

Story Circle Journal

The newsletter for women with stories to tell...

Volume 6 Number 3, September 2002

Story Circle Transforms Dreams to Reality

One of the most wonderful things about working with the Story Circle Network is seeing so many exciting dreams turned into reality, with the willing help of a great many hearts and minds. From our small beginning just five years ago, we can now celebrate an active, energetic, and growing organization—thanks to our dedicated Board of Directors, to Story Circle facilitators around the country, and to the many women who have made Story Circle a part of their lives.

Dreams and Realities

We've been in the transformation business so long now that it's easy to forget all the things we've done. But since it's always helpful to look back and take stock, here is a very brief list:

- ❖ *The Story Circle Journal*, now in its sixth year, has expanded from 12 to 24 pages and including both members' writing and specific and helpful content.
- ❖ The Internet site, at www.storycircle.org, the "heart center" of SCN, gives us a place where we can declare to the world the importance of women's stories.
- ❖ Our Austin and Internet Chapters bring members together in writing and reading circles, on-line courses, monthly competitions, and much more.
- ❖ Our workshops and programs, such as the semi-annual Writing From Life Workshop held in Austin TX, have grown from two in 1998 to seven in 2002, and our OWL-Circle Memoir Workshop program has expanded from a local to a national program.
- ❖ Stories from the Heart, our first National Conference in 2002, gave members from all over the country an opportunity to come together, network, share, and learn.

Just Ahead: Dreams Coming True

We know, just as you do, that unless we plan for the future, it will take us by surprise—and we might not like what it brings us!. So our Story Circle Board has continued to dream and scheme, planning the shape of things to come. Here is just a sample of what's in the works for the next few years.

- ❖ We've planned an intensive lifewriting weekend March 28-30, 2003, with Christina Baldwin, celebrated journaling teacher and author of *Life's Companion: Journal Writing as a Spiritual Quest*. For details, see page 24.
- ❖ We're holding our first major Austin fundraising event, a special performance of the celebrated play, *Waiting For MacArthur*, by Story Circle member and noted playwright Paulette MacDougal.
- ❖ We're creating a special-edition Story Circle Journal Book, with inspiring women's quotations and an introduction by Susan Wittig Albert, author of *Writing From Life: Telling Your Soul's Story*. We're hoping that this book, a long-time dream of our Board of Directors, will be available for your 2002 Christmas giving.
- ❖ We're wrapping up our first book, *With Courage and Common Sense*, a collection of OWL-Circle memoirs, which will be published by the University of Texas Press in early 2004. And we're already starting to think about our second collection of women's stories.
- ❖ We're partnering with SafePlace, a women's crisis center in Austin TX, to offer a series of lifewriting workshops for women seeking refuge in the center.
- ❖ We're already planning *Stories from the Heart 2004*, our next National Conference, to be held February 6-8, 2004, in Austin TX. (Put it on your calendar!)

The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.

— Eleanor Roosevelt

If you're still hanging onto a dead dream of yesterday, laying flowers on its grave by the hour, you cannot be planting the seeds for a new dream to grow today.

—Joyce Chapman

If you want your dreams to come true, don't oversleep.

—Yiddish proverb



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And Even More Dreams in our DreamWorks

For some time now, our 18-member Story Circle Board has been thinking about ways to put our organization on an even more solid footing, so that we can continue to dream and build for the future. As many of you know, we have accomplished our many goals with volunteer woman-power, as well as the additional assistance of our multi-talented Peggy Moody, who handles the office work, manages the membership lists, and designs and maintains our web site.

But as our dreams get bigger and more exciting, we need to think of ways to make them happen. At its July meeting, the board reviewed our Planning Document and agreed that one of our most pressing needs is to hire an Executive Director who can take over some of the work that is now being done by volunteers in managing and coordinating our various programs. It's a natural next step in the evolution of SCN, and the board has wisely recognized that we're ready to take it.

But we also know that this dream is going to need some very special help and support from our Story Circle members and friends. To transform this dream into reality, we need to almost double our annual budget. Sound scary? You bet! But Story Circle has dreamed big before, and we're eager to dream big now. With your help, we'll make it happen.

How You Can Help

The board will soon be studying options, and as the plans take shape, we'll share them with you. But in the meantime, here's what you can do to help us work toward this important goal.

- ❖ Help increase our membership. Tell your friends about the Story Circle Network, and invite them to become members. Request brochures from our office and hand them out when you get together with friends. Or start your own Story Circle and suggest that everyone join! We are a non-profit 501c3 organization. Memberships are tax-deductible.
- ❖ Give gift memberships to family members and friends. SCN membership lasts for a full year, and brings many benefits. Share these with those you love, and give us a boost at the same time.
- ❖ Make all your on-line book purchases through our Book Review web site, at www.storycircle.org/BookReviews. It doesn't matter whether you want to buy one of our Book Review offerings, or something else entirely. All you have to do is click on the words **amazon.com** on that page, and you'll go straight to Amazon. A portion of your purchases on that shopping trip will be credited to Story Circle. Every click counts, and every purchase helps! So please bookmark this page, and use it as your gateway to book-shopping!
- ❖ If you live in Austin, participate in Randall's Good Neighbor program. Stop in at your local Randall's, get your Remarkable card, and ask that your purchase credits be directed to Story Circle. Our Good Neighbor number is 10082.
- ❖ Make a direct gift. We welcome gifts of any amount. (Don't forget, they're tax-deductible.) You can make an electronic payment at www.storycircle.org/frmdonate.shtml. Or you can mail a check to our office: Story Circle Network, PO Box 500127, Austin TX 78750.

It Takes a Community...

Increasing our membership, raising additional funds, strengthening our central organization—these aren't goals we can realize by ourselves. If you believe in the power of women's stories, if you believe that each woman's life must be celebrated and that each woman's voice must be honored, we hope you'll help us strengthen the community of women committed to making these dreams come true.

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

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.

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ISSN: 1093-7528

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Membership Rates

One Year \$24 US

\$36 elsewhere

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

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PO Box 1616,

Bertram TX 78605-1616

Back Issues: Back issues are available either as first-run or photocopies. 1-9 issues: \$5 each; 10 or more, \$3 each. Add postage as follows: \$1 for 1 issue, \$3.50 for 2-5 issues, \$6 for 6+ issues.

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!

Creating A Family History**Chapters in Your Family's History**

This is the third of our articles on family history. If you have a special interest in genealogy and/or family history and would like to contribute to this 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.

If you've already begun working on your family's history, chances are that you've spent quite a bit of time researching the many branches of your family tree. Since the Internet came along, our ability to reconstruct the family line has been remarkably improved, and once you get started, it won't be long before you'll discover connections to a world of ancestors you had not even imagined.

But a family's history is more than just genealogy—it's the stories of individuals, where and how they lived, what they did, what their world was like.

For instance, what did your grandparents have for breakfast? I remember my grandmother baking biscuits made with lard from their own pig, frying bacon (that pig, again) making cream gravy with top milk from Florrie the cow, and frying eggs (the chickens were already at work, laying more).

As I write this, I'm imagining how my own great-granddaughter might smile, reading about her ancestors' breakfasts at the end of the twenty-first century and trying to imagine the scene. My challenge, and yours, as family historians, is to reconstruct the world of the past for the world of the future.

Chapters in Your Family's History

One interesting way to organize the life of the past is to present it in chapters. In that way, you can pull together a great deal of fascinating information, perhaps illustrated with family pictures. Here are some ideas for chapters you might create.

