



Story Circle Journal

The newsletter for women with stories to tell...

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Why We're Passionate About Women's Stories

by Susan Wittig Albert, President, Story Circle Network

Every now and then, whoever we are and whatever we're doing, it's a good idea to stop for a few minutes and ask ourselves why: *why* we do what we do, *why* we believe as we believe. It's a good idea for individuals, and it's a good idea for organizations. So if you don't mind, I'd like to take a few moments to think out loud about why Story Circle is so passionate about women's stories, and why so many of us are working so hard to make sure that this small organization survives and succeeds.

First, we believe that women's stories are among the most valuable resources of our human culture. As women, we have given birth to the children, educated the young, cared for the family, nurtured the elderly, and worked wherever we were needed, wherever we were called, wherever we could make a place for ourselves. We have been ambitious and we have worked to achieve those ambitions, and we have stories to tell about our ambitions and achievements, in the home and in the public world, that our children deserve to hear. So many women have lived and died, their real-life stories untold, their legacies unclaimed. But we *can* tell our stories, and our women's stories can change the future of our communities and our culture.

If there are important social reasons for us to speak up, there is also an urgent psychological need. As we reveal ourselves in story, we become aware of the true and coherent meaning that lies under the fragmented and apparently meaningless surface of our experience. And the better we understand this coherence, the more we are able to acknowledge our needs and desires and fears, and the healthier we are, both psychologically and physically. (I'm not making this up—there's a strong body of new research to support these statements.) Our stories heal us in remarkable ways—and they heal not only the storyteller, but those with whom we share our stories. Read Judy Fettman's column on page 4 for some wonderful examples of healing stories, or just look into your own life. Remember how much better you felt when you wrote about your partner's death (as Carolyn does on page 14), or your lovers' betrayals (as Linda does, with wonderful humor, on page 5)? Or when you explored your own selfishness (as Marie does, so engagingly, on page 13)? We don't have to be great novelists (as Karen remarks on p. 11), we simply have to tell the truth of life as we have lived it, with all our ragged fears and unraveled hopes and frayed dreams. And our listeners don't have to criticize: all they have to do is listen and reflect and be amazed at the commonality of our lives, at the many ways that our different stories are alike.

For the truth is that our stories *are* amazing—and we don't know that until we've started to tell and begun to listen. That's why we're here, at Story Circle. We want you to tell your story, and gain new energy and insight as you explore your life. We want to listen and marvel and learn from your story. We want to empower ourselves and others to revise the script that was handed to us when we were born: the cultural directions for the "right" way to think and feel, the "right" story to tell.

Can you see why we're so passionate about women's stories? This isn't an academic exercise for us, or a game to fill our idle hours. For us at Story Circle, this is our truth, and our faith: that our shared stories heal us, that they raise our hopes and enlarge our dreams, and that they give us the strength and wisdom to become the artists of our lives.

Good stories have the power to save us.... We can all make a difference by simply sharing our stories with real people in real times and places.
—Mary Pipher

Telling a "true story" about personal experience is not just a matter of being oneself, or even of finding oneself. It is also a matter of choosing oneself.
—Harriet Goldhor Lerner

The longer we listen to one another—with real attention—the more commonality we will find in all our lives.
—Barbara Deming

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Story Circle National Conference February 8-9, 2002

*Mark your calendars now
for our first Story Circle Conference!*

In the coming months, we'll tell you about the program, which will feature the nationally-known speaker and author, Dr. Betty Sue Flowers, plus workshops, panels, opportunities to share your story, exhibitors, entertainment...lots of exciting stuff! If you'd like to be involved (offer a workshop, read or exhibit, etc.) please write to
Judith Helburn, 5914 Highland Hills Dr,
Austin TX 78731, or email her at helburn@mail.utexas.edu.

Please plan to join us for this unique and exciting event.



Story Circle

STORY CIRCLE is a quarterly newsletter, published in February, May, August, and November. It is written by and for women who want to share their experiences. Its purpose is to encourage readers to become writers, guide women to set down their true stories, and encourage the sharing of women's lives. This newsletter is provided for information and is not intended to replace qualified therapeutic assistance.

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Back Issues: Back issues are available either as first-run or photocopies, for \$5.50 each (includes first class postage). Canada, Mexico, and elsewhere: \$8 each.

Missed Issues: We try to ensure that *Story Circle Journal* arrives in your mailbox four times a year. If you miss an issue, send us a note and we'll mail you a replacement.

Change of address: If you move, please tell us. Unless you send us your new address, we can't guarantee that you'll receive your newsletter!

The Story Circle Network

The Story Circle Network—What is it and who are the members?

The Story Circle Network is made up of women who want to explore their lives by exploring their stories.

What can I gain from the Network?

You will receive the following publications, information, and opportunities. These things won't be available all at once—we're just getting started! But as our membership grows, our activities will expand. You'll get:

- ◇ **four issues** of the 16- to 22-page newsletter, *Story Circle Journal*, with ideas for writing additional chapters of your life story, plus poetry and brief personal essays from subscribers
- ◇ **the opportunity to submit your writing** to the newsletter and other Network publications
- ◇ **a network guide** that will allow you to directly contact members with interests and experiences similar to yours (forthcoming, as the Network grows and members send us their information)
- ◇ **a report on the activities of Story Circles** across the country, in each issue of the newsletter
- ◇ **book reviews and a resource guide** listing groups, teachers, and publications that are committed to helping women tell their stories (in each newsletter)

What can I contribute to the Network?

The Story Circle Network is built out of our shared experiences. To it, we hope you will bring yourself and your willingness to share your life and what you have learned from it. If you wish, you may contribute some of your writing (poetry, prose, book reviews—ask for a copy of our writer's guidelines). If you are a teacher or group leader, you are invited to calendar your related events.

We also hope that many of you will decide to participate by leading a Story Circle in your community. It isn't hard, and it's enormously rewarding. Won't you give it a try?

How do I become a member?

That's the easiest part! You automatically become a member of the Network when you subscribe to *Story Circle Journal*. Annual memberships are \$24 in the United States and \$36 elsewhere. You will find a membership form at the back of this newsletter. Please join us and share your story.

*You're on the Net?
So are we!
Visit us at
www.storycircle.org*

LifeStory Briefs: Practical How-to for Memoir Writers

Using Dialogue in Your Mem-

One of the techniques that makes your work sparkle is *dialogue*, the use of the spoken word as part of your story. For one thing, dialogue is more interesting for the reader (and the writer) than simple narrative. For another, it allows you to reveal aspects of your characters without telling your readers exactly what opinion they should have—you let them think it out for themselves. And finally, dialogue allows you to show conflict in an interesting and complex way.

To see how this works, study the excerpt on the right, from a book about a woman who forsakes her activist city life to live on an island off the coast of Maine, in a cabin with no plumbing, electricity, or phone. Shulman's family and friends all think she's gone crazy. Shulman (recently returned from her island retreat) is having lunch with a friend, who spends most of the time complaining about her mother.

Katherine and her mother are not important characters in Shulman's book and neither appears again. Why does Shulman report the conversation in such detail? Because the conflict in this dialogue (the opposing concerns of the narrator and Katherine) tell us something important about the narrator's commitment to her own need for privacy and seclusion. Katherine's complaints about her mother's behavior resemble the complaints the narrator imagines her own children making, and force the narrator to defend the reclusive mother against an interfering daughter. "Anyway, what's the matter with being reclusive? What's wrong with it?"

In fact, this conversation is central to the main themes of Shulman's book: her need to make her own personal choices about privacy even when her use of her private time seems irrational to others; her need to continually redefine herself, even when this means changing family traditions ("This year she told them she wants *them* to do Christmas."); her need to resist others' moral judgements about what she's doing ("It's just wrong...something is terribly wrong.")

To put it a different way, in this scene Shulman dramatizes her own family's op-

posing objections through dialogue with Katherine and reveals, quite cleverly, how psychologically and morally inadequate those opposing judgements are. We can schematize it this way:

Katherine: my mother wants to be alone

Alix: but that's her choice

K.: her need for privacy is irrational and unhealthy

A: but it makes her happy

K: we feel left out of her life, so she should get therapy

A: but privacy is what she prefers

K: what she prefers is wrong

You can also notice, in this scene, the use of "dialogue summary." The first paragraph sums up and condenses several moments of conversation, as well as setting the stage for the conflict that follows. Dialogue summary is also a useful tool when you don't want to repeat something that your reader already knows.

Another useful dialogue technique is something we might call "between the lines" speech—which sometimes isn't speech at all. At one point in this scene, the narrator laughs. She's really saying something like *Can't you see how foolish it is to impose your expectations on her?* When Katherine doesn't get it, the narrator spells it out: "Maybe she prefers her own company." Between the lines, the narrator is affirming her own choices: *I prefer my own company. I refuse to do Christmas this year.*

If you're going to use dialogue in your memoir, be sure you make it sound natural. This means using contractions: *What's wrong* instead of *What is wrong*. It may also mean using sentence fragments (*No exercise*), one-word sentences (*Nothing.*) and other non-grammatical constructions. In fact, the best way to achieve writing that sounds like speech is to read it aloud after you've written it, trying out different ways of making it seem more natural. As one of my writer friends says, "Hey! This is the fun part of the work!"—*Susan Albert*

Excerpt from *Drinking the Rain* by Alix Kates Shulman

I lean forward to hear Katherine's story. For years, she confides, her mother has been a problem to her children, ever since her husband left her for a younger woman. Now she's suddenly gotten worse, more and more reclusive. Lately she stays in her house for days on end, goes out only to get food. When people drop by to see her, she sends them away. If they come back, she goes upstairs and won't answer the door.

"What's the matter with that?" I ask.

Katherine glares at me. "It's sick," she says, folding her arms.

I back down. "What does she do by herself?"

"Nothing. That's the problem."

"Nothing?"

"Well, you know, she watches TV, reads, does the crosswords, bakes. She's getting fat, too. No exercise. We've got to decide what to do about her."

"Maybe she's happier by herself. Maybe this is what she always wanted to do but never had the chance."

