



The Tales of Tanglewood

About ten miles west of Sand Springs, Oklahoma, lies a hilly and wooded area on the Arkansas River, largely uninhabited except for a few houses on the northside bluffs. Bald eagles from a nearby sanctuary fish in the river, though the general public doesn't always get to see them because the land is mostly private property. The area is known as Tanglewood, though you won't find that name on any map since the tiny community was annexed by Sand Springs many years ago.

I moved from Tulsa, where I grew up, to the general area when I was 19. I felt at the time that I was giving up the fun of Tulsa life in order to be closer to my boyfriend who was from the area. Then I ended up staying there eleven years—long past the relationship that brought me—because I was having too much fun to leave.

The large group of friends, nearly all of whom had grown up together, were a wildly varied bunch but they were very creative, and creativity is required when one lives that far away from the nightlife and cultural activities of a city. We had all-night barbecues, horseshoe tournaments with cash prizes, and bonfires with music supplied by a few local musicians who also played professionally. When it was hot, we went down to the river and swam. When it was cold, we took our fun inside. They had a kind of community that I hadn't experienced before, and they grew to feel like an extended family.

But there was something else that made gatherings there so rich and wonderful: the art of conversation and storytelling. We drank beer and told stories. We played horseshoes and told stories. We sat in our lawnchairs on the river, enjoying the scenery and telling stories. We played music and told stories. We ate and told stories. The stories were generally true, or true with a little creative license, culled from the everyday lives of this group of people who had few rules and lived life with abandon.

As young as we were, there were some master storytellers in the group. Several of them could have rivaled the best stand-up comics of the era. I learned a lot from them, and as time went on, when something funny or dramatic happened to me, I would compose it as a story in my head to share with the group at the next gathering. The stories I heard covered the human spectrum, and they nourished my spirit just as surely as the stacks and stacks of books next to my bed.

Funny enough, when I was still living in Oklahoma, at a time when I never had the slightest clue of where life would lead me, I had a thought that if I ever had a business of my own, I would call it Tanglewood. And then a short time later, I received an unexpected (and highly improbable) scholarship to the American University of Paris to study comparative literature. I left Sand Springs and Tanglewood, never to return for any length of time, but for some reason, I never forgot that moment.

I feel incredibly lucky to have lived in that place in that time. I feel even luckier to have lived in Paris and a couple of other major cities. I treasure the culture I experienced there—but I did always miss the Tanglewood group and the feeling of being more of a creative, active participant and not just the passive observer I was in the large cities.

So it seems fitting, to name a publishing company Tanglewood. The two questions I ask myself when I read a manuscript are: Is it a great story? Will kids love reading it? It's nice when it expresses an important value or lesson, but I think any story that is true to life will provide all the lessons that kids need.

I know how unusual it is for a person to be able to work at their passion, and I never take it for granted. It is sheer bliss to play an active role in creating a book with a story told well. I hope to honor the traditions of all the books that influenced and shaped me. But I also want to do justice to the extraordinary group of storytellers I was lucky to call friends, living and playing on the banks of the Arkansas River in a beautiful little off-the-map area called Tanglewood.