

## Award for Promotion of Literature Presented at Festival

The University of Nebraska at Omaha Thompson Alumni Center was the site of the 2013 Nebraska Book Festival, sponsored by Humanities Nebraska, Nebraska Center for the Book, Nebraska Cultural Endowment, Nebraska Library Commission, University of Nebraska at Omaha College of Arts and Sciences, and University of Nebraska Press. The Festival, *Believing in Nebraska Writers*, featured the presentation of the Nebraska Center for the Book's **Mildred Bennett Award to Jane Renner Hood**, of Lincoln.

The award recognizes an individual who has made a significant contribution to the fostering of the literary tradition in Nebraska. It reminds us all of the importance of individual leadership and service to the literary and intellectual traditions that enrich our

lives. Jane Renner Hood was honored for her long service to Nebraska's cultural heritage, serving as the Executive Director of the Nebraska Humanities Council (now Humanities Nebraska) for 23 years before her retirement in 2010. Under her leadership, the Council awarded more than 1,900 grants of over 3.8 million dollars to organizations in Nebraska. Nearly half of these were based on authors, literature, and storytelling. The

Council also funded Speakers' Bureau programs across the state, including presentations on Nebraska authors and state history. During her 23 years of leadership, funding was expanded to include support for the Nebraska Book Festival and statewide programs to complement the annual One Book One Nebraska reading project. Omaha-based artist Eddith Buis donated the artwork for the 2013 Mildred Bennett Award. Omaha printer, book artist and poet Denise Brady, made the portfolio case for this award presentation.

Jane Renner Hood  
Photography by Keller

A Keynote Presentation by Kurt Andersen, author of *True Believers*, opened the Festival. The event also included readings by a variety of Nebraska authors with books published in 2012, writers' workshops, and a special presentation by Andrew Jewell, co-editor of *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather*, highlighting the 2013 One Book One Nebraska selection: *O Pioneers!* by Willa Cather. 📖



2013 Mildred Bennett Award  
(artwork by Nebraska artists)

# Louder Than a Bomb: Omaha 2012-13

*Guest Editorial*  
by Matt Mason,  
Nebraska Writers  
Collective

*The Louder Than a Bomb* Omaha youth poetry festival finished up April 12th with over 500 fans screaming wildly for 4 teams of high school poets. I want to just stop there for a bit to let you digest that opening sentence. Okay, we're back: *Louder Than a Bomb* is run by the Nebraska Writers Collective, basing it on a program started in Chicago twelve years ago by Young Chicago Authors. Teams of 4-8 students compete by reading their poems and then having the poem and delivery judged by five somewhat-random yahoos chosen from the audience. At this



The 2013 State Champions of Louder Than a Bomb from Lincoln High School: (l to r) Lillian Bornstein, Charlie Curtis-Beard, Reagan Myers, and Paul Schack.

year's month-long event, judges included Chris Sommerich, executive director of Humanities Nebraska, and some guy who'd never seen a poetry event in his life. So take that as you will, the judging is a gimmick to make the poets reach the audience, to stir them up and get them to laugh, cry, applaud. And boy did they.

Our coaches had been working with 21 teams, some since September of last year, working on creative writing and perfor-

mance. Teams are mostly centered around Omaha and Lincoln but included one squad from Alliance who made the long drive and had most of their teaching done via Skype. Though it is set up in a sports format, we always emphasize that the points are not the point, the point is poetry. And these students deliver on that beautifully. No matter what place a team comes in, these students get to be on stage sharing their creativity, their stories, their lives, their jokes, their loves, their heartbreaks, the whole thing, making for a show that'll get you on your feet, smacking your hands pink, for poetry. See videos at [youtube.com/ltabomaha](http://youtube.com/ltabomaha) and find out more at [ltabomaha.org](http://ltabomaha.org)

Arianna Di Bernardo,  
Bellevue West High  
School



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Denise Brady

**Letters About Literature Coordinator**

Lauren Riedesel

Nebraska Library Commission Director Rod Wagner is an ex-officio member of all committees.

**2013 Nebraska Center for the Book Board Meetings**

June 8 ..... 10:00 a.m.,  
South Omaha Library,  
Omaha, Nebraska

**Advertising**

The NCB News can accept up to four 1/8- page ads for each issue. The advertising rate is \$125 for 1/8-page. NCB News is issued March 15, June 15 and October 15. The advertising and copy deadline is six weeks prior to issue date. For details, contact Mary Jo Ryan, Nebraska Center for the Book, The Atrium, 1200 N Street, Suite 120, Lincoln, NE 68508-2023; phone 402-471-3434, 800-307-2665, e-mail: [maryjo.ryan@nebraska.gov](mailto:maryjo.ryan@nebraska.gov), [centerforthebook.nebraska.gov](http://centerforthebook.nebraska.gov)

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# Take a Literary Tour of Nebraska



Nebraskans are invited to participate in the Nebraska Tourism Commission's Passport Program—with ten themed tours, each with eight stops sharing a common theme. One of the themes this year is a literary tour: *Turn the Page* (<http://www.nebraskapassport.com/tours/turn-the-page>). It features stops involving famous Nebraska authors, including:

