



Story Circle Journal

The newsletter for women with stories to tell...

Volume 5 Number 2, May 2001

Stories From the Heart, With Heart

Our first national Story Circle conference, one of the major events in Story Circle's history, is coming up in February. The conference is called "Stories from the Heart," and we're speaking from our hearts when we say that we hope you'll be able to make history with us here in Austin TX next February 8, 9, and 10.

Making history hasn't been hard for the Story Circle Network, because we are such a unique organization. Consider these landmark events:

- ❖ In 1997, Story Circle became the first writers' organization ever formed to focus exclusively on women's lifewriting and to declare that women's stories must be told, shared, preserved, celebrated. The *Story Circle Journal*, a 16-page quarterly, was the first journal ever published to honor women's stories.
- ❖ In 1998, Story Circle received a \$100,000 grant, funding our Older Women's Legacy Circle Memoir Project, and began to develop a workbook and workshop facilitator's manual. The project, first of its kind, attracted national attention. The Austin Chapter held its first meetings.
- ❖ In 1999 and 2000, Story Circle offered the OWL-Circle workshops to over 500 senior women. Our national membership doubled, with members in over 20 states, and we opened our doors on the web, at www.storycircle.org.
- ❖ In 2000, the Internet Chapter opened, offering on-line e-circles, workshops, chat rooms, and other member services. The first LifeWriting Competition was held, and the *Journal*, now expanded to 24 pages, published a special issue.
- ❖ Now it is 2001. Our web site has been named as one of the 101 Best Sites for Writers on the Internet (that is, it's full of free goodies, all for women writers!). And we are now an *international* organization, with members in 38 states and four foreign countries!

That's *our* story, here at Story Circle, and we're proud of every minute of it. That's why we think it is time to celebrate that story, and yours, and every woman's, with our first-ever national conference. You'll find information and a registration form on pp. 18-19.

The conference planning committee, led by Judith Helburn of Austin TX, is made up of 25 enthusiastic Story Circle members in Austin and around the country. They have already done a wonderful job of soliciting sponsors for our scholarship fund, designing a diversity-and-outreach program to identify women from a variety of backgrounds who might like to attend, and developing an exciting and diverse program and inviting presenters to offer proposals. They have 41 proposals to choose from, so there will be plenty of exciting things to learn, experience, and take home.

The rest, really, is up to you. We hope you will mark your calendar, make your travel plans, and promise yourself (and us) that you will be in Austin next February. We would love to see every Story Circle member here at our conference, from all of our 38 states and from England, Italy, Canada, and Australia! We are all looking forward to hugging those women whose emails we read, whose stories we hear, whose lives we have shared. Because that's what we're all about at Story Circle: reading, hearing, sharing, caring—all that lovely heart-work that makes our lives so much sweeter and richer.

We've called our first national Story Circle conference "Stories From the Heart" for a reason. Each one of our stories comes from our hearts, from that part of us that is whole and sacred. And each story reaches to the heart of another woman, somewhere, offering courage and hope and help and love. Please come, bring your stories, and share with us, heart to heart.—*Susan Wittig Albert*

*Nobody has ever measured,
even poets, how much the heart
can hold.*

—Zelda Fitzgerald

*When you open your heart,
you open your mind.*

—Beth Mende Conny

*The best and most beautiful
things in this world cannot be
seen or even touched.*

They must be felt with the heart.

—Helen Keller



In This Issue

<i>Stories from the Heart, with Heart ..1</i>
<i>The Story Circle Network.....2</i>
<i>Journaling Your Life....3</i>
<i>Writing & Healing....4</i>
<i>A Reader Tells Her Story....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>LifeWriting Prize Essays....14</i>
<i>Stories from the Heart.....18</i>
<i>Tips from LifeWriters.....20</i>
<i>A Story Circle News RoundUp....21</i>
<i>More Books....22</i>
<i>In Print/Market Watch...23</i>
<i>Wise Words/Mini-Stories....24</i>



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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 publish 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.

***Hey! Time to buy your
Story Circle T-Shirt!***

**Your purchase helps
women tell their
stories!**

Story Circle Journal

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

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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!

Journaling Your Life

Journaling a Legacy

Cindy Baum will be writing four journaling columns for the Story Circle Journal, beginning with this one. Cindy is a married mom with four children. Her eldest daughter is attending college and her youngest son is starting first grade this fall. Another daughter will be a sophomore in high school. Cindy and her youngest daughter, age 12, will be starting a new adventure this fall: homeschool. Caitlin struggles with dyslexia and after very frustrating years in public school, they decided that homeschool would be the best way for Caitlin to learn at her own pace and in her own way. Cindy and her husband Brad have been married 23 years. Besides being a mom at home, she is a freelance magazine writer, journaler, and loves pen-and-ink letter writing.

Whether we realize it or not each of us wants to leave a trace of our lives behind for others to know. Why else do we write our thoughts in blank books, notebooks or loose pages? If we didn't think, or perhaps hope, that someday, someone would read those pages, why would we keep them?

While many would shy away from the thought of writing an official memoir, journals written over a lifetime become just that when left for others to read when we are gone. It makes sense then, to create a journal that not only allows us a place to get the angst out, but also records the specifics of certain people, events and actions as well as the emotions evoked by them.

Perhaps the place to begin with the idea of journaling as a form of memoir is to see how it compares with a diary and autobiography. Traditionally, a diary was a day-to-day account of activity and dealt with basic facts, while a journal consisted of impressions and heartfelt responses to events. Today the terms "diary" and "journal" tend to mean the same thing, mingling the daily recording of life with heart-felt impressions.

An autobiography is typically a biography written about one's self by one's self and is self-focused both in subject and perspective; more of a written record of a life. A memoir, on the other hand, is a collection of stories remembered, anecdotes usually written by a person about herself and will likely include personal stories about many events and people whose lives were intertwined with her own.

Sometimes a memoir may focus on a person or time written from the perspective of the writer as an observer and participant in another's life rather than about her own. An example of this as a journal might be when a mother records a child's milestones and her feelings toward him throughout his childhood. It is her memoir of his life.

When we think in terms of what we want others to know about the life we lived, a journal can become our best resource for recalling the events and emotions through different stages of life. With this in mind, the way we approach journaling changes because now, instead of disjointed ramblings or venting, we try to write what is on our hearts while preserving the details surrounding the feelings. And, writing in this way frees us from the self-editing we would be tempted to do if we were "officially" writing our memoirs.

Even little snippets of information can be very telling. After my grandmother died, I helped go through her belongings. A few minutes into the job I found myself captivated as I discovered that Grandma had written on the backs of receipts and old envelopes everything from what species of birds visited the feeder that day, to how upset she was about moving from her home to an assisted care housing complex for the elderly; a

few sentences hastily written on the back of a telephone bill envelope and probably while my mother and aunt were packing her things. She never used her voice to tell others how she really felt about many things. I believe she didn't feel she could even write her feelings down in an official place like a journal for fear someone might read it, so she resorted to scraps of paper that no one would take notice of. But the fact that she didn't bother to throw away those notes tells me that she really did want someone to know, even if not until after her death. She wanted to leave a trace.

We among the living have a chance to validate our thoughts and lives through journaling. The journal becomes the memoir and story of a life when we focus on preserving the details while still writing straight from the heart, honestly and unencumbered.

Journal a Story. Think about your first kiss. Who was it with? Was it welcome or unwelcome? Here's what Juanita Rivera wrote (as recorded in "Legacy: A Step-By-Step Guide to Writing Personal History"): *"The first time I got kissed I was thirteen. By my girlfriend's brother. I couldn't tell you what it was like. I don't remember. I passed out. Then I ran home. Later I used to have crushes on boys but they never felt the same way. I always felt the ugly duckling - too tall, too skinny, no makeup. I wasn't allowed to date anyway. My mother even put cactus plants underneath my window."* A great story with potential for even more elaboration.

Or write about an animal you loved as a child. Willie Morris writes in "My Dog Skip," *"The dog of your boyhood teaches you a great deal about friendship, and love, and death: Old Skip was my brother."* Animals have great influence over us, especially when we were children.

Suggested Reading

Legacy: A Step-By-Step Guide to Writing Personal History
by Linda Spence

Leaving a Trace: On Keeping a Journal. The Art of Transforming a Life into Stories, by Alexandra Johnson

Lifelines: A Guide to Writing Your Personal Recollections, by Evelyn Nichols and Anne Lowenkopf

Your Life as Story: Writing the New Autobiography, by Tristine Rainer

Writing From Life: Telling Your Soul's Story, by Susan Wittig Albert



Writing and Healing

Write Through Pain

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. Debbie Tripp, M.A., is a freelance writer and teaches Writing for Healing and Self-discovery. She is a member of the National Assn. of Poetry Therapy and a recipient of the Wisconsin Regional Writers' Jade Ring Award for writing excellence. Email: debbietripp@hotmail.com.

For our writing to be a healing experience, we honor our pain, loss, and grief. We learn what the process of writing will hold for us by learning from good mentors and guides. We go with our pain and into it; we observe it and examine it in detail. We try to find words to describe our sensations precisely, accurately, and without distortion. We observe our writing process. Because we understand that doing the work might be painful, we honor our feelings and witness them instead of denying them or ignoring them. In this way, we enable ourselves to tolerate them. After doing the work, we will most likely feel a shift in our perspective, an enlargement of our sense of self.—Louise DeSalvo, Writing as a Way of Healing

It is the mind that makes the body.—Sojourner Truth

In so many ways I do not know my body, my incarnation, my being clothed in flesh, my dwelling. Being present to my body, to the workings of my corpus, requires a shift from a ho-hum-so-what to an amazement and wonder. It requires dwelling-thinking.—Dianne Connelly

We know the joy of sharing our life stories. Some of us journal regularly. Then, suddenly, pain enters our lives and we stop writing. Often when we face physical or emotional pain, we become blocked. Every other activity seems more important and looks more attractive. When I am in pain and sit down to write, I can almost hear my pillow calling me.

We ask ourselves, "Why should I write anyway? What stops me from writing when facing emotional or physical pain?" Although it is hard to remember in the moment, writing through pain helps. The blank page is a safe place to express our emotions surrounding the pain. It connects us to ways we have coped with pain in the past and gives us more coping skills while actually decreasing painful sensations (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, April 1999).

Knowing all this, why don't we write?

We stop ourselves from writing for any number of reasons. When I teach workshops for cancer and chronic pain patients, I am reminded of the physical limitations that hinder the writing process. Low energy, medication side effects and the intensity of physical symptoms can all hinder our writing.

In addition to physical symptoms, there is the fear that writing won't make a difference. What if once we begin writing, the pain only increases? Our first instinct is to run away from pain. So, be kind to yourself when dealing with pain. Set a time limit and stick to it. This type of writing is more manageable in small doses like ten minutes.

Play with a number of writing techniques to find what is most useful when facing pain. Life story writing is an approach that helps heal the past and connect it to the present. Be sure to include your emotions and lots of details as you write your personal story.

(Louise DeSalvo's *Writing as a Way of Healing* is a great book on this topic).

Another tool in writing for healing is poetry therapy. Don't let the word poetry frighten you. Try it as a way to express your pain and learn new ways of coping. Forget all the rules you've learned about poetry and just write.

