

Story Circle Journal

The newsletter for women with stories to tell...

Volume 6 Number 2, June 2002

With Courage and Common Sense



The Story Circle Board of Directors is delighted to announce that SCN's first collection of women's memoirs—an anthology entitled *With Courage and Common Sense*—will be published by the University of Texas Press, probably in early 2004.

With Courage and Common Sense, edited by Dayna Finet and Susan Wittig Albert, grew out of the fifty memoir workshops that were funded by the Older Women's Legacy Circle project in Austin TX. These workshops, which were supported by a grant from the Sisters of the Incarnate Word of Houston TX, served over 500 senior women who were

interested in writing about their lives. The workshops took place in 1999 and 2000 in living rooms, senior centers, churches and synagogues, city recreation centers, and public and private senior residences. A division of one of Austin's largest healthcare organizations, the Seton Good Health School, hosted workshops at several of its facilities. As part of the project, each workshop produced a booklet of the women's writings, allowing the participants to see their writing in print, usually for the very first time.

With Courage and Common Sense includes 106 stories written, either in the workshops or at home, between workshop sessions. The editors have presented these stories in nine thematically-organized chapters. Chapter One, "I Am Not Always the Same Person," deals with the fundamental issue of identity and the formative experiences and cultural teachings that have engendered these women's sense of who they are. The memoirs in Chapter Two offer a strong sense of rootedness in the landscapes of home. Chapter Three, "Making Something that Lasted," presents stories about women's work life and the significant changes in their workplaces during their working lives. In Chapter Four are collected the family stories that teach family values and recall the sturdy but sometimes disturbing intimacies of parents, brothers and sisters, children and grandchildren and extended family. Stories of romantic love and affectionate friendship appear in Chapter Five. The memoirs in Chapter Six reveal the many kinds of personal loss that women can encounter during a lifetime that spans six to nine decades—and the resilience and strong-heartedness that allows humans to live with and even learn from loss. Chapter Seven, "I Still Had My Two Dollars," gives a glimpse of the abundant fullness of women's experience, as they recollect large adventures and small ones, all personally significant. The stories in Chapter Eight, "Witness," recall decisive and often painful episodes in twentieth century history, from the point of view of ordinary women who were drawn willy-nilly into the extraordinary events of their time. Fittingly, Chapter Nine—"I Wish You Could Have Known My Grandma"—deals with legacies, and with the things that we inherit and in turn pass on to those who come after us.

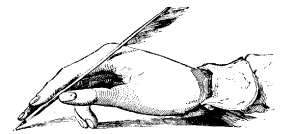
As they organized the memoirs, the editors of *With Courage and Common Sense* worked from the stories already collected in the workshop booklets, since the writers themselves judged them to be their best work. Dayna Finet assembled the first draft of the collection and drafted the introduction and chapter introductions. After the book's first editorial review at the University of Texas Press, Susan Wittig Albert revised the collection, adding and subtracting a number of pieces and revising the introductory material. Tentative editorial approval came in early January, 2002, and the Press's Faculty Advisory Committee gave its final approval in mid-April. While the publication date is not yet scheduled, it will probably be in early 2004.

"These women heal us by telling our stories, by embodying emotion that our everydays can't hold."

—Elizabeth Alexander

"My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you. But for every real word spoken, for every attempt I had ever made to speak those truths for which I am still seeking, I had made contact with other women. And it was the concern and caring of all those women which gave me strength."

—Audre Lorde



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Who We Are & What We Do

Who We Are

The Story Circle Network is a national not-for-profit membership organization dedicated to honoring women's voices and celebrating women's lives. Our membership is made up of hundreds of women in 41 states and four foreign countries who want to explore their lives and their soul-journeys through life-writing--writing that focuses on our personal experience, through memoirs and autobiographies, in diaries and journals, in personal essays, in poetry, in drama. The Network is for every woman who aims to claim the power of her experience, who wants to map her journey, and who is determined to name herself.

The Story Circle Network was founded in early 1997 by Dr. Susan Wittig Albert. We are guided by a 17-member board of directors and incorporated as a Texas not-for-profit corporation. Our activities are funded by the annual dues of our members, through our educational programs, and by the gifts and grants of our supporters. Our National office is located in Austin, TX.

What We Do

Publications. Our major organization is the quarterly *Story Circle Journal*, where we invite members to publish their writing. In addition, we publish an annual anthology, an award-winning website (www.storycircle.org) and other occasional publications. On our website, we host one of the largest women's book review collections on the Internet. You can find it at www.storycircle.org/BookReviews/ and a Speakers Bureau, where members can showcase their writing-related programs.

Chapters. To join a chapter, a member must also join the National organization. We currently have two chapters, one in Austin and one on the Internet. The Austin Chapter sponsors four writing circles and a reading circle, and schedules 4-5 additional meetings and Be Our Guest programs annually. The Internet Chapter currently has 11 writing circles and a reading circle, emails free weekly writing prompts, recognizes a "Writer of the Month," and offers on-line classes and workshops. If you are interested in starting a Story Circle chapter in your community, you may call the office for information or visit our website.

Writing From Life Workshops. Twice a year (May and October), in Austin, we offer a Writing From Life Workshop. The workshop is writing-intensive and staffed with experienced Story Circle facilitators. For information, call the office or go to www.storycircle.org/Workshops.

Conferences. In February, 2002, we held our first *Stories from the Heart* conference in Austin, with 18 presenters and participants from across the US and Canada. Our second conference is planned for February 6-8, 2004.

Writing Retreats. In March, 2003, we're planning a weekend writing retreat in the beautiful Texas Hill Country. Christina Baldwin, author of the beloved journal book *Life's Companion*, will help us learn more about exploring our lives through journaling and memoir writing.

Special Programs. In 1998, SCN received a grant of \$100,000 to fund 50 workshops for senior women in the Austin area. We called it the Older Women's Legacy Circle Project (OWL-Circle Project). The two-year grant-funded phase is over, but the workbook and facilitators manual developed and tested during the project are now available for use in a variety of senior-oriented settings, such as churches, residences, and nursing homes. For information on how to purchase this kit, call the office or go to <http://www.owlcircle.com>. In addition to the National OWL-Circle program, we also have an Austin-based program, directed by Pat Flathouse. Memoirs written in the original grant project have been collected into a book, *With Courage and Common Sense*, to be published in 2003 by the University of Texas Press.

Story Circles. Around the country, many women have created informal story circles where women can share their lifewriting. If you would like to start a circle, you may call the office for information or visit our website, where you can print a Story Circle facilitator's manual. Women do not have to belong to Story Circle to participate in these informal groups—but of course, we hope they will want to join!

Story Circle Journal

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

Editor: Susan Wittig Albert
Associate Editor: Marie Buckley
Contributing Editors:
Cindy Baum, Nancy Rigg,
Paula Yost

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Editorial Address

Story Circle Journal

PO Box 1616,

Bertram TX 78605-1616

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

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

*Journaling Your Life***Journaling Time: Past, Present, and Future**

This is the last in a series of four columns by Cindy Baum. Cindy has daughters in high school and college, a son in first grade, and is homeschooling her youngest daughter, 12. Besides being a mom at home, she is a freelance magazine writer, journaler, and loves pen-and-ink letter writing. Cindy and her husband Brad have been married 23 years. Thanks, Cindi, for four fine articles!

Life unfolds in phases. As you look over your life you will see distinct periods of time, each with its own character, that influenced you. When I think of who I was in college, I see a very different person than I have become or was before. I was more willing to take risks then, and found more excitement in living. I was ready to take on the world. Now, as a wife and mother, I live a quieter life. I no longer seek the “high” of new experiences. I was like that before college, too, so it seems that my late teens and early twenties represent a phase sandwiched between the more timid phases. But they all are important and have impacted who I am today.

Reading past journals helps to define your timeline. Just as journals reveal patterns, they also reveal phases of time and the character of those phases. To understand personal phases of time, we first need to discern and define our present.

In order to define our present phase, we need to answer several questions. When did this period of life begin? Identifying the boundaries helps us see the transition from one phase to another. Perhaps it was a job, a new relationship, an event, a life-changing decision. Who are the key people during this period and what role do they play? What sets this phase apart from other phases? Perhaps the lack of anything new or remarkable is what defines this phase. What ideas are important to you now that weren't before? How are your reflective self, emotional self, and physical self different now than in previous phases? Journaling can help us make sense of our lives as we pay attention to the realities of the day and respond to what we discover.

Using a journal to recover the past helps fill in the gaps that are often hidden behind the vivid memories. We tend to recall events and people in certain ways but when we go back and read our pages from that time other memories emerge that were forgotten. In his book *Spiritual*

Journaling: Recording Your Journey Toward God, Richard Peace says, “We cannot really know who we are now—much less who we will become—unless we know who we were as a child, a teenager, a young adult, a newlywed, and so on.” Few of us learned to write down our thoughts in our youth so we have to rely on a memory that is sometimes murky and unreliable. But when we do have memories it is important to preserve them by integrating them into our present observations.

A way to bring the past into the future is to recall what Richard Peace calls “hinge events.” A hinge is a turning point when life moved from one direction to another. It doesn't have to be dramatic. For example, a move to another town for a new job could be a hinge event that didn't seem at the time to dramatically change your life—but in retrospect you may be able to see how your life did change as a result of that move. Or perhaps a new person entered your life, or an event of national importance occurred, such as what we all experienced on September 11, 2001. When we recognize and write about the hinge events, we are able to see the often subtle, sometimes dramatic, changes of direction our lives took.

When we look ahead to the future it becomes clear that we can't really speculate and write about something that hasn't happened yet. But we can approach our future by understanding the past and paying attention to the patterns and phases that point us to our future. This is what Richard Peace calls “trajectories.” If, as a child, a girl was especially interested in animals and volunteered at the local Humane Society, it might not be a surprise to find that she became a vet when she grew up. It's the same with all of us. By reading our past journals we can see growth and direction that helps us outline goals and dreams for our future. We can find trajectory points that pave the way for who we might

become. What's more, we can choose to continue on that trajectory or change it. Perhaps when you read your journals you will discover what used to bring joy and find that you have strayed from those things. You might use your journal to record a plan for regaining those delights, and your progress in carrying out your plan. Perhaps you can discover the hinge that changed your direction, and see clearly how to chart a path for the future.

Through the power of journaling we build bridges between the past, present and future. When we create a journal with the idea that it can become a sort of memoir, we need to strive for accuracy and detail—or at least to occasionally go back to those pages and update them with present observations. If you use your journal in this way, it can become a memoir, with threads of the past, the present, and the future unforgettably interlaced.

Discovering Hinge Events

Write about how the following types of events turned out to be hinge incidents in your life.

- A move from one place to another
- A new person
- A new phase of education
- A new commitment (marriage, a child, a new career)
- A traumatic incident
- An illness
- A religious experience
- A national event
- A creative venture

Write about the character of each hinge event by recalling key people, the nature of your inner life (longings, images and emotions), the nature of your health, and the responsibilities you had at the time.

Writing and Healing

Healing Journey: Spirit Journey

"Writing is one of the healing arts," Mary Ann Moore says on her website, at www.retreatonline.net/flyingmermaids. "Your creativity will admit you to a sacred space." So we asked this writer, poet, and Story Circle member from Guelph, Ontario, to help us understand how she works with women who want to heal by writing themselves into a sacred space. Here is her story, and her suggestions for using writing to create your own sacred, healing place.

Recently, I reviewed a book called *Writing to Save Your Life* by Michele Weldon. I've been writing to save my life since I was a very small child—in both ways the author intended: to rescue **and** to preserve. I wrote even before I really knew how. I enjoyed the feel of the paper and the pencil in my hand, watching the flow of wavy lines on the page. As I wrote, I wasn't alone but entered the world of my imaginings.

