



Story Circle Journal

The newsletter for women with stories to tell...

Volume 4 Number 2, May 2000

Story Circle Gets Connected

This article was written by Marie Buckley, president of our new Internet Chapter. Marie is a freelance writer working from her Hillsboro OR home surrounded by parrots, cats, a dog, and a husband. Her motto: Once upon a time is now!

It's all about connecting—woman-to-woman, hearts and minds—all over the world. The Internet Chapter of the Story Circle Network is what I'm talking about and the women I'm talking to and exchanging ideas and pieces of life writing with are our IC members. And I'm doing it right from home, sitting in front of my computer screen, wearing my sweats, no makeup, and often with a cat or bird hanging onto me. I love it! To imagine that I can share ideas, hear other women's thoughts, and read pieces of their stories—women I would never have known without the IC—is amazing and wonderful.

Three years ago I turned 50. A few good friends lived nearby, others several states away. But I suddenly wanted more. I wanted to know women around the country with whom I could talk, gain new insights, and share life experiences. I felt in my heart that when women shared their own stories, they found they had much in common, not only in the experiences themselves but in the feelings and emotions those experiences generated. And the different lens through which each woman saw an experience would add to the perspective of all. Rather than a static landscape, I wanted a panoramic view of my life in relation to the world and looked for some way to make this happen.

I joined the IC in February, shortly after it opened. I signed the guest book, posted a message on the bulletin board, and tried out the chat room. I kept going back daily to read and respond to messages, and became a chat fanatic! Now I'm a member of the first IC E-Circle facilitated by Judy Fettman. Through our E-Circle I am exchanging writing with six other women. Our writings are even posted on the IC website! The IC has given us the opportunity and the tool for finding women a thousand or more miles away that we can know and talk to as friends.

I encourage Story Circle members who haven't yet joined our IC Chapter to do so and start forging links with others who are also in the process of discovering who they are through writing their lives and telling their true stories.

I invite those who already are IC members to become active in the IC. Email Judy Fettman (fettman@umich.edu) and join an E-Circle to exchange writing with other women. If you are looking for writing critique, consider a Round Robin critique group. Check the bulletin board, post a message, and respond to others' messages. Participate in our IC weekly chats; if the chat times don't work for you, email others (the IC membership list is posted) and choose a different time. If you want to read and discuss published life writings by women, start a Reading E-Circle. Suggested book titles and discussion questions are on the Story Circle website. You can also take an online writing workshop, use the weekly writing prompts for personal journaling, and stay inspired by reading True Words from Real Women.

As with most things, the more you put into the IC, the more you will get out of it. Don't be shy about contacting other members; most of us joined because we wanted to get in touch with other women! Don't be afraid to take action yourself to organize a chat, an E-Circle, or a book group. You may end up wondering how you got along without all the wonderful women you've met and gotten to know. I speak from experience, one of my own best teachers!—Marie Buckley, Hillsboro OR

*The circle is cast. We are between
the worlds, beyond the bounds of
time, where night and day,
birth and death, joy and sorrow,
meet as one.
—Starhawk*

*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*

*If you want a thing well done, get
a couple of old broods to do it.
—Bette Davis*

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Story Circle National Conference February, 2002

*We're planning the first
National Story Circle Conference!*

In coming months, we'll tell you about the program, which will feature a nationally-known speaker, 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.



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.

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

www.owlcircle.org

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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!

LifeStory Briefs: Practical How-to for Memoir Writers

Creating & Using Your LifeLine

Two years ago (in our August, 1998 issue, Vol. 2 No. 3), we told you how to create your LifeLine. Several people have written recently to say that they found that article very helpful and to ask for ideas about how to use the LifeLine as a tool for memoir-writing. So in this issue, we're going to explore the idea a bit further.

What is a LifeLine?

Your LifeLine is simply a chronological listing of the most important events of your life, with the year (perhaps also the month) in which they occurred.

Alice's LifeLine	
1940	my birth
1947	1st grade, parents' divorce
1958	HS graduation
May, 1961	Married Tom
1965	Divorce/started college
1971	Began teaching
1973	Moved to Idaho

Here is an example of a LifeLine that covers a 33-year period. The writer hasn't made any effort to describe these significant events, simply to note them down. This schematic format forces us to choose the most important moments of our lives, which often mark the beginnings and endings of important chapters.

We don't want to *tell* our life story chronologically (there's no more sure way to boredom!) but it is often helpful to *understand* the chronology of our lives. As you work with the LifeLine—writing down important life passages and recalling what happened at the time—you will understand more about what was going on in your mind and heart when you made the choices that shaped your future (now your past).

Developing Your LifeLine

So you've created your LifeLine—what next? How will you use it?

One of the most helpful things you can do at this point is to expand and develop your LifeLine by noting down some of the important elements of each event. Here are several ways you might do this.

—For each major event you have listed, write down three events that led up to it, then three events that followed from it. When you've written these down, think for

a few moments about how these causes and effects worked together. Then write down your thoughts.

—For each major event, write down the names of the people who were involved in it with you, and what their roles were. Take a moment to look back on the people who contributed so much to these vital turning points, then write a paragraph about each of them.

—For each major event, write down what you consider to be the two or three most negative implications of it, and the two or three most positive. Then write down its long-term implications, looking at it from your current perspective, with the wonderful wisdom of hindsight.

Passages

Gail Shehey has written several books about the "passages" in our lives: stages of individual growth marked by important events that many of us share in common. Some of these passages (such as menarche and menopause) take place only once and at relatively fixed points of our lives, while others (losing loved ones through death or separation, establishing new relationships, entering and leaving careers) can take place at any time and at many times. Looking back at your LifeLine, what "passages" can you find? Try giving a name to them. (Sheehy's clever titles included the Trying 20s, the Catch-30s, the Forlorn 40's.) What boundaries mark each of these periods? How does each of your LifeLine events change these boundaries?

Growing: From There to Here

The dates and one- or two-word descriptions in your LifeLine can't begin to tell the whole story of your life, which is all about growth. Think of each of the major events in your life as a "lesson" in the life-long curriculum of learning to live more fully and to be a more complete human being. What did you learn from each of these experiences? In what important ways did you grow from it? In what ways did it change you?

YOUR MEMOIR NOTEBOOK

If you haven't yet started a notebook for your memoirs, now is a good time to begin—and your LifeLine is a good tool to start with!

A three-ring binder can provide a flexible format. Put your LifeLine on one of the first few pages, like a table of contents. Use a tabbed divider to create a new section for each of the events you've listed in your LifeLine. Behind each divider, include plenty of blank pages, where you can write down more memories from each of these important periods in your life. You may want to include photographs, clippings, letters, and other memorabilia, as well as your writing. Of course, you can hand-write your pages, type them, or use your computer to produce a variety of interesting formats. And don't forget that art work! You can use crayons, watercolors, colored pencils, and markers to decorate your pages.

The LifeLife you've developed in this exercise is only a beginning, of course. Your life, and your LifeLine, will lengthen and your experiences broaden. And as your life goes on, you'll see the past differently. Events that you now consider life-changing may seem less important, while other events will assume major importance. Make it a regular practice to review your LifeLine regularly, adding, subtracting, and revising events to fit your current understanding of the shape and stages of your life.