When I was first diagnosed with fibromyalgia (a rheumatic condition with chronic muscle pain), I experimented with using simile and metaphor. In my journal, I wrote "having fibromyalgia is like_____." The words poured forth. I felt like a captive, a prisoner. I felt taunted and tortured by the disease. The poem I wrote helped me release my emotions. In addition, I was surprised when I recognized how victimized I felt. Later I experimented by using an imaginary dialogue with my body. This dialogue helped me learn new ways to comfort myself when the pain becomes intense.

My students have also found the dialogue technique to be very powerful. In this method, you interview your body, symptom or emotion. Sit for a moment after each question, go inside yourself and listen, then write an answer. Don't censor yourself, and don't worry if it feels like you're making up the answers. Just keep your pen moving. You will be surprised at what you learn.

Dialogues, metaphors, similes and free writes are all valuable writing tools. Your writing will help you discover new ways of approaching life's difficulties. There are no mistakes - you are leading yourself on a journey toward healing. Your courage in writing through pain will be rewarded with a new perspective. As one breast cancer survivor wrote, "I found an inner strength I didn't know I had."

For moving stories of the discovery of inner strength by writing through pain, read the prize-winning essays in the Carol Landherr LifeWriting Competition, pp. 14-17.

A Reader's Story

Lunch With Mom

Siobhan Kaliher has worked in commercial real estate finance for 13 years, most recently underwriting commercial real estate for the mortgage-based securities market. She is going back to school to earn a master's degree in counseling from Seton Hall University in New Jersey. Siobhan lives on 50 acres in east Tennessee with her husband Ward, three cats and three dogs.

The wooden bench is hard, unyielding. I am seated too closely to strangers who are also awaiting their lunch companions. The restaurant is crowded, noisy. I stare at the hostess, tall and slender, young and fresh, and I try on her life as I imagine it to be, like an elegant garment.

I stare at the other customers; when my gaze is met, my eyes quickly drop to the floor. I shift on the hard bench. Its seat is deep—if I sit all the way back, my feet dangle above the floor. I am a child again.

I wrote Mom the beginnings of a letter when I was 29. A letter that I eventually incorporated into another, and sent to her a few years later:

Dear Mom,

Santa arrived via UPS yesterday—I brought the box home tonight and just finished putting everything away—the corn butterers in my silverware drawer, the notepad and stamp holder in the phone stand drawer, Ukki's pad holder on the table where I can show Stuart tomorrow, the fans open and on a shelf in my bathroom, the kitchen towels in the drawer, knee-highs in my sock drawer, brush in my shower, hanging. So many nice things, and so many reminders of you. I've had these strong emotions about you washing over me the past two days—I wanted to talk to you yesterday—that's when I called and you were teaching. So, I'll write instead.

Have you been thinking about me? It sounds strange, but I've been getting these mental pictures of you in my head, and then this overwhelming feeling of warmth and love washes over me from you, and I know that I am your child, that I will always be your child, that the bond which connects us is stronger than any other in life but for that which I'll experience with my own children. When we talked at the table after Christmas dinner, I wasn't saying that I wanted to weaken that bond or diminish our relationship. What I was saying is that I'm trying my hardest right now to find my own way. I need you now more than ever in my life. Sometimes I want to be 9 years old again and have you hug me and hold me and tell me that everything is going to work out, and have you make it so....

I glance sideways to the woman sitting to my left. She looks up quickly every time the door opens. What is your life like, I want to ask her. What do you think about when you first wake up? Do you wake quickly next to a man you have loved for years and immediately set about the business of getting your kids dressed and fed, and yourself off to work? Or do you wake slowly from dreams you cannot understand, and quietly lay until all the pieces of your life, past and present, come into focus, arising from their slumber and attaching themselves to your body, until you become too heavy, too laden, to move?

What do you see when you look at me, I want to ask. Can you tell? Does it show? That I lost my only sibling when he was 22, and I 21. That I loved deeply and desperately, marrying and divorcing twice by the time I was 27 and becoming engaged two more times by the time I reached 32, living four very distinct and different lives with each man. That I had become acutely aware of the fine line we all walk between the worlds of sane and not so, spending two sleepless nights and manic days with the man I loved, helplessly witnessing a slide that stopped short of suicide, ending instead with a two-week stay in the hospital and a return to our "normal" life. That I had been sharply reminded of Dad's mortality, seeing him pale and bloated and completely helpless after open heart surgery, connected by a myriad of tubes and wires to the machines which controlled and sustained life. That I am at once an innocent child and an aged prizefighter, fueled by both hope and wonder, pride and anger, reeling from the impact of unforeseen blows. "Fight! Fight!" the crowd roars. I cannot lift my arms. I cannot remember street names, or who liked fishnet stockings, or who did not like green beans, or where and when all of the "he's" were born, because it all has become jumbled in my noisy mind, and my heart is too tired to care. Or do you just think I'm pretty?

I wrote my mother a letter when I was 33. Although addressed to her, it was never sent:

Dear Mom,

Damn you for being so quiet! For taking everything. For removing yourself to go cry in the bathroom, so we wouldn't see your pain. For withdrawing, retreating. Great example you set for me, for sending me the message that it's not okay for me to express my feelings, my desires, in a family setting. Show me that it's okay to accept so little involvement from a man. That it's natural to accept so little. You say you have a strong sense of self, and that's what has enabled you to make it through your marriage. Bull. You say to me that you keep a lot to yourself. You say that in front of Dad, like it's some kind of badge, a testament to your long-suffering.

You are repressing. You are resigned. And you are stuck. And you grow harder every year. Your light is growing dimmer, as you box yourself in. Make your environment smaller and more manageable, so you can be in control.

So many boundaries. "I cannot talk to you on the phone," the tone in your voice says. Why? Have to do laundry, or maybe clean? What happens if you are delayed by 30 minutes, or even 15? My emotions are triggered by your response to me, and I hate that.

Damn you for not giving me any guidance when I

continued on page 17

Meet Other Life-Writers

Heirloom Memoirs

An Interview with Paula Stallings Yost

All of the other memoirists we've interviewed in this section of the Journal have been tellers of their own tales. In this interview, however, we wanted to introduce you to a woman who believes so passionately in the power of story that she has created a business called Heirloom Memoirs, dedicated to helping others tell their stories.

Paula Stallings Yost is a memoirist and publisher with a background in journalism and public relations. After several years of juggling her freelance writing with a corporate public relations/employee motivation career in Dallas, she rebelled against the urban life and migrated to the piney woods of East Texas. Free to focus on her writing, Paula became lifestyles editor and feature reporter for a daily newspaper. In 1999, her interest in people and their stories evolved into a successful, gratifying business as a personal historian and the founder of Heirloom Memoirs. Helping others to preserve their family histories in book form—the real stories of people from all walks of life told in their own voices—has become the perfect niche for her talents.

In addition to her membership in Story Circle, Paula serves on the Board of Directors for the Association of Personal Historians, www.personalhistorians.org, an international organization of professional writers, videographers and oral historians, and is a member of the Texas Oral Historians Association. She also offers writing workshops and has organized conferences across the country.

We all have stories. And they must be told. In telling our stories we affirm our selves, our very being, and thereby the purpose of the Creator and our lives.—
Sophy Burnham

When we have stories that we all know, that we were raised with--public stories--then we begin to be able to connect our inner story to the outer story of our community, and we have some sense of where we fit, and that we fit, that we belong. There isn't a culture on Earth that isn't fueled by the stories that it tells.—
Paula Gunn Allen

Memoir must be written because each of us must possess a created version of the past....We must acquiesce to our experience and our gift to transform experience into meaning. You tell me your story, I'll tell you mine.—
Patricia Hampl

Story Circle: *You describe yourself as a "personal historian." What is that, Paula? Please tell us what you do.*

Paula: Interest in the collection and preservation of individual and family histories has exploded in recent years. Over the last several decades, American lifestyles have changed dramatically. Career demands and increasingly high divorce rates have resulted in the near annihilation of the extended family. In an effort to strengthen ties with other family members and establish roots for future generations, growing numbers are seeking ways to preserve their past and honor their elders. They utilize such methods as scrapbooks, audio recordings, written collections of family stories, videos, and books. However, many become intimidated when faced with such a daunting task and confusing array of possibilities. A personal historian can help them define their goals and ultimately build their unique family legacy – forming a link for past, present and future generations. As a former lifestyles editor and feature journalist, my career change to personal historian was a logical and natural step. Most of my work has been in book form; however, I have also provided oral histories via audio-taped interviews or simple manuscripts. For more information on the field, check out the web site for the Association of Personal Historians at www.personalhistorians.org.

SC: When you begin working to help someone capture her personal history, what do you do?

Paula: First, I get to know my clients and identify their goals. Are they interested in creating a

detailed and complete autobiography, a slice-of-life memoir focusing on a few key themes or important years, one specific story, or even a simple and concise family tree with paragraph sketches of relatives? Once we have decided on a path to follow, I develop a brief questionnaire tailored to key periods, places and people within their story. After the questionnaire has been completed, I prepare for the interview process. By the time we sit down for the first interview, the client and I have developed a comfortable rapport and are secure in the direction of their particular project. Gaining the trust and respect of a client is extremely important to one's success in extracting the best possible stories, so I never rush the process and I *always* listen carefully. If someone is unsure about the necessity of a book as their final product, I strongly encourage them to at least go through the interview process. As most of my work has been with the elderly, it is imperative to get their stories recorded before it is too late. Everything else can wait.

SC: *What do you think are the most important elements to capture in any personal history? What are your goals in helping people to create their life stories?*

Paula: Everyone has a story to tell. These stories bring history and heritage to life for family, friends and community. Often the simplest tales of daily activities in bygone eras offer the most insight into a person's character. Personal histories are not just for the rich and famous. Each person's story has a message and offers the drama or humor of their unique viewpoint.

continued on page 7

My first goal is to tell that person's story in his/her true voice. When a descendant sits down to read the story of a great-grandmother's life, I want them to hear their ancestor speaking to them in her own dialect with her own personality shining through – not mine.

SC: *As you have worked with people, helping them tell their story, what have been some of the biggest obstacles to success—theirs and yours?*

Paula: I've been extremely lucky so far and have encountered no serious obstacles. Though many people, particularly our elders, are at first a bit self-conscious and/or wary, they warm to the process rather quickly. It has happened on a couple of occasions that these same clients were having entirely too much fun and didn't want to end the story. When that situation arises, I must tactfully advise them as to what adds to their story and what does not.

Of course, not all memories are pleasant ones. If a client becomes upset while relating a particularly difficult story, I listen quietly and allow them the right to vent those emotions. But I never leave on a sad note. Once we have finished taping, I try to bring them back to the present with discussions of the weather or current matters over a nice cup of tea. Most personal historians are not therapists and should never attempt to act like one. If I feel that a client is becoming dangerously depressed, I will advise a family member or friend of my concerns and leave any decisions for further action to them.

A personal obstacle that comes to mind is my quest for honesty from the narrator. A quote from Thoreau hangs above my computer – "The one great rule of composition is to speak the truth." Sadly, people occasionally weave wonderful stories with little basis in reality. If one point contradicts an earlier statement or sounds outlandish, I try to discuss it diplomatically and with humor. But as most stories are based on individual viewpoints and biases rather than cold, hard facts, I have come to understand that a person is entitled to their truth as they see it.

