



# NETWORK

Volume XXIX, Number 3, ISSN 1044-1476

Network is published four times a year by The International Women's Writing Guild, PO Box 810, Gracie Station, New York, NY 10028.

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The IWWG is a nonprofit 501(c) 3 organization fiscally managed by The New York Foundation for the Arts.

## NETWORK

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## PHILOSOPHY & GOALS

The International Women's Writing Guild, founded in 1976, is a network for the personal and professional empowerment of women through writing. The Guild engenders and supports the joyful camaraderie that comes from shared interests of a woman's writing community while at the same time establishing a remarkable record of achievement in the publishing world. No portfolio necessary.

## SPECIAL PROJECTS

- ❖ The Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College is IWWG's archival repository.
- ❖ A Website on the Internet/Worldwide Web Offering timely information and features related to writing and the greater global women's community at [www.iwwg.org](http://www.iwwg.org).
- ❖ United Nations/Women's Issues IWWG is an official Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) with consultative status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council.
- ❖ Prison Project "Writers Inside" Members correspond with female inmates and/or teach writing workshops.

**SEE PAGE 31 FOR MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**

## MEMBERSHIP SERVICES

- ❖ A frequently updated list of literary agents and independent small presses, as well as a variety of writing services (described by their specialties), is available to members. Well over 100 books are published by Guild members each year.
- ❖ Subscription to the NETWORK journal (4 issues per year).
- ❖ Health Insurance (New York City only): For information, call IWWG at (212) 737-7536.
- ❖ Dental and Vision Insurance. Contact Beth Tani, the IWWG's Health Insurance Benefits Coordinator: Phone (888) 499-4669; email [Writers@CSSAdmin.com](mailto:Writers@CSSAdmin.com); CSS website: [www.cssadmin.com](http://www.cssadmin.com).
- ❖ Participation at reduced rates in eight or more nationwide conferences, including the renowned week-long "Remember the Magic" summer writing conference in Saratoga Springs, NY.
- ❖ Participation in regional writing workshops and IWWG Kitchen Table and cluster writing/manuscript critique groups.
- ❖ Supportive encouragement and guidance from other women connected to the written word.
- ❖ Amazon.com Bookstore Page on [www.iwwg.org](http://www.iwwg.org) (for details, see page 21)

**In 1976, when the Guild was born, there were three major "movements" in society:**

- ❖ The Human Potential Movement
- ❖ The New Age with the notion of transformation through spiritual practice
- ❖ The Women's Movement

**The Guild fused these movements under the umbrella of writing.**

- ❖ Through writing, it said, you will access and activate your potential
- ❖ Through writing, you will raise your consciousness and experience the transformation of your former self
- ❖ Through writing you will find your voice and become an empowered and authentic woman/person

**In addition, the Guild's way became generic. Hence:**

- ❖ Accessing human potential without becoming clinical
- ❖ Accessing the spiritual without becoming institutional or a cult
- ❖ Accessing the pro-Women's Movement without becoming politicized

## “In Her Own Words” Profile

# NANCY KING

Nancy King, Ph.D., professor emeritus, University of Delaware, has taught theatre, drama, and world literature. She has told stories and conducted storymaking workshops throughout the United States and in Scandinavia, the United Kingdom, Canada, Mexico, and Hungary. Currently she is a consultant, focusing on developing innovative literacy and drama programs in schools. The author of many books, plays, and essays, her latest books include: *Dancing With Wonder: Self-Discovery Through Stories and Morning Light: A Woman Walking*. Her most recent novel, *The Stones Speak*, published this year, was selected as a Finalist in the New Mexico Book Awards/Other Fiction, September '09.



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Where do stories come from? Where do they live?

As a child, I couldn't answer the first question but knew where stories lived—in my head. All I had to do was hide from my family in a place that felt safe, close my eyes, and turn on a kind of theatre in my head. Pictures formed, characters appeared, and a story began. As long as I didn't interfere with the images, the story continued until its final glorious ending where the heroine won the prize, outsmarted the bad guys, defeated the mean people, or rescued the underdog. I always felt better afterward if the story finished, but if it was interrupted, I felt discombobulated for the rest of the day, as if each foot was in a different world.

