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## Book Review: Women Writing on Family: Tips on Writing, Teaching and Publishing

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***Women Writing on Family: Tips on Writing, Teaching and Publishing 2012.***  
Carol Smallwood and Suzann Holland (Eds). The Key Publishing House Inc.,  
Toronto, Ontario, 343pp, (paperback) ISBN 978-1-926780-13-9. \$27.99.

Reviewed by Vera Gubnikskaia<sup>1</sup>

Striving to be politically correct, we avoid expressions such as “female writer”, or “female poet.” And yet, we cannot ignore the distinctiveness of the female literary voice. Women have historically been preservers of the language, and as society's storytellers, it is only natural for them to record and retell family memories. This volume, however, goes beyond the subjects of female writers and their family histories. *Women Writing on Family* covers issues and processes familiar to all authors, from the original conception of an idea to the delivery of a final product. Though focusing primarily on family history writing, it also addresses more general aspects of the craft while devoting much of its attention to the unique experiences and challenges faced by women authors.

One of the most helpful things that a beginning author will take away from this book is – you are not alone; others face similar struggles and doubts. How should you deal with pitfalls of emotional over-involvement? How do you handle potential skeletons in your family closet, embarrassing secrets, upsetting discoveries? How do you distance yourself as an objective author while staying closely connected to your family? Will you face legal challenges or ostracism? What are your rights and responsibilities as an author and a family member? “How do we, as writers, tell our truth about the disappointments and failings of family members who have died and also honor humanity?” asks Carol Hawkins in her chapter “Telling Our Truth: Writing the Legacy of the Dead”. Should you start writing as means of healing as Anna Saini points in her chapter “Using Writing as a Means of Surviving and Transgressing Family Violence and Trauma”? Contributors to the anthology invite you to be a special member of their group, sharing experiences, reassuring you in your doubts, and offering paths to survival and solutions.

Once they have addressed emotional and legal issues, aspiring authors encounter a new set of challenges. How do you juggle writing, family responsibilities, and a full-time job? Writing is a commitment involving multiple deadlines and contributors share tips, failures, and successes in managing their time.

There is no shortage of practical advice included in the anthology. Contributors offer suggestions on keeping a diary or a journal, techniques of writing poetry, fiction and non-fiction, selections of appropriate genres, and finding your own writing style. Publishing, marketing and promotion, working with editors, networking, participating in conferences, and self-publishing are not overlooked. Recommendations range from traditional to unconventional and include a variety of available avenues for writing, publishing, and marketing such as email lists, web, blogs, and Facebook.

Co-editors Carol Smallwood and Suzann Holland share a remarkable body of work between them. Contributors come from different walks of life, approaching a multitude of writing aspects from their distinctive perspectives. They are professional writers, college professors, school teachers, psychologists, sociologists, journalists, political scientists, nurses, and business owners. The author of the Foreword, Supriya Bhatnagar, states “I so wish I had a book like this while I was working on my collection

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<sup>1</sup> Orange County Library System, Orlando, Florida

of personal essays, my memoir.” I am sure many aspiring and established writers can share this sentiment.