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WOMEN Writing the West

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Sponsor of the WILLA Literary Award
WomenWritingtheWest.org

Remembering Sybil Downing



~ 1930 - 2011 ~
Co-founder and first WWW President

“Sybil was a remarkable woman, passionate about writing and preserving stories of the women’s West. She was the reason I became involved in WWW ... I learned new things about history, the unique roles that women played in our nation’s formation, and what it meant to be a professional writer. She believed in challenging herself to always write better and to be supportive of those who came behind her.

She will be remembered fondly by many, including me.”

– Jane Kirkpatrick

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Sybil Downing



By Jerrie Hurd

Sybil Downing and I met for lunch one day in 1994 to discuss how we were going to promote our upcoming books. My first novel would be out from Pocket Books in six months. Sybil was looking for a publisher for *Ladies of the Gold Field Stock Exchange*.

Book promotion is not a new problem, but we were on the cusp of real change in how stories of the American West were being told. Research by Sue Armitage (see *The Women's West*) and others had changed how historians told about women's contributions to our region. Our question was how to reach a wider audience.

Women mystery writers, faced with fewer reviews and less publisher promotion than male mystery writers, had organized as Sisters In Crime and turned that genre on its head. Ours was a bigger problem. At least women mystery writers had their books published as mysteries.

Women who wrote about the American West often were lumped with romance writers or defined as regional writers. Western Writers of America, the great, venerable organization of our genre, was biased toward male writers. Just read the

list of Spur Winners prior to 1994. Worse, the New York Times didn't review western books at all—nobody's, not even Wallace Stegner's.

Foolish or undaunted, we decided to follow the Sisters-In-Crime model. That June we met with women writers attending the Western Writers Conference to float the idea. Several months later, we met in Casper, Wyoming to actually incorporate and launch the organization. We picked Casper because some potential board members were coming down from Montana; we were driving up from Colorado, and Casper was in the middle.

At the risk of offending Wyomingites, I confess that Casper became our private joke. On our way to that meeting, Sybil and I agreed that Casper was not our idea of being in the center of anything. Worse, we couldn't think of anything of note that had started in Casper. What were we thinking? For years, whenever WWW hit a snag, and there were a few, Sybil and I would look at each other and mouth—"Casper" like what did we expect?

That's typical Sybil. She had a wicked sense of humor. At that

Casper meeting, she became WWW's first president and spent the next few years building the support to make the organization thrive. As the group's fifth anniversary approached, Sybil was quoted in the Denver Post saying, "The stereotypes must go—the West is cross-cultural and it crosses genres. We have mysteries, children's books, young adults, fiction and nonfiction." She was never off message.

No surprise, Sybil's novels reflect her best qualities. They always include a strong but likeable woman, a hint of romance, and a backbone of injustice that her protagonist is determined to set right. *The Binding Oath* is about the Ku Klux Klan in Denver. *Fire In the Hole* is about the Ludlow Massacre. *The Vote* focuses on harrowing scenes in a women's prison that is a little-known part of women's fight for the right to vote. *Ladies of the Goldfield Stock Exchange* is about women opening their own stock exchange. Her last book, *In Plain Sight*, is about child labor in the northern Colorado beet fields—a timely subject with today's talk of rolling back child labor laws.

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Recalling the years Sybil served as Chair of the board of the Colorado Center for the Book, Chris Citron says, "Sybil was passionate about the importance of books in our lives. She was a wise adviser and strategist. I always felt she was a true kindred spirit. Only after years of working together did I discover that we both had attended the same girls' school in New York City, The Brearley School. I guess that is where we both came to take feminism for granted. Sybil was an enthralling storyteller, especially of women's stories."

Jane Barker, who co-authored a series of children's books with Sybil, recalls being confronted, in front of an audience, by a man who accused them of rewriting history. Sybil stood up—tall, blonde, well-dressed and fearless. "You're absolutely right," she told him. "That's exactly what we're doing." When he tried to argue that she couldn't do that with books used in Colorado public schools, she explained that she and Barker were adding the parts that were left out and gave examples. She didn't win him over, but she won the support of those who heard the exchange.

This past week as we shared Sybil stories, everyone agreed she was a steadfast friend who had no time for small talk. She was affable, quick to smile, and equally quick to get down to business.

Virginia Culver wrote in the *Denver Post*, "Books were Sybil Downing's life: She read them, wrote them, reviewed them, and collected them." For the last ten years, Sybil reviewed for the *Denver Post*. Her beat was books of the West, both fiction and nonfiction,

by writers of every gender and ethnicity.

She saw herself filling a need, which is a polite way of saying she was forever pissed that the *New York Times* doesn't review western books.

Sybil was quoted in the Denver Post saying, 'The stereotypes must go—the West is cross-cultural and it crosses genres.'

Occasionally I had to remind myself that Sybil was only three years younger than my mother because she never acted like my mother. She might have been researching the past, but she was forever plotting the next move into the future. It was always about whether I could keep up.

Sybil died November 20, 2011 of a stroke. Her husband of 62 years died a year earlier. She had been fighting Alzheimer's for four or five years—emphasis on fighting. Still writing her reviews for the *Post*, she used dozens of sticky notes pasted into the books to remind herself what she wanted to say. She finished *In Plain Sight* during that time and had started a memoir of a trip she made with her mother to South America in the 1940s.

I saw her several months ago when she invited me to lunch. She arrived looking the way Sybil has always looked—perfectly put to-

gether. The conversation was also the usual—stimulating. Only when I walked her upstairs to her apartment did I sense her struggle.

There were sticky notes in her kitchen, on her desk, on the TV, on the door to her bedroom. All said the same thing: "Today, lunch with Jerrie." Standing for a moment, in her bathroom, looking in a mirror with two such sticky notes, I mouthed, "Fight on." I thought I meant her. I forgot to notice that I was looking back from the mirror.

• **Jerrie Hurd** is co-founder of Women Writing the West with Sybil Downing, WWW's second President, and first Newsletter Editor. The author of three novels, she is currently working on a book about the power of family stories with supporting blog at <http://www.jerriehurd.wordpress.com>. Her photography has shown at Camera Obscura, Dairy Center for the Arts and other galleries. She lives in Boulder, Colorado.