This Old House

What kind of houses did you and your family inhabit? Were they cabins in the woods, or mansions on Main Street? Beginning with the houses of your childhood and working backward, write down a brief description of each one that you can remember, then ask older members of the family to do the same thing, telling or writing as much as they remember about each house. Ask family members to contribute photographs. If the buildings are still in existence, get someone to take pictures and add those to your collections.

I've Been Working on the Railroad

What sorts of work did your family do? My paternal grandfather was a genteel jeweler, and my favorite picture of him shows him standing proudly in his Main Street jewelry store, wearing a suit and tie. My maternal grandfather was a dirt farmer in Missouri. My favorite snapshot shows him standing with his pair of huge draft horses, and my favorite memory is of riding to town in Grandpa's wagon, behind these wonderful horses. These two men and their very different ways of life are part of the American experience, and a chapter describing their work would give my descendants a better understanding of their past.

Of course, it isn't just a matter of where our ancestors have worked—some of the most interesting stories focus on what they worked with. Granddad's engraving tools and gold scale, the old typewriter, a pitch fork, a scythe, a hand saw, a lantern. Grandma's treadle sewing machine, her scrub board, her sewing box, an old pressure cooker. There is the family cookbook and favorite recipes, perhaps an account book of money made and bills paid, or an inventory of property made on someone's death. Photographs of these items, or of similar ones, can bring your family's story to life.

Those Old Piano-Roll Blues

But life wasn't all work, even in the "old" days, and your family history ought to reflect the various ways they enjoyed themselves. My mother loved to tell about going to the pond with her brothers to fish and hunt bullfrogs—around 1915, that would have been. My father had his picture taken on a boardwalk in New Jersey, dancing to a player piano. My grandmother, born in 1866, was given a stereoscope for her sixteenth birthday—the family still has it. Pleasures were simpler then: family get-togethers, making ice-cream in a wooden bucket with a crank, community "sings," going to baseball games, playing board games, putting puzzles together.

What did your family enjoy? How did they relax? A "family fun" chapter will add life to your family history.

"Come Away with me, Lucille, in my merry Oldsmobile"

Was it an Olds in your family, or a Ford, or a Cadillac? Going back another generation or two, how did your ancestors get around? Horse and buggy? Shank's mare (an old-fashioned way of saying "on foot")? Oxen and sleigh? Subway and "El"?

My grandfather's horses were members of the family, and he never went to bed at night without saying goodnight to them. My brother's first car (a used Edsel, back in the 50s) was his proudest possession—he wouldn't dream of going to bed without patting its fender. And your family story won't be complete without a history of its transportation, going back to the horse-and-buggy days. You'll probably be able to find plenty of pictures. Most guys couldn't resist taking a photograph of that favorite car.

And More Chapters...

Once you start thinking about chapters, you'll come up with plenty of ideas: chapters on food, clothing, religion, favorite possessions, hobbies—more than enough to keep you writing happily for the next few years.

So get started now. Recollections fade, people die. Begin your family history while the memories are still fresh.—*Susan Wittig Albert.*

Writing and Healing

Gifts of the 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. In this article, she takes us to a healing retreat, a cottage where she can get a clearer, quieter view of her life.

The Intent

We have a phenomenon in Ontario, Canada, called "going to the cottage." My intent for the cottage I rented this summer was to slow down and simplify my days. As with pilgrimages or spiritual journeys, I expected to learn something new and to reflect on the habits of my home life that don't serve me any more. As it turned out, the cottage reminded me of the elements I find healing about writing circles, gifts of the journey: celebration, creativity, ceremony, and community—as well as two more I realized while away: container and composting.

Getting Ready

I got sentimental before I left home, perhaps because I was leaving the familiar and because I wouldn't be the same person when I returned. I would uncover something or something would uncover me when I allowed myself to enter the stillness. I took my time to choose just the things I required for the journey: Molly Peacock's memoir, *Paradise, Piece by Piece*, a journal, some art supplies.

Celebration

At the cottage, I celebrated by remembering cottages I've visited before. The cottage at Washagami with Aunt Rene and Uncle Len where I sat on the porch and read Nancy Drew books. The cottage with Angie and her parents when we were young teens and sun-bathed while painting our toenails red.

Creativity

I get to be creative on a daily basis as a writer, poet and workshop facilitator with my own business. Part of the creativity is dealing with an uncertain and inconsistent income. At the cottage, I didn't worry about bills. I started to write when I got up in the morning, expressing whatever was on my heart that morning. I wrote about gardens I had left and found, longing and rites of passage.

An afternoon jaunt to an art gallery inspired me. Fabric mermaids with sequins and beads fed my imagination. Watercolors of local scenes let me know, "I can do that. I'm inspired to paint my version."

Ceremony

I describe poetry as the soul creating a ceremony out of ordinary events. Being at the cottage is like that. The simplest of things become rituals. Toasting marshmallows, using appliances that don't work reliably and reading five year old magazines. In Bayfield, on Lake Huron, the evening ceremony is to go and watch the sun set every night in Pioneer Park.

Community

The cottage is an ideal place to invite friends and I thought about doing that this year. But since so much of my non-holiday life is about scheduling, I opted to have this time for my partner and myself.

At first it's a shock to be with someone so much—someone you say good-bye to most mornings and don't see again until

the end of the day. There we were, enjoying coffee together in front of the window, taking time to listen.

One needs time alone too, so I claimed the sleeping cabin where I could stay up late and read. Everyone needs a special place to listen to themselves. Community means a place where that's acceptable, where you're free to also look after yourself.

Container

I realized while away that the writing circle is a container and a safe place to be heard. A holiday has a beginning and an end. A specific time and place within which one may move freely, letting the days unfold. We can surrender to serendipity within the safety of the container.

Composting

Each day at the cottage we took the vegetable peelings and coffee grounds to the composter—a way to let nature take its course. One day, those remains of the day will help other plants and vegetables grow. It's like the creative process that goes on as we percolate ideas for a time before painting the picture or writing the poem.

Coming Home

While on a pilgrimage, we receive a gift. The gift was the gentle unfolding. No finished product. Just permission to be. As mementos I brought home a small collection of smooth stones, some feathers and some pieces of deeply grooved wood. I made a list for home just as I made a list for the cottage. The list asked, how can I have more of the "cottage" in my every day life? Here's what I came up with.

Celebration: It could be a special way to honor the end of the work week on a Friday night. A circle of friends gathering to honor someone for their birthday, each one saying what the guest of honor means to them. **Creativity:** Make room for art. There is lots to be learned in the meditative process of art making, a way to surrender to whatever comes up. **Ceremony:** Take time to smell the peonies, to create small ceremonies out of household tasks like watering the plants. **Community:** Ask for help when I need it. Give Kate next door, who will be 90 this year, a hug at least every other day. **Container:** Continue to create places where I feel protected and know when to rest and when to work. A place where I can forgive myself for my limitations and where my strengths are honored. Containers can be personal rituals of silence and solitude and that ideal, real or imagined, writing place. **Composting:** The scraps become nourishment for soul. The words become sentences, paragraphs, chapters—a book! The ideas percolate for awhile and as various elements come in to assist them, sparkling imaginings result.

All of these words are separate but they're like the petals that make up the whole bloom. Celebration is a form of ceremony which is creative and has a special home in the container of the circle - a rich community of composting. As important as the journey, is the getting ready and coming home.

