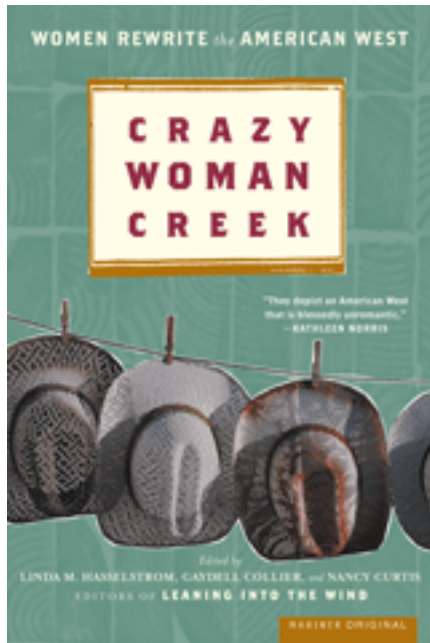


A Reader's Guide



Crazy Woman Creek

edited by [Linda M. Hasselstrom](#), [Gaydell Collier](#), and [Nancy Curtis](#)

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About the Editors

Linda M. Hasselstrom, born in Texas, divides her time between Hermosa, South Dakota, and Cheyenne, Wyoming. Her poetry, fiction, and nonfiction have been widely published. She is the author of eleven books, including *Between Grass and Sky: Where I Live and Work* and *Feels Like Far: A Rancher's Life on the Great Plains*. Hasselstrom was admitted to the South Dakota Hall of Fame in 1989 as Writer of the Year, and her book *Bison: Monarch of the Plains* was named the best environmental and nature book of 1999 by the Independent Publishers Association. She received a Wrangler Award from the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum in 2001 for her book of poems *Bitter Creek Junction*, which was also a finalist for the WILLA Literary Award from Women Writing the West. *Between Grass and Sky* was named a WILLA finalist in 2003.

Gaydell Collier, who was born on Long Island, New York, lives on a small ranch near Sundance, Wyoming, with her husband, Roy. A retired library director, she is the coauthor with Eleanor F. Prince of several books on horsemanship and horse care, including *Basic Horsemanship: English and Western*. Her work has appeared in periodicals and anthologies, including the *Christian Science Monitor*, *Smithsonian*, and *Flint-Edged Refrains*. She was a consultant on "Horses and Horsemanship" for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in 2000. Her interests include ranching, reading, dogs, horses, grand opera, and eating.

Nancy Curtis was born in Duncan, Oklahoma, and currently resides in Glendo, Wyoming, with her husband, Doug. She is the publisher and primary editor of High Plains Press, a company specializing in books about Wyoming and the West, which she runs from her family's ranch. High Plains Press has received three prestigious Wrangler Awards from the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum for publishing outstanding poetry. Curtis and her cows were the subject of a photo essay on western women in *Life*.

All three editors help manage working ranches.

For Discussion

We hope the following questions will stimulate discussion for reading groups and provide a deeper understanding of *Crazy Woman Creek* for every reader.

1. Community is defined in many ways in this anthology, with an understanding that "being part of a community is much more than owning property within its boundaries" ("I Like It That Way," 218). What does community mean to you? How do you define your place within your community?
2. How do the pieces in this anthology illustrate the ways in which a community originates and the means by which we can establish new ones? Is the more traditional notion of community becoming obsolete? What have these women done to preserve the communities and values people cherish? What can we do?
3. In her introduction, Linda M. Hasselstrom writes: "Can neighborliness survive even as our landscape is being bulldozed and paved over? Before we can answer that question, we need to get acquainted. In order to participate as members of any community, we need to exchange our stories, to teach, and to learn" (xxvi). In what ways can we exchange our own stories? In what ways do the women in these pages exchange stories?
4. Several stories express a newcomer's sense of belonging. See, for instance, "Path to a Small World" (58), "From Canton to Spearfish" (74), "A Haunting Experience" (109), "The Woman Who Didn't Fit In" (119), and "I Like It That Way" (216). How do the experiences of women who grew up in the West differ from those who went there later in life? How do these differences affect their sense of community? How can you create community wherever you are?
5. The epigraph of *Crazy Woman Creek* states that vulnerability is what weaves a community together. Do you think that this assessment is accurate? How does facing adverse circumstances bring people together? See, for instance, "The Hippie Central Library Fest" (26), "The Logging Bee" (84), "Nevada Firestorm" (87), and "Ongoing Sustenance" (224).
6. Clubs and organizations play a large role in these communities. See, for instance, "Bingo Babes" (130), "Straightforward and Unafraid" (137), "The Caring Cleveland Club" (156), and "Crone Circle: Grandmothers Giving Wisdom" (241). How do organizations help strengthen communities? How does spontaneous community function along with structured community? What elements make a community successful?
7. In "The Far Side of Maple Street," Sophie Dominik Echeverria remarks, "Gossip is the great ancestor of the media, but much more interesting" (203). How does gossip both help and hinder a community? What role does communication play in a community?
8. Remote areas and bustling cities of the West are both represented in *Crazy Woman Creek*. How do rural and urban communities in the West differ? What aspects do they share?