Writing and Healing

Connecting with the Continuous Self

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. Read more about her on p. 14.

Recovering Your Self

Julia Cameron was not the first to suggest morning writing. In *On Becoming A Writer* (1934), Dorothea Brande advised writing out thoughts first thing in the morning, before life's preoccupations intrude. Try writing morning pages for a week and see what it does for you.

Make a quiet time when you can be alone (such an island of solitude is itself therapeutic). Cameron and Brande feel that writing is most effective first thing in the morning, perhaps because during the transition from sleep to waking we are closest to our unconscious, to our true selves. Create a comfortable place—a favorite chair, with coffee or tea, outside where you can hear the birds or inside with music in a spot of sun. Write whatever comes to mind. Just write, keep the pen moving. Cameron suggests three pages each morning. I modify this to what feels right for each day. (But beware of your censor, which may chide, “You don't have time to write more than a paragraph today because...”) Remember that journaling is a discipline you are undertaking for a purpose, to heal, to recover your self and your creativity.

After a week, reflect. What have you learned? What was the process like? If you resisted the suggestion to write three pages, why? What might your censor be trying to protect you from? If you see a lot of “clutter” in your pages, why is it there? Could it be pared down? Are themes emerging that you would like to pay more attention to? Has journaling this week been helpful, healing? Would you like to continue the practice for another week?

When I was a timid ugly duckling in seventh grade, I was given a small diary bound in red leatherette, with a tiny brass lock and key. When I felt I had nowhere else that I could be genuine, I wrote in my diary what I came to call “my real feelings.” Little did I know then that journaling would become a life-long habit.

It is 9 a.m. on Thursday. My husband has left for work and the kids have been packed off to school. The dog has had his walk and the cat has been fed. Before I tackle the rest of my day, I sit down quietly with a cup of coffee. If possible, like the cat, I find a sunny spot. I tune in our classical music station, open my lime-green journal and begin to write. I write about the annoying but necessary business of the day, write lists of what I need to take care of—phone calls, errands, repairmen; I make another list for the grocery store. Among the lists, I write out my worry about my teenagers' grades, about the necessity of letting them make their own choices and mistakes. I write about Mark and me and our weekend in South Beach. I write how I like to sing but hate voice lessons; about my frustration in not having enough time to do the photography that I love; I write about wanting more time to write!

I began journaling in this way about two years ago when I joined a group based on Julia Cameron's *The Artist's Way*. One of the fundamental tools of the Artist's Way process is writing “morning pages.” We write whatever comes to mind, without censoring it, keeping the pen moving across the page, for three pages. As we write—about the mundane, the preoccupations, the frustrations—eventually we find ourselves writing about deeper things, things that matter. Writing becomes a journey of self-discovery, a means of working through the noise and clutter of everyday living to the underlying creativity in all of us. Writing about the resistances, noticing and naming them, helps to clear a path through them to the authentic self buried beneath them.

My friend Susan has journaled for years. Here she writes eloquently about the place of journaling in her life:

In putting words down on paper, in the safe container of a journal, I can explore whatever is going on that needs addressing. By having a relationship with my journal and trusting it to support me unconditionally, I can write things that I wouldn't share with anyone else. My journal doesn't talk back to me (usually), it doesn't judge me and it doesn't try to fix me. My journal is a visual therapist, it is a source of comfort, a form of release to be able to open up to a blank page and pour out my emotions, concerns, struggles.

Another friend, Idelle, began writing morning pages two years ago. Now she reflects:

What began as morning pages now is a lifeline that anchors me to myself. Perhaps the healing of writing is the pause it imposes, a meditation that allows words to flow, uncensored. If I don't pause, I might forget that I'm alive, that I have choices....

For me, writing morning pages has become the daily practice of healing and centering myself. It keeps me in the picture, keeps me from getting lost in the busy-ness of life; reminds me to give priority to my own authentic feelings and goals. It reminds me that beyond the fragmented roles of mother, wife, cook, chauffeur, mediator, there is a real continuous self that is me. It connects me with that inner river of soul, unseen and healing, with those “real feelings” I discovered in seventh grade. It reminds me that beyond the roles I must assume there is a real continuous self that is me.—Judy Fettman, *Ann Arbor MI*

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***Granny's Gone Cyber!**

Since we're focussing both on grandmothers and on our new Internet Chapter in this issue, Peggy Talley's story just seems to hit the spot! Peggy lives in Gonzales TX. She says "After watching family and friends retire and lose interest in the world, I was determined to keep my mind as active as possible. 'Granny's Gone Cyber' is the beginning of the chapter on retirement in my life story." If you have a story to tell (especially one that fits our themes—see p. 5—and is about 700 words) please send it to us.

When I decided I would retire in 1997, I made a list of the things I wanted to have available at home when I no longer had to get up, get dressed, and be somewhere on time every day. A computer topped the list. I knew nothing about using a computer but I knew I had to have a way to communicate with the world when I no longer worked with people all day every day. I had been reading about the "Net," about all the places you could go and the things you could do. The young people I worked with said they'd help me get started, and they did. Two of them came one afternoon and hooked me up to this miraculous box.

Before I wrote this article, I sent emails to some of my "Grandma" friends who use the Internet. I had message back from three of them within thirty minutes. I had asked them to share with me some of the different things they do on the Internet besides the obvious: staying in touch with friends and relatives, playing games, writing letters, doing genealogical research, and reading up on matters of personal interest.

One answer came from the Cape Cod area. She told me that ~~she and her~~ husband now have two computers, so they no longer have to wait their turn. They recently started to plan a long vacation trip and are getting information about the area they intend to visit from forums and travel usernet. They also do all their banking online now, saving money on postage and auto expense. She searches the online auctions for books to add to her granddaughter's collection. She reads the daily newspaper online instead of subscribing. She has bookmarked all of her favorite recipe sites. She checks on the weather and traffic situations before she starts out for her daily walk. She takes pride in the fact that she and her husband insisted that their children "get with the computer thing or miss the boat!" One of her greatest pleasures is in communicating with their grandchildren via the Internet and email. The grandchildren think Grandma and Grandpa are "with it" because they are using computers.

Another friend writes that she uses her computer for shopping from the auction sites, buying her art supplies, downloading music and sending her friends and family greeting cards. She also teaches basic computer skills to a group of children. She told me about the time she had a very sick dachshund. She went to newsgroup sites about pets and got expert advice from very caring people. She is in daily contact with her sister who is the primary caregiver for their elderly mother who lives with the sister.

A third friend lives near Dallas and had a bout with breast cancer last year. She says her computer helped save her sanity during the days of chemotherapy and its after-effects, when she was too ill to venture out of the house. She is a nurse and re-

searched medical sites for the latest information on techniques and treatment for breast cancer as well as finding information on the latest drugs. She also uses her computer to make all her own greeting cards, downloads the daily New York Times crossword puzzle and plays games. She also admits to going to the online casinos to play the virtual slot machines!