SC: *In addition to helping someone write her story, you also help her publish it in book form. What's involved in this part of your work? What did you have to know when you began? What have you had to learn?*

Paula: As a newspaper editor, I was responsible for page layouts and graphic design as well as content. Those skills have been a tremendous help in the publication process. Once a manuscript is complete and the first draft has been approved, it's time to review and select appropriate

photographs, documents, and other memorabilia for inclusion in the book. Properly placed within the text, these items are key to presenting a more complete picture of the person and a well-rounded account of their life

Printing and binding options were almost my downfall. There are so many factors to consider – offset printing vs. copying, signature binding vs. perfect binding, etc. Then there is the selection of the best color, texture and weight of paper or binding materials. I spent many months investigating these endless details and searching for reliable vendors. Having guided my client's intricate journey of recollections, I am committed to providing them with a treasured heirloom book. Their legacy stories deserve a tasteful presentation with premium materials that will endure for generations to come. As unique as each narrator, every book is custom designed, printed on archival, acid-free paper and professionally bound by the finest artisans.

SC: *What advice do you have for Story Circle members who are beginning to write their own story—including those who are thinking of self-publishing it?*

Paula: Do it now. No more excuses! Lock that nasty little critic in your mind away in a closet somewhere and start writing. Start anywhere, but write. Commit a block of time each day and write, write, write. Forget about perfect grammar or chronological order. Just get it down. Start with fond memories that are easy and fun to write about. One story typically will lead to another. Once you have several stories recorded, you can let the critic out of the closet if you must and go about cleaning up and organizing or filling in the blanks. Remember... it's *your* story and *your* truth! Presentation is a matter of individual taste. If you're happy with notes jotted down in a spiral notebook, that's great. If not, consider a neatly typed manuscript with photos, etc., included in plastic sleeves within a nice zippered binder. Or visit your local copy shop and order copies for your family with comb bindings and cardstock covers similar to many cookbooks. Better yet, call me or another small-run publisher and we'll talk about a book format. The expense is greater, but so is the end product. Whatever route you take, take pride in your accomplishment.

SC: *Do you write every day? Do you consider yourself a disciplined writer?*

Paula. Yes. With the exception of days I spend interviewing, I write every day. When working on

After a certain number of years our faces become our biographies. We get to be responsible for our faces.—Cynthia Ozick

*What I do in the writing of any character is to try to enter into the mind, heart and skin of a human being who is not myself. It is the act of a writer's imagination that I set the most high.
—Eudora Welty*

*Long before I wrote stories, I listened for stories. Listening for them is something more acute than listening to them. When their elders sit and begin, children are just waiting and hoping for one to come out, like a mouse from its hole.
—Eudora Welty*

*My very first lessons in the art of telling stories took place in the kitchen . . . my mother and three or four of her friends. . . told stories. . . with effortless art and technique. They were natural-born storytellers in the oral tradition.
—Paula Marshall*

a life story, I commit to completing at least ten pages per day. As a morning person, I typically begin quite early and allow myself no distractions until I have fulfilled my commitment. If I have a particularly productive day and finish earlier than normal, I'll usually continue working to stay ahead. Though some days are tougher than others, it's not much of a sacrifice since writing is my first love.

SC: In addition to your work as a personal historian, you are also a teacher of life-writing. Tell us about some of the programs you have offered or plan to offer.

Paula: Currently, I offer two workshops throughout East Texas. The first is titled "Your Life – One Story at a Time." This one-day course covers such topics as Getting Started, Memoir as Opposed to Biography, Making a Plan, Narrative Flow, and Beyond the First Draft. I'm really looking forward to presenting a customized version of this workshop at the Story Circle Network Conference in Austin next February. Folks who are not interested in writing a memoir have also enjoyed my "Cooking Up the Memories" workshop – a one-day seminar on creating a family history cookbook with a brief family background piece and recipes handed down over generations with anecdotes and memories of family gatherings where appropriate. Both classes prepare participants to begin the process of recording family histories and provide workbooks to aid in their future progress. Also, I will be adding an OWL (Older Women's Legacy) Circle Workshop in the fall.

SC: At Story Circle, we believe that sharing our stories changes us—that we learn and grow as we witness the stories of others. As a personal historian, you hear a great many stories. Are you changed by those you hear and help to write?

Paula: The beauty of this work is the friendship and trust that evolves during the process of helping others to tell and preserve

their family or personal histories. I have learned a great deal from each client and have grown in the process. Listening to their dreams, heartaches and triumphs has been a special gift that has strengthened my ability to understand human nature and to put things in perspective. Perhaps the most poignant, personal story I have done was that of my father, Elmer B. Stallings. It was not until I interviewed him objectively that I came to know the man rather than the father figure. Now I understand that is the greatest gift I can offer to the families of my clients. I lost my father earlier this year, but having his book, "Tales of a Scrapper," has been a great comfort.

"Miracles on the Amazon" is a collection of stories I wrote and published about a Tyler, Texas, couple's experiences during their forty years of Baptist missionary work in Brazil. Lonnie and Janelle Doyle invited me to read their journals, articles, and letters home from the day of their departure in 1949 until their return to Texas in 1989 – offering me a unique insight into their lives and psyches. They are a remarkable couple, and I am still amazed at the power of their faith and their unlimited capacity for love and charity. All proceeds from the sales of their book were donated to the Baptist Mission in Brazil. They have restored this skeptic's faith in mankind.

SC: Thank you, Paula—and good luck in all you do!

Heirloom Memoirs

To learn more about Paula Yost's lifewriting services, classes, and programs, contact her at

Heirloom Memoirs
690 PR 5860, Yantis TX 75497
903-383-2126
psyost@peoplescom.net



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Books for the Journey

In each issue, we review books that teach us something important about women's stories. If you have a favorite book you'd like to share, send for our Reviewers Guide or go to <http://www.storycircle.org/ReviewersGuidelines.shtml>. We welcome your reviews!

Dreams that Blister Sleep: A Nurse in Vietnam by Sharon Grant Wildwind, River Arts Books, 1999. *Reviewed by Susan Albert.* Sharon is a Story Circle member in Calgary, Alberta, CA. She is a nurse-educator who does a great deal of technical writing, but has also found time to write a romance, a mystery, short stories, and (of course) her journal. ***Dreams*** is her first published work

Sharon Grant Wildwind's memoir begins on May 14, 1970 and ends exactly a year later—no ordinary year, in no ordinary place. It is a life-changing year that Sharon spends on assignment in hospitals in Pleiku and Qui Nhon Vietnam, where she sleeps in one of the eight nurses' hooches, a tin-and-wood building with screens and sandbags, and spends her waking hours in Intensive Care, the Emergency Room, or on the wards. It's a tough life, but as Sharon's daily journal shows, it's a life that demands courage, and more than that, the honesty to reveal fear, at least in her journal:

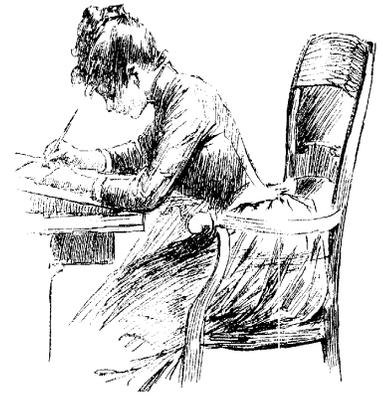
:
 May 30. I've discovered I can fly half-way around the world, lie on the floor of a bus waiting for an ambush, go to sleep during a mortar attack. The worst thing that has happened to me so far is losing my duffel bag because I might have had to borrow clothes that would make me look silly and fatter. People scare me. Jim scared me. Ruth scares me. Captain B. scares me. The doctors scare me. Even the corpsmen scare me. I'm most afraid of not living up to my own expectations. And I will never let anyone see how scared I am. This is a place of courage and that's all I intend to show to the world.

And that's what Sharon shows us, on every page of her journal—the courage to face death and dying, the horrible chaos of war, the loss of a man she almost loves. But her journal also reveals the courage it takes to face the grinding routine of everyday life: living with the rain and mud, cleaning the hospital, working fourteen nights in a row, waiting for the mail, waiting for a day off. Sharon never writes in generalities; everything is specific, concrete, detailed:

Dec. 17. Like faint background music I am learning the rhythms of the ward, the changing shifts, the coming and going of the patients, the rattle of the medicine cart's stubborn wheel, the endless card games, the sounds of football and Captain Kirk, the Viet Nameese children, the lewd remarks, the rounds, the "Good Morning, Viet Nam" that start each day. It's like a waltz, slow and flowing in three-quarter time. I've been dancing to this music a long time now. I want to keep dancing as long as the men do....

It's a cliché to say that war is brutal, but there are no clichés in this journal of real experiences in a terrible place and time that nobody wants to remember. But we must remember and acknowledge it, or we will be doomed to repeat it. Sharon Wildwind's journal is a window into an experience that is too horrible to remember, too powerful to forget.

Dreams that Blister Sleep may be obtained from The Books Collective, 214-21 10405 Jasper Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta T5J 3S2 (Telephone 780-448-0590).



From Dreams that Blister Sleep

Going Home:

May 11, 1971. I am at loose ends, no longer having a place here, having no other place to go. The Colonel gives me a Bronze Star today. It is no big deal. It isn't like the Bronze Star for Valour. Still, it is rather nice. If I hadn't gotten one, I'd have felt like a child who comes home from a party without a favour.

May 14, 1971. I pack everything I can into my one duffel bag and leave my fatigues and combat boots in a corner of my room at the Transient Officer's quarters. The Army can do what it wants with them. If they want me to go to another war, they will just have to issue me more clothing. It's pretty decrepit by now, full of stains and tears. I do regret leaving the combat boots behind. They have worked themselves around to being really comfortable....

It's dark when we leave and there is a hot breeze blowing from the sea. The freedom bird takes off the runway at 2130... All the way down the runway I think, "Please, God, don't let the plane crash on take-off." I am so close to going home. When the plane is airborne, all of us cheer, and most of us cry. The stewardesses serve champagne.

For more Books for the Journey, see p. 22



True Words from Real Women

In this section of each Story Circle Journal, we publish members' 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!

The Path to the Nurse's Office

While I was growing up, my self-esteem was quite low. In elementary school, a lot of the children used to call me "Tiny Tim," after the singer who sang *Tiptoe Through the Tulips*. They called me this because I had long frizzy dark hair, and they wanted to tease me.

I felt so unattractive that I would cover up my face with part of my hair, like a mask, and hold my head downward, looking at the floor. Actually a mask would have done the trick much easier! Perhaps a mask with beautiful straight long hair, and a face with perfect features.

One particular gloomy day I will never forget happened in seventh grade. As I was coming out of my speech class, a classmate that I used to be friends with called me "Tiny Tim," as a hard-to-die remnant of the past. I was so stunned that I was speechless. I was so upset that I did not wish to sit through my last hour choir class.

When I met my choir teacher outside the classroom door, I tearfully told him that I was not feeling well. His reply was for me to report to the school nurse. Instead, I walked home, wanting simply for the world to disappear, and not thinking about the consequences of what I was doing, meaning being truant from my class.