A Reader Tells Her Story**Return to Fullness**

*Illia Thompson has taught preschool through college. She is currently an instructor in Memoir Writing at Monterey Peninsula College and a leader of private journaling classes and workshops. Illia is a former guest lecturer for the Inner Journey writing sessions at Rancho La Puerta Spa in Mexico. She is the author of **Heartframes**, a poetry collection, and **Gracious Seasons**.*

We write to heighten our awareness of life. We write to be able to transcend our life, to teach ourselves to speak with others. When I don't write, I feel my world shrinking. I feel I lose my fire, my color. ~ Anais Nin

Imagine a six-year-old girl, traveling the ocean on a Portuguese ship, twelve days at sea with her parents and younger sister, speaking happily with the sailors, arriving at dusty gray Ellis Island and losing her favorite rag doll in the process of immigration. No more country home. No music from the washerwomen as they hung linen sheets to dry in the sun.

Not only could my doll not be found, I lost my language. My parents expected me to learn English quickly, to become American. They both spoke this tongue, so should their children. My sister and I were put in a boarding school for a month, which felt like years, while they looked for a place to settle. My ears opened wide, listening hard. Even the pores on my skin tried to help by feeling the sounds, trying to make sense out of the change from greenness and song to grayness and strangeness.

Like most children, I learned. By the end of six months in school, I could speak without accent, read about Spot and Dick and Jane, add numbers easily and in my shyness, absorbed the way of the culture.

Only as an adult did the power of the uprooting become visible and through writing about those times, understanding and healing began. As I wrote in diaries, in classes, through journaling, I began to claim my life, to honor its fullness. Often through writing, loss loses its grip, if not its touch. Humor finds its play. Recollections revive spirit. Creativity flourishes.

Like Anais Nin, the famous diarist, writing saves my life. In times of stress, it is an anchor. In times of grace, it is a reminder of blessings. Unrecorded thoughts often drift away. The written work keeps us in touch with ourselves, allows us to become our own good friend.

Writing *Gracious Seasons*, an ongoing journal of the year that my husband was dying, became a way to cope. On days of weakness, I could look back and find pages of strength. On days of strength, I could feel nourished by rereading my current entries. As it was being written, I sensed that my words could help others.

When our son went to college, two years later, his first call home: "Send a care package. Send the book, I need it." Through rereading the book, he could reacquaint himself with his own courage and keep remembering his father.

Since the millennium, I find more people ready to record their lives, be it through journal or memoir writing. September Eleventh prompted reminders that life is not infinite. Over and over again I hear: "Writing heals." I always felt good after writing. I believed this came from the satisfaction of a task well done. Now science tells me that my body also benefits. T-Cells increase, those that help build up the immune system, those that fight disease. Students tell me of increased energy, of headaches that disappear, as well as psychological healing.

Each week I sit in many circles of writers, witness words finding their place on paper. Then, later, given voice, stories are shared. Deep listening allows one's own memories to be sparked. Emotions flow, and being present becomes as gratifying as attending any theater production. I applaud those who feel the tug and step bravely forward to create a record of their journey, to pass on or to better acquaint themselves with themselves.

I now live in Carmel Valley country and a dear friend, who hears my ongoing story as we write in community, presented me with a handmade rag doll, who now watches over me as I sleep. And I know my own song.

Gracious Seasons is a year's journey with a loved one from diagnosis until death. It is available from the author for \$15. (includes postage and handling.) *Gracious Journey*, a guide to personal writing, is currently in progress. Contact: Illia Thompson, P. O. Box 661, Carmel Valley, CA 93924

Telling Our Stories, Sharing Our Sorrow

The events of 9/11/01 will be forever a part of our stories.

Many women shared their experiences and feelings on SCN's website, *Give Sorrow Words: The Day America Changed*. Continue to share your stories about how this event changed your life by contributing to our on-going archive. To share your story for the first time, or update your earlier contribution, go to www.storycircle.org/sorrow.html

Does Your Friend Have a Story?

Of course she does!

So does your mother, your sister, your cousin, your aunt, your grandmother, your neighbor....

Help them believe that their stories are important by giving them a Story Circle membership.

Use the membership form on p. 8
or go on-line at
www.storycircle.org

Meet Other LifeWriters and Learn from Their Stories...

Telling Every Woman's Story: Deborah Hansen Linzer

Deborah Hansen Linzer was born and raised in South Dakota. She majored in English and did graduate work in journalism and mass communication. After 15 years in public relations, she became Executive Director of the Arizona Center for the Book. A passionate supporter of progress for women, she went on to develop the National Life Stories Center, a non-profit organization that sponsors activities similar to those of the Story Circle Network. When we met her at our first national conference in February, 2002, we were struck with the parallels between our two organizations. We have invited her to tell you about the NLSC, with the hope that SCN and the NLSC can begin to explore ways in which we can work together to meet our mission: encouraging women to write and share their life stories.



National
Life Stories Center
PO Box 9608
Scottsdale AZ
85252
480-421-1999
www.thestoriescenter.org

Most of the stories we are told now are written by novelists and screenwriters...stories that have beginnings and endings, stories that are not real. The stories we can tell each other have no beginning and no ending. They are a front-row seat to the real experience. Even though they may have happened in a different time or place, they have a familiar feel. In some way, they are about us, too.—
Rachel Naomi Remen

SCN. Please tell us about the National Life Stories Center and the Cameo Life Stories program.

Deborah. The nonprofit National Life Stories Center was created 1) to encourage people to value their lives as significant contributions to human history and progress; 2) to make history more complete and more accurate by including women's individual histories and personal life stories; and 3) to increase respect for the worth of the individual by establishing a universal tradition of life story writing, sharing and preservation.

Headquartered in Scottsdale AZ and led by a seven-member board, the NLSC sponsors three key programs: 1) Cameo Life Stories, a life story writing program for women; 2) *FirstCameo* Life Stories, a life story writing program for young women; and 3) *FourWords*, a rite-of-passage program for adolescent girls and boys. Life story writing programs for men and boys are being developed.

The genesis of Cameo Life Stories was the one hundred fiftieth anniversary of the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, the first women's rights convention in the world. I've been involved with women's issues my entire adult life and was excited in 1997 about the upcoming opportunity to honor the women who so courageously challenged the awful status of women in 1848. While reading about the history of the convention and the subsequent women's suffrage movement, I had three significant epiphanies. First, I was struck by the reality that the progress of women was not the work of Susan B. Anthony or Elizabeth Cady Stanton alone, but the result of the millions of individual acts of courage of women of every walk of life!

Second, I saw that written history does not recognize the important contributions of individual women, nor are women generally taught—or taught to appreciate—the enormous influence of women who have paved our way for us. That felt like a tragedy to me, an unfortunate oversight that hampers women's individual and group

development because real-life examples of women's decisions and lives can be very empowering.

Third, I realized that women today needed to connect with the truth of other women's lives—lives past and present—and that simply extolling the virtues of reading women's history would fall on the deaf ears of women who were too busy, who thought history was too boring, or who were suspicious of women's history because it had bad associations in their minds with militant feminism.

So I thought long and hard about how to use my marketing background, my passion for women's progress, and my respect for women's history to create a project that would open eyes—that would provide epiphanies to women, girls, men and boys. My hope was that asking women to tell their personal stories would underscore the history-making quality of their lives, give them added self-confidence, and create a stronger bond among many different kinds of women.

It has worked—largely because of the innate power of life story writing and sharing. Cameo Life Stories has now reached thousands of women throughout the U.S. and the world. "Cameo" was a perfect fit, because it is a portrait of a woman and an item that is traditionally a precious heirloom passed from woman to woman, generation to generation. My daughter Jennie Anna, a high school senior at the time, posed for the logo, as well as for the cover of my book. Having her lovely profile adorning all our materials is now very poignant for me, because we lost Jennie in a car accident a year later. Her death has been very hard for me, but it is consoling to have her loving spirit live on in such a love-filled program.

