

I was born August 27, 1945, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the second of four children. My father was an engineer and my mother was an organizer of various community ventures. She later worked as office manager for my father's business. I grew up beside a lake in Northeastern Pennsylvania, just a few miles from where I live now. The road from there to here has taken me around the world many times.

When I was a child I loved fishing, exploring the woods and streams, and adventures, both real and imagined. I loved rainy days and the excuse to tuck up under the eaves of our summer cottage with a book. A lot of my life took place between the pages of those books, as well as in stories I created myself. My favorites (of those not invented by me) were Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*, *The Wind in the Willows*, *Swiss Family Robinson*, and *Black Beauty*. I was an inveterate journal-keeper. There always seemed to be at least one independent, charming animal in both my story life and my real life. I earned the reputation in my family for being a daydreamer. My grandmother used to say, "She doesn't have a practical bone in her body." And I'm afraid that at that time in my life, it was absolutely true. I loved everything exotic: food, clothing, art, stories, languages, and especially people. My favorite words were words like Istanbul and Ladakh and Dharamsala. They were the places I wanted to visit – and I've been lucky to have visited most of them.



My husband, Wayne Harley

My father wanted me to be a teacher. But I was shy and couldn't imagine myself standing in front of a class. In college I couldn't resist classes in literature and writing, politics, world religions, and anything having to do with stories, geography, and nature. And so, quite naturally, I became a liberal arts major, with concentration in literature and political science. I never got around to telling my father I'd never taken a single education course until after graduation. When I finally admitted my sin of omission, he wished me luck with finding a job.

It occurred to me that someone who loved to write and travel might be a good journalist. My first job at a newspaper was at The Canyon Courier in Evergreen, Colorado. I took photographs, wrote captions, and covered things like pet shows and fundraisers. My instincts as a reporter weren't very good. One time I got involved with rescuing a dog and his owner who'd fallen through the ice on the lake at the edge of town. I left my camera in the car, and didn't take a single photo. But the man and his dog were both saved by ice fishermen and the emergency squad of the volunteer fire department.

Through a series of lucky moves I ended up only a few years later working in Hong Kong for United Press International. I say lucky, because even then it was difficult to find work as a reporter unless you had a degree in journalism, which I did not have. I was hired by Leon Daniel, who was prejudiced in favor of old-fashioned reporting without benefit of a master's degree. My job at UPI was not the glamorous job you might imagine when you think of a foreign correspondent. We took turns on the news desk editing copy from people whose knowledge of English often was minimal. We filed commodity prices, stock reports, and news items before covering politics, train wrecks, the vagaries of weather, air crashes, and a steady stream of feature stories. We monitored English translations of Hsinhua, the official Chinese news agency, as well as the major Chinese daily newspapers, Radio Beijing, and Chinese television broadcasts. The part I loved most was keeping up with Chinese intellectuals of various descriptions who'd left the Mainland. I met them in tea stalls and kanji shops in the alleys of Wanchai and Causeway Bay. Much of this enterprise reporting was done on our own time. My instincts improved, and I was never at a loss for story ideas, most of which came from these courageous, idealistic, and sometimes reckless people.



BB King

In 1979 I was promoted to my own bureau based in New Delhi, India, covering all of the above, as well as the administration of news bureaus in seven countries: India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Republic of the Maldives. The stories I covered included the execution in Pakistan of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (for a murder most people believed he did not commit), the stirrings of democracy in Nepal, the return to office in India of Indira Gandhi, the assassination in Bangladesh of President Ziaur Rehman, and the invasion of Afghanistan by the former Soviet Union, which set off the war that continues to this day with the open involvement of the United States.

After bumping around Asia for more than ten years I went back to the United States, worked part time editing foreign news for The Washington Post, and looked for an opportunity to return to Asia. By that time I had come to believe that the news was only part of what Americans needed to understand about world events. What was missing from the American education about the rest of the world was cultural understanding. It seemed to me (and still does) that culture overlies basic human instincts pretty thinly, and that 'getting' other cultures is really about understanding our own strengths, weaknesses and tendencies. This kind of understanding is best gained by telling people's stories – and I don't mean the stories of their economies, geo-political adventures, and internal politics. We need to see what they eat for breakfast, where they sleep, how the air smells outside their houses, and how they talk to each other.



