



Story Circle Journal

The newsletter for women with stories to tell...

Volume 5 Number 4, November 2001

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

**Plan now to join us for a unique and exciting event:
the 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!

For program details, registration form, hotel information, and scholarship application turn to pages 16-20. Want to know more about Austin, the prettiest city in Texas? Turn to page 2.

Austin, Texas, is...

Austin is live music, high tech, Texas politics, the University of Texas, and the Story Circle Network, of course—plus a whole lot more!

Austin is Beautiful, Naturally

With a river running through it and a mild climate, Austin prides itself on natural beauty. Greenbelts, waterways and pockets of undeveloped land create a unique greenscape. Town Lake, the southernmost in a series of seven manmade lakes along the Lower Colorado River, flows past our conference hotel, and some 10 miles of hike-and-bike trails are right outside the door.

Austin is Rich, Historically

Originally a Tonkawa Indian buffalo-hunting ground, Austin was originally named Waterloo for all its springs and creeks. Now more than a million people live in the city renamed to honor Stephen F. Austin, who helped make Texas a state. The city's historical importance comes alive in such places as Bremond Block, an area of stately 19th century mansions; the antebellum Governor's Mansion; and more than 220 other landmarks. The splendid new Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum chronicles the colorful history of Texas.

Austin is Appealing, Culturally

With 20 museums, nearly three dozen galleries, 35 theater companies, and professional ballet and symphony, Austin is a cultural mecca. The University of Texas libraries are only a short taxi-ride from our hotel, and the campus offers fine cultural programs.

Austin is Diverse, Ethnically

The Hispanic influence has brought Tex-Mex cuisine and festive celebrations. In clubs all over town, music-lovers listen to the African-American community's musical contribution of jazz and the blues. A French connection is honored at the old French Legation, built during the Republic of Texas era. And Austin is the gateway to the Texas Hill Country, where thousands of German immigrants settled in the 19th century, leaving a legacy of food, music and unique architectural styles.

Austin is Alive, Musically

You can enjoy live performance at more than 100 music venues on any given evening. Many of those venues are clustered downtown along Sixth Street and in the Warehouse District. And all over the world, viewers tune in weekly to Austin City Limits, PBS's longest running series. Tours of the studio on the University of Texas campus are available each Friday.

Austin is Lovely (especially in February)

It may be snowing and blowing a gale up north, but Austin's February average temperature is 62 degrees, with less than an inch of rain during the average month. The daffodils, iris, and forsythias are all in bloom, and around town, the native redbuds and Mexican plums are glorious.

And Texas is a Whole Other Country!

Discovering all there is to see and do in Texas is no easy task. But for a good start, check out the free, 264-page, full-color guide that is offered at Travel.tex.com. It's jam-packed with information on things to see and do. They'll even throw in the official state highway map and an accommodations guide. You can also order it free by calling 800-8888-TEX.

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

Turning Your Journal Entries into Stories

This is the second of four journaling columns that Cindy Baum plans to write for the Journal. Cindy is a married mom with four children. Her eldest daughter is attending college and her youngest son started first grade this fall. Another daughter is a sophomore in high school. Cindy and her youngest daughter, age 12, are homeschooling this year. Caitlin struggles with dyslexia and after very frustrating years in public school, she and her mom decided that homeschool would be the best way for Caitlin to learn. Cindy and her husband Brad have been married 23 years. Besides being a mom at home, Cindy is a freelance magazine writer and journalist, and loves pen-and-ink letter writing.

When we think about telling our stories to others, a journal can become our best resource for recalling daily life or milestones such as the birth of a child, the death of a loved one, a marriage or first love. We write our responses to the world around us, stages of life and emotions. We use a journal to come to grips with injury done to us, past or present, or to joyfully record a memorable time. The pages become references that can be shuffled and organized into a memoir.

A Timeline of our Lives

By its very nature, a journal is a timeline of our lives. Jotting down the smallest details of a day can jog our memory later, even if what we've written is a knee-jerk reaction and not the whole story. In her book, *Leaving A Trace*, Alexandra Johnson writes, "A journal, unintentionally, lies by omission. Diarists simply can't hold the whole truth of a day. That fuller truth is only seen in retrospect, often years later. Memoir is the deliberate shaping of that final truth." Some writers use storyboarding to organize their plot by writing facts and ideas on cards and laying them out, putting them in chronological order or in a way that best tells the story. The journal is another way of doing that. We write our reaction to something then go back later and expand on it, often referring to other entries that give more insight. By combining a first reaction with retrospect, the whole story emerges.

The journal even becomes an historical document as our version of certain events lends a personal touch to the documentation of news and facts. September 11, 2001 has become the new date that will live in infamy, an historical event to which we can add our story. It is a story we will tell our children and grandchildren, and they theirs. They will be able to read any number of books with

accounts of the day, but the personal family stories of where we were, what we were doing, and how we responded will be the ones that will matter most to us. Journaling our grief not only leads to healing and coping but also begins the process of telling the whole story later.

We have had the opportunity to record our reactions to the atrocity, writing our initial responses of shock and disbelief and later, feelings of anger, fear and grief. Being diligent in putting our feelings into words will create a database of sorts for us to draw from when telling the story later. Time changes the view, so telling the story through the lenses of passing time with no reference to the past is different than telling it with journal entries that have recorded exactly how we were impacted at the moment.

I didn't feel like writing anything that morning as I watched the drama unfold with Katie Couric and Matt Lauer giving monotone narrations. But something told me I must or I would forget, maybe not on purpose, but as a way of dealing with the shock. What I wrote seems unemotional as I read it now, but it helps me recall the day and I can draw from it to expand on the transition of my feelings and thoughts as more information came in the days to follow. I also find it interesting that I never once mentioned New York City, the World Trade Center, or any other real details in my first entry. Perhaps it is because I knew I would never forget and anyone who reads that entry and makes note of the date will know of what I write. I have continued to record the stages of dealing with this, going from feelings of fear for the future, to anger at both the terrorists and Americans who became critical of shows of patriotism, to a profound grief as I realized the loss of life involved and what they must have felt and thought in those last moments. All these entries are forming a story that I will put together for my children and for myself.

From Narrative Snapshots to a Collage

We can tell our stories, happy and sad, by diligently recording the facts as we see them. When we discipline ourselves to write down details surrounding a person or event that affects us in a profound way, the journal becomes a collection of narrative snapshots that we can look at later and turn into a collage that tells the whole story.

- **As you think about the events** of the past two months, record the details of your domestic life, your reactions, your emotions as the tragedy unfolded that day and continues even now. Time changes perspective and contributes to the initial response. Telling a story from memory with no reference is better than not telling it at all, but writing things down as they happen gives a clearer, more objective picture.
- **See your journal** as a scrapbook or photo album. No matter how small the snapshot, it is part of the bigger story.
- **Set aside a small calendar** each year on which you can write down personal milestones or historical events as they happen. Then, as you review the calendar, you can find the journal entry that corresponds to that day and see how it affected you. I looked over a calendar I kept in 1999 and found the dates for the Columbine shooting and the plane crash in which John F. Kennedy, Jr. died. It was interesting to go back and read my thoughts in my journal and compare them to how I feel about the events now.

Writing and Healing

Write To Heal Grief

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.

Poetry is a Two-Sided Breath

Poetry is a two-sided breath,
The out-breath of our grieving
and the in-breath of our hope.
It is the process of relief and
inspiration
constantly necessary to our lives
as breathing is
as there is only so much one
body can hold
at a time.

—Vicki Edmonds

A Faithfulness to Breath

Spirit somehow presides through breath. *Spirare*, the Latin root, means to breathe. A spiritual discipline is a discipline of the breathing centers, which are life-centers. If we say that poetry is a spiritual discipline, we may as well say that poetry is a commitment to the Living Air: a faithfulness to breath, to Speech, to Logos.... Poetic images create in us capacities for personal reality and for participation. They are the joyful breathing at our source.—from *Centering*, by M.C. Richards

Vicky Edmonds uses the art and practice of writing as an inroad to healing and an alternative to acting out. In her Writes of Passage Classes as well as in her upcoming book, *One Cell in the Body of God*, she teaches poetry as a therapeutic and spiritual practice. **Mary Caroline Richards** (1916-1999) was a poet, potter, and teacher who insisted that all art is spiritual autobiography. *Centering* is her best-known book.

Sept. 11, 2001. As I write this date, images fill my mind and I sigh deeply. Can writing help with an event of this magnitude? How do I even begin?

In my *Writing to Heal* class, I tell my students, “we write our sorrow, our grief, in the same way as we breathe: out-breath, in-breath. Letting the ink bleed our sorrow and renew us. Writing the emotions as they flow, through out bodies. Writing to keep from being stuck or letting them lodge in our tissues.”

The second day after the tragedy, however, I couldn't imagine how to open the valve and release some of the emotional pressure. At first, I wasn't able to get a flow going. I found I needed a template—a simple structure to get my pen moving, so I used the five senses to explore my grief. When using this exercise, I write the words *smells, sounds, feels, tastes* and *looks like* in the top corner of my page. I use them in any order and explore the images as they come to me. It is important to use the first image that comes to mind and keep going. This is my journal entry for Sept. 13:

The news comes on, and I sink into my chair. My grief is heavy. It feels like a lead ball sinking, sinking into a bottomless ocean. The heaviness fills my forehead and my legs. I imagine hitting bottom would be a relief but for days I am only sinking. The taste in my mouth is of gun powder—a taste I remember at age 5 when learning to shoot. It is also the taste of raw fear. It is the smell of dense fog when lost at sea—the way ocean air transforms from soothing to terrifying as it tightens and darkens around our boat lost in a storm. The color [I used color for the looks like] is gray, the color of lead, fog, anchors. The color of fear—the gray of lips tightened to stifle a scream. This grief sounds like gasps and sighs—a struggle between surrender and horror—a battle played out in the muscles on my neck.

I hold this gray, heavy picture before me and know I want to spit out the fear, throw down the lead, splash color on the walls of my soul and run in a green meadow on solid ground, no longer adrift in the sea of terror.”

I felt a sense of release after writing this entry. It was an outflow of emotion. The next step would be to write the inflow. I used the poem you can read at the top of the sidebar. I have found the idea of exhaling and inhaling in my writing invaluable in keeping my journal (and my self) in balance, particularly during times of stress.

For my second piece of writing, I tried a listing exercise: Comfort is.... I began making a list and kept writing for five minutes.

Comfort is hot custard sprinkled with nutmeg, steaming from the oven, melting against the roof of my heart [I meant to write *mouth* but actually wrote *heart*], reminding me of the taste of love. Comfort is quiet and laughter and whispers of surprises. Comfort is the smell of salt air, the touch of warm hands. Comfort is capturing grief in my body and letting it flow out as ink on the page, giving me rest from the battle. Comfort looks like groups of people supporting each other in a storm of emotions that threatens to wash us out to sea. Comfort is available. I sometimes forget to reach for it.