As I grew older, I kept records to preserve my life. I'd write about a book I read (Daphne du Maurier was a favorite in my early teens) or an artist I was learning about or I'd copy a phrase that particularly resonated with me. During the seventies, when my children were young, I wrote about local history, interviewing elderly people who lived in the small Ontario town where I lived. During the eighties, I began learning about goddess archetypes and started collecting stories about them. As I gained first-hand knowledge of the healing arts, I kept a journal on the different practices such as Reiki, Shiatsu, Massage, aromatherapy and flower essences.

Although I've been a writer all my life, I worked as a secretary from the time I was 19 until I was 50 years old (with a few years off when my children were young). It took many years of talking about it and taking small steps to finally take the courageous leap of leaving my last office job at a law firm in Toronto. My body was in a lot of pain from computer and telephone work, the stress of deadlines and of being where I didn't want to be anymore. As I had learned about various healing arts, I knew I wanted to do something in the healing arts too, but I wondered what that might be. Then I realized that what I had been doing all along to save myself was write. Writing was my healing art—I would help others use it, as well.

When I started offering women's writing circles in my Toronto apartment, I, as well as the other women who attended, experienced the healing power of sharing our stories with others. I had known something about circles already from my Sunday School days and from a wonderful women's writing retreat in Vancouver, British Columbia in the summer of 1993. My intent for the women's writing circles was to provide a safe place for women to tell their stories.

I called the writing circles I began in 1997, Flying Mermaids. At first I wasn't sure why I chose the name, but it has turned out to be a wonderful choice. The symbol of the mermaid is part of the folklore of many cultures and is connected to the healing waters. I like to think that while we women gather in circles we swim to the depths. We may also do the unexpected, fly overhead to dry land.

"Mapping Your Spiritual Journey" is the title of a writing circle series I started in Toronto in 1998, following my trip to ancient goddess sites in Turkey. I have a long list of steps for women to nourish their journaling practice and many writing

prompts for them to get in touch with what they define as spirit. I've honed the steps down to these which I hope are useful for your individual writing practice as well as for the circles in which you gather with others who hold a mirror as mermaids do, to reflect you.

A Place to Begin

Clear a place at the table. Light a candle or burn some incense to denote this a sacred time.

Create a sacred center, with a photograph of a beloved teacher, a stone, a feather, a piece of bark, other things important to you. This center is an anchor, representing strength, guidance, wisdom and spirit.

Now, name and thank your teachers and guides. Then read a poem or invocation—one you have written or one you have especially enjoyed. It might be as simple as an affirmation: "I am worth the time it takes. Writing is my healing art and my spiritual path." ("The Artist's Creed" in *Marry Your Muse* by Jan Phillips will inspire you to write your own affirmation.)

Clear the clutter by writing down what's on your mind. This is a way of setting aside those things that need to be done but not just now. Name any fears. Release anger to the page. Consider some form of physical activity like dancing around the living room to release what has been pent up inside.

To come back to centre, breathe. Think of what Christina Baldwin has to say about the three breaths (described in *Calling the Circle: The First and Future Culture*). One breath to let go. The second to stay here. The third breath to ask, what's next?

Now, state your intention for this day's writing. Write what's on your heart. (See some suggestions below.) As a way to close, express gratitude. Be easy on yourself as you prepare for re-entry to your daily life.

Read a poem to close.

Suggestions for your Journaling Practice

What does "spirit" mean to you? As a way to explore the word, you could write "spirit" in the middle of a page and draw lines like spokes leading out from that center to create a wheel.

On my spirit wheel, I've included some words I've cut out of magazines such as *aromatherapy*, *dreams*, *Aphrodite*, *perennials planted*, part of a tea bag label that says *Tazo Chai*, and a postage stamp that says LOVE. I've added my own phrases: *a candle burning*, *the sun setting*, *washing the horizon with orange and the wind sounding like ocean waves through the trees*. The wheel is a wonderful tool for exploring all sorts of topics. It's also a beautiful collage of what has heart and meaning for you.

Another of the early writing prompts I give women in the

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A Story Circle Member's Story

Ketchup and Kotex

Melanie Alberts began writing her non-linear, literary memoir Moved as soon as she joined a Risky Writing e-circle on the Inet Chapter. Intended for young adult readers, Moved is the story of a girl whose family relocates every few years and who is homeless for several months when she is fourteen. "God Gets a Divorce," a chapter from her manuscript, was accepted for publication in an anthology of personal essays for young women titled Stories of the Girl I Was: Women Share Lessons of Growing Up, edited by Laurie Degatto. You can read more about Melanie's life and work on page 20, where she is featured as a Story Circle volunteer.

Miami Beach, Florida 1969

Age 6

I find the best things in the bags and stuff people throw away on trash day. Like some roller-skates and I found a doll once. This boy from our apartments was there poking around the trash with a stick. He said if you find food, don't eat it. I got a stick, too, and ripped open a bag and found something rolled up with blood on it. I know it was blood 'cause I smelled it. Wow, I said and showed it to the boy. This is what they put around your arm when you break it, I told him. It was long and white and soft with lots of blood on it. The boy took it from me and looked at it for a long time. He wrapped it around his stick and tossed it into the trees behind the parking lot. I put an empty can of beans on my stick and threw it too. Too bad, there wasn't much good stuff today except that huge band-aid and a quarter I found by some cars.

Durham, Connecticut 1971

Age 10

It was a special Health Day at school today but none of the teachers would tell us what we were doing. I knew something was up when our class was separated by just boys and just girls. The boys headed off to the gym and the girls went to the cafeteria where we saw a movie about a girl growing up and having to wear a special belt and pads with her underwear every month because now she's old enough to have babies. Girls have this tiny egg that goes through them to the place (that is NOT your stomach!) where babies grow. But since girls are too young to get married the eggs don't become babies. The eggs come out every month with lots of blood and stuff. In the movie the girl had to have showers instead of baths because baths are for little kids.

I was glad to find out about those pads you have to wear. Last year my friend Cheryl pointed to the machine in the girl's room that sells them for 10 cents and asked me what they were for. I've seen commercials for them on TV where ladies in pantsuits walk around looking really happy so I told her that when you lose weight and your pants get loose, you pin one of those pads to the waistband so you can wear your pants. That's what it looked like to me. I wonder what kind of movie the boys saw, because when they came back to class they were giggling and the girls sure weren't. Maybe they got to see cartoons. Boys don't have babies and the only things they have to worry about are nose bleeds, not this menstrolation stuff.

West Hartford, Connecticut 1973

Age 11

I got my period the night Leslie and me were babysitting the

Stein kids. I just turned eleven and most girls don't get it until they're twelve or thirteen. I didn't tell her then and I can't tell her now because she would just tease me, she'd be so jealous. Leslie knows a lot more about sex than I do, like, she told me how women get babies, her mother told her. Her mom even lets her put on eye shadow. My mother would never tell me stuff like that but I know she knows because she had six kids! Mom taught me how to cross my arms over my boobies when I get undressed in front of other girls, big deal.

Anyway, this next time when my period came I was wearing my white painter's pants and I went over to Leslie's house to watch "Happy Days". I was sitting on the beanbag when Leslie saw the blood stain between my legs. I told her I had a hotdog for lunch and some ketchup dripped onto my pants, but I don't think she believed me. Leslie thinks growing up is a race and like all the games we play together, she really wanted to win this one. Too bad, I got to be a woman before her but it will be a loooong time before I have any babies. I want Leslie to teach me how to put on eye shadow first.

Sunrise, Florida 1977

Age 14

My new high school is a box. The ceiling is really high, there're no windows because it's air-conditioned, and all the classrooms have three walls and carpeting. Oh, great, I'm going to school in a mall. But the administrative offices are like the ones in Connecticut, filled with unsmiling old ladies staring hard at their typewriters. Dad and I were there to register me for tenth grade. I had to be dragged in because I got my period this morning and it hurt like hell. I was lying on my side of the bed in the motel with my legs up against the wall and the cramps were still killing me. Figures we didn't have any Kotex so I had to wrap toilet paper forever around the crotch of my panties. Mom said use a lot, toilet paper's free and she wasn't going to the drug store anytime soon.

An hour later I was sitting there in the Sunrise High admin offices, leaning into my lap because of the pain. The old lady stood up and spoke to my father, "You and your son can come in now."

Dad chuckled and I shot him a look with my mouth open but he didn't correct her. Maybe I do look like Shaun Cassidy in my chinos and shag haircut but she should know better, she works in a high school, the old bat!

One good thing came of this stupid move to Sunrise because when we got back to the motel, I heard Dad tell Mom it was time for me to start wearing make-up. But who cares now, just let me crawl back into bed, just let this clenching in my gut stop.

Meet Other LifeWriters and Learn from Their Stories...

Deborah Morgan: Writing From the Heart

Story Circle member Deborah Morgan is a very special person. She has devoted her life to working with people—mostly women—who live with a secret handicap: they are illiterate. Deborah has a handicap too: she lives with multiple sclerosis. But like the women whose lives she has helped to shape, she has is a survivor who has learned to celebrate life in joy and in service. A Canadian who lives in Camrose, Alberta, Deborah began her life's work when someone invited her to help; answering the call and responding to the needs and opportunities that she saw around her, she has become internationally celebrated for her work. For Deborah, writing about life is not just something to do—it's a way to live, and a way to change lives. We are honored that she has agreed to share her remarkable story with us.

SCN: You've been involved in the literacy field for nearly 20 years, Deborah. What led you to discover this work?

Deborah: I think literacy work discovered me! I was a young mom, teaching craft courses. Mary, a Further Education Coordinator, approached me and asked if I'd sit on a literacy committee she was organizing to do a needs assessment in the community. I politely said no, several times, until one day I found in my mailbox a book called *Illiterate America* by Jonathan Kozol. After spending an hour with the book, I discovered a note from Mary, between the pages: "I thought this might be of interest to you." Oh my God, I thought. All this time I had been avoiding Mary (who was very involved in her church) because I thought she wanted me to sit on a *liturgy* committee! She thought I was the right person for LITERACY work, and it turned out that she was right.

In 1986 our community set up a literacy program which trained volunteer tutors to work with adults who wished to improve their literacy skills. I was hired as the Coordinator of program and learned very early in my literacy work, that people involved in literacy (as learners or instructors) were special. The students were so brave and determined, yet so full of fear and shame. The tutors were compassionate, caring individuals who truly valued the ability to read and write, who selflessly went to great lengths to help others understand the written word.. When the students and tutors connected with one another, built trust and friendships, magic happened. To me it was the best of the word "community." People came together to help one another, to learn from one another without judgment or unrealistic expectations. I worked hard too, but I mostly felt lucky to be part of it all.

SCN: You were diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 1984. Can you tell us about this difficult and challenging experience?

Deborah: When I applied for the position of program coordinator for the new literacy program, I

desperately wanted the job. I had been diagnosed with MS two years before, so I didn't know how good my chances were.

At the interview, I was asked, "Why do you think we should hire you for this position?" I told the interview committee that I also had a hidden handicap, that I knew what it was like to have something about me that I didn't necessarily want others to know about. And I knew what it was like to be judged unfairly because of having a handicap, like people with literacy difficulties. I knew that feeling of wanting to be seen for me first, and my handicap second.

Having MS got me a job I loved, and a job that has lead to so many wonderful opportunities. I have been able to break through barriers and build trust with students because I have a chronic illness. Most of my students have experienced abusive relationships, prostitution, foster care, lost jobs, broken hearts and bad luck. They relaxed and welcomed me into their lives when they knew that my life wasn't perfect either.

But it hasn't been easy. MS cost me my marriage. My husband wasn't able to cope with the unpredictability of the disease and the responsibility of being a care giver. He chose to deal with his anger and frustrations by drinking. In 1994, my sons and I moved to a little house and started our lives over again, free of the demons of alcoholism—more realities that my students could relate to. It was, in fact, their care and support of me and my young boys that made it possible to take that desperately painful step. They helped me furnish our home with garage sale finds and the loan of bed linens and kitchen pots and pans. And once in a while, during those awful first months, I would come home from work and find a pot of bean soup and fresh baked bread on the doorstep.