"That's insane," Katherine bristles. "Being alone like that isn't good for anyone, but especially not my mother. Her family was always everything to her. Now she won't see her own sons or even her grandchildren unless they make a date in advance. She refuses to cook for them, too. This year she told them she wants *them* to do Christmas."

When I laugh, Katherine says, "I think she should get some therapy. I'm going to try to convince her to see someone."

"But Katherine," I protest, "maybe she prefers her own company. Or maybe she's tired of being the mama after all these years. Anyway, what's the matter with being reclusive? What's wrong with it?"

Katherine sets her jaw and stares at me. "It's just wrong," she says, weighting each word. Anxiety lines her brow. "Something is terribly wrong."

Writing and Healing

Peace, Healing, and Marilyn Monroe

Psychologists tell us that frequent, regular, uncensored writing about our daily lives can be profoundly therapeutic, in part because it helps us to discover and connect with the core self that persists through life's changes and challenges. Judy Fettman (MSW, ACSW) lives in Ann Arbor MI and coordinates Story Circle's Internet E-Circles. For the last few years, she has been exploring interests from childhood that have been on hold while she tended to career, marriage, and children.

**"When life gives you lemons,
make lemonade."**

I used to think that this line was "Pollyanna-ish." You know, too shiny bright, not acknowledging what we all know, that there are indeed disappointments in life. Of course it can be used that way. But there is truth here too: without denying the disappointment, we can also find opportunities.

A few years ago, I was to sing for the first time with a group I had long admired. After weeks of rehearsals, the cold I had been fighting turned into pneumonia and I couldn't sing at the performance. While to this day I am disappointed about missing my big chance, something positive came of it. I went to the performance as a part of the audience and during intermission began talking (hoarsely!) with the man sitting next to me. The conversation became so funny that I developed it into a piece of writing that will always bring a smile to my face, as well as remind me of that first aborted performance. I transformed a disappointment into a creative opportunity.

How to Make Lemonade

Write about an experience that was difficult, sad, frustrating, or disappointing. Shape it into a story. Don't deny the hurt, but let your words convey the feelings, whatever they were, giving your story authenticity and color. Share it with someone who will appreciate it—or send it to the Story Circle Journal! (Read Linda's story on the next page, as a wonderful example of making lemonade out of a half-dozen lemons!) It may just help you heal .

A couple of years ago, when I began to seriously consider doing some life writing, my daughter and I signed up for a memoir-writing workshop sponsored by the community education department of our public school. Walking into the first class, it appeared that two thirds of the group was octogenarian. I had to wonder whether my daughter (16) and I would find common interests with this group that was so much older than either of us.

Pat, the workshop facilitator, asked us to introduce ourselves. I learned that the older members belonged to an on-going writing group at the University "geriatric center" and had been writing and meeting together for several years. Betty, a perky, petite woman in a bright yellow blouse, told us that she had started writing a few years ago at the age of 65 to help her deal with the loss many years before, of her husband and two children in an automobile accident. She said that writing about this had helped her heal. William, a handsome, distinguished-looking gentleman with white hair and moustache, had a British accent and a mischievous twinkle in his eye. He said he was writing a mystery novel, but was also trying to come to terms with the loss of his wife of 40 years, who had died recently of cancer. I groaned inwardly and fidgeted in my seat. I had just left a career in social work, in part, because I was burned out and just didn't want to deal with people's problems anymore. And look what I had walked into---aging, loss, grief. Did I want more of this?

Pat asked each of us to read a short piece of our own writing. I can't remember what I read. What I do remember are the pieces read by Betty and William. Betty read a story about going to Miami Beach with her mother for a week as a teenager. There she met a beautiful blond woman, struck up a conversation, and invited the woman to their beach house for dinner. Her vivid descriptions of the beach, the ocean, and the woman's eccentric, colorful dress brought her story to life. And in the last line of her story she revealed the identity of the mysterious blond: Marilyn Monroe!

William had written about a Sunday afternoon the summer before when he and his wife, in the last stages of cancer, planned a trip to the country together. But as they fantasized their trip, they realized that she was too weak to go. Little by little, the afternoon's plan was scaled down to a picnic which she couldn't eat, in the lush backyard garden, and a nap as they both fell asleep in the late afternoon sun, side by side, holding hands, not knowing that this was the last Sunday of her life. As he read, tears trickled down William's cheeks, and some of the rest of us cried with him. But then he smiled. When he shared his story with us, we were privileged to share a very intimate and sacred hour of his life.

I was very moved. Witnessing these stories was a very different experience than trying to help fix problems. In recalling the precious memories of the people they had loved and the experiences of their lives, these people were healing their own wounds. In the process of writing their precious memories, they were preserving them, reliving them, and transforming them into art. That evening and in evenings to come, these writers taught me some important lessons. For one, they changed forever the way I thought about "old people." They didn't seem old at all, but vibrant, full of curiosity, talent, and warmth, and through their writing, we saw their wisdom, and the beauty and poignancy of life. What they needed was not someone to fix things or change things, but listeners who appreciated their experiences and valued them as they did. They helped me to understand the impossible burden I had placed on myself as a social worker, trying to fix things. I also learned that this kind of sharing of oneself through writing was something I, too, wanted to do. Even my young daughter was in awe of the idea that ordinary people could write about meeting Marilyn Monroe!

We're looking for contributors to this column, so if you have a special interest in the topic of life writing and wellness and would like to be a guest columnist, please write to Editor, Story Circle Journal, PO Drawer M, Bertram TX 78605, or email china@tstar.net.

A Reader Tells Her Story

Daydreaming in the Garden

Linda Wisniewski is a retired librarian who does freelance research online for the health care industry. Her articles have been published in trade newsletters, but her real love is writing about life and its many surprises. Linda and her family live in Bucks County, PA.

After five days of rain, the sun finally came out, and so did I, out into the perennial garden in front of my house. Stooping over a huge dandelion, I gathered the leaves into a bundle in my hand, and pulled. Thwack! There is nothing quite so satisfying as the sound of pulling weeds out of the wet garden soil after a rain. I pulled again, this time on a piece of onion grass. Thwick! They are thinner than dandelions, and make a lighter sound. I love to weed when I am upset or angry. Take that! And that! You ugly weeds! Out, out of my garden! I tossed them over my shoulder, and they landed in a pile on the sidewalk, to be burned with the other yard debris. Over in the corner, I spied a huge ugly weed with tiny yellow blossoms. I walked over, squatted beside it, and gathered it in both my hands. I pulled and pulled, but it would not budge. I could have gotten it out by digging around it with a trowel, but that's just not as gratifying, especially when I am angry. And I was very angry at my computer for losing my file. Grrrr. I pulled and pulled and cursed the weed, when... THWOCK! Up it came and I almost fell backward with the momentum of my pulling. That weight training class is starting to pay off!

Suddenly, I remembered the last page of *The Shell Seekers*, by Rosamunde Pilcher. All the loose ends in the novel have been neatly tied off, and the heroine, who has recovered from a heart attack, is sitting on a bench, observing her beloved rose garden. She spots an ugly weed spoiling the beauty before her eyes, and so she stoops to pull it out, but it won't come. She pulls and pulls, and soon feels a terrible pain in her chest. Then she sees the long-deceased Love of Her Life walking toward her, reaching for her, and she smiles and peacefully dies in the rose garden.

I sat back down on the grass, lost in fantasy. Suppose that happened to me? Which of my former lovers would I want to see, walking towards me, arms outstretched, at my moment of death?

Now, let's see. There are quite a number.

Would it be Tim, the bespectacled, wiry athletic teacher at a boys' private school? He was environmentally aware, ate organic when he could, and had a garden apartment with its own vegetable plot just outside the patio. Tim was on crutches when I met him, though. My friend Meryl said that he represented my "Caretaker" phase, and that if he had been in a wheelchair, I would have jumped into his lap. Maybe not Tim.

Would it be Phil, the bespectacled, bearded engineer, who lived alone in an 18-room Victorian house with hollyhocks and hydrangeas in the yard? We spent many weekends at flea markets in search of antique toasters for his collection. He had close to 500 of the little contraptions. Phil opened his spare bedrooms to his ex-girlfriends whenever they were in town. Meryl says he represents my "Women Who Love Too much" phase. Not Phil.

Would it be Arty, my high school sweetheart, the short and stubby football player with the big heart, who grew up to become

a psychologist? Nah, he doesn't qualify. We never really did... Oh, never mind. Not dear Arty.

Perhaps it would be Nick, the handsome computer salesman who showed up uninvited at dinner parties, because he "couldn't stay away" from me. Linda, can you spell STALKER? Oh, please, not Nick.

Or Les, the balding purchasing agent who loved to sing duets with me? ("On the streeet... where you li-i-i-ve...") He did love to talk about his prosthetic eye and the "other woman" who was so attached to him that he could never go out with me on Friday nights. Les represents my "Enabler" phase. So, not Les.

Oh, no. Would it be (Goddess forbid!) Randy, my first husband? He refused to come to the hospital when our son was injured in a fall, because he had a scuba club meeting. "As long as he's all right", said Randy, "I'll check with you later. Gotta go." Well, my death would be a bigger emergency than our son's forehead stitches. Still, if I had to wait for Randy to come and get me, I might have to live forever. Hey.....maybe? Nah. Randy was definitely my "Wishful Thinking" phase.

Maybe it will be Nat, the devilishly handsome rogue who convinced me that someone had stolen his jacket and worn it to a robbery, then returned it to his apartment before the police arrived with the warrant. Nat represents my "Women Who Do Stupid Things To Mess Up Their Lives", phase. Thank you, Dr. Laura. After Nat, I probably should have sworn off men forever.

Just then, I had a wonderful thought: None of these guys are dead yet, as far as I know. So, there is no danger of any of them showing up to escort me to the hereafter if I should give myself a heart attack pulling weeds!

Besides, I did finally come to my senses. I left all those trendy phases behind, and married the true Love of My Life. He has given me a rose bush every Mother's Day for the last 10 years. "I beg your pardon, I never promised you a..." Yes, he really did promise me a rose garden. And he is still very much alive, so I don't do much longing in the garden. Unless it's with him, on our bench, smelling the roses.

