



Story Circle Journal

The newsletter for women with stories to tell...

Volume 4 Number 4, November 2000

It's Time to Renew Our Commit-

A Letter From Our President

Dear Story Circle Member:

Here at Story Circle, we are about to begin a brand-new year, the first in the new millennium—and we're already thinking about our resolutions for 2001. It may seem a little early yet to talk about this sort of thing (we haven't even had Christmas yet, for heaven's sake!) but there's one resolution we need to remind you of right now. Each one of us needs to renew her commitment to telling her story. And to support our individual and collective efforts to tell our stories, each of us needs to renew her commitment to Story Circle for another year, so that Story Circle can continue to help us tell our stories.

Why is this important? For one answer, read this moving letter from Ann McSwiggen of Carmel Valley, CA:

I am a visual artist who is just "coming out." I have chosen art as my path for this second half of my life. Many forms of creativity attracts me. I am into organizing my household in a major way. Two and half years of piled-up papers and a lifetime of old filed papers are being gone through. I've come to the end of my role as wife and mother of four and I'm living alone, managing my own home and property for the first time in my life. I write every day for myself. I do morning pages and journaling and write my dreams down. My goal in joining Story Circle is to make a space in my life to write my own story and have it all in one package, so to speak. Just for myself. And perhaps for my four children someday to know more fully who I am.

I e-mail friends every day, telling my story in bits and pieces. I do not do visual art every day. It is not a necessity to me as writing is. I must write. I had an appointment yesterday with the woman representing Seaside City Hall where I will have my public art show and afterwards I just had to cry and cry. Where did that come from? What could I do but get my paper out and write in the car, go to a place for coffee and write some more. It gives me such comfort just to put it all down. I don't value what I write in terms of sharing it with others. I have to work on that with the visual art I create, as well. I must learn to value what I have to offer. Sometimes I think about the fact that I have "given myself away" all my life. I am in the process of a huge transition, as just everyone in my life is. I finally got much of my art framed and up for a show in my home recently and I can see how I need to see it all there visually. I guess in a way, I need to do that in writing too. I have to write a bio for this public art show I am doing in January and I dreaded doing it. But I see how important it is. I looked at the long list of things I have done in my life and I am amazed I did all those things. Who was this woman? Who am I now? A different woman who has changed her focus in life dramatically—yet all the things I have done have brought me to this place.

When a woman tells the truth, she is creating the possibility for more truth around her.—
Adrienne Rich

*Storytelling is at the heart of life...
In finding our own story, we assemble all the parts of ourselves.
Whatever kind of mess we have made of it, we can somehow see the totality of who we are and recognize how our blunderings are related. We can own what we did and value who we are, not because of the outcome but because of the soul story that propelled us."*

--Marion Woodman

In This Issue

<i>It's Time to Renew....1</i>
<i>The Story Circle Network.....2</i>
<i>LifeStory Briefs.....3</i>
<i>Writing & Healing....4</i>
<i>Carol Landherr Contest Winner....5</i>
<i>Meet Other Life-Writers....6</i>
<i>Books for the Journey....9</i>
<i>True Words from Real Women....10</i>
<i>For LifeWriting Teachers.....18</i>
<i>A Story Circle News RoundUp....19</i>
<i>Mini-Stories From Our Readers....20</i>

Continued on page 16

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.

Editor: Susan Wittig Albert
Associate Editor: Marie Buckley

ISSN: 1093-7528

©2000 Story Circle Network
Copyrights to all contributed works
remain with the authors.

Membership Rates

One Year \$24 US
\$36 elsewhere

Foreign Memberships: International
Postal Money Order *only*, please

Editorial Address
Story Circle Journal
PO Box 1616,
Bertram TX 78605-1616

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

www.owlcircle.org

LifeStory Briefs: Practical How-to for Memoir Writers

Finding Your Voice

If you will read Donna Remmert's piece on pp. 6-8 of this issue, you'll discover this interesting paragraph, in which Donna describes something that happened during the process of writing her book:

When I first started writing stories from my childhood, I wrote from my adult perspective, reflecting back to those years. Then something magical happened: the little girl within me, the one that I had been and was now remembering, started writing my stories for me. Because her version of how things happened was so much more honest and entertaining than I can be as an adult, I surrendered to her influence, never knowing where it would take me from one moment to the next.

I love Donna's description what happened to her as a "magical event," for when we find our voices, it often *feels* magical. "Surrender" is a perfect way to describe what happens when our voice begins to emerge. And when that happens, it's much easier to tell our story.

A Voice of a Past Self

Donna found her voice by inviting one of her past selves—her child-self—to speak. From a child's perspective, the world looks different: less complicated, brighter and fresher. The famous memoirist, Anais Nin, writes, "*The poet is the one who is able to keep the fresh vision of the child alive.*" What would happen if you wrote about your childhood from your child's point of view?

To see how this might work for you, try this: choose an event from your childhood (a remembered birthday party, a family trip, a new house) and tell it from your child's point of view. For an example, go to page 8 and read the excerpt from Donna Remmert's book. Close your eyes and mentally go back to the time you've chosen, seeing yourself at that age, feeling what it was like to be *you* at that time. Then let that *you* tell the story. Like Donna, you might be surprised and very pleased by the voice that emerges.

A Voice of a Different Self

All of us are made up of different selves—a family/relational self, a work/professional self, a variety of past selves, a mystical/spiritual self. For a lovely example of a "mystical/spiritual" voice, go to page 10 and read Nora Jamieson's short essay, "Drifting." Here is the first paragraph:

I am drifting in my canoe. It is early morning on Long Pond and the sun's warmth infuses the cool night air. It quickens into a soft boil of breath that moves over the water. As I drift, I think about this. This brief reunion of warmth and cool, dark and light, stillness and movement. This brief moment where one blessed thing lives aside another before giving itself over completely. The wind, stronger now, slowly spins me, the canoe, my control into itself and out beyond the shelter of the island. I think about that old Gospel song. They say Gods goin to trouble these waters. Wade in sister, wade in.

Can you hear the difference in this voice? It's quiet, reflective, almost poetic. In fact, Nora uses several poetic devices: repetition (*drifting...drift...This brief reunion...This brief moment...*), sentence balance, even "ungrammatical" elements. The voice itself is almost like a prayer, inviting the speaker and her listeners to "Wade in sister, wade in." As you read her essay, you'll hear this prayerful voice over and over, asking to be woven into the fabric of creation, to be submerged in the depths of Mystery.

Often, our lives and our writing are dominated by a single, loud voice—the one we use for work, the one we use in our relationships. But you may have a different voice that would like to be heard: a quieter, more reflective voice, a prayerful, poetic voice. How can you let that voice speak?

Nora's reflective voice emerges when she writes about her experiences in the natural world. Would that work for you? If so, choose a natural landscape that centers you, a place from memory or from imagination. Go there,

*I feel that strong emotion
must leave its trace; and
it is only a question of
discovering how we can
get ourselves again at-
tached to it, so that we
shall be able to live
our lives through
from the start.*
—Virginia Woolf

*Life presents us with re-
peated opportunities to
face what we fear, what we
need to become conscious
of, or what we need
to master.*
—Jean Shinoda Bolen

*I have thought for as long
I can remember that
the asking of unanswer-
able questions and the
facing of irreparable
truths is our only consola-
tion for having
to live them.*
—Catherine Masden

Continued on page 16

Writing and Healing

Relational Theory and E-Circles

Psychologists tell us that frequent, regular, uncensored writing about our daily lives can be profoundly therapeutic, especially when we connect with others through that writing. 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.

Women's great desire for affiliation is both a fundamental strength, essential for social advance, and at the same time the inevitable source of many of women's current problems.

—Jean Baker Miller

Women are quite validly seeking something more complete than autonomy...a fuller, not a lesser, ability to encompass relationships to others, simultaneous with the fullest development of oneself.

—Jean Baker Miller

Nurturant work is not only for mothers, not only for parents even; it is the birth-right of every man, woman, and child. Without it, we shall never grow to our full stature.

—Carol Flinders

Reading my mail on my deck one hot day in August, I came across an article in the Stone Center's Spring/Summer Research report entitled, "Relational Theory Makes an Internet Connection." My curiosity piqued, I read on to learn that a group of mental health professionals who had attended a recent Jean Baker Miller Training Institute have continued their group relationship via e-mail and chat rooms, and reported that "the group's cyber connection illustrates some of the central ideas of relational theory." In brief, relational theory states that while men develop a sense of autonomy and maturity through separation from their parents, women come to maturity via a different route, one of a continual process of "self-in-relation." Janet Surrey, in her groundbreaking research, postulates that women become their true selves through relationships with other women when a mutual empathic understanding and mirroring back takes place between them, giving birth to an expanded sense of self.

I will never forget that sense of "Aha!" for this is exactly what our e-circles are about. If you will refer to page 2 of the Story Circle Journal, you will read that 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." The primary vehicle for doing this is participation in a Story Circle, or an "e-Circle" ("e" as in "electronic" or as in "e-mail").

Many of you have participated in one or more of our local Story Circles or nation-wide e-circles. Each circle of 6 or 7 women is facilitated by a group leader, who suggests topics that lend themselves to life writing. Stories are then shared with the group and responded to by group members, offering feedback, sharing similar experiences, and leading to more writing and more feedback. We have found that as the circles continue, a great deal of trust and intimacy can evolve, and deeper and more true versions of women's stories can be written. Women find themselves evolving more authentic selves as they explore with others their own stories.