SCN: Before you began to work on the Cameo program, you had already had two different careers, one in public relations and the other at the Arizona Center for the Book. How did you happen to move from PR to the AZ.C.B.?

Deborah. After graduate school in journalism, I worked for 13 years serving as director of public

relations for two multi-hospital corporations, the largest hospital in Arizona, and the third-largest community college district in the country. At 35, when I remarried, I chose to stay home to raise my two daughters, who were only 6 and 7. I became active as a volunteer in causes important to me. I ardently believe that two of the human race's worst habits are patriarchy and intolerance, and I believe that knowledge is the strongest tool to overcome both. Good reading broadens our knowledge of ourselves and others and promotes tolerance. To encourage children and adults, to read, I volunteered as executive director of the Arizona Center for the Book, building it into a part-time paying position. The mission of the Center for the Book is "to stimulate public interest in books, reading, libraries and literacy."

SCN: One of the features that sets your program apart is your aim to archive women's stories. How did that come about?

Deborah. I was heavily influenced to create an archive by the women's history classes I had taken and by association with some of the leading women's history scholars and advocates in the country, including Mary Rothschild, then head of the Arizona State University Women's Studies Department. I realized that scholars were interpreting the women's materials they had available, but saw no organized effort to collect life stories from a wide variety of women and make them available to the historians who are helping to create our educational legacies.

SCN. You have written a book and offer workshops and other programs for a variety of audiences. Tell us about these activities.

Deborah. In the Cameo Workshops, I found I had too much to say in too little time, so I decided to provide the information in a workbook, which grew so big that it was impractical to make copies all the time. So I sequestered myself for a month and expanded it to book size. The money to print it came from Daryl Ott Underhill, who edited *Every Woman Has a Story* for Warner Books. I went on a national book tour with her. That was a wonderful connection.

NLSC is committed to encouraging people to write, share, and archive their life stories, and we preach that message through publicity, speeches to women's organizations and Cameo Workshops in churches, senior centers, libraries, conventions, family reunions—anywhere we can find a venue. Usually there emerge a number of women who are excited not just about writing their own story but about helping other women

write theirs. They have become our Cameo facilitators, leading their own Cameo Circles and helping others form similar groups, similar to Story Circles.

The workshops are always a magical experience, because life story writing is a "transformative art"—as members of the Story Circle Network know very well. Many women come thinking they will simply learn techniques for getting their story on paper. They end up learning to empathize with others of different backgrounds and faiths, to reexamine their own experience and learn new understanding and acceptance, to appreciate the fascinating tales and influence of a larger women's history and to be proud of their own contributions to human progress.

NLSC also sponsors a program to encourage young people to face the future with a sense of hope and possibility. FourWords is a simple but powerful rite-of-passage ceremony for pre-teens and teens that brings together the young person and her or his significant others—parents and siblings, friends, teachers, clergy—in a symbolic crossing of the threshold on the path to maturity.

SCN: Your website offers an interesting questionnaire. How do you hope women will use it? What do you do with the questionnaire and the stories you receive?

Deborah. The Cameo Life Stories Questionnaire was created with input from women's history scholars and women from all walks of life. Its purpose is to encourage women not just to record the facts of their life journey, but to examine and reflect on them for the lessons they hold. The questionnaire also serves to gather information about life experiences unique to women—information we hope they will share with historians, so the truth about women's lives is captured and not minimized in the larger picture of human life. Completed questionnaires (and any other form of life stories we receive) are acknowledged by NLSC, then sent to the Fletcher Library at Arizona State University-West Campus. Discussions are being held with archivists at Smith College about including our archive in the Sophia Smith Collection, one of the largest women's history archives in the country. (Details of the archiving process are still being worked out.)

Our programs are endorsed by the National Women's History Museum, which is working towards a building in Washington, D.C., and by the 21-year-old National Women's History Project in California. The NWHP provides the largest selection of women's history material

I constantly encourage women to share their stories with their children, their extended families, the men in their lives and the community at large, but I also urge them to share their truths with historians who will ensure that the history of the human race is not lopsided with tales of "great men and great events."
—Deborah Linzer

Every woman makes history every day. For better or for worse. Our actions and decisions are important, no matter who we are. I met Sandra Day O'Connor at a recent book signing and confessed to her, "I tell the women in my workshops that they don't have to be Sandra Day O'Connor to change the world." She agreed!
—Deborah Linzer

Not only is your story worth telling, but it can be told in words so painfully eloquent that it becomes a song.
—Gloria Naylor

available to schools and individuals and has an extensive website with an online catalog—www.nwhp.com.

SCN. Tell us about Cameo Circles and how they work. They sound very similar to Story Circles.

Deborah. Cameo Circles are safe and disciplined gatherings for women to reflect, write, and share their life stories. Chapter 9 in my *Cameo Life Stories* describes how to form and lead one. The model came from my experience with “consciousness-raising groups” of the 70s, which were an amazing American phenomenon which stimulated great personal growth and bonding for women. As with the Story Circle Network, Cameo Circles are a support group to help women progress with their writing, but we follow the format of the 92-question Cameo Life Stories Questionnaire. We don’t know how many Cameo Circles are presently running, since many are begun independently by women who have read the book or are encouraged by someone who participated in another group. A woman can call the NLSC for information on what circles may be meeting in her area.

SCN. You have networked your Stories Center with other women’s history organizations. How has this helped to shape your organization?

Deborah. To me, women’s history is a powerful potion that too often sits corked on the shelf. In America, women have lost much of our oral life-sharing tradition. The workplace is not an appropriate place for baring our souls to each other, and we are often too busy or too overworked for time with trusted friends or even our mothers and sisters.

Our goal is to remind women that we are shaped by our history—just as we are shaping the women who follow us. Networking with women’s history scholars and organizations helps “history” and contemporary women connect with each

other, creating an energy good for them both. Networking helps spread the word about the power of women’s words!

SCN. How has your work with the Stories Center changed your life? What do you see for yourself as you look ahead?

Deborah. In my previous career, I always felt restless, longing to apply my skills and energy to a cause I felt would have a bigger impact on making the world a better place. *Cameo Life Stories* and its related programs combines my passionate beliefs in the need for women to lead full, authentic lives, unfettered by stereotypes that don’t fit their souls and the need for human beings to control their instinctual intolerance and learn to live in harmony.

Cameo Life Stories has changed my life by bringing me closer to the most marvelous women imaginable—and by bringing me closer to myself. The death of my precious daughter has taught me, as nothing else could, that my life story is not endless and that it is wasted without love. While I still yearn to evangelize about women’s empowerment, I know it is time for me to be still and write my story—on paper and in the lives of those I love.

Available from National Life Stories Center

FourWords Guidebook, \$5

FirstCameo Life Stories Questionnaire for girls, \$5

Girl Scout Cameo Program Points Booklet, \$5

Cameo Life Stories Writing Guide for Everywoman (272 pp—also available from www.thestoriescenter.org) \$19.90

NLSC

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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!

Cameo Life Stories: Writing Guide for Everywoman, by Deborah Hansen, Linzer. Blue Moon Books, Scottsdale AZ, 1999. ISBN 0-9674820-0-3. Reviewed by Susan Wittig Albert

Cameo Life Stories was written, Deborah Linzer tells us,

to encourage women everywhere to value their lives as important contributions to human history, to make human history more complete and more accurate by including women's life stories, and to share women's stories as invaluable sources of inspiration.