Still, if he only knew... I was back in fantasyland again. What if, when I'm about ninety years old, I pull a really, really big weed in that rose garden and give myself a heart attack, and they ALL come for me? All of my former lovers, crowding and pushing each other! Would they fight over the right to escort me to the pearly gates? Would they form a line? Did I seriously think I would survive them all? Some questions just never get answered, do they? Shaking my head, I picked up my trowel and walked back to the house. It was time to start dinner.

Meet Other Life-Writers

Writing "Peace At Heart"

In this issue, we interview writer Barbara Drake, whose memoir *Peace at Heart: An Oregon Country Life*, was the first selection of our Internet Chapter's new e-reading circle. Barbara is also the author of the popular textbook, *Writing Poetry*, as well as several volumes of her own poetry. She is a professor of English at Linfield College in McMinnville, OR. The life she shares with her husband William Beckman at Lilac Hill Farm, in the Yamhill Valley, is the subject of her book.

If I ever go looking for my heart's desire again, I won't look any further than my own backyard; because if it isn't there, I never really lost it to begin with!...and I'm not going to leave here ever, every again, because I love you all! And...oh, Auntie Em, there's no place like home!

—Judy Garland as Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*

Home is all-embracing, a continuous inclusion of all events: this too and this too and this too.

Home en route. Home is the place from which I have come and to which I return. Home is where I always am...

—Dianne Connelly

We learn best to listen to our own voices if we are listening at the same time to other women—whose stories, for all our differences, turn out, if we listen well, to be our stories also.

—Barbara Deming

Story Circle. *Peace at Heart* is a wonderful book, with such a strong sense of detail and immediate presence. Do you keep a journal? If so, how did the journal contribute to the book? Can you describe your journaling practice? If not, how were you able to recall and evoke such details?

Barbara I don't usually keep a daily bound journal of thoughts and ideas, although I do keep that sort of journal when I'm undertaking some particular experience, such as when I travel and want to have a specific and thorough record. When I recently took a series of art courses (life drawing, water color, colored pencil), I kept a dated, continuous journal in which I would describe the lessons and any associations and reflections that came up, including my feelings about how my own work turned out. I also wrote about related experiences the art classes reminded me of. For example, I wrote down thoughts about my mother teaching me to draw when I was a child, about nudity, about some exhibits I saw in New York around that time, about a conversation between artists and scientists at a faculty party--that sort of thing.

Last year I had to have surgery (lumpectomy) and radiation for breast cancer (DCIS) so I kept a journal of that whole process. I'm using some of that material in other writing and I think it helped me a lot to write about what was going on. If I didn't write it, I would just run it all through my head obsessively. (I'm fine, now, by the way.)

Except for such occasions, I just write down ideas I have and do rough drafts that I later work into essays or poems. I really enjoy the writing process and I write a lot so it's never been a problem for me to make myself write. I started using a typewriter to write my poems and other things when I was about thirteen. If I don't have access to my office I write by hand but I prefer to write on my computer, even first drafts.

Peace at Heart came naturally as a series of informal stories I wrote after we moved to the farm. I've learned that when something happens that feels like "material" I should write it down as soon as possible, because that's how you get those fresh details. On the other hand, I had two children before I finished graduate school and eventually had three and was writing all the time when they

were little so I got in the habit of working on my writing in my head while I was doing other things. I do keep my ideas going mentally, even when I don't have a chance to write them down right away. My first "journal" is in my head.

SC. In your book, you convey a very strong sense of place. In what ways has your life been shaped by the place where you live? Do you think your experience of living in that place has been further shaped by writing about it?

Barbara Although I was born in Kansas, my parents moved to Oregon when I was two. My dad had visited Oregon and loved it. When he met my mom and proposed, he promised he'd take her out West, and he did, so the journey to the beautiful West has been a big part in my life-long personal mythology. Although I eventually grew up on the southern Oregon coast, went to college and grad school in Eugene, in the Willamette Valley, and lived for sixteen years in Michigan, this farm where we live now and which is the subject of *Peace at Heart* is actually off a small old Oregon highway that connects two of the Oregon towns where we first lived. I'm just twelve miles from where I lived when I was two years old. When I moved back out here I went to that neighborhood and found my way to the corner where our apartment had been (now a vacant lot)--I think I have strong homing instincts. I like to travel and I am constantly falling in love with other landscapes, but I still always know that Oregon is my first love and this is home.

Now, did writing about the Yamhill Valley change my sense of it? I think so. I appreciate it more when I learn about the ecology of the place for example, with regard to water, subsistence, native plants, history, and so on. I like the fact that places intersect with my personal history and memory. My husband and I have recently been canoeing the Tualatin River near here. It winds all over the valley and even though it's a slow little river, very tame, and travels through a lot of suburban areas, once you're down in it you feel like you've entered the forest primeval because the trees lean out over the river and there are lots

of birds and wildflowers and few people. Local advocacy groups are doing a lot to restore and preserve this little river. Well, my own memory of this river from when I was a child is that we sometimes picnicked along it. The only time I ever saw my father in a bathing suit was about 1945, in a certain spot in this river (which I can still identify). He didn't care much for swimming but he went in that day for some reason and I found it quite surprising. This landscape feels very personal to me, but when I write about it I keep learning and understanding it more and it just gets better.

SC. Writing about our lives can help us to heal, to grow, to become more deeply aware. Did the writing of your memoir change you in any significant way?

Barbara. I certainly agree with your initial statement here. Both the events I describe and writing about them helped me work through some difficult emotions--having the experience and paying close attention is one step, and writing it out is another. When Ursula Le Guin wrote the blurb saying the book offered a definition of happiness, it scared me a little. I really hadn't thought about that being the subject of the book, even though I now realize it is one of the book's subjects. (Others include renewal, rural living, family, death, loss, love of animals, beauty in nature, and a certain amount of how-to--all those big ones). But I wouldn't deliberately set out to try to define happiness, because I'm the sort who thinks if things are really good you should maybe just keep quiet about it. But I do love to share and celebrate the good things of life, as well as good ways of getting through things that might not be so good. When something interests me, I want to tell others about it--the vocation of the teacher there. Writing does change the writer in a mysterious way, maybe by bringing into existence a transcendental version of reality, if you're lucky.

There are also practical and social effects with a new book. My publications before this had been poetry, textbooks, and (some years back) fiction. There's a wider audience for prose than poetry. A lot of people who wouldn't necessarily read my poetry seem to find *Peace At Heart* appealing and respond to it in a personal way. It's gratifying. I'm not abandoning poetry, though. I'm just working in a different genre right now.

SC It's hard to write about happiness and peace because these emotions lack drama. How did you handle this problem?

Barbara. Let's see, that's a hard question. As I mentioned already, I didn't know I was writing about happiness and peace. I was writing stories about things that interested me, presenting, explaining, and commenting on them. I mainly wrote about things I found dramatic or amusing or moving. I wrote more essays that might have been included in the book, but if they didn't seem to be dynamic enough, I left them out. The title came up after I finished the book. My subconscious sort of presented it to me and I wasn't sure what it meant but it seemed right and, along with arranging the book chronologically and writing a little more where there seemed to be gaps, the title sort of pulled things together.

SC. Do you write every day, or just when you are inspired? Do

you have a special place/time to write?

Barbara. I write every day when I have time. Sometimes after a long day of teaching I am too tired, but even while I'm teaching, when I give my students writing exercises I write with them, so that I don't miss out. I've gotten some published pieces out of work I've written to prompts I've given my students. I prefer to write at the computer, but I also write a lot of little bits on whatever--notes on scraps of paper, on napkins, in little spiral notebooks, etc.--when I'm not at the computer. I always have a big "mulch pile" of rough drafts and ideas. Periodically I go through and sort these into piles, such as a pile of drafts that I'm pretty sure I can make into essays or poems, and groups of things that seem related and might all be connected to make one work--stuff that doesn't seem interesting any more sinks to the bottom, or rather, off into another pile, which I don't actually throw away but sort of ignore. In a nutshell, my writing practice is: 1) do lots of free writes or little rough drafts about things that interest me or that get my attention somehow; 2) when I have time, comb through this accumulating pile of stuff and look for common themes or drafts that seem promising and work on one, trying to make it into something someone else might enjoy reading (and which I will enjoy rereading); 3) keep working on it, and working on it, and....finally it's done.

SC Do you work on several pieces at a time?

Barbara Yes. I've got lots of essays going, lots of notes, it almost gets out of control. Or maybe it *is* out of control. Oh well. I told Bill I needed a "task shelf" with a lot of shallow shelves so I could lay out my various projects without continually losing track of them, and what do you know, he went out to the workshop and built one for me and it really helps. It's about six feet long with three levels, and I can keep my various stacks in plain view, so I can find things. I've got filing cabinets as well, but I really like my task shelf.

SC About a third of the essays in your book were originally published in small magazines before you collected them under the title *Peace At Heart*. How did that come about?

Barbara Actually, the first three essays I wrote (and the first three in the book) were published in a commercial magazine, a glossy literary supplement called *Northwest* that used to come out with the *Portland Oregonian* newspaper on Sundays. Lots of good literary stuff by well-known authors appeared there--fiction, poems, and creative nonfiction as well as contemporary living type articles. *Northwest* also paid fairly well. So I sent them the first three essays I finished and they bought them. In some ways, that kept me going on the project. I hadn't published essays before and to have someone accept and pay for the first three was very encouraging. Later on, for marketing reasons, the newspaper discontinued that magazine supplement. Pretty sad, I think. It made a contribution to the cultural life of the area, and none of their fashion sections or home and garden sections have come up to that standard. Some of the other essays were published in literary magazines.

SC What advice do you have for those of us who would like to

publish our journals and memoirs?

Barbara There is definitely a difference between journals for personal expression and writing for publication. You can often develop publishable work from journals, but when you edit and develop something for publication, you often have to leave out things that are very interesting to you, either because they detract from the central idea or feeling of a piece and ruin the unity of it, or because the material is mainly of personal interest. Also, work for publication often requires some sort of research for development. It may be research so casual and minor that no one would recognize it as such, but research, such as checking "facts" you remember or looking up some statistics or definitions that will strengthen your piece, is important for publication. Sometimes a student will feel shocked when I suggest drastic cutting, say half, to get at the heart of the work, but I do it to my own work all the time. Think of it as panning for gold. I won't claim that I always succeed, but that's what I aim for. If you don't want to edit your own writing or consider your audience, you may simply want to write for yourself, for expression, an outlet, to record your life for future generations, or to improve your writing. That's fine too. I'm all for writing uncritically in first drafts and free writes or to get something off your chest. But it's important to edit and develop when it comes to writing for publication.