I have used these two techniques with several groups since Sept. 11. It is good to remind ourselves that help is literally at our fingertips. These two techniques can be used with any topic or emotion. Try fear, love, community. Consider pen and paper as a therapy for today's difficult feelings.

For over 100 moving examples of the practice of writing to heal grief, see our Story Circle web publication, *Give Sorrow Words*, at www.storycircle.org/sorrow.html, or turn to pp. 14-15 of this Journal for several excerpts.

A Reader Tells Her Story

Blanche: My Great-Grandmother, 1955

*Linda Joy Myers has been a therapist in Berkeley, CA for 20 years. She received her MFA in creative writing from Mills and integrates writing and therapy in her groups called Autobiography and Therapeutic Healing. Linda's memoir, **Don't Call Me Mother**, from which this excerpt is taken, is about three generations of mothers who abandon their daughters and find redemption and forgiveness. Linda has three children and four kitties. More from her memoir can be found at www.memoriesandmemoirs.com.*

Blanche and I are in her garden. The Iowa air is full and rich, redolent with the scent of thick black earth, green growing things, sweet flowers. When I get close to her, I smell her sweat. It runs in rivulets along the creases of her skin. Her brown eyes under curly eyebrows are fierce. She flails away with the sickle at weeds that have the audacity to grow in her garden and bury the potato patch. Her whole arm rises and falls, sails of flesh hanging from her substantial bones. I am fascinated by her, how she can be so old, her body with its variety of wrinkles and drappings. She is more alive than anyone I know, passionate about weeds, her tomato plants, her raspberries and strawberries. Passionate about her woodpile, and the fire she builds each day in her wood cook stove. Blanche is the hero of my life. Blanche is with me every day, even now.

Blanche's life in her eighties is that of the earth, of growing things. Soil, green leaves. Life. Her garden. Her life and the life of her mother, Josephine, a life of farm and earth. Blood and slaughtered animals; births of colts, calves and lambs in the barn at night. Death. Burial. Milk and cheese, beheaded chickens spouting red blood over the dirt yard. Deaths from the birthing of babies. Midwives delivering, mopping the brows of the laboring mother. Josephine and Blanche were both midwives. There was always mud. Frozen water. Outhouses. Heated bricks tucked among featherbed and quilts during icy winters. Quilting. Bodies laid out in death in the living room. Blanche tells me these things as we sleep together in the featherbed. I am eight and she is eighty, and the stories drone on and on during the hot summer nights of my childhood.

Blanche's mother and father emigrated to the United States in the 1850's to Iowa after the land was officially rid of the Indians—the Sac, Fox, and Mouscatin, tribes who fished and hunted on lands beside the Mississippi. Muscatine, once called Greenwood, was named for these Indians. Everywhere are the names of those who bodies lie silently beneath land now plowed for corn and sorghum, tomatoes and melon. I would stand in an open field imagining the Indians lurking behind trees, silently tracking us in their moccasins. As a child I listened deeply to the stories emanating from the soil where I stood. I imagined that the land knew everything that happened there.

My family was Germanic—stark, grim, and unsmiling, if you can trust the photographs. They believed in the value of work, self-reliance and stubborn survival. Tears were for the weak. One cried alone in secret about things too strong to bury. By the time Blanche was eighty, she had a mound of buried, yet very alive, feelings.

Blanche bends over the earth, digging up weeds, bowed like

a water witch's wand, skirts gathering around her ankles in the front and riding above her knees in the back. Flesh-colored cotton hose are rolled up on an elastic just below her knees. Blue veins make a map on her legs. Sweat drips from her nose. She gnashes her teeth and yanks, muttering. Thick ropes of melon stalks and huge leaves the size of small umbrellas wend their way across the sandy earth. The heat of the July day rises up from the land. Everything smells like fresh air and earth, black and loamy. The tomatoes are ripening, round globules of green and yellow, pendulously hanging from the vines, the red of the tomatoes high contrast against the green. Blanche snaps off a tomato and bites into it. Juice runs down the crevices of her chin. Above the red tomato and her long nose are her deep-set, wise eyes behind gold-rimmed spectacles.

“Mmm,” she mutters, gesturing that I should pick one. I hesitate. Everything is too raw, too close to the earth. I am awe-stricken and a little frightened. There are bugs and dirt everywhere. Flies are buzzing and ants crawl all over everything. Gnats fly in my mouth and stick in the corners of my eyes. At night there are mosquitoes who eat me in particular, and of course lightning bugs. But right now Blanche is gesturing at the tomatoes. I pluck one with a satisfying snap. Everything smells of tomato-acrid and a little bitter. The skin doesn't give in to my teeth. I feel silly hesitating. Blanche is a pioneer woman, born in 1873. She tells me to eat it.

“Come on, bite down hard.”

“But it's dirty.”

“You got to eat a peck o'dirt 'fore you die. Come on.” She smears yellow seeds around on her chin with her sleeve. She seems unsophisticated and rough, and I feel instantly guilty of that thought.

“Come on. Try it. It's good for ya. Nothin' like the fruit of the earth. This is what it's all about.”

My teeth pierce the skin, the juices flood my mouth and run down my throat. I choke, surprised at the instantaneous tartness, flooded with tomato, the sun on my head, the smell of earth and Blanche's sweat. Her eyes laugh behind her glasses, her mouth curls up a little.

“Good, ain't it?” she says and turns around to savagely hoe the weeds that try to take away her vegetables. Every year she has fed her children from her garden summer and fall. She taught them how to plant and reap and grow things, and how to can them for the winter. The life of the land belongs to Blanche, just as it did to the Native Americans who planted corn on this very spot. Blanche sucks in air, spits out a few seeds. They will take root next year, nurtured by soil and sun, and the deep rooted water under the land, the Mississippi sending out its life giving waters, part of the endless cycle of life.

Meet Other Life-Writers

Standing By Our Stories: An Interview with Christina Baldwin

Christina Baldwin has taught journal writing seminars internationally for over 20 years and has written two classic books, One to One: Self-Understanding through Journal Writing (1977/1991) and Life's Companion: Journal Writing as a Spiritual Quest (1991). In the early '90s, she began exploring ways to help people use the circle as a way to move from personal to social consciousness, to understand how we must all stand by our stories and make our presence count in the world. Her explorations led to the book Calling the Circle: The First and Future Culture (1994/1998). She and her partner, author and educator Ann Linnea (see the May issue of SCJ for an interview with Ann), have founded a company called PeerSpirit, in Langley WA. They offer Circle Practicum, wilderness adventures, and writing seminars. You can read about their work at <http://www.peerspirit.com>.

Having the ability to write one's own life story is incredibly empowering and liberating. We can speak our reality in our own words! We can practice how we see our lives and life around us. And for many women, before we can say, "here's what I think about that..." or "here's the impact that has on me..." we have first to write it down and finish these sentences for ourselves. Privately, quietly, tucking our truths away until we are ready to stand by our stories.—CB

When one vision falls, another vision rises. This is not usually a sudden switch, but a long process of the old paradigm fading away—struggling with itself to let go... We are losing our way of life; and we need to lose it, in order not to lose life itself.

Story Circle: *I'd like to begin on a personal note by saying that I believe Life's Companion to be the very best book on journaling ever written. I've used it in a great many classes, and participants never fail to connect with the book. How did you become interested in journal writing? Did your view of journal writing change between these two books?*

CB I became aware of journal writing through the story of Anne Frank. When I was twelve, I read her diary and saw the play about her life that was first being performed at that time. It was 1958 when I began to write daily pages. First I had one of those little dime-store diaries with five lines a day, but very quickly I went free-form into a spiral notebook. I still have Volume One stored in a box somewhere. My first entry is a tear-stained letter addressed to "Kitty," the imaginary friend Anne Frank addressed. It begins dramatically, "As you have probably guessed by now, Anne is dead." I think it shows how real the experience of reading this girl's life was for me. At that time, and I hope it is still true today, every child in America read Anne Frank's diary as part of the standard eighth-grade English curriculum. I have kept up with the ongoing translations and release of the full and annotated diary, material that Otto Frank didn't consider appropriate in the 1950's.

Anne's diary was the beginning of my interest in personal story, and my awakening to the fact that my ordinary life as a Minnesota school-girl was also a story. So I began writing about my own life. I was no Anne Frank in terms of my skills, or understanding how to speak the truth about myself or family or situation! The first half of the 1960s was still the age of complicit silence, and my early writing skims along, not knowing how to use language to go deeper. Still, the seeds of the self-examined life are there, recorded line by pencil line.

SC: *Has the act of keeping a journal changed your life in anyway? How have your journal writing practices changed? Stayed the same?*

CB: The act of writing has changed everything about my life, and I cannot tell you how, because I have no way of seeing how my life would have been without writing. From the age of 12, I have been putting my life into words. Often very superficially, quickly jotting down events and feelings, very centered on the journey of the self. What has grown in me is a profound regard for real story, for truth-telling, for sleuthing after secrets, and digging through layers of reality like an anthropologist seeking to understand the life held in the bones of words.

To my surprise, my essential practices have stayed the same all these years: I work in a free-form book, writing as long or short an entry as I can manage in the moment. I do not write every day, but I keep a little monthly calendar in my journals, two lines that say things like: "Jan. 16: Ann to gardening, Debbie here, resettling office details, 2 hours on e-mail, conference call, Roger for lunch, feeling harried but ok." In the same month I may have six long entries that explore my thoughts and feelings in depth.

One change is that the way I am "self-absorbed" is different. I have slogged through the major therapeutic issues and healing, and while I spend a lot of time writing as an act of self-maintenance, my desires to be of service at this perilous time are a conversation that consistently emerges now. I keep making a commitment to bring news of the world into the journal. There is an urgent question I am asking: *what can I do?*

And when I look at these issues and raise them on the page, I have to have a spiritual framework for seeking to understand the times and my place within them. So the spiritual level of the same question is: *what wouldst Thou have me do?* These seem to be absolutely essential questions in

my own life, and in our collective life. All of my work—self-work, community work, professional work, is framed around them.

SC: *What special benefits does journaling bring to women?*

CB: It brings us our voice! The act of writing is a fairly recent skill acquisition for common people of both genders, and especially for women. Two hundred years ago, most women could not read or write and there are parts of the world, as currently in Afghanistan, where it is a crime to teach a girl to read or write. Having the ability to write one's own life story is incredibly empowering and liberating. We can speak our reality in our own words! We can practice how we see our lives and life around us. And for many women, before we can say, "here's what I think about that..." or "here's the impact that has on me..." we have first to write it down and finish these sentences for ourselves. Privately, quietly, tucking our truths away until we are ready to stand by our stories.

I still believe the lines from Muriel Rukeyser's poem ("The Speed of Darkness") that asks: "What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? The world would split open." [Christina didn't know it when she wrote this, but Story Circle uses these lines as its motto!] The world has split open in the last forty years, and claiming the stories of our lives has been a catalytic act beyond our ability to even see its full impact. And, of course, it has led men to start speaking the reality of their lives—not the public persona and mythology about being male, but their own realities, which are harsh and limiting in their own ways.