- Willa Cather State Historic Site in Red Cloud
- Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center in Chadron
- Lincoln City Libraries' Jane Pope Geske Heritage Room of Nebraska Authors
- The Sisters Grimm in Bushnell
- Wright Morris Walking/Driving Tour in Central City
- John G. Neihardt State Historic Site in Bancroft

- Bess Streeter Aldrich House & Museum in Elmwood
- The Lyceum Café & Bookstore in Brownville

Literary tourists can get their passports stamped at these and at 72 other Nebraska locations. Participants who complete a tour get a free T-shirt. Collect twenty stamps to receive twenty \$1.00 lottery scratch-off tickets. Collecting forty stamps earns the participant a free digital camera. The grand prize is an iPad Mini. Travelers are invited to share Nebraska Passport adventures at <http://www.nebraskapassport.com/share-your-nebraska-passport-adventure>. Passports can be picked up at participating stops or pre-ordered by emailing [info@NebraskaPassport.com](mailto:info@NebraskaPassport.com). For more information see <http://www.nebraskapassport.com>. 

Jane Pope Geske  
Heritage Room of  
Nebraska Authors

## What is the Nebraska Center for the Book?

*The Nebraska Center for the Book brings together the state's readers, writers, booksellers, librarians, publishers, printers, educators, and scholars to build the community of the book. We are the people who know and love books, and who value the richness they bring to our lives. Our Nebraska Center supports programs to celebrate and stimulate public interest in books, reading, and the written word. We have been an affiliate of the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress since 1990.*

## Join the Nebraska Center for the Book

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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Name/address of a friend who might be interested in NCB membership:  
\_\_\_\_\_

\$15 Individual Membership  \$25 Organizational Membership  Additional Contribution

*Contributions above \$15 are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.*

**Please send this form and a check to: Nebraska Center for the Book  
The Atrium, 1200 N Street, Suite 120 • Lincoln, NE 68508-2023**



## Young Nebraskans Win Writing Competition



Honorees (l to r) Cole Shank, Allie Thompson, William Conrad, Young-Joon Park, Shannon Chinn, and Sydney Miller with Gov. Dave Heineman, Nebraska Library Commission Director Rod Wagner, and Nebraska Center for the Book President Mary Ellen Ducey at the proclamation-signing ceremony.

Young Nebraska writers received Letters about Literature award certificates from Gov. Dave Heineman on April 10 at a proclamation-signing ceremony celebrating National Library Week, April 14-20, 2013. Letters about Literature is a national reading and writing promotion program. The competition encourages young people to read, be inspired, and write back to the author who had an impact on their lives.

This annual contest is sponsored nationally by the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress. The Center for the Book was established in 1977 as a public-private partnership to use the resources of the Library of Congress to stimulate public interest in books and reading. The Nebraska competition is coordinated and sponsored by the Nebraska Center for the Book, Nebraska Library Commission, and Houchen Bindery Ltd.

### Young Nebraska writers honored are:

#### WINNERS

- Young-Joon Park, Elkhorn, for a letter to Arthur Miller for *Death of a Salesman*
- Shannon Chinn, Omaha, for a letter to Ray Bradbury for *Fahrenheit 451*
- Sydney Miller, Lincoln, for a letter to Sharon Draper for *Out of My Mind*

#### ALTERNATE WINNERS

- Allie Thompson, Omaha, for a letter to Kathryn Stockett for *The Help*
- Cole Shank, Lincoln, for a letter to Kathleen Benner Duble for *Phantoms in the Snow*
- William Conrad, Lincoln, for a letter to Charles Dickens for *David Copperfield*

The students wrote personal letters to the authors explaining how his or her work changed their view of themselves or the world. They selected authors from any genre, fiction or non-fiction, contemporary or classic. Winners were chosen from three competition levels: upper elementary, middle, and secondary school.

The Nebraska winners were honored at a luncheon, received cash prizes and gift certificates, and their winning letters were placed in the Jane Pope Geske Heritage Room of Nebraska Authors at Bennett Martin Public Library in Lincoln. They advanced to the national competition and Shannon Chinn, of Omaha, was named the National Runner-up for Level II—grades 7-8. For more information see <http://centerforthebook.nebraska.gov/programs/LAL.html>. 

## Library Commission Staff Celebrate National Poetry Month

Hear “Casey at the Bat” read by Nebraska Library Commission staffers—one line at a time—at <http://youtu.be/EggDi4VHHUU>. Inspired by Bob Barringer’s presentation at the Big Talk from Small Libraries workshop, and

because April was National Poetry Month, the staff decided to try out a group poetry reading. The technique could make a terrific community program—fun, funny, inexpensive, and involving lots of community members of all ages. 



## What Are You Reading?

Nebraska Center for the Book board members share their thoughts about the books they are reading.

