

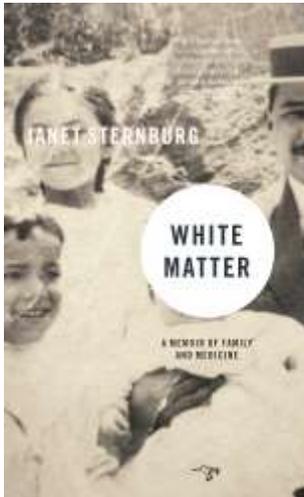


HAWTHORNE
BOOKS & LITERARY ARTS

2201 NE 25th Avenue, Third Floor | Portland, Oregon, 97212 | Phone: (503) 327-8849 | www.hawthornebooks.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Megan Beatie
Goldberg McDuffie Communications
mbeatie@goldbergmcduffie.com or (818) 678-6288



WHITE MATTER

A Memoir of Family and Medicine
by Janet Sternburg

“This is a unique book. The writing is beautiful, the observations refined, the subject gripping.”
–Antonio Damasio, author of *Descartes’ Error* and *Self Comes to Mind*

“*White Matter: A Memoir of Family and Medicine* is a stunning achievement, attempting nothing less than to understand the impossible. Sternburg is a master at creating the perfect structuring metaphor through which to tell her family’s history and by which to illuminate a particularly dark time in our nation’s history.” –Ladette Randolph, author of *Leaving the Pink House* and *A Sandhills Ballad* and Editor-in-chief of *Ploughshares*

“As Sternburg grapples with her unnerving subject, her antennae admirably stay out for that which makes us human, how we serve and fail each other, what enables both love and grace.”
–Maggie Nelson, author of *The Argonauts*

Janet Sternburg, a writer living in Los Angeles, has a life-long fascination with the connections between personal lives and medicine. Her interest stems from a deeply personal experience: her family’s struggle with mental illness, their choice to lobotomize both her aunt and her uncle, and the legacy of their actions.

Now, the author of the critically acclaimed memoir, *Phantom Limb*, which *Library Journal* called “compassionate, painful, and joyful,” tells her family’s heart-rending and engrossing story

in a new book, **WHITE MATTER: A Memoir of Family and Medicine**, which Hawthorne Books will publish on September 15, 2015.

With unflinching honesty, Sternburg describes a Bostonian close-knit Jewish family of five sisters and one brother, revealing the consequences of the devastating medical decisions made to keep the family together after their father abandoned them. When Sternburg's uncle Bennie became increasingly mentally ill, his sisters decided he should undergo a lobotomy to treat his schizophrenia. Later, their youngest sister, Francie, had to endure the same procedure to cure her debilitating depression. Today, surgery that disconnects the brain's white matter, leaving a person without feelings, seems inconceivable. Sternburg places the story against a backdrop of the medical conditions of the time and tells of notable Jewish figures who influenced the family, among them Abraham Myerson, inventor of the first anti-depressant, and Alexandra Adler, daughter of Alfred Adler, who pioneered the concept of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Janet Sternburg writes as a daughter consumed with questions about her family. As she searches for answers for her own peace of mind, she explores the many strands of what happened – the psychology of individuals, the fallibilities of the medical profession, and the universal mistakes we all make. She also looks to the future: what does a history of mental illness mean for her? Throughout the narrative, she relates her own story to the big picture: every generation has to make medical choices based on the knowledge of their time. What does it mean to live with the results?

The powerful outcome of more than a decade of Janet Sternburg's immersion in history, neurobiology, psychology, philosophy, and personal family stories surrounding this story, **WHITE MATTER** will surprise, intrigue, and have a profound impact on how readers think about both the big picture of mental health and the medical legacy of their own families.



WHITE MATTER: A Memoir of Family and Medicine
by Janet Sternburg

**Hawthorne Books & Literary Arts; September 15, 2015; original trade paperback; \$18.95;
ISBN: 978-0989360494**

About Janet Sternburg

Janet Sternburg is a writer of memoir, essays, poetry and plays, as well as a fine-art photographer.