SC: *In Life's Companion, you say that you wrote the book three times. What events in your life changed this book so dramatically?*

CB: It was partly life events, but even more so, it was the willingness to take the writing down deeper and deeper into the voice required by the work itself. *Life's Companion* is the book where I came into my mature voice as a writer. I knew going into the project that I had to find that voice in myself in order to do this topic justice, and that I didn't have it when I started writing. My agent sold the book concept to Bantam, and I began seeking my voice/the book's voice, and everything I wrote for the first three months I deleted. Then I finally found a voice that allowed me to complete the first draft. I sent it to my editor, who sent it back with a seven-page critique, telling me I wasn't quite there. I sat on the back steps of my house, had a little cry, a long

walk with my dog, and started over. That was when my relationship with the content of the book really took off, and when I got the idea to separate out these little essays on spiritual life from the writing exercises and quotes. Someone who doesn't want to write can just read the essays, and someone who wants a lot of suggestions can make their way through 120 exercises.

SC: *This year is the tenth anniversary of the publication of Life's Companion. How has the book changed your own life?*

CB: There is a Spanish proverb which says: there is no road, we make the road as we walk. I would say the same thing about journal writing: we make the path as we write. The journey I laid out in *Life's Companion* has been a journey I have now made for myself in these past ten years. I remember that, as I finished writing that book, the last four chapters made me nervous because I knew I wasn't there yet. I hadn't found my community, my right place. I had to make a number of changes in my life before I could fulfill my own spiritual quest. I have lived my way through that book, and now have written two more books that I am also living through.

SC: *Your most recent book is Calling the Circle. How did you shift from journal writing to circle?*

CB: I have always taught in a circle. Always said to other journal writers, "I'm not the expert here... we are all writing our life stories, are all co-learners and co-teachers." So that spirit has always imbued my classrooms, retreats and seminars. When I met Ann Linnea in 1991, she was looking for ways to work with more women, I was looking for ways to do something besides writing, while keeping journal writing as part of the activity. The first thing we had in common was that both of us had always taught in circles... and that became the place we started to combine our fields of knowledge.

I personally think it was an act of guidance, because when we began studying the impact the circle itself has on groups we realized that there was great potential to intentionally create the kind of spiritual/social intimacy people long for by teaching people circle skills. Once inside the circle people can do just about anything in terms of content.

Circle is like a skeleton, and the intention, conversational topics and personalities of those who gather "flesh out" the structure and make the circle process as unique as we are ourselves.

*Writing makes a map,
and there is something
about a journey that begs
to have its passage
marked.*

*Writing bridges the inner
and outer worlds and
connects that paths of
action and reflection....
Writing is sorting. Writ-
ing down the stream of
consciousness gives us a
way to respect the mind,
to choose among and
harness thoughts, to in-
teract with and change
the contents of
who we are.*

*My journal is my life's
companion....It reminds
me that I need to act,
watch, reflect, write, and
then act more clearly. It
urges me to remember to
pay attention to spirit, to
be led rather than lead.*

*What I think we are up
to, we throngs of
journal-writing
pilgrims, is
reclamation. We are
searching for ways to
reclaim a sense of
place, a sense of
empowerment, a sense
of healthy relationship
between our lives and
times. We look for
whatever can help us
make sense of the
moment.
We write.*

SC: What are you doing now? What are you writing? Does PeerSpirit occupy all your time?

CB: I have a new book coming out in a few months called: *Seven Whispers, Listening to the Voice of Spirit*. It's a book of essays based on seven phrases that came into my prayer life in 1999 and have guided me ever since. I think of these phrases as spiritual commonsense, things like: *Practice peace of mind. Move at the pace of guidance...* The book evolved into a look at claiming our spiritual lives and our spiritual authority for ourselves, how to trust our own inner voices.

PeerSpirit does occupy most of my time, but what we do under that umbrella keeps evolving. Ann Linnea and I still love to teach together. We love combining her lifelong passion for attuning people to nature with my lifelong passion for transforming experience into story. And we find that the need for story is everywhere: we need to make sense out of what is happening, especially now in the world. The only way we can change what we are doing as human beings is to create a story that brings evolutionary changes into language for we proceed from the story outward.

Every person who keeps a journal, who keeps turning experience into story makes room for a new story to emerge about who we are and what we are capable of. It is the stories of our goodness that lay out the path we can follow into the future. At least that's the belief that carries me forward day by day.

A circle is not just a meeting with the chairs rearranged....A circle is a return to our original form of community as well as a leap forward to create a new community...."

Christina Baldwin, Calling the Circle

To learn more about the mission and programs of PeerSpirit, and the work of Christina Baldwin and Ann Linnea, visit the PeerSpirit website at www.peerspirit.com, write to PeerSpirit, PO Box 550, Langley WA, 98260, or phone 360-331-3580.

Life's Companion: A Review

Life's Companion: Journal Writing as a Spiritual Quest, by Christina Baldwin, Bantam Books, 1991, ISBN 0553352024. Reviewed by Margaret Knorr.

When Christina Baldwin pioneered the journaling movement with her book *One to One* in 1977, the Library of Congress did not have a category for journaling. In 1990 she took the art of journaling into spiritual practice with her book, *Life's Companion*, a clear, well-written guide to making journaling a deeper experience.

The book is divided into six sections. In *Laying the Groundwork*, Baldwin suggests that life is a spiritual journey and journaling is the map of that journey. She discusses the importance of journaling as well as the importance of questioning and the role silence has in life. *Conditions for Travel* covers the emerging self, writing your spiritual history, the role of disorder and the role of wonder. In *Types of Guidance*, Baldwin talks about being guided in life by our bodies, dreams, and intuition and using ritual to move us along in our journey. Love, forgiveness, trust and acceptance are *The Four Major Practices*. We apply them in daily life by paying attention, learning to follow, pursuing our visions, and becoming persons of power. *Traveling in the World* suggests that we will be taken far outside ourselves and then will return to find community. At the end of each section there are meditations and guided imagery exercises.

Life's Companion is a gentle and loving instruction in seeing life as a spiritual quest and journaling as a map for the journey. If you're keeping a journal, you need this guide.

Our secular culture is destroying the planet. People are crying out for guidance, you and I among them. But this is no longer the age of the singular hero who will travel our hardships for us—this is the age when the ordinary person takes up the voyage, takes up the obligations of return, becomes a person of power.—Christina Baldwin, Life's Companion



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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!

Circle of Stones

Volume 1: Circle of Stones: Woman's Journey to Herself. Volume 2: I Sit Listening to the Wind: Woman's Encounter Within Herself. By Judith Duerk, Innisfree Press, Philadelphia. Reviewed by Linda C. Wisniewski

Recently reissued, 10 years after its first publication, this two-volume series came from a dream the author had in her forty-sixth year, and images she had for several years prior to the dream, of a group of women who called themselves the Circle of Stones.

Ideally, these books are to be shared among real women. At the end of each volume is a reading group guide, "Deepening Your Circle," with suggestions for discussing each chapter.

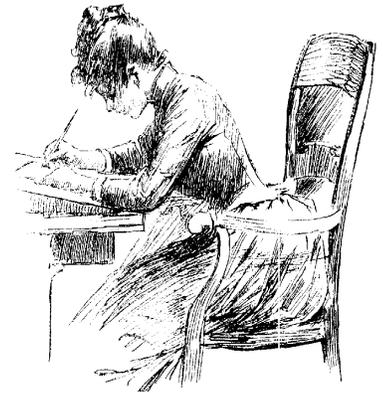
Volume 1 was written in three sections. "In Search of her Mother" talks about "the universal importance of a woman's tears" and why we need to express sadness. "How it was before..." describes a possible celebration of first menstruation. "In Search of Her Self" discusses "a sense of her depth," or going inside yourself, "a sense of her feelings," about expressing them and understanding them, and "a sense of her process," about using depression as a gift. "A sense of her need" is about our overextended lifestyles. (I really identified with that one! We try to be Amazons, superwomen. We have to get sick before we stop trying to prove ourselves and start taking care of ourselves.) "In Search of Her Life," the third and final section, is about grounding, embracing woundedness, and finding one's voice.

In Volume 2, *I Sit Listening to the Wind*, Duerk explains that the masculine energy within women, which many traditions call "the wind," or the yang energy, is what psychologist Carl Jung called "the animus." To demonstrate the need for balance in life, Duerk uses the analogy of the "wire mother" experiment, in which hungry monkeys were given a choice between wire models with a feeding apparatus attached and a soft model with a cushioned body. The monkeys who chose the wire models did not survive as well as those who chose soft cloth "mothers." Duerk compares these monkeys to our goal-driven society. We are frantically busy, trying to mask our need for a "cloth mother," for meaning in our life, for identity. We are trying to survive with the "wire mother" of achievement by ignoring our feelings. Duerk asks, in the end, "How might our lives be different if we were helped to know that our feelings might bring truth to bear where it was needed?"

The *Circle of Stones* books can be read separately or together, but I don't recommend reading them straight through. Read them slowly, with lots of time for your own thoughts and notes. Keep them for the stressful times when concentrating on what you are reading is difficult. Keep them on your bedside table for comfort, support, and affirmation. Keep them on your desk for inspiration. Keep them in your meditation space for thoughtful reflection.

A woman in Volume 2 talks about getting rid of some of the books she has hoarded all her life. "I had always thrived on reading," she says, "and the world of ideas. But I knew I would never have time to uncover my own ideas of life if I were to read every one of those carefully-hoarded words." I too have always "thrived on reading." I especially love to read spiritual works by women. *Circle of Stones*, however, convinced me to spend more quiet time with my self, at least equal to the time I spend reading the thoughts of others.

This review first appeared in Equal wRites, published by the Southeastern Pennsylvania chapter of the Women's Ordination Conference, September-November, 1999.



From The Circle Continues

*Come, now, and celebrate this woman
in the circle unending,
in the circle that binds us in the
sacred sisterhood
of all women who walk through
waning light
on a path whose turning
has no end*
Carlanda Green

*Because I sit and listen,
I know where I have been, and
I know where you are.
You are stepping into a space apart
from me, and that is as it should be.
But I wish for you.
I wish for you the whole beautiful
world with all of its myriad contrasts.
I wish for you grass so soft and thick
that your body will
connect to the earth.
I wish for you paths so stony
that your feet bleed.
I wish for you the blessings of a
warm fire and at times
harsh cold rain on your face...
—Virginia R. Walker*

*How might your life have been
different if, through every stage of
your life...birth, puberty, adulthood,
old age...you had been received,
affirmed, sustained by a 'circle' of
older, wiser women?
Judith Duerk*



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!

Sisters

For 12 years I was an only child. When I was in the sixth grade, Mother got pregnant. My concern, much discussed among my friends, was that everyone knew my parents "did it." We were mortified but survived the embarrassment as we entered junior high.

The new baby, Josie, was absolutely fabulous. I had the option of helping and enjoying her as I wanted. She was as spoiled as I was. My driver's license increased my involvement — running errands with Josie was my specialty. She looked up to me and to my friends and we loved to have her around.