The next day at school, at the onset of my last hour class, my choir teacher summoned me into the hallway and lectured me on the evils of not being trustworthy. He then escorted me to the school nurse's office, where my embarrassment magnified. To add insult to injury the school nurse told me, in front of my choir teacher, that I appeared to look well recovered from not feeling well the previous day. I was simply too ashamed to explain to either of them the real reason why I had gone straight home that day.

Afterwards, it just remained less than a happy experience, as some events can't be erased. But we can move forward.

Sharon Blumberg
Munster IN

Just Keep Writing, Write the Words

Just keep writing. Write the words.
What are the words, where are they?
Hidden away, deep inside.
Is it safe for them to come out?
Just a glimpse, into the light, for just a moment,
And then, darting back into the depths of the
being, the soul—my being, my soul.

What are the words, where are they?
What would they say? What story would they tell?
My story—but it's hidden in the depths.
The words, the feelings, the tears, the joy,
Where are they?
Plumb the depths?
I don't think so...
Not yet....

Leilani Rose
Austin TX

Masks

At a creative arts retreat, I choose to make a mask. With a partner, one takes turns placing damp plaster over the face, waits for it to harden, then oneself spreads plaster over the form, sands it into softness of surface. Decorating options abound. My dear friend, Laura, places strip upon strip of warm tape over my face, eyeholes and breathing space carefully created. Tenderness, a gentleness of caring, as the layers build up. My prone position helps relaxation, which slowly becomes meditative. Today, I witness my trust to allow another to place a mask upon my skin. I relax tension gathered over the recent months of great stress.

After letting the mask dry and readying it for decoration, I intentionally pass by beads and feathers and wildness of possibility and am called to the delicate watercolors. I use a simple wash of aquas, gentle blues and pale browns, then leave the mask to fully dry again.

Upon returning, I carefully hold this creation upright. One large blue tear-like drop appears down the right cheek. I place the solid mask upon my face, look in the mirror and see the face of my mother, who died a few months ago. She rested in a coma as her face softened and held the glorious delicate paleness that preceded her journey for which she was prepared, yet left a tear in her wake.

Illia Thompson
Carmel Valley CA

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You Can Make A Difference

On a snowy December evening in Baltimore, I watched a young, recently hired, female news reporter, Oprah Winfrey, interviewing a disabled Vietnam veteran whose disability payment was caught up in red tape. Because of his injuries, he was unable to return to his factory job and he and his wife and family of four (soon to be five) had to move from their house to an apartment. He also needed back surgery. Oprah made an appeal for help so he and his family could survive until the money situation was resolved. Anyone who could help was asked to call the station for more specific details.

I called Oprah for the information and then called the church where I taught a third-grade Sunday School class and talked to the nun in charge. Together we contacted the rest of the students in the third grade and asked them to bring canned goods to class the next Saturday morning.

Since all of the couple's children were under seven years old, they would be expecting presents for Christmas. My girls had so many dolls and stuffed animals that I had put a lot of them in the closet just to get them out of the way. I decided to refurbish the closet toys and take them, plus a small present for each parent, along with the food collection.

On Saturday, we collected four big boxes of food, which I packed in my car along with the toys to take to the family later that evening.

We located the roach-infested apartment building where the family now lived and were greeted by a thin, weary-looking woman, obviously soon to deliver a child, and three shabbily dressed little girls. Another little girl played with a headless doll in a playpen.

As the food was being carried into the kitchen and the toys hidden in a bedroom, the veteran told me they had to depend solely on outside help to survive. To my surprise, he said we were the only ones who had contacted them. As we left, I almost cried when one of their little daughters ran up the stairs to kiss us good-bye.

I learned a valuable lesson that day—that one person really can make a difference.

Barbara Greenland
Kempner TX

Masks

A close friend is someone who can accept us for what ever it is that we are. Someone that we trust will not judge us for whatever life brings for us to bear. For all others there are masks. Masks that show a face to the world that says everything is fine.

I have known two people who committed suicide. I regret immensely that this happened. I wish I had realized what was really happening, for I would have done everything I could have. But I did not see behind the masks they wore.

In one case a wonderful, accomplished woman that I hadn't seen in a while called me up for a lunch date. My husband and I were able to meet her for lunch. We enjoyed seeing and talking with her. Life had not been going well, but she seemed to be handling it ok. My husband said he had thought about inviting her to come and stay with us, but wasn't sure if he should have made the offer. He realized that her life was getting harder and harder, but she was cheerful, and her usual witty, charming self.

How I wish we had been able to put down the masks and talk about her real state of mind. Maybe the outcome would not have changed, but I would know that I had done all I could to provide the support and help she needed.

A coworker once said that sometimes little events set off a small red light in the back of our brain. Usually we ignore it. He advised me never to ignore such a signal. It could be that a mask was lowered for a brief instant and we caught a glimpse of the real face.

By the same token, if we can put down our masks, we can draw closer to those people who live around us and discover the person behind their masks. Someone caring, who will, or has, faced many of the same issues we face. Someone who needs to have our friendship as much as we need his or hers.

Iva Jean
Florida

Stories from the Heart
February 8-10, 2001
see pp. 18-19 for registration information

Looking Ahead

True Words from Real Women 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. **Members only, please.** And do make sure that your stories are **350** words or less. We receive so many contributions that we must now reject longer stories. Here are the upcoming topics and deadlines:

Sisters—November, 2001 (due October 15)
Friendship—February, 2002 (due January 15)
Feels Like Home—May, 2002 (due April 15)

If you can send your writing via email or as a Word attachment, the editors will love you. If you type your story on an Internet computer, all you need to do is **highlight** the text, **copy** it, and **paste** it directly into an email message. (This will eliminate lots of extra typing!) Send your work to Marie Buckley, marie@aracnet.com. If you submit typed or handwritten stories, please make sure that every word is legible. Mail to Marie Buckley, 1070 N.E. Sturgess St., Hillsboro, OR 97124-3330

More True Words

Where the Wild Things Are

Resentment coils in heavy, greasy folds;
 a blindness wills the status quo to hold.
 Something mean and toothy,
 ready to bite *hard*
 lies wakeful in there.
 It will eat alive (and painfully)
 anyone who tells it "Play along,"
 "Be nice," "Get over it"
 even one more time.
 What would it take to feed the beast?
 To touch the shaggy head with kindness
 and a willingness to understand?
 There is no cage to hold the creature —
 it crouches in there willingly.
 So hungry for approval and permission
 it gnaws its own leg off,
 rather than attack unbidden —
 refusing to hide, to die, to play along.
 Oh, how I do not want the light
 to go out of those fierce, unblinded eyes!
 How much I love you, peering in
 from my acceptable, comfortable world.
 You *must* get well.
 We'll heal together, you and I.
 I will be wild and fierce and run barefoot
 over jagged rocks in winter,
 and howl unfettered at the agony
 and beauty of this life.
 And you, my snarling, mangy friend,
 will learn to eat from a blue crockery bowl
 and love the sound of children's voices
 coming home from school to pull your fur
 and pounce and pummel you with their joy.
 Your coat will grow sleek and shiny
 and you will sigh by the fire
 on a rag rug woven just for you
 by the mistress for whom your heart leaps.
 And your eyes will echo the glow of the fireplace,
 and mine will dance
 with reflected starlight on fast water,
 and there will be such fullness in our souls
 that it will give the angels pause,
 and cause the avatars to smile
 and murmur "Blessed be."

Carolyn Blankenship
 Austin TX

Masks

We live in a time of masks. Which do you wear? How many? Politically correct masks are in fashion: Soccer Moms, Hostess-With-The-Mostest, Wife, Club Member, and others. Is your identity defined as Johnny's Mom, David's Wife, Chairperson of this, or Member of that?

How many masks does an average woman wear during the day, or week, or month? Through the years, the pile of masks must be staggering. We've become comfortable in our masks. They are convenient to hide behind.

I wonder—if we took them all off—would there be anyone underneath?

Barbara Greenland
 Kempner TX

Lessons From a Daughter

It is a humbling experience for me to find that I am learning important lessons from my daughter. One in particular happened recently and remains in my memory.

It happened on a sunny Sunday afternoon. My daughter, Scout, her eight-year old daughter, Madeleine, and I were picnicking in a nearby park. Madeleine had gobbled down her lunch and run off to play with a Frisbee we had brought along. We kept an eye on her as she threw the Frisbee in the air and tried to catch it. She seemed busy and happy...until...we suddenly became aware of her voice. She was surrounded by two girls, a little older than she, and they seemed to be arguing about something. I was about to leap up and rush to Madeleine's defense when Scout gently stopped me. "Wait just a minute, Mom," she cautioned.

I looked at her, surprised, and found it difficult to do as she asked. But Scout's face told me that she meant what she said when she asked me to wait. Then, as though sensing my frustration, she whispered gently, "She will work it out." A few worrisome moments later, the three girls separated and began throwing the Frisbee to one another. Their loud voices had been replaced by laughing voices as they chased after the Frisbee in all directions. I breathed a sigh of relief and looked at my daughter in wonder.

Guessing my thoughts, she explained, "I don't interfere unless it's absolutely necessary."

Sadly, I countered, "I ran interference for you too much, didn't I?"

Scout took my hand and said, "Perhaps that was because no one ran interference for you." The truth of this statement, coming from my daughter, stirred old wounds and moved me to tears. I said nothing for a few minutes until I was able to acknowledge her with a teary smile.

I learned two things that sunny afternoon: one, to have greater faith in my daughter as a mother, and two, to have greater faith in my granddaughter who, in most situations, seems quite capable of taking care of herself.

Dorothee Bart
 Monterey CA

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Poodles on the Beach

In Memory of Mitzi and Muffin~1977-1991

I have a photograph on the night table next to my bed of myself with my two toy poodles, Mitzi and Muffin. I'm kneeling in the sand and they stand in front of me with the blue waves of the ocean behind us. Mitzi, a cool, long-legged silver beauty and Muffin, a cuddly, chubby white ball of fur.

My husband and I used to take them with us each summer on vacation to Gulf Shores, AL. They spent the trip there curled up on my lap sleeping but when we turned off the interstate, they would begin to stir. Then when we turned onto the beach road, smiles would appear and tails would wag excitedly as they peered out the window. It's the beach!

The first summer they were a bit anxious, not knowing where they were, but quickly adapted to sand underfoot instead of grass. They really loved the beach. They would frolic down the beach, fluffy ears flapping behind them in the salty breeze as they chased sand crabs and each other. Then they would run to the water's edge only to scamper back startled when the waves washed over their feet. My husband would say, "I think the dogs enjoy the beach as much as we do." And he was right. It amazed me how my poodles seemed to experience the same feelings as we did. They obviously felt the same sense of freedom and exhilaration from the cool caress of the beach breeze, the same happiness and carefree contentment.

Each time I look at that photo I remember those long, lazy enchanted days on the beach that soothed the souls and invigorated the spirits of dogs and dog lovers alike. Then I imagine Mitzi and Muffin frolicking happily together on the beaches of heaven.

Charlotte Hamrick
New Orleans LA

Masks

What are masks for? Why do we have them? Is it something we need?

I think yes. If we don't have a mask, people will be able to touch what is tender and make you hurt, make you weak.

There are different masks. Mine are for covering my anger. If I do not wear the mask I will hurt you, or you hurt me. I am full, so full of hate, bitter but sweet, and I cannot and will not allow my anger to hurt you as I have hurt.