Mango aka "Baby Doll"

In 1986 I returned to Pakistan, where I worked on a literacy project for the US Agency for International Development and the government of Pakistan, which took me to the Cholistan Desert. I was captivated by the landscape, the people, their music and poetry, and their stories. In the weeks I had to wait for permission to return to Cholistan, which was located along the sensitive border area between India and Pakistan, I began to transcribe these stories and weave them together into a narrative. This became my first novel, *Shabanu Daughter of the Wind*. The book was published in 1989, and in 1990 it won a Newbery Honor. By that time I was writing a second novel. I hadn't quite got the people of Cholistan

out of my system (nor have I to this day!) and so the second novel was the sequel to *Shabanu*, which I called *Haveli*. In 2009 a third novel in the series appeared: *The House of Djinn*, which is the story of two Pakistani teen-agers, cousins whose family arranges for them to marry to seal a political bargain.

Several other novels followed *Shabanu* and *Haveli* for a total of eight: *Dangerous Skies* is a story set on the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay, where I went to live after I came home from Asia. I was still in the throes of culture shock, and the Eastern Shore seemed as exotic to me as anywhere I'd lived in Asia. This is a story about a boy and girl who have been friends since they were toddlers. It isn't until they're teenagers that race opens up a chasm between them. The aftermath of the publication of this book was painful, as my neighbors on the Eastern Shore insisted the racial divide I wrote about didn't exist, and at the same time accused me of writing about their families. It wasn't exactly true – but it taught me to be careful about naming real places in writing fiction.

Shiva's Fire is a story that allowed me to explore what I knew but didn't quite understand about Hindu mythology and the part the deities play in a Hindu's personal beliefs. Writing this book (which is just out as an ebook) was a great adventure that took me back to India twice to check facts that I couldn't check in books or on the Internet: the texture and color of the dirt on a farm in southern India, the scent and feeling of the bark of sandalwood, the heft of a sandalwood carver's tools, the gossip of girls who live a strictly regimented life in a gurukulam, where learning sacred dance is the most serious business imaginable.



Poco Surveying For Field Mice

This book was followed by *The Green Dog*, a memoir that my mother helped me with. She was in a wheelchair, was nearly blind, and loved to reminisce about our lives as we grew up beside Chapman Lake. It was a way of spending time with her at the end of her life, even though I lived nearly a thousand miles away. We did this through daily phone conversations and monthly visits. She died before it was published, but I will always treasure the time we spent reconstructing the memories upon which this story was built.

Next came *Under the Persimmon Tree*, which I first wrote as a short story for a collection called *911: The Book of Help*, published just after September 11, 2001, by Carus. I brought up from the basement of my house boxes of notebooks filled with conversations I'd had with refugees from the fighting in Afghanistan during the Soviet war. But I never even opened one of those notebooks. All those years of reporting on the horrors of what war did to families, to children, to the land, and to a nation had lodged firmly in my subconscious. I always thought I might want to process my reactions to the events I witnessed in Afghanistan, but there was always another story to deal with, and I never sat down to write about it. When I did, it came out faster than my fingers could type.

Next came *The House of Djinn*, and this year *Callie's Paradox*, which is the story of a girl from an imperfect family who are strict observers of Sundays in church. Callie's family think they know what Callie should believe. Callie is a soccer-player, an avid star-gazer, and a skeptic. From the natural world she is inspired to discover what she really believes in, even though her parents don't understand and try to force her to stick with their beliefs. The story is set in Pennsylvania, near where I live now.

I am currently writing screenplays of the *Shabanu* novels, which have been optioned by [Equilibrium Entertainment](#). I love learning a new discipline while revisiting material I love. I also have been working on an adult novel about an American woman who gets caught up in violent events in Pakistan, where she has gone to write a magazine article about the history of guns in Pakistan and Afghanistan. I also plan the program for The Gathering, a literature conference at Keystone College, which is my alma mater, and just a few miles down the road from our little farm. The Gathering uses literature, visual arts, music, theater, film, and culture to explore imagination. Please have a look at our Website: www.gathering.keystone.edu

In my spare time I sing, garden, kayak, hike, star-gaze, read, listen to music, and talk to friends about books, religion, politics, philosophy, and other interesting stuff. I am married to my first love, Wayne Harley. We live on our 25-acre farm, where we (most of the labor is done by Wayne) grow berries, herbs, vegetables, and flowers. Our cat Poco keeps down the field mouse population, and our standard poodles BB King and Mango entertain us within an inch of our lives.