I met all three of these women when I started visiting a chat site for the mature computer user. We have talked extensively with each other and with the others who visit that site. During the first few months I went there, something happened that solidified my interest in the use of the computer and made me believe that good things can still happen. One of the men who "talked" with us on the site was paraplegic. He operated his computer by blowing into a tube to type the words on the screen. He occasionally would disappear for awhile so he could recline his wheelchair to take the pressure off his spine. He was talking one day and suddenly typed "I need help." One of the women talking had been an EMS dispatcher. She said, "Type in your address if you can." He was able to do so. These two people were across the United States from each other, but she was able to keep him on the computer, call her local EMS, put them in touch with his EMS, explain the situation, and give them his address. Help was at his side within ten minutes.

That episode made the headlines in both their local newspapers. They were interviewed by their local TV stations. Several of the local men who talked on the site got together. They saw to it that his home had some needed repairs and that his especially-equipped van was put back into working order. Events like these don't get as much publicity as the bad things that happen to people when they chat on the net.

I started my retirement by learning to use my computer to travel the World Wide Web. Now I can't imagine life without being able to chat with my friends, send email to friends all over the world, and "talk" with my granddaughter on Instant Messenger. I am using the computer to write a book. I am the secretary of my art group and made the members a yearbook complete with colored pictures of some of them and their art work last year. I volunteer my time to help moderate interview on my favorite women's forum on the Internet and have "met" and "talked with" several authors that I admire.

This Grandma considers her computer to be her umbilical cord to the outside world.—Peggy Talley, Gonzales TX

Meet Other Life-Writers

“Where is Our Real Story?”

We have begun a series of interviews with women who are engaged in telling the stories of their lives through a variety of media: through words, music, art, textiles—in all the myriad ways women find to express their experiences. Some of these women are also teachers, encouraging other women to find a way to share their personal histories. If you have a suggestion for an interesting interview subject, please let us know!

For some time every day, let writing your life be your highest priority, your greatest challenge, your deepest practice. Climb the mountain of your hopes, dive the depths of your shadow, dance the beauty of your spirit. And as you do, watch yourself growing strong and more skillful, more willing to risk. These are the qualities that writing practice demands of us...and returns to us, multiplied more times than we can count.

—Susan Albert

Stories have such enormous potential. When I tell you the story of my life, I don't have to do anything special—just tell the truth of it as I lived it, with all its ragged edges and loose ends, all the hurtful and the healing bits. When you tell me your story, I don't have to do anything special, either: just listen and accept and reflect and be amazed. Together, telling and listening, accepting and reflecting, we are changed.

—Susan Albert

In 1997, Susan Wittig Albert founded the Story Circle Network. In the three short years since, the Network has grown to a sizable national organization which includes two chapters, a major grant project, and an extensive web site. For 30+ years, Susan has kept a journal, taught journaling and memoir writing, and committed herself to exploring her own life through writing. She's also the editor of the Story Circle Journal, so for this article, Sarah Silvus, a member of the Story Circle board of directors, asked the questions!

Sarah: What would you like us to know about you, Susan? What's important in your life?

Susan: Besides Story Circle? Is there time for anything else? (laughter) Well, I'd like you to know that I'm a mother (of three), grandmother (of six), and wife (of nearly 14 years, to my writing partner Bill Albert). I write for a living: two mystery series, several bi-monthly magazine columns, a bi-weekly radio show, and other odds and ends of writing projects. My work is important to me, and my family, and Story Circle. I cherish the place where Bill and I live, and my gardens, and our dog Zach.

Sarah: Lots of people are curious about the writing life. What's it like to be a writer?

Susan: I write two novels a year (one of them with Bill). Each one takes about four months to complete. When I'm writing, it's like any other job: I show up in the office by nine, knock off for an hour at noon, and turn off the computer around 4:30. Of course, there are phone calls and email (what was life like before email?) and the dog to walk and the laundry and so forth—all kinds of wonderful distractions. But I'm a fairly disciplined person, and I know that the book won't get written if I don't show up at the computer. And if the book doesn't get written, Bill and I don't eat and Zach doesn't get any puppy biscuits. That's a pretty powerful motivation, wouldn't you say?

Sarah: So you work at a computer? Have you always done it that way?

Susan: Omigosh, Sarah, I've just had my 60th

birthday! I'm old enough to remember writing on yellow tablets! Seriously, though: I like to write by hand, and my journal (which I've kept for over 30 years) is handwritten, in a cheap spiral-bound notebook with narrow-ruled lines, with a black-ink pen. Writing by hand forces me to write more slowly and to *feel* the words as they come out of my pen. But since the early 80s I've used a computer/word processor for all other kinds of writing. The computer is a wonderful tool which encourages me to write faster and better. It gives me the ability to revise infinitely, and every revision (I hope) makes the text livelier and denser and cleaner. For a period in the middle 80s, when my life was changing faster than I was, I kept my journal on the computer too. That way, I wrote more—and I needed to write *lots*, just to try to understand what was going on.

Sarah : Why do you keep a journal?

Susan: I journal because I want to remember who I have been, know who I am now, and imagine who I'm going to be when I grow up! If I don't write down what's happened, I'll forget it—and I want to *remember* my life, even the bad parts. So journal and memoir writing, for me, are ways to collect memories before they've faded, to keep them from vanishing forever into the flood of day-to-day experience. But I also write to discover myself, and to try to understand out why I'm doing what I'm doing. And I'm always exploring new scenarios for the future, thinking out what I might want to do, how I might change some aspect or another of my life. My journal is the real story of my life—or at least, as it seems to me, living it.

Sarah: Do you see a difference between journaling and memoir writing?

Susan: Well, we're working with life experience, so in that sense it's the same. But when I journal, I'm primarily dealing with my daily life, making a few side trips into the past and detours into the future. When I'm writing memoir, I'm reconstructing the past, trying to create a coherent picture of some important (to me) event. Also, when I'm writing memoir, I often visualize an audience, someone to

whom I'm telling my story. When I'm journaling, my audience is me, and it's very private. I'm fascinated by this boundary between public and private. Where is our real story? Is it what we tell to ourselves? Or what we tell to others?

Sarah: *But you've put your journal up on the Internet. That's not private at all!*

Susan: That's true—I do write a garden journal that goes onto the MysteryPartners website that I share with my husband Bill. But I intentionally write that journal for publication, with an audience in mind. I write about gardening in my fiction and in garden magazines, so my garden journal is an extension of my work. But writing a journal for publication is very different than writing for yourself. When I'm writing for publication, I'm always thinking of how a reader is going to respond to what I've written. When I write for myself, I'm the only reader. I think I'm more truthful, more honest, when I'm writing for myself. I enjoy reading published journals, like those by May Sarton—but these are the public version of private stories. There's more to it than that!

Sarah: *Let's talk about the Story Circle Network. Why did you begin it?*

Susan: I taught journal writing at the Jung Society in Austin for some years, and also taught writing workshops. Most of the participants were women, and they were all eager to write and share something of their lives. As I listened to them, I realized how rare it is for women to come together to write about their lives and how hungry we all are for that powerful and empowering experience. It was as if we had these stories inside of us, bottled up, and we were just waiting for someone to be willing to listen. I realized that many of us were voice-less, that we desperately need to be heard, and as time went along, I began to see how our lives might be transformed by the telling and sharing of our stories. I wrote *Writing From Life: Telling Your Soul's Story*, to encourage women to do, on their own, what we were doing in our classes and workshops.