SC How long did it take you to write *Peace at Heart*?

Barbara It took me six years to get about half of it finished and then I had a sabbatical and I wrote the other half in about six months.

SC What are you working on now?

Barbara My new project is not about the farm at all, though I am still making rough drafts and notes when something here comes up. But I am going in sort of the opposite direction and working on essays having to do with travel. I got a bunch of letters back from my Mom, ones I'd sent to her and my dad during the early 60's, when I was in Europe traveling around on a motor scooter and sleeping in free parks and so on and ended up living in Greece for a while. The material interested me so much that I started a series of essays in which I weave together past and present travel journals and topics. That's a lot of fun for me right now. I am learning a great deal in the process of going back to my memories and travel journals and then researching the stuff I didn't fully understand or know about at the time.

Peace At Heart by Barbara Drake

I love shaking wild apples down for the sheep in the fall. In October, their wool has grown out from their February shearing. The pasture grass is dry after months of hot weather and the sheep enjoy the juicy wild apples, beautiful in their varied shapes, sizes, and colors, some of them sweet, some of them so bitter I'm amazed that the sheep gobble them so fast.

I go into the pasture. It is the first day of September. The air smells smoky from a field burn somewhere down the valley....I call the sheep by loudly singing out "Sheep, sheep, sheep...." in chanting tones I learned from church when I was a child. They know what this means and come streaming from all directions—twenty-eight of them, for we still have some of this year's lambs—out of the woods, from the lower pasture, from the barn where they have been scrounging for alfalfa stems left in the feeder from the night before. As they come, they start to baa in answer to my calling. I go to a broad, low-growing, wild tree at the bottom of the ravine. Its branches are packed with small, yellow apples the size of golf balls, thousands of them. I grab a branch and shake. Apples rain down and bounce into the dry cavity of the winter pond. The sheep start to run and then they are all around me, gray, black, brown, white, crunching up the apples.

I walk on to the next tree. The apples here are dark red, with a stark white meat. I taste one. Pretty good, but there are plenty to go around. I shake a branch and apples tumble. I duck back out of the way and sheep rush forward to crunch the best ones. I walk on and up the hill. This tree is covered with purplish-pink, small apples on wire-like stems, some wild variation on a crab apple, and this tree too is loaded. I taste one—unbelievably sour! But like lemon juice, fresh and clean. I shake a branch. Some of the sheep are sticking with the earlier choices, but many of the lambs and a few of the mothers rush up. They like these small apples. They can get their mouths around them....

A group of sheep breaks off and forms a loose line going back up the hill. The mountains are purple now—the light makes a golden halo behind them. Where the sun goes down, the sky is red. The sheep's wool takes on a lavender cast from the cooling light as they follow the path up the hill to the barn. They feel the darkness coming and they go toward the barnyard light....

The sheep. The light. The good, deep smells of oily wool, crushed apples, and drying grass. The dogs snuffling the hedge where they flushed a pheasant earlier today. The chickens settling on their roost in the hen house. An owl drops out of the woods and soars across the pasture. The cats trill their greetings and twine around the pasture fence posts. The warm light beckons from the barn on the hill. Being in it, with it. This is happiness. There is beauty everywhere and for the moment I am part of it.

Books for the Journey

In each issue, we review one or more books that teach us something important about women's stories. If you have a favorite book you'd like others to know about, please send for our Reviewers Guide. We welcome your reviews!

Peace at Heart: An Oregon Country Life, by Barbara Drake, Oregon S. U. Press, 1998.

If you've ever taken a drive in the country and passed a small orderly farm or lovely vineyard and wondered what it would be like to live there, Barbara Drake's book will give you that experience. She and her husband kept their city jobs and moved to 20 acres in the country, which included a pasture, the beginnings of a small vineyard and a wild apple orchard overgrown with tangled blackberry vines.

Peace at Heart is a collection of essays written during the first ten years at Lilac Hill in western Oregon. With a great deal of energy, perseverance, patience and curiosity, Barbara shares her experiences and observations as well as newfound knowledge with us. She takes us with her as she spends an afternoon tasting and describing the wild apples she excitedly discovers behind a thicket of brambles. Beyond the sheep quietly grazing in the pasture, she tells of time and devotion tending the flock. We follow the making of a blanket from shearing to weaving. With a great regard for life, she confronts the reality of eating the extra lambs. From grape to wine, we see the vineyard. Wells and water, animals, plants, neighbors; all things of a country life are served up for us to sample. It is a visit with a friend who shares the joys and difficulties of living close to the land. She considers all things with respect and looks beyond to show us more. *Peace at Heart* is a book you will love the first time you read it and the next time and the next time...

—Lina Tanner lives in Oregon. She has organized our first e-Reading Circle, contributes regularly to an e-writing circles, and reads everything she can get her hands on. Recently, she arranged an e-chat with author Barbara Drake for Story Circle members.

Through the Kitchen Window: Women Writers Explore the Intimate Meaning of Food and Cooking, edited by Arlene Voski Avakian. Beacon Press, 1997

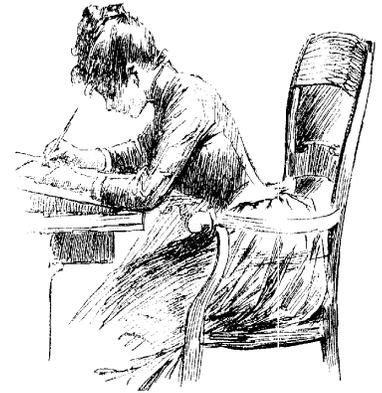
For the two weeks my grandchildren join their dad at our house every summer, we celebrate: Thanksgiving dinner one evening, an Easter Egg hunt early on a cool morning, and always a Father's Day picnic with fried chicken and potato salad. It's the only time all year we're together, and family memories are more important than the calendar. Food is an important and essential part of the memories. Writing in *Through the Kitchen Window*, Helen Barolini sees the kitchen as "an embassy of cultural tradition." We are ambassadors of our heritage.

In this fine book, Arlene Voski Avakian presents a collection of American women's essays, poems, and recipes considering the importance of food, cooking, and kitchens in women's lives. These glimpses through kitchen windows provide diverse views: Julie Dash's admonition never to stir Geechee red rice after it comes to a boil appears together with Joan Ormondroyd's wonderful memories of her Russian-Jewish grandmother's beet borsht.

These kitchen memories come sweet and sour. Letty Cottin Pogrebin takes pleasure in holding a cookbook with her mother's handwritten recipes. Maya Angelou recounts with pride how her mother used her kitchen and cooking skills to open new doors for her family. But Marge Piercy sees a burnt meal as "not incompetence, but war," and Helen Barolini says, "growing up I had deliberately stayed as far away from my mother's kitchen as I could."

There is great value in *Through the Kitchen Window*, not only in the glances into other lives and the feeling of togetherness (and sometimes separateness) that the stories evoke, but also in the way they call back memories of our own lives. I started a list of food and kitchen memories while reading the first essay; and by the time I laid the book down, the list was pushing seventy-five entries. Now it lies on my counter, still growing with memories as varied as the tales in this book. A gallery of good taste indeed!

Read this book with your notebook in your hand and a napkin tucked under your chin. And stir up the ginger crinkles on page 63, and be a little girl again.—Texas-born Patricia Nordyke Pando taught college economics in Texas and Georgia. She now writes, reads and gardens in the South Georgia bungalow she shares with her husband Bob.



Hard work as it is, there is something ancient and satisfying in the actual clipping of the wool.

The act connects us to the ten thousand years or so of human cultivation of sheep flocks...I love to see the fresh fleeces rolled inside out, the clean under part of the wool and the true, unweathered color of the fleece revealed. ...

—Barbara Drake



Birdlike, deeply veined, and lightly floured...I can still see them firmly kneading—patting—rolling out biscuit dough on the old maple board. The fragrance of raw wheat dough rising in summer heat perfumes my recollections. One of my earliest childhood memories is of my grandmother's hands and of her soft voice drifting somewhere above them...in her deep southern drawl telling me of the farm "things" I would ask about, endlessly. Days oozed by like molasses. then.

—E. Barrie Kavasch
"My Grandmother's Hands"
Through the Kitchen Window



True Words from Real Women

In this section of each Story Circle Journal, we publish your contributions of poetry and prose. Write for our Writers' Guidelines, limber up your ballpoint pen (or your typewriter or computer) and send in your contributions. We want to hear your stories!

Sage Woman: Mentor

Connie entered the room a whole presence. It was as though a PR executive had constructed her image. Everything about her blended together in a distinct and harmonious manner. Her physical appearance was neat and stylish; not in a runway model sort of way, but a personal style. The color of her clothes matched the color of her skin, matched the color of her hair, matched her jewelry. Her voice and movements created an aura around her. She exuded energy and enthusiasm for her subject, her audience, and herself.

She had come to our school to present a conference on engaging children in learning, and she succeeded in engaging all of us in a motivating experience not to be rivaled. She was animated in a unique way, as though her words, ideas and movements were blended into one. Her gestures were not tacked on but an integral part of her words. She created little phrases to accent the concepts she conveyed: like "fluff your dendrites" to describe exposing yourself to new ideas that would boost your creativity and lessen teacher burnout.

That first time I saw her I was wildly impressed and had returned to my classroom with renewed energy and a wealth of ideas for my students. But realizing an ideal in the classroom, as all teachers know, is a difficult feat to accomplish. There are always bureaucratic processes that impeded the implementation of new ways to teach. Nevertheless, I attempted some changes that were successful.

The next year I attended another of her conferences and received a much needed jump start. I began to think I would need an annual dose of this woman in order to keep my creativity and enthusiasm alive and kicking. She was definitely a person I wanted to emulate, though I wouldn't realize how much until the following year.

