Never from a carton . . . that would spoil the fun, since presentation and anticipation are part of the pleasure. Love pistachio in a bowl.

About the Book:

Miranda Jones, 29-year-old female protagonist wildlife artist, escapes a life of privilege to create her own identity as an artist, and as a woman, in the small coastal town of Milford-Haven.

Chris Christian, a local television journalist, follows a lead to the unfinished Clarke mansion where she's killed by an unknown man, then buried under the house.

Sally O'Mally has moved to Milford-Haven from Arkansas and created a successful restaurant on Main Street. But her secret affair with Jack Sawyer is shredding as she learns about the secrets he's been keeping from her.

Samantha Hugo, accomplished middle-aged woman is a leader in the environmental field, but wrestles with having given up her son for adoption years earlier, as revealed in her personal journal entries.

Susan Winslow, Native American part-time student, wrestles with her heritage, her own identity, her relationship with a father just released from prison.

Well-known builder Jack Sawyer tries to ignore his true calling as an architect, cuts corners as a builder, and does his best to undermine Samantha Hugo, his former wife.

Zack Calvin, heir to an oil fortune, takes a brief vacation north from his Santa Barbara home, and finds a painting he must own. When he meets the artist Miranda Jones he begins to pursue her, despite another romantic entangle back home.

About the Series:

Milford-Haven began as an original radio drama Purl created. It was a hit on BBC Radio with 4.5 million listeners in the U.K. and won the Finalist Award for Best Radio Drama, the New York Festivals.

Listeners began requesting books based on the radio drama, which led to the adaptation and development of the novel series. Twelve books are planned for the novel series, with additional short story collections.

The Novels are also being published as audio books performed by the author. The first won the Silver Ben Franklin Award for audio. The second won the Gold USA BookNews Award for audio.

About the Author Mara Purl:

Mara Purl was a performer on-camera and on-stage, with her regular character on Days Of Our Lives having been her starting point for soap opera.

Purl began her writing career as a journalist for the Associated Press, Rolling Stone, The Financial Times of London, Working Woman Magazine, and The Christian Science Monitor. A prolific fiction author, she also has written a play and several non-fiction books including Act Right: A Manual for the On-Camera Actor with actress Erin Gray.

Other Awards include: for radio, the New York Festivals Award; for her play Mary Shelley: In Her Own Words, the Peak Award; and for public service, Woman of the Year 2002 by the Los Angeles County Commission for Women.

Mara Purl is also an accomplished musician. Her instrument is the koto and she recorded and has played on the international stage with many noteworthy musicians including the works Sumahama recorded with Mike Love and the Beach Boys, Pathless Path recorded with Charles Lloyd, Koto Keys with Marilyn Harris, and Teiji Ito's Watermill recorded with Grammy-winning musician Steve Gorn.

The hit song "Jet Laggin'" she co-wrote with Marilyn Harris is in current release on the new CD Orphans.

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