- 9.** In many cases, being part of a community entails a connection to the land as well as a connection to other people. How does the land become part of and affect a community? What other elements help form communities?
- 10.** How do the part titles — "Women Driving Pickups," "Hallelujah and a Show of Hands," and "Cowgirl Up, Cupcakes" — represent women, community, and the West? How do you interpret these titles?
- 11.** In "Well — You Told Me To," A. J. Harnish writes, "As women, I think we need to seize the opportunities we have to bond with those we encounter" (73). How do these stories depict women's general attitude toward forming communities? Do women have a tendency toward community that is particular in any way? How do men and women function differently in communities? Is this an accurate reflection of men and women in your own communities?
- 12.** In her introduction, Linda M. Hasselstrom poses the question "Why weren't more mountains, statues, or government buildings named for women?" (xvi). What is your reaction to this question? How does this reflect what you know about the West? How are the women in this anthology rewriting the history of the West?
- 13.** The editors compiled these anthologies in part to confront the stereotypes about rural women that they thought were misguided, untrue, or unfair. Are there stereotypes about women in your region? How do they respond to such stereotypes?
- 14.** How do the voices here come together to create a more complete image of women in the West? How did this book change your image of women in the West?

Beyond Crazy Woman Creek

Prior to *Crazy Woman Creek*, the editors published two other anthologies about and by women in the contemporary West — *Leaning into the Wind* and *Woven on the Wind*. Please see Linda M. Hasselstrom's introduction (xv) for background on this series of books. The following questions are meant to open the discussion about *Crazy Woman Creek* to include *Leaning into the Wind* and *Woven on the Wind*. Or they may simply be used to foster further discussion about *Crazy Woman Creek*. Either way, we hope that these questions will enrich your understanding of real women in the West — their particular challenges, opportunities, preoccupations, and hopes.

- 1.** Looking at all three collections, do you think that women who arrived later in life have a different relationship to the land and their neighbors — their community — than do women who are native to the area? Are these recent migrants any more or less "children of the land" than women who have lived in the West all their lives? Are they more or less likely to become involved in their western communities?
- 2.** In metropolitan areas, families may move frequently because of changing jobs or growing families. By contrast, some of the families that writers consider in these anthologies have dwelled on the same farm or ranch or in the same small town or rural community for generations. How are their relations with neighbors different from those of less rooted

families? Can people who move west from a metropolis learn the skills necessary to make them truly members of a new community?

3. Rural women are often faced with events beyond their control; however, women living in other areas also deal with unexpected events. Compare the importance of weather, transportation, emergency care, and other uncontrollable events in your life and in the lives of these western women. How do such events affect community life? Might your community and its members learn and change as a result of observing how such events are handled in other communities?

4. Busy calving and harvest seasons make afternoon tea a difficult proposition for women ranchers and farmers. Indeed, the lives of women everywhere seem too busy, sometimes, for friendship and community involvement. How do women in your area reach out to their communities and bond with their friends and neighbors?

5. Have you lost friends because they moved or from some other cause? Have you been able to accept changes in friendships, to accept new neighbors? Can you discuss difficult and challenging issues with your friends? Is there a place or organization in your community that encourages such discussions?

6. How do you communicate most often with friends — by telephone, letter, e-mail, or some other method? How do changes in methods of keeping in touch affect our friendships? Our communities?

For Further Reading

[Woven on the Wind: Women Write About Friendship in the Sagebrush West](#) edited by Linda M. Hasselstrom, Gaydell Collier, and Nancy Curtis

[Leaning into the Wind: Women Write from the Heart of the West](#) edited by Linda M. Hasselstrom, Gaydell Collier, and Nancy Curtis