I was familiar with relational theory from attending a training institute several years ago and to me, a feminist, thought it made a lot of sense. Yet, when I subsequently put my social work career aside, and began doing more with my interest in the arts, relational theory, along with other psy-

chological theories, went on the back burner. But now, having developed a passionate interest in establishing and nurturing SC e-circles, the flame of relational theory suddenly leaps to life again and offers me a framework I solidly believe, one that supports my sense of mission involving myself with Story Circle.

Our e-circles are unique in that, with very few exceptions, none of our members has ever met face to face. All of our interactions have been mediated by computer, through either e-mail or chat rooms. One might assume that with this rather great limitation on relationships that it might be difficult to establish the empathy, trust, and intimacy necessary for the kind of engagement with each other that is required to truly "listen," mirror each other, and grow. But we have found this not to be the case. Read some of the comments offered by our e-circle members.

I have been blessed since I found and joined Story Circle... (Other women's) stories have triggered memories that make me want to write more stories for them. We are learning more about each other with every new story that we read. We are also learning more about ourselves with each story that we write...The encouragement and recognition from women writers...has made me grow in ways I would not have thought possible. —P.T.

I identified with so much in it (a story written by another e-circle member). I kept saying, "yes, it was like that, yes, I remember that and felt like that! --M.B.

The Internet Chapter of the Story Circle has worked perfectly for me. ...it's amazing to me that I can sit in my living room and "chat" with friends across the country and I don't even have to clean the house first! --E.B.

Congruent with the Stone Center model of relational theory, we in the writing e-circles strive to create safe, nurturing communities for self-disclosure and mutual growth, and we seem to be succeeding. (In the next issue, we will take a look at the special limitations of computer-mediated groups, and how we try to mitigate those effects on our cyber-friendships.)

To experience this self discovery and mutual growth, I recommend that each of you who is serious about "writing for life" join a local Story Circle or join one of our writing e-circles. Look on your community bulletin boards in libraries

Continued on page 17

Winner of the Carol Landherr Prize

Mrs. Backus

In August, we failed to print Mary Faith Pankin's memoir, "Mrs. Backus," first place winner in the Carol Landherr LifeWriting Contest. Here it is, with apologies for our oversight. Mary Faith is a cataloger at the Gelman Library, George Washington University, Washington D.C., where she has worked since 1982. Over the last 25 years, she has published articles in library and historical journals and short essays in Story Circle Journal. In her leisure time she enjoys reading detective fiction.

When I attended my twenty-fifth girls' high school reunion in 1986, I walked around the campus and was amazed at how little the look of the place had changed. I glanced up at the second-story classroom where I learned so much, and it seemed impossible that Mrs. Backus wasn't still there, teaching as she had for so many years. A twinge reminded me that she had died the previous fall and that I would never see her again.

Mary Elizabeth Dulaney Backus grew up in Conway, Arkansas in the early years of the twentieth century. Her father was the minister of an impoverished Methodist church. When it came time for college, she attended Vanderbilt on a scholarship. She recalled how she lived on surplus buttermilk from the dairy much of the time, because money was so tight. After graduate school she taught at a poorly funded girls' school, some of the time for room and board only, until she came to Southern Seminary in Buena Vista, Virginia in the early 1930s. This was where I met her in 1959.

I had dropped out of another school midway through my junior year because of illness, and my parents thought it best for me to finish high school within commuting distance. "Sem" had a dubious reputation as a horsy and academically unrigorous institution with the pretensions of a finishing school. So it was with some trepidation that I met Mrs. Backus in the teachers' lounge so that she could assess my knowledge of French, the subject she taught. She was only five feet tall and scrawny, with dowdy glasses. Her graying reddish hair was short and straight and contributed to an almost childlike appearance in spite of her middle-aged wrinkles and ubiquitous unfiltered cigarette. Her kindness was apparent in her smile, and I liked her immediately. In the next two hours she gently probed my knowledge of grammar, and at the end of the time told me that she would welcome me to her French II class.

Here is the first thing she taught me: to have confidence that I could understand not just concrete facts that I could memorize, but also abstract ideas and literary nuances -- and even more importantly, to get pleasure in the exercise. The next year in French III we began to read short stories by Maupassant and classical dramas by Racine and Corneille. She explained the historical

background of these, and showed the human feelings behind the rhymed couplets. She never overcame the Arkansas twang to the point of having a "good" French accent, but somehow that didn't matter because her enthusiasm for the language and culture was infectious. I was in a play that year, as a beggar in Garcia Lorca's "The House of Bernarda Alba." She invited my parents and sister and me over after the play and served wonderful homemade brown bread. From time to time over the years she served this bread, but couldn't give out the recipe since she made it by "feel." So this was something she didn't teach me, and the secret died with her.

The summer of my graduation in 1961, my parents agreed that I could accompany her for the summer to Paris. Talk about an education! I inhaled Parisian culture. It was a magical time. Every day we visited another museum and saw another play or opera. We saw Rudolf Nureyev dance and heard Joan Sutherland sing. We saw a dozen plays at the Comedie-Francaise. We went to the Folies-Bergere, where I was mildly shocked by the nudity. I learned to drink (watered-down) red wine with dinner, and to eat an artichoke, but my attempts to smoke Gaulloises like her met with coughing defeat. I remember her saying how it was fine to smoke while walking on the street in France, although it would be considered trashy behavior at home. She wrote to her husband Ed every other day without fail, and encouraged me to write my parents often.

Here is the second lesson she taught me, a sad one: cigarettes will kill you. She stopped smoking several times over the years, finally for good in her 70s, but it wasn't soon enough to prevent the emphysema that eventually killed her. When Mother and I visited her in the hospital near the end, we looked like ghosts in the hospital gowns and masks we had to don before entering her room. I told her how her wonderful teaching had helped me in my job and how much that and her friendship had meant to me. Struggling for breath, she was dazed and bewildered, and I knew this would be our last meeting. Her father lived to be 97; by that standard her death was untimely.

Here is the third thing she taught me: in love or friendship, age does not matter. Through the

*To be one woman,
truly, wholly, is to be
all women. Tend one
garden and you will
birth worlds.*

—Kate Braverman

*If you have knowledge,
let others light their
candles at it.*

—Margaret Fuller

*The human contribu-
tion is the essential
ingredient. It is only in
the giving of oneself to
others that we
truly live.*

—Ethel Percy Andrus

*If someone listens,, or
stretches out a hand,
or whispers a kind
word of encourage-
ment, or attempts to
understand a lonely
person, extraordinary
things begin
to happen.*

—Loretta Girzartis

Continued on page 17

The Littlest Big Kid: My Self-Publishing Experience

by Donna Remmert

Donna Remmert's professional background includes teaching high school English and working as a journalist. Interpreting literature and writing creatively was the impetus for her interest in dream understanding; for more than 20 years, she has pursued an informal study of Jungian psychology, especially as it relates to dreams. She is past president of the Austin Chapter of Story Circle Network. For a sample of *The Littlest Big Kid*, go to page 20, where we reprint an excerpt.

Everyone says that I am good at acting so I've decided that when I grow up I'll be a movie star. Maybe a singing movie star like Mama wanted to be before she had babies. My aunts and uncles also say that I am the cute one of Glen's girls so I will probably be beautiful when I get old enough to go to Hollywood. Actresses have to be beautiful, except for Ma Kettle. I don't want to be like her because she's just a plain ol' housewife in the movies. I want to be a glamour queen!

We build high ski jumps that girls don't go down except for me. I did on a dare made by Warren Fassbender who wants to be my boyfriend. It was scary because the jump is really for older kids. Joan said I was showing off and that I could have broken my neck. Well I didn't break my neck, so there! And after that Warren became my boyfriend.

I've been creating stories from the events in my life since childhood, promising myself that I'd write them down someday. That someday finally arrived 4 years ago, when my husband and I moved to Austin and began building our retirement home. Most of my "stuff" was in storage and I had no social or work obligations. My life was scaled down to two projects, building a home and building a more conscious awareness of myself through telling stories about my childhood. Both projects were about self expression. Life was good!

The only contact with the world beyond my projects was the Jung Society of Austin. I called for a catalog and as synchronicity would have it, Susan Albert's writing workshop was being offered. I took it and it triggered just the right flow of creativity in me to produce my book.

It took two years to write and another year to proof, edit and print. Building a house was my creative work, this was my creative play. I'd estimate that I was at my desk playing about 2-4 hours almost every day. Not counting all the hours I spent creating stories while doing something else besides - driving, napping, doing dishes, listening to my husband...I was always thinking about my childhood and ideas would come to me at very strange times. While at my computer writing, I laughed, I cried, I even smelled things from my childhood. It was fun!

My Audience

I initially defined my audience as family and maybe a few close friends. This would mean printing about 100 copies in some way, probably off my computer in booklet form. Then, I realized that my stories appealed to more than just family and a few friends and I started feeling quite conflicted over how to print. I wanted to print a real book. But, printing a real book would mean marketing, selling. I didn't really want to do that. I never seriously entertained the idea of finding a publisher because of the odds against succeeding

and because this would mean changing my stories in ways that may not be best for my original intended audience of family and friends.

