

Wendy K Harris

Lynne Hackles hears about 'dream' storylines...

The days of staggering out of bed to bully the family into action are over,' announces Wendy K Harris. 'I can take my time to drift out of my fragile dreamscape, an extraordinary layer in the strata of consciousness. Twilight and dawn – the times when the edges of materiality blur and metamorphose – mystical! Talking too soon can precipitate amnesia.

'I have a fantasy that I will walk down to the shore in silent awareness before breakfast but seldom do. Once my left brain has booted up I become organised, eat toast, drink tea and sort out everyday stuff before I enter my writing room.

'I live with my husband on the southern tip of the Isle of Wight in an area of outstanding natural beauty, atmospherically called, The

Undercliff – literally a shelf of slipping land between the landward and sea cliffs. It's an inspiring place to walk, which we do after work and at the weekends.

'I remember the day I learned to read. I was looking at the pictures in my father's newspaper, suddenly the black letters turned into words and a new dimension opened up for me. Our library was an old monastery in a park. I can recall the damp cloisters and mysterious gloomy interior – and that addictive smell of books. I started to write a list of the books I read each week and a tiny diary of events. At school, I loved English and writing compositions, but blanked out many other subjects. I'm not sure it was altogether good for me. I was never a very "present" child, always off in my internal world. Later, becoming a mother gave me the opportunity to revisit all my childhood stories and also to write some for my children.

'My first novel, *The Sorrow Of Sisters* (Transita), was published last year in the UK, Germany and Holland and has just been bought by Norway. The second, *Blue Slipper Bay*, came out in May.

'I don't try to think up a plot. An idea arrives, sometimes triggered by a small event or dream. I scribble it down in my writer's notebook or on scraps of paper (I keep piles in every room) with a pencil. As I write, the original idea expands and characters birth themselves. I eventually have so many bits of paper that I have to start organising them and get it on the PC. I weave back and forth and return to the beginning to "layer" another thread into the plot. It becomes quite complex and I pin timelines, notes, maps and pictures on the wall so I can keep track.



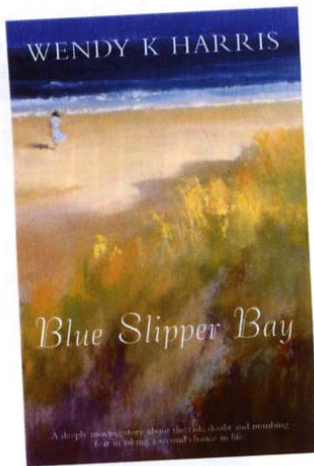
Wendy K Harris

'As long as I organise myself before I start writing I'm not distracted by displacement activities but I do have certain rituals. I have great faith in the creative force of the universe and I invoke it by lighting candles, incense, and sitting quietly to still my busy mind to make space for it.

'I start writing in the morning as soon as I feel clear and I can become so immersed that unless someone rescues me I lose all sense of time and write until hunger or sleep overwhelms me. I always intend not to do this, I'm sure it can't be healthy. With my first Undercliff novel I explored the island and I should spend more time doing this to remind myself it is a real place and not just inside my head. Ideally, I would like to start earlier in the morning and finish at lunchtime. But some of the best writing days for me are the ones where I forget myself.

'And, yes, my characters do disturb my sleep with their needs. I sometimes have to fumble for pencil and paper to write down a meaningful idea or line of poetry that I know I will have distorted by morning.

'I am working on my third Undercliff novel, *Rocken Edge*, and the old characters still live on.' Website: www.wendykharris.com



Writing Place

'I write "below deck". Our living room has doors which open out to a deck. My inventive husband has enclosed the space beneath to make a writing room to which I have been banished with my laptop, files, reference books and all writing paraphernalia. Bliss! I can pin, stick, glue and scatter my inspirational and meaningful clutter wherever I like without having to clear it up when I've finished. Watching over me I have a dilapidated wooden Buddha who looks as if he knows a thing or two. From the window I can see through the poplar trees to the sea. These trees rustle in the wind with a sound like falling rain and I can also hear the low drone – sometimes roar – of the sea. On my windowsill sits a piece of glass engraved with a small figure in meditation and the words, Be Still And Know – my aspiration.'

To order a copy of *Blue Slipper Bay* published by Transita at £7.99pb, call Writers' Bookshelf on freephone 0800 015 0554. Postage and packing is £1.95. Please have your credit card ready.

Lynne Hackles's website:
www.lynnhackles.com

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