The first time I took the stories out of my head and put them on paper was when I was in the fourth grade. The school was preparing for the annual Christmas play and everyone was invited to audition for a part. When my father heard that I planned to try out for the role of Baby Jesus, he told me, “No daughter of mine is going to play Baby Jesus.” His tone of voice left no room for discussion.

I thought he said this because we are Jewish so I was about to protest and remind him that Baby Jesus was a Jew, but a new idea occurred to me. I asked, “What if there's a

play about Chanukah? Can I be in that?”

His response? “Talk to your teacher.”

The next day in school I asked the teacher if we could have a Chanukah play as well as a Christmas play. She asked me, “What's Chanukah?” I explained it as best I could. Her response? “I never heard of a Chanukah play.”

“Well,” I said, “I'll go to the library and when I find one, can we do it on stage, like the Christmas play?”

“I guess,” she said, looking doubtful. “But you'll have to find people to be in your play and you'll have to be in charge.” I didn't know enough to wonder if I could do this.

I went to the library and looked up holiday plays. No Chanukah play. I asked the librarian if she could help me and we both looked. No Chanukah play. “It seems,” she said, “that if you want to have a Chanukah play in school, you'll have to write one.”

I had never written a play and yet the idea appealed to me. I took out a book of plays from the library so I would know the form, but before I could begin writing I had to decide what part of the story to tell. The idea of staging a

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Stories continue to play a critical role in my life. Through telling, listening, and sharing stories, I am nurtured and empowered. I experience healing at its deepest level.”

battle between the Macabees and their adversaries seemed beyond my capability, so I chose to focus on the story of Hannah and her seven sons. I spent the weekend writing and crossing out and writing and crossing out. Writing a play was

much harder than it appeared when I'd looked at the plays in the library book, but by Monday morning I had finished, or so I thought.

I waited for a time when the teacher wasn't busy and went up to her. "Here's my play. Can I ask who wants to be in it?" (I convinced her the play would be short and wouldn't require a lot of people.) And so began my career as a playwright and director and costume designer. I was grateful that a few kids volunteered to be in my play. I carefully made copies, by hand, so everyone could have the script. The first rehearsal quickly taught me that writing words on a page is not the same as speaking those words. Fortunately, my classmates knew less than I did about making a play and were willing to do what I asked, as well as learn new lines as I wrote them, which was about every time we rehearsed.

The day of the play arrived and I woke up with a ferocious headache so blinding I could hardly see. In the auditorium, I was nervous and people sitting on either side of me kept saying, "Calm down."

There is no way I can describe the feeling I had when my classmates spoke lines I had written, performing in a play about my holiday, Chanukah, with the whole school watching. My headache disappeared. I no longer felt like throwing up. What I did feel was a sense of pride and pleasure that the audience got to see a Chanukah play. My Chanukah play!

Since then, I've written many plays, books and articles, and much of what I wrote has now been published or performed. But no performance ever matched the joy of my fourth grade self, hearing her words come alive for an appreciative audience.

In 1982, after a disquieting phone conversation with my ex-husband, I headed to my bedroom intending to go under the covers and tell myself a story to feel better. Suddenly I stopped. I said to myself, "Enough hiding!" I went into my office, sat down at the desk, and typed a title: *The Birth of the Storyteller*. The first words wrote themselves. "In a time long ago, in a place far away," and soon I had twelve pages of what seemed to be a folk tale about a young woman whose aging parents tell their daughter she cannot marry, that she must be a storyteller like her grandfather and that she must travel from village to village, telling the stories of their people. The young woman protests, saying she wants to marry, to have children like all the other village women. But her parents sadly tell her this cannot be. She is a storyteller and must be a storyteller. At the end of the twelve pages, her parents have died and the young woman has left her village, too afraid not to do what her parents said was her fate.

I was amazed. Where had the story come from? Why a

folk tale? What did it have to do with my current situation? Convinced it was an anomaly, I dismissed it until a few weeks later when, after a fierce argument with my mother, I once again sat down at my typewriter and typed a title: *The Well*. And once again my fingers typed about twelve pages about the same young woman, who, by the end of the chapter, now had a name—Ninan. In this episode, Ninan, with the help of an old shoemaker, Tomas, uncovers a village well that had been trashed by marauding soldiers many years before.



There is no way I can describe the feeling I had when my classmates spoke lines I had written."