Some Challenges Along the Way

While trying to get organized for writing, I thought my challenges would be remembering my childhood and then writing stories that would be interesting. The solution to both challenges was magical. This is how I describe it on the back cover of my book: "When I first started writing stories from my childhood, I wrote from my adult perspective, reflecting back to those years. Then something magical happened: the little girl within me, the one that I had been and was now remembering, started writing my stories for me. Because her version of how things happened was so much more honest and entertaining than I can be as an adult, I surrendered to her influence, never knowing where it would take me from one moment to the next...."

That's exactly what happened. I got myself, the adult author (the critic, the censor, the inhibited one), out of the way and that's when my stories flowed magically and became entertaining. Remembering was easy after I found my voice, the present-tense voice of a kid, and the book seemed to be writing itself.

I also need to mention that my 4 sisters and 2 brothers helped me remember. I sent them stories, they wrote in the margins and we e-mailed each other frequently.

Another aid to my writing process was my Story Circle, five friends who meet once a month to read to each other. All of my stories were read and many changes were made because of reactions to them. They picked up on words I used that didn't belong to the period and some of their stories influenced mine. It really helps to be able to read to others and receive feedback.

Publishing Decisions

My original intention was to print off my computer. Easy, inexpensive. The fantasy of printing a real book, however, wouldn't go

away. In fact, it got stronger so I called my son Stephen, a graphic designer. I asked him about designing and then printing a book and when costs seemed prohibitive, Stephen filled me full of enthusiasm for doing it anyway. "You've been practical all of your life, Mom. It's time for you to be wild and crazy and just do it! Think of all the time you've spent writing, you deserve this! Do it!" Such a good son he is!

It's expensive to make a book, yet this is what I wanted to do and I wanted to give the book to some people - my sons, my sisters and brothers, my nieces and nephews, my aunts and uncles (to share with their families, my cousins) close friends. I also wanted to save copies for children in the relation who are yet to be born. My grandchildren!

We decided to print 200 books, 100 to give away and 100 to sell, in order to pay for the possibility of printing again. This is not mass marketing. I simply wanted to have a book available for anyone wanting a copy and it seemed like a good idea, considering costs, to sell some. By this time I knew that my book was good and that it was about more than just me and my family. It's about a time gone by and the way it was for me is the way it was for most kids living then. I felt confident that I could sell 100 copies word of mouth.

We selected acid free paper so that my grandchildren's children will be able to read the book someday. We chose to photocopy the text because it was the least expensive method of printing. Also, photocopy prices aren't dependent upon volume so printing again instead of printing all at once wouldn't be more expensive.

This was not the case with our 4-color cover; for printing again would cost much more than printing enough the first time. Therefore, we paid \$150 more to print 1000 covers instead of only the 200 we needed.

Our printing decisions were made but the book was yet to be designed. I flew to Boulder and spent five days watching Stephen work. He inserted my floppy disc (the book) into his computer and within about ten hours, the text looked like pages in a book. The work was tedious and afterwards I needed to proof the entire book again. Of course I found mistakes and changed one thing after another so Stephen had some more tedious work to do. Such a good son!

The cover design was fun. We chose my third grade school picture because it shows my Toni Home Permanent hair that I complain about in a story. I wrote words to songs from the 40's as background cover design because we sang these

songs as a family, while driving to Grandpa and Grandma Van Straten's house every Sunday after church. The key pictured on the cover was Grandma and Grandpa Schwister's house key. It was hidden in Grandpa's old brown pants that were hanging on the back porch. The Tootsie Roll was our big treat to look forward to while quarantined with scarlet fever. And the beans are about my dad's way of keeping us out of trouble every summer, by planting an acre of beans for us to pick and earn spending money. Each image contained a story; the cover was finished.

We took the disc containing the text of my book to one printer and the disc containing the cover to another. Our work was done and I flew home feeling thrilled over having shared such an awesome project with my son.

How much did it cost? \$1500 to print 1000 4-color covers and \$1500 for printing and binding 200 books. Stephen wanted to do his work as a gift to me and I insisted upon paying his full fee of \$2500. The first 200 copies of my book cost \$5000.

Has it been worth it? This one copy is worth \$5000 to me. It's one of the best things I have ever done for myself, and one of the best things I've ever done for my family. My nieces and nephews love the book so much that they've asked for extra copies to put into plastic bags and save for their children, now babies, to read to their children. I'm the first to put our family stories onto paper—my book is a treasure!

I'm awfully glad we printed 1000 covers because the 100 copies I printed to sell are almost gone. I've been selling them for \$12 each even though they cost me \$25 each. It's not such a losing proposition, however, because I've almost sold enough books to pay for a second printing of 200 copies. It's costing only \$1500 this time, because we already have the covers and I've already paid for the graphic design.

Okay, so maybe it is a losing proposition. I don't care. I wrote this book as a way to remember myself and entertain others. This is fun!

Responses to the Book

I knew in advance that my family and friends would love it. That had been tested by sending rough drafts to my brothers and sisters and by reading each story to my Story Circle friends. I got lots of encouragement, lots of help from them. I sent a few stories to people mentioned in the book, to make sure I wasn't

My 10th birthday.

Doris and I planned the games for my party and we brought Dori's phonograph and records so that we could dance with boys. Everyone got pretty wild because of jumping off the beer bar and attacking boys. So we didn't actually play the games and the boys wouldn't dance. When I asked one, he ran like crazy and I chased him like crazy, up the back stairway and behind the stage where it's real dark and romantic. Someone said Virginia kissed Whitey back there. She probably did. It was a great party.

Grandma sure does have lots of aches and pains. It's because she got captured when she was a little girl. Honestly, it's true. Jimmy said so. It was when she lived in the country, way outside Black Creek where it was wild. And another thing about Grandma is that she has lots of chore to do because her house is really, really old-fashioned. She doesn't even have an icebox so she keeps milk in her cellar... and cooks and bakes in a wood stove which makes the house very hot, even on winter days.

stepping over the line.

Would my cousin Jackie see the humor in my story about her bedwetting? I got an okay.

Would my friend, Doris, mind my mention of her father's drunken behavior? I got an okay. I think that when something is true, most people in today's world feel liberated by telling about it.

Not always, of course, and I have done my share of worrying about whether I've hurt feelings. So far, no one I've heard from has been offended; they seem able to laugh at themselves and how things were back then. This is another reason I liked telling my stories as though I were a kid. I was able to tell the truth but leave room for doubt since, after all, I'm just a kid with a wild imagination.

No one has ever written a book about life in Black Creek, Wisconsin, population 492, then and now. Mine is the first and news of it has spread like wild fire. I'm getting lots of letters and phone calls from people wanting a copy. The book is now in the town library and people who have read it there want copies of their own. Maybe I should print 800 more books, using all of those covers in reserve. Not that expensive, actually, and at \$12 a book, I may even pull myself out of the red!

A Few Things I'd Do Differently

I'm not a perfectionist. There are spelling and grammatical errors, the right margin is smaller than the left. Sometimes I cringe when I see these mistakes. Mostly I tell myself that it doesn't matter.

My biggest mistake is something that I've only recently realized. I should have included stories about my high school years in the book. I thought at the time that they wouldn't be as entertaining. Well, now that I've written and tested them out in my Story Circle, I realize that they're as entertaining as anything written about my early childhood.

The fact is, I may have to publish again and again because I'm so completely in love with the process of personal writing that I think I'll be writing about my entire life. I'll stay with my present tense "voice", as though I'm the age that's being written about and I think it will be fascinating to watch myself grow up and even into old age.

When I fantasize publishing stories from my entire life, I see that my stories are enough like other women's to make it a good read. That's the feedback I've received from "Littlest Big Kid" and I think it could apply to stories about my entire life.

Who am I to think that my life is so fascinating that others would want to read a book about me? In my epilogue I explain myself by saying this: "What I most treasure about my childhood is how I felt wonder and amazement over phenomenal happenings almost every day of my extremely ordinary life." I think that this is one of my gifts even as an adult—to see the beauty in ordinary living. This is what I'd like to share with you and others in my writing and I think that this desire comes from my heart more than from my ego.

Becoming a Big Kid

Excerpt from *The Littlest Big Kid*

by Donna Remmert

Our old-fashioned house is warm and cozy and it's spic and span clean. It smells like toasting bread for breakfast, baby powder for sprinkling onto baby bottoms and bleach from the diaper pail that sits on the top step going down to the basement. Best of all, I like the big ol' pantry off the kitchen with shelves that go way up to the ceiling. But I can get into big trouble in the flour bin that's in the pantry so Mama has to go with me whenever I need a cracker. The pantry smells like cookie spices that I get to taste when it's my turn to lick the spoon.

The very first thing I, by myself, remember is the day Mama came home from the hospital with Patsy Anne. She got born on July 8, 1940 and it's in her story that all the doctors and nurses at the hospital said she looked like baby Jesus. We have a picture of baby Jesus. It's over Mama and Daddy's bed and I sometimes pretend that it's Patsy. Jesus looks like a girl in the picture but I know he's not because I asked Mama.

The reason I remember the day Mama came home from the hospital with Patsy is because it's the same day I became a big kid. "You can sleep upstairs with Joan from now on," Mama said from the bottom of the steps of our old-fashioned house, "because you're already three and that's old enough to be a big kid." I was at the top of the stairs and Mama said I should practice walking down the steep, scary steps rather than turning around and crawling down the way I knew how. I had to stretch my arm as far as it could stretch to reach the railing and go way down low with one leg and then the other to reach the next step. I made it all the way to the bottom and into Mama's arms just fine, even with my bottom lip quivering like I might cry. Mama says I'll get used to it so I know I will.