My other mask covers "me" and "self." Why? I am bitter and sweet. I am standing strong but do fall weak when I am alone. I laugh when I hurt; I hurt and I laugh when I'm angry, and I get angry. I laugh when I cry, and I cry.

I am human.

Tamra Ellis
Lockhart TX

"The very least you can do in your life is to figure out what you hope for. And the most you can do is live inside that hope. Not admire it from a distance but live right in it, under its roof."—Barbara Kingsolver

Links To My Childhood

The sun just came out. I was on the window seat reading, and immediately I was transported back to all those summers at the cottage. On a lake in central Michigan, at the cottage we had days like this every year. In the middle of the night, you pulled up the extra quilt at the foot of your bed, because the night had turned cold. When you woke in the morning you put on jeans and a sweatshirt, instead of your swimsuit, because it was too cool for swimming in the lake. Days like today meant Mom would bake all morning, to keep the oven on, to warm up the cottage at least a little.

I would curl up in one of the big rockers on the screened porch, with a quilt off my bed, a cup of hot cocoa and a good book to read. From the porch I could watch the lake, gray instead of the usual deep blue. Like today, about mid-day the sun would finally come out, at least fitfully.

It has been hot all week here in southern Oregon. Last night I woke in the night and needed the light quilt I keep on the foot of my bed. This morning I put a sweatshirt over my housecoat. I've made bread and I'm baking a chicken for dinner. An hour or so ago I made coffee, gathered pillows, a warm throw, and my kitties and settled onto the window seat to start a new mystery. Part of me was lecturing that in this cool weather I should be out weeding in the garden; the other part of me was justifying what I was doing, because it is, after all, Sunday, the day of rest.

It wasn't until the sun came out, that I realized I had spent the morning recreating a pattern from all those summers. It never occurred to me to turn on the heat, rather than bake. I unconsciously recreated what speaks strongly to me of rest, relaxation, and vacation. The very things I wanted for myself this weekend.

Jennifer Haake
Klamath Falls OR



"Mama exhorted her children at every opportunity to 'jump at de sun.' We might not land on the sun, but at least we would get off the ground."—Zora Neale Hurston

"I have met brave women who are exploring the outer edge of human possibility, with no history to guide them, and with a courage to make themselves vulnerable that I find moving beyond words."—Gloria Steinem

The Carol Landherr LifeWriting Competition

The Story Circle Network is proud to present the winners of its second annual Life-Writing Competition, dedicated to the memory of Carol W. Landherr, an enthusiastic and committed life-writer who inspired others to write and share their stories. Fifteen talented memoirists submitted their work on this year's topic: "To Close the Door on Pain," which was drawn from a remark by May Sarton: "To close the door on pain is to miss the chance for growth." We offer our thanks to everyone who entered the competition, and our congratulations to our three fine winners: **Jean McGroarty (\$50 Prize)**, **Erin Philbin (\$25 Prize)**, and **Sandy McKinzie (\$25 Prize)**. And thanks, also, to the team of eight judges who determined the winners.

Domino Effect

by Jean McGroarty

Jean McGroarty lives in Battle Ground IN, where she serves as Director of Education of the Tippecanoe County Humane Society. Jean has been involved with the Story Circle Network for a little over a year, and facilitates E-circle #3 in the Internet Chapter. Her next adventure will be sending her twin daughters off to colleges 800 miles apart, while making sure her husband, teenaged son, and two cats are fed and cared for.

Dominoes. I used to love setting up those little black rectangles on their narrow ends in complicated formations. Then, by touching one, I could send the whole bunch gently tumbling, each knocking the next one down, until a pattern was made clear. Sometimes they formed a simple shape. Other times I was more creative, making letters or pictures. Always, every domino affected its neighbor, causing the next to fall, on and on until the big picture emerged.

I wasn't thinking about dominoes on that day in May of 1991 when Dave, my husband, confronted me about my alcoholism. Of course I knew about it. I knew I was so deeply mired in my pain and depression and vodka habit that I couldn't see any way out of it. I knew I was impaired as a parent. I knew my work was suffering. I knew all of these things. But I also knew that alcoholism isn't just a bad habit like biting your fingernails or sticking your bubble gum wad under the desk. It was a friend, a malevolent companion that grew inside and all around my soul. It was a way of life—my way of life—and I was afraid to change, to give up what kept me going every day.

I remember the tears in his eyes and the pleading in his voice when he told me that I had to stop. If I didn't, he would leave me and take our three children. I was drunk and weepy, but I listened to his pain as I was listening to my own. I had no doubts that he was right. This had to stop. But, oh, I was frightened to take this step away from my comfortable misery. What I didn't know was that I was tipping the first in a row of dominoes that would become my new life.

The next day I kept the appointment Dave had made for me with an addictions counselor. I threw away the bottles hidden here and there around the house and spent my first sober day in years. I was right to be afraid. I learned that I was not only leaving behind my drinking days, but I was also entering into the different misery of ridding my body of its dependence on alcohol.

What saved me from going crazy was walking. When I craved a drink, I'd take a ten-minute walk. When I was so irritable I wanted to scream at my kindergartener, I'd walk for 20

minutes. When all the little frustrations at work made me shake, a half-hour stroll was my prescription. All that drinking had contributed to obesity, and I must have weighed 250 pounds (I was afraid to step on a scale, so I don't know). As I walked, little by little, I began to shed pounds. The second domino was falling, pushed by the first.

After several months of sobriety, I realized that I had lost at least one dress size, so I decided to enter a weight loss program. I continued to walk. I dusted off my old bicycle and started to ride a little bit, too. As the effects of years of drinking began to fade away, I also began to notice the beauty of my town, of the trail where I walked every day, of my family. I noticed my own beauty, too. I was on my way out of the pit I'd dug for myself, and I liked it. Working with my weight loss group, exercising every day and eating well made me a happy woman, and I hadn't been truly happy for a long time.

Other dominoes took their places in the pattern. Because I felt good and wasn't out of commission in the evenings and weekends, I began to volunteer—at my children's school, at the local nature center, in our community theater. I made new friends and rekindled relationships I'd let fall by the wayside. I continued to lose weight. My relationship with my husband was the best it had been since before the kids were born. I spent more time with my children, and my family began to heal from the wounds I had inflicted.

In November 1992, having lost 85 pounds, I counted some of the new things I could do. I could cross my legs comfortably rather than sitting splay-legged. I could fit in the bathtub, soaking in scented water with candles and a good paperback. I could also do breast self-exam and actually tell if my breasts felt different. The first time I did this I found a lump, about the size of a walnut. Another domino, solid black, plunked into the pattern.

It was breast cancer, and things moved quickly. Mammograms, the first I'd ever had, since I was only 41 years old, then a biopsy, then a mastectomy with reconstruction. Events and medical personnel whirled around me like I was on a merry-go-round. Having found the cancer at an early stage, I managed to escape chemotherapy and radiation. One of my doctors told me that if I hadn't lost the weight, the cancer could have passed unnoticed for a longer time—perhaps too long. Because I was healthy and in good physical condition before the surgery, my recovery was smoother and shorter. I didn't feel the need for a support group because my family and my friends wrapped themselves around me like a soft blanket, comforting and warming my battered psyche. I continued to walk every day, even if only for a block or two, as my body became whole again.

By the spring of 1993, I had lost 103 pounds. I had beaten alcoholism, obesity and cancer in two years' time. It was then

that I turned to look behind me. I saw the pattern the dominoes had left. When I stopped drinking, I started to walk. As I walked, I lost weight. Once I had lost enough weight, I found the cancer. The help and compassion of friends and family I had rediscovered along the way made my road easier. The cancer itself taught me many things about my own strength and determination. The dominoes had formed a perfect circle, not a circle back to my old ways, but a circle of love and recovery, of finding a happier, healthier, wiser woman growing and blooming within me.

I'll never know what made me touch that first domino. Maybe it was a higher power. It could have been my own intuition, urging me to stop killing myself so I could find the disease that was trying to kill me, too. Perhaps it was both. But I do know that my life changed irreversibly in those two years, and only for the better. There can be growth from pain, healthy growth that will bear wonderful fruit.

How I (Mostly) Stopped Worrying & Learned to (Sometimes) Love the Change

by Erin Philbin

Erin Philbin writes: "I was born into a loving family, the fourth of five daughters. I am married to Christopher Boyle and have two sons: Brendan (6) and Owen (2). I am a speech-language pathologist working in a rehab hospital, primarily with an adult, outpatient population. I participated in a Story Circle in Pittsburgh several years ago, and joined the Story Circle Network. I also belong to our Internet Chapter and an e-circle led by Marie Buckley. I am grateful for the connection I have made with my sister members, and continue to enjoy writing my life story."

Last April, a month after I weaned my younger son, I was diagnosed with premature menopause. For almost a year, I tried to deny it. *"This can't be happening to me! I've just turned thirty-eight! This must be some crazy reaction my body is having to going off the Pill. Maybe it's because I've lost some weight recently."* I have some lab work done which concurs with the diagnosis. I won't hear of it. *"I'm not ready for this! I didn't ask for it. I won't accept it."*

I feel like Edith Bunker. When I got my first period, I was nine years old. After my sister showed me how to wear a sanitary belt, I went out on the front porch to play with my baby dolls. I've been married for fifteen years, and spent almost half that time in fertility treatment. *"Could all those drugs and procedures have caused me to run out of eggs faster? I'll guess I'll never know. It wouldn't do me any good to ask, would it? Jesus, just when I thought I was ready to stop beating myself up."* Now I'm going to be an old woman. I don't know how to do that either. Hell, I don't want to know. I don't have time for a midlife crisis. Owen is still in diapers, and I have to teach Brendan to tie his shoes.

I try more tests and get a sonogram of my ovaries. The young technician smiles brightly. "Perfect, just perfect," she says.

"Everything is okay then," I say with relief.

"I could use your sonogram in a classroom," she says. "It perfectly shows a woman going through the change. See how everything is thinning out..."

"I'm thirty-eight," I interrupt. "My son just turned one." I'm starting to sound like a broken record.

"Well, at least you've had your babies," she replies.

I decide that just because I have some medical diagnosis, it doesn't mean has to anything has to change. No one has to know. My body, however, begins a total revolt. One minute I'm so tired I could fall asleep in the middle of a conversation. The next minute, I'm wide-awake and my heart is racing. *"Am I having a heart attack or a panic attack?"* Parts of my body are too dry and parts are too wet. My eyes are itchy all the time, and I'm using more Clearasil than I did in high school. I get cramps and back pain so badly that it feels like the back labor I had with Brendan. *"What good is not getting a period if you still get PMS?"* I try Lamaze breathing and wine poured in a travel mug. The wine works better.

I still try to pretend that nothing is happening. When the major symptoms start, I have ready excuses. *"This isn't really insomnia. I just have too much on my mind. Who wouldn't have trouble sleeping with everything that's going on at work and at home?"*

The night sweats start. *"Damn water bed heater! What's wrong with it now? I must have been having a nightmare, and the weather has been so funky..."*

But then the hot flashes begin. *"Maybe they aren't hot flashes. Aren't they supposed to start at your neck and move up your face?"* Mine start at my back and move down. Twice as I stand to walk patients to the door, I notice that it looks like I've wet my pants. Well, I guess I can't ignore that.