I have been on my own for eight years. I use a wheelchair most of the time now, but I count my blessings daily, because I am still able to write. On days when my hands are weak and I can't type, I can still write freehand. And I am learning now how to use voice activated software. Sometimes I lash out and want to know how I'm supposed to

If you don't like the way the world is, you change it. You have an obligation to change it. You just do it one step at a time.
—Marian Wright Edelman

We whose hands have rocked the cradle are now using our heads to rock the boat.
—Wilma Scott Heide

Justice is a concept. Muscle is the reality.
—Linda Blandford

If you want something said, ask a man. If you want something done, ask a woman.
—Margaret Thatcher

manage when I have a mind that is active and a body that won't move and cries with pain. I struggle to understand how I'm supposed to keep doing the work I feel I am meant to do, without the strength of my body to support me. I survive by reminding myself, every day, that I don't need legs to love, feel joy or share a conversation with a friend. So I carry on.

SCN: *In the early 90s you wrote a book called Opening Doors. What led you to write it? How is this book related to your own life's story and to the life stories of others?*

Deborah: International Literacy Year was celebrated in 1990. In my literacy work (by this time I was serving on the board of our provincial literacy organization and traveling frequently) I often heard fascinating, real-life stories of people (mostly women) working in literacy, and I kept thinking about the need to document these stories.

Grant money was available for special projects for International Literacy Year so I applied for and received a grant to compile an anthology of the stories I had been hearing. I contacted people from all over the province and asked if they would write their stories and send them to me. (This was before the convenience of email!) The stories didn't come. When I contacted the literacy workers, they said that they didn't think their stories were interesting enough, that they didn't have time or that they didn't feel their writing was good enough to include in the book. Frustrated, I asked for more money so I could travel to the literacy programs around the province, interview people, tape record their stories and write them myself! And that's what I did.

The happy ending to this is that Opening Doors (which came out in 1992) as a huge success. It put our stories out there and became a bible for new literacy workers, a reference for government funders and a powerful statement of what people can do when they work together. It gave me confidence in my own ability to write (I was a published author!) and afforded me the position of story teller and historian for our provincial literacy community. I have just received a new grant to write Still Opening Doors: Ten Years Later. It's a wonderful project that will allow me to go back and speak to all the people I met 10 years ago.

SCN: *The Chapters project, a literacy and writing program for women receiving government support, began at your kitchen table. What was going on in your life and in the lives of the women you worked with that made this program happen?*

Deborah: In 1992, after Opening Doors came out, I decided to take what I thought would be a

short-term nine-to-five position co-facilitating a job readiness program for people on social assistance. I was to help the program participants find employment in our community. When the social worker handed me the client files he gave me a sideways smile and said, "These are the bottom of the barrel. Good luck." The program was called SED: Severely Employment Disadvantaged. What an awful name! I was appalled by the way the participants were treated—and so were they, because at every possible opportunity, they broke the rules, disrupted the classroom, physically fought with one another and were fired from every job I found for them.

When the program ended, I asked some of the participants if they would be willing to meet with me to talk about designing a program that would better meet their needs. We literally sat around my kitchen table and talked about simple things, like starting the program at 9:30 instead of 8:30 a.m. so they could get their kids to school and finishing at 3:00 instead of 3:30 p.m. so that they could be at home when the kids got home from school. They wanted to have one day off a week for counseling, doctor's appointments, meetings with lawyers or social workers

The women designed the program. They recognized that before they could look at finding a job, they had to get their lives in order. They needed to have a safe place to live, get their kids settled in school, and find help to deal with their addictions. These women were prostitutes with low literacy skills, waitresses with drug habits, and third-generation welfare recipients who had given up their children to foster care. They were surviving, but not living. They felt very little hope, and yet I saw their eyes sparkle when we dreamed together about a program that would truly help them.

SCN: *Most literacy programs seem to be focused on reading. The Chapters program focuses on writing about life experience. What is there about writing about their lives that encourages these women to reshape their lives?*

Deborah: The women in the Chapters Program (funded from 1994-1997) were able to say that they wanted to move forward in their lives, but they honestly didn't know how. What had helped me most in my life when I felt stuck was writing—even the simple act of making lists of things I needed and wanted to do. So that's where we started.

I had already put together a set of modules as a framework for our learning, but as we wrote and read our writing out loud to one another, a new curriculum emerged. As the women wrote about

I discovered, over time, that each of the women had issues of abuse in their lives, that some of their stories were heart-breaking and horrific. If I had known their backgrounds ahead of time, I honestly don't know if I could have taught them. But I learned that we all had stories, that we were all, on some level, survivors of traumatic life events. We learned about each other's life experiences as we went along. It wasn't always easy going, but we were able to share our stories (and we all had many!) because we took some simple steps to build trust and establish boundaries.
Deborah Morgan

Stories about ourselves and our communities give us our sense of identity; they define our place in the world...That's because stories not only reflect who we are as individuals but also give us ever-changing kaleidoscopic glimpses of what it's like to be members of the human family.
—Anne B. Simpkinson

It takes a village.
—Hillary Clinton

their lives and what was important to them (from garage sales to menopause), topics surfaced and became our focus. That's why I called what we were doing "real life literacy." We were working on basic literacy skills—reading and writing—but the women were also practicing listening, speaking, and thinking about issues that were of real importance to them and affected the way they lived their lives and raised their children. The more the women wrote about their life experiences and had those experiences validated by the other women, the more their sense of *self* came alive. As they told their stories, they started to laugh more. They cried a lot too, but we welcomed the healing tears. They helped each other identify the courage and strength that had gotten them through the roughest times. They began to see themselves as survivors, not losers, and their stories became a celebration of life. At the end of the first year, we published their writing in a book they titled Rediscover Learning—Rediscover Life.

Writing Out Loud came next. It was originally a notebook containing the best of our writing exercises, submitted with our final report. The funding agency was so impressed that they gave us money to print 200 copies. One hundred of those books were given to all the literacy workers in Alberta. We sold the rest and used the proceeds to print more copies. (A couple of the Chapters students worked with me to fill orders. They put a map of Canada up on the wall and marked where the books went!) We sold 1000 copies this way, until last year when Grass Roots Press in Edmonton agreed to publish the book for us, with an exciting new look.

Writing Out Loud was popular because literacy workers said it helped them teach writing to reluctant or new adult writers. And because it encourages teachers to write *with* students, the instructors found their own confidence growing. Sharing their stories, students and teachers laughed and cried together, and learned together. The student/teacher barriers began to disappear, trust developed, and the teachers found they were able to teach more effectively.

The Writing Out Loud approach became so popular that we

were being inundated with requests to do workshops and presentations. Another grant allowed me to travel across Canada in 1999 with three students, giving what we called Fearless Writing workshops. Our year of travel was exhilarating, but also exhausting. We couldn't possibly keep up with the demand for workshops, so the next step was to train other literacy workers from across Canada to be able to take over the work we had been doing. We developed a five-month, on-line, distance education training program and we now have 34 Certified Writing Out Loud Instructors who are having a great time presenting workshops in their regions and provinces. And now, we have put together a second book, More Writing Out Loud, which will be ready for distribution on May 15.

Where do I see things five years from now? Well, already we are working on a third of the series of Writing Out Loud books. designed for groups with special needs: youth at risk, seniors, single moms, men in conflict with the law, etc. Already Writing Out Loud groups are happening all over the country in places we never imagined—in elementary, high school and university classes as well as in various social programs. We are being invited to present workshops in the United States and Writing Out Loud has now sold in England and Australia. This year we hope to have the book translated and adapted into French so that the French communities in Canada can have access to this resource.

What I am most looking forward to right now is a wonderful event we have planned in November. During the distance-education training we did, the women from all areas of Canada (some of them very remote) became good friends. They formed a solid on-line community that is still going strong, long after the training ended. So in November, with funding from the National Literacy Secretariat, all of the Writing Out Loud instructors will meet in Calgary, Alberta, to spend five days together to celebrate our learning and to help us determine ways to create and maintain an National Writing Network.

continued on p. 17



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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!

Writing Out Loud, by Deborah Morgan. Grass Roots Press. PO Box 52192, Edmonton, Alberta T6G 2T5, Canada, grassrt@telusplanet.net] 2002, ISBN 1-894593-16-2. Reviewed by Judith Helburn, Story Circle writing circle and OWL Circle facilitator.

Writing Out Loud is a delightful manual for leaders of writing and personal growth groups of all levels. Deborah Morgan developed this easy-to-use tool as part of the Literacy Coordinators of Alberta Chapters Project. The students—all of them adult women in the Chapters Program—called the project "Fearless Writing" and it seems to have reached its goal of helping them gain enough confidence and literacy skills to become independent.

This spiral bound handbook—which is designed to help students write from the heart—is divided into seven sections: Getting Ready, Starting Out, Having Fun, Taking Risks, Building Confidence, Feeling Good and the Bibliography. Each of the writing sections has several exercises (with adaptations), samples in cursive of Deborah's students' work, and her own reflections. In "Getting Ready," Deborah explains what she means by "writing from the heart."

The writing I'm talking about in this handbook is "writing from the heart"—writing about how we feel, in words that are as simple as the words we think and speak...It took the students a few weeks to believe me when I told them I didn't care about spelling or grammar or what the words looked like on the page. I just wanted them to write—to write for the pure pleasure of it. I explained to them that if we worry about where to put the comma before we start writing, we'll never write anything. Once the students stopped worrying, they started writing. They wrote about things that were important to them, they wrote in their own words and they were amazed by what they had to say. This is writing from the heart.

Writing from the heart can give us some interesting insights into who we are. One exercise that I cannot wait to try with my SCN Writing Circle is the "Tattoo Parlour," in the section "Having Fun." Deborah writes that a number of the women in the group had tattoos on their bodies. The whole group decided to obtain some temporary tattoos—hearts, flowers, angels, birds—and wear them. Then they wrote about the experience, asking these questions:

- How does it feel to have a tattoo?
- Would you like to have a real one?
- What would your family say if you got a tattoo?
- Do you know people with a tattoo?

Reflecting on the activity, Deborah writes, *I found my own comfort was a little challenged with this exercise, but because a student had suggested the idea, I was willing... It turned out to be a wonderful experience. We laughed and had fun and discovered a great deal about ourselves as women. To my surprise, I learned that the students felt really empowered with a rose tattooed on their arm, shoulder or chest...* (Judith's Austin Writing Circle, watch out! You're about to be tattooed!)

At the end of the book, in a section called "Polish & Publish," Deborah writes: "Nothing gives writers more confidence than to have their words published." She reminds us that one definition of publish is to "put into circulation," so that whenever we share our writing in a small group, in the SCN Journal, on-line, or in a church bulletin, we have become published writers. She adds: "The process of preparing work for publication is an act of determination, discipline and faith."

Writing Out Loud can be used with any writing group, and as a rich bonus, the members would discover more about themselves. The spiral binding adds to the cost [\$33.00 US], but makes the book very easy to use.



Risky Writing

All writers feel vulnerable when they write their thoughts and ideas on paper. There they are, in black and white, for all the world to see. People think that putting their thoughts on paper will leave them open to criticism. That's where the trust and comfort you've been working on [as a facilitator in a writing group, or as a teacher] comes in. Writing from the heart can feel "risky" because it might take your students to a new level of awareness or understanding. But that's not something to be afraid of; it's something to celebrate.

—Deborah Morgan

How to Become a Writer

Many people think they aren't writers because they haven't written a novel or been published. While few of us will ever write a book, the things we write about are still valuable and important. A writer is simply someone who writes —a lot.

—Deborah Morgan

Feeling Good

I have never met anyone who said they were sorry they had taken the time to write something down. Writing is not something we regret doing: it is something that brings us pleasure, insight, and release.

It feels good.

—Deborah Morgan



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!