During the long and snowy weeks of early 2013, I have tried to read as much as possible. Two particular books stand out as having transported me from the miserable weather. The first was Jeffrey Zaslow's *The Girls from Ames*, a non-fiction account of the 40-year friendship of a group of young women who graduated from high school together in Ames, Iowa. Their lives took typical twists and turns, and Zaslow focuses on the ways in which they supported each other. My favorite novel of the winter was *Loving Frank* by Nancy Horan, a fictionalized account of the affair between Frank Lloyd Wright and Mamah Cheney. I found it beautifully researched and developed.

**Becky Faber**

Ron Hull's *BACKSTAGE: Stories from My Life in Public Television* is an entertaining and inspirational read. Ron recently gave a presentation at the Nebraska Book Festival. If you have a chance to hear him speak, do. It was great fun! The book has an easy style that is just like Ron. Not only do you get to hear stories about Neihardt and Sandoz and many others, but you really learn about Ron's role in establishing NET and how he took that knowledge to Vietnam to help them establish a television network. He dreamed big and followed his dreams.

**Molly Fisher**

I just finished *Tiny Beautiful Things: Advice on Love and Life from Dear Sugar*, by Cheryl Strayed. *Tiny Beautiful Things* is more like a collection of personal essays from Cheryl Strayed, rather than "quippy" answers in an advice column. It's full of insight, honesty, humor, and deep compassion. Any reader will be able to find several interesting and inspirational stories within these covers.

**Cindy Grady**

As a big Willa Cather fan, I am of course reading the recently-released volume, *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather*. Until now, Cather's will had forbidden quotation from, or publication of, her letters. I always thought this was a shame, since as a Cather scholar I had read a number of her letters in various archives and found them fascinating reading. I'm still making my way through them, but I can say that I am thoroughly enjoying learning more about

a woman I thought I knew pretty well. I'm sure others would, too!

**Charles Johanningsmeier**

I recently finished *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* by Katherine Boo. This book is about the slums of Mumbai India. It is non-fiction but reads like a story of people surviving—thriving and not. I am reading *The Art of Fielding* by Chad Harbach, this is fiction, a story of baseball and people finding themselves. It is a very enjoyable read.

**Donna Kennedy Marvin**

*Butch Geography* by Stacey Waite is a really great read on gender and identity in these confusing times. Waite's poetry is solidly woven and her language stays accessible and fascinating as you find yourself rooting for the speaker, poem after poem.

**Matt Mason**

I am reading the "other" shades of gray book: *Between Shades of Gray* by Ruta Sepetys. I'm reading it with the intent of incorporating it into my Reading Enrichment class, a class that supports high school students who struggle with reading. I've found that good YA literature is a wonderful bridge for students who have 'quit' reading. Once something triggers their interest, they get hooked!

**Lois Meyer**

I recently read Stew Magnuson's *Wounded Knee 1973: Still Bleeding*, an account of a conference held at Augustana College in South Dakota that brought together notables involved in the 1973 occupation and standoff at Wounded Knee. Magnuson provides background on the 71-day occupation and aftermath. The Augustana Dakota Conference proved that the issues and emotions surrounding this event have not gone away despite the intervening years.

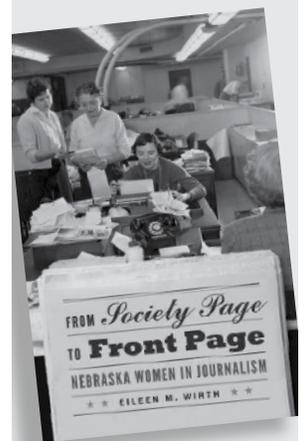
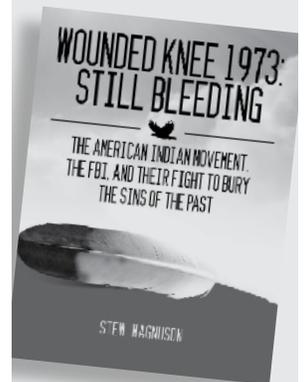
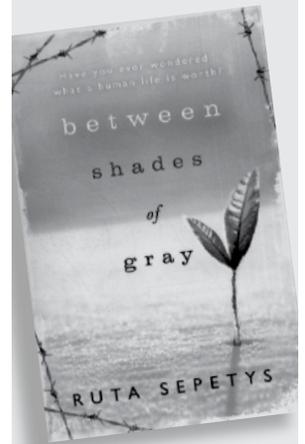
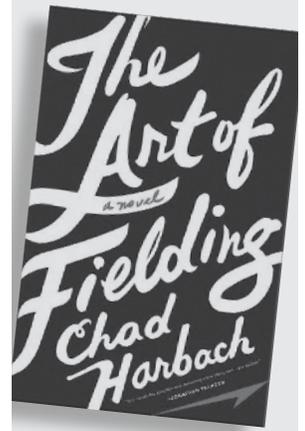
**Rod Wagner**

I'm reading a new book, *From Society Page to Front Page: Nebraska Women in Journalism*, by Creighton professor of journalism Eileen Wirth. It's a great read, and has introduced me to a huge chapter in our local history of which I knew almost nothing. Many of the women profiled are having their story shared in depth for the first time.

