

*Seven diverse women writers, coming of age in the late 20th century, describe how they learned to craft meaningful lives in spite of cultural expectations, limited opportunities and a variety of glass ceilings. An unusual collaboration!*

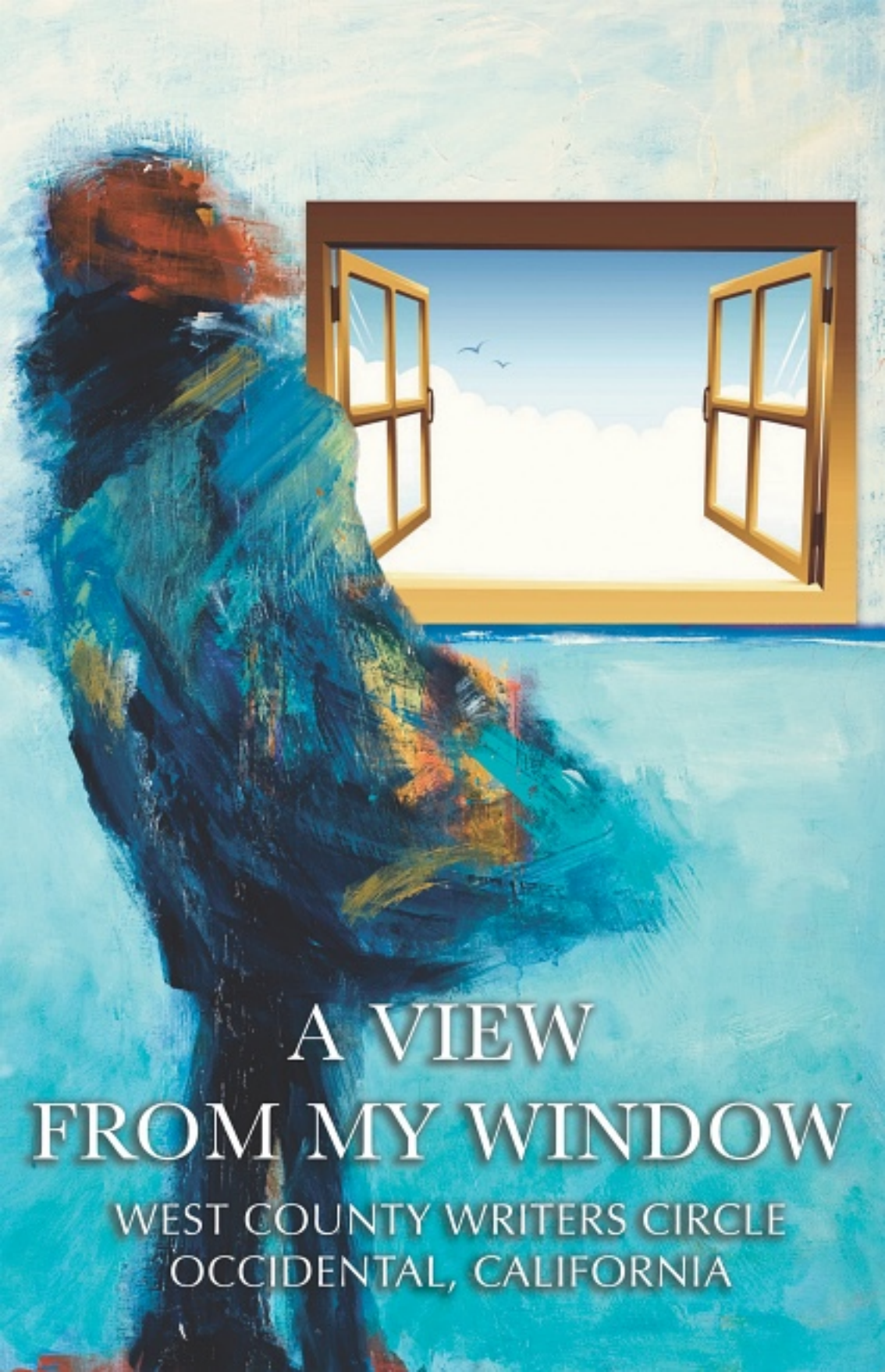
## **A View From My Window**

By West County Writers' Circle Occidental

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# A VIEW FROM MY WINDOW

WEST COUNTY WRITERS CIRCLE  
OCCIDENTAL, CALIFORNIA

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*Nevertheless, They Persisted (2017)*