I make a momentous decision. I'm not going to handle this in my usual way any longer. I'm not going to be quiet, secretive any more. If you can't beat 'em; join 'em. I'm working on becoming a menopause poster child. I try to talk myself into my new life. *"If I'm going to do this, I'm going to have to set some new goals; get some new role models. I'm going to need some new clothes!"* Maybe I should work on not needing so much.

I'm reading up on nutrition. I eat Luna Bars that are delicious, and drink sage tea, which is not. I bring in gallons of soy-milk for my friends to try. I buy flaxseed and then realize I don't know what to do with it.

Terrified of the debilitating osteoporosis my aunt suffered, I've started weight lifting. I hadn't even bought myself a pair of shorts in over ten years. It takes me more courage than I thought I had to walk into the gym and ask for help. I work next to a lovely woman in her late sixties who's had a stroke. She's able to leg press more than I. I manage to stick with it, and find that I'm getting hooked. I flex in the mirror while I'm getting dressed if no one is looking. My friend, Valerie, asks me if I'm doing ok. I tell her, "I just did my personal best on the chest press."

"That's nice," she responds. "Right?"

I find that I'm getting blunter, saying things I wouldn't have dared to think of last year. I tell my mother about my hot flashes. "Ah, power surges," she says. "I never had them."

"Obviously not, or you wouldn't be calling them power surges," I respond.

Although I have a bit of reputation as a "push-over" when it

comes to my patients, I report in staffing that I've told one of them to "Suck it up." There is a moment of silence before everyone starts to laugh. "What is the world coming to?" the doctor asks. "If Erin starts telling people to 'suck it up', what chance do the rest of us have?"

"Hey, look out, doc," I tell him. "I'm wearing purple, and saying what I mean. I'm also never wearing platform shoes again, no matter how many times they come back in style." Maybe I'm not going through the change. Maybe I'm developing Tourette's syndrome.

A physician with whom I've worked for over ten years, asks me how I'm doing. I surprise both of us by telling him. He is able to give me some research data and balanced information. After our discussion I decide to call my gynecologist and agree to begin hormone replacement therapy. It's not perfect, but I'm feeling better. I'm keeping a list of questions for my next visit with her. I'm also having follow-up discussions with my colleague. "*Eek! Did I just say 'break-through bleeding' to him?*"

So, now I'm working on being a crone. I'm ready to be wise and mellow. Hell, I'd buy some mellow if I could. I'm not exactly sure where I'm going, but I've strapped on my seatbelt, and I'm ready for the trip of my life.

Healing Power

by Sandy McKinzie

Sandy McKenzie writes: "I am a retiree. I now enjoy the freedom to dabble in writing. After Ed died, I continued writing. I was thankful that I had kept a diary, and I knew my biggest fan was watching over me. He was my constant supporter, and without his dying experience I would not have known how to fully trust in a loving God and live each day in that trust and faith. I am also truly blessed with a twin sister. She is my writing advisor on our family stories, but claims I don't always remember the way 'they really happened'."

It is September, 29, 1998. I am standing beside my husband's bed in the Intensive Care Unit of St. Vincent Hospital in Indianapolis. Ed has been a patient for eight long, pain filled days. Ill since our retirement in 1996, his chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (C.O.P.D.) has wrecked his lungs and taken a deadly toll on his body. His lungs are now filled with pneumonia and aspergillus, a fungal infection. The doctors have given Ed an ominous diagnosis and urged me to share with him the reminder of his Living Will. They want to make sure he understands and still desires "no heroics".

I want the doctors to know about my Ed. They need to know what a stubborn, willful man my Ed is. I tell them that my husband knows God...has since Cradle Roll at the First Baptist Church in 1934. They smile, sympathetically, pat my shoulder and urge me to go talk with him.

God is no stranger to either of us yet I'm not ready to lose Ed. I wonder how I can possibly talk with him about his Will, and keep the terror off of my face and out of my voice. Surely he'll see that I need to tell him so much more. That I want him to stay with me longer than forty-three years.

A beeping heart monitor and an IV holding his 'meat and po-

tato' nourishment stand beside Ed's bed. There is a sliding table holding his untouched coffee and a pencil to mark the optimistic menu lying close by. He is wearing an irritating oxygen mask and his blue socks. The blue socks I brought for him to wear home, though it's obvious it won't be to our home he will be going. I softly cry and ask Ed if he's sure he doesn't want the respirator, and he says adamantly, "No!" You still want your Living Will enforced? He again assures me with a "Yes!"

Now Ed knows he is dying. I want him to speak to me, but he closes his eyes just as he stubbornly closes the subject. I wonder how such a small, sick man can be so strong in his faith.

There are only two chairs to give comfort to our exhausted family, so we stagger our needs. Ed's brother, our niece, granddaughter and two daughters return to the family waiting room down the hall. Our youngest daughter, Nancy, has opted to stay with her dad and me. Ed's pain and thirst has made him agitated, and his nurse has ordered more medication.

After thirty-three hours of murmured prayers and quiet tears beside his deathbed, the nurse enters the room. She urges me to lie down beside Ed. "When I was taking my nurses training I was involved in a study that proved that lying beside your dying mate has a healing power. My mother-in-law did this when my father-in-law was dying. As morbid as many might think, there was a healing power for her," she explains.

"But I can't do that. My Ed is comatose from morphine. He won't even know I'm here, so how can it be healing?"

"How do you know he won't know?" she counters.

Nancy agrees with the nurse, "Lie down, Mom, you're totally exhausted. I'll sit in the chair beside the bed."

With trepidation I crawl into the hospital bed to lay at Ed's side...to listen to his raspy breathing...to memorize the antiseptic smell of his bedclothes and sheets. The acid odor of morphine and sweat from his exhaustive effort of wanting to live permeates the room. I struggle to close the green shoulder snaps on his hospital gown for I want to keep him warm...to busy my hands...to touch. I place my hand over his small, bony shoulder to rest my aching head. My eyes are so close to his ear I peruse his many gray hairs and the small black mole behind his right ear. His chest heaves to keep life in his six-foot, one-hundred-thirty-pound, fragile body. The vocal sounds of Ed's choked inhaling and exhaling pound my eardrums. Yet, for some reason, they are as quieting to my nerves as raindrops on the roof of our camping trailer on a summer night.

My left hand cradles his listless arm; too long for me to touch his fingers so I gently squeeze his wrist, and hold as tightly as I dare. I breathe in and breathe out pungent memories. Miraculously I sleep.

The nurse's station, the epicenter of activity, is across the short hall from Ed's room. When I had drifted off, the noise was reverberating around my exhausted ears. I awaken. Now, except for the beeping of the heart monitor, the silence is deafening. At some time, the nurse had tightly closed the door and pulled the drapes. Refreshed from my short nap, I crawl from the hospital bed. I tiptoe past Nancy who is now asleep in her chair.

Two hours later, our family stands together. I hold Ed's clammy hand. The power nap and holding him has given my body the energy I now need. The salty taste from my tears and

kisses linger on my lips as he smiles and takes his last breath. Ed's unexpected smile gives me the affirmation of a better life beyond...the affirmation that all Christians need and want.

What a spiritual experience I would have missed had I allowed my fear and grief to reign. Like childbirth, I pray the pain and blur of the vigilant days will heal.

A Reader's Story—Siobhan Kaliher

continued from page 5

came a teenager, obsessed with my body and attracting boys. Damn you for calling me Thunder Thighs, for squeezing my love handles after we hugged. For not helping me know that it was who I was on the inside that mattered, that was important. Encouraging my interests, talking to me about how I was feeling--you did none of that. Busy yourself in your routine, and let the kids raise themselves. After all, you said, you were self-directed as a child. You assumed we were just like you.

I blame you and Dad for where I am today. And still I'm eager to present to you this "perfect" image of who I am. The happy daughter. Eager to please.

The week after I wrote that letter, Mom found a lump in her breast, and we were thrown headlong into the world of diagnoses, prognoses, surgery, and chemotherapy. Another year passed, and Mom, amid confessions of past denial and rage, left Dad. Last week, the three of us sat in the cool rationality of the therapist's office, and began to sort through lifetimes of experience, and emotions that had long been felt but never expressed.

I shift again on the bench. We did say 11:30, didn't we? And it is Tuesday, and I am at the right restaurant, aren't I? I sit with all my thoughts and feelings, clamoring for attention, like so many needy children pulling on the hem of my dress. The door once again opens, and my mother walks toward me.

"Hello, Little Mother," is how I greet her, pulling her small body into my arms, tucking her head under my chin. Her hair is golden brown, free from gray, and is soft and downy, like a baby's. Frog's hair, my hairdresser says. I always called it chick fuzz, an ever-present temptation, after she shampooed and dried it and before she coated it with hair spray, to hit her head with a close-range blast of air from my pursed lips. Poof! All the hair would scatter and stay that way, revealing a small spot of scalp. She has always worn her hair short, even more so now after chemo. One inch all around, trimmed every ten days by the amazing Flo-Bee clippers, attached to the in-house vacuum. She is now free from her daily ritual of washing, drying, spraying, combing and spraying again. I used to tease that she was going to die of White Rain Maximum Hold lung disease.

A year ago she sketched in pencil a portrait of herself, emphasizing lines that I do not see, creating an image of a dour, unhappy woman that I did not recognize. "Is this how you see yourself?" I asked her. "I tried to be true to what I saw in the mirror," she answered.

I see something different, a collage of images collected over the 35 years I have known her. Normally reserved, she is occasionally overcome with laughter, throwing her head back, eyes closed, great peals coming from deep inside. She is beautiful

when she smiles. Dad says he remembers watching her play basketball in 9th grade, all elbows and knees and crooked teeth. Her smile is wide and bright, her teeth made straight by braces which the poor minister's daughter paid for herself, working as a stenographer; a professional girl wearing Bobbie Brooks suits in colors named shrimp or powder blue or fawn.

She cries without drama, quietly catching big tears with her cupped hands as they squeeze one by one out of her sad brown eyes. She has experienced much loss in her life. She lost her childhood homes and family heirlooms to bombs in war-torn Helsinki. No one knows now that little Eeva Marie watched starving Finns eat bark from the trees in the town parks, or that she had a penchant for eating fish eyes. They pop when you bite down on them, she would later describe, trying to make us understand that such a thing would serve as a delicacy within her family, who would make one fish last for three meals—first the flesh, then fish soup, and then finally the bones, made soft by hours of boiling. As a child I could never understand why she always ate the cartilage from the chicken bones at our family suppers.

She lost her native land and people when she sailed to Ellis Island aboard the QE II as a girl of twelve. She later lost her brother, as she knew him, his mind destroyed by shock treatments administered by the State of Minnesota in the 1950s after he traded his delinquent ways for God and frightened those around him. Northern Minnesotans are not given to public fits of passion, religious or otherwise. She lost her mother, her father, her only son, her breast, and most recently, the marriage, in which she has lived for 38 years. She has survived 13 surgeries. All quietly, without fanfare or complaint.

The Finns have a word to describe a quality within themselves: *Sisu*. An untranslatable word, loosely meaning fortitude, the ability to carry on through the inevitable adversity and emerge unbroken, with the recognition that tomorrow will come and bring with it another opportunity to live, thrive, prosper.