**Gary Wasdin**

*Fahrenheit 451*, by Ray Bradbury. I'm embarrassed to say I had never read this classic before. Published in 1953, I was amazed at how prescient the author was on the preoccupations and gadgets that run society today.

**Suzanne Wise** 



## American Life in Poetry: Column 421



by Ted Kooser,  
U.S. Poet Laureate,  
2004-2006

This column originates in Nebraska, and our office is about two hours' drive from that stretch of the Platte River where thousands of sandhill cranes stop for a few weeks each year. Linda Hogan, one of our most respected Native writers and Writer in Residence for The Chickasaw Nation, perfectly captures their magic and mystery in this fine poem.

### The Sandhills

The language of cranes  
we once were told  
is the wind. The wind  
is their method,  
their current, the translated story  
of life they write across the sky.  
Millions of years  
they have blown here  
on ancestral longing,  
their wings of wide arrival,  
necks long, legs stretched out  
above strands of earth  
where they arrive

with the shine of water,  
stories, interminable  
language of exchanges  
descended from the sky  
and then they stand,  
earth made only of crane  
from bank to bank of the river  
as far as you can see  
the ancient story made new.

American Life in Poetry is made possible by The Poetry Foundation ([www.poetryfoundation.org](http://www.poetryfoundation.org)), publisher of *Poetry* magazine. It is also supported by the Department of English at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Poem reprinted from *Sing: Poetry from the Indigenous Americas*, Ed. by Allison Adelle Hedge Coke, The Univ. of Arizona Press, 2011, by permission of Linda Hogan and the publisher. Introduction copyright © 2013 by The Poetry Foundation. The introduction's author, Ted Kooser, served as United States Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 2004-2006. We do not accept unsolicited manuscripts. 📖

## O Pioneers! Book Club Kits Available

The One Book One Nebraska reading program, now in its ninth year, encourages Nebraskans across the state to read and discuss

**one book**—chosen from books written by Nebraska authors or that have a Nebraska theme or setting. **2013 One Book One Nebraska** encourages schools, libraries, and

other literary and cultural organizations to host book discussions, activities, and events focusing on Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!*

Book Club Kits include books, bookmarks, evaluation materials, and a list of web resources to help you find discussion questions, lesson plans, and events. Schedule your group now to read this great book and ask your local librarian to contact the Nebraska Library Commission (<http://nlc.nebraska.gov/ref/bookclub> or [nlc.ask@nebraska.gov](mailto:nlc.ask@nebraska.gov)) to borrow the kit for you.

Host a scholar listed on the Humanities Nebraska Speakers' Bureau to create a great

local activity for book groups, community organizations, and speaker series. One program is **O Pioneers! —Willa Cather's Second "First Novel,"** presented by Andrew Jewell, Assistant Professor UNL Libraries, see [humanitiesnebraska.org/speakers/speakers-index/#J](http://humanitiesnebraska.org/speakers/speakers-index/#J) (interview with him on page 9). Nonprofit organizations may be eligible to apply for a grant from Humanities Nebraska to finance your event. Follow the steps at <http://humanitiesnebraska.org/speakers/book-a-speaker>. For more information contact Mary Yager, [mary@humanitiesnebraska.org](mailto:mary@humanitiesnebraska.org).

One Book One Nebraska is sponsored by Humanities Nebraska, Nebraska Center for the Book, Nebraska Library Association, Nebraska Library Commission, University of Nebraska Press, and the Willa Cather Foundation. For more information see [onebook.nebraska.gov/2013](http://onebook.nebraska.gov/2013) or [facebook.com/OneBookOneNebraska](https://facebook.com/OneBookOneNebraska). 📖



## Prairie Schooner Tours Nebraska Libraries

*K*wame Dawes, Guggenheim Fellow and 2011 Barnes & Noble Writers for Writers Award winner, recently toured Nebraska libraries. The editor-in-chief of the *Prairie Schooner*, University of Nebraska-Lincoln's literary magazine, completed a ten-city driving tour of the state, stopping in public libraries to do readings, and to promote *Prairie Schooner*. He was accompanied by managing editor and poet Marianne Kunkel.

The tour, one of Dawes' first commitments upon taking his position in 2011, featured poetry readings by Dawes and Kunkel followed by a question and answer session. For each stop, the pair wrote a blog reflecting on the people they met, places they visited, and what they learned. Uploaded throughout the trip these blog entries, "Schoonering through Nebraska," encouraged people across the state to follow the tour in real time.

"Our message to folks around the state was that the journal is their journal," Dawes said. "I also wanted to remind them that the journal began with the expressed desire to remind the world of the values of hard work and independent thinking that are part of the Nebraskan culture, and that the dogged survival and thriving of this journal through steady work is a true testament to these values." Established more than eighty-five years ago, the *Prairie Schooner* has received attention as one of the top literary magazines in the country—and one of the longest-running. "I learned that I have much to learn about the state of Nebraska," Kunkel said. "I was pleased to learn that Nebraska public libraries are lovely buildings and the people we met even lovelier — generous, enthusiastic and inquisitive."

