

FAITH SULLIVAN from Encyclopedia.com

Sullivan, Faith 1933- (Faith Scheid)

PERSONAL:

Born October 1, 1933, in Pipestone, MN; daughter of Edgar W. (a buyer) and Helen (a teacher) Scheid; married George Lengas, December 8, 1958 (divorced December, 1959); married Dan Sullivan (a theater critic); children: Maggie, Ben, Kate. *Education*: Mankato State University, B.S., 1956.

ADDRESSES:

Home and office—Minneapolis, MN. *Agent*—Arthur Pine, Arthur Pine Associates Inc., 1780 Broadway, [New York](#), NY 10019.

CAREER:

High school teacher in English, speech, and social studies in Cambridge, MN, 1956-57; worked variously as a legal secretary, employment counselor, department store clerk, and waitress, 1957-61; high school teacher in English in Evanston, WY, 1961-62; North High School, Minneapolis, MN, instructor in history, 1962-65; writer, 1965—. Visiting instructor at Southwest State University, Marshall, MN and Split Rock Arts Program, Duluth MN; instructor and board member with the Loft, Minneapolis, MN.

MEMBER:

PEN, Authors Guild, Women's National Book Association, Women Writers Computer Group.

AWARDS, HONORS:

Milkweed National Fiction Prize, for *The Empress of One*.

WRITINGS:

NOVELS

Repent, Lanny Merkel, McGraw ([New York](#), NY), 1981.

Watchdog, McGraw (New York, NY), 1982.

Mrs. Demming and the Mythical Beast, Macmillan (New York, NY), 1985.

The Cape Ann, Crown (New York, NY), 1988.

The Empress of One (sequel to *The Cape Ann*), Milkweed Editions (Minneapolis, MN), 1996.

What a Woman Must Do, Random House (New York, NY), 2000.

Gardenias (sequel to *The Empress of One*), Milkweed Editions (Minneapolis, MN), 2005.

SIDELIGHTS:

In her first novel, *Repent, Lanny Merkel*, Faith Sullivan began writing about women and their experiences of self-discovery. The book delves into the life of a homemaker and mother who decides to return to her hometown—which she left in disgrace—to attend her twenty-five-year high school reunion. The story,

which some critics praised for its humorous outlook, follows the woman as she recalls the past, including a shameful incident involving the school's football captain, Lanny Merkel, and reviews her present life. Sullivan's second book, *Watchdog*, concerns a woman whose husband was killed in an automobile accident, which ironically leaves the new dog he was bringing home for the children unharmed. The story veers off into the occult when the dog, named Fido (meaning "I will be faithful"), reacts viciously to the woman's new love, causing the widow to believe the dog is her jealous husband reincarnated. *Watchdog* also explores the possibility that the widow's perception of hostility from the dog is really the angst she herself feels as a result of her late husband's dominance over her.

In *Mrs. Demming and the Mythical Beast* Sullivan's antagonist is a middle-aged homemaker and mother who escapes the doldrums of a mediocre life by befriending a satyr who lives on a remote island near the family's summer cottage. Sullivan's tale mixes fantasy with reality to describe the awakening of the woman who has not come to terms with the affair she had with her father—a man with characteristics similar to those of her mythical beast—after her mother's death.

What a Woman Must Do, set in 1950s Minnesota, is the story of three women of different generations who share a home. Widowed Kate, the eldest, who is crippled with arthritis, is the great-aunt of Bess, who she has raised since childhood after her parents, Celia and Archer, died in an accident. Her cousin Harriet moved in when she was a young woman who needed to escape a difficult home life. Now Harriet is in love with a farmer, and is faced with leaving the safety of Kate's house. Bess, who is disgusted by the romantic notions of middle-aged Harriet, is herself in love with a married man. Kate, now fifty-nine, reminisces about the people she has lost and looks forward to a future in which all three women must live independent of each other. A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer wrote that as "once spoiled, insecure Bess and hopelessly romantic Harriet are ensconced in their respective games of the heart, the pages can't turn fast enough." *Booklist* contributor Grace Fill wrote that *What a Woman Must Do* is a "poignant and powerful story of family ties and the dense weave of past and present in small-town life."