I have to be a big kid now because my baby sister Patsy needs my crib. I tried to convince Mama that Patsy could use Bonnie's crib but Mama said no because Bonnie is only one year old and that's too young to be a big kid....

Being a big kid is a good thing because I don't want to be a baby one single bit. But does this mean I have to go potty in our spider-webby, stinky-poochy outhouse that's dark with no light to turn on?...I asked Mama what to do. "Since you are the littlest big kid, you can use the potty chair in the kitchen for a while longer," Mama decided. This is why being the littlest big kid in the family is the best of all....

You can purchase your own copy of Donna Remmert's book, *The Littlest Big Kid* by sending your name, address, phone number and a check for \$15.00 (\$12 for the book, \$3 for postage and handling) to: Donna Remmert, 3301 Far View Drive, Austin, TX. 78730.

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!

Tender at the Bone: Growing Up at the Table by Ruth Reichl, Broadway Books, 1999, ISBN 0767903382

Ruth Reichl has been a food editor and restaurant critic for the LA Times and NY Times and is now the editor of Gourmet Magazine, but if you're thinking that **Tender at the Bone** is just another foodie book, think again. Sure, it has recipes (18 of them, most simple, all tantalizing) and plenty of mouth-watering descriptions of food, cookery, and dining. It's also a tasty, tantalizing book, a smorgasbord of entertaining character sketches and often hilarious food adventures.

But **Tender at the Bone** has its serious side. It tells the disturbing tale of a family thrown into chaos by Ruth's manic mother, the "Queen of Mold" whose idea of a gourmet meal is a stewed two-week-old turkey carcass. It is an almost-classic rite-of-passage journey of a lonely young girl whose dysfunctional parents abandon her to the care of others, leaving her to discover that good food can comfort the lonely (Alice's Apple Dumplings), that food can seduce the unwary (Devil's Food Cake), and that food always expresses our deepest cultural and familial longings (Serafina's mother's Coconut Bread). As she meets helpers who encourage her to outgrow her controlling mother, Ruth graduates from waitress to commune cook to restaurant chef to food writer, stumbling into her vocation along the way in this wonderful journey of self-discovery. Food is a "way of making sense of the world," Ruth says in an introspective moment, or as another character succinctly remarks, "I have to keep tasting."

Tender at the Bone is a sweet, funny, light-hearted memoir whose lessons are dished out with a deft hand. At the same time it is a revealing self-study that offers insights into the forces that limited Reichl during her childhood and teen years, as well as those that brought her new experiences. The author's insatiable appetite for life, her compelling need to "keep tasting": to savor adventure, sample many lifestyles, delight in diversity, relish discovery, learn, create, and grow. It is a nourishing book, in all its various dimensions.

Briefly Noted

Miriam's Kitchen: A Memoir by Elizabeth Ehrlich, Penguin Books, 1997, ISBN 014026759X.

Elizabeth Ehrlich is a Jewish American woman who rejected, for many years, her connection to the practices of her Jewish faith. It is only through her discovery of her mother-in-law Miriam's kitchen and the foods prepared there that she learns to value the traditions that shaped her own family, traditions brought from the Old World and translated into the New. Through entries in her journal, through letters, memories, stories, and above all, through Miriam's recipes, Ehrlich recreates for us the story of one woman's spiritual awakening and her self-guided journey into the lives of her foremothers, who nourished their faith and kept it alive and growing in difficult times, difficult places, through pain, separation, and even despair. This often funny, often heart-rending, always beautifully-evocative book is a powerful testimony to the importance of women's domestic contributions to the survival of their families, their communities, and their faith.



Disaster was always simmering just below the surface and we cherished every peaceful moment with my mother. By then we were starting to suspect the truth, that my mother was a manic-depressive... [Dad and I] both believed that my mother's moods were our personal responsibility. Mom never knew who she was going to be when she woke up in the morning and Dad and I danced around, doing our best to avert trouble. When we somehow managed to do it we were so grateful we giddy with relief....

Ruth Reichl

What made me value my inheritance as treasure, not burden? The luck that has placed me, as an adult, in range of Miriam's kitch. My mother-in-law Miriam, born in a small village in Jewish Poland, survived the Holocaust. A keeper of rituals and recipes, and of stories, she cooks to recreate a lost world, and to prove that unimaginable loss is not the end of everything. She is motivated by duty to ancestors and descendants, by memory and obligation and an impossible wish to make the world whole.—

Elizabeth Ehrlich



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!

Drifting

I am drifting in my canoe. It is early morning on Long Pond and the sun's warmth infuses the cool night air. It quickens into a soft boil of breath that moves over the water. As I drift, I think about this. This brief reunion of warmth and cool, dark and light, stillness and movement. This brief moment where one blessed thing lives aside another before giving itself over completely. The wind, stronger now, slowly spins me, the canoe, my control into itself and out beyond the shelter of the island. I think about that old Gospel song. They say Gods goin to trouble these waters. Wade in sister, wade in.

I am drifting in my canoe. Listening to the wind whisper the fog into the trees surrounding this bowl of lake. I am drifting, waiting for the relief of ecstasy, of entering a world not of human culture but one that is moved by a deeper imperative than mind or plastic desire. I drift and pray to be taken outside myself into the world of the beaver, the otter, the heron, the hawk, the other. I want to be included in that world.

I am drifting in my little boat, held in my mother's watery palm with trees and sky and clouds and the reflection of the pump and shush of the loon's flight above me. Coming in from Nickol's Pond, a morning ritual, they arrive one by one. I can feel the denseness of its flight, like a storm cloud ponderous under its weight of water. I wonder what keeps it there, in the sky, the loon, why it doesn't fall to earth. It seems sheer will keeps it aloft. And perhaps grace. It is not at home up there.

The cedar waxwings undulate and dart, fall into the currents. Little bandits showing off, the sky is home to them. But not the loon. I am touched by what seems the loon's sheer earnestness, such willingness to leave the comfort of the water to follow the imperatives of instinct. Perhaps the loon is meant to live in water but must leave home to survive. What we must do to follow our desire to live. What we must suffer to again and again come home to our elemental nature. The loon is willing to be awkward, desperate, flapping as fast as she can for a greater calling.

Can't I at least do that?

I count, there are nine loons gathered this morning. I have never seen so many on this small pond. I leave the spaciousness of the driving, the wind, the sun.

I enter this precise moment where nine women of Brigit tend the fire at Kildare, nine shape-shifting priestesses guard the cauldron of Cerridwen the Deep. Nine loons circle. Two, one west, one east, arch up magnificently, spread their wings wide and walk across the water. They move toward each other in a ritual dance, ululating as they go. Seven wing-spread-sisters whoop and holler them to greater ecstasy. It's a hoedown. A ritual greeting. A preparation for the great journey south. Again and again they dance across the water. For a brief moment I am

led out of myself and into the greater, the exquisite, the Mystery. I laugh.

And then the ceremony is over. They swim and fish like the loons I know and I look away for what seems just a few seconds. When I look back, they are gone. Gone.

I am drifting in my canoe. I think about Linda Hogan's understanding of ceremony. How its purpose is to reweave us back into the whole of life. Now inside my skin is Creation—the water, the wind, the sky, the clouds, the trees and the nine dancing loons. All my relations. My prayer answered, I go home.

Nora L. Jamieson
Collinsville, CT

"Hey Pops, do you want to play ball?"

Before my sons are born, I am certain that I will be able to teach them all manner of things. My gift to my children will be to share my rather definite opinions on life with them. As my oldest son is placed in my arms, I begin to realize that all bets are off. He has his own personality with his own ideas on how the universe should operate. I discover that this is his gift to me. I am learning to lighten up and to see the world in a new light.

Since before Brendan is conceived, my husband and I agree that there will be no toy guns. Our kids will only have non-competitive, non-gender specific learning experiences. It is the parents' responsibility to keep the planet safe for the next generation.

By the time Brendan is three he is obsessed with guns. Suddenly, everything can be used to fashion a weapon: Legos, coat hangers, half-eaten Pop Tarts. I buy an Advent calendar with little angels behind each of the windows. Eager to share one of my own family's traditions, I wake him early on December first. The first window reveals a darling picture of three angels holding candles, each flame a tiny speck a silver glitter. Brendan takes a look at it and says, "Cool. They've got guns!" I totally lose control. "They're not guns! Angels don't use guns!" I scream. "Angels wouldn't go near guns!" He looks at me seriously for several seconds before he bursts out laughing. "Fooled you!" he says.

Brendan begs for an action figure, but I'm determined to stick with the "no guns" rule. I finally find one called Quick-Change Clark Kent/Superman. I feel proud of myself. I've managed to find an action figure that comes with no guns, knives or rocket launchers—just a change of clothes. A pair of khakis snap neatly over the blue tights and fly off with what I now know is "karate-chop action." His cape fits into a backpack that is also easily jettisoned. No telephone booth is required.