In the blog entries, Kunkel observed the beauty of small-town libraries, "These are no ordinary buildings. Mission-style woodwork, high ceilings with exposed beams, pillars, skylights...Forget IKEA megastores. Better models of architecture and design are public libraries, where visitors can roam from one cozy corner to another. Oak banisters, full-length-mirror-size windows, soft track lights above bookshelves, a cappuccino machine—these are features that have tempted me to stay in Nebraska libraries



*Kwame Dawes*

Photo by Rachel Eliza Griffiths



*Marianne Kunkel*

Photo by Josh Fiedler

long after Kwame and I finish our poetry readings."

Dawes commented in a blog post, "I enjoy the fact, though, that the librarians in these parts are dogged protectors of the freedom of speech and the freedom to read. They also laughingly say that their patrons are not shy about borrowing books that might be deemed as a tad scandalous. 'We have no brown paper covering our books. And they just come in and borrow.' It is clear that the community understands the safety of the library. It is a wonderful thought. Freedom is enacted here in startlingly beautiful ways. This is where the real freedoms of the country happen—in the right of people to read whatever they want without fearing serious recriminations." **And** he also praised the "strange, curious and just before dark, stunningly beautiful" stop at Carhenge in Alliance. See the December 2012 blog entries at <http://prairieschooner.unl.edu/?q=blog/archive/201212> for rich detail and compelling stories of the journey. 📖



## UNL Leads in Digital Humanities

by Jonathan Nitcher,  
University of  
Nebraska-Lincoln

The Center for Digital Research in the Humanities (CDRH) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) sponsors a number of projects concerned with history and literature, with an emphasis on American cultural history. The projects are developed and maintained by CDRH staff members, faculty at UNL and at several other universities, and graduate and undergraduate students such as myself. I am a senior undergraduate student majoring in English with an interest in the Digital Humanities, specifically XML archival work. All sponsored projects are research-based, and use digitization to provide access to resources in the humanities.

Some projects study writers and literary texts, and make rare documents and writings available to a large mass of academic and non-academic users in an easily accessible medium. Perhaps the most well-known of these is the *Walt Whitman Archive* ([www.whitmanarchive.org](http://www.whitmanarchive.org)), co-edited by Kenneth M. Price and Ed Folsom. This archive's goal is to gather Walt Whitman's published books, manuscripts, and periodical poetry, as well as a selection of secondary sources, into a single place. Many other projects share goals similar to that of the *Whitman Archive*, such as the *Willa Cather Archive* ([cather.unl.edu](http://cather.unl.edu)), edited by Andrew Jewell. The *Cather Archive* contains photos, videos, letters, and biographies, as well as published pieces by Cather.

Other projects are concerned with researching and preserving history, culture, and endangered languages—magazines and newspapers, photographs, letters, and essays. Many of these projects are concerned with American history or conflict, such as *Civil War Washington* ([civilwardc.org](http://civilwardc.org)), a sweeping effort to examine the U.S. capitol as it changed during the Civil War, headed by Kenneth Price along with Susan C. Lawrence, and Kenneth J. Winkle. Some focus more on a historical figure, such as the *William F. Cody Archive* ([codyarchive.org](http://codyarchive.org)), which follows the development of the American nation along with Cody's life. *The Cody Archive*, like many others sponsored by the CDRH, is multidisciplinary and multi-institutional—with faculty and staff at UNL under the direction of CDRH co-director Katherine Walter, in conjunction with primary investigators from other

institutions including the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Brigham Young University, and Ball State University.

Several projects are focused on Great Plains history and development, like the *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains* ([plainshumanities.unl.edu/encyclopedia/](http://plainshumanities.unl.edu/encyclopedia/)), edited by David S. Wishart, and *The Great Plains During WWII* ([plainshumanities.unl.edu/homefront/](http://plainshumanities.unl.edu/homefront/)), headed by R. Douglas Hurt. Some projects examine certain events in Great Plains and Western history, including *Railroads and the Making of Modern America* ([railroads.unl.edu](http://railroads.unl.edu)), directed by Will Thomas and Timothy R. Mahoney's *Gilded Age Plains City* ([gildedage.unl.edu](http://gildedage.unl.edu)) project. Native American history, culture, and language are addressed by such efforts as the *American Indian Treaties Portal* ([treatiesportal.unl.edu](http://treatiesportal.unl.edu)), Thomas P. Meyers' *Omaha Indian Heritage* project ([omahatribe.unl.edu](http://omahatribe.unl.edu)), the *Omaha Language Learning* website ([omahalanguage.unl.edu](http://omahalanguage.unl.edu)), and the *Omaha and Ponca Digital Dictionary* ([omahaponca.unl.edu](http://omahaponca.unl.edu)) run by Mark Awakuni-Swetland and Catherine Rudin.