This biography was printed inside
the program at Sybil's Celebration
of Life:

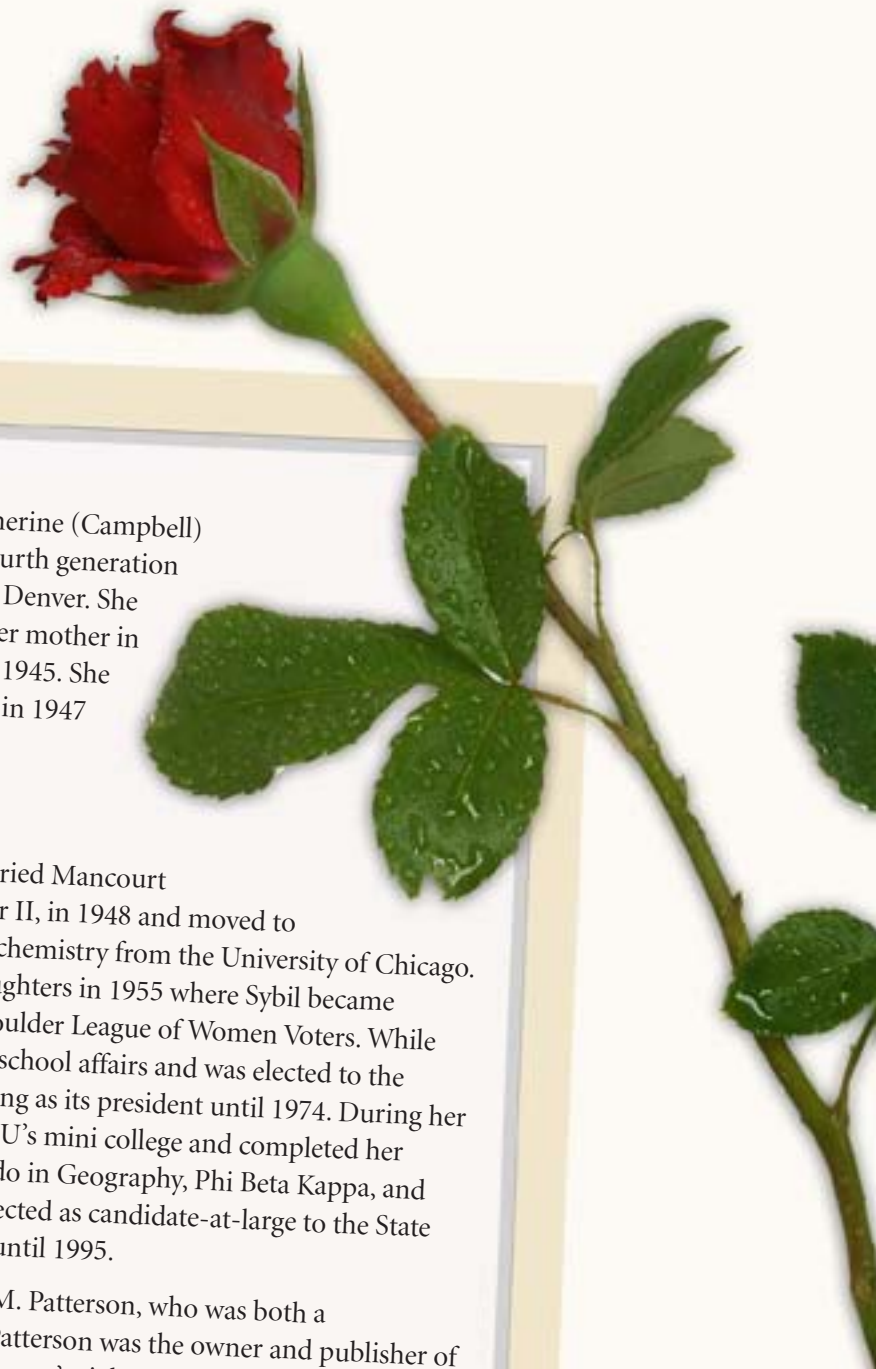
Sybil Downing, daughter of Stuart S. and Catherine (Campbell) Smith, died November 20, 2011. Sybil was a fourth generation native of Colorado, born February 10, 1930 in Denver. She attended Friends Seminary while living with her mother in New York City until she returned to Denver in 1945. She graduated from Denver's Randall High School in 1947 where, at her graduation, she delivered the valedictorian address to her graduating class in fluent French.

Upon graduating from high school Sybil married Mancourt (Corky) Downing, a naval veteran of World War II, in 1948 and moved to Chicago, where Corky received his Ph.D. in Biochemistry from the University of Chicago. They moved to Boulder, Colorado with two daughters in 1955 where Sybil became involved with and eventually president of the Boulder League of Women Voters. While raising four children, she became active in local school affairs and was elected to the Boulder Valley RE-2 School Board in 1967, serving as its president until 1974. During her tenure on the school board, she took classes at CU's mini college and completed her Bachelor's degree from the University of Colorado in Geography, Phi Beta Kappa, and Magna Cum Laude in 1976. In 1984, Sybil was elected as candidate-at-large to the State Board of Education where she presided as chair until 1995.

Sybil was the great granddaughter of Thomas M. Patterson, who was both a Congressman and U.S. Senator from Colorado. Patterson was the owner and publisher of the Rocky Mountain News and a champion of women's rights. Sybil continued his legacy by authoring many published books that championed women's rights and reflected her lifelong passion for politics and love of the West.

She wrote a monthly review column for the *Denver Post* Book Review Section and appeared on C-SPAN and local talk shows. A former chair of the Colorado Center for the Book and co-founder and first President of Women Writing the West, Sybil was dedicated to improving literacy and celebrating books.

She is preceded in death by her husband of 62 years – Corky Downing, her stepbrother, Jim Dewson and is survived by her brother Malcolm C. Smith of Glasgow, Kentucky, four children and six grandchildren.



In the days after Sybil's passing,
members posted sentiments on our online ListServ...

"I never knew her personally, spoke to her only once, but I know she was a grand person and writer. My condolences to her family and to our family of writers."



From a founding member who knew her well: "Sybil was a beautiful woman, a wonderful person."



"Sybil was one of the first WWW members I met. She was a lovely woman, so friendly and welcoming to new members. I remember her with great fondness."



"She was a strong and guiding force and will never be forgotten."



"That first meeting, where twelve of us gathered with Jerrie and Sybil at WWA, was truly a remarkable event. The last time Sybil and I presented together was at Pikes Peak Writers in 2007. Our topic was 'Writing the Changing West' and Sybil was as passionate then as she had been at that first founding meeting."