Then, when I was a senior in high school and Josie in kindergarten, Mother got pregnant again. This time the talk among my friends was amazement that they were still "doing it." Mother was 40, Daddy was 48. But now, we thought it was pretty cool.

After M'Liss was born, things really got interesting. Our household: a newborn, a first grader, and a college freshman. I chose to live at home so I would know the baby. We lived close to campus and my car gave me ample freedom as long as I kept doing errands. I never did feel imposed upon. I left home when Josie was 10 and M'Liss was four. They visited me often. When I moved back to Austin, we resumed all family activities.

My sisters and I like to discuss the differences in our early lives. I was born during WWII and we moved 10 times before I was 12. My sisters never moved until they were out of college. There were also vast economic and social differences.

These differences were, however, eclipsed by the consistency of our parents. The closeness that my sisters and I have was modeled and encouraged by our parents. Caring for each other, growing into genuine friendship, has sustained us through the death of both parents. The age difference seems to shrink, as we get older. I cherish Josie and M'Liss and feel richly blessed to call these two accomplished, lovely young women *sisters*.

Carolyn Cook

Sisters at Seventy

I carry with me a mental snapshot of my sister and myself as women of seventy or so. This particular image captures the end of one of those days that are a wonderful mix of summer daytime and autumn night. The two of us are sitting in rocking chairs on a porch that overlooks the ocean, watching the sun fade. Rocking not because we are old, but because, in my mind, rocking chairs are mandatory on beachfront porches.

In this picture, we are sitting with our bare, sandy feet outstretched, wine glasses in our wrinkled hands, our hair windblown and gray around our lined faces. And we are laughing about something silly. I plan to still be silly at seventy. I imagine we are laughing at a memory. One of many memories that include children, men, travel and careers. Friends that have come and gone. Lovers that have exhilarated or crushed us. We can laugh because life has been so full.

In childhood we were inseparable. We were each other's playmate, caretaker and confidant. Now, as adults, we are often separated. I started out this life with her by my side, but right now our paths only occasionally come together. Most of the time they run parallel to each other and we work hard to stay connected. But eventually we will come together the way we were in childhood, and rock in unison again.

Julie Renaud
Raleigh NC

A New Sister

Not many women my age get new sisters, but I did. Several months before my dad died, my mother suggested that he tell me about Ellajean. I knew that my dad had been married to Polly before he married my mother but we had never talked about this in our family.

My dad told me that he married at the beginning of the depression. He had graduated from TCU but the only job he could find was working in an oil field in a small Texas town. He worked atop an oil rig doing something very dangerous and he said he hated every minute of it. Dad said that he was barely able to make enough money to put food on the table for the two of them and Polly soon became pregnant. Finally, Dad quit his job and they went to their respective homes in Amarillo and Fort Worth to live until Dad found a better job. By mutual agreement they just never got back together. Dad said that it was the blackest period of his life. Ten years later Dad married my mother but kept his secret from us for all those years.

After Dad told me his story Mother gave me Ellajean's address and suggested that I contact her because she thought I would enjoy meeting her. I had mixed feelings about contacting

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Ellajean and agonized about it for a couple of months. Finally I sent her a rather generic letter about collecting our family history and asked if she would share her history with me.

A few days later I got a tearful phone call from Ellajean telling me that she had waited all her life for this moment. We both began talking at once and agreed to meet. Unfortunately our dad died before we could get together and our first meeting was at his funeral. However, we now visit back and forth, and have since become wonderful sisters in the true sense of the word.

Pat Flathouse
Austin TX

Sisters

I'm 61 years old and I want a sister. I want someone to share my thoughts with. I want someone who will understand where I am coming from. I want somebody to shop with, play with and share growing old with. Is it too late to establish a warm and loving relationship with a sister I hardly know? We are all the family we have left...isn't it worth a try?

We were so young when we went our separate ways. I married at 16 and Peg was only 15 when she ran away from home. While I managed to lead a normal, stable married existence with children, Peg turned to drugs and prostitution. Over the past 40 years she has spent more than 25 in State Prison systems. The last time she was released she was 57, followed by two years of parole.

At 60 she is trying to make her place in normal society. She is working as a drug and alcoholic counselor. Will she stay clean this time? Can I trust her? She has tried to "fit in" so many times before but it never seems to last more than three years before she is in trouble again.

In my mind I want to believe she is tired...tired of running, tired of the ways of her old friends...just tired. She isn't young anymore; surely she is ready to have a family...a sister, too.

I will reach out, I will try, I will hope and I will pray that for whatever time we have left we can be sisters.

Judy Watkins
Hillsboro OR

Music and Memory

As I was driving to work one morning, I randomly chose a Jefferson Airplane cassette from the basket on the front seat of the car. I slipped it into the tape player and casually listened to the first two songs. The music and lyrics tangled nicely with the thoughts in my head. As the next track began to fill the interior of my Toyota Corolla, I was snapped out of my mental planning for the day ahead. The song *Today* transported me back in time to the SUNY Fredonia campus, 1968.

The haunting strains of the melancholy melody permeated my senses. I was now in the suite room of my college dormitory. Through the floor to ceiling corner windows came a gray and wet afternoon. Raindrops dripped down the glass like tears. I sat on the floor and peered out at the vacant courtyard. That gray, wet vacancy entered my heart as I listened to the record on the phonograph behind me. Words like "hollow," "empty," and "alone," pierced through me. The ghostly music, my feelings and the somber day were perfectly aligned.

The synchronicity escaped me then, but it shouted at me now. My depression catapulted itself into the year 2000 with more ferocity than it had had 32 years before. It was so palpable I could have sponged it up like teardrops. The hollows of despair I had been unaware of at age 18, hit me now, at age 50, like a torrential downpour.

In that moment on the Southern State Parkway, I not only realized what a depressed young woman I had been, but also how powerful the effects of music could be. I could have written about that time in my life for pages and only succeeded in skirting its fragile edges. But hearing that one song sucked me right back into its cold grayness.

Music is an effective tool for tweaking memories from the past. The mood of some songs can recreate the feelings we had at a visceral level. By playing a few songs we can call up people, places, events and emotions that create fodder for our life stories.

Renee Howard Cassese
Seaford NY

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:

Friendship—February, 2002 (due January 15)

Feels Like Home—May, 2002 (due April 15)

Building Bridges—August, 2002 (due July 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

Salt and Pepper Shakers

Dad requested three sets of salt and pepper shakers when they handed them out at the Farmer's Elevator meeting back in the early 70's. He gave one set to each of his three daughters. The light gray ceramic shakers, shaped like the Farmer's Elevator, remind us of our parents' deepest desire for us.

In years past, Dad's family had a big blow-up over their father's estate. Dad's two brothers didn't speak for years even though they lived only one mile from one another. Now one brother's kids don't speak to each other for the same reason.

Because of Dad's unpleasant memories, my folks sought, above all else, harmony in our family. I don't know how many times I heard the words, "We don't want trouble like in Uncle Henry's [not his real name] family."

In an attempt to achieve this, Mom and Dad divided things as equally as possible between us three girls. I was the only one of the three daughters who left the Northwest Iowa area. Whenever I went home to visit, Dad gave us a brief oral history behind their keepsakes. Then we made a list and put our names beside things each of us wanted. If we couldn't decide, we put three items together and drew.

After both Mom and Dad died, the three of us completed the process. I'm sure Mom and Dad rejoiced as they looked down on us and saw us agree.

Did we agree on everything? No. I realize that my two sisters, who lived in the area, probably acquired more things than I—especially big stuff. But I tell myself this doesn't really matter. What matters is the value of fairness the folks instilled within me.

Today I display my Farmer's Elevator salt and pepper shakers to remind me of the importance of family harmony.

And what is my deepest desire? I want that value passed down to my heirs. I wonder, "Where can I get more Farmer's Elevator salt and pepper shakers?"

Carolyn J. Scheider
Austin TX

Portugal, *Fados*

Fados: sad songs that became joyous as words and music held hands. Maybe then, when my voice, newly found, began its journey, maybe as early as that, I learned, took into my body through my pores as well as my eyes and ears, that giving form to pain and grief transformed these into the bearable, took power away from profound sorrow, allowed its flight from deep darkness into the light of day, where clear air could heal.

Maybe then, in a language I no longer know, my future blueprint became mapped. Could be that my blood carried wisdom to all my cells, and I would become a person as proper as a medical professional, as comforting as a nurse, as available as a shaman, to bring this message into the universe?

So, without knowing this to be my mission, I followed the ways of the ordinary, studied as told, took the doses of education in four-year increments, received pieces of paper that

I chose to store away. I knew that pictures to be framed and hung on walls had not yet been taken.

And, as it is with us all, my share of grief arrived in form of loss, of death, of betrayal as true as any *fados* of my early youth. Thus ink became my salve as I recorded. Then without my planning, listeners and tellers arrived, now, two full decades, I've sung sad songs on paper, often watched sorrow evaporate before the ink dried. I've allowed tears to dampen pages, to hold others in a sacred chalice.

And now the balance begins. The joy that holds hands with us as we gather and know trust that echoes tradition before our birth. Sweet washerwomen, who hung cotton sheets to dry on the long clotheslines, thank you for your songs and the soft ironed linen that let me slide about and smell sunshine during dark nights.

Illia Thompson
Carmel Valley CA

Polio—or What?

Polio? No! Please, Lord, let it not happen to Joan [not her real name]. I had listened as the grownups talked about polio, the disease that left so many people crippled or paralyzed. Knowing the symptoms, I panicked the morning my 15 year-old sister couldn't get out of bed. At nine, I was too naive to think of anything else other than this devastating illness.

Joan, a personable, attractive, physically-mature cheerleader had gone to a ballgame the night before. Joan and I shared a bed, and I vividly recall how the next morning Joan told me to tell Mom she couldn't walk.

Joan and I attended a rural school that included grades one through twelve. That same morning as I worried about polio, rumors spread like wildfire throughout the school that Joan had "done it" with five basketball players the night before. Apparently, instead of taking the bus home from the game, she had ridden in a car with the players.

The ramifications of that incident cut short my carefree childhood days. While I barely knew what doing it meant, I soon realized the stigma placed on me. I felt guys eyeball me. One guy told me he knew I'd be just like my big sister someday. But my form resembled a stick, and I didn't bloom until much later, so they lost interest. Even so, the snickers and cutting remarks continued throughout those school years.

Unfortunately, my family never openly discussed this sad situation. In my late teens, I asked Joan if the story was true. Staring straight ahead, and with an icy, emotionless tone Joan said, "What do you think?" I never brought it up again.

Fifty years have passed since that morning and, while I know Joan didn't have polio, I still don't know what, if anything, happened to her. But I know how it felt to have my innocent childhood robbed.

Today my heart goes out to all little sisters with similar experiences. Each one needs an extra hug, encouragement to keep her chin up and carry on, and courage to tell her story.