This is an important and ambitious mission statement, but *Cameo Life Stories* certainly lives up to it. While most "write-your-life-story" texts focus on the how-to of telling your story, or encourage women to write about their lives because writing is a healing act, Deborah Linzer urges us to write our life stories because "every woman makes history, no matter who she is or what she does." We are all history-makers, she reminds us, and every choice we make is an "exercise in making history."

When we begin thinking of ourselves as history-makers, it becomes a little easier to write our life stories. We see that we have been shaping our personal histories, and the histories of those around us, every day, in both positive and negative ways. Some days, making history may be as simple as catching up with the laundry... Other days, making history may be as momentous as sending a large check to a worthy charity...starting graduate school, staying sober for one more day, leaving an abusive husband...or beginning to write down the story of your history-making life.

This is important enough, and as the central message of the book, is repeated clearly, often, and compellingly throughout. But Deborah Linzer does more. She also helps us to see that when we write our stories, we are contributing to the new and expanding scholarship in women's history, where scholars are now beginning to incorporate the lives of women into the human record. What we write about our lives, she says, will be important not only to our families and friends, but to historians in the future. There are several aspects of women's history, she reminds us, that need the help of every woman: collecting stories from women "with knowledge of a vanishing way of life"; collecting stories about the ways individual women have transformed society; and collecting stories about the ways individual women have transformed themselves. What's more, she says, we need to establish "forms and forums" through which women can communicate these stories. (Sounds like Story Circle, doesn't it? Clearly, Linzer's work parallels our own commitments and activities. Our upcoming book, *With Courage and Common Sense*, which comes out of our OWL-Circle Memoir Workshops, is a good example of what Linzer is encouraging women to do.)

To guide women in the writing of their stories, Linzer offers several chapters on writing life stories, a questionnaire, and examples. The chapters give helpful advice on collecting and working with memories, while the questionnaire is a useful prompt for recalling details that might otherwise be forgotten, and the examples are strong and interesting. Additional chapters sketch out a plan for archiving women's stories, although it is not quite clear how these stories will be stored or how access to them will be provided in the future.

The idea of archiving is a valuable one, and reinforces Linzer's most important message: that women's stories are not just our own personal affair, they illuminate our contribution to our families and our communities, and hence belong not just to us, but to the world. They must be shared, they must find some sort of permanent form (as in print or oral recording), and they should be archived in a safe place that makes them accessible to those who have a reason to read them. It's a tall order, isn't it? But Linzer's book gives us a useful road map, and Story Circle has created its own journey. Together, we can find the courage to keep going.



I found my voice, and I won't lose it again...Silence is not our protection. Society will only learn and heal if our voices are heard. Let everyone hear you. Let them know who you are. You must be willing to share your stories.

—Anita Hill

quoted in *Cameo Life Stories*

Our shared stories can often help educate others about the present as well as the past, and they can suggest ways that society might improve its ability to respond to the problems of women and children.

—Deborah Linzer

And what about the stories of women who have pushed for change?...We find inspiration not just in the biographies of famous women, but in the actions of 'ordinary' women who demonstrate compassion, courage and perseverance in their activism.

—Deborah Linzer

Our stories, when shared, can be the catalyst to enlighten men who might otherwise remain in the dark...Men will never learn the truth about real women in general and about the women in their lives unless we tell them the truth.

—Deborah Linzer



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!

V-E Day

The first Monday in May—May 7, 1945—all German forces had surrendered to the Allies! At last! That awful war in Europe was over! School was closed the following day as the country celebrated Victory-in-Europe Day, (V-E Day). With nowhere else to go, we dashed through the streets to meet at school. The girls stood awkwardly together, stealing glances at the boys milling around in their own little groups. Would more of our classmates show up? What was going to happen?

Suddenly it began! Gently at first, just a soft set of lonesome bells tolling from a tall church steeple nearby. Then louder and louder they became. We had never heard anything like it before. Soon it seemed as if the bells were descending from heaven itself. The whole city from the northeast to the southwest and all points in between was reverberating with the joyful, the glorious, the rapturous sound of pealing bells. They burst forth from large stately cathedrals, from modest neighborhood churches and faraway tiny chapels all signaling the official end of the war in Europe.

It didn't take long for our emotions to swell up inside us and for all the barriers to disappear. The boys unashamedly brushed back their tears, the girls sobbed on each other's shoulders. We weren't sure just how it started, but suddenly the boys were hugging girls, and the girls were hugging the boys. Many of us were lost in our own little worlds, wondering how soon brothers, fathers, or other relatives would be home. Sadly some of us had relatives who would never return. We stayed together for what seemed hours, some of us constantly talking and laughing, others quietly saying nothing.

We grew up a little that day, for we had witnessed a very special moment in our lives. That special feeling has remained with us. Even though our meetings have been few and far between, nearly all of them begin with, "Do you still remember V-E Day and the bells—and how we felt? Wasn't that a day?" It was. It is our bridge to the past.

Trudie M. Eklund
Austin TX

Lifetime Bridge Span

Flimsy childhood bridges across murky learning ponds were expected of me by parents and teachers. Reading was traumatic at first—but what joy I experienced when I could read the comics to my baby sister! This provided courage to raise my learning planks onto higher strata of mysterious math and unexplored history. Advanced bridgework transported me through business college into the real world.

War clouds hovered in 1941 while the world balanced on a suspension bridge of uncertainty. Adventure lured me to join war effort excitement at Wright Field, Dayton, Ohio. Pearl Harbor's bombing brought rationing; Mother nurtured a victory garden and rolled Red Cross bandages. Through U.S.O. dances and prolific V-mails I helped boost servicemen's morale.

When War ended in 1945 I remained on the suspension bridge surrounded by Who? When? Where? balloons. Destiny provided answers when I married a veteran whose vaudeville dancing career ceased with the arrival of Uncle Sam's "Greetings." He planned to re-enter the dance world via a teaching path. I was thrilled to join him in this dance of life.

We built a practical, flat pontoon bridge over hollow cylinders, which transported a span of 20 years across my marriage-motherhood memories. Cylinders were added as needed—bearing the weight of ailments, child care, church, scouting, P.T.A. and working-mom duties. There was a happiness cylinder—viewing birthdays and holidays through children's eyes, plus relatively tranquil teen years. A cylinder of sadness, however, bore the weight of my husband's heart attack, related illnesses, and temporary economic disaster.

Later as "empty nesters" we could wander where job opportunities and travel beckoned. Instead of building bridges, we explored them. Quaint European fieldstone bridges, medieval castle drawbridges, stalwart bridges over the Thames in London, the Seine in Paris and across the River Liffey in Dublin.

As my contemporaries depart this world, I'm reminded that there's a mortality bridge—distantly shrouded in mysterious shadows. Faith must see me through that adventure. For now, there are many books to read, stories to write, and dances to dance. That final bridge will just have to wait.

Pat O'Toole
Sun City, Arizona

Nothing you write, if you hope to be good, will ever come out as you first hoped.—Lillian Hellman

A Bridge to Nowhere

By definition, a bridge is a structure that spans a gap or provides passage over a river or a chasm. It connects what is on one side to what lies on the other. It crosses from here to there.

When I first walked across the country's highest suspension bridge in the early seventies, the Royal Gorge Bridge, it went nowhere. It crossed the deep chasm where the Arkansas River flowed and then the road stopped.