"She was a gracious person and a wonderful writer."



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The
WOMEN
Writing the West

LAURA
SHORT FICTION
AWARD

Congratulations!

The 2011 LAURA Short Fiction Awards are as follows:

First Place — “Sulfur Springs” by Lucinda Stein

Second Place — “The Long Road Home” by Bonnie Hobbs

Third Place — “Last Dance” by Anne Schroeder

Honorable Mention — “The Lucky One” by Kathleen Ernst

Honorable Mention — “White River Phoenix” by Leslee Breene

These short stories are published in the second edition of the LAURA Journal.

Advertising Policy and Rates

pdf or jpg email files preferred *
Minimum of 300 dpi

Ad Sizes:	W	x	H
Full pg	7.5"	x	9.75"
Half pg	7.5"	x	4.75"
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President's Message

By Pamela Tartaglio



The speed of modern travel still amazes me. The continental crossing that took our ancestors months now takes hours. Weeks before I flew to our conference in Seattle, I flew from California to Florida to visit family. In 1965, I made this same trip with my parents and brothers, but it was a road trip. At that time family vacations were generally by car. Airfare was more expensive than today.

Perhaps the biggest difference in my lifetime, I tell my children, is that the world is smaller. One reason is faster, more frequent travel. Thanks to interstate highways that make car trips quick and easy, our country's landscape is becoming more homogeneous, writes James Howard Kunstler in *The Geography of Nowhere*.

"Where have all the places gone?" asks Richard Russo in *The Complete Handbook of Novel Writing*. When we travel, we don't want to see dozens of mini-malls and McDonald's eateries. We want every region to feel different than the last, that we could never see and experience all that makes it distinctive.

We buy souvenirs we could not find back home. You may recall the word "souvenir" is French for "to remember." Our purchases and photographs help us remember how different it was on vacation, in that other part of the country.

Readers have this same longing.

In the past, travel was considered part of one's education. Eva Scott Fenyes was born into wealth in 1849. With her parents she embarked on a Grand Tour during what are now one's college years and traveled to Europe, Egypt and the Mideast. Later, she became an

influential patron of American painters and continued to travel the world.

She herself painted as a hobby. Late in life, she left her comfortable mansion in Pasadena, took her chauffeur and art supplies and motored along difficult dirt roads, far from the best hotels, to paint the missions along the coast of California. Built of adobe, they were crumbling and would not last in their original state. Eva did not paint them for fun or to decorate her walls; she owned many landscapes by fine artists. Her letters indicate she felt compelled to preserve Western heritage.

Some of us write and give life to the West of the past. Others write of the West of today, and readers savor these distinctive places, their culture and beauty.

The 2011 conference has passed, and we have returned home for a winter of solitary writing. If you, as I do, have moments of frustration and discouragement, remember that when we illuminate the West, we share and preserve it. It's a noble calling, and we answer with our best efforts.

• **Pamela Tartaglio**, 2012 President of WWW, is writing a historical novel set in the gold mining town of Cripple Creek, Colorado. She has published contemporary flash fiction at EveryDayFiction.com. A former geologist, Pamela and her husband have three grown children. She lives near Los Angeles.



WWW Honors 2011

WILLA *Awardees*

By Alice Trego
2011 WWW WILLA Chair

Willa Cather, one of our country's foremost novelists and a Pulitzer Prize winner, wrote the following in her revered 1913 novel, *O Pioneers!*

"There are only two or three human stories, and they go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if they had never happened before..." (Part II, Chap. 4)

When Women Writing the West presents its prestigious WILLA Literary Award for literary excellence in published novels, some of these human stories are truly evident. The Winners and Finalists, whose works have been chosen by our librarian final judges, have all successfully written these two or three human stories within the seven genres this literary award encompasses.

When Sybil Downing laid the groundwork for this award, it was known as The Willa Cather Award. Guidelines and judging criteria were set forth in the 13 years since the WILLA Award has been given.

Each entry must be a "woman's story set in the West" that presents an accurate portrayal, as opposed to a stereotype, of women in the American West, regardless of time period. They must exhibit superior writing in a quality product, including packaging and typesetting.

First presented at the 1999 Women Writing the West Conference in Seattle, WA, the award's name has taken on a more contemporary term — the WILLA Literary Awards. The guidelines have remained the same, with the addition of the word "girls" in the first qualification to specifically accommodate the young adult category.

This year's WILLA Literary Award competition was open to any book published in 2010. Authors did not have to be members of Women Writing the West nor did they have to be women to enter. We received 71 entries that met our guidelines in seven categories.

Our final librarian judges who are not members of Women Writing the West selected books of literary excellence in their respective genres. At the 17th Annual WWW Conference in Lynnwood, WA, the WILLA Finalists were honored during a special luncheon, and the WILLA Winners were honored during the evening banquet.

Outstanding, emotional, universal, well written, and complex are a few of the many adjectives that the final judges described in their comments. Another adjective,



2011 WILLA Winners, left to right, Kimberley Mangun, Evelyn Searle Hess, Heidi M. Thomas, Bill J. Scott and Jamie Lisa Forbes.



2011 WILLA Finalists, left to right, Doris (D.H.) Eraldi, Beth Hodder, Bonnie Buckley Maldonado, and Jane Kirkpatrick. Nel Rand is seated.

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“emotional grabber,” can be added for Nel Rand’s Contemporary Fiction Finalist, *The Burning Jacket*. For Lori Armstrong’s Contemporary Fiction Finalist, judges declared her novel, *No Mercy*, as “[a] gripping story,” and a “...female protagonist...strong, complicated, and savvy.”

Historical Fiction Finalist, *Last Train from Cuernavaca*, by Lucia St. Clair Robson, garnered such judges’ accolades as: “Robson is truly a credit to her profession. Her use of real characters in conjunction with her excellent writing gives the reader a top notch reading experience.” Within the covers of Sandra Dallas’s Historical Fiction Finalist, *Whiter Than Snow*, judges deemed the work “...captivating, horrifying and redemptive, all at the same time” and “This book is a wonderful representative for Women Writing the West.”

For the Original Softcover Fiction category Finalists, Jane Kirkpatrick’s *An Absence So Great* and Doris Eraldi’s *Settler’s Chase*, judges’ comments ranged from “fabulous writing” and “historically interesting” for Jane’s work to “engrossing plot and characters” and “a very quick, exciting, satisfying read” for Doris’s novel.