1202 South Third

Houses have special meaning for me. As I attempt to write my story they are my catalyst. There is something mystical about brick and mortar that makes me wish that houses could tell their own stories.

I was born in 1959 to a recently wed 16-year-old. My paternal Grandmother Viola attended. It is her home and her presence that became the central force in my life. Within two years the young marriage dissolved. I went to live with Granny Vi when I was discovered sitting unattended on the curb in front of my maternal grandmother's home. No one was sober enough there to recall where I might be found. The only memory of that house is that in the early morning hours I could crawl around on the kitchen counter and sometimes find food.

Her family told Granny Vi that she should not take me in, due to her health and other concerns. She had a Down's syndrome daughter at home. Granny ignored their warnings. This was by the grace of God and she was my angel. The relatives aforementioned made sure I knew that I better be grateful. She and my grandfather loved me completely and without reservation. With them, I was safe and loved.

As a very young girl, I was excited when my mommy showed up. It was like having a birthday that day. Unfortunately, like birthdays fade, she would go away and I would be devastated. I could not understand why she could not stay here in my nice place with Granny and me. It was not until much, much later in my life I learned her story, her struggles. I only knew that I wanted her. But it did not matter how very much I loved her, how good I acted, how pretty I looked, or even the horrible tempers and long cries I had when she left, the fact remained that she always did leave sooner or later.

Lady Lee
Austin TX

Home Away from Home

The familiar smell of ham frying and coffee brewing lures me from my deep sleep and reminds me where I am. Glancing around the room I notice that the early morning light is just beginning to streak across the floor. The two brass beds across the room still hold sleeping forms. I slowly roll from my favorite perch on the high bed and carefully touch my toes to the cool wood floor. I gingerly step over the creaky wood plank next to the door and slip out into the hall. The quickest way to the kitchen is down the hall and through the utility/storage room. I choose the long way this morning, since the air is still cool and the concrete floor in the utility room would be too cold on my feet. Instead, I feel soft carpet underfoot as I

make my way through the dark living room.

As I step over the threshold of the kitchen I am enveloped by warmth and light. I take a seat at the small wooden table which has already been set, and soak in the smells of breakfast cooking. My grandmother turns from the stove with a smile. With coffee pot in hand, she heads towards me. I quickly hand her my chipped yellow cup and she fills it a quarter full of coffee. She then generously heaps sugar and pours milk into my cup. At twelve years old, this is my favorite way to drink coffee!

My green and yellow plate is heaped with fried country ham, scrambled eggs, and toast. As I dig into my breakfast I glance out the window and can see my grandmother's flowers awakening to the rising sun. The birds are chirping their morning hellos among the many feeders in my grandparents yard. I smile as I think of this home, practically unchanged since my Mom lived here. Here I feel a constant familiarity that I don't always feel from our own homes, having moved five times so far in my life. This feels like home.

Kara Flathouse
Pampa TX

The Heart Knows Its Home

The heart knows its home
And longs to return
From long absence,

Devoted to work—or
The process of dying—
The yearning yet lives

For love and expression
And honest, plain hope.
When that longing peaks,

The heart turns its wheel
To the rutted road bed,
Old and beloved.

It remembers the way—
And returns.

Noel Klaus
Austin TX



Home is Where the Consciousness Is

My first home was the nursery in Christ Hospital, Mt. Auburn, Cincinnati, Ohio. I certainly don't remember it, but my birth certificate proves it.

My second home, which I don't remember either, was an upstairs apartment on Sycamore Hill, Mt. Auburn, where I lived with my mother, father, and paternal grandmother. I know I lived there because my family attests to it, and I have the scar on my chin to prove it. Seems I tumbled down a flight of stairs one day, broke my china doll, and cut my chin on one of the pieces. Blood was everywhere, I am told. Dad was beside himself! Now you'd think I'd remember that, but then I was only two.

Consciousness finally dawned in me when I was four, and we lived on Dorchester Ave. in Mt. Auburn. We were renting a two-floor home attached to three other homes, a four-plex. We had a living room with a piano which I played vigorously and atonally, making up my own compositions, a dining room with four large windows, a kitchen with my grandmother's ancient stove, an icebox that got filled every other day by the iceman, and a little pantry by the backdoor where the field mice would often sneak in to sample the goodies.

The basement had a huge furnace, which my mother stoked every morning from the coal bin. There was a wonderful backyard and my fun playmates, Walter and Margie, who lived just over the fence. Next door lived old Mrs. Taylor and her dachshund, Hansi. Every afternoon she and I would sit on her back porch and watch the ants proceed about their busyness. And on the other side lived Mrs. Ruppner and her Polly who could call out my name, "Coreee," for the whole neighborhood to hear.

Upstairs were three bedrooms. My grandmother's room smelled of the wintergreen oil she rubbed on her aching joints. But my own small bedroom was the best with silver-starred wallpaper and a small window on the wall opposite my bed, so I could see the stars at night and watch the robins hopping along the tree branches and singing their morning melody. I felt comfortable and safe here!

Cora Stephens
Austin TX

It Feels Like Home

Variety was the spice-of-life relished by me in at least twenty different homes. These included childhood tours-of-duty to the Panama Canal Zone and the Philippines with my Army Dad—plus later adventures with an unpredictable husband.

Mother was a "pioneer woman" whose needle magic with hooked rugs and innovative curtains transformed our Army quarters. On Sundays there were tantalizing aromas from roasts of chicken or beef—followed later in lower culinary echelon by stews and hash. Home was a haven after school. Peanut butter crackers restored energy lost at tennis, and hot chocolate and cinnamon toast became ambrosia fit for the gods following a chilly session on ski slopes in South Dakota.

A few of Mother's skills rubbed off on me—but not cooking. Being one of the first career moms in our California neighborhood, savory aromas seldom emanated from my kitchen. Peg Bracken's *I Hate To Cook Book* remained at my elbow. McDonalds' Golden Arches and Kentucky Colonel's Chicken beckoned. Retiring first, my husband felt compelled to take over the kitchen—and my envious coffee-mates advised me never to retire.

My hobbies were scrap booking and decorating walls. Added to the wall displaying my husband's old vaudeville dancing pictures were trophies of real estate awards and Toastmaster achievements—plus an occasional hole-in-one golf certificate. Constantly changing pictures of my two daughters and granddaughter kept me apprised of their latest hair-dos, homes and interests. Even after my husband's death, I continued to fill travel walls with pictures and artifacts from Australia to Zimbabwe.

There is now a new wall of beautiful miniature woodcarvings created from the heart by the Significant Other and new dance partner who brightens my golden years.

My condo is usually quiet during daytime hours while I work on genealogy—but at any moment I can look at a wall, wave my magic baton (as they seemed to do in 1930's musicals) and conjure up Roaring 20s, Beatles or Country Western music. Harmoniously it accompanies my 80-plus years of precious memories. It feels like home.

Pat O'Toole
Sun City AZ

Looking Ahead

Each issue of the *SCJ* is loosely organized around a particular theme. While we do accept non-thematic writing, we give precedence to stories written on the theme of a particular issue. **Members only, please.** And do make sure that your stories are **350 words** or less. We receive so many contributions that we must reject longer stories. We may edit your submission for grammar and spelling. Here are the upcoming topics and deadlines:

Building Bridges—September, 2002 (due July 15)
Songs to Sing—December, 2002 (due October 15)
Tracks and Trails—March 2003 (due January 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

More True Words

Homecoming Reunion

In October the small towns in the Mississippi Delta have a Homecoming Day. Folks who have moved away, return to attend festivities in the city parks and hold class reunions. Last year my mother and I returned to the small town where she attended high school.

As I was walking across the park, I passed a picnic table displaying a sign, Class of '56 Reunion. A large woman ran over to me, gave me a big hug and said, "Doris, so glad you came. You haven't changed a bit. I was just talkin' to George Hamond about you. There he is now. George, look who's here!" I tried to explain I was not Doris but the gushy woman interrupted me to reminisce, "Doris, remember how we chased after George and his brother. We were so boy-crazy and silly." I tried again but was interrupted this time by George's hug. "Doris, you look great. It's so good to see you." As I opened my mouth, someone put their hands over my eyes. A loud male voice commanded, "Guess who?" Turning around quickly, I faced Charles, George's brother, "Doris, you look great. You're still a beauty. You know, I still remember that good night kiss you gave me after the senior prom. Remember, we double-dated with George and Edna." I thought: I look great; I'm still a beauty; maybe. I am at home; I'll just go along with it.

I joined them for dinner, ate fried chicken and potato salad, answered all questions humorously, became the life of the reunion party until someone mentioned my twin sister, Ugena, had arrived. When confused Ugena announced Doris had passed away in 1990, I ducked behind a tree and disappeared.

Suzanne Vance Zoch
Austin TX

Feels Like Home

I am a High Plains girl. I was raised in the wide open spaces where the winds blow and the tumbleweeds roll until they hit a barbed wire fence. I like the wind in my hair; I like being able to see the weather coming, and I love the full sky sunsets. I like the smell of rain on dry, parched land, and I like seeing raging torrents of water rush down dry gullies after a quick cloudburst.

I love the history of the land where buffalo, wild mustangs and bands of Indians roamed freely, but I know it is also a harsh land where my ancestors settled to break sod, to build dugout homes and to raise large families. The land still feels harsh on windy days when drought ravages the crops and when I can watch tornadoes dance along dry riverbeds.

I love the mystery and mystique of the High Plains, but now I live in a hilly area covered with trees and dotted with lakes. My house is only a short drive from creeks and lakes and a spring fed pool warm enough to swim in year around. This too was a harsh land first inhabited by Indians and later pioneers who battled flooding and bugs and poisonous water

snakes, but it was harsh in a different way.

Once or twice a year I return to the High Plains where I can hardly wait to get out of the car and breathe deeply of the fresh air as the wind whips through my hair. I love to look at the horizon that seems to stretch on to forever. And I love to watch clouds mushroom up on the horizon and progress across the sky. As I feel the wind toss my hair across my face and whip against my body, I know that this will always *feel like home* to me.

Pat Flathouse
Austin TX

Feels Like Home

"Too late now," I thought as I signed a six-month apartment lease. I had left the house, for nearly 32 years a home, now merely a structure filled with a broken up, tangled disarray of stuff strewn wall to wall, room to room, stuff better off left behind. There I stood, a body, equally filled with stuff, broken and tangled, in the empty living room of my new apartment.

It was time for a new start. As I retrieved carefully selected items from the house, every corner and crevice of each piece was dusted and scrubbed, vigorously, as if it would erase any remnants of an unhealthy, chaos filled existence. Broken pieces mended, glued back together. The apartment was soon arranged with the old things, neat and tidy, ready for a new beginning. But something was missing. I went back and picked up Minnie, one of our ten cats.

Still, it felt like I was "playing house." This wasn't really mine, this two-bedroom apartment filled with pieces of my "real" house. I went back, retrieved a few familiar pictures to hang on the walls. With hesitation I pounded the first nail in the wall, feeling as if the holes represented a final commitment to stay there. No turning back now.

Minnie seemed lonely in this new residence. She waited by the front window all day, following me around each evening when I returned from work, pleading with big mournful eyes for attention. A month passed and I went back to the house to retrieve her brother Rusty. As I released him into the apartment, there was an instant recognition, evidence that the bonds were still there. Minnie followed Rusty around the apartment as he sniffed at the familiar furnishings in an unfamiliar place.

As I settled into bed that night, a cat on each side, suddenly it felt just like home.

Marjorie Witt
Lafayette CA

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

—Dorothy, in The Wizard of Oz

What I Need to Feel At Home

The physical dwellings I've called home have had enough variety to make life interesting. Geographically, they've stretched from coast to coast. The residences have run the gamut when it comes to modern conveniences.

Some have satisfied my wants more than others. But despite differences in locale or modern conveniences, they've all felt homey to me.

Why? Because I had my stuff in them? Yes, in part. I like having my stuff, my creature comforts, like hot water with lemon in the morning.