Kate E. Young
Austin TX

My Sister Bear

Charlene was a sickly child who was frail in comparison to me. As kids, we had the usual sibling rivalry, yet she looked up to me, her older sister.

My sister bear suffered from a severe stroke last year. On that dreadful morning, I saw three angels standing like pillars behind her hospital bed. I have been blessed with an ability to see angels so they did not frighten me. In fact, I was comforted by their presence and quietly acknowledged them.

The doctors were doing everything possible but it did not look good. We were advised to prepare for the worse. Our family vigil began as we prayed for her miraculous recovery.

Early the next morning, I looked down the hall. At the opposite end, I saw my sister bear with her familiar raised-eyebrow expression of uncertainty. Next to her stood one of the angels in what can only be described as a bright, shining light.

For an instant, my precious sister and I made eye contact as we connected for the very last time. She turned and walked away with that angel by her side. At that moment, I realized that Charlene's spirit had passed on.

After regaining my composure, I entered Charlene's room. The first thing I noticed was that the angels were gone. It seemed as if they had accomplished their mission. For me, it was confirmation of my sister's departure.

Her doctors gave us the devastating news that my sister was brain-dead. After tests were done to confirm her condition, our family made the difficult decision to turn off all life-support systems.

Like others who are grieving the loss of a loved one, I have my struggles. There is a hole in my heart, but I will always thank God for the special sister He gave me. For Charlene and me, sisterhood meant a bond like no other.

Marsha Aetonu-Iuli
Waipahu HI

Runaway, Toad!

One sunny day when I was around eight or nine years old, I sprang from my back door to play out in my backyard. It was a beautiful yard surrounded by creamy lavender colored lilac bushes and crimson red rose bushes.

As I approached the grass looking for an insect or creature to catch, I spotted a nice-sized speckled toad, thumping through the sun-glistened grass. I had to have that toad! Why, I really don't know. Perhaps it was the thrill of making a catch, claiming a prize. As I eyed the toad, he sideways eyed me back. Before I knew it, my handy plastic, washed-out margarine container had enclosed the toad and it was now mine! As I sealed up the container with air holes in the lid for its roof, I gloated over the prize that I had stolen from nature.

However, as I began to examine this creature, bobbing up and down inside its plastic prison, my emotions began to stir. I felt that something was definitely not right. With an immense feeling of ambiguity, I knew what I had to do.

With a sudden rush of excitement, I lifted up the lid. My little prisoner leaped out into the clover and sun-sparkled grassland. I had such a feeling of victory as I watch the toad glide its way into freedom and peace.

Sharon Blumberg
Munster IN

I Cried

I cried all night till dawn
a letter I tried to write...
for today my heart was broken
there was no one in sight.

I don't know how I'll make it
or how I'll get along...
I know I will not quit for
my heart is very strong.

So when the sun is shining
over the weary sea,
will you, the shores, please
say a prayer for me?

Believe in yourself, in the power
you have to control your own
life day by day.

Believe in the strength that you
have deep inside, and your faith
will help show you the way.

Believe in tomorrow and what it
will bring, let a hopeful heart
carry you through.

Believe things will work out if
you trust and believe, there's
no limit to what you can do.

Whatever special challenges you
face along life's way...

May you trust and believe
that you will always find
the best in every day.

Just Believe!

Debra Miller
Lockhart TX

"I cannot tell the truth about anything unless I confess being a student, growing and learning something new every day. The more I learn, the clearer my view of the world becomes."

—Sonia Sanchez

Give Sorrow Words: The Day America

"Give sorrow words."

--William Shakespeare

On September 12, 2001, the Story Circle Board of Directors convened a special e-mail meeting to explore what we might do to help ourselves and others deal with our grief and loss. Our answer grew out of Story Circle's mission: to share our stories. A day later, we posted our new web page, "Give Sorrow Words." We thought of it as a place where women—and men, too—were invited to express their anguish and begin to heal. Here is what we wrote on that page.

September 11, 2001, was the day America changed. In this historic time of national grief and outrage, each of us feels a terrible pain and we are all seeking a way to deal with it. Some of us are giving blood or contributing financially to families who lost loved ones, but many of us feel helpless, not sure what we can do to heal ourselves, help others heal, and honor those who have died so tragically.

But there is a way. We can give our sorrow words. We can write our stories of this terrible day: stories about what we witnessed, either on the scene or on television; stories about how we felt, either at the time of the tragedy or as the long days unfolded; stories that honor the memory of those we have lost and pay tribute to their lives. As we search for words, we will understand more about the experience and how this trauma has changed us. As we write our feelings, they will become less confused and more accessible. The profound pain we feel may not be immediately lessened, but expression gives voice to our grief, and our stories help us to heal.

Here are excerpts from some of these healing stories. To read the full story, or to read all of the stories, go to <http://www.storycircle.org/sorrow.html>.

9-11: Two Things I Know for Sure

by Judy Fettman, Ann Arbor MI

I switched on the tiny television in the kitchen--a fire in the Big Apple.

It always fascinates me, in this age of television shows and movies, how we have come to depend upon dramatic clues to interpret events --how the narrative line slowly builds, how the background music is ominous, hinting toward danger, and then climaxes in some powerful event. That Tuesday morning, no screen-writer had done his homework, no composer had thought to point toward anything significant. There was no narrator to make sense of the senseless. Silently, and as if in slow motion, a plane flies into a 110-story tower; flames leap and smoke billows; debris scatters; then the screen is divided and the right half shows a smoking Pentagon; Peter Jennings announces that a plane has crashed in a Pennsylvania field.

What? What?!

This movie doesn't make sense. Is this a video game on the screen? "Sin City," perhaps? Bomb that tower! Then that one! And the Pentagon! Score 1800 points!

I don't know how long I stood motionless at my kitchen counter transfixed before that tiny screen as it began to sink in that this was not a movie and not a game, that this was real life, this was war, and it was happening now, and I was scared. When the towers fell, an agonized voice rose from within me and echoed, "Oh, the humanity!"

Now, two days later, like the debris from those scenes of horror, my thoughts also are still flying, falling, settling, a pile of rubble that still must be sifted for meaning. Like the rescue workers searching for survivors and the FBI searching for clues, my search will take a long time....[more at www.storycircle.org/sorrow.html]

Garden Therapy

Carolyn Blankenship, Austin TX

It was a beautiful day, sunny and cool after weeks of rain. A perfect gardening day. I was outside early, carrying tools, bags of dirt and new plants to a corner of the yard back of the deck where the rocky ground sloped away to the fence. I'd been planning to do something with this little corner for a while, just waiting for the heat of summer to pass. I walked Monty to the car, kissed him goodbye, and turned to go as he started the motor. He said, "This is weird. NPR says a plane has hit the World Trade Center." I said, "What? An accident?" He replied, "I don't know." Shaking my head, I turned and went back into the house for a bottle of water to keep at hand for the sweaty work of putting in a new flower bed.

As I walked in the door, the phone rang. My best friend said, "Turn on the TV, the World Trade Center's been hit by a plane. They think it's terrorism." Still holding the phone, I reached for the remote and turned the channel to CNN, watching in horror and disbelief as the second plane tore through the other tower. The phone line was silent. What could we say? After a few words, we rung off to check on family and friends.

I woke up my daughter in San Diego to make sure her husband wasn't traveling, as he'd been to New York recently. He wasn't. She and I watched, eyes glued to the television, ears glued to the receiver as the Pentagon burned. What on earth was happening? It all seemed to surreal, just like a disaster movie. We stayed on the phone for an hour, watching, listening, trying to comfort each other. Monty called, saying his family couldn't reach either of his cousins, one of whom worked in the Pentagon, one in the World Trade Center. I called my office to ask about our company's office in New York: 200 employees in the WTC, 2,000 more two blocks away. No one knew anything yet.

I sat in front of the television for hours, unable to look away, watching the same footage over and over, trying to absorb what had happened. I felt like I'd been punched in the stomach and swallowed a boulder. Finally, I walked outside, to my sacks of soil and pile of tools. I decided that my way of dealing with so much ugliness would be to create something beautiful. This corner would become a memorial garden....

By Friday we knew that Monty's cousins were okay, by those twists of fate the news stories are full of. Art was coming in late to New York and saw the plane hit the tower as he sat stuck in traffic; Jim wasn't due in at the Pentagon until 3:00 that afternoon. At my company, one person had been on Flight 11, ten were still missing from the WTC, everyone at the building two blocks away was safe...

That night, I lit our candle and put on a tape of Buddhist chanting. The beautiful, ethereal voices of Wings of Song filled the room, singing "Heart of Perfect Wisdom." We sang along, softly, "Gate, gate, para gate, para sam gate, bodhi svaha" - "Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone beyond the beyond, into the Heart of Perfect Wisdom." May it be so. May we let our hearts break open a little more, may we use this as an opportunity to become more wise, more loving, more compassionate....[more at www.storycircle.org/sorrow.htm.]

The Day the World Cried

Kara Flathouse, Pampa TX

Sept. 11, 2001

Today is a horrific day. Hard to believe when you wake up to such brilliant blue skies and such peace only to discover others were in the midst of terror. We are visiting my parents in Houston and as I turn on the TV, just as my Dad is walking out the door the sight of the WTC towers on fire fills the screen. My Dad and I watched horrified as the second plane was caught on video and sharply careened into the tower.

"That is a passenger plane!" my Dad shouts as he watches the video.

We would find out later it was, both planes, full of innocent people. The anguish just about brings me to my knees. I can't help but think the world as I've known it is gone and tomorrow will bring us into a new era...

A Day for Detachment

Renee Cassese, Seaford NY

From the second I heard the news I could not drag myself away from the television screen. For a woman who rarely watches TV at all this was a strange feeling in itself. As I watched the horrors of that day unfold, over and over again, I began to pull away from myself. Nothing seemed to matter anymore except the lives of those personally involved and the apprehension of what was to happen next. Fortunately no one I know personally was trapped in those towers. My brother lives in lower Manhattan and it was a harrowing three hours before I heard that he was safe. How precious our telephone communications are when they suddenly disintegrate like the steel and concrete which once shored up much of this country's economy . As I watched the continuous replay of those planes hitting

the towers I felt as though my insides were being ripped out. By the end of the day I felt like a hollow shell of a woman. Now, a week later, I still feel very removed from the things I find most rewarding and pleasurable. They are all so trivial in comparison. Their meanings stripped away like the leaves that fall from the trees outside my window.

My job as a special ed teacher seems useless--why bother? My focus and commitment are gone. Journaling is like a life preserver that I have not yet been able to grab hold of. My notebook lies opened on my desk, pen angled on the page, but no words emerge on the lines. My photographs nestle in their boxes waiting for me to continue my new hobby of scrap-booking, the smiles of my children almost haunting in the knowledge that they are safe while so many others are not.

And then the question of how safe are we now anyway? No answer for that except in each new sunrise... [more at www.storycircle.org/sorrow.html]

Two Candles

Judith Helburn, Austin TX

The words below, by Rabbi Zoe Kline, were used to begin our Shabbat Service last night. My husband Beber and I were moved by them and I am providing them below with the hope that they are meaningful regardless of what your faith may be.