What was going on? How could a story just pop out with no prior thought or conscious planning? I still don't know the answer to this. What I do know is that afterward, every time I had a difficult or painful experience, I would sit down at my typewriter, type a title, and out would come a story. It soon became clear that the story was about Ninan, and that it was developing into a kind of episodic novel over which I had no control. No matter what I thought could or might happen, the story wrote itself.

At the time, I was seeing a Jungian analyst and would read each episode to him, always with a sense of awe and wonder. After I'd read him about seven episodes, he said, "I'm worried about you."

"Why?" I asked (knowing there were plenty of reasons for worry).

His answer astonished me. "Because Ninan is moving in tighter and tighter spirals. She has almost no place to go. That's not a healthy place for you to be."

"It's not about me, it's about Ninan. And I'm not going back."

He knew better than to argue with me. "Of course you don't want to go back, but how about moving the spiral up and out?" When I looked bewildered, he told me, "Just think about it when you write."

He was right. One afternoon, I felt an odd pressure in my head, as if something was trying to get out. I went to my desk and as soon as I typed the title, *Gathering Strength*, I felt new energy entering into my writing. Subsequent chapters still popped out but without the stimulus of a painful experience. Within a few months, I was able to finish

(Continued on next page)

what felt like a complete draft of the novel. I felt empty and excited—wondering how this weird way of writing would affect future writing. I would soon have a chance to find out. About two weeks later I would be leaving Delaware to go to England for four months to work with a colleague on a book about storymaking.

Our writing went well. I found that I had more confidence in my writing and more ideas for the book than I had before writing the folktale novel. We found a publisher in London and a co-publisher at the Stockholm Institute of Education where I had done a lot of teaching. Yet despite this, I felt displaced from myself, wondering who I was. It was not a good time. I spiraled into depression, struggling to hide my growing despair from friends and colleagues. And when I returned to the U.S. in the fall of 1984 and left the Theatre Department and started teaching interdisciplinary studies in the University Honors Program, the change in focus and the challenge to create new courses helped, but my increasing fatigue felt like a plague.



To stop the process, I wrote down one particularly horrific nightmare...”

January of 1985 I went back to London to continue working on the book, *Storymaking in Education and Therapy*, with my colleague, but after three weeks was rushed to the hospital, critically ill, with no clear diagnosis. When I was told my blood levels were life-threateningly low, that I needed blood transfusions, and that I might be dying. I felt relieved and told the doctors, “I don’t mind.”

Stunned, my main doctor said, “Well, I do.” He ordered that I be given four pints of blood to restore my blood counts, but after a little more than two, my arm swelled to epic proportions. The pain was unbearable. Finally, I persuaded the doctor to stop the transfusion. I also asked him to stop the seven antibiotics when my body became covered with an itchy, ugly crimson rash that looked horrible and felt worse. I prepared to die, quite content and no longer fighting inner demons.

My inner storyteller was not content. That night, as I lay awake listening to the sounds of oxygen flowing through the mask, a Native American story started telling itself. And each night, for the rest of the nineteen days I was hospitalized and for the next few months, in and out of hospitals, the story was

my constant companion. It took me months to realize that the emphasis in the story changed as I began to recover. When it became clear that I wasn’t going to die in the foreseeable future, the ending repeated itself like a mantra: The man and woman looked at each other. They knew they had come to the place that was home.

Although I was already a tenured full professor at the University of Delaware, as part of a promise I made to myself, that if I got well, I’d get the Ph.D. I’d always wanted. I returned to graduate school to explore the mysteries of the storymaking process. And as part of my Ph.D. thesis, I wrote a memoir, *Beyond this Crossing Place: The Story of a Year, the Stories of a Life*. After completing it, part of me felt strangely unsettled. I was discovering new information about my early life, but knew very little about why my parents had acted as they did. When my father was dying, why did he refuse to talk about my early childhood, saying “It would only hurt your mother?”

I began to have nightmares—ferocious, terrifying, horrible dreams that woke me up and kept me awake for nights on end. To stop the process, I wrote down one particularly horrific nightmare, turning it into a three-page short story, and showed it to a friend who asked “Where’s the rest of it?” she asked.

“That’s it. There is no more.”

She shook her head, “Oh, yes, there is.”

She was right. The three-page nightmare became a three-hundred-plus-page novel, *Morning Light*, which takes its name from an old Yiddish proverb: “You can cry, cry, cry all night, but smile by morning light.”

