

SLWG Member Spotlight: *We're pleased to present...*

Janet Grace Riehl



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The following text is from our Fall 2008 print newsletter, *The Scribe*:

In the 1860's, high on the bluffs above the Mississippi in Alton, her great grandfather founded the family's home place. Two generations later, **Janet Grace Riehl** was born and raised on the same land as her father before her, growing up a country girl.

Janet realized her talent for writing early on after having had four of her works published as a teenager. She credits her father as her greatest influence.

"...[He] wrote in the midst of fixing things, working with his hands and being a family man."

Janet also realized that there was a whole world to see and write about, eventually taking the word "country" to a whole new level.

After earning a master's degree in English, Janet spent the next 20 years as a writer, working in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe directing cross-cultural development projects, workshops with villagers in Botswana and Ghana and Native American pueblos to high-tech business leaders.

"Through it all, writing in some way has been at the core," says Janet.

Janet taught English as a second language while in the Peace Corps., and was editor of a corporate in-house newsletter, which she claims is "the best job I ever had."

Her consulting firm, Clear Communications, in New Mexico, "teaches folks how to write more clearly."

However, writing is only part of her creative personae. In 1990 Janet launched an impressive visual art exhibit, "Celebrating an African Experience," including chants, songs, dances and ceremonies—and her creative world exploded.

She went on to earn a BFA from the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland and attended a lecture that prompted her to begin promoting the arts, supporting herself through various forms of teaching Art, English and literacy.

Janet says her father, Erwin A. Thompson (also an author with more than 40 novels), taught her that creativity is a gift; its products are a labor of love that are shared freely with the community.

Janet says her childhood was filled with books from the late 1800s and early 1900s.

"Many of my favorite books are from those earlier times...one book I've always thought masterful is Jean Webster's *Daddy Long Legs* written in 1912...[It] inspired me to write my novelette *Barcelona Pregnancy Club*."

Among Janet's publications is *Sightlines: A Poet's Diary*. Though the sudden death of her sister provided the impetus for the book, "it encompasses themes on impermanence, chance, and the mutability of memory...the passage of time."

Soon Janet will release an audio version of her book. She recorded it in Nashville with her 93-year-old father, who plays the music.

She also plans to keep working on her memoir and fiction writing inspired by Africa, because, "I feel there is so much Western culture has to learn from the mother continent."

The advice she has for other writers is to view writing as a craft that demands the discipline of work.

"Our muse comes out when we're at work," she says. "Art is good, but craft will see you through." She adds, "I'd like to have coffee mugs made up with this on them as a slogan."