Other CDRH projects are concerned with the field of digital humanities. For example, the *Digital History Project* ([digitalhistory.unl.edu](http://digitalhistory.unl.edu)), supervised by UNL's Will Thomas and Doug Seefeldt at Ball State University, focuses on the changing world of the digital history field. *Scholarly Editing* ([scholarlyediting.org](http://scholarlyediting.org)), edited by Amanda Gailey and Andrew Jewell, is an online journal that works to advance the field by publishing editions of interesting literary and historical texts. For more information on these and other projects, see [cdrh.unl.edu](http://cdrh.unl.edu). 

### Entries due June 30th

An Invitation to Enter...



The 2013  
Book Awards  
Competition

Sponsored by the Nebraska Center for the Book

[centerforthebook.nebraska.gov](http://centerforthebook.nebraska.gov)



## Cather's Letters Illuminate Her Personality

Nebraska Center for the Book board member Molly Fisher recently interviewed Andrew Jewell. A lifelong Nebraskan, Andrew Jewell is the co-editor of *The Willa Cather Archive*. He has published several articles on Cather and American literature and is the co-editor *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather* (Knopf, 2013). He is an associate professor in the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries.

**Q. Since you grew up in North Platte, were you always a Cather fan, or what led you to her?**

A. Ironically, I somehow missed reading Willa Cather all through my earlier days in Nebraska. It wasn't until I was a graduate student at the University of Missouri-Columbia (in the only part of my life when I did not live in Nebraska) that I discovered Cather's writing. I read her short story "Neighbor Rosicky" in a survey of American literature course and was very moved by it. I started reading her novels, and when I got to *The Song of the Lark*, I realized I had found a writer I could really get into. I asked a professor of mine in Missouri where I should go for my Ph.D. if I wanted to study Willa Cather, and he said, "You couldn't do any better than the University of Nebraska-Lincoln." Thankfully, I took his advice.

**Q. Your reading of the over 3000 letters must have given you new insight into Cather. How did the letters influence you, or were you changed by your reading of them?**

A. Reading extensively in Cather's letters, I grew to have a new, much more complex sense of her personality. The biographies I had read presented her as a remote, single-minded, and lonely person. I don't see her that way at all, and I struggle to see how anyone with access to her letters can miss her humor, her big-heartedness, her candor, her lively circle of friends and family, and her profundity. Yes, she could be prickly and melodramatic at times, but her human fallibility just makes her more interesting to me. I have been influenced—and continue to be influenced—by her courage to be herself, by her independent intellect, and by the vibrancy of her life and accomplishments.

**Q. Since the work was a collaboration with Stout, how did you choose the letters and how did the collaboration work?**

A. After gathering transcriptions of letters scattered in nearly seventy-five different institutions—something Janis Stout wisely did over many, many years of research—the two of us independently read

every letter and made a first pass at selecting the ones we thought were the most important, the most interesting, and the most revealing of different aspects of Cather's life. Our first selection was far too long for one volume, so we made several revisions, trading electronic files via email, until we were within our word limit. After having a basic selection worked out for each of our twelve sections in the book, we wrote introductions to each section, wrote notes to be interspersed with the letters that would help readers understand the context, and provided identifications for the names and titles referenced in the letters. I drafted each section, often consulting drafts of introductory paragraphs Janis Stout had already written, and then sent the drafts to Janis. She made several revisions and sent it back to me, and the process was repeated until we were both satisfied. Rather remarkably, the two of us rather easily agreed on virtually every decision we had to make in the creation of this book. We had a united vision and a mutual respect that resulted in a very happy collaboration.

**Q. What do you hope will come out of your publishing the letters and what reaction have you received?**

A. Because readers now have access to Willa Cather's letters, what we know about her and say about her will be more accurate and, in many cases, more interesting. She left a large and lively collection of personal letters behind her, and these writings should inform the books and articles written about her. And, with the attention the book is getting, I also hope that more letters by Cather come to light; I believe there are more out there somewhere. Mostly, though, because Cather's letters are so well-written and she is so present in them, I hope that readers find pleasure in them and are moved by them. Because Cather's work is so well-loved by so many different kinds of readers, we designed the first book of her letters not for specialists only, but for general readers, too. The response so far has been encouraging.

**Q. What are you working on now?**

A. I am editing a special double issue of the academic journal *Studies in the Novel* that is focused on Cather. Published in the fall of 2013, this issue will feature twelve essays by Cather scholars on different aspects of her life and work. And, I'm very pleased to say, it will be the first major collection of Cather scholarship to directly quote and interpret the specific language of Willa Cather's letters. 📖



Andrew Jewell,  
University of Nebraska-  
Lincoln



## Where Can Writers Get Ideas?

by Devra Dragos,  
Nebraska Library  
Commission



Dr. Muriel Anderson  
(Butler County Collection)



Sleeping porch at  
the Hospital for  
Tuberculous, Kearney  
(Nebraska Library  
Commission Collection)

A common answer to this question may be: anywhere and everywhere. So what can they do if they hit a writer's block or don't know how to describe something historical? Our suggestion is—try Nebraska Memories at [memories.ne.gov](http://memories.ne.gov)!