During our first years together, we had no need for a bridge. We stepped as one, marching to the beat of the same drum. Then one day, a rift appeared. It seemed tiny, insignificant at first. We did not plan the life-roads that led us to that point. Nor did we plan the gorge opening up between us, inch by silent inch. Then there was another and another until a cold, silent hole stretched between us. Over the years, the walls of the chasm deepened.

Our work served as the staple holding us together those last years. When I retired, the bridge suddenly imploded. And so we embarked on the adventure of divorce. There is no good word for the pain of a friendly separation. So why not call it an adventure?

I am relieved to connect again with the woman I once knew. And yet I grieve over those years we might have shared as they roll by un-lived.

One day I sought to test a thread no longer taut. He felt the tug and heard my voice once more across the years, a brief, sweet moment from another time.

These days there is no tangible connection between us. Just a few email notes shared between old friends. Some say it is a foolish friendship, that it doesn't go anywhere. But it does. It goes from here to there. It provides continuity from the present to the past.

Jackie Woolley
Hutto TX



Grief

The doe was alone. Last year she had been accompanied by two does, two bucks, three fawns, and three brand new babies. Altogether, there had been eleven deer on the property.

This year the doe was alone. She prowled the grounds. She would stand motionless in the grass. I could see her sniff. Did she hope to catch the elusive, long gone scent of the other deer?

The doe is not tall enough to eat the rambling roses that grow high on the steel fence. Last year the bucks would stand munching them all until there were none left. This year the dissolute roses dominate.

Where were the other deer? That was my question. Did I imagine it, or was that her question also? I felt, that since hunting season had just passed, the herd had been wiped out, save for herself.

The doe returned over and over to locations she and the others had traversed last year as if, if she were faithful to the places they had inhabited, the rest of her family would reappear. She was motionless, pensive, seeking, faithful, loyal, but always alone. There was no one to assuage her grief; no one to companion her; no one to share memories.

I am that doe. I have come back to our property alone. My mother and father have died; my two six-and-a-half-foot tall siblings, Ted and Joe, are dead.

I return repeatedly to sites where we had been together, where we had grown up. In all those places there had been laughter, tears, stories, struggles, companionship, and memories. I sniff the terrain to catch their odor. I search the ground for their tears. Somehow, I feel that if I am faithful to our land, to the places we've been, to our ancestral home, I will see them again and connect with them. I will inhale their fragrance.

No longer will I be alone. I will be their memory. I will be their story. I will be their bridge from the past to the future.

Sister Mary Sullivan, r.c.
Highland Park NJ

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:

Songs to Sing—December, 2002 (due October 15)

Tracks and Trails—March 2003 (due January 15)

Buds and Blossoms—June 2003 (due April 15)

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

More True Words

Crying Uncle

Uncle. There, I've said it. Uncle. I'm giving in and admitting defeat. It didn't take much for me to buckle under. No, not at all. Just the first 23 days of the year 2002. Twenty-three days in which my mother is diagnosed with terminal stage-four kidney cancer. Twenty-three days in which some low-life degenerate stole my identity and is going around the country attempting to purchase things I only dream about, all in my name, of course. Twenty-three days in which my sister suffered unbearable pain and finally had her gall bladder removed, thereby gifting me with four extra children until she's back on her feet. Twenty-three days in which my youngest daughter's breathing became so labored I had to take her to the hospital for breathing treatments and then continue them at home every three hours. Twenty-three days that included seizures for my littlest angel as well. Twenty-three days waiting for the Boeing layoffs, with all the stress that entails. No, we didn't receive one but I'd sure like to thank all those Boeing executives for the waves of stress they're making their employees ride each month until the layoffs are announced. Twenty-three days in which all four children have had bronchitis, flu and four ear infections. But the last straw, the topper that made me cry Uncle in hopes of appeasing whatever dark force that appears to have us in its cross-hairs, is that Allison was diagnosed with pneumonia today.

Okay, okay, okay. So crying Uncle won't make everything perfect. I know that. I'm just trying to figure out how to make this all stop. Crying Uncle usually made my brother stop tickling me until I couldn't breathe. I think it should work that way in the real world, too. There ought to be some sort of international sign you could make and everything that was annoying you would immediately come to a halt. A time out, if you please. If anyone out there knows that particular signal, please let me know. It's high time I signaled for a time out.

Pamela Troeppel Kinnaird
Seattle WA

Stepping Into the New

I have built many bridges in my long life, bridges I think of as "internal bridges," bridges I needed to build and cross at important turning points. I think about these bridges now and realize they took some patience and fortitude to build; they were not built in a day. I think of them as times of transition... those times when I became aware I needed to make some sort of change, do something different but wasn't yet ready to do it. I did not know what might greet me on the other side of the bridge and so I postponed building it. Instead, I would talk myself into keeping the status quo, talk myself into leaving well enough alone. But, in time, "well enough" was no longer good enough. My need for some sort of change

continued to rumble inside. Sometimes I wanted a change though I had no idea what that change might be. But I found that if I pushed myself into making a change, something new and more to my liking would appear.

I feel today that I received help—help from some invisible force which gave me the courage to build the bridge when the time was right, and to cross it, step by difficult step. Some of these bridges were little ones; others much bigger. Cutting off my long hair which I had had for as long as I could remember was a small bridge (although it didn't seem so at the time). Leaving my marriage was a bigger bridge. Both were important. The smaller bridges I managed to build gave me the courage to embark on the larger ones.

I believe that life consists of building bridges and that, if we listen, if we slow down and stay still long enough, we will feel and hear the encouragement we need to change something that needs to be changed, and to build the bridge which will bring that necessary change about. It is the building of our bridges, in my view, that makes life the beautiful adventure it is.

Duffie Bart
Monterey CA

Healing Bridges

Why does anybody build a bridge if it isn't to allow people to connect with one another? Family relationships are complicated and some hurts seem too deep to heal. But similar to an illness, without medication to heal a person could die. Without a bridge some emotional wounds might never heal.

In June I went to my father's family reunion. My father is 82 and we have never been close. Last summer when I visited him it was my first trip to Oklahoma since he moved there 26 years ago. Our visit was stilted and uncomfortable but I was doing what I could to make his final years easier.

This year I planned to include more family in an effort to relax the atmosphere. My sister from Seattle and my 44 year-old daughter agreed to go with me. My daughter had not seen her grandfather for about 20 years and because he had a recent stroke she felt if she didn't go now she may never see him again. I didn't have high hopes of a successful visit but I knew the additional people would help.

My father and my daughter became instant friends. She had no historical memories to get in her way. He was very pleased and excited to have somebody to show the sights of his home state to and to listen to his childhood memories. I had the opportunity as a third-party observer to see my father as a person with a good sense of humor, a man that is getting older but is still determined to live every moment he has left to the fullest.

When I left his house this year I was content. We had a good visit and somehow we finally made our peace. If he dies this year both of us will know we are once again a family. My daughter acted as our bridge and we can all be thankful for our good fortune.

Judy Watkins

Feathering

within the depths
 lies fertile loam
 embraced by slumber dark
 awaiting birth
 until slight light
 ignites the resting spark

a tiny crack
 illuminates
 a pin point opens wide
 shoots of white
 reach toward pale green
 imagine lighter side

in cycles old
 as nature's breath
 white and black entwine
 nod kindly to each other
 light needs dark to shine

Illia Thompson
 Carmel Valley CA

Building a Bridge of Understanding

I had heard of the famous Charles Bridge before I went to Prague. I had even seen pictures of the bridge, but I was not prepared for the day that I actually walked across the bridge myself. We were in the Czech Republic and being escorted around Prague by a wonderful Czech historian and his wife.