On Shabbat we would light two candles,
 One for remembering Shabbat
 and one for observing Shabbat.
 Tonight we light two candles.
 This one for Building One,
 And this one for Building Two,
 This one for the Pentagon
 And this one for Pittsburgh,
 This one for the hundreds of firefighters
 And this one for the hundreds of police,
 This one for all the men,
 And this one for all the women,
 This one for all the girls,
 And this one for all the boys,
 And these candles for the husband and wife
 Who leapt out of the tower holding hands,
 This one for our luck running out,
 This one for the New York skyline,
 This one for the walking wounded,
 This one for the critically wounded
 This one for the survivors,
 This one for the dead,
 This candle for Building One,
 This candle for Building Two.

Is it time to renew yourself!

Check your mailing label. It may be time to renew your annual membership. If so, don't put it off, please—renewal is urgent business.

And while you're at it, why not give a gift?

Someone you know has a story to tell!

Stories from the Heart

Preliminary Program

Friday, February 8

- 12 p.m. Registration opens
- 2:30-4:30 Optional pre-conference workshop: *The Muse's Journal*, Dana Reynolds (see page 20 for more details)
- 5:30-7 Dutch-treat dinner, Holiday Inn restaurant, hosted by Austin Chapter members
- 7:30 Opening talk: Betty Sue Flowers, Ph.D. (Dessert reception following)

Saturday, February 9

- 8:30 a.m. Registration opens. Hospitality Suite open until 6 p.m.
- 9-10:15 Session 1, Tracks A, B, and C
- 10:45-12 Session 2, Tracks A, B, and C
- 12:30-2 Lunch, *Straight from the Heart*, inspirational music and remarks by Bethani
- 2:15-3:30 Session 3, Tracks A, B, and C
- 4:00-5:15 Session 4, Tracks A, B, and C
- 6:00-7:45 Dutch-treat dinner, various Austin restaurants, transportation provided by Austin chapter members
- 8-10 *Storytelling from the Heart*: After-dinner Open Mike. Rebecca Roberts, Mistress of Revels

Sunday, February 10

- 9-10:15 Session 5, Tracks A, B, and C
- 10:45-12 Session 6, Tracks A, B, and C
- 12:30-2 Lunch: *Telling Our Heart's Story*, Susan Wittig Albert, Ph.D.

Our Major Speakers

Dr. Betty Sue Flowers, is the recently-named director of the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library. She is also a distinguished professor of English and an award-winning teacher, poet, editor, and consultant to government and international corporations. She has collaborated with Bill Moyers to produce four books from Moyers' PBS television series.

Dr. Susan Wittig Albert is a former English professor and university dean and vice-president. The recipient of many teaching awards and fellowships, she is the author of numerous books for young adults and the best-selling author of two mystery series. She is also the author of *Work of Her Own* and *Writing From Life: Telling Your Soul's Story*. In 1997, she founded the Story Circle Network.

Saturday Lunch: Inspiring Entertainment

At lunch on Saturday, Austin artist Bethani will be performing original music from her New Age/Spiritual CDs "Go Within" and "Remember Me." She'll share her story, her paths to inspiration, and the ways music can help us become whole. In addition to performing, Bethani teaches music and directs the music program at an Austin church. Learn more at www.bethaniSings.com

We hope you'll join us at the....

Holiday Inn Town Lake

20 N. IH-35 , Austin, TX 78701 , 512-472-8211

Complimentary transportation to/from airport,
Located beside Town Lake on Austin's beautiful hike & bike trail

To receive the conference rate of \$109/night (plus tax, double occupancy), you *must* call **512-472-8211** to make your reservation, (don't go through the Holiday Inn website or call the 1-800 number)

Be sure to tell them you're with Story Circle!

Want a roommate? See our Roommates Wanted! web page, at
<http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/roommates.shtml>

Program Sessions*

Friday Afternoon Workshop

The Muse's Journal. Dana Reynolds, Carmel CA. We will explore ways to create a visual/written journal by crafting imagery, collage, poetry, words, and ephemera of our lives in our "Muse's Journal." Participants will bring personal materials (favorite imagery, photos, poetry, etc.), other materials provided. \$25 fee.

Track A: Finding Your Voice

Making Modern Parables. Marianna Gage, Austin TX Our life experiences can be distilled into stories that open us to the healing process and can be used to heal and teach others. This experienced story-teller will help us find our healing stories.

Passing the Light. Jan Seale, McAllen TX. Our stories about sex, birth, money, marriage, self, spirit, family, and career are shaped by our family stories and deeply influence the stories by which our children shape their lives.

The Nature of our Lives. Jean McGroarty, Battle Ground IN. The natural world shapes our stories in more ways than we know. Through clustering, word association games, lists and other activities, we'll bring the outdoors to our writing, encouraged by an experienced Story Circle facilitator.

Women, Autobiography, and Spirituality. Linda Myers, Richmond, CA. Deepening into the self is a way to heal and to find the true voice within us. Led by a therapist who teaches classes in spiritual autobiography and has published poetry, fiction, and memoir, we will read inspiring poetry, listen, write, and create a sacred circle.

Writing the Stories of Our Lives: Getting Started. Frances E. Reynolds, Columbia MO. Writing our family stories encourages us to reflect on our values while we assess the impact of family culture and the power of place. Explore these stories with a skilled teacher and facilitator. For novice life-writers.

The Red Shoes: A Parable for Today's Women. Lorraine Soukup, Kittery ME. The story of the Red Shoes is a story of every woman's need to create and sustain a self-designed, authentic life filled with passion and vitality. This story-telling session, led by an internationally-known singer-story teller, will inspire our creativity, help us find our own Red Shoes, and stand on our own two feet.

Track B: Serious Stuff

Outside the Box: Playing with Frameworks for Writing Life Stories, Susie Kelly Flatau, Austin TX. A creative, nuts-and-bolts gathering led by the author of *From My Mother's Hands* and *Red Boots and Attitudes* will help us find the right personal framework for our tales. Explore tried-and-true approaches, share ideas, and play with story.

From Memoir to Fiction: Using Novelistic Techniques. Susan Wittig Albert, Bertram TX. The lines between memoir and fiction have blurred in recent years. The best-selling author of *Writing From Life* and 80-plus novels will show us how to use

description, conflict, dialogue, setting, and other novelistic techniques to enhance our stories.

Cameo Life Stories: Penning Your Portrait in Words. Deborah Hansen Linzer, Paradise Valley, AZ. From its director, we'll hear about the Cameo Life Stories writing program for women, sponsored by the not-for-profit National Life Stories Center and affiliated with the National Women's History Project. Find out how women's stories are archived at Arizona State University.

Interviewing the Important Women in Your Life, P.J. Pierce, Austin TX. Wise women have much to teach us. With the author of *Texas WiseWomen Speak*, we will learn important interview techniques for oral history: how to ask questions and record and compile answers.

The Nitty Gritty of Self Publishing and Marketing, Donna Remmert, with Terry Sherrell of Morgan Printing Company, Austin TX. Find out from the experts how to publish your own book! The author of *The Littlest Big Kid* will interview a representative of a small press that caters to self-publishers.

Using Genograms to Identify and Map Your Life Stories, Annette Riggio, San Marcos TX. Learn how to use the genogram to study your family tree and map your family's complex history.

Track C: Stories in Many Voices, Many Media

Mythologically Speaking: Creating Your Personal Myth, Carolyn Blankenship, Austin TX There is tremendous power (and a great deal of fun) in telling our stories as fairy tales. Let this inspiring leader/facilitator help you find your own fairy godmother.

Second Bloom: Creativity in the Second Half of Life, Judith Helburn. With a certified Spiritual Eldering leader, we will explore the definitions of creativity and ways to open to it. Inspire yourself to take risks and give yourself permission to tell new stories about yourself.

Art as Inspiration, Beth Kennedy, Austin TX. This nationally-exhibited textile and quilt artist will show us how to tell our stories through monoprinting on cloth and paper, then lead us to write about the experience.

Art as Teacher & Tool for Discovering Your Story, Rebecca Roberts, Austin TX. In this workshop, we'll play with clay, and then write. The facilitator, an award-winning potter, will show us how to discover stories we've hidden from ourselves.

Between Generations: Mothers & Daughters Sharing Our Life Stories. Carolyn Scheider, Austin TX. Sharing our stories with our daughters and mothers can strengthen these bonds and help us cope with difficult relationships. Led by a teacher who has organized Girls Club writing activities.

Preserving Memories through Scrapbooking, Paula Rudisill & Lee Ann Smith, Austin TX. Scrapbooking is a wonderful and fun way to preserve your family's heritage. Learn scrapbooking basics from the owner of Scrapbook Cupboard. Bring 5-6 related photographs.

*Sessions are subject to change.



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)	Registration at the door
Friday/Saturday/ Sunday Sessions	Member	\$150	\$175	\$200
	Non-Member*	\$200	\$225	\$250
Friday only: Optional Pre-Conference Workshop	Members & Non-Members	\$25	\$25	\$25
Friday only: Opening talk & Reception	Members & Non-Members	\$25	\$30	35
Saturday Only (includes lunch)	Member	\$75	\$100	\$125
	Non-Member	\$100	\$125	\$150
Sunday Only (includes lunch)	Member	\$50	\$75	\$100
	Non-Member	\$75	\$100	\$125

Important Notes

- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **Cancellations** are accepted until January 25, 2002, and are subject to a cancellation fee of \$50. SC reserves the right to cancel any event and refund registration fees
- ❖ **Conference hotel:** Holiday Inn, Town Lake, Austin TX. Room rate: \$109/plus tax/double occupancy. To receive this rate, reserve through hotel reservations: 512-472-8211

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/Conference>.

Scholarship Assistance: Deadline, December 15, 2001

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 shortly after December 15, 2001

Our Conference Sponsors

We're grateful to the many fine folks who have helped us with donations of cash, merchandise, and services. Thank you for your generosity!

Keynote Address

The Wardrobe
26 Doors Shopping Center
1206 W. 38th St
Austin, TX 78705

Scholarships

Ronya Kozmetsky
Bill and Susan Albert

Refreshments

Satay Restaurant
3202 W. Anderson Ln Suite 205
Austin, TX 78757

Special Events Donor

Chicago Title
950 Westbank Dr. Suite 101
Austin, TX 78746

Door Prizes, Session Materials

Bei Amici Salon
6507 Jester Blvd
Austin, TX 78750

The Garden Room
5 Jefferson Sq
Austin, TX 78731

Satay Restaurant (address above)

Scrapbook Cupboard
2165 W. Anderson Lane
Austin TX 78757
www.scrapbookcupboard.com

Susan Albert, www.mysterypartners.com
Bethani, www.BethaniSings.com.
Susie Flatau, www.wordsbysusie.com/
Donna Remmert
Rebecca Roberts

Story-Telling From the Heart: Saturday Night, Live, in Austin Texas

It's Saturday night in Austin TX—what would you like to do after you've enjoyed a fine dinner at one of Austin's many great restaurants? Well, you might take in a film, or join the Mardi Gras party in Austin's disco district (the River City is widely known as the Live Music Capital of the World).