These creature comforts--can I have them somewhere other than where I live? Can I feel at home while traveling, for example? Resoundingly yes.

I learned I could make a hotel room feel like home while living out of a suitcase years ago. While on a plane, I conversed with a young, career woman who traveled frequently. I told her I was going on my first tour, and said I felt nervous about staying in so many unfamiliar places. She advised creating a personal corner in every hotel room. I took her advice, and each place felt cozier as a result.

This young woman's advice still echoes in my mind as I define what I need to feel at home. As I separate my needs from my wants, I find I need only a private, small space comprised of a few choice belongings. Here I can take time to retreat, regroup, and recoup. This nonpublic downtime helps me center and equip myself so I can give back to the world, and carry on my life's purpose.

As I age, I'm not sure how many more abodes I'll have, where they'll be, or what conveniences they'll have. I don't know how much I'll travel and live out of a suitcase. But as long as I have a purpose in life, I'm certain I'll need to retreat, regroup, and recoup. And I'll meet those needs with a few of my favorite things in my little corner of the world, otherwise known as home.

Carolyn J. Scheider
Austin TX

The Throne of My Youth

Whenever I think of the family home of my childhood, I think of the outhouse. This unpainted, wooden shack, big enough for two thrones, stood beyond the chicken pens near the shelter belt. I don't know how far away from the house it really was, but to me, at five or six years of age, it seemed a city block away, too far when I was in a hurry. I soon learned the wisdom of going to the outhouse at certain times of the day whether I had the urge or not.

No one in our family lingered in the outhouse, especially me. In the summer, the sun beat down on the metal roof, turning it into a sweat box. If I tried to prop the door open to catch a breeze, a certain Rhode Island Red rooster lurked nearby, seeking to peck my bare toes. In the winter, the wind whistled through every crack, and the tender skin of my frozen rump stuck to the toilet seat.

Any time I feel nostalgic about my childhood or growing up

as a country kid, all I have to do is remember that throne of my youth. Having an outhouse those first few years gave me a reference point from then on. Throughout the years, whenever my life seemed troubled or difficult, I could always ask, "Is this as scary as having to trek through a dark, rainy night filled with boogie men? Is this as annoying as crunching through the snow on a frosty morning, only to find the Sears catalog missing?"

Things were rarely that bad. I always felt it gave me an advantage that city kids lacked.

Jackie Woolley
Hutto TX

My Home Remembered

December 15, 1937

I don't know anyone else who lives in a very small house like mine. A man who lives in Houston, Texas named Mr. Josey built a great big Lodge for the Boy Scouts here. There is a sign over the big double-doors that says "JOSEY BOY SCOUT LODGE." I live in the little log cabin beside the back of the Lodge. I think it must be almost like the log cabin Abraham Lincoln lived in, except mine is nicer because it has electric lights and a bathroom and heaters to keep us warm in the wintertime. Mr. Josey is a very rich man. He paid to have the Lodge built and built this little log house for the caretakers for the Lodge. Mother and Daddy were happy when Daddy was chosen for the caretaker job so we could live in this little house.

The Lodge is built of great long logs and sits under big pine trees at the edge of the woods. It has a meeting room where they hold big affairs. The floors are oak. They shine so pretty when Daddy waxes them. I can almost see my face on the floor and the wax smells so clean. There are smaller meeting rooms in the front of the building and a big kitchen in the back. One of the front rooms has a piano. While Daddy works, if I'm very careful to not hurt it, I can play the piano. I think it sounds almost like it is going to be a real song when I play. I always sing loud enough so nobody can tell I can't play a real song.

We have to save up money because in another month, my baby brother or sister will come. I would really like to have a baby sister but Mother and Daddy are hoping it will be a boy. We already have some baby things but Mother says babies are expensive and we will need more things when it gets here.

Mother says we will need a bigger house after the baby comes but I don't want to leave here. This is a good house for us and I like to live here.

Peggy Park Talley
Seguin TX

All the years we lived in that house where we children were born, the same people lived in the other houses on our street too. People changed through the arithmetic of birth, marriage and death, but not by going away. So families just accrued stories, which through the fullness of time, in those times, their own lives made. And I grew up in those....

—"The Little Store," by Eudora Welty

And More True Words

A Healing Place

In the city, there is always Sound. Eighteen-wheelers, police helicopters, and garbage trucks at four a.m. Even on a fairly quiet night, an electrical hum hangs over Houston like a mantra.

Out here, at my home on Lake Livingston, I hear only sweet nothing. A cipher. In the house, the decks, and the side yards. Down on the dock I hear an occasional mallard honking, but it's too soft and distant to count as Sound.

Inside, I hear only my own noise—the clicking of my computer keys and the music of Mozart on the stereo. I find myself tiptoeing around the house so I won't disturb the quietness. The dogs, as startled as I am, bark at the wind in the pines, the water lapping at the boat dock, or a lone fisherman checking his trot lines. Occasionally I hear the faint sound of a truck on the highway beyond our woods. It sounds out of place, not because it's loud, but because everything else is so still.

Once my sinuses begin to heal from the smells of the city, I notice the clean, sappy smell of pines, the dampness of the lake sending up millions of negative ions, and the odor of dead oak leaves and pine straw. All of nature whispers and affirms this is indeed a healing place.

On my first night alone, I find a family of raccoons sitting in the swing on the front deck. They think our boat dock is their private fishing pier and the underside of our house their new winter cabin. I recall an old movie in which Elizabeth Taylor lived in a house built in the path of an elephant walk in Ceylon. Could there be such a thing as a *coon walk*? I go outside and yell, "Don't you guys have houses of your own? This one is mine!" They look at me like I'm touched in the head, then amble on down to the boat dock to the supper table.

Jackie Woolley
Hutto TX

Feels Like Home

I have lived in many places. My life began in Germany, in the city of Cologne, and I often wonder whether I might have felt a greater sense of comfort, a greater sense of "at homeness" had Hitler not forced my family to leave our native land. I cannot help but wonder if I might have become a different sort of personality if I had remained a German, if I had lived my life in Europe. Would my view of life be different from what it is today? My priorities? The choices I have made? Might I have become a lawyer like my father and his father before him? Would I have become the mother I am today? I imagine myself in Germany, speaking German, being German, and cannot help but wonder if I might have grown up a more confident person, with a deeper sense of belonging to the community and country of my birth than I do today to my beloved adopted country. Yes, I cannot help but wonder if I would feel more at home in the world, and within myself had my life not been uprooted.

My life has been one of "becoming American," and one of doing my utmost to fit into the society I live in. In recent years

this has begun to change as I slowly realized that there is a most important element missing in my life: and that is the element of my own integrity. In my need to "fit in," I have been emulating others, and not valued the individual I am in my own right. I have been too busy looking for my place in the world instead of realizing that my place in the world, my ability to feel at home, is, and can only be, within myself.

This has been my most important lesson, and since learning it, and paying more attention to my own essential nature, I have miraculously found my way home. It has been a most remarkable and exhilarating journey!

Duffie Bart
Monterey, CA

Healing Journey: Spirit Journey

continued from Page 4

writing circles I facilitate is "The Story of Your Name." In that story are many details about you and your spiritual journey. I would say about my name for instance, that my full name, Mary Ann Moore, is the same as that of an American poet, although they're spelled differently. (The poet is Marianne Moore.) My first name was also the name of my maternal grandmother, with whom I lived until I was nine. My Celtic name is Moira Oenia. In Turkey, I am Meryem. In Moorish Spain, I taught girls science, mathematics and history. In Brazil, I am the Goddess of Health and Healing. Your name story gives you many prompts for further stories about your family, your roots, your hurts and your passions.

As I reflect on my spirit journey, I see that much of it has to do with community and celebration in the circle, finding what is sacred in my life, and making creativity a precious ceremony. Mapping my spiritual journey is of course another journey. Some may choose to journey through the wilderness or—as a friend of mine is doing—walk the Appalachian Trail. But we writers clear a space at the table and remember our past by dwelling in the present and by surrendering to surprise.

Flying Mermaids

writing circles
and retreats
Mary Ann Moore



Guelph & Toronto, Canada
Telephone: 519-827-9415

Email: flyingm@interlog.com

Website: www.retreatsonline.net/flyingmermaids

**Be seen. Be heard. Be amazed
at what comes out of the stillness.**

Book Browsing with an Attitude—And a PayOff!

This article was written by **Paula Stallings Yost**, our volunteer Book Review Editor. Paula spends a great many hours coordinating books and reviewers and working with Peggy Moody to post the reviews on our site. When she isn't managing the Book Review site, Paula is helping others preserve their memories in book form, through her business, **Heirloom Memoirs**. She is the Vice President of the Association of Personal Historians and serves on the Story Circle board.

If you have not had the chance to check out the Story Circle Network Book Review web site at www.storycircle.org/BookReviews, you don't know what you're missing. As editor, I'm thrilled to report that we are growing by leaps and bounds, with an average of 4,000 hits per year. Thanks to the collaborative efforts of our talented reviewers and web mistress Peggy Moody, the Story Circle site has become one of the most exciting and unique book review sites on the web.

What makes this site so different is that it was designed exclusively with women in mind—particularly women who are interested in exploring their lives through life-writing. The site currently offers over 70 informative, entertaining reviews of our members' favorite books about women, for women, and by women. Exclusivity, however, does not get in the way of our diversity. Reviews are posted for books in a variety of genres and categories: Memoirs, Autobiographies & Journals; The Writing Life; Writing, Healing & Discovering; Fiction; Biographies; Books for Young Adults; and Poetry.

Of course, at the heart of our success are the Story Circle women who have written these great reviews: Melanie Alberts, Lee Ambrose, Karen Bensing, Carolyn Blankenship, Leslie Crowley, Judith Helburn, Cassandra Jacobs, Susan Jaeschke, Juanita Johnson, Margaret Knorr, Dianne Lodge-Peters, Mary Ann Moore, Patricia Pando, Laurie Park, Paulette Rees-Denis, Donna Remmert, Rebecca Roberts, Doris Anne Roop-Benner, Leslea Smith, Lina Tanner, Linda Wisniewski, and yours truly. These clever women have a unique understanding of women's issues and, without fail, get to the heart of the matter in each book reviewed.

A fine example of the talents of our reviewers appears in this issue of the Story Circle Journal on page 9. Don't miss Judith Helburn's outstanding review of "Writing Out Loud" by Deborah Morgan. Visit us on-line for "the rest of the story" and a great deal more.

As our book review site has grown, so has the interest of various publishers and authors, who often send free copies of their

new releases for our review. Those books become gifts for members of our team who volunteer to review them. Hyperion Press and Viking Press have supplied several books so far. Additionally, we have received books from within our own ranks. Several gifted SCN members have provided copies of their published works; including Joyce Chapman's "Live Your Dream," Mary Boyd Faloon's "The Fullness of Love: Stories of Willie's Gifts," Susie Kelly Flatau's "Counter Culture Texas" and "From My Mother's Hands," Deborah Morgan's "Writing Out Loud," and Jan Seale's "The Yin of It" and "Homeland: Essay Beside and Beyond the Rio Grande."

Why not join our team and keep the momentum going? Consider writing a review of your favorite book or the latest tome to grace your nightstand. Not only would you be contributing to the success of Story Circle's book review site, but adding to your writing portfolio as a published author, for you can list each published review on your resume.

It's easy to write a review. Check out the Reviewers' Guidelines at www.storycircle.org/BookReviews and get started today. We also will be pleased to publish your photograph along with a brief bio. Once you have completed your review, just send it to me (psyost@peoplescom.net) within an e-mail message or as a Word attachment. Snail mail works, too: Paula Yost, 690 PR 5860, Yantis, Texas 75497.

If writing reviews is not your thing, then just relax and enjoy the fruits of these delightful labors. You are sure to find a "must-read" among our diverse selection. Simply click on the book cover and you will be magically transported to Amazon.com, one of the largest on-line bookstores in the world. There, you can purchase the book with the greatest of ease and simultaneously support the work of Story Circle Network.

