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## Food and Writing at 30,000 Feet-Mara Purl

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Mara Purl

Shuttling back and forth to the [International Culinary Institute](#) in New York City each week for six weeks in May-Jun for “Steven Shaw’s Food Blogging” class has had many wonderful, unexpected benefits, the most prominent of which was the synchronous introduction to national best-selling author, [Mara Purl](#). Mara has an amazing bio as a journalist for Rolling Stone, a staff writer for Financial Times of London, an actress (Days of our Lives), and as a writer-producer of a successful radio drama (Milford-Haven USA) licensed by the BBC, among many, many other accomplishments.

For the flight time between LaGuardia and Chicago, Mara and I had the great fortune of recognizing one another as friends of the most wonderful sort, friends of the heart.

While **The Essential Garden’s** mission is to explore and promote the wonders and benefits of today’s organic and sustainable food cultures, an underlying tenet of this exploration aligns with my meeting Mara: a recognition that each of us is called, compelled really, to follow our heart’s desire.

Mara is on the cusp of publishing “*What the Heart Knows*”(Sep 2011), the

first in a series of women’s fiction novels, the Milford-Haven series, an “advance reader copy” of which I have had the pleasure to read. Therefore, today’s post is a blog interview with Mara Purl and, by extension, an opportunity for my readers to feel into their hearts’ desires. [Interview is completed on a second post, 27-Aug-2011.]

**Linda Naylor:** The geographical setting for *What the Heart Knows* is the fictional town, Milford-Haven of Wales origin, near beautiful Cambria, California on the Central Coast. I’m familiar with Cambria and, in fact, took the drive from Los Angeles through Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo to Morro Bay. What features of those coastal towns created the impetus for the design of Milford-Haven, and why did you want your characters to be in such a setting?



What the Heart Knows, Mara Purl

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**Mara Purl:** Something about the Central Coast spoke to me from the very first moment I visited. And the special feeling I have for the place has never abated, never diminished. I have that special feeling every time I'm there. Though I recognized this at the outset, over time I've come to trust it more and more. And I've also come to realize that every author who develops a series has to find their "thing"—something rich enough that we can continue to explore and study it, while using it as the framework for the kind of story we wish to tell. For Louis L'Amour, a friend and mentor, it was the Old West. Louis had many jobs for many years before he became a published writer, and the setting of the West gave him the perfect paradigm for telling stories of valor, moral choices, self-reliance, and self-knowledge. For Tony Hillerman, it was the Navajo people, and I heard him speak about finding his relationship with them, and his sense that this was where his stories would unfold. For Sue Grafton it's her fictional town of Santa Teresa. For me, it's my fictional town of Milford-Haven set in the real California Central Coast.

**LN:** Tell us about what the most important character features of Miranda Jones, the protagonist, were to the confluence of the story's characters. Since *What the Heart Knows* is the first in the Milford-Haven series, how do you see Miranda Jones in subsequent books?

**MP:** The first important feature about Miranda is her willingness to begin listening to her heart. She's a young woman of privilege, with parents who love her, but who expect her to "keep up with the Joneses"—which in her case, is her own family tradition. Her father has told her all her life to "use your head;" her mother has said, "you're a smart girl." Because this is basically good advice, and because her parents do love her, the things that are holding her back from her own development are actually quite subtle.

Yet an inkling becomes an instinct, and a question becomes a burning need to listen to intuition. Could there be a different way to live? Could she make it on her own without family support? Paying attention to these internal urgings is uncomfortable! They cause upheaval and disapproval. But she's willing to weather all this, and follow her heart into a completely new life in this little town of Milford-Haven.

How Miranda will develop as the series continues in the next few books is that her connection to heart and intuition will get stronger. And what is that connection? It's to an inner spiritual sense of things that doesn't always align with the external circumstances the world presents. It will mean she'll have some unusual experiences, some heartaches and heartbreaks because people don't measure up to the potential she glimpses in them, and also because she doesn't do what she's expected to do. Yet she will ultimately win through to a clear sense of identity and a wonderful sense of fulfillment.

[Conclusion of interview, 27-Aug-2011 post]