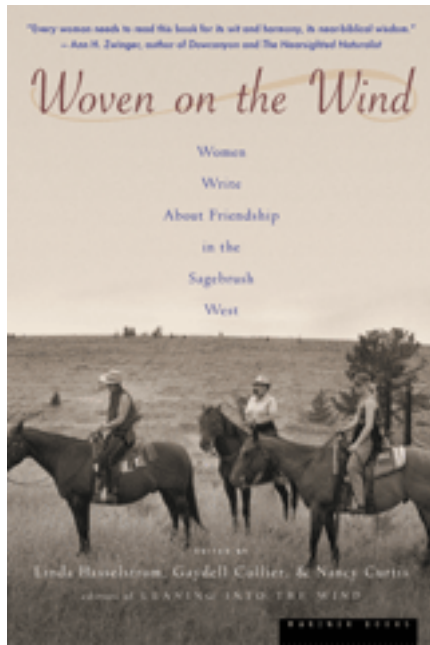


A Reader's Guide



[Woven on the Wind](#)

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

[Leaning into the Wind](#)

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Both Books

The editors of these groundbreaking collections, all three of whom are ranch women, used to joke about the West's stereotypical images and perennial popularity. As Deirdre Stoelzle points out in her essay "The Curtsy" (*Leaning into the Wind*), "The fake cowboys are the ones wearing hats and western shirts and are often overweight and have full beards. The real ones look oddly unobtrusive." But the editors also recognized how quickly the rural West's population is changing.

The women of the region have much to do with these changes. Linda Hasselstrom, Gaydell Collier, and Nancy Curtis resolved to offer these women a platform from which to speak. They appealed to writers through announcements in newsletters, newspapers, libraries, and arts organizations. For the first collection, *Leaning into the Wind*, they focused on responses from rural women in a six-state region. For the second, *Woven on the Wind*, they asked for writing by western women in a broader geographic area, and they accepted submissions

from women in small towns and cities as well as on ranches and farms. Both projects became grassroots efforts in a very real sense. Somewhat to the editors' surprise, a near avalanche of manuscripts arrived, including excerpts from old photo albums and family trees. In poems and memoirs, real western women wrote with passion and conviction, describing their lives as mothers, farmers, daughters, ranchers, wives, and teachers in the heart of the West.

Leaning into the Wind

The editors focused this collection by presenting contributors with the following questions, in Linda Hasselstrom's words: "What, we asked, do they think of their companions, both animal and human? What conditions — weather? isolation? — affect them most? What do they think when a friend remarks how they're wasting their lives or their educations in a barren land?"

For Discussion

1. This anthology contains many reflections by women who moved to the West in adulthood. Do women who arrive later in life have a different relationship to the land and their neighbors than women who grew up in the West? Are these recent migrants any more or less "children of the land" than women who have lived in the West all their lives? Quite a few women, as young brides, followed their husbands westward. How would you characterize the relationship of a couple who opt to become "pioneers" together?
2. In metropolitan areas, people may move frequently because of changing jobs or growing families, but some of the families in this book have lived on the same farm or ranch or in the same small town for generations. How are their relations with neighbors different from those of less rooted families?
3. Women who work with animals must necessarily confront death. How do these women approach death? See, for instance, "The Handmaiden" (36), "Porky's Hard Labor" (21), and "Curley" (219).
4. Rural women are often faced with events beyond their control, just as women living in towns and cities must deal with things they cannot control. Compare the importance of weather, transportation, emergency care, and other uncontrollable events in your life and in the lives of western women.
5. Modern technology and the growth of a world economy have transformed farming and ranching. How are the challenges of modern women different from or similar to those of their forebears? See, for instance, "Night Lambing" (15), "American Dream on an Elk Ranch" (32), and "The Auction" (212).
6. Linda Hasselstrom cites a stereotype of western women as "slim blondes in tight jeans on prancing palominos. Or musclebound heifers who look and smell like old leather" (xiv). Before reading this anthology, what was your image of women of the West? How has your understanding changed after reading *Leaning into the Wind*?

