

Dr. Phyllis A. Langton Working on the Final Revision for Sweet Abandon

During March 2017, Langton was a Resident Fellow at the Hambidge Center for the Creative Arts and Sciences, Rabun Gap, Georgia, working on the final revision of SWEET ABANDON: An Orphan's Life Amid Secrets and Lies - A story about families that live with secrets and lies grounded in shame.

September 25, 2017 (FPRC) -- In the summer, Dr. Langton volunteers at Camp-to-Belong in Georgia at the Roosevelt estate working with children who have been separated from their siblings early in life. The children spend a week together in June with their siblings, some whom they meet for the first time at camp. It is a great program.

From 2007 to 2010, she published chapters in eight anthologies published by Wising Up Press, Georgia. The stories drew from Last Light Out and my current memoir, Sweet Abandon. In 2010, she co-edited one anthology with Heather Tosteson and Charles Brockett-owners of Wising Up Press: View from the Bed, View from the Bedside. Knowledge for this anthology drew from my years as a Registered Nurse and as a Medical Sociologist.

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"Words are my passion. It began as a young child when I lived in foster homes and a Children's Home during the Great Depression in the 1930s and continued through the 1940s. I learned to write and tell stories to anyone who would listen as a way to connect with the people in my life. I didn't understand why my friends and schoolmates lived a different life from mine: pretty clothes, bicycles, parents who picked them up in big, black cars, while I wore second-hand clothes and walked everywhere.

My writing passion flourished during the early 1950s, when as a student nurse, I learned to write narrative non-fiction in the form of 'nurse's notes' on patients' charts that described in detail: how the wound smelled and the color of the wound drainage. Again, the medium was words.

My next writing journey began in the 1960s with my graduate education to earn a PhD in Sociology where the predominant medium was numbers. I learned a new form of thinking and writing that was heavily focused on the manipulation of quantitative data. Writing science was a challenge because I preferred words to numbers. But I accepted the challenge and evolved into a social science researcher, publishing books and articles as an academic sociologist. But my thirst for narrative non-fiction remained. This hunger led me to my current journey: creative non-fiction.

Early in 2000, my husband showed physical signs of a severe neurological disease: hand tremors, facial tremors, and slightly slurred speech. I began writing a journal of my observations. On Friday the 13th, 2000, he was diagnosed with ALS, commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease. I continued this journal throughout our journey. Journaling exposed me to myself. I found that sometimes I wanted the dying to happen sooner so I didn't have to watch his pain and he would be free of this ugly disease, but then he would be free of me. The contradictions loomed large during the journey we shared."

Last Flight Out: Living, Loving, & Leaving

How do you live the rest of your life when your doctor says, "You have Lou Gehrig's disease, you probably have six months to live. Go out and have fun, do all the things you've wanted to do while you still can and prepare to die?"

Americans continue to fear death and dying. Comedian Woody Allen said, "I'm not afraid of death, I just don't want to be there when it happens." Phyllis Langton's memoir, *Last Flight Out: Living, Loving, & Leaving*, is a passionate love story, one that deepens as she and her husband George Thomas live their way into the experience of ALS, its unremitting losses and its surprising gifts, with dignity, keen humor, a fighter pilot's courage and a nurse's unsentimental pragmatism.

"I know what's going to be on my death certificate. That's more than you can say," George tells her after receiving his diagnosis.

How they are going to live the time that remains to them as a couple is also not in question, for they are equally committed to savoring every minute, respecting George Thomas's choices about what makes for a meaningful life, a meaningful death.

Supporting her husband's wishes is a moral as well as emotional choice on Langton's part, and definitely not always an easy one. As a medical sociologist, she invites her readers into an open discussion of some of these choices through a thoughtful discussion guide.

Available at Amazon and Barnes & Noble.

"Phyllis Langton has had as illustrious a career as anyone in academia, but she has taken infinite pains now to write a different kind of book. Her story of her husband's life with and death from ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) yields many a valuable lesson, but this lesson above all: that dying, whatever its pains, can be both a negative and a positive experience. Here love and mortality, laughter and sorrow are all but inseparable, and their inseparability may help lessen a reader's fear of death and dying. Anyone who enjoys a deeply moving story will want to read this wondrous, indispensable book, and anybody who faces adversity, that is to say everybody, will need to read it."

Jeffery Paine—author of *Father India*, *Re-enchantment*, *Adventures with the Buddha*, and *Tales of Wonder* (with Huston Smith). Judge for the Pulitzer Prize and former vice-president of the National Book Critics Circle.

"Like many others, I've not been comfortable with the subject of death—the death of my loved ones or myself. How lucky we humans are to have Phyllis Langton's story as part of our lives. This moving book has allowed me to look death in the eye, and even find a way to laugh about it. Langton shows us that deep love and laughter make the sorrow and loss bearable, paving the way for this ultimate journey and beyond. . . ."

Jill Breckenridge—author of *The Gravity of Flesh* and *Miss Priss and the Con Man*.

"I couldn't put *Last Flight Out* down. I wanted it to go on so I could learn more about Phyllis and George and their story about facing ALS together. George had a terminal disease and he and

Phyllis chose to live and love to the fullest! What an incredible message to read especially with a disease that takes and takes.”

Sharon J. Matland, R.N., M.B.A.—Vice-President of Patient Services, The ALS Association

“Who would have thought that disease can be a page-turner? But Phyllis Langton's bittersweet memoir of her fighter-pilot husband's last years shows that a good marriage can be as joyous in sickness as it is in health. Last Flight Out is a vivid, sparkling story about facing death with grace and high spirits.”

Mark Weston—author of Giants of Japan and Prophets and Princes: Saudi Arabia From Muhammad to the Present.

“Last Flight Out really touched my heart. As the hospice physician who cared for George, I found the description of the denial of his symptoms extremely compelling and riveting and it taught me to appreciate more deeply the psychological defenses which patients use to protect themselves against the perception of their own vulnerabilities. In addition, this memoir reminds all who read it of the paramount need to honor and respect a patient's wishes to control the conditions of care and medical treatment. George achieved a wonderful peace of mind as his disease relentlessly progressed. Everyone should be so fortunate to have such a resourceful and loving advocate for their partner.”

Dr. Henry Willner—Hospice Physician and Palliative Care Consultant, Capital Hospice.

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