But when the book was published, I began to feel that it wasn't enough just to put it out there and hope that women would discover and benefit from it. Other "self-help" authors encouraged me to start giving workshops and go on what they called the "lecture circuit"—apparently there's a lot of money to be made from that sort of thing! But I felt that I wanted to create something more enduring, and that an organization (which would outlive my involvement in it) would offer a more substantial empowerment to more women.

That's a long answer to a short question. I can sum it up by saying that Story Circle began with the three ideas. First, that women's stories are both valuable and vital—important to our families, to our communities, and to ourselves. Second, that we need encouragement to believe this and keep believing it. And third, that we need support to act on this belief—to write and keep on writing. We need to be connected to other women who believe, as we do, that telling our stories is one of the most important, life-enhancing things we can do for ourselves.

Sarah: *So in your mind, Story Circle Network is really a support network?*

Susan: Exactly! The *Story Circle Journal* is designed to carry the message that telling our stories is important to our psychological and to our physical health, and important to our families and communities as well. The Story Circles themselves, in various communities, help to motivate and encourage women, and to keep them connected with one another. In Austin, we also do this through the activities of our Austin Chapter—writing circles, reading circles, storytelling circles—and we hope that women in other communities will copy these ideas and start their own chapters. And there's the new Internet Chapter, which we hope will help women to stay connected and help one another stay true to the belief that telling and sharing our stories is vitally important.

Sarah: *Well, then, can you tell us a little more of your own story—the real story?*

Susan: I can tell you some of it—but of course, there's more, all muddled up, and with a great many contradictions! Like many women who were children in the middle of this century, I was born in one generation and grew up in another, and I have spent my life in meeting challenges and trying to take advantage of opportunities. It's been a chaotic 60 years!

I was born in 1940 and spent my childhood in a rural area of east-central Illinois, where I learned to love open fields and animals and gardens. It wasn't an altogether happy childhood, because my father was an alcoholic (although in those days, we didn't have a vocabulary for this—we just called it a "drinking problem"). I married at 18 and had three children before I was 22. In 1963, when my children were aged 2, 3, and 4, I decided to enroll at the University of Illinois, in Urbana, where my husband and I were living.

Choosing to go to college is an unremarkable thing today, but four decades ago it was an unusual decision for a young mother. At 23, I belonged to an organization called SOTA—Students Older Than Average—and I was the *only* mother in the entire freshman class of 1200! I had no women college professors during my undergraduate years, so there wasn't anyone I could talk to about my dream of becoming an English professor. But Betty Friedan had just written *The Feminine Mystique*, women were beginning to enter the career culture, and there was a powerful electricity in the air—a sense of high hopes and wonderful dreams. When I entered graduate school at Berkley in 1968, two other mothers entered at the same time, and we even had a tenured woman faculty member (but just one) to encourage our professional ambitions. I began keeping my journal in that year, so I can go back and re-read my hopes and despairs, my weariness, my joys. Those were extraordinary times, and I'm glad to have kept a record of them.

By 1972, I had a Ph.D. in English and a new job (at the University of Texas), but no husband—we divorced along the way. In 1974, I remarried, and for the next 13 years I taught English and held administrative positions in several universities in Texas and Louisiana.

Sarah: *You worked hard to create a successful academic career, but you left it in 1985. Why?*

Susan: I left because the stress of my work (I was a university vice-president) was making me physically ill and because I no longer wanted to pursue my ambition of becoming a university president. I'd just gone through my third divorce and was beginning to realize that I had followed an essentially male career model, sacrificing my relationship life to my professional life. After journaling about it for two years, writing out my fears and anger and frustrations and dreams, I decided to leave the university and become a full-time writer. I married Bill Albert in 1986, and we moved to his five-acre property 60 miles from Austin. Now we have 25 acres, and I have room to garden, time to write, and Story Circle to keep me connected with women who care about women's stories. It's a wonderful life.

Sarah: *We've been looking back—what do you see for yourself when you look into the future?*

Susan: To tell the truth, I have no idea what lies ahead, and I'm at a time in my life when I'm very comfortable with that uncertainty. I want to continue writing and gardening and living in the country. I want to stay involved with Story Circle, although I hope very much that other women will want to assume leadership roles in the organization. And as long as I have my journal, I'll be able to keep in touch with what my "Continuous Self" wants and needs [see Judy Fettman's piece, page 4]. Whatever comes along, I'll look forward to the experience of new chapters in my life!

You can keep in touch with Susan by reading her web journal. Go to www.mysterypartners.com and click on "Susan's Meadow Knoll Journal." She and her husband/writing partner Bill also publish an occasional free newsletter. For a copy, write to Partners in Crime, PO Drawer M, Bertram TX 78605.

Breast Cancer Survivor? Want to share 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.

A Summer with My Sister

by Mary A. Johnson
Oakland, CA

Hot summer
July August days
A breakfast of stewed prunes
homemade biscuits, with buttermilk
a little sugar added

Early morning
we sit on the edge
of the walkway
leading to our house
our bare feet resting on cinder sidewalk
still hot from the day before
hoping Aunt Rachel will beckon us
to go
to the neighborhood general store
for cornmeal and buttermilk
so
we race,
we race
with our dimes
We buy sugar cookies and ice cream
watch streets being tarred and sanded

We make mud pies
bake them in the sun on our brick stove
and play in a small space swept clean at the top of the coal house
play house with our BetsyWetsie doll
We stand under the shade
of the grape arbor
at midday
eat large sweet purple grapes
A wasp stings
my sister's forehead
after we throw rocks to tear down their nest
Screaming, we run to the house for mama

Saturday movie matinees in sandals and dresses
Sunday morning, bright and colorful
Sunday school cards
pictures on one side
Bible verses on the other
church with Mama
an afternoon walk
to window-shop downtown
a visit with relatives
Sunday night
Mama reads
we read
and listen to the radio
Top of the News: Gabriel Heater

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, write for our Reviewers Guide. We welcome your reviews!



First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers, by Loung Ung, Harper Collins 2000. Reviewed by Juanita Johnson, MA, CGT, CDE

A few weeks ago, I heard Loung Ung interviewed by Scott Simon on National Public Radio. Ung (who is the national spokesperson for the "Campaign for a Landmine-Free World," a program of the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation) poignantly explained what writing her book meant to her. She said that writing her story had helped her put into perspective what had happened to her family and thousands of others in Cambodia, and that writing had offered comfort to her as she was able to put her thoughts and feelings on paper. She said the writing had offered her a place to grieve and to heal. Ah, yes, the writing (or telling) of one's story can be transforming.

I wept as I listened to Loung recount her experiences as a child living in Cambodia in the mid-70s, under the Pol Pot regime. Although it did not make sense to want to read a book that I knew was going to be very sad, I felt compelled to go directly to the nearest bookstore and find *First They Killed My Father*.