I realize now that action figures come with their own super-hero reproductive systems. When you let one into the house, it's all over. They mysteriously multiply until there are enough for a small army. I feel disappointed in myself for being so weak until I learn my most important action figure lesson. All super heroes, no matter what their planet of origin, have weapons that discharge exactly in the same manner. It does not matter what terrible means of destruction come included with the hero. The first time the weapons are activated, they fly unerringly into the nearest floor vent or manhole cover. They are never seen or heard from again. The heroes are left to survive with only their capes and their communication skills.

The other day I overheard Brendan playing with Vision and Batman Beyond. Vision is green with a bright red brain that lights up when you push a button in his belt. Batman Beyond has his eyes painted shut in a permanent scowl. Vision says to Batman, "*Hey Pops, do you want to play ball?*" I guess our planet is safe for now.

Erin Philbin Boyle
Pittsburgh PA

Today, Soon

This morning I was cleaning off my desk and for the 417th month in a row I changed the month on the perpetual calendar that sits on my desk. Surprised, I noticed how very tarnished the sterling silver had become. On reflection I actually couldn't remember ever having polished it. As I was taking it to the kitchen to clean, I reflected on how I came to have this exquisite Tiffany jewel.

It was 1968 and I was sailing from New York harbor on a cruise ship bound for the Caribbean. It was my first cruise ever and what a time I had. I recall the shipboard romance with the ship's doctor. It was a whirlwind. He was handsome and romantic and very Italian. He was a musician and a fabulous dancer and he waltzed his way right into my heart. As part of the festivities on the cruise, they had a costume party and I came as a tube of Colgate toothpaste. Much to my delight I won first place and the prize was a sterling silver perpetual calendar from Tiffany's.

Nothing came of the romance once we were on land, and the calendar has gone mostly unnoticed and uncared for all these years. But it did keep perfect account of the passing months and years and has accompanied me through the passages of my life. Alongside the calendar sits a brass divider that has two slots, one marked Today and the other marked Soon. I don't recall if it was a gift or something I picked up along the way to help me be more organized. I do tend to have these fits periodically where I know that the answer to life's challenges is to get organized. It's funny how that thought prevails rather than the one that says "Do something, anything, not just the same old thing." So I was struck by the continual presence of these reminders of my creativity and the prompt to do it Today or at the very least Soon. Time is marching on.

Patricia Hoglund
Olympia WA

Abundant Gifts

As I get older I am becoming more and more grateful for the abundant gifts I have been given. It used to be that I gave thanks for my health and for a life which was financially secure. I did not grow up with financial security; I became financially secure for the first time when I married, a blessing for which I give thanks daily (though now divorced for many years.)

In recent years, as I climb into my sixties, I have become aware that the blessings in my life far exceed my good health and financial security. I have never been one to dwell on my own background, my own history, but with every passing year I am gradually becoming more aware of the full extent of my blessings, of the abundant gifts I have, so many of which have remained outside my awareness. I have suppressed so much, remained unconscious out of fear about so much. My family escaped from Hitler's Germany in 1939 and I have always felt a vague sense of how lucky I am to be alive, but lately the full impact of the gift of my escape (thanks to my parents!), my personal freedom to come and go, to think as I please in this extraordinary democracy, hits me with resounding force many times during the day. I feel more than lucky; I am aware that a miracle has been given to me: the miracle of my life! My heart pounds wildly as I think about what might have been the alternative and I can feel the tears triggered by this profound sadness.

As I am gaining a clearer understanding of the larger picture of my life, inner shifts are occurring to give me a stronger sense and understanding of who I am. Every day I feel I am given the opportunity to understand myself better: to understand my emotional insecurities, how I protect myself in relationship, how I am afraid to risk being myself, express myself. For the first time in over sixty years, I am connecting more consciously to those inner gifts I can share and contribute to others, those inner gifts in which I had no confidence, and which now so enrich my life. I am learning to stand up and be counted, learning that I have worth, learning to trust a force greater than myself, to trust and listen to my inner voice; I am learning to be patient with both others and myself...all of which means being willing to risk, means making the "harder decision," means choosing the "high road" whenever necessary.

And so my life is changing daily: I feel the ups and downs of this new uncertainty, this new need to trust myself and this extraordinary universe in which I live, and which has taken care of me from the very beginning. I am finding beautiful new relationships, my writing flows more easily, my relationship to my children has improved, and perhaps most important, my relationship to myself is flourishing.

Duffie Bart



More True Words

Patches of Love

A personal love affair with quilting began when my friend Pat called to tell me of a workshop called "Quilt in a Day." She encouraged me to take the class and offered to be my helper. That first class was truly a moment of accomplishment for me. Because I have always had trouble reading instructions, Pat and the class teacher patiently helped. That day, I finished my beautiful "Trip Around the World" quilt in only eight and a half hours.

In the following weeks, Pat and I constructed many quilts in like manner so we would be sure of the pattern instructions. Pat insisted that we could teach a "Quilt in a Day" class ourselves. I was apprehensive and refused. I did not see myself as a teacher, but Pat persisted until I finally gave in, agreeing to be a co-teacher.

When the first of our own classes began, I was a bundle of nerves. But as the months progressed, each quilting class became a personal accomplishment, building my self-confidence. During chatty coffee breaks, shared pot-luck luncheons and recipe exchanges, women often told why they wanted, or needed, to make a quilt. They had come for many different reasons.

I will never forget one particular class. That day, I had looked across the room and observed seven women laboring over their quilts. Cindy, a young mother, was humming to herself as she tied the corners of her lime-and-peach-sherbet quilt, a gift for her mother's seventieth birthday. It would be a major surprise, because her mother wasn't aware that Cindy had learned to sew.

Across the room, Irene was fussing with her American flag pattern, her arthritic hands painfully submitting to the challenge as she carefully matched flags on each row of fabric, intent on having the quilt finished for her son's homecoming from the Gulf War. Her friend Dorothy, a cancer survivor, was aware of Irene's pain, so she continually reached over to help.

At the ironing board, Ellen, recently retired, carefully

pressed her blue paisley and rose quilt strips. With time on her hands now, she planned to donate this quilt and others to raise money for church camps.

Working at their tables, Mary was smiling as she arranged her rose and black floral fabrics to design her daughter's wedding quilt. Working beside her, Joan, defeated by her bitter divorce, groaned and struggled to match, then pin her seams. Joan wondered aloud why her marriage had been such a mis-match, too.

Having recently lost her 22-year-old son in a car accident, Eleanor sewed with quiet perseverance, her body hunched over her Singer as though in prayer.

For whatever reason those women gathered for that one memorable class, the common thread was the need to create. With the purring of sewing machines, they stitched the seams on their special gifts for others, and tied the bonds of friendship as well.

Perhaps that day had also been the beginning of healing for some.

Marcy Wooldridge

Abundant Gifts

The abundant gifts in my life have been people who have loved deeply and some are still left that continue.

My first experience with abundance was with the love of my mother, who prayed for me for two years, and when God blessed her, she took such good care of me. She transcended to Heaven with Jesus December 22nd.

I became pregnant one week before my sixteenth birthday, giving birth to Crystal (*the pure one*), my best friend. Crystal has a pure heart, one who sees God and His glory. Crystal's heart sings and dances.

What an abundance of love I have today and every day. Knowing I'm blessed, I look forward to a bright, prosperous future, nature-filled, with gifts of rivers, trees, bears, eagles, elk, deer, moose, a log cabin, but most of all God, my greatest gift from God, my daughter, and our new life.

Rebekah Lee Taylor
Corona CA

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:

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

Discoveries—May, 2001 (due April 15)

Masks—August, 2000 (due July 15)

If you can send your writing via email or as a Word attachment, the editors would appreciate it very much. (This will eliminate lots of extra typing!) Send your work to Susan Albert, at china@tstar.net.

My Grandmother's Gifts

for Olive Hackett-Shaughnessy
storyteller, mentor, friend

Blue eyes flashing, my grandmother pointed her index finger at the kitchen ceiling. The gesture was a sign that I should sit up and take notice. "Whatever's give you that idea?" she asked, her west-country brogue as thick, slow, and crisp as if she'd never left the moorlands.

Every day when I came home from school, Nana had tea ready, hot Oolong with milk and sugar served with slices cut from round loaves she called "Kern Teacakes." *Kern* is for currant, teacake for yeast bread, and teatime for telling stories. One afternoon, while "dossling" (dunking) a finger-shaped slice of kern teacake in my tea, I told what I'd learned at school:

"Bacteria are living things," I announced, believing that such things not only had a mind of their own, but that it was a mind best left untampered with. "I wouldn't dare try making yeast bread."

Nana's finger shot straight up. Her words as much as said *Oh yes you can!* and her dialect was one I spoke myself. "It doesn't matter yeast's alive, lass," she told me. "You're smarter than it is."

That's all it took. The following Saturday I made kern teacakes. Successfully and under her direction.

"See?" Nana said. "T'dough will rise if you let it. Trust it. And *tha-sen*." *Tha-sen* is an all-purpose pronoun meaning yourself, herself, ourselves, themselves...depending on the context of the sentence.

My grandmother never finished third grade. In the late nineteenth century, girls were seldom allowed my schooling, and so Nana didn't spell or punctuate very well. She wrote words by their sounds—*vacation* was *vakashun*. Her letters to me at college, for instance, began with a capital letter and ended eight pages later with a period. In between was all the family and neighborhood news, which I read phonetically—a skill I put to use when I studied medieval literature. I could read Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* immediately, in the original language, without special instruction from a professor. Granted, not all that Chaucer wrote sounds like my family's west-country dialect, but Nana's letters taught me how to hear not just the sounds of the words inside my head, regardless of proper spelling, but also the rhythm of the words' music making a proper sentence. Nana's letters helped me to learn how our language goes together to make meaning.