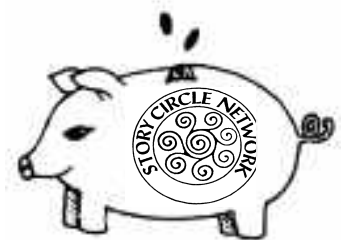
The women of Story Circle have proven their unique talents time and again. In this effort, they have worked together to create a professional, widely respected program not only for fellow members, but for countless other women with similar interests. Obviously, our strengths in numbers and skills are showing!—*Paula Stallings Yost*

Buy Books and Support Story Circle!

If you enter Amazon.com through the Story Circle Reading Circle or Book Review pages—our SCN "gateway" into Amazon—about 6 cents of every dollar of your purchases will find its way into Story Circle's piggy bank.

Here's how:

- Go to this page: http://www.storycircle.org/Reading_Circle/rc_sched02.html.
- Save the page in your favorites list under a name like "Amazon SCN."
- When you want to go shopping at Amazon, just go to that page (our SCN "gateway,") and click on any of the book covers. You'll go straight to Amazon and can start your shopping. (No, you don't have to buy the book you clicked on—it's only a "door" that takes you into Amazon.)
- Your purchases will be automatically credited to our Story Circle account, and within three months, Amazon will drop your contribution into our Story Circle Piggy Bank. Oink!



Three Poems by Story Circle Poets

Saying No

by Carolyn Blankenship

Such a little word . . .
too small, really.
 Therein lies the problem.
 It needs some decoration,
 some filler to soften it:
 NO—*but that doesn't mean I don't love you.*
 NO—*don't be too disappointed; don't think badly of me.*
 NO—*I'm just too tired—but I'm really not always tired.*
 NO—*I'd rather not; I like you, but I just hate Tupperware parties and pyramid schemes.*
 No more, no way, no thank you . . . no big deal.
 Why is that so difficult?
 Somehow it seems to close the heart and block the mind.
 NO is like a shield held out to ward you off.
 NO is like a line drawn—"Do not cross."
 NO is a wall-builder—one more brick between you and me.
 It means I must refuse you,
 go another way, separate 'us' into
 'me' over here

and

'you' over there.

I know the drill.
 I know the necessity of healthy boundaries—I even believe it.
 What kind of YES is it
 when poisoned by resentment
 and complaint?
 Just a hidden NO, and more—
 dishonest for the lie.
 What kind of YES berates the weary
 body and the tired mind
 with *shoulds* and *oughts* and *musts* and *have-tos*
 while NO stands unadorned and waiting just offstage?
 Perhaps to guard the joy of YES—
 that reaching, joining, partnering,
 sharing, smile of a word—
 I can say NO, up-front and center,
 with the promise that my YES
 will be both guileless
 and wholehearted.

Carolyn Blankenship is a gifted poet, writer, and teacher who has said YES to two important Story Circle jobs: serving on the board and designing and editing the wonderful Austin Story Circle Chapter newsletter.



OF HOMES AND HEARTS

by Patricia Fiske

Not knowing how or when or where
 or what it would look like
 I found both home and heart
 patient, trusting, floating on intuition,
 open to possibilities. I found them,
 a home and a heart,
 places to plant my spirit roots deep
 But both needed major renovation
 paint and pain stripped from walls
 replaced with vibrant, happy colors,
 new carpet, tile and hope for floors
 once sullied by scar-tissue, debris
 and too much traffic,
 lighting changed, now lit with love
 my home, now occupied by me

Circular Magic

by Susan Jaeschke

Ugly duckling preadolescence
 Encircled with insecurity, inadequacy
 Pretty was for movie stars, not me
 Until one magic summer night

Mother cut one smaller circle
 Centered in the larger circle
 A skirt of bright red cotton covered
 With tiny blue, green, yellow circles

Try it on, see how much to hem
 She thought she'd get it back
 But no! I twirl, twirl, twirl circles
 Dancing 'round the kitchen ballroom

My magic skirt swirling outward
 Hundreds of tiny circles racing
 Round and round my bare legs
 Suddenly strong, sleek, pretty

Transformed into brilliant swan
 By circular movement of fabric
 Beheld by one who could easily see
 Pretty me emerging from center

Patricia and Susan recently read their work in the 2002 Austin International Poetry Festival, and Susan's poem was selected for publication in the festival's anthology. Patricia is a member of the Austin Reading Circle. Susan belongs to the Internet Chapter's on-line Reading Circle and contributes to SCN's Book Review site. Congratulations to both of these fine poets!

Writing From the Heart, continued

SCN: *You lead a wonderfully full life, Deborah. Do you find time for your own lifewriting? If so, how does your life writing lead back into your life. Are you changed in any way by it?*

Deborah: One of the joys of doing this work is that I get to write all the time. But even though with writing is my work, I still keep a personal journal. I use writing as a way to know what I'm thinking. I am always aware of and sure of my emotions, but never as clear about my thinking. When I have decisions to make, I write pages and pages to clarify my thoughts. I come at the world from my heart. I need to make sure my head gets equal time or I can end up letting my emotions take over (which sometimes leads me into trouble!)

Writing every day helps me stay focused on what's truly important in my life. I feel less stressed when I write and I feel physically healthier when I stay committed to my daily writing practice. It's like yoga for the mind! I like to follow two rules when I am doing personal writing. I always date the page. Finding old (and intriguing) pieces of writing with no indication of when it was written is like finding old photographs and only being able to guess when the picture was taken. And I always end my personal writing with five things I'm grateful for. It's so easy to write about the negative and unhappy stuff in our lives, so I've learned to balance the angers and frustrations and disappointments with a recognition of what is good in my life.

SCN: *What similarities do you see between what Story Circle is doing and what you're doing? Can you think of ways in which Story Circle members can begin to use what they know about the value of lifewriting in their own communities?*

Deborah: I saw an ad in Personal Journaling Magazine about SCN. I found the website and was so excited to learn that I wasn't alone in my thinking! Laurie Kehler and I traveled (against great odds!) to the SCN conference because we were so intrigued and impressed by what we had learned about the organization on line. We felt we wanted to see it all in person! We learned that the women in the SCN are from different walks of life, but that the belief that telling our stories is important to validate who we are as women is the same.

I am working now with the idea of community writing. There are so many groups in our communities who would benefit from opportunities to write from the heart—lonely seniors who need to know that their lives have been of value, or women in shelters who are sad and full of fear. The women in SCN—which is also a community—know the value and benefits of writing. Many of them write with others and know the value of sharing stories with one another. There are so many people who could benefit from the knowledge and passion the women in SCN share. There are literacy programs, and social programs where a journaling group that focuses on hope could have a huge impact on the lives of the participants (and the facilitator!)

So many people in our communities don't think that their stories are important or worth telling. It is people like the members of SCN who, through their love of writing, could change that thinking. And change lives in the process.

Schmooze the Muse Saturdays!

This summer, Story Circle will offer three Saturday writing-intensive workshops in the Austin TX area. Join us for one, two or all three of these day-long workshops, which will give you plenty of opportunity to explore and share your personal story, discover creative new approaches to lifewriting, and schmooze that elusive, reclusive, exclusive Muse! **Enrollment is limited to eight** to ensure that everyone has a chance to participate, so register early! Each workshop costs \$65 for Story Circle Network members, \$75 for non-members. For more information, call the Story Circle office at 512-254-9833, or log on to <http://www.storycircle.org/SchmoozeTheMuse.shtml>. If the class has been filled, please go ahead and register. We're keeping a waiting list, in case places open up at the last moment. If there's enough interest, we may offer these same classes in the fall.

Saturday, June 8: *Goddess in the Mirror: Reclaiming Our Divine Nature*, led by Carolyn Blankenship. How does the Divine express through the feminine? The Goddess is the guardian of human interiority, whose aspects of instinct, feeling, intuition and emotion have been devalued and overridden by our culture. Through a variety of writing techniques, we will explore and share the feminine aspects of our spiritual nature and discover or create new models that will nurture and support us in our journey.

Saturday, June 29: *Dream Writing*, led by Donna Remmert. This writing-intensive workshop will challenge you to understand the symbolic images of your dreams, find the connecting link to your outer experience of life and then create soul-depth stories about yourself. Come with five or more dreams in writing, to be used for your personal introspection as we discuss ways to understand a dream and use this knowledge for story telling. You will be invited to write and share stories inspired by your understanding of your dreams at the workshop. Sharing is of course always optional.

Saturday, July 20: *From Memoir to Fiction: Using Novelistic Techniques in Memoir Writing*, led by Susan Albert. The line between truth and fiction is blurred in many memoirs, partly because truth is elusive, and partly because fiction is enticing. This workshop will offer suggestions for re-creating your true life experiences in fictional form. We'll work with conflict, characterization, dialogue, setting, point of view, and other novelistic techniques. Bring a short memoir that you'd like to fictionalize.

"These stories were remembered for a reason. Family stories, they were told and retold because they contained essential truths. Life and ourselves were in these stories, whether they were flattering or not, straightforward or opaque, legend or history. They showed us, in one way or another, how to live."

—Elizabeth Ehrlich, *Miriam's Kitchen*

A Chorus of Memories: A Book by Judy Fettman

In a few months, Judy Fettman will be on her way to San Francisco, leaving behind a great many friends in Ann Arbor MI, where she has been active in the University Music Society Choral Union for the past four years.

But Judy won't be forgotten when she has gone on to other things, for she has given her UMS friends a gift they won't forget: a collection of personal essays entitled "Chorus Stories: Tales from Four Years of Singing with the UMS Choral Union." The book contains eight personal essays that trace the history of Judy's activities with the Choral Union. The collection opens with "The Audition," which Judy managed to pass, by the skin of her teeth. (That's her story, anyway—we know better.) It closes with "The Pioneer Party Bus," in which the bus catches fire and Judy and her UMS friends are stranded beside the freeway:

Now consider [she writes]: if you had been driving on I-96 at 11:15 just outside the city of Detroit, and had seen 40 people in tuxedos and floor-length black dresses lining the interstate, wine glasses in hand, being served chocolate-covered strawberries from a silver platter—what would you think?

What we think, Judy, is that you tell a darn good story—and that it's a good thing your singing buddies had their chronicler along to record what happened!

Judy began writing these stories (using her computer's version of Word) when the Internet chapter started, and almost all were written for the two eCircles to which she belongs. In March, she selected the stories she planned to include and started

playing with a computer program called Microsoft Publisher, doing drafts of layouts, graphics, until she settled on a page format that she liked. Then, she says, it took only a few hours to paste the stories from Word into Publisher and add photos and graphics. Some of these might be a problem, she concedes, since they were scanned from conference programs. "So if I were ever to market this," she adds, "I'd have to get permission from many sources, or else delete those graphics."

The printing (on her computer printer) was easy and inexpensive, even though she used a textured paper. Each book cost less than \$3 a book to print, and the binding (velo binding, at Kinko's) added another \$4. The final result has a professional look that the author and her friends can be proud of.

Judy will be moving in June, but before she goes, she plans to put together another collection. "Again, these will be stories I've already written," she says, "but this time they are for friends who have been instrumental in getting me going and supporting me in my creative projects. It will be a combination of stories—some funny, some serious, but all (to me) with the overall theme of finding meaning in the small things." A future collection will be for her brothers and their families, about growing up together.

"After two years of keeping my stories in a loose-leaf notebook," Judy says, "it has been so satisfying to at last see them taking shape as a book! And since photography and graphic design are other interests I've been pursuing, creating the layouts was another creative process in itself."

Judy's book is a gift, not only to herself and to her friends, but to us here at Story Circle. It is an eloquent testimony to the importance of participating in writing groups, and to the truth that our stories do matter. It teaches us that giving our writing some permanent form that can be shared ensures that neither the stories nor the storyteller will be forgotten. Thank you, Judy, for showing us that we can become the publishers of our own books!