Loung's father was a high-ranking government official. The family of father, mother, and seven children lived in Phnom Penh. When Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge army stormed into Phnom Penh in April 1975, the family fled their home and moved from village to village to hide their identity. Loung is separated from her family and trained as a child soldier in a work camp for orphans. The spirit of this resilient child is truly an inspiration. What her father has given her in the few years they had together sustains her long after his death. His regard for her, his belief in her spirit and spunk, as well as her mother's love, shout out from the pages and make your heart sing. As I finished reading the book, I was reminded that it is not how long we have to be a parent that matters as much as what we do with the time we have to parent a child. In her mind, Loung continues to hear what her father has told her about herself, and she survives and learns to thrive. *First They Killed My Father* is a grand testimony to the human spirit.

Juanita Johnson offers lifestory workshops in Norwich NY. To receive an information packet about her work, phone 607-336-8457, or email her at johnsonj@norwich.net.

Writing In Flow: Keys to Enhanced Creativity, by Susan K. Perry, Ph.D, Writers' Digest Books, 2000. Reviewed by Susan Wittig Albert

Most writers agree that their best writing takes place when they lose themselves in their work. In this unself-conscious and highly creative state, the words flow effortlessly and the writing seems to shape itself. In this new book, psychologist Susan Perry reports on the process of "flow" and suggests ways in which you can open yourself to this process as well. If you occasionally (or often!) suffer from writer's block, she suggests five keys to becoming a more fluent and creative writer: 1) have a compelling reason to write; 2) open yourself to all possibilities; 3) loosen up and allow yourself to play with words; 4) focus on your writing, rather than on you-as-writer; 5) let the writing take you where it wants to go.

What Perry says rang generally true for me; I know that my most productive writing occurs when my story takes over and tells itself. I also enjoyed (and learned from) the testimony of other writers, who speak freely in her book about the writing process. But I found the best advice of all in three words on page 168: "Just do it." To my way of thinking, the only way to become engrossed in your writing is to write...and write...and write. As you write, you'll discover your own techniques for getting lost, opening up, loosening up, focussing, and going with the flow—wherever it takes you!

*Writing has helped me heal.
Writing has changed my life.
Writing has saved my life.*

—Louise DeSalvo

*I am the only one who can tell
the story of my life
and say what it means.*

—Dorothy Allison



*I consider the gift of being
absorbed into my work the
greatest pleasure and the noblest
privilege of my life—*

Ursula K. Le Guin

*Why do I write? Because my
childhood disturbed me, pained
me, made me ask foolish ques-
tions. I write because oftentimes
I can't express myself any other
way, and I think I'll explode if I
don't find the words. I write for
very much the same reasons I
read: to startle my mind, to
churn my heart, to tingle my
spine, to knock the blinders off
my eyes. Writing for me is an act
of faith, a hope that I will dis-
cover what I mean by truth.*

—Amy Tan



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!

Three Generations

I have fond memories of my maternal grandmother. She was sixty-four when I was born, a tiny woman, although pictures of her, when much younger, reveal that she was not small then. Osteoporosis was probably the cause of her small stature when older. Grandma and Grandpa lived next door, so I was able to pop in frequently to visit.

Grandma's hair was long but very thin. As a young teen, I remember helping her roll it into a circular piece of black elastic that was placed on the crown of her head. In the summer, I accompanied Mom and Grandma to the grocery store. Grandma always donned a flat black felt hat with a very narrow brim. It sat on her head like a pancake. On one of these trips to the store, Mom made a comment about the hat, that maybe she was due for a new one. The next week, she had the same hat on but she had crocheted lavender violets and attached them to the narrow brim. The subject of a new hat was never mentioned again. Grandma passed away when I was sixteen and I still miss her.

Mom became a grandmother at age fifty-one, a warm, loving one who found time to sew Easter outfits and school clothes while working a full-time job. She was a grandmother only thirteen short years when breast cancer claimed her life. The immense void left by her death can never be filled.

I was forty-seven when my first grandchild was born. Ten years later, there are seven. I hope my grandchildren will have fond memories of me. I sew patches on Boy Scout uniforms, attend sport and school functions, and crochet afghans. I love watching them grow. However, I have a career, I dye my hair, and wear fake nails. I would say that I'm a new millennium grandma!

Karen Cooley
Sandisfield MA 01255

A Sprig of Mint

Summer, 1995

I am walking on the cement path that leads from the alley to the back door, through my friend Diane's garden, and spy a stand of mint. I pick a sprig and crush the leaves between my fingers. At once, without warning, that pungent scent transports me back in time to Vincennes, Indiana. I am eight, in the country-kitchen with my grandmother, Carrie.

"Anne, let's go and pick some mint for the iced tea for dinner," my grandmother says.

"Oh, yes," I say, as my eyes light up: being with my grandmother is always an adventure.

The screen door slams as we walk together onto the back porch, down the gray-painted wood steps, a few steps on the narrow cement path, then the grass, across the gravel road, and onto the lawn that faces the house and frames the garden. Grandmother beams as we near her beautiful, well-tended garden with its small lily pond. Her mint is mixed with the flowers and we search for it; of course she knows just where it is. Meanwhile, Grandmother tells me the names of the flowers—petunias, nasturtiums, snapdragons, baby's breath—how they like to be planted, and whether they prefer to live in shade or sun.

"There's the mint," I say, and we begin to collect the sprigs in a basket, along with flowers for the dinner table. Before we leave the garden, we look in the pond for the fish and carefully examine an about-to-bloom lily bud. The fish are keeping cool near the bottom; they will have to wait until late afternoon for their food. I notice my reflection in the pond. Two little frogs watch with bulging eyes. I am happy listening to my grandmother's voice, telling me things and answering my questions.

Now, my mind returns to Diane's garden, where I'm still holding the crushed mint. I blink in amazement at the power of scent to rekindle memories, vivid and complete with feeling, as if in the present. I suddenly realize that my grandmother lives in my memory, reading and waiting to be summoned by a sprig of mint.

Ann K. Waldron
West Chester PA

Grandma Gaven

When I was very young, I lived right across the street from my grandparents. I learned to cross the street by walking to their home. *"Look up; look down, before you cross the street. Use your eyes. Use your ears. Then use your feet."*

I loved the early mornings at Grandma's the best. Mom would watch me cross the street as soon as Grandma got home from early Mass. The whole place smelled like the coffee percolating on the stove. I'd snuggle up on her lap in the front room. We'd look out the big window over the radiator, listening to the heat come up, watching the street come to life.

After Grandpa died, Grandma began to develop Alzheimer's, or "hardening of the arteries," as we called it. My older sisters got to take turns sleeping at Grandma's house so

she wouldn't be alone at night. I was jealous of them, and angry that I was considered too young. After a bit, Grandma moved in with us. She slept in our bedroom, in Patty's twin bed. Patty, Meghan, and I slept next to her, cross-wise on the double bed. Patty was taller, and her feet stuck out over the edge. Grandma would cry to Mom that Patty was kicking her. I realized that it wasn't my grandmother's fault; it wasn't even really *her* any more. Still, it was unbearable to watch her become more dependent, less sure of herself.

Eventually, Grandma needed to be placed in a nursing home, which almost killed my own mother. She'd stop in every day on her way home from the factory and feed Grandma her dinner. "How was her night?" Mom would ask the nursing staff. They'd report that she was up all night asking the aides, "Is Tommy home yet? Has Eddie come in?" Lost in time, she was checking up on her siblings, all many years passed on—except for Eddie, who was well into his eighties. After a short time, Grandma herself passed on. I always believe that she finally just willed herself to go, somehow getting some of her old spirit back at the very end.