The agency I worked for was fortunate enough to have this "wise woman" come to our school and present a training for a small group of teachers and staff. We would be taught the concept and practice of "peer coaching"; a method of facilitating colleagues in resolving their own problems, personal and professional. Needless to say, I was the first to volunteer to participate in the training.

As part of the program, each participant was to choose an issue for which they wanted to receive coaching. Then Connie would engage us in a series of one-to-one coaching sessions in order for us to experience the process in action. It was during my sessions, and some follow-up conversations, that, for me, this teacher became my mentor.

At the time I was actively pursuing ways to use my knowledge and experience outside of the classroom. Connie helped me to develop a variety of options: ways to be more creative in the classroom, ways to create my own consulting business,

ways to create a new position at the agency. In essence, she opened up a new world for me, or helped me to open a new world for myself by analyzing my needs and desires in the work field.

I have come full circle, having left that agency for an administrative position and, now, returning to that agency to create that position for them. Though I don't discount my own energy, initiative, and creativity in coming as far as I have, I was boosted along the way by the guidance of my sage woman, mentor.

I think there is a sage woman for each of us. We just need to know where to look for her, or have our eyes open when she steps on our path.

Renee Howard Cassese
Seaford NY

In Memory of Mama

When everyone had left the house, I leaned against the refrigerator, then glanced at the pile of clothes on the table, and suddenly I was nine years old, watching Mama fold clothes....

Sitting cross-legged on the hardwood floor, I breath in the tang of lemon furniture polish and stare at Mama's face brightened by ruby lips and framed by auburn hair. She stands above me, a 1950s housewife, in her starched cotton blouse and seersucker pedal pushers. After putting a plate of warm brownies onto the coffee table, she turns to the mount of clothes from the clothesline. Methodically, she snaps out each crisp item, straightens, then folds it. While she works, the attic fan from deep within the hallway ushers in the morning through open windows and swishes the aroma of bleach and morning air about the room. Down the street, a dog barks, and Mama and I chat in snippets.

As quickly as this memory arrived, it vanished with the speed of a New Mexico thunderstorm. I listened to the water sprinkler's melody that ebbed in oceanic swells amid the liquid Celtic music playing on the radio. With a metronome's precision, I began folding clothes. I passed the fabric across my cheek and matched the cadence of sprinkler and song. I shook out each rumpled piece, hugged it to my chest, smoothed out the wrinkles, folded, then gently placed it onto the stacks of clothes that projected upward like a New York skyline. Outside the grasshoppers harmonized with the sprinkler's tune.

I smiled into Mama's green eyes and tears formed at her memory. I continued to mimic the magic of Mama's hands until minutes later I folded the last article of clothing. I glanced over at the kitchen sink filled with dirty dishes and again saw

Mama...

She stands at the tiled kitchen counter washing pots and pans and plates and all the while stares out the open window in front of her. There are slight pauses and then she returns to the rhythm of washing dishes. With left elbow atop the green Formica table, I cradle my chin in an upturned palm. With my right hand I turn the lazy susan around and around to see how fast it can rotate before the salt and pepper shakers fall off. A lawn mower engine drifts in through the window as a breeze flutters the café curtains. I chatter endless about turtles and go carts and Jimmy Hoyland. Mama simply looks my way and nods. Her smile is gentle.

At this last image, I danced over to the kitchen sink and sent Mama a silent message to thank her for giving me the joy of folding clothes and washing dishes.

Susie Kelly Flatau
Austin TX

Lois Daniel as My Teacher

Before reading Lois Daniel's *How to Write Your Own Life Story*, I thought that my past experiences were trivial and that I could never remember enough to write about out them. Her idea of setting up what she calls a "Memory Bank," which is a loose leaf notebook designed to hold random daily memories under certain topics, allowed me to retrieve my past. Also her recommendation to write for one half hour daily, before reading autobiographies, helped me a great deal. But her most important gift to me was her discussion of writing for future generations.

As a highly educated College English teacher from a working class background, I was accustomed to reading and writing about great writers. So when I dreamed of writing, whatever I might allow myself to scribble on the page seemed very imperfect. Daniel taught me to ignore how short and unsophisticated my sentences were. The trick was to capture the memories without a thought about how good the writing was.

I was amazed at how freeing the experience of writing my autobiography was. Having grown up quiet and self-effacing, I had secretly wished for people to listen to what I said. For me, the experience of writing my autobiography became an opportunity to write the stories about my life that fascinated me whether anyone had time to listen to them or not. Daniel taught me that I could remember my past and that a half hour a day was enough to get many thoughts down on paper.

Karen Echard Boyle
East Palestine OH

Silva: My Inspiration

One evening on a walk around the block while recovering from surgery, I spotted a sign on a billboard. It read, "I need help writing my children's stories. Contact Silva Eisenhower at Pilgrim Manor, Room 26." I memorized her name and address and contacted her in October of 1988.

Silva suffered from multiple sclerosis. A wide, black headband pinned down her thinning salt and pepper hair, and a food-spotted bib circled her neck. A wheel chair trapped her body as she sat beside her bed far from the window. Her only view was a tree, shaking like a giant, green pom-pom. Fresh air was absent as I expected her spirit to be as I timidly approached and introduced myself. She smiled, oh, such a beautiful smile.

Her enthusiasm for writing became contagious. Her mind flew with ideas while my hand held the pen she could no longer hold. Although it might be three or four days between visits, her memory would charge right in: "I want to change that line where..." Her "let's rewrite" became as unpalatable as "rip" was when I was in a sewing class. I shared her enthusiasm in mailing a manuscript, and I shared her disappointment in her rejections.

One time, Silva needed an illustrator for her "Footie Asterisk" story, so she sent me to hire one. I was to be explicit with her demands and write as check from her checkbook. This was an awesome responsibility, but then Silva was used to handing out responsibility.

we wrote together for nearly six years. Then writing took a backseat when her voice projection and my hearing loss became incompatible. In order to be with her, I began reading to her. When I would read, I sometimes had trouble with pronunciation. I had developed a nasty habit of merely skimming the word whenever I read to myself. If I knew what the word meant, I didn't take time to pronounce it. But when I stumbled on a word while reading to Silva, she would stop me. She would calmly give the correct pronunciation, ask me to repeat, then we would go on.

Silva never realized her dream of being published. She died in 1996. Her family had a bulletin board at the funeral home to share some of Silva's life. I knew she had been active in teaching the Laubach Literacy Method, herself being a volunteer with the Adult Literacy program. I didn't know she had been a second grade teacher. No wonder she had corrected my pronunciation, but she never made me feel inadequate...*au contraire*.

I have fond memories of Silva. She made me love to write, struggle for words, and use my imagination. I believe I'll hitch a ride on Silva's publishing dream. Silva nurtured me as we wrote, and made me want to continue...or is that pronounced 'content you'...with my writing.

Sandy McKinzie
Lafayette IN

Full Circle

You held your infant daughter
 in your arms
 agonizing, cajoling,
 willing your love to her.
 This baby expected
 perfection—
 that you read her mind
 and provide
 every need, every want.
 Sometimes that infant
 arises now,
 and your daughter rails
 against you
 for not possessing omniscience.

You jiggled your toddler daughter
 on your lap
 as she laughed,
 singing to her,
 calling her your “little Punkin’.”
 This half-pint drank
 your love
 as a thirsty babe
 guzzles the milk of life into every cell.
 Sometimes that toddler
 gazes now
 with adoration for her infinite
 mother
 content and whole in her trust.

You watched your teenage daughter

from afar
 as she brooded,
 wishing her victory
 over that devil called depression.
 This young woman envied
 your detachment
 accused you
 of confusing her
 and burdening her beyond control.
 Sometimes that girl-woman
 rages now
 crying, wondering where
 you hid
 your secret fountain of peace

You love your grown daughter
 with all your life
 as she strives,
 reaching to her
 with the gift of friendship.
 This woman recognizes
 your humanity
 and gently removes you
 from the pedestal
 to a place in her heart.
 Sometimes this woman
 perceives now
 that though we are family
 we can meet
 somewhere in the middle.

By Kathryn M. Petro
Austin TX

**Want to Start a Story Circle
in Your Community?**

If you're interested in writing and sharing your story and enjoy working with other women, this invitation is for you!

A Story Circle is a group of women who come together to read, write, and celebrate the stories of their lives. A Circle may be made up of as few as two or three people, or as many as twenty. Typically, a Circle meets one night a week, or perhaps twice a month. It may have a set number of meetings (say, 6, 8, or 10) or may continue indefinitely. The group may be facilitated by the organizer (who sometimes charges a small fee for her work), or members may organize the group and take turns leading it.

Each meeting of your Circle will probably include a period of writing, voluntary reading, and discussion. Many Circles are made up of women who have never met one another, and have responded to a flyer in the mail, a posting in a local library or bookstore, or an invitation from the leader. Other Circles are made up of friends, members of a church, participants in a social organization, or neighbors.

You'll find a guide to creating and leading Story Circles on our website. (Go to www.storycircle.org, look for “How to Start a Story Circle” on the toolbar, and click on “Facilitator’s Guide.”) For a printed copy, send \$1 to Facilitator’s Guide, Story Circle Network, 1501 W. 5th #107, Austin TX 78703.

This membership is a gift.
My name and address:

Please send me ____ free copies of the *Story Circle* brochure to share with family, friends, or clients.

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One year, USA \$24; International memberships \$36
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Here is my check for \$_____. I'd like to become a member for the remaining months of 2000.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ - _____

Foreign memberships: International Postal Money Order only please

Mail to Story Circle Network, 1501 W. Fifth Street #107, Austin TX 78703

Authentic Voices, Speaking from the Heart... Winners of the Carol W. Landherr Life-Writing Competition

In our February issue, we announced our first Life-Writing Competition, on the topic, "A Relationship that Taught Me Something Important." Here are the winners, chosen for their freshness and originality, and the clarity and authenticity of the voice. We know you will enjoy reading them as much as we have. Congratulations to our winning writers! (And look for an announcement of our next competition in our November issue.)