Journal Publication Dates and a Big Thank You!

Perhaps you've noticed a change in the dates of your *Story Circle Journal* this year. We've changed our publication dates to correspond with the calendar quarters—March, June, September, and December—and with our annual membership calendar. Our mailing dates will remain the same, however, so you'll get your *Journal* around the same time as always.

Story Circle couldn't publish this unique quarterly newsletter without the help of a great many people: contributors whose names appear on the articles; proofreaders Paula Yost, Judith Helburn, Catherine Cogburn, and Carolyn Blankenship, who read each word carefully; and Catherine (again) who printed out the computer file, made necessary adjustments, and took the hard copy to our printer. And then there are the members of the mailing team, who report to Peggy Moody's house to help us stamp and label. For mailing the *March Journal*, thanks go to Susan Scott and Leilani Rose. Big hugs all around, gals! We couldn't do it without you!

LifeWriting Tips....

Family Ties

Take a sheet of paper; at the top of one side write "Mother" and on the other "Father." Now divide both sides in half and label one column "positive" and the other "negative" on both sides. List all your mother's positive traits in the "positive" column and the negative traits in the "negative" column. Then turn the paper over and do the same with your father.

Take another sheet of paper. Put your name at the top of the page, then make a "positive" column and a "negative" column. Make a list of your positive and negative traits. Compare your lists to the lists you made for your parents. Which ones are similar? Are any of the traits you listed as "positive" or "negative" for yourself similar to those that you listed in the opposite column for your parents? Why do you think that is? Journal about your findings and reactions.—*Margaret Knorr lives in Charleston, WV. Her website, club and monthly newsletter, Writing for Life are devoted to journaling. www.writingforlife.net. She teaches journaling workshops at Inspired2Write.com.*

The Third Annual Carol W. Landherr Life-Writing Competition

The Story Circle Network is proud to announce its third annual LifeWriting Competition, dedicated to the memory of Carol W. Landherr. Carol was an enthusiastic and committed lifewriter who inspired others to write and share their stories. She died on October 10, 1999 after a valiant fight with breast cancer, but the memory of her life remains bright and fresh in the hearts of all who know her story.

Topic: This year's topic focuses on our identity and asks: "Who Am I, Anyway?" Some possible approaches: how you found (or lost) an identity; how you discovered, resolved, or learned to live with a contradiction or conflict in identities; or how your identities changed in response to changing circumstances. The topic was suggested by Duffie Bart, of Monterey CA, a winner of our 2000 competition.

Awards: One prize of \$75, one prize of \$50, and two prizes of \$25 each. Winning stories will be published in a special section of the September *Story Circle Journal* and will be featured on the Story Circle's award-winning web site. Upon the judges' recommendation, other entries may be published in later issues of the *Journal*.

Rules: You must be a member of Story Circle Network to enter; winners of previous competitions are not eligible. You may email your entry (preferably as a Word attachment or copied into an email) or mail it (typed and *single-spaced*, on 8.5 x 11" paper). If you do not have access to a typewriter, we will accept entries that are *clearly handwritten in dark black ink*. Each entry must be titled, and *no longer than 1200 words*. To be eligible, the entry must be previously unpublished. Please be sure that your name and address appear on your entry (these will be removed for the judging process), and include a 100-word bio to be published with it if you win. Winners' stories must be available for publication; however, if you wish your story to be published anonymously, we will remove your name. Be sure and keep a copy of your entry. By submitting your story, you are giving Story Circle the right to publish it in the *Journal* and on its web site. However, authors retain copyright.

Criteria and Judging. The judges will be looking for entries that are fresh and original, are written in a clear and authentic voice, are responsive to the topic, and have been polished *and* proofread for presentation in the competition. The judging team will include the winners of previous competitions, writing teachers, and several published writers. No evaluations will be returned.

Deadline: July 15, 2002. Winners will be notified by August 15, 2002.

Email your entry to: storycircle@storycircle.org.

Mail your entry to: LifeWriting Competition, Story Circle Network, PO Box 500127, Austin TX, 78750-0127

Previous Winners of SCN's Landherr Lifewriting Competition

2000

Marie Buckley, Hillsboro OR
Duffie Bart, Monterey CA
Carolyn Cook, Austin TX
Mary Faith Pankin, Washington D.C.
Peggy Park Talley, Gonzales TX

2001

Jean McGroarty, Battleground IN
Erin Philbin, Pittsburgh PA
Sandy McKinzie, Lafayette IN

If writing makes you a writer, I was already one. But without some outward validation, you don't feel like a writer. When my poem won a contest, it was like God saying, "Yes, this is the right thing for you to do."

—Patricia Bell-Scott

Looking for places to publish your LifeWriting?

Go to Story Circle's On-Line
LifeWriter's Market Watch
<http://www.storycircle.org/MarketWatch.shtml>

New publishing opportunities for lifewriters appear every week. To help you keep abreast of these emerging possibilities for sharing your writing, we have moved our Market Watch to the website.

You can help by letting us know about writing contests, publication opportunities, and writers' conferences. Send email with as many details as possible to marketwatch@storycircle.org.

Take a Bow! Spotlighting Our Story Circle Volunteers

A Passion for Stories and Story -Telling

With this issue, we are beginning a series of articles highlighting the stories of the very special women who have made the Story Circle Network such a stunning success. In this article, we feature Melanie Alberts, president of the Internet Chapter, and Carolyn Scheider, President of the Austin TX chapter. We are very grateful to Melanie and Carolyn for devoting their time and talent to the task of encouraging our members to write and share their stories.

As an organization, the Story Circle Network is energized by a great many strong, capable, and committed women who share our passion for women's stories and for the life-changing art and craft of story telling. Two of these women, Melanie Alberts and Carolyn Scheider, lead our two Story Circle chapters, each one bringing to her task her own blend of unique talents and experience.

By the time she was eight, **Melanie Alberts** knew that she wanted to be a writer and an actress. At Emerson College in 1981, she began her work in theater but soon changed to Creative Writing—"so I could practice my craft without having to audition first," she says with a grin. After three years, (and after winning the prestigious Ellen LaForge Poetry Prize), she went to work for the National Park Service, helping to design and carry out programs for the bicentennial of the Constitution, for Washington's Birthplace National Monument; and for Thomas Jefferson's home at Monticello. She enjoyed the work because it meant bringing the stories of colonial days to life, often in costume, and spent a happy summer acting with a community Shakespeare ensemble. And along the way, she continued to practice her other passion—writing. Her poems were in several literary magazines.

In 1997, Melanie and her new husband Chris moved to Austin, where she trained as a massage therapist. After leaving her position in a chiropractic office to stay home with son Zane, she joined a Mother's Club and served on the board. "I realized then," she says, "that I'm happiest when I'm writing and not obsessing about diapers and daycare!" She began to look for online writing groups and discovered SCN—and then one thing led to another.

Not long after joining the Inet Chapter in January 2001, Melanie volunteered to facilitate the Risky Writers e-circle #6. "My stories were all about my itinerant childhood," she notes, and it wasn't long before she had compiled them into several chapters. (One of these, "God Gets a Divorce," has been accepted for publication in the forthcoming book *The Girl Within*.) Because her stories were written primarily for children, Melanie also joined the Society for Children's Book Writers & Illustrators. Her book reviews for young adult readers have appeared on SCN's Book Review website. She is an active member of one of the Austin Chapter's writing circles, and she leads a writing critique group. She is also a regular contributor to the "Hill Country Sun" and has recently broken into the national market as a freelance writer.

In addition to her writing-focused activities, Melanie devotes several hours a week to her work as SCN's Internet Chapter president and to work on the Story Circle board. She explains her wide interests and commitments by quoting Katherine Anne Porter, who wrote:

For myself, I am interested in every creature living, I like hearing as much as I can about the world and all the people in it. I suppose this belongs to the nature of a writer for it's no good writing about life until you've lived a little."

In the few months that she has been president of the Austin Chapter, **Carolyn Scheider** has pulled together a very energetic group of women who have helped to reorganize the chapter, plan a year's worth of creative and interesting chapter activities, and develop a hospitality program to welcome new members. Characteristically, Carolyn gives all the credit to her volunteers, but her gentle leadership brought them together and encouraged them to be creative.

Throughout her life, Carolyn has exhibited a commitment to helping and serving. She grew up on a farm in northwest Iowa, and attended Northwest Iowa College and the University of Iowa, where she earned her Masters degree in Education. She married, and her husband's job took her to Oregon, Idaho, and Florida. She spent much of her time raising the couple's two children, Lora and Tim, but she also taught in elementary classrooms, taught piano, and worked as a church organist. When the marriage ended, she began full-time teaching, first in Florida, then (in 1994) in Round Rock TX.

In 1997, she married again, choosing to retire from teaching two years later so she could spend more time with her husband and pursue other interests, such as lifewriting. She has been actively working on her memoirs—gathering material, creating notebooks, and writing—for several years. You can read one of her pieces, "What I Need to Feel at Home," on p. 13 of this issue. She has taken journaling and memoir classes at the Jung Society in Austin and at Story Circle. She has also participated in Story Circle's Older Women's Legacy program, and in 1999, completed a three-week course that certified her as a Texas teacher of the New Jersey Writing Project.

Carolyn's passion for helping others tell their stories has led her to volunteer as a facilitator for an Austin Chapter writing circle. In addition to the time she devotes to the chapter and to service on the Story Circle board (she has been a board member since 2000), she also volunteers in the Girls' clubs in the Round Rock School District, where she has developed a special program that helps parents and children connect by writing their life stories. She is especially interested in intergenerational story-telling, which she believes can create more open, trusting relationships between younger and older women.

Carolyn's work, her life, and her gifts of her time and energies grow out of her personal conviction that giving is one of the paths to wholeness. As Annie Dillard put it, "The dedicated life is the life worth living. You must give with your whole heart."

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

Long Island Area Story Circle

Story Circle member *Renee Cassese* is leading a new Story Circle in Hicksville, Long Island, hosted by the Hicksville Public Schools. The group will be using Susan Albert's *Writing From Life*, in combination with some of the topics suggested in the Story Circle Facilitator's Guide. The sessions will include an overview of the history of women's lifewriting, reading and discussion of women's published life stories, and writing exercises to help participants get started on their own stories. There will also be exercises and suggestions for writing between sessions. Renee plans to end the six-week series with a dessert party and perhaps a printed collection of the circle's stories. She hopes that the group will continue to meet after the series ends, and that there will be enough interest to start a Story Circle chapter in the New York area. If you're interested in participating in activities in the Long Island/New York area, please write to the Story Circle office, or email storycircle@storycircle.org, and we'll pass the word to Renee.

News from our Chapters

Melanie Alberts reports several news items from the **Internet Chapter**. A new "Story of the Month" replaces the "Writer of the Month." Each eCircle will nominate a story written by one of their members. Stories that have already appeared: eCircle #1 (Judy Fettman); #2 (Marie Buckley), #3, Sharon Wildwind.

An Introductory eCircle (#12) has been formed, with Melanie as the facilitator. There are currently 6 members. The goal is to show new circle members how an eCircle operates, and what is expected of its members.

Susan Albert's "From Memoir to Fiction" online workshop is underway again, and there will be another next fall. Susan is also facilitating the Reading eCircle, which currently has 8 members.

For the **Austin Chapter**, Carolyn Scheider reports that several people have volunteered to play important roles in the chapter. As Hospitality chair, Donna Burgess will work with writing and reading circle facilitators to help provide rides to members who could not otherwise attend meetings. Donna Rimmert has lined up a great series of programs for the year. Carolyn Blankenship will produce announcements, and Danelle Sasser will handle the mailing list. Thanks to all for their support and hard work!

At the April 14 Be Our Guest program, Susie Flatau talked about her new book *Red Boots & Attitude*, and Susie's writing circle read their work. The writing circle also provided refreshments.

The next Be Our Guest program is planned for June 23. Judith Helburn will talk about story-telling, and Judith's circle will read some of the pieces they have written.