In Pat Carr’s Creative Nonfiction Finalist, *One Page at a Time*, a judge wrote, “I really loved the ‘one page’ organization of this book.” Ruth McLaughlin’s *Bound Like Grass*, a Finalist in the same category, one judge commented, “Heart breaking and beautifully told story.”

The Scholarly Nonfiction Fiction Finalist, *Extraordinary Women of the Rocky Mountain West*, by editors Tim Blevins, Dennis Daily, Chris Nicholl, Calvin P. Otto and Katherine Scott Sturdevant, earned the comment, “...a great snapshot of powerful women and outstanding role models.” Also a Finalist in this category, *Caroline Severance* by Virginia Elwood-Akers, a judge commented on Virginia’s novel, “...[a] well-organized biography...thoroughly researched...”

It’s Only Raven Laughing, the Poetry Finalist by Bonnie Buckley Maldonado, gained a judge’s remark, “...weaves together stories of the past and the present into a compelling narrative that will affect the reader deeply.”

For the Children’s/Young Adult Fiction and Nonfiction Finalist, *The Midnight Ride of Blackwell Station* by Mary Peace Finley, a judge wrote, “A particularly memorable storyline that engages readers in a lesser known history of the American West.” Beth Hodder’s Children’s/Young Adult Finalist, *Stealing the Wild*, collected an “Intriguing, unique premise...” remark from a final judge.

“Outstanding portrayal” and “...an amazing story about strength and weakness...” are comments written by judges to describe Jamie Lisa Forbes’s Contemporary Fiction Win-

ner, *Unbroken*.

Brian Leung’s Historical Fiction Winner, *Take Me Home*, earned a judge’s mention that read, “...offers an interesting glimpse into the coal mining communities of Wyoming and provides a good look at a difficult chapter in our nation’s history...”

For Bill J. Scott’s Original Softcover Fiction Winner, *Light On A Distant Hill*, a final judge wrote in part, “Interesting and original story-line with some nice twists at the end... Good descriptions of the West. I feel this book is truly worthy of the WILLA Award.”

A judge commented, “Beautiful use of language to describe the author’s love of the natural world...” for Evelyn Searle Hess’s Creative Nonfiction Winner, *To the Woods:*

Sinking Roots, Living Lightly, and Finding True Home.

Kimberley Mangun’s Scholarly Nonfiction Winner, *A Force for Change: Beatrice Morrow Cannaday and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Oregon, 1912-1936*, received a judge’s remark that included, “Mangun did an excellent job in expanding our understanding of the Black experience in Oregon history.”

One judge wrote of Renny Golden’s Poetry Winner, *Blood Desert: Witnesses, 1820-1880*, “A cohesive and nicely themed book that especially highlights Women Writing

the West’s theme of ‘a sense of adventure, a willingness to cross into a new frontier.’”

In the Children’s and Young Adult Fiction and Nonfiction Winner category, *Follow the Dream* by Heidi M. Thomas collected a judge’s comment that read, “Strong female character who realistically represents the joys and trials of western life in the early 20th century.”

Women Writing the West has come “full circle.” The Willa Cather Award began in 1998 by Sybil Downing in Seattle, WA, and the 2011 WILLA Literary Awards were presented at the Seattle (Lynnwood), Conference shortly before Sybil’s passing. It may be coincidental. It may be fate. The irony is there.

The WILLA Awards will continue to honor novels that hold fast to Willa Cather’s eloquent statement about those two or three stories that are repeated as though they’d never happened before — and as Sybil Downing had decreed.

**Outstanding, emotional,
universal, well written, and
complex are a few of the
many adjectives that the final
judges described in their
entries’ comments.**

• **Alice Trego**, WWW Past President and 2011 WILLA Chair, presented this year’s WILLA awards to Winners and Finalists during the 17th Annual Conference, “North By Northwest,” in Lynnwood, WA.



Conference Photos



1. Carolyn Wing Greenlee and Nancy Horne talking to Alice Trego.
2. Heidi Thomas, Randi Platt and Mary Trimble are all smiles at the conference.
3. Linda Jacobs, Richard Jacobs, Don Lohse, Joyce Lohse.
4. Tour group at the Port Gamble cemetery.
5. Lee Emory consulting with author
6. WILLA Winner B.J. (Bill) Scott and Pamela Tartaglio with Joyce Lohse and Julie Weston in background.

Photos by Karen Casey Fitzjerrell

Left: 2011 WILLA Award Winner B.J. (Bill) Scott and LAURA Third-Place Winner Anne Schroeder.



Right: Anne Schroeder shares a copy of her **Ordinary Aphrodite** with a friend on a bench in front of BookTown, Canada in Sidney, BC on Vancouver Island.



Work the Conference

By Anne Schroeder

It's the day after the WWW Conference and I'm packing up. In my folder are business cards from an agent and two publishers who each want to see both novel manuscripts I pitched them. My endorphins are exploding.

It was a great conference, but it wasn't all luck that brought me to this serendipitous place. Many times people will say to me, "I know your name," even if we're meeting for the first time. It's because I spend the effort to get "out there" and work the room. After all, I've spent a lot of cash to get there. I want to maximize the opportunity.

If you went home from a conference feeling like you missed something, here are a few suggestions for next time. They're not my ideas. Most of these are points that the agents and publishers made at the panel workshop.

Study the conference flyer. That's why it's sent out in advance. Research every agent and publisher who is attending. Go to their websites. See what genres they represent and which books they acquire. Also study the other agents at their agency.

Make an appointment for a one-on-one while the time-slot selection is good.

Arrive early to the conference—the night before is perfect. At the Embassy Suites breakfast, I noticed a woman sitting alone. Even though I was finished eating, I introduced myself. Turns out she was an acquisitions editor. We had a delightful chat that had nothing to do with books or writing. During the conference we found other opportuni-

ties to talk. On Monday she emailed me to express her pleasure at having met me. And invited me to submit.

Don't assume someone isn't "your type". The YA agent who buys vampire books turned out to be a new friend. We sat together at the awards dinner and she quizzed me to see if I had anything she could take a look at. Turns out, I have a novel that she's interested in if I change the protagonist's age. I wasn't pitching her—she was interested in me as a person and the offer just fell into place.