The Woman Who Changed My Life by Duffie Bart, Monterey CA

Her name is Evelyn Freeman: *Doctor* Evelyn Freeman. She is a psychologist who earned her Ph.D. at the age of 70. She is often complimented on achieving this goal so late in life and her answer, typically, is: I knew I would be 70 one day, one way or the other, and I chose to be 70 with a Ph.D. rather than without. When I first heard her say this, I thought to myself: *Sure...easy to say, hard to do...* But that is Dr. Freeman's wonderful way of thinking.

I met Dr. Freeman many years ago through a one-day workshop I had taken at UCLA. The course was called Creative Counseling. I was in the midst of my own journey toward a Masters in Clinical Psychology and the subject greatly interested me. Often, a day-long workshop can progress slowly and I am conscious of time passing, of wanting to learn more than I am learning. Not so with Dr. Freeman. The day sped by all too quickly and when it was over, wanting a few more minutes with her, I approached her and asked about the work she was doing in addition to teaching.

I learned that she is head of the Mental health department of a senior center in Santa Monica and that she implemented a Senior Peer Counseling program there in which counselors, 55 and older who wished to donate their time, are trained to counsel their peers. She informed me that the three-month training program was open and I was welcome to call for an interview. She smiled at me and my heart jumped with joy.

The training program turned out to be an intense exploration of our inner selves. Dr. Freeman believes, as I have come to believe also, that we cannot help one another without first dealing with our own demons. The irony here is that when I joined the program I was certain that I knew myself very well. I had always been a voracious reader in the fields of psychology and philosophy and prided myself on my confidence and self-knowledge. And yet, as the program progressed, I learned new things about myself in every session. Dr. Freeman, I discovered, had an uncanny ability to hear the underlying essence and meaning of words that revealed feelings and emotions we did not know we had; we were simply not aware of them. And she would zap right into these feelings and emotions, addressing them both firmly and gently in such a way that tears were a common occurrence during the sessions. We were unprepared for her insights, insights which, it seems, we had successfully hidden from ourselves.

In the months that followed, a strange thing happened. Dr. Freeman would ask me pleasantly: "How are you, Duffie?" I always answered cheerfully: "Fine, thank you, Dr. Freeman." She would look into my face quietly as though waiting for me

to say something more, and I could feel the smile on my face turn into puzzlement. "I'm fine, really," I would assure her. But her eyes didn't leave mine for another few moments and as we parted, I felt flustered and bewildered: I DID feel fine, I assured myself; what could Dr. Freeman be thinking when she looked at me with her quizzical gaze?

One day in one of our sessions, she wished to give us the experience of what it would be like to face a client as we would be doing after the training ended. There were about twenty of us, all sitting in a circle so that we could see one another and communicate easily. Dr. Freeman placed two chairs facing one another in the center of the room and asked a counselor-in-training to volunteer to be the counselor. She then asked me if I would be willing to play the client role. I felt a bit nervous as I sat down but, as always, did my best to appear confident and self-assured. The counselor introduced herself as she had been taught, smiled a friendly smile and asked as she would in a real session: "How are you, Duffie? How can I help you?" And again, I answered that I am fine, that I have no upsetting concerns, no difficult issues, but that I believe counseling to be important, that there is always more to learn. She heard this and couldn't think how to proceed, how to respond to this, and shot a helpless glance at Dr. Freeman, who was watching nearby.

Dr. Freeman came over and motioned for the trainee to rise so she could take her place. A moment later, surprised and this time more than a little bit nervous, I was gazing into the intelligent face of my teacher whom I so loved and respected. "You are fine, Duffie, are you?" she began in a kind tone. I nodded vigorously; indeed I did believe with all my heart that I was fine...that indeed I was incredibly lucky, having grown up with immigrant parents in a lower middle-class neighborhood in New York City, to now be living in sunny California, the mother of two dear children, healthy and financially secure. The room was eerily still, and I sensed the rapt attention of the trainees, who also wondered what they should do in a similar situation. Then, in her deeply caring voice, Dr. Freeman asked again: "Fine?" I could hear that she *really wanted to know* and felt inundated with a sudden sadness. In that moment, all of my certainty collapsed...just fell away into a deep dark hole. I could feel my eyes tearing, and confusion taking the place of my complacency. I looked at her at a loss for words and her eyes reflected such compassion, such genuine concern, I could not speak; I could not find the words to say what I was feeling; the truth is I did not know what I was feeling. It was now painfully clear, however, to myself, to Dr. Freeman, and to my fellow trainees that I was not feeling 'fine.' She sat with me in this way for a few moments. I took a deep breath. We continued looking at one another and while

my feelings of confusion continued, I felt somehow comfortable in the silence. I felt that she had reached a part of me I did not know, and that there was no judgment from her, only acceptance, that whatever was going on with me was all right.

I understood for the first time that I was not at all the calm and serene woman I was showing to the world, and of course to myself as well. This realization was the beginning of a new outlook, a new realization of the inner work that lay ahead of me. Those few minutes with Dr. Freeman changed the direction of my life. I remained her student for many years and learned invaluable lessons under her generous and wise tutelage. I made decision I never believed I would make, major life-changing and life-enhancing decisions. The wisdom I gained from her serves me to this day and my gratitude to her is boundless and everlasting.

Duffie Bart writes about herself: *My family left Germany in 1939. I was raised in Queens, N.Y., and left when my husband, a journalist, was transferred to Los Angeles. For several years I wrote screenplays but always had a secret ambition to write prose. Shortly after my divorce, I returned to school to study psychology. My mentor and advisor, Dr. Evelyn Freeman., helped me to understand myself and find the courage to write from my heart. I have written articles for the publication Science of Mind and hope one day to write a book.*

The Man Beside Me

by Marie Buckley, Hillsboro OR

When I met Bill I could hardly understand him. This handsome young man had a speech impediment that belied his good looks. Until he opened his mouth, I thought I'd met a movie star. Even then, although his voice altered the magic, his incredible appearance remained. I was 19 and Bill was 22. I was recovering from a string of seedy relationships with men my mother called "bad pennies" and getting ready for my second year of college at a small liberal arts school in Nebraska.

Bill was home for the summer working at his father's business prior to going back to Kansas to finish his last college semester. We hit it off like gangbusters. I couldn't believe his looks or my incredible luck to be dating him. Bill was the first man I'd met who wasn't looking for sex. He was a nice guy who didn't even realize how attractive he was. And his family had money. I'd dreamed of marrying someone with money.

Bill and I became inseparable. His speech still sounded odd to me, but I was starting to understand him better, and the fact that he obviously had a good financial future ahead of him was most important. I was smart enough to know that.

Months passed and Bill said he loved me. I found that I loved him too. I started helping him with his pronunciations. He was grateful. A year and a half later we were married. I quit

college immediately. Bill would take care of me now.

Bill became a teacher. The fact that he was difficult to understand never entered his mind. People learned to understand him. They always did.

Well, Bill failed to make a good teacher. The school board criticized his voice and didn't renew his contract. Then he failed at an office job because clients complained they couldn't understand him on the phone. Bill was depressed, I was disappointed, but we were together and still happy although we had little financially. I worked part time, read lots, did volunteer work, and never thought of returning to college. I was going to write a book.

Bill's mother died, his father remarried and spent much of his money. Bill went to work as a milkman for seven years. As for me, smart as I was, I wouldn't consider working full-time at some boring job. It was Bill's job to support me and furthermore he wanted to. We lived simply; we didn't go out much. We got by.

One day we decided to move to Oregon for adventure. When we arrived, Bill found a job as a laborer in a factory doing heavy lifting and hard physical work. I found part time work and an overwhelming interest in and concern for animals. Bill joined my animal advocacy efforts.

Then I began feeling angry with Bill. We really didn't have enough money. We never had. I was getting tired of our simple life style. It wasn't that much fun anymore. Bill patiently assured me that I could do whatever I wanted. He would continue to work as hard as he could to support us.

I decided to finish my B.A. degree. After all, I'd always been smart. After that I did some freelance writing, but I still didn't get a full-time job. I took care of animals; I started an educational organization for people with pet birds. I still talked about writing the book. Bill kept working so we could pay our bills. But he still wasn't making me happy or making us rich. His voice was now so improved that when people met him, they thought perhaps that he might be from a foreign country.

Yet when I thought about it, it was Bill's voice all along that had kept us from doing well. It had kept him from being a professional somebody and made him a blue collar nobody. It had kept me from being happy. We argued incessantly, but we were still united in our concern for animals.

Then Bill injured his back at work. He couldn't go back to his physically demanding job. He had surgery. I got panicky. As smart as I was, I didn't think I could even support myself. So I went back to school again, this time to be certified to teach and earn a master's degree as well.

Bill collected disability checks for two years. They provided very little. Thank goodness I was teaching full time. He was finally awarded retraining; then he couldn't get a job. I kept teaching. I also complained. I was overworked, exhausted, and yes, even miserable. Why should someone as smart as me have to work so hard?

Bill finally got his big inheritance. Only it wasn't big. We paid off our credit cards, took a vacation, bought a spa for Bill's back and a truck to move animal cages in. Then the money was gone. Bill had to have surgery on his back again. Finally, amazingly, he found a job. People listened to him at

his new employment; they respected him. He was in charge of a small production area. Although the job didn't pay much, Bill liked it.

Meanwhile, I was burned out. Much of my hair had turned white, I was sick every summer. I couldn't keep teaching. I turned 50 and I quit. Bill supported my decision. He told me we would get along without my salary. He encouraged me to write that book.

One day I was staring in the mirror thinking about how unhappy I was when suddenly it dawned on me that it wasn't Bill's job to make me happy, or to make me rich. It was up to me! Why had I spent so much time being angry with Bill, or with the way he sounded, when the only person who could do anything to change my feelings was myself? I was the only person who could ever write the book I had talked so much about.

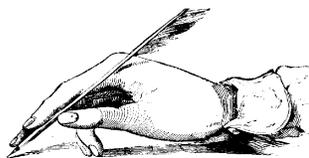
I thought I was smart. But Bill had the distinction of being a truly good person. He worked hard, he was honest, and he cared for animals. He didn't complain about his voice or our lack of money or me not working full time. He took what life handed him and went steadfastly on.