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# Dedication



## ANNIE MURPHY SPRINGER

We dedicate this book to Sonoma County artist, teacher and mentor, Annie Mary Katherine Bridget Theresa Murphy Springer who also had a view from her own room, away from her busy professional life. All four of her grandparents were from Tralee, Ireland, perhaps contributing to her fearlessness as a mentor to all women and men whose voices needed to be heard. She was employed for many years by the Ford Foundation Model Project as Program Developer for Native American, Black, and Hispanic community-based organizations.

In 1979 she was appointed Chief of a Fire Department, one of only three female chiefs nationwide. Later she became a senior faculty member of FEMA's National Emergency Training Center in Maryland. She is listed in *Who's Who of American Women* and her skillful water colors grace homes throughout the country.

Diane Masura



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# The Red Shoes

Life is so strange. It is sometimes hardly noticed inanimate objects that guide its path. I totally credit a pair of very red, very pointy-toed Capezio high heels for my successful career in medical science. As an assistant professor at Northwestern Med School, I was working on tumor suppressor genes, genes that act to keep cells behaving normally and that are lost when cells progress to malignancy. I could identify and map the genes I was studying but had no idea how they worked. Why, I constantly wondered did getting rid of them help tumors to grow? Once a year I attended national meetings, a mix of lectures by well-known scientists combined with poster sessions where the less august researchers presented their work on easels arrayed in long aisles stretching to the farthest ends of the giant open rooms of convention centers.

One day while attending a cancer meeting in Boston I wore my new red heels to wander these endless aisles checking out the poster displays. Felt very spiffy. Within an hour my feet began to hurt. I took refuge in an adjacent dimly lit unoccupied lecture hall. Slipping off my shoes I, well, I relaxed. After about ten minutes someone turned the lights up. Now that I had enough light to read my program, I set about searching it for intriguing titles to upcoming lectures, pretty much ignoring my surroundings. When I did look up, people were on stage, the slide projector was at the ready and the hall was filling up. Turning to the schedule, I read that a lecture by Judah Folkman, Harvard Med School was about to begin. It was on angiogenesis. I had never heard of that. Most off-putting was the notation that Dr. Folkman was a surgeon. Good surgeons in my experience were pathologically anal retentive, totally boring. Sure that this was going to be a simply awful lecture, I forced my feet back into my shoes preparing to leave but people had now settled in to the previously empty row on each side of me; the meeting chairman had begun his introduction. Leaving would make a tremendous fuss. I resigned myself to a dull hour.

But Dr. Folkman was an engaging speaker and what he said amazed me. Tumors, he insisted, could not grow larger than the size of a pinhead unless they were able to stimulate nearby blood vessels to sprout, to grow towards them and thus feed their expansion. In most normal tissue, there is no new blood vessel growth. I began to wonder how the tumor managed to induce quiescent blood vessels to suddenly grow. Could my suppressor gene encode something that was preventing vessel growth?

Folkman was unique in that he welcomed more researchers in his field and shared credit. He mentioned in that talk that in the dental school at my university there was a professor, Dr. Peter Polverini, who had a terrific assay for blood vessel growth. I went home, got together with Peter and we began asking whether or not the tumor suppressor genes that I studied could influence the sprouting of blood vessels that he studied. Well yes, they did, and sorting out how made for a wonderfully satisfying career. But jeepers, it is scary to think that I might never have figured out the function of the genes I studied, probably not gotten tenure at my university if I had worn comfy flats instead of my new red Capezios to that poster session.