Woven on the Wind

In the previous anthology, the editors noticed that few of the contributions examined relationships with other women. In their appeal for submissions to this anthology, the editors requested that the women contribute writing on this subject.

For Discussion

1. How do you define friendship? How do you decide when a woman is no longer a friend? See, for instance, "Summer Friends" (52), "Who Else?" (127), "Old Ladies Go Hunting" (143), "Huddled for Warmth" (156), and "Hog Wars" (167).
2. There are a number of stories of young or middle-aged women forming close bonds with older, more experienced women. What does such a friendship offer each woman? Drawing from personal experience, discuss friendships between women of different generations.
3. Wanda Rosseland remarks that "men rule" in the West (122). What does she mean by this? After reading the recollections of this diverse group of women, do you agree or disagree? How are women limited by the stereotypes of "rancher," "farmer," and "cowgirl"?
4. The rigors of farm life can make it difficult to maintain friendships. Women everywhere face responsibilities that can create similar time constraints. How do women in the West and in your region reach out to communicate and bond with their friends and neighbors? See, for example, "Tea with Daphne" (23).
5. Have the essays by and about older women altered your sense of what women experience as they age? See, for example, "Goldie" (13), "Without a Doubt" (20), "Pearls from the Milk" (21), "The Path" (34), "Ladies Aid" (37), "Light" (38), "Resolving Mrs. Wackerly" (70), "Coming Home" (107), and "Time for Friendship" (115).
6. You don't, of course, have to live in the West to experience isolation. Have you ever experienced the kind of isolation described by Laurie Wagner Buyer in "There Were No Women" (119)? How did it affect you, or how do you think it might affect you?
7. Have you tried to repair a broken relationship if the friend is still living (see "To Smooth a Mountain," 279) or memorialize it if she is not? See "Letters to Lil" (111), "Passage" (152), "Her Soul Lives Here" (243), "Melissa" (246), "Car Pool Friendship" (267), "To Breathe on My Own" (270), and "The Field Road" (281).

For General Discussion

1. Many of the pieces in these books are in the form of letters. Some are loving, some are angry, but each is charged with an emotion that the writer feels she must convey. To whom might you feel compelled to write? What would you say?
2. How do you communicate most often with your friends — by telephone, letter, e-mail, or some other method? How do changes in the ways we keep in touch affect our friendships?

3. 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 would they respond to such stereotypes?

4. Many of the stories told in the two books are unfinished, and all of us are in the midst of our own unfinished narrative. How has reading the stories of others enriched your story? Have you begun to write about your life? With whom would you share your personal story?

Don't miss your chance to be included in a new anthology, this time focusing on women and community. For this collection, scheduled for publication in 2004, the editors have dropped all requirements for rural residency and are calling for submissions about community from all women west of the Mississippi River in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The deadline for submission is October 1, 2002. The call for manuscripts can be downloaded at www.windbreakhouse.com.

About the Editors

Linda Hasselstrom divides her time between Hermosa, South Dakota, and Cheyenne, Wyoming. Her poetry, fiction, and nonfiction have been widely published. She is the author of nine books, including *Feels Like Far* and *Between Grass and Sky: Where I Live and Work*, to be published this fall. Linda was admitted to the South Dakota Hall of Fame in 1989 as the Author 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 Award from Women Writing the West.

Gaydell Collier, who was born on Long Island, New York, lives on a small ranch near Sundance, Wyoming, with her husband, Roy. She has coauthored several books on horsemanship and horse care with Eleanor F. Prince, including *Basic Horsemanship: English and Western*. Her work has appeared in periodicals and anthologies, including the *Christian Science Monitor* 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 books. Nancy and her cows were the subject of a photo essay on western women in *Life*.

All three editors help manage working ranches.

For Further Reading

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