

HAPPINESS KEY

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Sometimes the key to happiness is just within reach.

Sadness, like happiness, takes many forms and is often difficult to recognize in others. In her latest novel, *HAPPINESS KEY* (MIRA Books, July 2009, \$13.95 U.S./\$16.95 CAN.), *USA TODAY* bestselling author Emilie Richards examines the lives of four very different women, each living a life of quiet desperation in a Florida Keys cottage community. When a local elderly man suddenly dies, however, these women join efforts in order to find their departed neighbor's next of kin. Though their uneasy alliance is strained by their vastly different backgrounds, they all soon learn that there is far more to the others—and themselves—than they ever realized.

Tracy Deloche still doesn't know how it all went wrong. One day she's the spoiled wife of a real estate tycoon and the next day her husband is being sent to prison, leaving her with nothing to her name but a run-down cottage development on Florida's Gulf Coast called Happiness Key. Now newly divorced, broke and abandoned by her friends and family, Tracy desperately needs to sell the beachfront property for urgent cash. Unfortunately, due to holdups from local environmental groups, she's stuck for the time being. With no other income or work skills, and at the end of her rope, Tracy is forced to rely on the meager rents she receives from the eclectic tenants who occupy the four shabby beach houses on Happiness Key.

Sent by her family from India to America for an arranged marriage, Janya Kapur constantly feels like a foreigner—in the country, in her neighborhood, even in her own home with her husband, a man she barely knows. Though desperate to return home, Janya knows that she is stuck in Happiness Key for a long time.

Alice Brooks' confusion spells have been getting worse since her daughter's death. Her granddaughter and son-in-law have moved into her beach house to help her out, but lately she's been getting worse. And with the way her son-in-law treats her, she wonders if he's actually helping or hurting her.

Wanda Grey is brash, curt and defiant. But her harsh exterior is only masking the pain she feels inside in light of her failing marriage. Her husband barely even acknowledges her anymore. Well, if he's going to ignore her, she's figured out a way to hurt him back—even if it destroys their marriage.

Despite such turmoil in the community, however, the residents of Happiness Key remain unaware of their neighbors' struggles until the day the only other resident, elderly Herb Krause, is found dead in his cottage, holding on to a mysterious key. When no family information is found for the reclusive Herb, the four women put their own personal problems aside while they work to track down Herb's next of kin.

The more they discover about the life of Herb Krause—a man seemingly without a past—the more these four women also discover about themselves and the men in their lives. Most importantly, they start to realize that Happiness Key is far from the sad, lonely place they once thought it was.

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EMILIE RICHARDS
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EMILIE RICHARDS

USA TODAY bestselling author Emilie Richards recalls fondly the summer she served as a VISTA volunteer in the Arkansas Ozarks. Although conditions were primitive and resources scarce, at the end of the three months the 20-year-old college student left with a richness of experience that would forever change her life and ultimately inspire a series of novels for MIRA Books about the age-old craft of quilting.

After her stint in the Ozarks, Richards went on to finish her undergraduate degree in American studies from Florida State University, and her master's in family development from Virginia Tech. She subsequently served as a therapist in a mental health center, as a parent services coordinator for Head Start families and in several pastoral counseling centers before she began writing full-time.

Richards says that in every social service position she held, she gained more than she gave. "I set out to help people and ended up learning so much more about myself."

A full-time writer, Richards has drawn on those experiences while writing more than 50 novels. As her star has risen in the publishing world, she has appeared on national television and has been quoted in *Reader's Digest*, right between Oprah and Thomas Jefferson. Although in recent years she has broadened the scope of her writing to women's fiction, she was awarded a prestigious RITA[®] Award, romance publishing's Oscar[®], for her earlier work in the genre. *Romantic Times BOOKreviews* magazine has presented her with numerous awards, including one for career achievement.

No doubt Richards's background as a relationship counselor is partly responsible for the award-winning nature of her novels. This background enables her to consistently deliver richly textured family dramas that explore the human condition. In *HAPPINESS KEY* she explores the unlikely friendship that develops between four women who couldn't be more different from each other and would probably never even have met if they weren't neighbors on the same rundown spit of Florida land known as Happiness Key. Drawn together first by their search to uncover the

past of their late neighbor, a man whose identity simply doesn't add up, they soon start sharing their own doubts, fears and triumphs, forming bonds that will ultimately help a new relationship begin, rescue two marriages and save a life. By the time you finish this novel you will have laughed, cried, cheered, come to value the friends who share your own life and realize that Happiness Key couldn't be more aptly named.

Richards has been married for 39 years to her college sweetheart, a Unitarian Universalist minister. They have three grown sons and a daughter. Born in Bethesda, Maryland, and raised in St. Petersburg, Florida, Richards has lived with her family not only in Virginia but in Louisiana, California, Arkansas, Ohio and Pennsylvania. They also spent two four-month sabbaticals in Australia.

When not writing or engaging in her other passion, quilting, Richards enjoys traveling and turning her suburban yard into a country garden. She is currently plotting her next novel for MIRA Books, to be published in 2010.