The photograph and description of Dr. Muriel Anderson, a blind osteopath who practiced in David City, Nebraska from 1924 to 1971, can generate many questions and ideas. What would it be like to be a blind doctor? How would your other senses take over when you couldn't see a patient? What kind of challenges did she face in her medical education in the early 1920s—as a woman, as well as being blind? What other challenging occupations did women with disabilities become successful in during that time? What would it be like to be a patient of a blind doctor? What would happen if a patient tried to pull a fast one on the doctor?

What if \_\_\_\_? ....fill in the blank.

A writer may have an idea but might not be sure how to describe the scene. Say your heroine

is working in a state institution caring for patients with tuberculosis, what would the patient housing be like? What type of buildings were at a state institution? What type of people were cared for at state institutions? What was life like at a state institution? What did rooms look like in homes, schools, stores, manufacturing plants, and other buildings?

A writer might wonder: what did people wear when they were working? What did they wear to have a studio portrait taken? What did they do for fun? What did small western towns look like? What did bigger towns look like? What kind of pets did people have? Find images and stories about all of this at Nebraska Memories.

Nebraska Memories is a cooperative project to digitize Nebraska-related historical and cultural heritage materials and make them available to researchers of all ages via the Internet, sponsored by the Nebraska Library Commission. If your organization or institution is interested in participating in Nebraska Memories, see <http://nlc.nebraska.gov/nebraskamemories/participation.aspx> for more information, or contact Beth Goble, Historical Projects Librarian, or Devra Dragos, Technology & Access Services Director, at the Nebraska Library Commission, 800-307-2665.

## Review:

Reviewed by  
Rebecca Faber,  
University of  
Nebraska-Lincoln

## Losing the Ring in the River

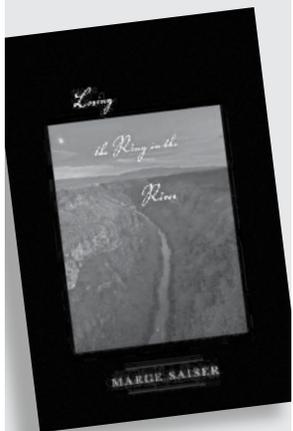
by Marge Saiser  
University of New Mexico Press, 2013  
ISBN: 978-0826353207

Without a doubt, Marge Saiser is one of the finest poets writing in Nebraska today. Her reputation will certainly be further enhanced by her latest book of poetry, *Losing the Ring in the River*.

The poems are developed through the perspectives of three women: Clara, the grandmother; Emma, her daughter; and Liz, Emma's daughter/Clara's granddaughter. The individual poems are powerful in their own delivery. This book, though, is much more than a collection of poems; it has the depth of a novel, developed through three main characters whose relationship is apparent. Their voices are presented in

a chronological poetic format. We see themes of love, marriage, parenthood, hard work, art, unfulfilled dreams, and poverty. As I was reading, I felt the influences of Tillie Olsen, Dorothy Thomas, and Wallace Stegner. An example of this tone is from Emma's section in the poem "Coping": Necessity is the floor/we move our chairs around on. Saiser's use of tight visual images holds the reader in each poem and prepares him/her to seek the connections in the poems that both precede and follow.

One of my favorite lines appears in Clara's section in the poem "I Study Luke": .... His shirt shows/his sweat and when the sweat dries/it leaves a thin white line of salt/in the fabric across his back./This, I believe, is art. Marge Saiser's book is art.



# What Do You Give a Low Vision Nonagenarian?

by Oliver B. Pollak

In 2000 I listened to Bernhard Schlink's 1999 novel *The Reader* on CDs driving from Wyoming to Omaha, a verbatim recording of the printed book. Subsequently, we listened to Michael Chabon's, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* between Winnipeg and Omaha. Listening eased the miles.

My mother turned 92 in February 2013. We had a grand twelve-course banquet at a Chinese restaurant where under Chinese custom mother would be considered 93. Four generations sat around the table, the youngest, Yael, a four-year old great-grandchild.

Mother was an avid newspaper, magazine and book reader, and an active letter writer. The vicissitudes of age have severely reduced her sight but she still has a healthy appetite. Reading large print is difficult, so we read her her birthday cards. My sister Judy goes to seminars at the Braille Institute in Anaheim and brought a Digital Talking Book and three books on cartridges, all at no cost. The player, made in Japan, is hefty but not heavy, with rounded edges. The buttons are large. Power is red, play and stop are green; volume is yellow, tone and speed are white and the Sleep command is a white crescent moon. The player, provided by the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, is the property of the U.S. Government. It can be plugged into the wall and has a rechargeable battery life of 29 hours. Turning on the machine activates oral instructions.

To familiarize mother with the machine we listened to *Home: A Memoir of My Early Years*, by Julie Andrews, covering 1935 to 1962. It runs 13 hours without the need to change tapes or CDs. Commercially, online it would cost from \$7.49 to \$31.40. When we left for the evening she said she would be too busy to listen. When we returned the next day, the Julie Andrews story was playing. All of a sudden I noticed blue talking book packages at the assisted living entry, library, and mail room.

