

# Maisie Dobbs 10th Anniversary Reflections

by Jacqueline Winspear

It seems as if it were only yesterday that a woman named Maisie Dobbs walked into my life—for that more or less sums up what happened as I was on my way to work, yet stuck in traffic during a typical California rainstorm. It was pouring! I was at a stop light with a sea of red taillights in front of me, and it seemed as if we commuters were destined to be there for days. There's never any good to come of worrying when you're in that situation—you just have to sit there and get on with it. I looked around at other drivers, and started thinking of other things—yes, I guess you could call it daydreaming. It was then that, in my mind's eye, I saw a young woman in the garb of the late 1920's, wearing a cloche hat and carrying a battered document case, come up out of the depths of Warren Street tube station in London—though in my daydream, instead of stepping on a steel escalator, she was on the old wooden clunkety-clunk escalator. She passed through the turnstile—no automatic machine—stopped to speak to a newspaper vendor outside, and then went on her way along Warren Street, where she stopped at a house, took out an envelope with two keys, and stepped into the gas-lit hallway. Her name was Maisie Dobbs. She was a psychologist and investigator, and at one time had been a nurse on the battlefields of WWI France. And—as readers later learn—she is as shell-shocked as any man who went to war.

A hail of horns interrupted my daydreaming—traffic had started moving and I was holding up a line of cars! However I could not stop thinking about this Maisie Dobbs woman, and by the time I arrived at work, I pretty much had the whole story in my head. I could not wait to get home that evening, and as soon as I walked into my apartment, I started writing—in fact, that evening I wrote what became the first chapter of [Maisie Dobbs](#), my first novel, and it has barely changed since I began writing—in fact it was my first ever fiction as an adult, for until then, I was a non-fiction writer in my spare time.

Since *Maisie Dobbs* was published in 2003 by SOHO Press, nine more novels have been published featuring Maisie Dobbs, Billy Beale, Rowan Compton, Priscilla Evernden and other characters in the series. I have been bowled over by the response the series has received from readers and reviewers, and also by the fact that each book in the series has been nominated for awards—*Maisie Dobbs* was nominated for seven awards all told, including the Edgar® Award for Best Novel. However, it is the readers' letters that have touched me more than anything else, reminding me of the special place that stories have in our lives.

One of the first letters I received was from a 94-year-old woman. She explained that her father had returned home from France in 1918 a changed man, and had eventually taken his own life when she was 11 years old—the loss had tormented her ever since. She went on to say that reading *Maisie Dobbs* and [Birds Of A Feather](#) had brought her peace, that finally she understood what her father might have experienced and what terrors of war had remained with him to the extent that he could not bear to live any longer, despite being a husband and father. I wept upon reading that letter.

Other readers—many veterans of more recent wars and their families—have reported similar experiences, and I can only imagine that reading a series of novels where the roots of each story are set in a tumultuous time of conflict can open conversation and perhaps a means of understanding—indeed, humans have been trying to make sense of their lives through stories since the days when myths and legends were passed on from parent to child, or in community around a fire as the sun went down on the day. I have heard from people who have read the books as a family, kindling a curiosity about grandparents and great-grandparents who might have been involved in The Great War, and I know the books have been used in colleges. But there are also the readers who enjoy following a series of characters to see what happens next—and I have now met thousands of you over the years since [Maisie Dobbs](#) was published; it is a privilege to have made your acquaintance.

Now SOHO Press is re-launching *Maisie Dobbs*, which has given me this opportunity to look back on the series and—once again—remember how fortunate I was to be stuck in traffic on a rainy California day, and then to be transported to a different place and time when a woman called Maisie Dobbs walked into my life.