Later in 2000, on a trip to Santa Fe, I fell in love with a house and resigned from the University of Delaware. I arrived in Santa Fe with ninety pages of a nonfiction manuscript, *Dancing With Wonder*, about my work with stories and the storymaking process, but I couldn’t get past page ninety-one. After expressing my frustration to a close friend, she said, “You wrote the first ninety pages as a professor and even though you’ve always told stories as part of your writing, you’re not a professor any more. So write the book as a maker and teller of stories.”

“How do I start?” I asked.

She laughed. “With your experience working with the women of Kazakhstan, of course.” (I had worked with these women as part of the University of Delaware’s International Studies Program.) Once I focused on the women, the words flowed. It was easy to remember how the day began. The nine Kazakh women had sat in a semi-circle flanked by two interpreters from the State Department who were prepared to simultaneously

translate the women's words from Russian into English.

I told a story from India, *Ant and Elephant*, about how Ant, the smallest of all the animals, figures out how to make King Elephant change from despot to caring leader. Then, the women painted images evoked by the story. They were in the process of making new stories from the one I had told when one of them, Eleni, suddenly stood up and challenged me. The interpreter translated her words: "What good are stories when we're being beaten?"

I tried to keep my face a mask as I responded, "No good. The beatings have to stop. But then, when they do, what do you do with your pain? Sharing your story with others helps to reconnect you with yourself and your community."

"Okay! I tell you my story."

With the others nodding, having had the same experience, she told how she was beaten by her husband whenever he felt like it, just because it was his "right." When she finished she stared at me, as if challenging me to do something. I took a deep breath and said, "I'll give all of you small pieces of paper. Let's each paint blessings for Eleni."

One by one they gave her their blessings, murmuring words of support. Since I had to go through the translator, my words were public and I could only hope I was saying the right thing. Later, at dinner at my house, the translator asked Eleni, "You seemed different after the blessings. What happened? What difference could a few scraps of paper possibly make?"

Eleni nodded, hesitating before she spoke. "Is difficult to explain. I was feeling pain. Closed inside myself. When Nancy told people to make blessings to give me, I was angry. What did she think little pieces of paper could do? But then, when the women gave them to me and talked to me, something happened. Like my closedness opened a little. Somehow I felt better."

The interpreter asked, "How long did feeling better last?"

Eleni smiled. "Is still feeling good. Is good to get blessings. Is good to tell story."

In 2004, my blood counts began dropping again and I knew I was no longer in remission, but I kept writing. In March 2006, shortly after *Dancing With Wonder: Self-Discovery Through Stories* (Sourcebooks) was published, what had been diagnosed as chronic leukemia became acute.

This time, friends saw through my mask and took care to make sure I knew I was not alone. Before, during, and after my hospitalization and chemotherapy, they came by with flowers, food, conversation, and encouragement. And in doing so, they made the difference between my choosing death or life.

My folktale novel, *A Woman Walking*, a meditation on identity (Atelier Books), was published in 2008 with illustrations inspired by my weavings. *Morning Light*, which explores the healing power of truth and the importance of stories, was also published by Atelier Books that year. And a third novel, *The Stones Speak*, about a man and two women who come to understand the importance of authenticity in relationships, was published in March 2009 and was selected as a Finalist in the New Mexico Book Awards/Other Fiction

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(September '09). Visitors to my website can read the first few pages of each of these novels. A fourth, *Spaces In Between*, has just been edited and awaits my attention.

(*Ed's Note*: Just before going to press with this *Network*, Nancy informed us that Atelier stopped publishing and she had to scramble to find a new arrangement. As of January 1, her books will be published by Tasora Books and distributed by Itaska Books.)

For more about Nancy, visit her website, [www.nancykingstories.com](http://www.nancykingstories.com), or write to her at [nanking1224@earthlink.net](mailto:nanking1224@earthlink.net).

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*Network* is open to receiving *In Her Own Words* profile submissions for this column from members. Send up to ten double-spaced pages. Narrative form usually works best and should creatively convey a sense of self, a sense of place, a strong point of view—possibly changed over time, roads taken (or not taken) and why, accomplishments and lessons learned. With only four *In Her Own Words* profiles a year, submission does not guarantee publication.