

Interview Questions

Tell us what sparked the idea for your newest book, *Phoebe's Light*.

While researching *Anna's Crossing*, a book about the ocean voyage of the first Amish who came to the New World, I visited historical ship museums. On a whaling ship was a *cuddy*, a small room built on the upper deck for the captain's wife, who was horrifically seasick. And that's where *Phoebe's Light* got its spark . . . with the idea of a young woman who had such high hopes for adventure and was so dismally disappointed.

***Phoebe's Light* is the first book in the new Nantucket Legacy series. How many books are proposed for this series and can you give us a brief idea of how these books will differ?**

There are three books in the series, with a common thread: Great Mary's journal, a story-within-a-story, discovered by her descendants. The three books cover the rise and fall of the whaling period of Nantucket, when it was the wealthiest port in the world.

How did you become interested in the Quakers of Nantucket? How are they different (or similar to) the Old Order Amish?

Most people confuse the two; while they do have similar values—pacifism, simple living—they are very different. The Quakers come from England, the Amish come out of Europe. The Quakers are reformers, the Amish prefer to be isolated. I find faith communities, all kinds, to be fascinating in how they influenced a society. Quakerism, in particular, gave historical Nantucket a strong and sturdy framework for its subsequent rapid growth in the 18th century.

This book is set in a very different location than many of your previous books. What made you choose the island of Nantucket for this setting?

A longtime visitor to Nantucket, I'd always had a vision to write a historical novel about the women of this island. Because it was a whaling community, men were often absent for long periods. The women ran this island, so much so that a main road in town was nicknamed "Petticoat Row." It's just ripe for a novel.

What research was required for writing *Phoebe's Light*? Did you uncover anything unusual?

I spent many hours in the Nantucket Historical Society, squinting at old documents. At one point, I had to sign away my life, lock up my camera and purse, and put on white gloves before the librarian went down into the vault to bring out Great Mary's Accounting Book, started in the late 1600s. I still get chills when I think of her careful handwriting, her apparent ability to work with

so many kinds of people. She was considered the “Deborah” of the Old Testament on Nantucket Island, a wise woman many sought out.

Besides wanting to plan their next vacation in Nantucket, what “takeaway value” will a reader glean from your book?

One of the last entries in Great Mary’s journal is, “We are not alone.” I hope a reader will take her words to heart.

How would you describe your writing style?

Engaging, character-driven, with historical information woven in painlessly. I hope.

What’s next on your writing to-do list?

After this series, I have a coastal contemporary series to write. And another historical. And another Amish contemporary. Lots going on!