Nana taught me who I was in the language of my ethnic heritage. She made sure I knew all the songs and stories that later, studying anthropology at the graduate level, I learned were classic Celtic folktales. Nana gave me the confidence and the patience to make yeast bread, win a college scholarship, and stick with a dissertation until it was finished. She taught me about trust: that yeast bread does rise if you let it and that being true to *tha-sen* works miracles every time.

And so it is that family stories are important. They tell later generations how life was lived before they were born. They tell our children who they are, where they belong, why

the faces around the supper table resemble each other.

Family stories are also important because they show us our family traditions—our processes or ways of knowing what we know, learning who we are, handing down our lives and patterns of living. Family stories show us how we survived as a family.

In my family we showed love not so much by hugging and kissing as by listening to the sounds of words in stories about Merlin and St. David, Rhiannon and Prince Pwyll, as well as stories that made us laugh at *tha-sen*: that bacteria were alive and sentient, for example, is the family joke on me. I love to tell it on myself and often do, when my grandsons come after school for "kern teacakes to dossle" in cups of Oolong tea.

Dianne S. Lodge-Peters
Evergreen AL

A Bibliophile in the Rough

Excitement built inside me as I walked down Barnyard Lane toward the corner of Brook Lane. A yellow summer sun provided a velvet heat and the breeze that grazed my cheek was soft and cool. The scent of freshly cut grass mingled with the aromas of Peace roses, honeysuckle, and privets. The maple trees that lined the streets cast dappled shadows on the ground, combining heat and cool in intricate patterns. Blue jays and robins crooned odes to summer. As I got closer to the corner I walked faster. It was nearly two o'clock and I was going to meet the Levittown Library's long, blue Bookmobile on its regular Wednesday visit.

Each week the bush-shaped vehicle arrived with its selection of library books to be borrowed by the members of the neighborhood. Its convenience escaped me at the time; I simply thought of it as a treasure chest for the bibliophile that was gestating within me.

By the time the bookmobile pulled up to the curb, a long line of readers had assembled. The throng of book lovers climbed the two steps into the bookmobile and, after returning their books, began to stroll around the edges of the vehicle where the books were shelved. The bookmobile was a sort of one-way affair: people entered from the front door and exited at the rear. Therefore, I had to follow those in front of me, patiently waiting until I came to the children's section. Each patron carefully browsed their favorite sections: biography, fiction, classic novels, non-fiction. People waited eagerly, but calmly, to arrive at the section they wanted. You could hear quiet snippets of conversation, but in general these was a silent reverence observed here. The bookmobile was, after all, an extension of the public library and in those days library patrons whispered at most, but silence prevailed.

When I reached my destination I stood in awe at the collection of books to be read. And this was just a mere portion of what was kept at the main library. The jacket covers cried out to me with their brightly-colored pictures and the titles, in their various fonts, seemed to reach out to me with beckoning fingers. I was only permitted to borrow three books at a time

Continued on Page 14

More True Words

Head/Heart

and so I had some difficult decision to make.

I particularly enjoyed stories about girls my own age, growing up in suburban neighborhoods like Levittown. And if the main character had a best friend, as I had, then the book held even more appeal. I read all the favorites: *The Bobbsey Twins*, *Nancy Drew*, *Betsy and Tacy*, all of Beverly Cleary's humorous stories and later on the nursing adventures of Sue Barton. Running my fingers along the spines of the shelved books, I tilted my head to better read the titles. I made careful choices, handed over my three precious gems with my library card, and then retraced my steps back home to 109 Barnyard Lane.

When I arrived back home to our square-shaped Cape Cod home I darted in through the side door. Hearing the slam of the screen door, my mother came into the kitchen. I showed her the books I had chosen while we shared a snack of cookies and milk... When I finished my snack...I made my way to my favorite shaded spot in our yard, where three evergreens stood as sentinels...It was the favorite spot of my best friend Emilia and me, but also one I enjoyed in solitude.

I sat in the cool grass in the dappled shade and sunlight and felt the breeze on my face and the soft grass beneath my bare legs. For a few minutes I simply gazed at the clouds floating above me and saw the shapes of horses, snowmen and airplanes. Quickly though I was drawn to the books lying next to me: *Betsy and Tacy Go Downtown*, *Sue Barton: Rural Nurse*, *The Six-Fingered Glove Mystery*. I picked them up, stacking them in size order, the book on top warmed by the sun, the one on the bottom cool as grass...Then I chose a book, opened it to chapter one, page one, and began my ascent to literary heaven. The clouds drifted, the branches of the evergreens swayed and the birds chirped. I was oblivious to the symphony around me. All that existed for me now were the magic words of my story and the new friends I was about to meet on yet another literary adventure.

A warm summer day, a soft breeze, the smell of grass, a trip to the bookmobile, and now, reading a good story. Life was perfection! The characters in the books led exciting lives, some of fantasy, others quite realistic, but none so pleasurable as that of a little girl devouring her stash from the bookmobile.

Renee Howard Cassese
Seaford NY

Think with your head, not with your heart. Never with your heart. This is what my Dad told me. Always.

I was seven years old, and I fell on my roller skates around the corner from my house. Both of my knees were scraped and the palms of my hands, but I did not cry. Two tiny tears seeped out of my eyes, but I caught myself and stopped. Do not cry. If you do not think it hurts, it will not hurt.

I lifted myself from the sidewalk and squatted, turning my head to look across the street and up and down the block. If no gardener was out mowing a neighbor's lawn and if the mailman was not around and if Mrs. Stanley's car was not in her driveway and if the old people who stayed in their houses all day watching game shows were not peering through their Venetian blinds, if they were too hard of hearing to have noticed the *caploomp* of me hitting the cement sidewalk, then they did not see me nor the metal roller skate dangling by its leather ankle strap from my right foot. If they did not see, if they did not come out of their houses and ask, "Are you OK, honey?" then I was OK. I was able to do just as Dad said, to think with my head and not my heart. But if I had found out someone had seen me fall, that would have hurt more than the fall itself.

I do not know why I did this, but I did. Later that year, Dad was coming home from Europe. He had been gone three weeks on a business trip. I never hugged my father ever, and I really didn't think I missed him, but that night there was just something inside of my brain telling me to hug him. When he opened the kitchen door, when I heard the creak of the rusty screen door—Mom was always telling Dad to oil it, but he never had the time—I ran from my chair in the kitchen, rushed past our avocado green stove and our white refrigerator and my brother's high chair and I leaped in the air toward Dad so he would catch me and I could rope my arms around his neck.

But my father's hands were full—his briefcase in one, a suitcase in the other—and my leap was unexpected. He didn't put his luggage down to catch me, and I fell backward, hard, on the linoleum floor. The rest of the night is a blur except for two memories: Dad asking in a kind voice, not stern at all, "What were you thinking, leaping in the air like that?" and me holding a light blue icebag on the back of my head. I held it there as long as I could, just like Mom told me to, hoping to avoid a large, painful lump when I awoke the next morning.

Kathy Dalle-Molle Kaplan
San Francisco CA



Dear Pen Partner...

Stories mean a great deal more when they're shared with a pen partner—someone (or two or three) with whom you can trade letters and/or emails. If you'd like to be a pen partner, send us your name and address and we'll print it here. The rest is up to you!

Zoe Climenhaga, 2068 S. Barnett Rd, Bisbee AZ 85603
Karen Boyle, 623 Neely Manor, E. Palestine OH 44413

Peaceful Answers

Love speaks the truth
the heart can never lie
soul is everlasting
spirit will never die

Our outstretched arms
reach farther than we know
the universe wrapped all around us
to teach of us of eternal flow

being everywhere & all at once
we've only one place to seek out & find
the question to all the answers we ask
awaits, discovery in our one universal mind

Sarah Durfor
Austin TX

A Heart Kind of Braille

Having triplet siblings has been a mixed blessing. When we were little, I think I hated them because they got so much attention. Somehow, though, I knew that hatred was not an acceptable feeling so I turned that hatred inward and spent most of my childhood and teen years depressed.

Since our parents were well-known in church circles, everyone knew about the Peery triplets. Consequently, everywhere we went, people wanted to know if I was one of them, since I'm only two and one-half years older than they are. When I said I was their older sister, people's invariable response was that they didn't know the triplets had an older sister—inadvertently confirming my own sense of invisibility and inferiority. As we got older and Dad became terminally ill, being nearly the same age was a benefit. We took care of ourselves and helped Mom care for Dad throughout most of our teenage years; being spread out in age would have considerably complicated our family's ability to cope with this devastating situation.

The trauma and uncertainty we experienced as Dad was sick and dying could have either brought us closer together or driven us apart. Fortunately, it brought us closer together than we had ever been, even to the point that we now consider each other to be close friends. We talk on the phone regularly, calling to share the ups and downs of our busy lives, and look forward to getting together at every opportunity. Sometimes we even call each other immediately after we've all been together because we did not get enough one-on-one visiting done as children, nieces, and nephews swarm around us.

I now enjoy each of them for the special people they are and thank God for such wonderful siblings. We do indeed share "a heart kind of Braille."