I had been a teacher, but Bill was the teacher. Not in a classroom full of kids as he had intended all those years ago, but in my life. He had shown me the value of being uncomplaining, kind, and virtuous. He demonstrated that living was more than how one sounded or what one looked like. I realized then that I'd rather have this man with whom I'd been for 30 years (at the time), than a whole bank vault full of money or a mansion full of possessions.

Today my favorite way to describe Bill is to say that he's the good human being I've been married to for 32 years. Bill looks at me like he isn't quite sure whom I'm talking about. And I know I'm darn lucky to be with him.

Marie Buckley writes this about her story: *When I first thought about a relationship I'd had that taught me something important, I settled on my father, an extraordinary man who died when I was only eight years old. Next I thought about my mother, a woman who had exerted tremendous influence over me. I considered a friend from long ago. A few teachers I'd been touched by came to mind.*

But when I put my fingers on the keyboard and looked at the screen, I knew who it would be. The person I've lived with more of my life than anyone else in the world. This is for him.



A Bittersweet Time of Life by Carolyn Cook, Austin TX

She died—how could that be? We had thirteen years together, and seven years of that time were under the diagnosis of ovarian cancer. During most of this time, Anne was able to live a full, joyful life, but finally the miracles of modern medicine ended, and at the end, through the shock and pain, I was able to feel pride in the process of dying that our love had created.

We had six years of blissful “real life” together before we were brought up short in September of 1991. Fibroid tumors were suspected. Surgery was scheduled; the tumors were malignant, with a diagnosis of ovarian cancer. It is a frightening disease with—at best—a poor prognosis. This malignant tumor was an unexpected blow, but we were grateful that, because of the timing, no major organs were invaded; however, treatment was called for.

And treatments there were. For the next six-and-a-half years, there were two other surgeries, two shunts, and more than ten series of chemotherapies, all combinations plus any new drugs. During all of this, Anne missed very little work. Only when treatment was on a workday or when she was recuperating from surgery did she miss. Her stamina was amazing and was greatly admired by her co-workers. Because of her strength and great good spirit, she became a beloved heroine to them.

One reason that she was able to continue to work so valiantly was a decision we made soon after diagnosis. We decided that “we” came first, work came second, and third came Lady Longhorn basketball activities. We knew that to conserve energy for these things, we would have to limit our social contacts to our close friends and family. We also decided that we would treat the disease neutrally. That is, we would not name this “bad,” because that would give this disease too much power. Every month Anne had a blood test to see if the chemotherapy was working. The test was sent away, and we had a week's wait for the results. This ability to remain neutral was very important. Too much emotion in either direction, we believed, was wasted energy. A roller coaster ride of ups and downs would have sapped our vigor, and our constant mantra was to save our strength.

Even with all our care, her doctor's skill, and the treatments, the other shoe finally dropped. The monthly blood test showed that there was no more stopping this dark invader. The medicines were not working, and there were no more options. All combinations had been used. Anne was going to die. Life as we had come to know it changed drastically.

My immediate response was physical. I developed high blood pressure and within two weeks was on medication. Through our grief, though, we saw many tasks that surrounded this death experience:

Notify our friends, make burial plans, refinance the mortgage and add me to it, get the legalities “fixed,” get a new picture taken (she hated this!), drive to Houston to tell her dad and sisters, get medical retirement, apply for state disability, get the utilities in my name, plan the memorial service, meet with Hospice

But, most importantly, we wanted to spend as much time as possible together. There was something so wrong about this whole scene. Anne was a woman of vast talents and abilities. Fifty-four was too young to die; she was leaving, and I wasn't. We were so good together; we shared so very well together. She showed me how to live in an intimate relationship and share feelings, and even though I had thirteen years of these memories, I wanted to be very aware in these last moments...not to squander one minute of our remaining time together.

Anne wanted to die at home, surrounded by family and friends. Because of her flat-out honesty, we broke many of the usual "death" patterns. In essence, we held an open house. She stayed in the living room in her recliner most of the time; to her total delight, she got to keep the TV clicker 24 hours a day! When our friends visited, conversation was wide open. She helped us plan her memorial service. This made some guests uncomfortable, and there was a gleam in her eye as she brought up the topic—full of the devil, as usual. She delighted in giving away many of her earrings and "gimme" caps and knew to whom she wanted to give each gift. We planned a party to be held in her honor and memory in the fall. She gleefully helped me decide to buy a new car with insurance money. We cherished each visitor, but our hearts were filled with Lady Longhorn pride when Jody Conradt [the women's basketball coach] came to see Anne to thank her for her loyal support. We were both thrilled by this genuinely loving gesture from Jody. Anne proudly said at least four or five times a day, "Coach came to see me."

In the last two weeks, we needed help. Into this bittersweet atmosphere, our sisters and friends came in shifts to spend the nights and days. Not only did they help me, but they also used these hours as their last time to share their love with Anne and tell her of the joy she had brought to their lives. This was a time they all held dear. Even during active dying, she remained as concerned as ever for others; she even left me a note concerning my birthday gift, and the money to buy it! Her determination to be a good friend never wavered. We had dear friends on vacation as the time of her death drew nearer. She was hell-bent to see their return, and sure enough, they all returned by Monday, and she died early Wednesday morning.

If love, attitude, and determination could Anne would still be here. Her courage, her concern for me, and her openness in facing death had a profound impact on all who were involved. This experience is now an integral part of me, and as I survey the mental snapshots of our life, the tender, cherished memories that run around my brain, I am surprised by my strength of will and by my ability to cope creatively with the most challenging situation of my life. I have learned that "better" might never be possible, but that "different" is okay. I jealously guard my time and want to be with family and friends to maximize love and gratitude for all my blessings. And, of all the lessons about life, relationships, and death that I gleaned from Ann's illness and death, the most lasting is the absolute knowledge that I can and will survive and that family, friends, and faith will continue to sustain me through the difficult times.

Carolyn Cook writes this about herself: *I am a retired state employee—thirty-two years in the trenches of the social service community and I still have a brain! I am also a student of A Course in Miracles, the most important element that saw me through the death of my partner. I am a very lucky big sister; I have two much younger sisters. We've always been close but more so since our parents died.*

I am blessed with a multitude of wonderful friends, a support group that has always sustained me, but never with such love, tenderness, and care as in the past five years.

Auntie

by Peggy Park Talley, Gonzales TX

All of Mother's five sisters had nicknames. Auntie's real name was Bert; she was third in the line of birth order of ten children and my favorite of the aunts. She was the only one of the sisters who never married and the one that I was around most often. I always thought I was her favorite niece. I'm sure I liked her most because she was the one who spoiled me most. If there was anything I really wanted, I dropped a hint in her presence. She usually arranged for me to get what I wanted.

When I was about twelve, she bought me a diamond ring. I know now that it was only a tiny chip of a diamond, but if it had been three carats, I couldn't have been more proud. On the ride back home that day, I kept my hand on the back of the car seat so anyone in the car behind us could see the sparkle of my diamond and know what a fortunate and important person I was to have such a jewel at such an early age. For weeks, I would place my hand where the diamond would catch the rays of the sun so I could see the sparkle.

Auntie was a very respected nurse. Everyone in town knew Bert Cline. Her reputation was impeccable. At one time she was the supervisor of the hospital in the small town where I was born. She was the one who arranged it so I could stand on a Coca Cola box outside the window of the operating room to view my first surgery when I was about eight years old. That was one of the highlights of my life up to that time. I couldn't see much detail from that distance, but I could smell the "hospital" smells and see that the surgery was done on a child about my age. When the doctor had the appendix out and ready to go into the bowl for later examination, he took a step toward my window and held it up, grasped in forceps so I could see it better. I thought then and still think that an appen-

dix looks like a fat pink worm. That event precipitated my desire to be a nurse and work in an operating room, just like Auntie. I wanted to be part of that kind of action. It pleased Auntie that I finally did follow in her footsteps when I went back to school and became a registered nurse. My first job was working in the operating rooms of a large hospital. I was offered more money in other hospitals and in other specialties but I had always known that my choice would be to work in surgery.

All of the sisters were BIG women. Auntie was the biggest of them all. In her forties, she probably weighed two hundred and fifty pounds. That weight was spread over a six-foot, one-inch frame. She was a formidable but very attractive woman. I envision her still in a starched white uniform with long sleeves; the collar buttoned up close to her neck. After my father was killed, we moved back to Huntsville. Auntie lived in the same house with us. Naturally, her uniforms were part of the wash that was done weekly and it became my job to iron those uniforms. First you had to spread a white, clean sheet on the floor under the ironing board. The immense size of those uniforms was such that there was no way to iron them without their touching the floor. They were made of heavy cotton. It took at least an hour to iron one properly and then another fifteen minutes to replace all the buttons that were removed before you washed the uniform. It wasn't one of my favorite chores but I would have done anything for Auntie; after all, she had given me permission to charge things to her account at one of the local drugstores. I could take one of my girl friends with me to the drugstore for lunch (a pimento cheese sandwich with potato chips, dill pickle, and a cherry coke) and tell the soda jerk to "charge it to Bert Cline." You can't get much more important than that!

I wasn't the only family member who benefited from Auntie's generosity. Especially her brothers knew who to call when they got into a financial pinch. When Auntie got older and no longer worked or had plenty of money to spend, her brothers had all preceded her in death so it was left up to the sisters to try to help her with finances. They could never afford to be as generous as she had been but they did see to it that she had a place to live and the necessities of life. Those were few in her final years. Nothing brought her greater joy than having the family around, making homemade ice cream and visiting with her sisters, nieces, and nephews. Her greatest relief was in no longer being required to wear that stiff, starched, buttoned-up

white uniform every day!

There came a night when Mother called and told me that Auntie was in the hospital. She had a stroke. I went as soon as I could make arrangements. Auntie lay, still massive but so still, so pale, in the hospital bed. One side was completely paralyzed. She couldn't speak and was sliding in and out of consciousness. I leaned down and kissed her on the cheek and told her I would be there by the bed. I pulled a chair close to the bed and sat there massaging the hand that she could feel while she slept, rousing only occasionally. I watched the IV fluid drip slowly into her vein. I must have dozed for when I opened my eyes, her eyes were looking directly into mine. I said, "Hello there, you finally woke up."