Enter the conference contest. I found a short story from a few years ago and entered it in the LAURA Awards. I didn't win top place, but my third place finish earned me a surprised glance from a publisher I had pitched earlier. As I returned to my table with my award and some flattering remarks about my writing ability, I watched her make the connection, face to pitch, and I know she'll remember me.

Make a point to speak to every faculty member. Ask questions of them. Establish a relationship and don't obsess about your elevator pitch. If your conversation makes the pitch feel awkward right then, wait for a better time. The key is to be authentic.

Dress for success. I always wear a brightly colored dress or black. I try to look professional and successful. No jeans for me at a conference—ever. After all, the presenters are all dressed professionally. It helps them to see me as one of them.

Volunteer to introduce a speaker,

moderate a panel, make an announcement, or wrap raffle items. Anything to get your name mentioned. Ask pertinent questions at the Q & A. A writer is a speaker. Demonstrate your poise. Make your name stand out. It all helps.

Buy a lot of books. Buy your fellow attendees' books. Buy the presenters' books. But be authentic about it. Talk up your common interests. Make friends. The conference is as much about face time as it is about learning new skills.

Write thank you notes as soon as you return home. Work to perfect the novel you plan to submit. Mention the conference in your submission letter, but don't assume liberties because you shared a Bloody Mary with an agent on Sunday morning.

• **Anne Schroeder** writes from California's Central Coast. **Ordinary Aphrodite**, her inspirational memoir, offers wise and humorous insights about life, love and small steps. It is available on e-book and Amazon. She is submitting two of her five novel manuscripts to the agents and publishers she met at the conference.



A Ramble to Port Gamble

By Joyce B. Lohse

In 1853, two pioneering businessmen named Andrew Jackson Pope and Frederick Talbot arrived near Seattle from East Machias, Maine aboard the steamship Oregon. They settled in an area still known as Port Gamble where they fashioned an idyllic town in the style of their New England homeland. The community grew around Pope and Talbot's shipping company and sawmill, which continued operating until 1995.

At "West by Northwest," the 17th Annual WWW Conference in Lynnwood, Washington, twenty-eight registrants boarded a comfortable tour bus for a day trip to historic Port Gamble, via a ferry ride across Puget Sound. As supervisors of the tour, my husband, Don, and I attended to management duties. Plans came together

seamlessly due to Conference Chair Mary Trimble's fine preparations.

During the ferry ride, some of us braved a chilly breeze to stand on its bow to enjoy the view. Upon arrival, our bus exited the ferry at Kingston and took us across the peninsula to Port Gamble. We disembarked and were led by a knowledgeable tour guide named Pete.

He took us through some old buildings and shared stories from Port Gamble's past. We lingered in the historic Buena Vista Cemetery to visit gravesites of pioneers and to enjoy a view of the bay and the town from the crest of a hill.

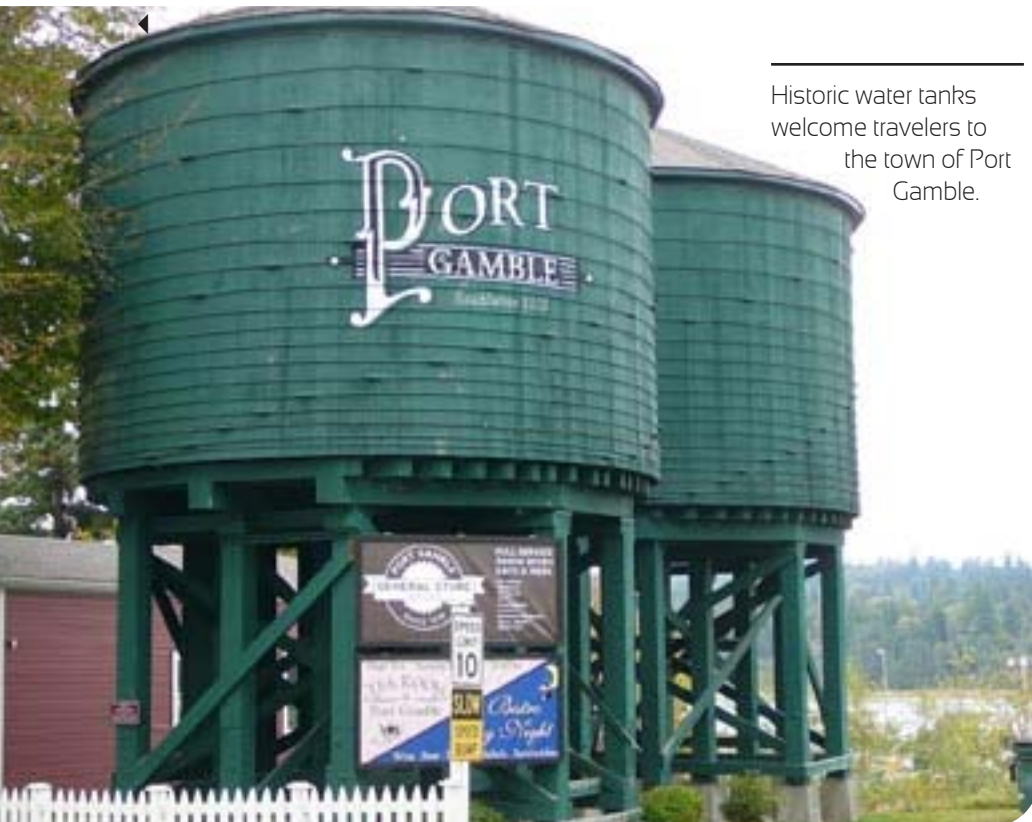
We continued our walk through town past Victorian-era buildings. During the 1930s, the number of structures reached a peak of one hundred-sixty, when more than two dozen houses were barged across the bay from Port Ludlow. Currently, eighty-five buildings still exist.

Our tour took us through the most elaborate home, the Walker-Ames House, which features beautiful trim, detailed woodwork, and stained glass windows. When properly restored and decorated, the vacant old structure facing the bay would regain its former beauty, perhaps as an attractive West Coast bed and breakfast.

Port Gamble continues to function as a company town and tourist destination, where houses and stores are leased, and public areas are maintained by busy crews.

After browsing through the history museum in the lower level of the general store, we were free to enjoy lunch

Historic water tanks welcome travelers to the town of Port Gamble.



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at the home-style deli upstairs, or eat at a nearby teashop, or a barbecue café. We could wander through quaint shops, which included a bookstore and a weaving shop, on our way back to the bus. We returned just in time for the opening session and a welcome speech by President Suzanne Lyon.