Lynn Mills
Indianapolis IN

Hugs

This morning I woke up wondering if I had hugged my daughter enough when she was a child. Last night I saw *Hope Floats*, a movie about relationships, including those between mothers and daughters. There was a lot of hugging in the movie and a generous amount of mother-love for daughters. My daughter and I are separated by a geographical distance that is difficult to get beyond on the telephone, but even when we are near it seems to me that a physical holding-back sometimes precludes a hug between us.

It occurred to me one day that in my childhood, my mother never hugged me. I didn't fully perceive this until late in life. In my adulthood, I have always been the one who has initiated hugs with my mother, and though I always get a warm and generous squeeze back, I sometimes feel that I am giving something to my mother rather than getting something from her. In spite of this, I've never doubted my mother's love for me; I think she simply didn't know how to express it in hug terms when I was a child.

I wonder what my now-grown daughter recollects from her childhood. Was I a hugger then? When I was watching the movie last night, I shed tears, thinking about lost opportunities to hug her. I'll have to ask her if she was hugged enough as a child and find ways to hug her more often these days.

Patricia Jones
San Jose CA

Walking

Most mornings I set out at first light for a walk. It's a ritual, walking the sun up. The quiet and solitude are antidotes to the ravages of a day in the city. The walking gets my heart rate up.

Even in the suburbs, Mother Nature makes her presence felt in the faithful trees, the ubiquitous crows, the spiraling round of seasons. And always, at this hour, the changing light, the brightening sky. Walking past still-dark houses I marvel that we humans sleep each night, trusting time.

I know when I'm walking what a good thing it is to be in a body on earth. Legs swinging, arms pumping, weight shifting left and right. Bend of the knee, sway of the hip, drop of the foot. All to an inner, unique rhythm.

The natural world is the body's world, for breathing deep, for seeing and smelling and hearing, again and again. I know when I'm walking that I'm a member of this world and belong with all its other wild members, from snails to stars, in the morning outdoors, and I'm glad for the freedom to talk a walk, the ability to walk, a place to walk, time enough just to walk.

I've walked in European capitals, at the seashore, in deep woods, but it's this walk that begins and ends at my front door that sustains me through long indoor days. Once as I watched the eastern sky at dawn, I saw a flock of pigeons soar and swoop and soar again as one body against the gorgeous sunrise. Their exuberant flight exactly expressed my own feeling. Celebration. Walking gets my soul rate up.

Jeanne Lupton
Arlington VA

Finding Your Voice

Continued from page 3

relax deeply into the place (as Nora does as she drifts in her canoe) and then begin to record your observations and feelings. Or perhaps you might choose a place with religious associations: a place of worship, a sacred spot. Go there (in reality or in imagination), wait, listen, and then write, letting that voice speak.

However, you choose to do it, honoring the voice of a “different self” is one way to find our true voices.

A Duet of Voices

Sometimes we find our true voices when we speak to others, honestly and openly in dialogue. If you’ll read the story “My Grandmother’s Gifts” (page 13, by Dianne Lodge-Peters), you’ll see how Dianne’s voice is sharpened and brought to life by listening to and responding to her grandmother’s voice, heard in memory, heard in letters, heard in the words of family stories. By including her grandmother’s voice in her own story, Dianne shows us how she found her own voice, an echo of a voice dearly-loved and deeply-honored. Her story reminds me of a comment by Carl Jung, the famous psychologist: *“The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed.”*

Is there someone whose voice has helped to bring your own voice to life, to transform your voice? Think about the people in your life whose words have influenced you. Imagine yourself in dialogue with them. (Reread Dianne’s story to see how she does this.)

Finding Your Voice

Sometimes I think that the most important thing I can do for myself is to find my true voice: a voice that allows me to speak true and deeply-felt words, a voice that is confident and courageous, even outrageous too, perhaps. Who is to tell us what kind of voice is “right” or “proper”? Who is to tell us what words to speak or how to speak them? As you experiment with different ways to tell your story, listen to your own different voices, surrender to their influences, and experience the magic that comes with letting them speak.—*Susan Wittig Albert*



When a woman tells the truth, she is creating the possibility for more truth around her... The most important thing one woman can do for another is to illuminate and expand her sense of actual possibilities.--Adrienne Rich

It’s Time to Renew Our Commit-

Continued from page 1

Who was this woman? Who am I now? These are compelling questions, not just for Ann but for each one of us. Like her, we all need to see what we have done in our lives with the gifts that have been given to us, and we urgently need to start taking credit for our past and present achievements. As she is doing, we need to make space and time to write about our lives and, like her, acknowledge that writing is crucial to our self-understanding. Ann’s roles have changed, requiring her to think how those past roles shaped her present; our roles are changing too, and the more we know about our past, the more clarity we will have about the present and the future. Like Ann, we all need to understand the things we have done that have brought us to this place.

That’s what’s Story Circle is all about: understanding the events in our lives that have brought us to this present moment. And that’s why it’s important to renew your commitment to this unique organization—the only organization in the world that is devoted solely to the support of women’s stories. We need *you* to renew your commitment so that we can renew *our* commitment to you, and to all the women who are part of Story Circle.

We’re bringing this up now because December is the month to renew your annual membership. If you’ll remember, last year the Board of Directors changed our membership cycle from a revolving 12-month renewal to a once-a-year, all-at-one-time renewal—the last day of December. This is the time to take out your pen and your checkbook, fill out the enclosed membership form, and renew your commitment to yourself, to your story, to the stories of other women, and to Story Circle itself.

What will you gain by this renewal? Of course, you’ll continue to receive this unique *Journal*, designed to encourage you to tell your story. But you’ll also receive our 16-page Special Issue, which is being compiled by Judy Fettman—a collection of women’s stories that have been submitted during the past year to the *Journal*, or written in various Story Circles, or exchanged via the Internet. This Special Issue is a treasury of true stories and authentic women’s voices. It will be a treasure you’ll want to keep.

So stop what you’re doing right now and fill out the renewal coupon on the facing page or the one we’ve inserted into this issue. We’ll *all* be glad you did!

Susan Wittig Albert
President, Story Circle Network

The patchwork seemed a metaphor for memory and for the deeply loving and caring way in which women transform the world around them, starting from what they have as individuals and weaving it into a pattern of life.—Gloria Vanderbilt

Relational Theory & E-

Continued from page 4

and bookstores for announcements and brochures; look in your local newspaper "events" section. Or join one of our on-line e-circles (joining the Inet Chapter is only \$12. And in cases where paying that is difficult, we do have a limited scholarship fund.) Or perhaps you can start a Story Circle of your own by approaching some friends that might be interested, or announcing it at your church or social center.

For a taste of this kind of real connection between two people, try what Brenda Ueland calls "tranquil listening,"

Try to learn tranquility, to live in the present...Say to yourself: "Now. What is happening now? This friend is talking. I am quiet. There is endless time. I hear it, every word." Then suddenly, you begin to hear not only what people are saying, but what they are trying to say, and you sense the whole truth about them.

Through careful, caring listening, you can "sense the whole truth" about another woman. You can help her to grow and you can grow yourself. Together you can become a mutual growth-enhancing organism.

We write to taste life twice, in the moment, and in retrospection... We write to be able to transcend our life, to reach beyond it. We write to teach ourselves to speak with others, to record the journey into the labyrinth.--Anais Nin

Mrs. Backus

Continued from page 5

years I visited her whenever I was home. If she was disappointed that I didn't become a teacher like her, she never showed it. When I got my first job as a college librarian, she shared my happiness. We traded confidences as equals about the academic politics of our institutions. Even so, I never called her anything but Mrs. Backus, and the formality seemed to suit us both even as close as we were. As long as I knew her, her conversations were often curiously circular. By this I mean that I felt that I had come in the middle of a story and had missed the beginning. I learned I had only to wait and listen until the first part came around again. It was like this when she told me in the early 1970s about cleaning out her late father's house. "It was in his Bible," she said. There followed an hour-long meticulous recounting of the old clothes, books, and lampshades she had found in the attic. Then finally she continued, "Because records were poorly kept then and I was educated at home, I didn't find out until I looked in the Bible that I am actually three years older than I thought I was. I am so glad I didn't know. I thought I was six years older than Ed, and if I had known I was actually nine years older, I would never have married him in 1940, and both of us would needlessly have missed these happy years together." Something I remembered when I met my younger husband-to-be.

The age difference between Mrs. Backus and me did not matter either. I am now the age she was that summer in Paris. After Mr. Backus died in 1987, Mother bought a porcelain teacup at the estate sale and gave it to me. Inside was a note in Mrs. Backus's neat penmanship, "Given to Mrs. Alvin Dulaney on the birth of her daughter, Mary Elizabeth." This is the only keepsake I have from her. As such I treasure it, and I still miss her.

Renew Your Membership/ Join the Story Circle Network!

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.

- ____ Annual Membership: \$24 (prorated@2/mo.); Canada & Mexico: \$30 (prorated @\$2.50/mo); International \$36(\$3/mo. International MO only) *Membership Year is Jan. 1 through Dec.31.*
- ____ Austin Chapter: \$12/yr (prorated@\$1/mo)
- ____ Internet Chapter: \$12/yr (prorated@\$1/mo)
- ____ Sample copy of the SCN Journal: \$5

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ - _____

Mail to Story Circle Network, PO Box 500127, Austin TX 78750-0127

You can also join by going to www.storycircle.org and clicking on "Join"

For Life Writing Teachers....