Or we could all hang out together and swap stories.

Swap stories?

Hey, what a great idea! After all, isn't that what Story Circle is all about? And who has more stories to swap than women—women who have loved and laughed and cried and succeeded and failed and survived and, yes, triumphed! Creative, canny, crafty, clever, courageous women. Women who have lived ordinary, extraordinary, and sometimes downright outrageous lives!

So for Saturday night's entertainment, we offer you—*ta da!* (a flourish of trumpets and rattle of drums, if you please)—an open mike!

And all you have to bring is you, and your story. Maybe it's a piece you've already shared with your Story Circle, or a poem or two that you've just finished, or a short autobiographical fiction. Maybe it's a story to be sung, or danced (if you need music, let us know ahead of time). Or perhaps you'd like to bring a piece of art that you've made—pottery, painting, textile, whatever—and tell us how and why it is part of your story. The sky's the limit, gals, and the only thing we have to fear (as some famous man said once) is fear itself. So let's see how many different stories, and how many different ways to tell a story, we can all come up with

To give every story-teller a chance to participate, we ask you to limit your turn at the mike to ten minutes. And to help our Mistress of Revels do her job, we also ask you to bring a typed page with your name and three-line bio. You can sign up at registration.

Remember that wonderful '60s song that began "When you come to San Francisco, be sure and wear flowers in your hair"?

When you come to Austin, Texas, be sure to bring a story from your heart. We're eager to hear it, y'all!



Medium, large,
extra-large, 2X, 3X

\$16 shipping/handling,
tax included

Story Circle T-Shirts

Fruit of the Loom 100% cotton, beige with purple printing
Logo on front, motto on back:

*"What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life.
The world would split open."*

Muriel Rukeyser

buy on-line at www.storycircle.org
click on SCN T-Shirts

Or mail check to: Story Circle, PO Box 500127, Austin TX 78750



Pre-Conference Workshop Features

California teacher and writer Dana Reynolds will lead the optional two-hour pre-conference workshop, scheduled for 2:30-4:30 p.m. on Friday, February 8. The Muse's Journal: Dana's workshop is entitled "The Crafting of a Visual Journal to Inspire the Writer's Spirit." You may register and pay for the workshop (\$25) at the same time you register for the conference, or you may register and pay when you arrive.

"We will explore ways to create a visual and written journal as a pathway of steppingstones to the writer's well of inspiration," Dana says. Participants will experiment with different ways to craft the imagery, poetry, words, and ephemera of their lives as a "muse's journal," which will be not only a record of their experiences, feelings, and imaginings, but a rich source of future inspiration and future stories, as well. If you choose to join us in this exciting exploration, you will leave the workshop with the beginnings of your own "Muse's Journal."

What should you bring? Dana suggests that you gather a collection of personal materials that are meaningful, inspiring, and inspiriting: photographs, poetry, clippings, a page from an old journal, a letter, and so on. The workshop fee of \$25 includes additional special materials.

For ten years, Dana Reynolds has been facilitating women's spirituality/creativity workshops and retreats nationwide. Her work as a Spiritual Midwife, one who assists women as they birth their creative gifts into the world, has been presented in a variety of settings to hundreds of women. Her background as a visual artist and writer are combined in her unique Spiritual Midwifery workshops.

Dana is the author of *Be An Angel*, with graphic designer Karen Blessen, (Simon & Schuster). Her essay, *Visual Prayers*, is included in the anthology, *Our Turn, Our Time: Women Coming of Age*, edited by Cynthia Black. She writes a monthly column, *The Sacred Imagination Gallery*, for the online magazine www.soulfulliving.com.

As the creator/facilitator of an art-making process known as Visual Prayer, Dana teaches women how to combine ritual with sacred intention to create altars, collage, spirit dolls, and other touchstones. Her web-site www.sacredimagination.com offers samplings of her visual prayer collages, poetry, and workshop catalogue.

Utterances

The story that is ready to be birthed speaks to me now in the voice of one who will wait no longer. Before I had language I knew this story. Memory was illumined as I held my small green Rosary beads in my hand. The utterance of prayers before I knew how to pray. Secrets carried in my dreams would later become my alphabet. A pilgrimage to a foreign cathedral, labyrinth walks at dusk, whispers and faces from ancient places. These things paved my path to this door. I enter now to engage the Mystery, to read the language etched into my skin, to know the one who knows my name. . .who knows my destiny.—
Dana Reynolds

Hospitality from the Heart of the Lone Star State!

We Texans pride ourselves on being warm-hearted and hospitable, but we hope to out-do ourselves when our Story Circle friends—many of whom we've never met!—converge on Austin just before Valentine's Day next year.

Here's what's in the works so far, according to our hardy (and hearty) Conference Chairperson, Judith Helburn.

Transportation. Getting from and to Bergstrom International Airport is free and easy, via the hotel limousine. When you arrive, locate a courtesy phone and call the Town Lake Holiday Inn. They'll tell you where and when to catch the limo.

Dining. Saturday and Sunday lunches are included in your registration fee, as well as the dessert reception after our keynote speaker on Friday night. For Friday night dinner, you're invited to join members of the Austin Story Circle Chapter in the hotel restaurant, 5:30-7 p.m. And for Saturday night dinner, other members of the Austin Chapter will have cars available to drive small groups of us to various restaurants. You'll be able to choose from a variety of one-of-a-kind Austin restaurants, from Texas barbeque joints to Mexican, southeast Asian, Continental, Italian, and just plain down-home eateries.

Hospitality Suite. Want a place to kick off your shoes, put up your feet, and trade stories with women you've met through the Internet Chapter but never laid eyes on? Boy-howdy (oh, no, we didn't say *that*, did we?) do we have the place for you! We've reserved a special Hospitality Suite on the fourteenth floor, with a spectacular view, and we'll stock it with munchies and drinks to keep us going until its time to enjoy another great meal. The suite will be open at specified times, posted at the registration table.

Goodie Bag full of Goodies. What's a party without take-home party favors, and what's a conference without something to show for it? (Besides all the wonderful ideas, dreams, and schemes you're taking home with you, of course.) We'll be providing a great tote bag, perfect to carry books to and from your Story Circle reading circle. And wait until you see all the little goodies we'll tuck inside!

Door Prizes. Our conference committee has been working hard to corral some valuable door prizes to give away to conferees. Plus, you will receive a . . .

Free Art Print. Local artist Stephen Remmert has donated a magnificent art print, valued at \$125, to every registrant. The print is entitled "Pitcher of Apples." You can view it on the web at www.storycircle.org. Click on 'National Conference' and then click on "Goodies." Prints will be available at registration. You can mail it home for \$10 (which includes a \$7 mailing tube.)

So what are you waiting for! Register now, and discover some of that wonderful Lone Star State hospitality!

A LifeWriting Tip

by Margaret Knorr

Margaret Knorr, the Internet Chapter's Writer of the Month for September, 2001, is our new Tips columnist. She and her husband have a small herb business in Charleston, WV. Maggie is homeschooling her five-year-old son and has a website dedicated to journaling tips and exercises called **Writing for Life**. It can be found at www.geocities.com/mairearad. Check it out, and subscribe to Maggie's excellent monthly e-newsletter on journaling.

Organizing Your LifeWriting

Getting organized is very important to me when I start writing. When considering writing stories of my life, this organization is also very important. I have 29 years to cover. My mother has 54. That is a lot of time to cover! Where do we start??

Get a notebook. Put aside one page (front and back or front only—it's up to you) for each year of your life. At the top of the page write the year and how old you were. Write down whatever you can remember from that year. No need to go into details, just list key words that will bring things back to memory when you are ready to write about them.

You may want to work with a three-ring binder so you can add pages to each year as needed.

Story Circle Market Watch

by Nancy Rigg

Please let me know if you've found this information useful. And if you have found interesting markets, please share the information. Email me at njrigg@mediaone.net.

One of the best places to get published is in your local newspaper. Many papers seek stories with a personal slant, especially around the holidays. You do have to submit well in advance, though, so think ahead! Here is a useful newspaper link, including addresses and international publications: www.newspaperlinks.com/home.cfm

And don't miss the WD Short-Short Competition: The **Writer's Digest Short-Short Story Competition** is now accepting entries of 1,500 words or less. This is your chance to compete with other short-short fiction writers for more than \$3,000 cash and your name in the June 2002 Writer's Digest. www.writersdigest.com/catalog/2001shortstory.asp

Writer's Digest Short Short Story Competition
1507 Dana Avenue,
Cincinnati, OH 45207
Deadline: December 3, 2001

Story Circle Members in Print

by Nancy Rigg

Nancy Rigg has been a working newspaper/magazine writer and documentary filmmaker for over 20 years, as well as working as a screenwriter for such shows as *Dallas* and *China Beach*. Her special field is disaster-preparedness, and since 9/11, she has been writing articles for emergency-management magazines. She was the IC Writer of the Month for April, 2001. She is working on a memoir called *Song of the River*.

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.

We do not have as much publishing news to report as we usually do, in part because so much attention has been focused on world events. But let's join in a round of applause for these Story Circle members who have had articles and stories published recently or accepted for publication.

Susie Kelly Flatau's third book, *Red Boots & Attitude* (Eakin Press), a collection of fiction, non-fiction, and poetry by 34 Texas women writers, is due out in January 2002. Susie, who lives in Austin, TX and serves on the Story Circle Board, notes that a portion of royalties and special event book sales will benefit breast cancer support organizations.

Lou Traylor of Ellendale, TN, has written an article about keeping a family vacation journal that has been accepted for publication by *Family Fun Magazine*. The article includes directions about how to hand-make your own journals.

Margaret Knorr's new *Writing for Life Forum* is featured at: <http://clubs.yahoo.com/clubs/writingforlifeforum>. Margaret also facilitates one of our Risky Writers e-Circles and lives in Rand, WV.

Nancy Rigg of Los Angeles. Since the events of September 11, she has written three articles about the impact of the terrorist attacks on fire, law enforcement, and emergency medical services for *Advanced Rescue Technology Magazine* and *9-1-1 Magazine*. Her short article about a wonderful search and rescue dog named Bella is being published in the November issue of *Dog Fancy Magazine*.

Susan Wittig Albert's new China Bayles mystery, *Bloodroot*, appeared in October. The paperback edition of *Mistletoe Man* was published at the same time, and spent three weeks on the USA Today best-seller list. Susan lives near Austin TX.

**Check your label. Is it time to renew ?
Use the form on page 8—
and while you're at it, give someone a gift
of SCN membership!**

....And Two More Books for the Journey

Breaking Apart: A Memoir of Divorce, by Wendy Swallow. Hyperion, 2001. ISBN: 0-7868-6599-7. Reviewed by Margaret Knorr.

"People say marriages break up, but mine finally broke down."

This is how Wendy Swallow, a former staff writer for the Washington Post and currently a journalism professor at American University, describes the end of her marriage.

