

# VENTURA BREZZE

Your Hometown Paper



## Mara Purl loves the Central Coast!

By Nanci Cone

PERHAPS you know Mara Purl as the actress who, for two years, played Darla Cook in "Days of Our Lives" or as the sister of Linda Purl, the Executive Director of the Rubicon's International Theatre Festival. Maybe you were fortunate enough to catch her in her one-woman play (co-written with Sydney Swire) "Mary Shelley—In Her Own Words" which garnered the 2003 Peak Award.

You may not know that she is the award-winning author of the Milford-Haven novels which began as a successful radio drama. Milford-Haven, U.S.A. was the first environmental and the only American radio soap opera ever licensed and broadcast by the BBC which reached an audience of more than 4.5 million listeners throughout the United Kingdom.

Her novels are based on the fictional town of Milford-Haven, a central coast town, and the characters are people you know with problems, issues, and dreams like yours and mine.

They visit and shop in towns like Ventura, Solvang, Santa Barbara, and Cambria—any of which could be the model for her novels. And each novel is connected to the one before it although they do stand alone.

It's more fun to read them in order—it gives you a real sense of daily life on the Central Coast and you find yourself wishing they would hurry up and publish the next novel in the 12-book series!

Mara comes from a strong theatre background. Her grandmother was one of the founders of Actor's Equity, her father earned a degree from Yale Drama School and her mother was a professional ballerina who later became an actress.

She grew up in Tokyo, Japan and while in high school wandered into the local Japanese-American newspaper, Miainichi Daily News, and told the editor, Mr. Shibata, that she wanted to write for his paper. Instead of dismissing her, the editor told her to cover a press conference that day and write it up.

He was so impressed with her effort, he took her under his wing and taught her how to write for a newspaper.

While in high school, she starred in all the theatre productions which eventually led her to Bennington College where she studied Literature and Performing Arts.

She was told to give up one in order to succeed in her other major.

Not one to always listen to others, Mara has always been her own person and, as she put it, "Performing helped make me a better writer."

As a writer, she has been influenced by such authors as Dickens, Austen, Sue Grafton and Debbie

Macomber. Louis L'Amour became her mentor and helped guide her. Mara said that when they met, "it was like meeting family." He said to me, "Don't give up—you've found your path." When things get difficult for her or she's stuck on a chapter, she remembers those words.

On Saturday, July 26, Mara will present a seminar on the importance and relevance of women's fiction at the Ventura Book Festival.

Mara says, "As women, we are aware of our chapters. It's important to discover the next chapter of our lives."

Additionally, Mara will autograph copies of her award-winning novels from the Milford-Haven series.

The Third Annual Ventura Book Festival will be held from 9 am-4 pm at the Crowne Plaza Hotel. Admission to the festival and program is free to the public.

As a counterbalance to Mara Purl's perspective on women's fiction, Santa Barbara author, Andrew Klavan, known for his political thrillers, will present a seminar on men's fiction.

The Book Festival will also present writing seminars, panel discussions, readings by professional actors, book signings by local authors and drawings conducted hourly for great prizes.

As you can gather, I've only begun to scratch the surface of this unique, interesting and talented individual.

To learn more about Mara Purl including her rich acting background, her teaching curriculum, the other books she has written, her music, and her many other accomplishments and awards, visit her website.



Author Mara Purl and Ventura Book Festival Founder Mary Embree