Each day of our tour took us through more than a thousand years of history and architecture. On our way to the Charles Bridge we walked along the Vltava River and saw ancient churches, universities, and buildings dating all the way back to 400 A.D. All the while we were looking up at the magnificent buildings of the Prague Castle rising solidly on the hill above us.

At the entrance to the Charles Bridge we joined others who were strolling leisurely across the bridge. On both sides of us loomed huge statues of saints. Some of the saints, like St. Christopher and St. Francis, were familiar to us. Other saints were directly linked to Czech history, like St. John Nepomuk, murdered for opposing the king and then thrown off the Charles Bridge. Another was St. Wenceslas, the first Christian king, who was murdered by his brother. A third was his grandmother, St. Ludmilla, the country's first female Christian martyr, strangled as she knelt at prayer through the order of her daughter-in-law.

As we heard the story of each statue, we learned about the unsettling history of this stormy country, so grounded in the European history of Christianity. After crossing the Charles Bridge, we entered the Prague Castle area with churches and buildings from every period of the country's history, including the office of the president of the Czech Republic.

Once again we had the sense of taking a step back in time, thanks to our lovely surroundings.

I yearn to return to the Czech Republic, but not without our Czech friends who worked to build for us a bridge of understanding of the complex history of their land—a history spanning more than a thousand years!

Pat Flathouse
 Austin, Texas

Bridge Temporarily Closed

To build or not to build, that is the question. I have always believed in building bridges to form relationships, feeling that it was a moral order—you must do it to have a fulfilling life. Isn't the bond between women so strong and satisfying that our lives are empty without it? Now I am conflicted!

Over the last 15 years I have worked hard to build a bridge of friendship with my friend "Chloe." I tolerated her idiosyncrasies and quirks and prided myself on the fact that she was one of my "eccentric" friends. I happily did all the things to build a strong bridge, making soup when she was sick, being available when she had anxiety attacks over her divorce and her parenting.

She built her side of the bridge by listening to my life's frustrations and encouraging me in my newest endeavors. Sitting on the farmhouse porch, watching the cows meander home at day's end, our friendship seemed sealed.

However, throughout these 15 years, cracks appeared in this friendship. By not addressing them, I thought I was being a tolerant friend. I looked the other way. I would come home upset after one of her angry outbursts, feeling that I must be too sensitive. She would fly off the handle if I said the wrong thing, or scold me for a mistake.

Still I decided to overlook these verbal tantrums because that is "just Chloe." Now I am at an impasse. After a tirade over the telephone because I had given her name to a salesman, she hung up on me. She called several days later, not to apologize, but to inform me that she was over her "snit." I, however, feel that this damage may be too large to repair. Feeling as if I had been verbally abused and still feeling the sting of her words, there has been no more contact for months. My question is, "Do I repair this bridge?" or shall I let this emotional span that has existed between two lives just fall into total disrepair, crumble and wash away in a river of silence?

Ellen McDevitt
 Doylestown PA

I've given my memoirs far more thought than any of my marriages. You can't divorce a book.—Gloria Swanson

And More True Words

Building Bridges to Last

9/11/2001. That fateful day! The horror of it! The impossibility that this could be happening even as we watched the TV.

Now, we are gathered together in the grassy courtyard of our Statton Park community—80 plus of us: husbands and wives, grandmothers, grandfathers, many children, single men and women—in memoriam of the deaths and destruction we all have been witnessing.

It is a cultural plurality of souls who are assembled here, silently, looking around at our neighbors, wondering, waiting for a word to tie us together, to tell us what to do now. “Who are we?” I muse, looking around as we spontaneously form a circle, side by side.

Surely Christians, I muse, for we are deep in the Bible Belt and Baptist country, but certainly some atheists and agnostics, too. My friend Dorothy is Jewish. Eva and Monika are Catholic. Sudha is Hindu, there, in her bright orange sari. The Muslims I identify by their white, full-length clothes and the women and girls with their hair covered. The Chinese families from my building are there, and I, a member of New Thought.

Many of us have brought candles, which we now light. The children are particularly impressed with this, for the day is darkening into dusk, and the candlelight, softly glowing, is comforting, presaging something important. Slowly, hesitantly, one after another, we start to speak, expressing our anguish, asking for help from a Higher Source, pleading that we do not become terrorists ourselves, in retaliation. The people who speak seem to feel some relief at venting their emotions.

Then someone starts to sing softly *God Bless America*. Since many people don't know the words, we sing it over again, this time loudly and clearly. There are tears, then there is pressing of hands, patting of shoulders, hugging, much conversation. For this moment in time we are one. May it last!

Cora Stephens
Austin TX

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Girdles, Pumps and Purses

In that solitary, lonely house where the living had long departed the drawers were the first to be opened revealing layers and layers of girdles yearning to speak of dimpled, unruly flesh restrained harnessed, cosseted, contained.

So that no taint of sexuality might stain the demure persona.

The closet floors and even the doors were hampered by racks to present, to protect, to display the rainbow of footwear in every color, hue and tone insoles curled, insolent and sassy from years of disuse.

The eighty-eight pairs of pumps stood ready on command to carry my mother in a fashionable statement into the world which dictated that fine Southern ladies were shod to match their attire.

The closets held yet plastic conveyances designed with convenient slots for the matching purses to rest in place. Upon closer examination, they contained remnants of those long past events.

The program from the Republican women, the ticket from the matinee, the small notebooks filled with lists of things to do, the stacks of appointment cards for doctors' appointments to tend the aging flesh.

These artifacts, these relics spoke poignantly of my mother's life and a generation of Southern women aspiring to be “nice” and to follow the rules, the norms, the customs.

To be so perfectly cosseted, coiffed with matching pump and purse that they would be thought of as refined.

Yet her restless soul yearned for liberation, for understanding, for deeper community.

Instead a life spent living neatly between the lines, yet longing to be bold ribald color spread dramatically across the page.

This yielded neuroses and physical pain, manifestations of unmet suffering.

Her longing expressed as rage or weeklong migraines that held the family under siege.

Tipping around, as though on eggshells, so not to disturb the soul in agony.

Now, a generation later, I make peace with my mother.

My heart fills with compassion for a life defined by Southern mores, girdles, pumps and purses.

Linda O'Neal
Boone NC

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The Carol Landherr LifeWriting Competition

The Story Circle Network is proud to present the winners of its third annual Life-Writing Competition, dedicated to the memory of Carol W. Landherr, an enthusiastic life-writer who inspired others to write and share their stories. Thirty talented memoirists submitted their work on this year's topic—"Who Am I?"—which invited them to reflect on the nature of identity. We offer our thanks to all who submitted entries, and our congratulations to our four winners: **Linda Joy Myers, Jackie Woolley, Mary Jo Doig, and Lisa Shirah-Hiers.** And thanks, also, to the hard-working team of judges who determined the winners.

Who Am I?

by *Linda Joy Myers*

I look at my face in the mirror under the glare of the bathroom light. My fingers pull at lines to smooth them. I lean in closer, light scatters across the face in the mirror—could it really be mine? I gaze at the image through half-closed eyes—now it's the face in my dreams. I'm always thirty in my dreams—is that who I really am? I'd never go back to thirty, to all the not-knowing, pain in the stomach, confusion. But in my dreams, the lithe woman (is she me?) stretches in her black leotard, the quick fire within is certain and sure that her attractiveness—yet she always doubts it—is reflected in the eyes of that black haired guy in the tie-dyed T-shirt, those feline brown eyes promise...