In *The Cape Ann*, Sullivan uses two female heroines, six-year-old Lark Ann and her mother, Arlene Erhardt, to weave a story of lost innocence and the fulfillment of dreams. Set amid the [Great Depression](#) of the 1930s, the tale is told through the eyes of the child who describes the incidents in her life using the language of an adult. The novel evokes the girl's frustration as she watches her mother desperately trying to save money to buy their dream house while her father drinks and gambles it away. *The Cape Ann*, which also explores the father's use of domination and the wife and child's ability to rise above it, is "an unforgettable portrait of some of our enduring social frailties," wrote Artelia Court in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*. "Sullivan leads us unerringly into the heart of an American childhood," concluded Dean Faulkner Wells in Chicago *Tribune Books*.

The Empress of One, the sequel to *The Cape Ann*, focuses on Lark's friend, Sally, and Sally's mother, Stella Wheeler, whose depression and its effect on her daughter are followed over fifteen years. Lark has moved away, and Sally now depends on Beverly, a street-smart girl who cares little for appearances. Sally's life deteriorates, and by seventeen she is drinking and wasting her life. Her only support comes from adults, including her gay drama teacher Mr. Davis, and her own depression lifts only when her acting and writing skills give her hope for an escape from Harvester, Minnesota.

Gardenias finds Lark, Arlene, and Lark's Aunt Betty, who is recovering from the death of her baby and abandonment by her husband, migrating to California, where work is available in plants producing for the war effort. Lark, now nine, lives with the women in a [San Diego](#) housing project and becomes

uncomfortable when a girl named Shirley is invited to live with them to escape her dysfunctional family. She is taught piano by Betty, and soon her music becomes her escape, just as Lark's writing has become hers. The women make friends and face and deal with a succession of problems, including the arrival of Lark's father, who wants them to return home. Reviewing the book for *Armchair Interviews*, Kathy Perschmann wrote: "Sullivan is a wonderful and evocative storyteller."

Sullivan told CA: "I believe that in the misty future when such matters are considered, the overshadowing historical feature of the twentieth century will not be the unleashing of the atom or the rise of the [Third World](#), but the rise of the Second World—women. The novels I write, whether comic or serious, deal with the oftentimes subtle, unconscious, evolving image women have of themselves—women who do not ordinarily or consciously perceive themselves as feminist, but whose perspectives and expectations have been radically, irrevocably altered by feminist politics and the mid-century emergence of the female work force.

"What are the new conflicts and satisfactions, losses and rewards—emotional, intellectual, as well as tangible—for the ubiquitous, nonexistent 'average woman'? This sort of question underlies the kind of intimate, personally detailed novel I enjoy writing and reading."

BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL SOURCES:

PERIODICALS

Booklist, September 15, 1995, Jennifer Henderson, review of *The Empress of One*, p. 222; June 1, 2000, Grace Fill, review of *What a Woman Must Do*, p. 1862; October 1, 2005, Laurie Sundborg, review of *Gardenias*, p. 36.

Library Journal, June 1, 2000, Patricia Gulian, review of *What a Woman Must Do*, p. 204; October 15, 2005, Caroline M. Hallsworth, review of *Gardenias*, p. 49.

[Los Angeles Times Book Review](#), June 26, 1988, Artelia Court, review of *The Cape Ann*, p. 11.

National Catholic Reporter, May 23, 1997, Judith Bromberg, review of *The Empress of One*, p. 23.

New York Times Book Review, June 26, 1988, Robert Roper, review of *The Cape Ann*, p. 49.

Publishers Weekly, August 19, 1996, review of *The Empress of One*, p. 52; May 15, 2000, review of *What a Woman Must Do*, p. 85.

School Library Journal, January, 2001, Francisca Goldsmith, review of *What a Woman Must Do*, p. 160.

Tribune Books (Chicago, IL), May 22, 1988, Dean Faulkner, review of *The Cape Ann*, p. 6.

ONLINE

Armchair Interviews, <http://www.armchairinterviews.com/> (February 6, 2007), Kathy Perschmann, review of *Gardenias*.