She recently showed me her latest acquisition—a butterfly catching kit, complete with extra large net, ventilated jar, and identification book. "I want to see them closer," she said, "to know what they are." I smiled to myself, picturing my 59-year-old mother running around her backyard, catching colorful bits of intricate beauty, naming them, and setting them free to be appreciated another day.

"No, I don't care for any," she replies to the waiter's offer of coffee or tea or dessert. "None for me, thanks," I say. We have managed to, for the last hour, consume our food and our drinks and at the same time not miss a step in our elaborate yet simple dance around the edge of the chasm that holds our feelings about all that has happened. I look across the table at Mom, and imagine our faces to be mirrors, as she meets my eyes with a pleasant smile.

*"Oh, I know all about my mother and me," you may say.
"All that business with my mother was over years ago."
You don't and it wasn't.—Nancy Friday*

When you
open your
heart,
you open your
mind.
—Beth Mende Conny



The best and most
beautiful things in
this world cannot be
seen or even touched.
They must be felt
with the heart.
—Helen Keller

Stories from the Heart

Story Circle Network National Conference

February 8 – 10, 2002
Holiday Inn on Town Lake
Austin, Texas

It's not too early to make plans to join us in Austin for the exciting first national conference of the Story Circle Network!

Stories from the Heart will bring women from around the country to celebrate our stories and our lives. Through writing, reading, listening, and sharing, we will discover how personal narrative is a healing art, how we can gather our memories, how we can tell our stories. We welcome readers, writers, storytellers, and any woman with a past, present, and future. There will be opportunities to explore difficult or hidden issues, expand our relationships with other women, and discover different modes and media—such as art, dance, and drama—for sharing our stories. Come, learn, share, celebrate with us as we honor our stories!



Our Keynoters

From our Friday night keynote speaker, Dr. Betty Sue Flowers, to our closing lunch on Sunday with Dr. Susan Wittig Albert, you will meet remarkable women discussing topics ranging from finding a publisher, to meeting ourselves anew, to creativity in the second half of life. Betty Sue is a professor of English, a published poet, and has collaborated with Bill Moyers on *The Power of Myth* and other books. Susan is the founder of the Story Circle Network and national best-selling author of *Writing From Life: Telling Your Soul's Story*. Both are committed to the vital work of helping women realize the importance of the stories of their lives.





Registration Form

Stories from the Heart

Name _____ Phone _____
 Street Address _____ Email _____
 City, State, Zip _____ Story Circle Member? yes no

If attending on Sunday, please note your lunch preference: ___chicken___vegetarian

Payment Information

Session/Day	Membership Status	Early Registration (before 12/15/01)	Regular Registration (12/16/01 -02/07/02)	Amount
Full Session (Fri/Sat/Sun)	Member	\$150	\$175	
	Non-Member*	\$200	\$225	
Friday Session only (Pre-Conference Workshop)	Member & Non-Member/Guest	\$25	\$30	
Friday only (Keynote Speaker & Reception)	Member & Non-Member/Guest	\$25	\$30	
Saturday Session Only	Member	\$75	\$100	
	Non-Member/Guest	\$100	\$125	
Sunday Session Only	Member	\$50	\$75	
	Non-Member/Guest	\$75	\$100	
			Total Enclosed	

- ❖ Non-Members who choose to join prior to the end of the conference on Sunday, February 10, 2002, will have a portion of their registration fee applied to their dues.

Copy this page and send with your check to Conference Registration, The Story Circle Network, PO Box 500127, Austin TX 78750. To register on-line and use your credit card, go to <http://www.storycircle.org/frmregister.shtml>.

Scholarship Aid

We are able to offer a limited number of scholarships in increments of \$50 up to \$200 for a full non-member conference fee to women who need help to meet the conference costs. We may also be able to offer an additional \$50 for baby sitting help. If you would like to apply for a scholarship, please give us the following information, on a separate sheet of paper:

- 1) How much aid you are requesting for either registration fees or child care
- 2) Tell us about yourself, including your reason for applying for a scholarship
- 3) One of the objectives of the conference is "to return to our communities and share our discoveries with others. In approximately 200 words, explain how you will help the Story Circle Network achieve this objective.

We will respond to your scholarship request on or before December 15, 2001

Tips from LifeWriters

Recently, *Story Circle* asked a few lifewriters to tell us about their favorite tools and techniques for lifewriting. We were so intrigued by their responses that we wanted to share them with you—and ask you to share your ideas with us! If you have a lifewriting tool or technique that works for you, send it to *Lifewriting Tips*, china@tstar.net or PO Box 1616, Bertram TX 78605.

Using a Memory Chain and a Memory Wheel

Two tools I use to gather memories are from my days as a language arts teacher. They are a Memory Chain and a Memory Wheel. I have used both techniques in my online writing class and in my local lifewriting classes.

A Memory Chain simply involves placing any object in front of you, writing its name down and then the first thing that it reminds you of. You continue by writing down what that memory reminds you of and so on for twelve memories. Example: This "watch" reminds me of "our anniversary" reminds me of "looking for something special to buy Bill" reminds me of "not taking the trip we planned for our 25th anniversary" reminds me of "beach photographers" etc. until you have a dozen memories listed.

A Memory Wheel can be done around any topic. The topic word goes in the middle of the wheel. There are 8 spokes radiating out and on each is a prompt under which you jot down all the memories that you can think of. Example: If the topic is Sisters, the prompts on the spokes might be Games We Played, Times We Laughed, Trips Together, Embarrassing Moments, Clothes and Shopping Stories, Boyfriends and so on.—*Marie Buckley, Hillsboro OR*

Passionate about Colors

I'm prompted to write by emotion and passion. I write emotionally in my journal for myself, and I write passionately about things that I want to share with others in letters, articles and editorials.

My favorite tool for writing letters is a really good fountain pen. For everything else (journaling, research notes, etc.) a fountain pen slows me down because I write faster, so I use a Pilot Precise V5 extra fine rolling ball pen. Imagine my delight when Pilot came out with new ink colors in magenta, turquoise and purple—wait until the utility companies see the checks I've sent them this month! Sometimes I do step out of "vanilla" mode to live on the wild side.

I have several journaling techniques but one of my most rewarding is questions and answers. I write what I'm struggling with in the form of a question and then write every conceivable answer until I get to the core of what is really going on and can see which direction to take. It's writing through the wave to the other side, instead of trying to stay on the crest. Just dive in and see what is really there churning underneath the surface.—*Cindy Baum, Waukarusa IN*

Quicklists: A Repository of Ideas

In order to get stories in my mind, on my lips, and on paper I often use a Quicklist. Examples of my Quicklists include "Gifts Given," "Gifts Received," and "Tangible Treasures."

The Quicklist consists of three vertical columns with a narrow left-hand column called "NAMES." Names can include persons, places, things, events, etc. I generally complete this column before going on to the other columns on the page. The middle column, labeled "DESCRIPTION" describes the name from the first column by using adjectives, dates, etc. I title the right hand column "ANECDOTES." In this column I briefly describe the story. Each Quicklist is a repository of ideas that I can use any time I'm at a loss for something to write about.—*Carolyn Scheider, Austin TX*

A Fountain of Truth

Even in today's high tech world of computers and instant communications, my favorite writing tools include a hardback, blank-page journal and a proper fountain pen. Not ballpoint, not "Uniball" roller, but a genuine ink pen filled with coal-black ink. My sister gave me a beautiful Montblanc Fountain pen many years ago, and like a special paintbrush for an artist, it has been my preferred creative writing tool since that time.

Although I am accustomed to writing magazine and newspaper articles directly on my computer, maintaining a personal journal there just doesn't work for me. The sound of the keyboard clacking and the appearance of letters on the screen is too noisy and removed, too sterile. There is something mystical, even magical at times, about putting pen to paper and watching the letters form, the words emerge, with a smudge here or crossing out a word there. It is almost as though the process of writing by hand takes me deeper within, closer to my heart, closer to the truth. Like life-writing itself, using a fountain pen and paper is, quite simply, a more raw and essential way of nurturing a story.—*Nancy Rigg, Los Angeles, CA*

Bloodroot

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A Story Circle News Roundup

If you'd like to share your writing-related news, or if you're facilitating or participating in a Story Circle, tell us about it! Write to Story Circle Roundup, PO Box 1616, Bertram TX, or email Susan Albert at china@star.net

Hillsboro OR News

Marie Buckley just finished facilitating two Summer Story Circles for 6 weeks. One group met in the morning and one in the evening each Wednesday in June and July. "We wrote summer stories about food, clothes, celebrations, travel, romance, and jobs," Marie says. "Summer memories are some of the best we have!"

Marie will be facilitating a nine-week lifewriting class this fall through Jackson Bottom Wetlands in Hillsboro and an evening group at Main Street Books. Both will begin the third week of September. The Hillsboro Reading Circle that Marie facilitates continues to meet monthly to discuss women's memoirs. Both discussion and lifewriting or journaling questions are sent to members in advance of each meeting. Anyone interested in either a lifewriting class or the Reading Circle, please contact Marie at 503-648-7019 or marie@aracnet.com.

Internet Chapter Update

Inet membership is currently at 143, there are 11 writing ecircles and two reading ecircles. We are happily writing our stories with a great variety of topics and experiences to share. All of the writing ecircle facilitators recently completed a survey about how their groups are going along with a discussion of both successes and challenges each has faced within her ecircle. We are all now in the process of reviewing our findings and thoughts which may lead to a few changes in ecircles such as combining those that have only two or three participating members and also letting members know that if they don't participate for three months, their name will be taken off an ecircle's active list. An active writing ecircle participant completes 12 new stories every year, so ecircle writing alone can be the basis for putting together a memoir for yourself, your family, or even for publication! —*Marie Buckley*

Austin Chapter Plans Fall Programs

The Austin TX chapter is starting two new evening Writing Circles and one new reading Circle. Susie Flatau will facilitate the Southwest Circle, especially for folks in the Oak Hill-Dripping Springs area. Beginning August 21, this group will meet from 7-8:30 p.m. on the third Tuesday of each month at Serrano's in Oak Hill, 6510 W. Hwy 290. Contact Susie at galaia@flash.net, or 512-288-4614

Carolyn Blankenship will facilitate a South-Central Circle which will meet from 7:30-9 p.m. on the first Tuesday of each month, beginning on September 4. Carolyn's group will be called "Journaling for Insight and Personal Growth." It is scheduled to meet at the Senior Activity Center at 3911 Manchaca Rd, between Lamar Blvd and Ben White. Email Carolyn at maddog@io.com or call her at 443-5222.

Penny Appleby would like to facilitate a Women's Fiction Ready Circle. If you're interested in participating, send her a note at penny.appleby@attglobal.net or call her at 512-306-8936. Please let her know the times that are convenient for you.—*Catherine Cogburn*

Story Circle Schedules Benefit Book Signings in Austin

Susan Wittig Albert will talk about *Bloodroot*, her new China Bayles mystery and sign copies of the book on Monday, October 22, 7-9 p.m. in the Colorado Room of the LCRA, 3700 Lake Austin Blvd, Austin TX. For information, 512-454-9833, or email storycircle@storycircle.org. Last year, we raised nearly \$1000 for Story Circle at this annual benefit. This year, our goal is \$1200. Come, enjoy an evening with Susan, do your Christmas shopping, and help Story Circle grow—all at the same time! So mark your calendar now, and bring a friend.