Creating a Wisdom Circle

by Juanita Johnson

Juanita Johnson, M.A., C.B.T., lives and practices in Norwich NY. She is a certified grief therapist, consultant, and storyteller. She performs a one-woman production of her own life stories, "A Daughter's Stories of Laughter, Tears, and Love." You may email Juanita at johnsonj@norwich.net.

My interest in writing life stories and helping others do so was precipitated by the efforts of my father. When I became sixteen, he began to write letters to me—letters that described what life was like for him growing up, his deep love for his wife (my mother) and his thoughts about what he believed the world might be like when I was a grownup. I cherished his letters, which continued when I went away from home to college and finally stopped just a few weeks before he died, when I was 21 years old.

My father's letters continue to sustain me. It is because of his stories that I became interested in writing life stories myself and facilitating life story writing groups. Over the course of the next several *Story Circle Journal* issues, I will be describing the different kinds of writing groups I facilitate.

In this issue, I would like to share with you the idea of creating and using a Wisdom Circle format for your writing group, a format I use for all life writing groups. I am grateful to author Christina Baldwin for her clear explanation of what a Wisdom Circle is and how it works, in her book *Calling the Circle*.

The time together begins with one minute of silence followed by the passing of a "talking piece"—a symbolic object that can be passed from one person to another. We have used such objects as a fountain pen, a book mark,

a writing journal, a photograph, a book of life stories, a heart-shaped stone, a storyteller doll, and a tin box. Only the person who holds the talking piece can speak and share whatever they want about themselves.

Often people talk about their writing and what they thought of the writing theme. Sometimes an individual wants the group to know that a loved one is sick or that the speaker is feeling tired or stressed. This check-in time takes about 15 minutes and allows people to slow down and begin to listen carefully to each other.

We always meet in a circle (without tables). In the middle of the circle is a small table with a candle on it. I ask members of the group to contribute a symbolic object to our table as well. We create a "story" of objects representing ourselves: car keys, photographs, a piece of jewelry, a flower, a scarf. A person may bring a specific object that represents the life story she will be sharing; others pull out something from their pockets or purses.

After the talking piece has been passed around the circle, the writing is shared. Each person is encouraged to be mindful of using no more than fifteen minutes. (This became necessary when some members were taking up too much "air time." After every woman has shared her story, we blow out the candle and have a minute of silence.

I find that the wisdom circle ritual helps people settle in, slow down, and savor the delicious stories.

The Circle as a Universal Symbol *Words from the Wisdom Circle Web Site*

The circle is a universal symbol for unity and wholeness and the form of meeting in circle is ancient. Each of us has ancestors, no matter what our ethnic or racial background, who sat around a fire together, drumming, singing, playing, dancing, telling stories, praying, grieving together, solving the problems of everyday life. The memory of this connection to the circle is in our bodies, in our psyches.

Participants in a Wisdom Circle are asked to consider these important questions:

- * Can you listen from the heart without judgment, without resistance, to the urgencies of a soul longing to be heard?
- * Can you speak from the heart, expressing your truth as best you know it? And will you choose your words carefully, with sensitivity to their impact?
- * Can you express gratitude to those who bear witness to your words?
- * Will you sit in silence and wait for deeper thoughts and feelings to rise?
- * Can you give voice to this new form of community pressing to be born?

To learn more about the organization, Wisdom Circle (created to facilitate and support self-discovery and community-building in small groups) you may visit their web site at www.wisdomcircle.org

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 Box 1616, Bertram TX, 78605, or email Susan Albert at china@tstar.net.

Story Circle is discovering and linking with other organizations that have a similar purpose. Recently, Susan Albert was invited to give the keynote lecture at the annual conference of the Association of Personal Historians, meeting in Dallas, TX. The Association of Personal Historians is a non-profit professional association whose mission is to help people preserve life stories and memories by advancing the efforts and activities of personal historians through networking, training, and support, and encouraging and fostering personal history activities and projects of all kinds and of varying scope.

While the Story Circle Network is an association of women, we recognize the importance of personal history and storytelling for both men and women. Because of this, the Network has joined the APH and is becoming one of its active members. This year, Susan Albert and SCN board member Carolyn Joy Scheider attended the APH annual conference to meet APH members, learn more about the organization, and introduce Story Circle to APH members. Story Circle also hopes to attend the next APH annual conference (Tampa FL, November 2001) to present workshops on women's story-telling.

The APH is primarily an association of people who offer such personal history services as oral history interviews, book production and publishing, video recordings and CD-Rom production, photo preservation, and genealogical research. If you're interested in using any of these or similar services to create your life story, you might want to contact the APH by visiting their website (www.personalhistorians.org) or write to The Association of Personal Historians, 1509 S. Raitt St, Unit C, Santa Ana CA 92704..

Oregon Fall Story Circle

Marie Buckley reports that the six week Fall Story Circle she facilitated at Main Street Books in Hillsboro, OR was so well received that three additional weeks were added to allow everyone to write about more topics as well as spend more time together. Eight women attended the Fall Circle and group rapport was both immediate and amazing. From the first meeting everyone was instantly comfortable enough to share memories and experiences and to respond truly and deeply to one another's stories. The group is meeting once more in December for a holiday social evening of cider and cookies. They will also discuss astrological charts prepared for everyone by a Circle member.

One of the most popular topics for the Fall group was called "Our Cars and the Road." Participants wrote about such things as buying a car, learning to drive, car trips, and even dreaming about cars, and everyone reported a great deal of enjoyment in the writing. The topic was inspired by an anthology Marie discovered called *Ladies, Start Your Engines: Women Writers on Cars and the Road*, edited by Elinor Nauen, Faber & Faber, 1996. "We all have so many car stories it's unbelievable," Marie says. "Cars symbolize much more to us than just transportation."

Winter Story Circle starts in January and will meet for nine weeks. Two Winter groups may be created in order to accommodate more women, each group meeting on a different evening. A facilitator's fee is charged and any woman who wants to write about her own life and experiences is welcome. Contact Marie at marie@aracnet.com or 503-648-7019 for more information.

"Thanks to this issue's sponsors!"

In order to make more room for your stories, we've added four more pages to our *Story Circle Journal*

. To help support this expansion, we invite you to sponsor the *Journal* by purchasing a business-card-size advertisement.

- . If you have a product or service that our readers might find helpful or interesting, send your business card or card-size ad copy and a check for \$15 to Advertising, Story Circle Journal, PO Box 1616, Bertram TX 78605-1616.

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



"I enjoyed the Older Women's Legacy project and felt lucky to have author Susie Flatau as our leader. Now I would like to have a follow-up workshop. My grown grandchildren have requested my life story and it's a great challenge."—*Dorothy Taylor, Austin TX*

"I was my mother's daughter until I was 16, then I became my husband's wife and my children's mother. At 35 I found me—the college student, the professional woman. At 60 I wonder what adventures the future holds."—*Judy Watkins, of Hillsboro OR*

"I was born and brought up on a farm in western England, where, due to the lack of other entertainment, I read and read and read. I went to art school in England and have stayed connected to the visual arts since then. I recently arrived in Austin from Saudi Arabia where I spent 22 years."—*Margaret Powis-Turner, Austin TX*

"I have written since first grade, approximately 22 years. Two years ago I began journaling again and felt like I wanted to put my life stories on paper. I want to leave a legacy behind for my son." *Margaret Knorr, Rand WV*

"I am an independent woman who also happens to be a wife, mother, grandmother, and nurse. I love to journal, read, do handwork, scuba dive, and play with my grandchildren. I also love to have teas, especially with friends and family."—*Roseann Hoyle, Mulberry AR*

"I was born into a theatre family and grew up in Los Angeles. I met my husband at UCLA and moved to Kansas, where we raised four children. Now we live in a small mountain town in southeast Arizona, where I weave, write, and direct shows in the local repertory theatre."—*Zoe Climenhaga, Bisbee AZ*

"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."—*Diana Coonradt, Layton, UT*

"Here are the titles of two books I would like to recommend. The first is called *Housekeeping*, by Marilynne Robinson, an absorbing and offbeat story which I

feel contains some of the most brilliant writing I have read in years. The other is called *Women of Courage*, a wonderfully inspirational anthology which I believe your readers would find moving and interesting. I certainly did."—*Duffie Bart, Monterey CA*

"In spite of my self-inflicted obstacles and an overwhelming compulsion to be a perfectionist at every endeavor, I am now a comparatively serene lady who lives in relative peace with her husband and 12 'alley type' cats on a secluded ivy-covered hillside. The last dozen years have been a process of enjoying a sober life, physical challenges, and spiritual explorations, resulting in a cultivation of a new attitude about life and a willingness to try almost any adventure at least once. How I got to this point is yet to be revealed in my continuing attempt at writing my memoirs."—*Marjorie A. Witt, Lafayette CA*

"I am a wife and mother to my two teenage children. I was shy and insecure as a child and young adult. Through some difficult years of struggling, I finally became a seventh-grade Spanish teacher, currently for the last six years."—*Sharon Blumberg, Munster IN*



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

Postmaster: Address correction requested
Return postage guaranteed

FIRST CLASS

The Story Circle Network
is an active member of



This page doesn't get printed