Notes from the Board of Directors

At its second quarterly meeting of the year (April, 2002), 17 members of the Board of Directors met to hear reports from various workgroups and make plans for future work. Here are some of the highlights.

2002 Conference. Judith Helburn gave a final wrap-up report on the conference, which was attended by 150 people and netted \$7,900. Lisa Belli has convened a committee to make recommendations for the use of the money at the July board meeting.

2004 Conference. The board approved a plan that will move conference coordination to the office, under the direction of Peggy Moody. Some committee chairs have already been appointed: Site, Judith Helburn; Outreach, Susie Flatau; Scholarship, P.J. Pierce; Program, Paula Yost; Publications, Carolyn Blankenship and Susan Albert; Entertainment, Donna Rimmert. Other chairs will be appointed during the summer. Peggy is already working on the website we use to coordinate our planning activities. The conference, which will again be called "Stories from the Heart," will be held the first weekend of February, in Austin.

2003 Weekend Writing Retreat. The board approved the selection of Mo Ranch, near Kerrville TX as the site of the 2003 Weekend Writing Retreat, to be held March 28-30. Christina Baldwin, author of *Life's Companion*, will be the speaker.

Austin OWL-Circle Project. Pat Flathouse reported that she has been in touch with four Austin churches, two retirement centers, and the local chapter of the DAR—all interested in sponsoring memoir workshops. Plans for a newsletter are underway. The board approved the appointment of the Austin OWL-Circle Director to a seat on the board, and welcomed Pat, who has filled that slot since late last fall.

With Courage and Common Sense. Susan Albert reported that UT Press has approved the publication of our OWL-Circle memoir anthology. No date yet, but probably early 2004. See story, page 1.

Volunteer Hours. Board members reported the volunteer hours they have worked since January 1. The year-to-date total is 1046 hours. That's a lot of woman power!

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Creating A Family History**Creating a Family History**

With the last issue, we began a new section on Family History. If you have a special interest in genealogy and/or family history writing and would like to contribute to this new section, we would very much like to hear from you. Please email us at storycircle@storycircle.org, or write to SCN Journal, PO Box 1616, Bertram TX 78605.

RESOURCES**Genealogy**

Unpuzzling Your Past: A Basic Guide to Genealogy, by Emily Anne Croom

Ancestors: A Beginner's Guide to Family History & Genealogy, by Jim Willard

The Everything Family Tree Book: Finding, Charting, & Preserving Your Family History, by William G. Hartley

Guide to Genealogical Research in the National Archives, National Archives Trust Foundation

Genealogy Online for Dummies, by Matthew Helm (includes CD-Rom with family-tree programs)

Beyond Genealogy

To Our Children's Children: Preserving Family History for Generations to Come, by Bob Greene

A Family History Logbook, Reinhard Klein

Preserving Family Memories: A Guide to Creating Oral History, by Marc A. Seligman

Creating a Family History

Creating a family history is an important part of telling and understanding our own life stories. The more we know about the family that shaped us, the more we can learn about ourselves and the more we may understand the shape of our lives and the directions we have taken. If you haven't done so already, now is the time to make a notebook containing your family's history. Here are some ideas to get you started.

Making a Genealogy

Your genealogy—a list of the names and dates of birth and death—is an essential part of your family history. Begin by listing the full names of your brothers and sisters, the dates of their births and deaths, and the places they were born and died. Then list your parents (using the same information) and their siblings, then your grandparents and their siblings. Following this pattern, trace the family history as far as you can. If you know how to construct a family tree (some helpful how-to books are listed at the right), you can create it now. Place your lists and/or your tree at the beginning of your notebook, then use dividers to create a special section for each generation—your generation (you and your siblings), your parents' generation, your grandparents' generation, and so on.

Expanding Your Genealogy

To expand and give life to the basic family information, you can create an individual page for each member of each generation. It will probably be relatively easy to do this for yourself or your brothers and sisters, but harder with the earlier generations. Here are a few of the additional life facts you may want to include for each person:

- marriage (date/place), names of spouse and children, education
- work, military service, community contributions, special achievements

Not Just the Facts, Please

As you're compiling this factual information, you will be reminded of special bits of personal information about the individuals in your family history. You may remember that Aunt Jane traveled around the world, or that Great-Uncle Hank sold apples during the Depression, or that

your great-great grandfather was said to raise the finest horses in the county. Write down whatever you can remember. Include a photo or two, if you have them—the picture itself may spark even more memories of this person. As far as you are able, flesh out the factual account of your family members by collecting additional impressions and memories from others, and from the person, as well, if he or she is still living.

What Else?

A family history can include lots of different kinds of information and material. For instance, you might ask each living member of your family to contribute a page or two about themselves—their own brief life history—and some photographs. If they don't want to write things down, perhaps they'd be willing to record what they know on a cassette. (You can buy a plastic page for your notebook that will hold the cassettes.)

You might also ask family members to contribute something they have created or done that can become a permanent part of the family record: a story or group of poems, a collection of recipes, photographs of a hobby, travel notes on a special trip.

Another way to give life to your family history is to conduct interviews with older family members, collecting information about their lives and encouraging them to share their memories of previous generations. These oral histories can be written down or recorded on cassettes. You may be surprised at the family stories that emerge when your grandmother or elderly aunt starts remembering her life!

Planning a family reunion? A get-together would be a wonderful time to show and share your family history and solicit contributions from family members.

Using New Technologies

If you have access to a computer, you might want to look into some genealogy software that can help you create your family tree. In fact, you may even want to start collecting your information on the computer, and develop a web site to share the family history with others. For more information on computer resources, see the February issue of the *SC Journal*.



Story Circle Members in Print & in the News

What have you been up to lately? Please send news about your publications and writing-related activities to Nancy Rigg, njrigg@mediaone.net. You may also send your news item to news@storycircle.org for posting on our website.

Story Circle members **Donna Remmert** and **Paulette MacDougal** recently travelled to La Crosse WI to see Paulette's stage version of Donna's memoir, *The Littlest Big Kid*. The production was staged by the Family Playhouse at the Pump House Regional Center for the Arts in La Crosse. Based on Donna's experiences as a child growing up during World War II, the play included a cast of children aged 3-14. Music for the production was written by Steven Koch. Paulette is an award-winning playwright with five produced works (including "Back Talk," based on the memoir by Joan Weimer). Donna is now at work on a second memoir, *Jitterbug Girl*.

Susie Flatau has been actively introducing her just-released book, *Red Boots & Attitude*, a collection of works by 34 veteran and emerging Texas women writers. The book includes three of Susie's own pieces. A portion of the book sales benefit the Breast Cancer Resource Center of Austin. For details about the book and how to purchase it, visit Susie's web site, at www.wordsbysusie.com.

P. Jae Stanley was recently nominated for Female Vocalist of the Year and performed at the First Annual Groovy Awards Show in Waco TX. P. Jae sings her story in jazz and blues. She thrilled the audience at the 2002 Stories From the Heart conference with her original song, "One Love." Her CD "Stir It Up" is available from P. Jae Stanley, 216 Deep Canyon Drive, Whitney TX 76692, or from www.lyricallyspeaking.com.

Trudi Ecklund, of Cedar Park TX, recently published her memoir entitled *Where Are My Hugs?* From the book jacket: "This book gives a vivid picture of years of child abuse and domestic violence by two Irish Catholic immigrant parents trapped in a loveless marriage but bound by their culture and religion to present to the outside world the picture of a perfect church-going family." To purchase the book, go to www.bookden.com and enter the author's name.

Gail Rae is offering coaching seminars in El Dorado NM using story-telling techniques. "Have you ever noticed how a compelling story pulls you into it, makes you want to keep listening until you get to the end, makes you want to know more?" she asks. You can learn more about Gail's unique use of story-telling techniques by emailing her at g.rae@att.net

Rebecca Roberts of Austin TX is one of 139 clay artists (only 13 from Texas) whose work was accepted into the 14th San Angelo National Ceramic Competition. The show opened April 18 and remains at The San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts until June 23, 2002. Rebecca's work is also featured at J Walker Gallery in San Angelo.

Got a Prize-Winning Story Up Your Sleeve?

Your story could be a big winner. In addition to our very own Third Annual Landherr LifeWriting Competition, here are two other contests that welcome stories about personal experience. Be sure to read the rules and observe the deadlines.

Put it in Writing @ Your Library Contest!

The American Library Association has announced a new national partnership with Woman's Day magazine called "Put It in Writing @ Your Library™." The program is designed to promote the wealth of opportunities that all types of libraries offer—in schools, on college/university campuses and in communities large and small—that can spark a writer's imagination and creativity and help create a community of writers.

Three winners will be chosen for the Put It in Writing @ Your Library writing contest, with one winner each in the categories of health, general reporting, and personal essay. Health articles (1200-1500 words) should cover newsworthy topics in the field of women's health. General reporting articles (1200-1500 words) should cover newsworthy topics that are of special interest to women. **Personal essays, (600 to 800 words) should focus on life-changing incidents promoting personal growth and insight. (Story Circle members, here's your chance!)** The winners will be featured in the March 2003 issue of Woman's Day. For complete contest information, ask your local library or go online at <https://cs.ala.org/@yourlibrary/putitinwriting/rules.cfm> The deadline is August 1, so now is the time to get started!

Another activity for Story Circle members is to participate in a program called. Hosting A Writer's Workshop. Invite future writers in your community to learn how to get published by hosting a writer's workshop @ your library. As part of the "Put it in Writing @ your library" program, Woman's Day magazine and the ALA have developed a sample writer's workshop agenda and collateral materials, which can be downloaded from <https://cs.ala.org/@yourlibrary/putitinwriting/workshop.cfm>.

Personal Journaling's Joy of Writing Contest

The editors of *Personal Journaling* magazine have created a contest designed to honor and promote the craft of personal writing. Here's what they say about it: "Celebrate writing's meaning in your life in either a personal essay or personal poem. Compete for the Blue Ribbon prize in your category—or win the overall Grand Prize." Each entry, whether it is an essay or a poem, must convey the value or impact writing has had on your life. The prize is publication in *Personal Journaling* magazine and \$100 in books. For official rules and an entry form, see the latest issue of the magazine, or log on to http://www.writersdigest.com/contests/joy_of_writing.asp. Their deadline is November 26, 2002.

Mini-Stories: Our Readers Share

"Born and educated in the Northwest. Married for 41 years to Mike and have raised five children, three of ours and two of my brother's, the youngest a pulsating teen. We have three grandchildren with two more added this year. I've worked as a psychotherapist with a focus on mind/body/spirit and now read on the subject, play in my clay studio, and make baby quilts."—*Sharon Anglea, San Antonio TX*

"I am an artist who has only recently owned that talent. As a partner, mother, daughter and sister, I have many stories and now enjoy exploring ways to tell them. My life and my work are ever changing."—*Ellen Reardan, Portland OR*

"I am an almost 76-year-old native-Oregonian, relatively healthy, lesbian who, except for two years at Reed College in Portland OR, three years in Honolulu, two years in Boston, have lived in Jackson County my entire life. My partner Joan and I are seriously addicted to crossword puzzles, puns, and proofreading, and to our medium-haired Maine Coon cat mix, Richard. Two daughters from a former marriage, and one set of grandchildren, for whom I have written a book about my Depression childhood, live close by."—*Mary Louise Lyman, Ashland OR*

"I am almost 82 years old, living in a senior home. For my 11 children and 28 grandchildren, I write a newsletter to which they all contribute. My published cookbook, "Delicious Memories," in 1982 brought many rewards. Now I write articles for our community newsletter."—*Helen Mary Mollinger, Wauwatosa WI*

"I am the only sister of five brothers. I became a registered nurse; served on the hospital ship Hope in Africa; am married, had two children. At 45, went back to college and obtained a PhD in literature; taught creative writing and children's literature before retiring four years ago."—*Genevieve Bronk, Queensbury NY*

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