To learn more about Port Gamble, a national landmark since 1966, visit www.PortGamble.com. At the bottom of the home page, a walking tour can be printed, which describes the sites we visited. It is a nice souvenir of Port Gamble for those who were there, and a great way to share the sites and stories. You may also click on a link at the bottom of the home page for a cyber tour.

• Article and photos are by author **Joyce B. Lohse**, who writes historical biographies and is administrator for Women Writing the West.



Three former WWW presidents, Gail Jenner, Suzanne Lyon, and Cindy Massey, enjoy the view from Port Gamble's historic cemetery.



WWW members watched while Port Gamble tour director, Pete, pointed out the Walker-Ames House. Incoming President, Pamela Tartaglio, is in the foreground.



WWW members enjoy some chilly fresh air on the ferry boat during a journey to tour historic Port Gamble.



The Queen Anne style Walker-Ames House displays many attractive architectural details.

Conference Epiphanies Set Us on a Positive Track

By Sue Cauhape

There are as many reasons for attending writers' workshops and conferences as there are writers, it seems. Something magic happens when writers mingle in an environment rich with ideas. Just being there, sniffing the air and feeling the vibrations, can point a writer's imagination in directions that don't appear in her normal life.

As LaDene Morton points out: "My epiphany? The comfort and validation of being a part of a community of writers."

Sometimes a particular workshop resets our thinking, thus solving a problem. Oftentimes, just the ebb and flow of information floats around in the brain until it breaches with dramatic clarity.

Sheila MacAvoy had this experience at this year's conference:

"As I was getting dressed for the WILLA dinner, it bubbled up like a genie escaping the bottle, 'Too many characters.' Simple as that. My novel, one third done, has too many threads for any reader to follow. I didn't even have to struggle for that insight. It was given to me because I was there, listening."

Ruby Murray came away from the "Pick Me!" game with helpful criticism and a "big boost" for her work. Hers was the only piece that all the panel members wanted to look at further. The following is her experience:

"I looked forward to the 'Pick Me' first page contest. I wanted the scrutiny afforded my work by a panel of editors and agents. I wanted to test my chops with them, but also to learn how they responded to other beginnings.

"At first it seemed the editors and agents wanted to be polite. Each listened and appeared hesitant to be the first to raise her hand, indicating 'I wouldn't read more' or I wouldn't seek to buy that.

"I understand how busy editors are and it makes sense that they can form an impression very quickly. I understand because I know how quickly I, as a reader, decide whether I want to read a book.

"Agent Elizabeth Wales said she was uncomfortable with the exercise because she wanted to tell people what they did well and how to fix the problems. I want that attitude in a professional looking at my work.

"My first page did well. I learned some things: 'I don't know what's going on,' more than one person said. I got a

compliment: 'Not a cliché in sight.'

"The bottom line, as Colleen Patrick, the screenwriter on the panel, said was that 'We all want a good story.' We authors work hard to make sure that our words deliver just that, and the game helped me move in that direction."

Arletta Dawdy, author of *The Huachuca Trilogy*, enjoyed the wide diversity of the panel.

"WWW's conferences get better and better each time I attend and this was the winner... there were agents, editors, a filmmaker, an audio scout and marketers to lend their wisdom, advice and funny lines.

My personal big moments were an interview with a funny, perceptive and wise agent. In a new feature, 'Pick Me, Pick Me,' first pages were submitted, drawn, read aloud and judged by six agents and editors. 'My' agent, the film maker and the audio scout all liked the page from *Huachuca Woman* ...delightful responses of enthusiasm which thrilled me."

Sometimes, a workshop pertaining to a totally different genre or type of writing can help us get a new angle on our own writing. Suzanne Lyon had this experience:

"I have never written a screenplay, and doing so is not on my radar screen at the moment; but I always try to attend at

least one presentation at conference that breaks me out of my box, that allows me to look at my writing in a different way. With that in mind, I sat in on movie writer/director/producer Colleen Patrick's presentation 'Practical Screenwriting Success Secrets.'

"Colleen informed us that every screenplay should be constructed using the following structure: Once upon a time, And every day, Until one day, Because of that, and Because of that, Until finally, And ever since then.

"The light bulb went on over my head. Of course, this structure can be used for any story, in any genre. From now on, I will not consider any of my work complete until I am satisfied that it contains all seven of Colleen's elements."

Whenever we bring creative people together in the same room with those who can offer our work to the world, it makes for a wondrous synergy. This is the importance and reward of attending the WWW conferences. They give us a chance to renew, re-energize, and redirect our writing to achieve greater success and fulfillment.



• **Sue Cauhape** edited this edition of the WWW newsletter. She has written a novel, **Paradise Ridge**, and a book of poetry, **When the Horses Come and Go**, which tells of her experiences with her appaloosa mare, Abby. She also writes a blog on her website: ringaroundbasin.com.



Is There Life after Conference?

By Mary Trimble

Slogging through the preparations over the last fifteen months, I wondered what life would be like after the 2011 Women Writing the West Conference, held in Lynnwood, WA. It seemed so long since the conference wasn't uppermost on my mind; I could hardly imagine life without thinking *conference*.

In the spring of 2010, when President-Elect Suzanne Lyon asked me if I would be VP Conference, I hesitated, knowing it was a huge job, one that I had no aspirations of fulfilling. I joined WWW when the conference came to Seattle in 1998. Since then, I have never missed a conference. I reasoned it was my turn. I couldn't just keep taking; it was time to give back. I accepted, but not without serious misgivings.

I tackled the job head-on. There could be no tiptoeing around this project.

But I wasn't alone. I consider myself blessed with a wonderful committee. Heidi Thomas held the job of Treasurer, but was also valuable in securing presenters and offering opinions and suggestions. Just before the conference, Heidi also formatted the conference program—a huge undertaking for which a professional is often hired and at which Heidi excelled. Randi Platt not only contributed valuable suggestions, but offered to take on various tasks. Joyce Lohse took responsibility for the huge job of Private Appointments and we even recruited her husband, Don, to “shepherd” the Friday tour, making sure no one got left behind. Lani Schonberg was an immense help in finding the conference venue and in planning the Friday morning tour. Many others helped too, and I'm grateful for each and every one.