If you believe in heaven, and I do, Grandma Gaven is there. In her heaven, I'm sure that she's tending to her garden and making doll clothes for the little girl who still lives in us all.

Erin Boyle
Pittsburg PA

My Reflection

Oh my gosh, it's her nose I have! The bane of much of my existence is on the face of the woman holding me in her arms in the small black-and-white snapshot, circa 1947. It's Grandma. My mother's mother. She is responsible for my big nose.

I was close to Grandma, maybe because my mother and I lived with her and Grandpa after my father died. After my mother remarried, I regularly wrote letters to Grandma. When I became engaged, Bill and I drove back to where she lived, now alone in a little apartment. She had pulled the curtains back from the window on the second floor to watch for us, and she had lunchmeat, bread, and coffee waiting on the table after our long drive. We took her out that evening for a restaurant meal in the fanciest place in town. For the next few years, I continued to write my weekly letters to her. Then she died.

She was my only grandmother, and like my mother, not necessarily an easy woman to live with. Grandma regularly flew off the handle, complained, held grudges, and sometimes didn't speak to people for days, years, even decades. On the other hand, she wasn't worried if an ant crawled across a piece of bread while she was spreading jelly on it. "Some meat for my sandwich," she'd declare triumphantly. She liked to concock an unnamed dish made of fried pork sausage mixed with homemade noodles and heaps of sauerkraut, then baked in a huge rectangular pan. She ate sweet rolls and drank boiled coffee in the middle of the afternoon with various neighbor ladies, and told me that the uppity one across the street who wouldn't join them was "no spring chicken."

Grandma confided things to me. She said she'd had a younger brother who drowned in the horse trough on the farm where she grew up. I discovered recently that no record exists of such a brother having lived or died.

Grandma was no beauty, as was my enviable mother. A birthday snapshot shows that she was plain-faced and broad by the time she was 40. Still, I was dumbfounded to realize that my big nose was really hers. No wonder my cousins all had their noses fixed. Even my aunt had her nose fixed. My mother's nose didn't need fixing. But mine did and it didn't get done.

Today, after 32 years with a man who claims he never noticed my nose at all, I find the snapshot of Grandma holding me and I recognize my nose immediately, right there on her face. Why hadn't I ever seen it before? I guess I never noticed it. When I looked at her, I always saw Grandma, not Grandma's nose.

So now Grandma and I are both in the mirror. And our reflections don't show noses. As I peel back the layers of who I am and who Grandma was, I see instead of noses, two distinctive and remarkable women.

Marie Buckley
Hillsboro OR

Grandmothers

Grandmothers, in my experience, are people who love you unconditionally, make your life better with homemade cookies, and supply loving counseling from vast years of experience.

My maternal grandmother, Mildred Irene Blakesley, was this type of grandmother. In addition to all these attributes, she was also an accomplished pianist and a terrific story teller. She'd spend time telling her grandchildren what it was like growing up as a girl in the early 1900s. My years of writing to my grandmother until her death in 1993 were also memorable. She'd send me precious letters and beautiful cards.

My most memorable time with Grandma was the time I drove up to Sacramento CA with my husband and son, to visit her in the nursing home. Grandma told me that she would cheer others in the home by singing to them old hymns she learned in church. She got out of her bed and standing with her walker, sang the refrain from the hymn "In the Garden":

And He walks with me and He talks with me
And He tells me I am His own.
And the joys we share as we tarry there
None other has ever known.

Now long gone, I realize my grandmother was not only a connection between me and God, through her faith, but she was a connection with me to my mother, and to generations in the future.

Katherine S. Dillon
Corona CA

More True Words

Grandma's Gift

My paternal grandmother was strong-willed, intimidating, a strict disciplinarian, and instilled in her children and grandchildren the wonder of the simple pleasures in life: the taste of sweet maple syrup, the beauty of a ripened tomato, the smell of wildflowers, and the soft fur of newborn kittens.

When Grandma began to lose her eyesight and lost her driver's license, she became frustrated. An independent woman, she did not like asking anyone for help, but I knew she loved to drive to northern Indiana to pick fresh blueberries. So for several berry seasons, I arranged to drive her.

Through blurred vision, Grandma would study the scenery out of the passenger window, then ask: "Did they plant red petunias on the courthouse square this year? Has the wheat begun to turn color yet? Anyone fishing out on the lake this morning? Does it look like rain today?"

Driving while fielding her questions was difficult for me at first, but with each trip, I gradually learned to look around and give roadside reports to Grandma and her sister, who was often her guest on those trips. Our last blueberry-picking trip was in 1976. Sounding like a tourist guide that morning, I had pointed out three deer standing by the side of the road, when Grandma suddenly turned to the back seat and, reaching out to pat her sister's knee, declared, "Don't you just love to go with Marcy? She sees everything!"

I was stunned, because I had become accustomed to reporting just what I thought would be of interest to them. Still, I knew that in that statement was a special thank you from Grandma to me.

After moving in 1978, my husband and I drove to and from our new home in Minnesota back to Indiana. Constantly, I found myself looking for unusual sights to report to Grandma whenever we visited. Grandma's shoulders now rounded, her body slightly bent and her hands in constant motion as though brushing a crumb from the table, but her face glowed as I told her of all I had seen. Still, she would quiz me for more details.

Grandma died in 1979, and those trips to the blueberry patches became sweet memories. Today, however, I still find myself looking at scenery as if Grandma's ghost was sitting beside me. Chauffeuring Grandma and her sister had been my gift to her, but Grandma gave me an even greater gift. Asking questions, forcing me to look, she taught me to use my sight to fully appreciate all of God's natural beauty that surrounds us along life's highways. It was the ultimate gift.

Marcy Wooldridge
Lafayette IN

Winnie

This is a poem to my Grandma Winnie.
Even your name sounds old-fashioned.
I never knew another Winnie.
You were old-fashioned and
Sometimes you embarrassed me
With your rolled-down hose that showed
Beneath your hem.
Your hair had a hard middle part,
Usually crooked, always greasy.
I watched you take your oversized pink comb
To scratch your head.
Then you twisted your hair round and round,
Ending with a tight knot at the base
Of your not-always-clean neck.
Your fingernails were rough,
Broken off with dirt caked underneath.
I knew that it was because you
Worked alongside Grandpa in the dairy barn,
But I couldn't forgive you.
I just wanted you to be more like Aunt Annie
With her springy, white-fluffy hair.
One day you settled down at the pump organ to play
Pressing the pedals hard,
Your hands found their way to the keyboard.
Their knotted, misshapen fingers
Began the notes of "Sweet Hour of Prayer."
I was amazed at the holy music you made.
I wish I could go back in time to know you better.
I wish I could have talked to you, asked who you were.
Who are you, Winnie?
What are your dreams, Winnie?
Do you like your name, Winnie?