Susan will also be speaking to the Austin Herb Guild on Tuesday, November 6, 10:30-11:30 a.m., at the Zilker Garden Center. The title of her talk is "Herbs are Good to Think With." The profits from book sales at this event also benefit Story Circle. Open to the public.



The Littlest Big Kid

long ago stories about me and my family

by Donna Van Straten Remmert

"Donna has beautifully recaptured her child self, speaking honestly and humorously within an authentic framework of time and place"—*Story Circle Book Reviews*

See the complete review at www.storycircle.org/BookReviews and read Donna's interview in the *Story Circle Journal*, November, 2000 (Vol.5 No.3)

Order copies now! \$12.00 + \$3.50 Priority Mail (TX residents add \$.99 tax)
Send check payable to Donna Remmert at 3301 Far View Dr., Austin, Tx. 78730
Questions? 512-349-0811 or dremmert@austin.rr.com



More Books for the Journey

The Dance of Anger, by Harriet Goldhor Lerner, Ph.D., Harper & Row 1985 ISBN 0-06-091565-X (pbk.)—reviewed by Doris Anne Roop-Benner, Richardson TX

When I read a book that inspires me, I mark the pages that I want to go back and study again. Of the 232 pages in *The Dance of Anger*, I turned down over 50 corners. My first reading was in 1989, and I still go back and find reasons why this book made such an impact on my life.

The biggest lesson was to put more 'I' in my life. Then, to remember that I have a right to my thoughts and feelings; that no one else will take responsibility for me; that I cannot change other people; and that the only person I have power over is myself.

The Dance of Anger has to do with becoming your own person without losing others. Anger can be a tool for managing our relationships and helping us become our best. I have recommended this book to many friends who are angry—at themselves, at their partners, at their families, at their employers—and, who have expressed a desire to improve their lives. It offers many excellent suggestions such as 'The Plan for Reshaping': think about your problem; seek temporary distance from it; don't place blame, be vague, or tell others how to feel; appreciate everyone's differences; speak up for yourself; and use the pronoun 'I'.

Take the challenge. Read the book. Become your own person.

A Good Book Is the Best of Friends, A Reader's Journal, by Robin Doak. Hyperion, 2001. Hardcover ISBN: 0-7868-6719-1. Reviewed by Margaret H. Knorr, Rand, WV.

I have been looking for a quality journal to keep notes on the books that I read, and now I've found it! Two years ago I bought a Book Reader's Journal, and it ended up being blank pages for me to list books I've read and books I want to read. It was very disappointing.

A Good Book Is the Best of Friends is not disappointing. There is space to review 25 books. This journal acts as a collection of book reviews and provides some space to provide some history about the books you've read. You are prompted to list title, author, genre, publication date, place of purchase, who recommended it to you, who you've recommended it to, whether you received it as a gift and from whom, why you chose to read the book, favorite characters, why you would or would not read other books by the same author, when you lent it out, when you got it back, notes and how you would rate the book. The author gives a rating system to use (1-5 stars) when filling out information on a book you've read and tips on things to record about the book as you're reading it. She also provides prompts for you to think and write about as you read a book of fiction or non-fiction. She also includes some suggestions for book group members.

Writers are what they write, also what they fail to write.—
Diane Trilling

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

with Susan Wittig Albert, Catherine Cogburn, Susie Flatau, Donna Remmert

Telling, Sharing, and Shaping Our Stories

Women are natural storytellers, sharing their experiences of work and love, children and challenge, bright hours and dark days. In this weekend workshop, you will learn why and how storytelling can be an important means of self-discovery, self-determination, and transformation. Together, we will discover why personal narrative is a healing art, how our stories can be sacred acts, and how writing the story of our past helps us define a healthy future.

Saturday, October 6 & Sunday, October 7, 2001

Lower Colorado River Authority Complex, 3700 Lake Austin Blvd., Austin TX

\$100 for Story Circle members, \$120 non-members

for details, go to www.storycircle.org/Workshops/

or write or phone Story Circle Network, PO Box 500127, Austin TX 78750-0127, 512-454-9833

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

Story Circle Members in Print

What have you published lately? Please send updates to Nancy Rigg, njrigg@mediaone.net. You may also send your news item to news@storycircle.org for posting on our website.

Let's join in a round of applause for these Story Circle members whose writing has been recently published.

Marie Buckley's work has been featured in the June and August 2001 issues of "Alternative & Complementary Therapies" and the "Journal of the Society of Integrative Medicine." Marie lives in Hillsboro OR.

Melanie Zyck-Alberts, of Austin TX, is a regular freelance writer for the "Hill Country Sun," a monthly magazine about the Texas Hill Country.

Mary Cox-Bilz has had another new book published (the second this year!): *How to Promote, Advertise, and Market Your Published Book* (Cambridge Books, July 2001). Mary lives in East New Market MD.

Mary Jo Doig's story "Luck," written for E-Circle #2, was published in the Rockbridge Area Free Clinic newsletter. Mary Jo is a resident of Glasgow VA.

Claudia Reder's first poetry collection, *My Father & Miro*, is coming out this fall, from Bright Hill Press. Claudia lives in Ojai CA.

Linda Wisniewski, of Doylestown PA, has written an article entitled "A Better Way," for the July/August issue of "Massage Magazine." Her essay, "Mrs. Brown's Tears," will appear in *The Circle Continues*, to be published in September 2001 by Innisfree Press.

Jean McGroarty's story, "Nose Memories," appeared in the Spring 2001 issue of *Peralta Press* literary magazine (Vol. 1 No. 1), and "Twin Troubles" and "The Driving Lesson" will appear in the anthology, *Ophelia's Mom*, edited by Nina Shand, to be published later this year. Jean lives in Battle Ground IN.

The artistic and writing talents of **Linda Jones** have been combined for a 19" X 24" poster entitled "The Qualifying Game for Disability-Related Services," for the Texas Department of Health. Linda lives in Austin TX

Three of **Pat Mitchell's** poems have been published recently: "Hand in Hand" in *Apropos*, "Pen and Ink" in *Bell's Letters Poet*, and "The Gift of Time" in *Poets at Work*. Pat is a Story Circle member from Mishawaka IN.

Cindi Baum of Wakarusa IN will have articles published in the Fall and Winter issues of *Marriage Partnership* magazine and the September issue of *Today's Christian Woman* magazine. Another article has been purchased by *Mary Engelbreit's Home Companion* magazine but has not yet been scheduled.

Story Circle Market Watch

by Nancy Rigg

Many literary magazines are now welcoming personal essays and creative nonfiction submissions. One regular source of market information is *Poets and Writers Magazine*. They have an excellent online site, which includes information about literary grants and awards, markets, and other resources: *Poets and Writers Online*, www.pw.org/

Here are some other potential literary magazine markets where personal essays and creative nonfiction are welcome:

Colorado Review, www.coloradoreview.com/

"The Colorado Review is now accepting fiction, poetry, and personal essays for its special summer 2002 issue, devoted entirely to the subject of travel. We are looking for writing that explores the question of what it means to travel--for example, whether it is really possible to travel, how travel might change us, or why we travel at all--and are more interested in the journey than the destination." For information, contact: creview@lamar.colostate.edu

The New Works Review, www.new-works.org/

Online literary magazine founded in October, 1997. "We actively seek previously-unpublished original poetry, short fiction, non-fiction (personal essays, critiques, and book reviews), photographs, and original artwork." January-February-March, 2002 —deadline November 15, 2001

Petroglyph: A Journal of Creative Nature Writing

www.english.usu.edu/petroglyph/

"The general purpose of the journal is to publish poetry, short stories, essays, and art work which celebrate nature and people's connections with it. The submission deadline for the Spring issue, scheduled for publication in May, is February 15." Utah State University, English Department, 3200 Old Main Hill, Logan, UT 84322-3200. Editor: sballam@english.usu.edu

Red Cedar Review, www.msu.edu/~rcreview/

"Welcomes submissions of 3-5 poems, fiction, and creative nonfiction up to 5,000 words from both veteran and emerging writers." Include SASE. Pays in copies. Send to: Red Cedar Review, Department of English, Michigan State University, 17C Morrill Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Hayden's Ferry Review, www.statepress.com/hfr/

Produced semi-annually at Arizona State University, HFR promotes work of emerging and established visual artists and writers of fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction. "How does land relate to story? Can landscapes become character? HFR is taking submissions for art, short stories, poetry, and personal narratives related to ecology and the environment for a special section in Issue 30, Spring/Summer 2002. We are interested in rural and urban landscapes." Deadline: September 30.

Mini-Stories: Our Readers Share

“I am a textile and studio quilt artist who has an academic background in linguistics and enjoys writing as well as incorporating written symbols in her work. I make one-of-a-kind art cloth (dyeing, silk-screening, etc.) and art quilts for the wall. My writing centers around personal experiences, many of which influence my work. I participate in a story circle which has contributed substantively to my work as well as to the development of my writing skills.”—*Beth Kennedy, Austin TX*

I have been writing since I could hold a pencil, but I’m the only one who reads most of it—until lately. The most unusual thing I’ve ever done is to begin college in my forties—and go straight through for eight years.—*Dorothy (Dot) Goodwin, Seymour IN*

Raised at the Jersey shore and educated in the city of Brotherly Love, I’ll always have sand in my shoes and peace in my heart as I journey through the abyss of transitions to find my community and right occupation. I’m a mother, wife, teacher, trainer and motivator who captures touchable moments and believes that we must acknowledge our strengths and love ourselves to be a fulfilled human being.—*Martie Mollenhauer, Pitman NJ*

I am going to retire in June to discover just what I will do with my time when I can do anything I want to do. I have had a very rewarding career as an accountant working for Tektronix in Beaverton, OR. My husband of 42 years will share my retirement.—*Judy Watkins, Hillsboro OR*

During the process of growing up, I lost my self trying to be all things to all people in order to be accepted by them. Now, at mid-life, I wonder who I really am and it has become important

to me to find my lost self before it’s too late. Journaling has given me a voice and has helped so much in the process of discovering. With pen in hand, I look forward to the journey!—*Lea Marie Vollmer, Mt. Vernon IN*

As I write this in 2001, I am a sometimes weary 57-year-old, who is also a feminist Jewish Unitarian Universalist married woman with no children born to me. I have two wonderful challenging young women who are like children to me and who have brought me aggravation and joy and granddaughters. Through journal writing and my personal spiritual journey, I began to write prayers and to say prayers and I have compiled a book of my prayers that I would like to publish one day.—*Betsy Fuchs, Chicago IL*

I am soon approaching that age of great wisdom and maturity (50!) which seems to be urging me with ever-growing intensity to consider organizing myself into someone I would recognize. I have always gotten along well with a piece of paper but somehow never formalized this with even a journal. Thus I am looking to clarify myself as I transition myself intentionally into this new age and expand beyond work (as a clinical social worker), beyond active parenting (daughters are now 16 and 19), in addition to marriage (28 years worth) and probably utilizing my interests in gardening, traveling in Tuscany, bicycling, and backpacking.—*Anne Olsen, Essexville MI*

Join us for
Writing From Life: A Workshop
 for
Women With Stories to Tell
October 6-7, Austin TX

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