

## Why I Belong to the NCWN

Written by Maureen Sherbondy  
Sunday, 31 January 2010 09:39 -

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Maureen A. Sherbondy  
[www.maureensherbondy.com](http://www.maureensherbondy.com)

At an early age I set four goals for myself: (1) earn a college degree, (2) marry, (3) have three children (yes, three, I have always been very decisive) prior to thirty, and (4) publish a book.

By twenty-nine I had checked the first three items off my life's to-do list. Item four eluded me. Get a book published. Was I crazy? What was I thinking? I hadn't even majored in English in college. I had no publishing contacts, yet I continued to write and read and refine my craft. Alone. It was a solitary act, this writing business. I managed to send some poems and stories out and get a few pieces published. But a book! This task seemed impossible.

Then in 1996 I moved to Raleigh, North Carolina. Everywhere I went, someone was either writing or talking about writing—at the local Starbucks, in the YMCA locker room, at temple. For the four years I had lived in Pennsylvania, I had never once bumped into another writer. This state was different, though. Someone told me about the North Carolina Writers' Network. I was so excited to hear that an active, thriving organization existed for people like me.

Soon, I signed up for my first NCWN conference and felt both excited and terrified. But the other writers, from Tony Abbott to Dave Manning, were so friendly. I remember people wore nametags with their chosen genres scrawled on their tags. This was a great conversation starter. Many friendships took root and blossomed. Writers whose work I admired taught informative, helpful classes. These workshop leaders were enthusiastic and knowledgeable. I took notes, learned how to write better, and discovered local journals. On display tables, workshop leaders and other NCWN authors exhibited their books of poetry, fiction, or essays. I remember drooling over the covers. In my head a little voice whispered, *One day my book will be on that table*. This tangible goal gave me something to work toward. When my mailbox overflowed with rejection letters, when I lost yet another book contest, I thought about my book displayed on that conference table.

If I had not attended the NCWN conferences, I never would have had my first book published. Every time I attended the Fall Conference, I walked the perimeter of the vendor room, where publishers set up tables and sold their books. There, I met Scott Douglass, owner and editor of

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Main Street Rag Publishing. Every time I returned to the conference, I talked to him, bought some of his fine books. He was publishing wonderful North Carolina poets and poets from other states.

At the 2006 conference, I once again stopped at his table and spoke with him. By this time, my work had appeared in over a hundred literary journals, and my poetry manuscript had landed on the finalist lists of several book contests. But I was frustrated, still missing that elusive book contract. Would I be sending manuscripts to book contests when I was ninety years old? Was this last goal on my list unattainable?

I will remember this next moment always. Later in the conference, as I was talking to Susan Lefler, a poet friend whom I met years earlier at another conference, Scott Douglass tapped my shoulder and said, "I don't usually do this, but I am inviting you to submit a book to me for consideration."

My jaw must have dropped. I could hear my heart pounding. At first, I thought he was talking to someone else. I had been waiting my whole life for someone to say these words. So, the rest is history. I sent the book, and *After the Fairy Tale* was published in 2007. I was ecstatic.

Until then, I had never thought beyond achieving that book publication goal. After a book is published, actually months before, the author becomes a marketer. Having a new goal of *selling my* book, I quickly learned that the NCWN was an extremely important promotional resource. I was able to post my Web site link on their Web site, to mention my good news in their Book Buzz, and also to announce my upcoming readings in their calendar. And, of course, I returned to the Fall Conference with my books. Standing over the display table there and seeing my first book was a preeminent life moment. On the outside I was calm and quiet, but on the inside I was jumping up and down yelling, "I did it!"

I strongly recommend joining the NCWN for writers who are interested in improving their craft, meeting a community of supportive writers, learning about the publishing universe, and promoting their books and events. The NCWN has, in Frost's words, "made all the difference" in my book publication journey.