Bonnie Watkins
Austin TX

Grandmother

I am looking now at a photograph of my aunt as a young woman, standing next to my grandmother. While my aunt is smiling, Grandmother is looking sternly straight at the camera. Although she has been dead for forty years, this is the way I remember her, and she looks pretty much this way in all her pictures. My aunt assures me that it isn't just that she didn't like her photograph taken—she was, at least by the 1920s, a formidable character. She was born in 1880 in Arkansas, her mother over forty and her father over seventy. As a young woman she moved to a small town in Texas to live with her father. In her mid-twenties she married an older widowed doctor from a neighboring town. They had three surviving daughters before he died in 1926, leaving her to manage his farms, which did poorly during the Depression years. So perhaps she had good reason to have a grim outlook with little sense of humor. By the time my sister and I knew her, she also had physical ailments of one sort and another. In fact, we

were afraid of her because of her sharp tongue. We visited from Virginia twice a year and our mother prepared us each time by telling us what subjects to avoid (certain relatives, politics, religion, race, etc.).

In later years, she went to bed very early, and my sister and I had to tiptoe around after seven each night on the upper floor where we stayed. But at least we knew she wouldn't bother us up there. Once, however, she was devastated upon hearing about the death of some distant relative whom she had not seen in years. She came upstairs in hysterics until Mother could calm her down. I remember being terrified, both because she seemed out of control and because it was now clear that she could find us upstairs.

She was always concerned with money and property matters, since at times her situation was precarious. She met my father for the first time at my mother's wedding. He said she looked him straight in the eye and greeted him with "Mr. Pusey, my daughter will not be your chattel!" She seldom saw him after this and always called him "Mr. Pusey," never by his first name....

It seemed that she was the opposite of my other, more benevolent grandmother, but I do remember one occasion she was very kind to me—probably because it was so unusual. I had admired a knitted white and gold hat at a local store, but it was expensive. When we got home, she suddenly announced that if I really wanted the hat, she would get it for me, and actually smiled! I was delighted and grateful, and wore the hat for years....

Mary Faith Pankin
Arlington VA

Sugar, 1925 Bradish, Nebraska

1925 My nicknames are "Sugar" and "Babe." I was an only child of a Nebraska farm couple. In the bitter cold of October of 1925, I was born. There was a joke in our family. "Sugar was born in a snow drift. You can tell because her nose is always red." My daddy couldn't get the doctor on the telephone. The neighbors knew he was trying, to no avail. Four of them jumped in a car and brought the doctor back with them

1931 At age six, I started first grade at a country school. I had a choice for getting there. Go around a section of land, about two miles, or go across. But a big mean bull came with that choice.

1938 My father committed suicide. He had been despondent. The crops had failed for five years due to poor rainfall. The Dust Bowl was in progress. The signs of the Great Depression were at hand. My father knew from his voracious reading of the Congressional Record that more than crop failures were coming. The banks would be next.

1940 We moved to Sacramento CA and I enrolled in high school. The principal was very kind. I tried out for the orchestra on all the instruments. I settled on the cello and the principal found the money for it.

Mary Lee Harris
Round Rock TX

Jewel

Fifteen years, come May
The teen-ager thought she'd surely be dead by the year 2000
But instead
You.
Funny she imagined herself dead—but never once
You.

She didn't whisper "I love you" that last night
Only, she looked to the sky—Are you there,
Floating among the clouds like that photograph
of Jesus?

Her chest of drawers holds your box.
Old photographs, a kaleidoscope necklace, the last letter
in spidery, slanted script:
"Hoping to be better one day soon" ...
Sealed with a butterfly.
Pappa's leather coin purse next to your obituary.

She wonders why the miles were so far,
The telephone out of reach,
The opportunities lost.

Do you still make coconut cream pie in heaven?
She still tastes the flavor on her tongue.

It tastes like eternity.

Charlotte Hamrick
New Orleans LA

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:

August, 2000—Teachers & Wise Women (July 15)

November, 2000—Abundant Gifts (Oct. 15)

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

Story Circles come in all shapes and sizes! Here are descriptions of three different circles, the first an informal circle of friends, the second a group-led circle within a church community, and the third a formally-organized circle of women who are getting to know one another through the circle. While it's hard to generalize (each circle has its own unique qualities), it might be fair to say that it's easier to work with friends and acquaintances, and perhaps a little more difficult to work with people you don't know. But each of these circles offers a good example of what you might do in your own community. For more information, contact the leaders. And next time, we'll have a report on our first E-Circle, out there in cyberspace!

Anne K. Waldron reports on a Story Circle she has been leading in the **West Chester PA** area: "I have been meeting with two-four friends once a month. We agreed at the outset to study and write about the subject of Chapter 8 in *Writing from Life*, on our friends and community involvement. We have had varied lives, but all have been involved in many groups. For the first hour, we take turns reading the text aloud and discussing and commenting on it. Then we do a time writing for 10-15 minutes and read all or excerpts from our writing, depending on the size of the group. We plan to take one more time on that chapter [at that point the group had spent three sessions with it] and then work on another. It has been quite satisfying. [Anne: 1434 Manorwood Dr, West Chester PA 19382, AKWALDRON@aol.com]

Linda Wisniewski [628 Point Pleasant Pike, Doylestown PA 18901, lindaw@pil.net] facilitated a Story Circle at her church in Warrington PA for eight weeks. "We met on alternate

Sundays after church services, bringing our own bag lunches. We used the book *Writing From Life*, and the meditations. After a couple of sessions, other women volunteered to facilitate. We were aged 30s to 70s, married, single, divorced, gay, straight, poet, housewives, dancer, drummer, Christian, atheist: a typical Unitarian group! We promised ourselves at the start that anything shared would be confidential. This created a safe place for some very painful stories, as well as providing support and validation for our stories that we hadn't received anywhere else. This coming summer, we are planning to host another Story Circle as an activity of the Women's Spirituality Group."

Marie Buckley [1070 NE Sturgess St, Hillsboro OR, 97124, Marie@aracnet.com] made a special effort to create a Story Circle involving women who had never met each other. She says: "Our Story Circle is a six-week series that ends June 1. We meet on Thursday evenings from 7:30-9 p.m. at the local bookstore. I had a free introductory meeting that drew seven women. (Press releases went to newspapers and I posted a few flyers.) At the second meeting I had four women sign up. Each one pays \$20: \$4 each for Sessions 2-6. I am using a combination of the Story Circle Facilitator's Guide and *Writing From Life*, and some of my own ideas. We begin each session with a report on how our writing went the past week, then share something we've written. Then we do some writing together and share some of that—then go home with a 'Week's Worth of Writing Prompts.' [These writing prompts are emailed each week to members of the Internet Chapter.] Hopefully, there will be another summer session."

Meet Our Internet Chapter Officers!

We're delighted with our new Internet Chapter and very grateful to the three energetic, dedicated women who are helping to make Story Circle a virtual community. Come and join us as we share and our stories and grow together!

President Marie Buckley is a former secondary language-arts teacher and storyteller from Hillsboro OR, who has a special interest in working with older women to recall and share life experiences. Marie says: "I'd like to see the IC become a cyber place where women can sit down together, at our screens, and form friendships, find support, ask questions, and exchange ideas. It will give us the opportunity to share our writing."

Member Services Coordinantor Judy Fettman, a retired social worker living in Ann Arbor MI, would like to see the IC become a community for women interested in life stories. She is actively involved with the IC and facilitates our first E-Circle. "I envision the bulletin board, the chat room, reading circles, and round-robin sharing of writing as ways that women can connect in a meaningful, even spiritual way," she says. Judy is currently working on a collection of autobiographical pieces.

