

Voices  
from the  
GapsAnna Lee  
Walters

“

*I remember asking (in my head) what was life for, why did anyone (or anything) live, and why did I live. At that point death to me was a word that represented very little fear. I had seen things die, animals and such, and I heard of people dying and saw evidence of it. I remember thinking that from what I could tell or see, there were only two things that were “real”, and the wonder of both: life and death.*

— Talking Indian: Reflections on Survival  
and Writing

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## Biography

Anna Lee Walters, Pawnee and Otoe-Missouria, was born in Pawnee, Oklahoma, in 1946. She attended Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont where she received her Bachelor of Arts Degree and her Master of Fine Arts Degree in Creative Writing. Through the years Walter's career has included working as a library technician at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, in curriculum development at the Navajo Community College, as Director of Public Relations and Information as well as publication with the Navajo Community College Press. Currently, she is an Instructor in the Humanities at Dine College in addition to pursuing her writing career. Walters has received the Virginia McCormick Award and the American Book Award in 1986 for her writing. She is married to Harry Walters (Navajo) who also works at Dine College as the head of the Ned A. Hatathli Museum. Anna and Harry Walters live in Tsaile, Arizona, and have two sons.

## Quick Facts

- \* Born in 1946
- \* Native American novelist, poet, and short story writer
- \* Author of *Ghost Singer* (1988)

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# Anna Lee Walters

## Biography continued

Anna Lee Walters has a large portfolio of written work. This includes novels and non-fiction in addition to a number of short stories, essays, and poetry in a number of anthologies. One of her well known novels is *Ghost Singer*, published in 1988. *Ghost Singer* is a novel that deals with the practices and morals of anthropologists and museums in the keeping of Native American belongings or “artifacts”. The novel centers on a cast of Navajo characters and a series of mysterious events that occur at a museum in Washington D.C., which holds a large number of controversial Native American “artifacts.”

Walters begins the novel by presenting the reader with a number of characters, varying scenes, and fluctuating time periods that seem to have little connection to one another. However, as the novel progresses, the characters and situations begin to weave together and eventually connect as a whole in the latter section. Walter’s ability to present this novel in such an abstract yet cohesive manner is in itself a success. By introducing the reader to seemingly unrelated characters and situations, she pulls the reader into the novel as he or she begins to question what the characters and situations have to do with one another. Then, just as the reader begins to feel frustration at the novel’s lack of cohesiveness, Walters reveals connections between characters and situations which keeps the reader on the edge of his seat in curiosity.

There has been some controversy over the authenticity of the novel and its Navajo characters. Critics such as Paula Giese, for example, feels that the story is over dramatic and “trendy” complaining that, “The book almost seems a parody of an issue that is important to many tribal people.” Giese’s response confronts the issues of author responsibility and intention and the criticism American Indian writers face when they write about tribal experiences other than their own. In this particular case Giese is questioning Walter’s use of Navajo beliefs and traditions in the novel in addition to the supernatural way in which she presents Native spirituality. In her opinion *Ghost Singer* adds to the melodramatic, supernatural view that Anglo culture has of Native peoples.

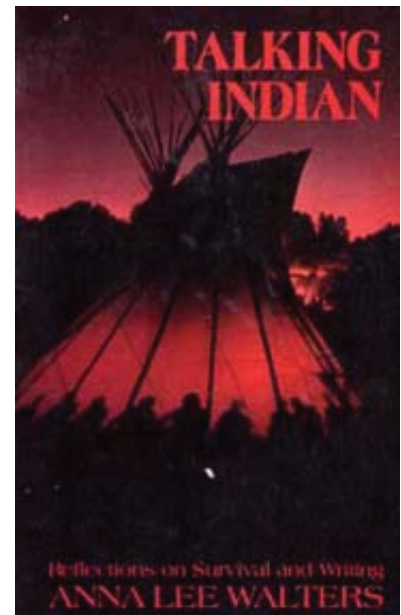


# Anna Lee Walters

## Biography continued

Other literary works by Anna Lee Walters are less controversial. However, this is not to say that she avoids important issues. In the short story “Buffalo Wallow Woman,” Walters writes the story of an elder woman who is locked away in a mental ward because she has been perceived as a “crazy old woman” by Anglo society. The story is told through the eyes of Buffalo Wallow Woman and her experience, and this method of writing gains for the reader an intimacy and empathy with the character that allows him to see and understand things he would otherwise be blind to. The story of Buffalo Wallow Woman confronts the issue of elders and traditional culture and how they are perceived and responded to in the larger society.

One of Walter’s other short stories, “The Warriors,” addresses the issue of alcoholism in Native families. “The Warriors” is a story of a spiritual man with a kind heart who is loved by his family but is destroyed by the effects of alcoholism. The story is told through the eyes of his niece who has a great respect for the uncle who gave her so much knowledge and cares so much for her. Walters writes the story in a way that prominently displays the effects of alcoholism in Native families while at the same time bringing the reader into the situation so that he can develop an empathetic. Nonetheless, the character of the uncle is somewhat stereotypical in that he is a Native man who could do so much good, except for the alcoholism that destroys his life. This is a story that has been told many times.





# Anna Lee Walters

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# Anna Lee Walters

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