The heart of the North Carolina Writers' Network beats in response to the needs and requests of its members. Its members are the poets, novelists, essayists, writers of short stories, flash fiction, nonfiction, novellas—all the vibrantly talented wordsmiths we have, who live and work across our state, from the western tip of our Blue Ridge Mountains to the wide, sandy beaches of our eastern shores.

What does the NCWN mean to me, personally? Let me set the scene …

Timing is just about everything. Well, it certainly was on the day I received the worst critique of my life. I'm sure you know the type: learned author reads your sentences aloud. Shakes his head, disgusted. Your BP ramps up like you've just run the mile. You wait for his feedback and pray it won't slice you to red-ribbon shreds. It shoots out like poison arrows from his lips: "I don't know, Jan. Maybe you should think about going back to school." (Insert shower scene from *Psycho* here; he is killing you.)

Time moved at glacial speeds for me after that day. I did not write for six months. My bruised heart thumped erratically. I cried at the oddest intervals, and I was making my spouse sick. One day, the Hubs said, "Dear, you have *got* to do something different."

Of course, I gave him the stink eye because his timing seemed to suck. In truth though, it was perfect. Online, I input my membership data to the NCWN's user-friendly Web site and rediscovered such delicious entrees as their guide to literary agents, calendar of upcoming events, Hats Off, resource links, and writing competitions. In the dessert section, Submit It, I read the call for submissions by a well-known publisher in Winston-Salem.

The deadline for their Open Awards was a few months off, so I decided to enter. What'd I have to loose? Soon, my computer and I were back on track. I wrote every day for the next six months and submitted everything I'd written to Press 53. One of my pieces earned a spot on the finalist list (2008), and I floated to cloud nine and back. I felt a whole lot smarter about the timing of things, not to mention, clearer on the fundamental definition of who *my community* needed to be. By the way, my novella, *Hard Times and Happenstance*, won first place honors in the 2009 *Press 53 Open Awards Anthology* and will be published this fall.

So, what does the NCWN mean to me personally? It is where my tender fellow writers and poets—the ones who speak in special tongues, the ones who shape-shift the world into a place we can actually bear (or stop putting up with) come together—online or at a conference, at a reading or via phone. It is where we can be counted and a place we can feel at home. The

North Carolina Writers' Network is my community. Together, we make the best of good times better.

So, dear, if you're not a member already, do something different today. Join. You'll thank yourself tomorrow for the good timing you had today. See you, Jan.