In *Breaking Apart: A Memoir of Divorce*, Swallow tells us how she met her husband and describes the warning signs that she didn't heed. With straight-forward honesty and 20/20 hindsight, she relates the ways she ignored her better instincts and ended up in an unlivable situation. Her memoir is a poignant account of divorce, a subject that people usually prefer to ignore.

As Swallow begins her narrative, I can identify with her situation. She had been involved in a couple of relationships that were not good for her because of a need she saw in the person's life. She was looking for purpose in her own life and a cause to live for. When she met her husband, she saw someone who needed her and offered her stability. He knew what he wanted in life and was working toward it. He was also 10 years older.

Before they married, Swallow had some indications of her husband's temper and bursts of anger and experienced more of it after they were married. Perhaps I related so fully to this book because I was in a similar situation. I can't remember if I had much of an indication of my husband's temper before we married, but a few months after we were married it became obvious. By this time, however, I was already expecting our son. Swallow let her husband persuade her to have children a few years after they were married, despite her growing misgivings about their relationship and the state of their marriage.

Breaking Apart is a painful important and essential book for our time. Reading this book, others may be encouraged to work harder at improving their marriage, as I have been. Or perhaps it will help some women decide not to marry, or to end an unhealthy relationship before they find themselves in a similar situation. Swallow's account also dispels whatever 'divorce fantasies' women may have about it being the perfect, painless answer to their miserable marital situation.

If you are considering divorce or beginning the process, this is an invaluable book to read. Swallow made mistakes in her choice of a lawyer and has some helpful advice for what is in your best interests. *Breaking Apart* is a no-holds-barred account that should be read by every woman, regardless of her situation.

Virgin Time, by Patricia Hampl, Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, New York, 1992. Reviewed by Dianne S. Lodge-Peters.

In these busy days of heeding the call for post-September eleventh normalcy, contemplating how we live can be an effort. Nearly ten years ago, Patricia Hampl wrote about her search for

the contemplate life in the travel memoir, *Virgin Time*, a series of life stories about excursions in central Italy and northern California, interspersed with childhood memories about growing up in Minnesota and being educated at a Catholic girls school.

The book is in three parts: "Faith," which chronicles the hike a group of people make to Assisi; "Miracles," Hampl's reflections about that trip; and "silence," which records a pilgrimage to a Sierra retreat and concludes that when travel doesn't work anymore, be still. I was intrigued by the book in 1992, as well as today—not so much for Hampl's calling St. Francis "a nutcase" as in persisting in such a view. That takes gumption from any Catholic girl. Mine is not the only criterion for evaluating the book, since in a recent issue of *Poets and Writers*, memoirist Vivian Gornick provides more solid standards:

Life stories as memoirs are "neither testament nor fable nor analytical transcription,...with the facts of the life experience but with the meaning the writer connects to those facts.

How well does Hampl measure up to Gornick's test?

In Part One, as Hampl begins the hike to Assisi, another hiker asks her if memoirists write from life experience or the imagination. Nonplused by her own answer—"Both!"—Hampl amplifies: "I wrote about the past because I wanted it to *be* past, not to recapture it." When the hiker wanted more, Hampl had none to give. Instead, she allowed her questioner to do "the only thing left to do," tell her own "troubled tale to the dark." In other words, writing, like pilgrimaging, is taking the journey on faith.

In Part Two, regarding memory, Hampl says: "Memory had always seemed a series of stories, then bits of consciousness, mental fragments, a mind like a camera admitting light, a reunion, a mysterious web of human relationships, and finally the capacity to endure."

In the final section, recounting a week without speaking, Hampl tells about finding the title for her memoir in a passage from Thomas Merton, which she recalled just as the Summer Solstice came to the Sierra:

It was the instant before things began...the virgin point between darkness and light, when creation in its innocence asks permission to *be* once again.

Weeping over this immaculate moment, Hampl uttered what she says was her first prayer: "*I can't help [crying], it's how I am.*" Prayer leaked out of the silence. Silence sifted things out. It sent Hampl into a hush in which she heard *her* voice. It demanded that she get in there and live with her experiences and imagination. She ended her pilgrimage when "the days soaked me up like a blotter."

I'd say that Hampl meets Gornick's standards. She does not prove her religious faith, nor meet supernatural beings, nor dissect the events of days, so much as she imbues them with meaning. She fills the pages of her book with wile and so provides readers the stillness for telling their own tales.

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

Story Circle National Board Elects New Members

At its October meeting, the 11-member Story Circle National Board elected six new members from Austin and East Texas. Three members whose terms expire at the end of this year were also reelected. Board members serve a three-year term and are eligible for renewal. Donna Remmert served as chair of the nominating committee.

Each of our six new members brings a special kind of expertise and experience to the Board. We're looking forward to benefiting from their ideas and energies!

Melanie Alberts is an active IC member and facilitator of an eCircle, as well as serving on the conference committee. She has been nominated for IC president in 2002.

Linda Jones's interest and expertise is in oral storytelling. In addition to her work with SC, she is an active member of the Central Texas Storytelling Guild.

PJ Pierce is the author of the forthcoming *Texas Wisewomen Speak*. The book, due from UT Press in Summer, 2002, is a collection of interviews with 25 well-known Texas women over age 50.

Rebecca Roberts is a clay artist with a passion for words. She has been involved with an Austin story circle for four years, and has participated in the Writing From Life workshop.

Leilani Rose, a long-time journaler, has been a member of SC since its inception in 1997. A Writing From Life workshop participant, she is also a member of an Artists Way group.

Paula Yost is a memoirist, personal historian, and founder of *Heirloom Memories*, a business that enables her to help others tell their stories. She also serves on the board of the Association of Personal Historians, is a member of the Texas Oral Historians Association, and offers writing workshops.

The three continuing Board members have already made many valuable contributions to our work. We don't know what we would do without them, so we're delighted that they've agreed to serve another term!

Catherine Cogburn is the president (2001) of the Austin Chapter, the director of our national OWL-Circle project, and the Austin OWL liaison.

Judith Helburn is Vice President of the Board for 2001 and the chair of the Stories From the Heart conference committee.

Peggy Moody is the Secretary of the Board for 2001, secretary of the Internet Chapter, and our webmistress.

Officers for 2002 will be elected at the January Board meeting. The slate includes Susan Albert, President; Lisa Belli, Vice President; Penny Appleby, Treasurer; and Peggy Moody, Secretary. Peggy is also our official webmistress.

Carolyn Blankenship, National Board member, Circle facilitator, and editor of the Austin Chapter newsletter, will be editing the 2001 issue of *True Words from Real Women*, our annual anthology. Circle facilitators are urged to email Carolyn at maddog@io.com with selections from their groups' stories.

Imagine, Create, Share...

These three words describe the way the Internet Chapter officers have worked together, creating the chapter, designing and developing its activities, and inviting members to become involved. **Marie Buckley**, the first chapter president, and **Judy Fettman**, the first membership services coordinator, are both stepping down after an extraordinarily creative 18 months, Marie to spend more time with her writing and her Hillsboro OR circles, and Judy to undertake a move to San Francisco. Their service as officers in the chapter has always been generous and warm and their energies boundless. All of the members of the Internet Chapter owe them a great debt of thanks for their innovative and ground-breaking work. We couldn't have done it without you, guys!

Melanie Alberts, of Austin TX, has been nominated as the new chapter president, and **Lee Ambrose**, of Naples FL as the new membership services coordinator. **Peggy Moody**, of Austin, is on the slate as secretary. (Peggy is also the chapter webmistress, and has the key to Story Circle's computer power!) The voting is being done on-line, from Nov. 12-23. The chapter is also voting on a by-laws amendment establishing a nominating committee.

Austin Chapter Looks to 2002

The Austin TX chapter will hold its first meeting of the new year on January 20, 2-4:30 p.m., in the Colorado Room of the LCRA on Lake Austin Blvd. The meeting, which will begin with a business session and election, will feature stories read by members of the Austin writing circles.

Catherine Cogburn is retiring as president after a year's service. Thank you, Catherine, for all you've done! **Carolyn Scheider** has agreed to be nominated as president for 2002, **Danelle Sasser** will continue as treasurer, and **Peggy Moody** as secretary/webmistress. **Donna Remmert** has offered to coordinate program planning, and **Carolyn Blankenship** will continue with the chapter newsletter. There are several openings for volunteers, particularly in the publicity area. If you'd like to help out, please email Carolyn at carjoys@aol.com. The writing circles and reading circle will continue, with another new reading circle, focusing on women's fiction, in the works. We also plan to continue the Be Our Guest program. We hope that you'll come and bring your friends, and help the chapter continue to grow.

Last, but definitely not least! we are looking for helpers for the conference. We need volunteers to drive conferees to Austin-area restaurants (contact Melanie at melanie@austin.rr.com), serve as hosts at the dutch-treat dinner on Friday night (contact Carolyn at carjoys@aol.com), and help staff the Hospitality Suite (contact Judith at helburn@mail.utexas.edu.) For descriptions of these activities, read "Hospitality from the Heart," on page 21. If you don't have email, you can call the SC office: 454-9833, and someone will get in touch with you.

A Letter From Our President

Dear Story Circle Members, Friends, and Supporters:

These are anxious times, and all of us have been saddened, angered, and perhaps also frightened by the events of the past months—just a little over two months, as I write this, from the tragedy of 9/11. But while we all mourn the losses suffered by so many families and continue to grieve for what we have lost, we are all awed by the birth of something new in our land: call it patriotism, call it a new awareness of our fragility and the preciousness of love, call it just plain gratitude that we are alive to count our blessings. Whatever it is, its essential virtue is *courage*, that special virtue that is born from a strong heart. We all feel it, and welcome it, and are changed by it.

But there are many among us who continue to have concerns, especially about traveling. I am thinking of this now, because I know that this concern may be on your mind too, and that you may be putting off registering for the conference because you're not sure what's going to happen.

If that's what you're thinking, I hope you'll gather your courage and sit down, right this very minute, and fill out and mail in the registration form on page 18. It would be a darned shame, wouldn't it, if a few angry men kept any of us strong women from getting together to share our stories? It would be a great loss to *all* of us if *any* of us became afraid to exercise her right to go anywhere, learn anything, or speak her mind, or share her wisdom and strength.

Stories From the Heart is the very first conference of its kind, anywhere in the world—a fact which makes us extraordinarily proud. A great many courageous, creative, and committed women have collaborated to put together a ground-breaking conference program for you. Please read the descriptions of the sessions, check out the other exciting activities, fill in the registration form, book your hotel room, and make those travel arrangements. One little step at a time, and the next thing you know, you'll be in Austin, sharing the heart-felt hugs of your Story Circle sisters.

Sometimes being first is wonderful and exciting, sometimes it's downright scary, but it *always* takes courage. Come and share the wonder and excitement with us, and the fears. Come and share your stories with other women of heart, women rich in the heart's special virtue: courage.



With joy for your journey,

Susan Wittig Albert

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