The first order of business in planning a conference is finding a venue. I consulted WWW members who lived fairly close to me and together we scouted around for the perfect place. We visited about a dozen potential sites, but many had drawbacks, such as hard to get to

without a car, too expensive, not large enough, etc. Interestingly, the first place we investigated became the place we chose.

Next, we needed a logo to provide an integral thread to the conference theme. My husband, Bruce, came up with the compass rose logo and team member Lani Schonberg coined the name, “West by Northwest.”

We were on a roll.

Several members came to my home for lunch and brainstormed ideas for presenters and sessions. Uppermost in our minds was to offer fresh material. Because of industry trends, we suggested an Alternative Publishing Panel from which sprang other innovative ideas. Between all of us, we developed lists of presenters. Splitting the list, we called contacts for panels, workshops and keynote speakers.

Randi Platt suggested a submission game she had experienced at another conference. We called it “Pick Me! Pick Me!” Randi organized this session and recruited panelists, agents, publishers and a screenwriter, presenters who participated in the conference.

In this game the first 250 words of a work-in-progress of any genre was read aloud and panelists raised their hands when the reader reached a spot at which they decided the work wasn't for them. Then, the panel discussed the work. It was a fun, lively session that proved very informative and engaging.

The Friday morning tour to Port Gamble received many favorable comments. Our committee agreed the tour needed to be water-oriented, since this part of the country is associated with Puget Sound. Although it was a challenging tour to organize, Port Gamble was a worthy and fun destination.

We knew many people make commitments far in advance and started contacting presenters in the last quarter of 2010. Some already had. Others couldn't make plans that far in advance. It all sorted itself out and we had our presenters in early 2011.

Four literary agencies were well-established Northwest agencies. During the next few months all but one of those said other commitments had come up, but they would send an associate. As it happened, those three associate agents were in their early twenties. It was interesting to learn what those young agents look for and to hear their impressions of the submissions read.

Arletta Dawdy's committee brought fresh and fun ideas to our WILLA Raffle, and a sizeable contribution to our WILLA fund.

I knew the job of VP Conference would be time-consuming. Toward the end it was ALL-consuming. During the year I contacted each of the twenty-one presenters and panelists numerous times and each contact seemed to bring more questions and issues to be resolved. Despite all my planning, toward the end it was a race against time.

I received helpful, solid support from President Suzanne Lyon and Past-President Alice Trego. I could ask them anything and always receive an honest, helpful reply. They gave me space to run the show, and the support I needed to make it happen.

All in all, it was a good experience. A learning experience. Sometimes a scary experience. I've discovered there is life after conference, but now I have the satisfaction of having done a job to the best of my ability and being rewarded by enthusiastic comments and favorable feedback.

Would I do it again? Don't be silly.

• **Mary E. Trimble** was 2011 VP Conference and a 13-year member of WWW. She is the author of 3 novels, *Tenderfoot*, 2010 Finalist for the SPUR Award, *McClellan's Bluff*, winner of EPIC Young Adult Award, and *Rosemount*. Her current work-in-progress is a memoir about her two years in Africa with the Peace Corps.



Spreading my Wings

By Sarah Byrn Rickman

A lifelong dream to fly came true on July 1, 2011 when I became a licensed pilot. During this process, I opened up vast possibilities for my writing.

The knowledge and experience gained over the last three years, in pursuit of this priceless (to me) piece of paper, already has paid dividends in my writing through my current book-in-progress as well as assorted other articles.

What began as a lark — a snap decision, truth be told — not surprisingly morphed into an unattainable goal twenty years ago. My zeal to “learn to fly” stalled and spun out of reach as life, lack of time and lack of money got in the way.

Seventeen years later, a pilot friend suggested that the new Sport Pilot Certificate just might meet my needs. The requirements are somewhat less stringent than the Private Certificate: no night or instrument flying; small, light, single-engine, two-seater airplanes only; and your driver’s license is your medical certificate.

I write about women who fly. I run with women who fly. Gnawing at my self-esteem was the need to become a woman who flies — to walk the talk, to tell hangar-flyin’ stories, to belong. But most of all, like Amelia Earhart, I wanted to fly for “the fun of it.”

I began lessons again in May 2008.

I have not burned up the airways with my progress. Through many starts and stops — during which life still got

in the way — I found a way to finance my habit. Sales of my four books about the Women’s Air Force Service Pilots (WASP) have paid for my flying. I have stayed with it, though at a snail’s pace.

The solo cross-country flight between Waynesville and Urbana came a year ago now — Monday, November 15. All alone at the controls of the Aeronca Champ — the 1946-vintage tail dragger I learned on — I soared above southwest Ohio in pursuit of my dream. Landings at two airports were not at my home airport. I reveled in every minute of this flight as I have reveled in every minute of the entire journey.

Since receiving my license, I’ve taken the older two grandkids up in a 4-seater Cessna-172 with my instructor in the right seat. I have yet to take them solo. I can only fly one passenger at a time.

Learning to fly an old-fashioned stick and rudder airplane with fabric wings and fuselage from a grass strip at Red Stewart Airfield in Waynesville has been the journey of a lifetime.

I’m still pinching myself!

• **Sarah Byrn Rickman** was 2005 WWW President and 2006 WILLA Chair. She has authored four books about the Women Air Force Service Pilots (WASP).

Sarah Rickman with her son, Chuck, granddaughter Katie (8) and grandson Alex.



Colorado Members Introduce WWW to Elbert, Colorado

By Carol Devlin

Last September, Gayle Gresham hosted, in fine style, a gathering in the Elbert Public Library, where she is head librarian. The library has a section exclusively for WWW members' works, books that WWW previously displayed at trade shows and book festivals. Gayle, the 2012 VP Marketing of WWW, established this section of the library a few years ago to increase our following in the area.

Because of Gayle's efforts to involve the community in the event, it was well attended by the public. Joining them were WWW members Doris McCraw, Carolee Laughton, Janet Limon and her sister, Tish Minear.

Panel members Nancy Oswald, Sherry Johns, Liz Duckworth, Jane Morton, Leslee Breene, Linda Wommack and myself, Carol Devlin, spoke about our writing and publishing experiences. We told what membership in WWW has meant to us and how it has affected our efforts to publish.

The group discussed the pros and cons of self-publishing: how public reception is changing, what effect eBooks are having on society, the costs of publishing, potential income, new software for formatting your own eBooks, the fact that your books are never out of print, and whether they're going to help or hurt the whole publishing/reading experience. There were lots of questions, speculation, and excitement about the future of publishing.