Sternburg commissioned and edited *The Writer on Her Work*, the first book on what it means to be a contemporary woman who writes, which *Poets & Writers* magazine called “groundbreaking.” In her introduction to the twentieth anniversary edition, Julia Alvarez wrote, “It was a first: seventeen women laying claim to rooms of their own in the mansion of literature with stories about how they had each, individually, particularly, done so.” The second volume of *The Writer on Her Work* focused on writers from around the world; published ten years after the first volume, it reflected on changes in writing by women.

Sternburg has also written two memoirs that are at the crux of her family and neuroscience. She is the author of *Phantom Limb* and the upcoming book, **WHITE MATTER: A Memoir of Family and Medicine**, which Hawthorne Books will publish in September 2015. It’s the story of a Bostonian close-knit Jewish working-class family of five sisters and one brother and the grave consequences of the medical decisions they made for two of the siblings. The connections between personal lives and medicine is an area of deep interest for Sternburg, and in her writing, she seeks to go beyond a dry and clinical explanation of science to encompass dilemmas, conflicts and solutions that affect all of us.

Her writing has appeared in many anthologies and magazines and includes two cover stories interviewing Oprah Winfrey for *O at Home*. Her work in theatre and film includes her play, *The Fifth String*, currently scheduled for a full production at New York’s La Mama Theatre in 2016, as well as films produced for public television, among them *Virginia Woolf: The Moment Whole* with Marian Seldes.

In 1998, Sternburg picked up a camera and began a parallel life as a photographer. Her work has appeared in solo shows throughout the world, ranging from Berlin to Seoul, Korea; portfolios appear in *Aperture* and *Art Journal*.

She lives with her husband Steven D. Lavine, President of California of the Arts, in Los Angeles, California and San Miguel de Allende, Mexico.

For more information, visit: www.janetsternburg.com.

###

Interview requests: Megan Beatie, Goldberg McDuffie Communications
mbeatie@goldbergmcduffie.com or 818-678-6288

PRAISE FOR JANET STERNBURG'S BOOKS

Phantom Limb

“Janet Sternburg has found the perfect metaphor for the tragedy of pain and loss, the ultimate inevitabilities of life.” - Bill Moyers

“At a time when many people are writing and publishing memoirs, Sternburg’s *Phantom Limb* is uncommon. The book is a meditation on memory. The author experiences difficulties and writes about them, but she does so without a sense of victimhood or self-pity. Instead, she tells a tender story of the expansiveness of love.” - *The Jewish Week*

“Feelings shared by countless others...luminously detailed recollections...moments of consoling happiness.” - *Kirkus Reviews*

“...part moving account of greater love in the face of her mother’s approaching death, part medical inquiry into neurology, and part spiritual meditation on the struggles and sufferings that living visits on each of us. Sternburg shows that emotional and spiritual integration is possible...” - *Booklist*

The Writer on Her Work, Volume One

“Groundbreaking . . . a landmark.” - *Poets & Writers* magazine

“A compelling and superbly crafted collection...It speaks to the active creative spirit.”
- *Philadelphia Inquirer*

“Tough, humorous, graceful, caring and joyful.” - *Washington Post*

“*The Writer on Her Work* is a collection which belongs on many reading lists, beside the bed, in the library, alongside the desk, in the classroom, in the bag that holds the notebooks and manuscripts.” - Adrienne Rich

“I don’t remember exactly how I happened upon Sternburg’s *The Writer on Her Work*. It seems now that it was always there, on the bookshelf next to my desk, where I keep the touchstone books. As I read of other women’s struggles with their families, their traditions, their fears – all summed up on that blank sheet of paper, I felt like Molly Bloom at the end of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, turning pages rapidly, saying, Yes, oh yes, yes indeed, uhhum, ay si. . . I was not alone.”
- Julia Alvarez

The Writer on Her Work, Volume Two

“This book is a gift in every possible way.” - Carolyn See, *Los Angeles Times*

“These books belongs in the library of every woman who wants to make art.” - 500 Great Books by Women