Her eyes left mine and went to the IV bottle hanging by the bed, then back to me. I said, "It's just fluid to keep you hydrated, no medication added." She looked back at the bottle, then back directly into my eyes and slowly shook her head from side to side. I asked if she felt that she could swallow a sip of water. Again, she slowly shook her head. I said, "You know that you must have fluids until you are able to drink. Your body needs the fluid."

She gave a sigh of resignation and slowly nodded. She understood. Her eyes closed, she slept again. As she slept, her breathing slowed, then became less regular. I slipped into the hallway and went to get the night nurse, a dear friend of my aunt and another nurse she had helped to train, so many years ago. Together, we stayed by the bed until Auntie left us there alone. She had very peacefully slipped away, as she had wanted to do.

Peggy writes about herself: *When I began to collect and edit the stories I had written and saved over a lifetime to include in the writing of my life story, I had to stop at the beginning to write about my favorite aunt.*

The stories and my life would have been much different and less rich without the influence of Auntie. She was the one who gave of herself, her time, her boundless love, her earthly possessions and most of her income. The entire family and many of the people who happened to cross her path as patients or strangers benefited from her generosity. I benefited more than most.

Looking Ahead

Each issue of the *SCJ* is loosely organized around a particular theme. While we do accept non-thematic writing, we give precedence to stories written on the theme of a particular issue. Here are the upcoming topics and deadlines:

Abundant Gifts—November, 2000 (due Oct. 15)

Cats, Dogs, and Other Significant Creatures—February, 2001 (due Jan. 15)

Discoveries—May, 2001 (due April 15)

A Story Circle News Roundup

We share reports about Story Circles to help us all imagine different formats for Circles. If you're participating in a Story Circle, tell us about it! Write to Story Circle Journal, PO Drawer M, Bertram TX, 78605, or email Susan Albert at china@tstar.net.

Email Goes Female

Our Internet e-circles are thriving! Each writing circle is a small group of women who write, share, and respond to each other's life stories via e-mail, web page, and chat room. We now have three active writing circles and one reading circle via the Internet.

Our first writing e-circle of seven members was launched in April and is facilitated by Judy Fettman. By June, enough women were interested in participating in a writing circle that we added a second e-circle, led by IC president Marie Buckley; and as I write early in August, a third writing circle is beginning, with Joan McGroarty as facilitator.

The facilitator of each circle sends out a writing topic to the group once a month. Each member's story is sent to the members of her circle, who then respond to the writing. While at first writing responses were sent to all circle members, we have recently provided the choice (for those who are more comfortable with a private response) of sending responses only to the writer. Topics in the past four months have included introductions, cats and other pets, gardens, summer and food, porches, independence, and bus rides. If you are a member of the Internet chapter, you can read our stories on our web pages (go to "StoryCircle.org/InetChapter" then follow the links to writing e-circles.)

Lina Tanner began the first reading e-circle with a discussion of *Peace at Heart: An Oregon Country Life*, by Barbara Drake. After members of the circle read the assigned book, they send in discussion questions. These are posted on the reading circle's web page (go to "StoryCircle.org/InetChapter" then follow the links to reading e-circles.) and participants fill out a response form that is sent to the circle members. Lina then arranges a chat time for members to share their thoughts. For the August 3rd chat, she organized a chat with the author, Barbara Drake!

I think that I can speak for most, if not all, of the e-circle members when I say that sharing our writing with each other has been very helpful and lots of fun. Many of us have become e-friends and frequently e-mail each other and meet in the chat room. We invite all of you to participate, too! Join the Internet Chapter, then sign up for an e-circle; write your stories, e-mail us, and come and chat (3:00 p.m. Tuesdays, EDT and 8:30 p.m. on Wednesdays, EDT). We'll be looking for you!—*Judy Fettman, Coordinator, IC E-Circles*

Mother-Daughter Group Meets in Austin

My article entitled "Between Generations: Women and Girls--Sharing Our Life Stories" appeared in the Volume 4 Number 1, February 2000 issue. In that article I described how I helped seventh grade girls' club members begin writing and sharing their life stories. I found that sorking with the girls and sharing their life stories proved immensely rewarding.

This experience helped me envision the idea of sharing between mothers and daughters. This summer I have met with two former students and their mothers. In the first three sessions they wrote stories and shared pictures and other memorabilia of their birth days. I reaped great rewards from this venture as has this mother/daughter group. We plan to continue meeting throughout the school year on a monthly basis. I want to expand this project by starting another group. If you are interested in sharing between generations within your own family, please contact me at carjoys@aol.com or write to me at 8811 Westerkirk Dr., Austin, TX 78750.—*Carolyn Joy Scheider*

Summer Circle Meets in Oregon

Marie Buckley is facilitating a four week Summer Story Circle in Hillsboro OR. The group meets at Main Street Books in downtown Hillsboro one evening a week. Eight women are attending the Summer Circle and exploring their lives and experiences by writing about Journeys, Body Language, Nature, and Aging. Marie's first local Story Circle, held in the spring, had four members. Interest in Story Circle life-writing has doubled! The local newspaper ran a story about the Story Circle Network, including some very nice testimonials by members of Marie's local circle, which generated a great deal of positive response. Marie now plans to facilitate Story Circle sessions in Hillsboro four times a year: Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter. The circles will each meet for six weeks, with the exception of the Summer Circle, which is meeting for four weeks. There is a small facilitator's fee charged for each series and women are welcome to attend any or all of the sessions. Anyone interested in finding out more may contact Marie at marie@aracnet.com or 503-648-7019.

Breast Cancer Survivor? We want to hear your story!

If you are a breast cancer survivor and would like to participate in a writing project designed to help breast cancer survivors write about their experience, we would like to hear from you! Write to Catherine Cogburn, Story Circle Network, 1501 W. Fifth Street #107, Austin TX 78703, or email her at ccogburn@io.com.

Writing from Life: A Workshop for Women with Stories to Tell

Friday, October 6, 7-9 p.m. and Saturday, October 7 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Lower Colorado River Authority Complex, 3700 Lake Austin Blvd., Austin TX

Women are natural storytellers, sharing their experiences of work and love, children and challenge, bright hours and dark days. In this ten-hour weekend workshop, you will learn why and how storytelling can be an important means of self-discovery, self-determination, and transformation. Together, we will discover why personal narrative is a healing art, how our stories can be sacred acts, and how writing the story of our past helps us define a healthy future. For a complete description, go to our web site, www.storycircle.org, and click on "Writing From Life Workshop." Or write to the address below for a brochure. The Story Circle presenters for this workshop are:

Susan Wittig Albert, Ph.D. is the author of *Writing From Life: Telling Your Soul's Story*, a guided writing program for women memoirists. Now a full-time fiction writer, she is retired from a 15-year university teaching and administrative career.

Catherine Cogburn, M.A., L.P.C. is a psychotherapist specializing in grief issues and life-writing as a tool for personal growth. She directed the Older Women's Legacy Circle project and helped to design its workbook.

Judith Helburn, M.S. has addressed audiences across the country on the topics of healthy aging and incorporating spirituality into our lives. She has created the video "*Getting Off Our Rocker*," and written a chapter in *Spiritual Elders: Women in Worth in the Third Millennium*.

Donna Remmert, B.A. has taught high-school English and worked as a journalist. She has facilitated workshops on ways to use dream imagery in art and writing, and led Story Circles. She is the author of her self-published memoir, *Littlest Big Kid*.

Natalie Thomas, M.A. is president of the Darling Thomas Group, a management consulting firm specializing in communications and team building. Natalie often speaks to organizations on women's career issues and building self esteem in young girls.

Writing From Life Workshop Registration Form

Name _____ Address _____ City _____

State _____ Zip _____ Daytime Phone _____ Evening Phone _____

Email _____

Please mail this form with your check for \$75, to Story Circle Network., 1501 W. Fifth #107, Austin TX 78703

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We'll place it at the bottom of a page, where it's sure to attract readers' attention.

(You read this, didn't you?)

Mini-Stories: Our Readers Share



Diana Coonradt, of **Layton UT** speaks for many of us when she says, "I have spent most of my life trying to be the perfect daughter, perfect wife, mother, church member, etc. I put everyone's needs before my own and almost lost the person I am. I have decided that the remainder of my life belongs to me to do with as I choose." *Thank you, Diana!*

Judy Fettman has been pitching in to help get our e-circles organized. Here's what she has to say about herself: "My self-writing began in seventh grade when I felt very shy and unpopular, was given a tiny red-bound diary, and proceeded to write my heart out! As a clinical social worker, I wrote case histories; as a mother I had time to write nothing! Now in my fifties, post-social work and 75% post-mothering, at last I have returned to writing from my heart—journaling, memoirs, and essays from real life." Judy writes and works in **Ann Arbor MI**.

Karen Boyle lives in **East Palestine**

OH, where she leads a life rich in doing and dreaming: "At age fifty, I am completing a dissertation on Willa Cather for a Ph.D. in literature and raising my three teenage sons alone since my husband died in 1993. For the last nine years, I have written and rewritten over two hundred typewritten pages of my autobiography. Although I need to earn a living, late instead of publishing or teaching, I dream of facilitating workshops to help women write their life stories."

From Austin TX, Susie Kelly Flatau tells us: "My story is filled with mentors, memories, and magic. Stirred into that life tale is pain and joy, play and perseverance, luck and determination. And—most importantly—there is the energy and optimism of a Pollyanna." Susie's new book *From My Mother's Hands* is being published this fall by the Republic of Texas Press! We'll introduce her and her work to you in an up-coming issue.

Our Stories, Our Selves

These verses were written by Mary Conley in an Older Women's Legacy Circle workshop. Mary's image of "stirred souls" testifies to the emotions many of us feel as we share our stories:

A few weeks ago we met, mostly strangers
Older women seeking aid—
In writing our life stories
Before our memories fade.

We wrote and read and listened
To events of our lives that occurred.
We smiled and laughed and
became teary-eyed
At times our very souls were stirred.

We wrote of keepsakes and treasures
and losses
Of homesteads and family and friends
The past often became the present
At the stroke of our pens.

Today we have our final meeting
We'll have papers and comments galore
But as we say goodbye one thing is certain
We older women are strangers no more.

Mary L. Conley
Austin TX

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