Providing literary services to the blind dates back to the mid-nineteenth century. New York Republican Representative Ruth Pratt and Utah Senator Reed Smoot introduced legislation for

the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped in 1931.

By 1933 the Library of Congress produced Braille books and talking books on phonograph discs. The technology progressed from records at 33-1/3, 16-2/3, to 8-1/3 rpm, followed by reel-to-reel tapes and cassette tapes in 1971 to the current cartridge flash drive. My law partner, David G. Hicks, made tapes at the KIOS Public Radio studio while in law school. Free services and easy access provide the visually impaired a virtually limitless library of recorded books. Would talking books online be audio Netflix?

Challenges abound. The numbers on her telephone and television remote control are slightly larger than scrabble letters. Different color tapes with a fuzzy feel are placed on answering machine buttons. The controls on her Bose radio, its CD player, and cell phones are not designed for consumers with low vision. Mother enjoys her Talking Book; it provides a story, voice, and companionship. She's currently listening to *The Help*. Google "Talking Book Library of Congress" and find out more about "That all may read..."

**Ed. Note:** Talking Books are distributed in Nebraska through the Nebraska Library Commission and can be downloaded online at [nlsbard.loc.gov/NE1A](http://nlsbard.loc.gov/NE1A) or mailed free of charge to Nebraska homes, schools, and living centers. For more information see <http://nlc.nebraska.gov/tbbs>, email: [nlc.readadv@nebraska.gov](mailto:nlc.readadv@nebraska.gov) or call VOICE/TDD: 800-742-7691 or 402-471-4038.

## READING IS FOR



## EVERYONE @ Your Library®

Talking Books are free for anyone who has difficulty holding a book, turning a page, or seeing regular print—including students with reading disabilities. Equipment and recordings are loaned and returned through the mail free of charge, or can be downloaded from a special website.



Scan the QR code for a video on how to get Talking Books

Nebraska Library Commission  
Talking Book and Braille Service

402-471-4038 • 800-742-7691  
[nlc.talkingbook@nebraska.gov](mailto:nlc.talkingbook@nebraska.gov) • [www.nlc.nebraska.gov](http://www.nlc.nebraska.gov)



# The NCB News

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*Strickland Gillian*

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## Calendar of Events:



View the complete  
Nebraska Literary  
Calendar at  
[centerforthebook.  
nebraska.gov/  
get\\_involved/calendar.  
html](http://centerforthebook.nebraska.gov/get_involved/calendar.html)

- Story Catcher 2013 Summer Writer's Workshop and Festival** ..... May 28-May 31..... Chadron  
Contact: Mari Sandoz Heritage Society, <http://www.storycatcherworkshop.com>
- 58th Annual Willa Cather Spring Conference, featuring *O Pioneers!***..... May 30-June 1..... Red Cloud  
Contact: Willa Cather Foundation, 866-731-7304,  
[www.WillaCather.org/conferences/spring-conference](http://www.WillaCather.org/conferences/spring-conference)
- Buffalo Commons Storytelling Festival**..... May 31-June 1..... McCook  
Contact: [festival-director@buffalocommons.org](mailto:festival-director@buffalocommons.org), <http://buffalocommons.org/site/en/>
- NCompass Live: Webinar with Andrew Jewell Celebrating *O Pioneers!*** ..... June 5 ..... Online  
Contact: Nebraska Library Commission, 800-307-2665,  
<http://nlc.nebraska.gov/scripts/calendar/eventshow.asp?ProgId=12171>
- FINE LINES Writing Camp for Creative Writers** ..... June 10-14 ..... Omaha  
Contact: Beveridge Magnet Middle School, 402-557-4000,  
or David Martin, [fine-lines@cox.net](mailto:fine-lines@cox.net), 402-871-3682, <http://finelines.org/?p=981>
- Superior Summer Screenwriting Colony** ..... June 15-18 ..... Superior  
Contact Lew Hunter, [lew1@windstream.net](mailto:lew1@windstream.net), 402-879-3617,  
[www.lewhunter.com/SuperiorColony.html](http://www.lewhunter.com/SuperiorColony.html)
- "Free Land? 1862 and the Shaping of Modern America" Chautauqua** ..... June 17-23 ..... Papillion
- "Free Land? 1862 and the Shaping of Modern America" Chautauqua** ..... June 24-30 ..... Grand Island  
Contact: Humanities Nebraska, 402-474-2131, [info@humanitiesnebraska.org](mailto:info@humanitiesnebraska.org),  
<http://humanitiesnebraska.org/programs/chautauqua>
- Norfolk Public Library Literature Festival** ..... July 27 ..... Norfolk  
Contact: Karen Drevo, [kdrevo@ci.norfolk.ne.us](mailto:kdrevo@ci.norfolk.ne.us), 402-844-2108,  
[www.ci.norfolk.ne.us/library/PDFdocs/2013%20lit%20fest.pdf](http://www.ci.norfolk.ne.us/library/PDFdocs/2013%20lit%20fest.pdf)
- OSFest 5: Science Fiction and Fantasy Festival** ..... July 26-28 ..... Omaha  
Contact: <http://www.osfes.org/>