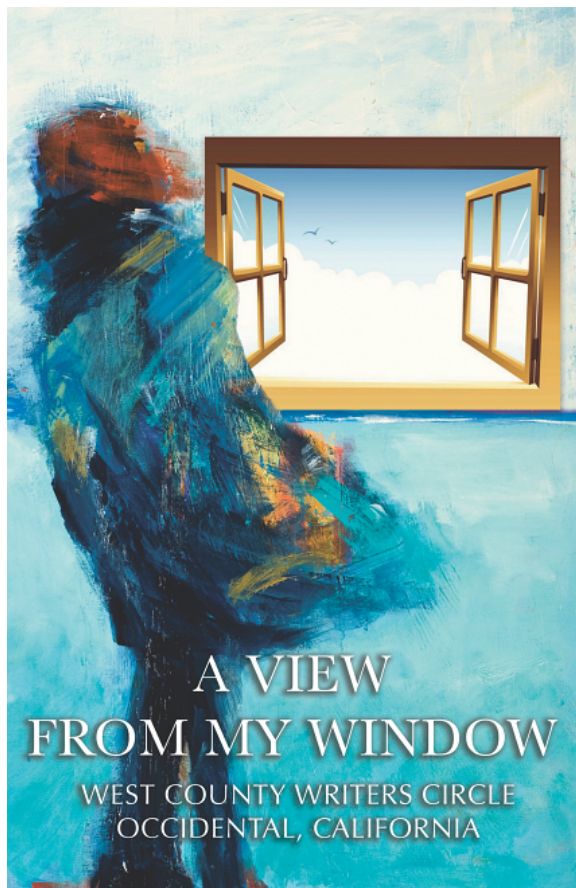
This is a true story and I told it once as an introduction to my talk to a giant 2000-person audience at a session chaired by Dr. Folkman. He had helped me in many ways and it was meant to be a way to give him a complement. I remember starting out saying that I was often asked how I came to go into angiogenesis and that I usually just said that it was obvious direction, but if it was someone I knew really well, I told the truth it was all due to my new red heels. Telling my story slowly, the audience, all of whom were fellow victims of endless aisles of convention poster sessions and boring symposia talks, started to titter and then to laugh and laugh. It was the first time I had ever elicited laughter from so many and what a high it was to hear it reverberate. I now understand why comedians pay such a high price in failed jokes for one good belly laugh from an audience.

About a year later I got a call from WBEZ, the PBS station in Boston. It was a producer who said she was doing an hour show for NOVA on Dr. Folkman and after a few pleasantries she came out with the question she called to ask “Would I actually say on national TV that surgeons were boringly anal retentive?” I said sure. She and her assistant flew to Chicago to interview me and came back a few months later to film my small part in the documentary in a single day.

It was one of the pleasantest days of my life. The producer and her assistant arrived along with their gofer who could be sent out anywhere for anything one wanted, and there was a light guy who had hired a local girl, his grip. They first set up in my lab, the producer’s face right by the camera and she asked me to tell my story to her which I did. Then they wanted to film work in the lab and later used an empty classroom to be the lecture hall and my lab mates as scientists who boxed me in. What made the day so delightful was that during the hour or more it took to set up lighting at each new place, we pulled chairs from adjacent labs and sat around in the hallways talking, drinking gofer-fetched coffee with rolls, and having a splendid time. Then briefly it would be time to hop up and do something on camera, then another hour break while the next spot was lighted. To call it work was ridiculous.

Eventually the NOVA show came out on national TV. Denizens of West Sonoma County often talk freely about various out of body experiences they have had. This was mine: the total unreality of seeing myself looking just like me, talking just like me but on my own TV set in my own house, in rural Occidental.

Some might say that this story of the red shoes is a clear example of “synchronicity,” C. J. Jung’s “meaningful coincidences” that are akin to waking dreams. Perhaps. But his conceptual theory rankles me a bit as it does seem to seriously dilute any credit I may wish to claim for having the insight to link my tumor suppressor genes to angiogenesis. Serendipity makes for a more satisfying explanation.



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