

L I F E S T Y L E T R A V E L

# BROUGHTON

QUARTERLY  
WINTER 2011

## THE SOFT SIDE

Hard-Edge Artist Penelope  
Krebs Looks to the Sky

## WOMEN OF BROUGHTON TERRITORY

**IN SEARCH OF GRETEL EHRLICH**  
WOMAN OF LIGHTNING AND ICE

**AUTHOR CATHERINE RYAN HYDE**  
ONE BOOK AT A TIME

**HER WINDY CITY**  
CHICAGO TOURING WITH A TWIST

**WATERFALLS TO WINERIES**  
A PERFECT DAY IN SOLVANG



# ONE BOOK AT A TIME

The next chapter of author Catherine Ryan Hyde

BY ANNE Z. COOKE



PHOTO BY GARY AND PIERRE SILVA

**S**HE DIDN'T SET OUT to change the world, though her latest novel, *Jumpstart the World*, released this October, takes on a generous slice of the pain. Nor did she invent "Pay It Forward," the catchphrase that encourages millions to offer a helping hand in hopes that one good deed inspires others until they spread worldwide like ripples on a pond.

That said, it's a pretty good bet that Catherine Ryan Hyde, author of the best-selling novel *Pay It Forward*, has been a greater force for good than Mother Teresa, the United Nations, and Oprah Winfrey combined.

How good, I wondered? My laptop wheezed in complaint as I googled "Pay It Forward," then waited. And waited. When the screen came up, more than 55 million entries had answered the call. Near the top was the Pay It Forward Foundation, which awards grants to pay-it-forward projects and for which Hyde is the official spokesperson. Close behind was the movie based on the book, starring Kevin Spacey, Helen Hunt, and Haley Joel Osment. And the rest of the list? Lifestyle seminars and school projects, motivational speakers and self-help articles, insurance salesmen and new-age gurus.

"A friend of mine who'd heard about Pay It Forward told me she'd seen the movie and wondered if I had, too," Hyde tells me on the phone. "When I told her I'd written the book, she was amazed. She had no idea."

Today, the world has adopted the slogan. But the author has moved on to explore more urgent social themes. *Jumpstart the World*, her fourteenth book, wrests friendship and love from the dark heart of shame and abandonment. And her previous novels, page-turners like their famous predecessor, introduce a legion of sympathetic characters coping with a gritty tangle of love and loss, guilt and rejection, tragedy and trust.

"To me, the joy of a book is that you don't have to sit on the outside and watch what a character does," says Hyde. "You see what he sees and hear what he hears. You can go down deep into a character and find the place where emotions are universal."

As a mere scribbler of non-fiction, such

weighty themes make me feel woefully outclassed as I set out to meet her in person. Heading north on Pacific Coast Highway to Cambria, where we're meeting for lunch, I turn inland at Moonstone Beach. Still juggling my putative list of questions and with 15 minutes to spare, a brief tour of this quiet seaside village seems in order. Clapboard bungalows and towering eucalyptus line narrow streets, as deserted as a church on a Wednesday at dinnertime. Craft and antique stores, historic plaques, and art galleries suggest that weekends here attract tourists like flies to a jelly sandwich. Otherwise it's just the sort of place where an author can find the solitude that creative writing demands.

We meet on the sidewalk, with hellos and a handshake. Catherine, as

It's no surprise that Hyde, born in 1955, comes from a family of writers. Her mother sold stories and articles to women's magazines in the '50s and '60s and both her sisters have written in their fields. But Hyde is the family dynamo. She's published a novel every ten months since 2000 and is presently under contract to finish two more books. She commands the discipline to organize and develop a full-length novel and to stay on schedule to the final edit. But to make it work, she's strict about balancing work with community events. "When I'm on a creative roll, I can't afford to let anything interrupt my focus," she explains, frowning slightly.

In the lull between novels, her books draw her to her community. She donated copies of her novels to Friends of the Cambria Library to raise

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she introduces herself, is about five-foot-seven, with shoulder-length dark hair, wearing slim jeans and a lightweight linen jacket. Smiling she leads the way to a table near the window.


"Robin's Restaurants is one of my favorites," she says, scanning the menu. "The food is wonderful." I order the salmon bisque, rich and thick, a house special. She orders the vegetarian wrap salad, stuffed with fresh ingredients and looking very plump when it comes to the table. "This will be messy to eat, but, well. . ." She admires it, chuckles, and digs in.

We eat and talk and the awkwardness fades. She's not in a rush, which puts me at ease and makes for a comfortable conversation. She's not a vegan, but she has developed food sensitivities and watches what she eats. As the minutes pass, we talk about life in Cambria, why she writes and the themes of her books.

"I think I have a predisposition to stand up for the thoroughly misunderstood," she tells me, citing *Jumpstart the World*.

"I'm a pretty big fan of letting people be what they need to be. We can't stop them for being themselves, yet we go right on telling others what they should and shouldn't be. It's a little like disapproving of the rain. You can condemn it, but you can't stop it."

funds for the library's new home. She appears at book signings to speak and to donate and autograph her works. She enjoys meeting and talking about her books with book club members willing to come to Cambria for lunch or tea. And she'd like to talk to high school English classes about creative writing, but so far, she says, "I haven't been asked."

Happily, Hyde is no recluse. You may catch her selecting asparagus at the market, or sipping tea at Robin's, on Burton Drive in historic east Cambria. But for wannabe writers, the way to connect is to enroll in one of her "Weekend Intensives," two-day writers' workshops for five to eight students. Groups who sign up together can arrange a convenient date. She's open to any fiction writing and publishing topic and may assign homework in advance. Students may also be asked to bring samples of their work to discuss. Past workshops have focused on story development, dialogue, self-editing, book proposal synopsis creation, and query letters. "We meet here in my studio, and skills and experience levels aren't an issue," she tells me. "If you love to write, you're welcome." 

For more information about Hyde, visit her website at [catherineryanhyde.com](http://catherineryanhyde.com) or look for her on Facebook.

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