Secretary/Treasurer Peggy Moody, who also serves on the Story Circle Board and lives in Austin TX, believes that the Internet is a powerful tool that can help Story Circle spread its message to women everywhere. Peggy, whose children range in age from 4 to 13, works at home as a part-time programmer for IBM. "I hope the IC will help women all over the country reach out and connect with others to form new friendships and tell our stories to a new audience," she says.

Life Writing for Publication

Copyright: What is it and How Does it Work?

Every writer, whether or not she intends to publish her work, needs to know about copyright. Most of us don't understand the subject very well, so here are a few basic questions and answers that offer some practical ways you can protect your literary property.

What is copyright?

Copyright law protects any "work of authorship," which simply means anything you have written down. This includes fiction, poetry, articles, catalogs, brochures, advertisements, recipes, song lyrics—anything made of words. It does not protect facts (although it protects the assembling of facts in a certain order) or titles. It also doesn't cover inventions, names, or symbols, which are protected under patent and trademark law.

What do have to do to get my work copyrighted?

Nothing! The minute you put your original words into some tangible form (by dictating them, writing them, typing them) they are your literary property. They belong to you and no one can use them without your written permission. Before March 1, 1989, you had to place a formal copyright notice on your work to gain copyright protection; since that date, you no longer have to do even that. Still, it's a good idea to put this phrase on the first page of your work: "Copyright 2000 by Janet Doe. All Rights Reserved." While your writing is protected without these magic words, they do let people know that you take your work seriously and may keep someone from "borrowing" it without asking you first.

My son says I have to register with the government in order to get a copyright. Is this true?

No. Remember, you own the copyright to your work from the minute you've put it into tangible form! However, the U.S.

Copyright Office does offer an inexpensive (\$20 per work) registration service. All you have to do is fill out the application and mail it with a check and a copy of your unpublished work (two copies, if it has been published). Published works must be registered within three months of publication. Registration makes it easier for you to sue someone for infringement. Contact the Copyright Office, Library of Congress, Washington DC 20559, 202-707-9111, lcweb.loc.gov/copyright/.

How long does my copyright last?

This is a complicated question, but here's a simplified answer. For anything you've written since Jan. 1, 1978, the copyright will last for your lifetime plus 50 years. For anything you wrote before Jan. 1, 1978, your copyright is good for 28 years. After that, you must renew it.

If someone borrows my work without my permission, have I lost my copyright?

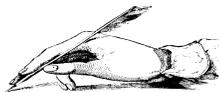
No. Your copyright belongs to you until you assign your rights to someone else.

I want to include a favorite quotation in my work. Will I be violating the author's copyright?

The copyright law allows what is called "fair use"—the reproduction of a small portion of a copyrighted work for a limited purpose (teaching, reviewing, etc.) You're probably safe if you borrow fewer than 350 words and cite the source. (On the other hand, you can't borrow even one line from a poem or song lyric without the author's permission.) Also, works no longer under copyright are in the "public domain" and may be copied without seeking permission.

<p>This membership is a gift. My name and address:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Please send me ____ free copies of the <i>Story Circle</i> brochure to share with family, friends, or clients.</p>	<h3 style="margin: 0;">Join the Story Circle Network!</h3> <p style="margin: 0;">One year, USA \$24; International memberships \$36</p> <p style="margin: 0;">New USA memberships are prorated at \$2 per month (\$3, International). To calculate your dues, count the number of months remaining in the year and multiply times \$2 (\$3 for foreign).</p> <p style="margin: 0;">Here is my check for \$_____. I'd like to become a member for the remaining months of 2000.</p> <p style="margin: 0;">Name _____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">Address _____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">City _____ State _____ Zip _____ - _____</p> <p style="margin: 0;">Foreign memberships: International Postal Money Order only please</p> <p style="margin: 0;">Mail to Story Circle Network, 1501 W. Fifth Street #107, Austin TX 78703</p>
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Mini-Stories: Our Readers Share



Marie Buckley of Hillsboro OR, left this intriguing comment on our Story Circle website guestbook: “I joined the Story Circle a short time ago and now the Internet Chapter. I’ve never been in a chat room—adventure awaits me! I have said I wanted to write a book my entire life. Now perhaps I will!”

Judy Fettman lives in Ann Arbor, where her creative activities keep her busy. “My self-writing began in seventh grade. I felt very shy and unpopular, was given a tiny red-bound diary, and wrote my heart out! As a clinical social worker, I wrote case histories; as a mother, I had time to write nothing! Now in my 50s, post-social work and 75% post-mothering, at last I have returned to writing from my heart—journaling, memoirs, and essays from real life.”

From Collinsville CT, **Nora Jamison** writes that she is “a woman who loves goats, the words, the magic of metaphor. I am a psychotherapist and a gatherer of women, and I am afraid to show my writing. But I will.” *Nora speaks for many of us who are hesitant to share our stories, for fear of the rejection and (perhaps?) disbelief others have expressed in the past. But as more of us share, more of us will be encouraged and empowered to share. Thank you, Nora, for giving voice to our fear.*

Kathryn Petro has recently become a member of the Austin Chapter. She says “I am a woman born in the early 1960s who is still coming of age, learning, exploring, and savoring life.” She adds, “I would be interested in extending to girls, to do some type of outreach which helps them to activate their voices, to believe in what they think and feel, to empower them by encouraging them to know themselves and be heard.”

Mary Johnson of Oakland CA, tells us that for many years, she has been a “closet writer.” She adds: “Due to the encouragement from my daughter I am able to share my life with other people through the Story Circle... I am now developing a new discipline and am thankful for this new beginning.” *We’re very glad you’ve joined us, Mary, and look forward to hearing more of your story!*

Mary Conley also lives in Austin TX. She is a “happily-married retired Navy Nurse. I’m a church goer, a volunteer, a Jazzerciser and a golfer. I have just finished an Older Women’s Legacy Circle workshop and it has started the creative juices a bit.”

Sue Anne Bisher is a New York native who has lived in many different places, since she served in the US Navy in six

states. She has a BS in Business and Public Administration from the University of Texas at Dallas. “I am medically retired by way of being blessed with MS. I write poetry, letters, short stories, and have finished my first novel (looking for a publisher and am contemplating the universe for that very thing).” *Way to go, Sue Anne!*

Want  a Pen

Partner?

Pen partners share life stories, support, and encouragement. Here are the names of members looking for partners.

Sue Anne Bisher
1111 County Road 132B
Kingsland TX 78639-3948

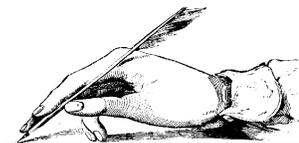
Kathryn Petro
5200 N. Lamar Blvd, #I-302
Austin TX 78751

Lina Tanner
88266 Elmont Dr
Florence OR 97439

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

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FIRST CLASS





Our Stories, Our Selves

These verses were written by Mary Conley, a participant in one of our Older Women's Legacy Circle workshops. Mary's image of "stirred souls" testifies to the emotions that 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