A woman of many talents, Gayle played her guitar and sang her composi-

tion, "Shadow of the Murdered Man," about an actual event from the Old West. Her husband John accompanied her on the mandolin. Book signings followed; then guests descended on the café, Li'l Slice of Elbert.

That afternoon, Gayle gave us an in-depth demonstration of Facebook and told how it can be used to promote our writing. Some of us who were not Facebook users wondered how much time is required each day to use it to its full potential. As busy, involved women, the thought of taking on another time-consuming activity made us anxious. Gayle soothed our fears.

I always get a little jolt from the enthusiasm of our members and that keeps me writing. I'm proud to be a member of such a fine organization. These gatherings are a perfect way to stay inspired. It's energizing when someone holds up a newly published book and I think, *maybe next time I'll have something to share.*

• **Carol Devlin** is an award-winning author, featured speaker and panelist, who also designs and publishes her craft patterns, working to publish five beading books in 2012. She volunteers teaching computer skills to seniors and helped establish Mountain Writers in Evergreen, CO. WWW honored her with a LAURA award in 2009.



WWW panel members sign books after discussion.



Gayle Gresham entertains with an original song.

The Blue Marker

By Sue Cahape

Even before I started college, I dared to apply at a local newspaper, hoping to follow that old-time tradition of learning the writing craft on the job. Instead of landing in a cub reporter's seat, however, I worked as secretary for the curmudgeonly city desk editor, Lou Bate.

Lou was Legendary.

One intern reporter, who became a media rep in Washington D.C., told me how her stomach lurched the minute she walked into the City Room and heard his booming voice.

While googling old friends, I discovered Lou's obituary and various stories from reporters who had honed their skills under this terrifying man.

One article revealed that Ed Asner had met Lou Bate and used him as a model for his character on the *Mary Tyler Moore* show. Unlike the relationship between his Lou and Mary's character, Lou Bate and I were on a first name basis.

I sat next to him, answering phones, calling hospitals for birth lists, filing reporters assignments, and writing the "What's Happening" column of daily events. For this, Lou thought the City Desk secretary position required a Master's Degree in Journalism and I was on probation to see if I could handle it. After a couple of years, he admitted that I'd proved such a degree wasn't necessary.

At least he never barred me because I was a woman. In fact, there were other female reporters on staff who commanded his respect and admiration. He was too pragmatic to be a chauvinist.

Like other staffers, though, I received my ration of "discipline" upon occasion. In fact, during one particularly loud discussion, I grabbed my purse and stomped toward the coatroom. When I emerged, Lou blocked my path and, in my face, whispered "you can't leave me now. Who's going to keep me on track with the rundown?"

The common denominator in articles I read about Lou was that he insisted on trim, concise writing. The verbose literary style of Samuel Clemens' time was obsolete.

Typing on an ancient typewriter fed by a roll of newsprint, Lou's memos were terse,

a precursor to today's texting lingo.

If he wanted someone to write tight, he'd type "rite tite." Thank goodness he left in the e's.

Sometimes he would express his gratitude by ending a memo with "TNX" or if he felt inspired to be effusive, "tnx 4 sty."

Whether these were his personal standards or established editorial style for all newspapers in the 1970s, the rules guided everyone's reading habits as well. It became a game for staffers to edit articles from that day's paper and pin them to the bulletin board.

Blue marker scribbles revealed double entendres in headlines, sloppy leads, articles and ads juxtaposed inappropriately, or comically misleading subheads. "Eats Shoots and Leaves" reminded me of some of those errors.

One reporter, who later wrote science-fiction novels, acquired such a strong editing habit that she couldn't pass up a piece of writing without pulling out her own blue marker. I'm surprised she didn't edit the backs of theater tickets.

These "laugh-a-day" writing lessons taught us all how gaffarpled our prose could be. Extra sets of eyes exposed how we all made mistakes despite our professional accomplishments. The irony, of course, is most of the headlines were written by copy editors whose job it was to catch these errors.

It was a rich and lively environment in which to learn how to write and edit my own work, if not the work of others. That came over time with lots of mentorship from writers' groups and classes.

One experience in a poetry seminar, however, showed me that it's not okay to wield that blue marker as if it were a sword. In the group, we all jotted notes on each other's poems. As the poets rose to leave, I handed one woman's poem back to her just as another poet snagged me to discuss her suggestions for mine.

The other woman walked away slowly, reading my rewrite of her poem. That's essentially what it was: a rewrite. I never got a

chance to talk to her about my suggestions. To this day, I am mortified by that moment and regret the implied insult to her work.

All of us hold our words as precious. It's hard work, this writing game. When we send our work to editors, we need to remember that a second pair of eyes and a fresh perspective will help us discover the flaws in our perfect prose.

When receiving the critiqued work, we need to weigh the edits with as critical an eye as the editor's. That person may not have "read" a cultural term or turn of phrase in the way we intended it.

While it is our right to decide whether to change the text or not, let's understand that each edit is a little lesson in how others perceive our words. That's the most important writing lesson we will ever receive.

In ending this essay, though, I wish to say that I discovered how tender-hearted Lou Bate could be behind that fierce, professional facade.

His mother had died the same year as mine. After the funeral, I found a small envelope in my mailbox. Written inside a tiny sympathy card, in blue ballpoint pen, was this message:

"Sharing with you in your grief. Lou."

• **Sue Cahape** edited this edition of the WWW newsletter. She has written a novel, **Paradise Ridge**, and a book of poetry, **When the Horses Come and Go**, which tells of her experiences with her appaloosa mare, Abby. She also writes a blog on her website: ringaroundbasin.com.



Sustaining Members

Baker, Doris
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 Dallas, Sandra

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 Farmer, W. Michael
 Fitzjerrell, Karen Casey
 Goeres-Gardner, Diane L.

Harris, B.J.
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 Stewart, Jodi Lea
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 Trego, Alice D.
 Trimble, Mary E.
 Tweit, Susan J.
 Wade, Mary D.
 Weinberg, Florence M.
 Weston, Julie



New Members • Winter 2011/2012

(* = joined at the sustaining member level)

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 Beth Groundwater • Breckenridge, CO • beth07@bethgroundwater.com

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Membership dues extend through December 31 of the current year. New members who apply mid-year receive a packet of materials to bring them up to date with current activities. New membership applications processed after September 1 extend through the following year.