Trying to be brave, I look at myself to see who I am now; it's like practicing this aging thing. Lines intersect with my lips, rivulets of ever-deepening lines cross my forehead, streak down my left cheek. I suppress the clutch in my stomach. Old, the voice says. I lean into the light of truth—my face at seventy, or maybe eighty. And then I see her—my great-grandmother staring back at me. I remember her. She was so old she was beyond time, she was eighty and I was eight. Wrinkles made a map on her face, wrinkles were etched on every inch of her skin, but her body was fierce as she tore at the weeds in her garden, or axed the kindling for the wood cook stove, as fierce as her wiry eyebrows that jabbed in every direction above deep-set eyes. Those are my eyebrows now.

A voice speaks to me. "Now you're real, you're who you've been meant to be. All your life, you have been becoming this. The old woman who lived within you is emerging from the chrysalis of youth."

At night, the thirty-year-old dances, wild hippie dances with flashing strobe lights, she falls in love, hands stroke her ribs and slim legs. Sex...sex and desire rise and infuse a youthful body—the woman in my dreams lives as I never did, unashamed of her sensuality, taking her smooth face for granted, as if it were real.

An ache arises from bone, I kneel and push up with a grunt, hearing my great-grandmother and my grandmother's friends gasp, "Oh, my arthritis." Their old bones creak, but I am a child, and they are other, old women in their sixties. My small legs run and my arms rotate like windmills as the fresh summer air hits my face. I'm nine, and jump on my tiptoes to look in the fogged-up mirror. I try to see if I look like my mother, but no, her face is smooth with powder, rouge. Lipstick's perfect on lovely lips. I peek at her around the corner of the hall door—my stomach flutters. Mama—I forget her face when she's gone all year. She's here now, fighting with Gram, her mother. If you

put all our faces alongside each other, you can see all of us, different generations of the same face. Only they are prettier than I am, I'm always the ugly duckling next to them.

"You're beautiful," whispered the man with the camera. I want to believe him. I am twenty-six, an art model, long legs stretched out on the chenille bedspread in drawing class, trying not to blush, trying to relax, but sweat drips down my ribs and the Baptist minister shouts in my ear so loud I have to look up to see if anyone else in the room hears him. "Sinner, bad, bad, bad. How dare you show yourself like this?" But I sit in the same position for thirty minutes like a good model, ignoring the numbness in my left elbow and hip. I watch them look at me as they peer over their drawing pads. I'm a collection of curves, lines, and shadows. I'm an abstract painting of shapes and colors, put together just so. "Suite Judy Blue Eyes" plays on the tape player, Judy Collins' "Wildflowers." My long hair brushes the arched bone of my hip, and I wonder how this can be beauty when I'm so confused.

Yesterday I noticed the skin on my arms in a certain light. It's not my skin, this alligator hide, it's the skin of the old women in my childhood. I lived with a grandmother, her friends, and her sisters as they grew into their seventies—all of them with encroaching wrinkles, knobby elbows, and corns on their toes. They were without guile, all except my grandmother and mother, who peered into mirrors and mourned aloud their lost youth. "I can't believe it, I can't believe it. Oh, will you look at this," Gram used to whisper as she held the circular hand mirror. It framed the face of an old woman. "I don't even know myself." In old sepia photographs of her, dark eyes of a young self gaze out at the world. Little did she know then that her daughter would abandon her daughter, just as she had done. Little did she know that she would curl upon a couch and smoke herself to death, die of a brain tumor, as would her daughter, faces overrun with wrinkles and sorrow and regret.

I look in the mirror, touch my skin with fingers that are wrinkling. I peer and prod, and that voice calls to me: "You are still you, you have more of yourself than ever. You are real. You are not them."

My body feels whole. I am alive, the pains of youth are gone. I snap off the light and whisper, "thank you."

Linda is from the San Francisco Bay Area. She teaches *Autobiography as Therapeutic Healing* workshops and offers weekly memoir groups. She presented "Women, Autobiography, and Spirituality" at the StoryCircle Conference in 2002. Her book *Becoming Whole—Writing Your Healing Story* is due in September. Her passion for memoir came from sharing a featherbed in Iowa with her great-grandmother, and a childhood of listening to stories of the older generations.

Who Am I?

by Jackie Woolley, Austin TX

I am a survivor, a woman who writes stories to make sense of a life that often makes no sense at all. My first stories go back to those times when I was a young girl on a farm in North Texas, when survival was a Prime Objective. I must have grown up in the same town, and maybe even in the same family, as Larry McMurry, Larry L. King, and Horton Foote. We all seem to have shared tough land, tough religion, and tough times. We all hail from small, mythic, Texas towns like Bountiful or Archer City or Odell.

My writing started with memories of my mother, although she never whispered in my ear that I should be a writer. She was not creative, unless you count the ways she knew how to survive. She made survival an art. She fought boll weevils and floods and droughts and the sickness that took away my father; she patched and mended and made do; and she taught me to keep on when there was nothing else to do.

I learned how to read when I was five years old and thought it was pure magic how those funny marks on a piece of paper could transform my life into a fairy tale. But my mother considered reading a waste of good daylight hours when I could be feeding the Rhode Island Reds, weeding the carrots and onions, or mopping the kitchen floor.

"Those books you read aren't real," she said. "This is real." The sweep of her hand took in the house where Daddy lay dying and beyond the yard to the cotton fields. Mother didn't need to speak out loud very often. Most days she didn't need to do more than look and sigh to convey her thoughts. And if you knew my mother, you'd know the misery of a glance that speaks louder than words.

My daddy was a sharecropper on a cotton farm in the early thirties and forties near the Red River in North Texas. I was only seven when he died, and I hardly knew him. He'd been dying as long as I could remember. This early awareness of mortality shaped my sensibilities and gave my life a tentative aura. Nothing in life seemed permanent. We were all just passing through.

Left with a stack of medical bills and four young girls, Mother worked all day and worried half the night, figuring out how she could stay on the farm without Daddy. She knew how to raise cantaloupes and chickens, but she couldn't drive a car, much less plow straight rows with the John Deere. "I never thought I'd need to know these things," she cried. "Oh, if only I had a better education."

We had little time for mother-daughter talks, but she told me while we picked okra and shelled black-eyed peas that when she was back in Kansas, a young miss in dotted-swiss pinafores, she wanted to work with her papa in his grocery store. "I'm good with figures," she told him. "Better than my brothers." But her papa would allow no such thing. So, her mama taught her to crochet lace doilies for the parlor, to put up spiced peach pickles, and to play "I Dream of Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair" on the piano when the boys came a-courting. "It's all a woman needs to know," her papa said. My mother, who died in her sleep at eighty-four, talked about this with great anguish all of her life.

We moved into town where Mother got a job in a boarding house, making yeast rolls, berry cobblers, and pecan pies. I was delighted to have running hot water and be only ten blocks from a

county library of 40,000 books. And to have a blessed, indoor flush toilet.

Having skipped two grades in grammar school, I was not only the youngest at home, but I was also two or three years younger than my classmates as well. I had to run faster, try harder, and last longer. I always felt a little out of breath from trying to keep up.

When I reached high school, I became totally awe-struck with the older girls in my class. They wore pastel sun dresses and White Shoulders cologne. They stood in front of the mirror for hours, fiddling with their Toni-permed hair and talking openly about boys' *you-know-whats* without blushing. They practiced putting on blue eye shadow, even though they weren't allowed to wear it. They spent their summer afternoons draped around the country club pool, sipping soft drinks, and posing as Esther Williams. They slow-danced in the evenings to Frank Sinatra and Nat King Cole. They made C's and D's in geometry, but no one seemed to mind. They played tennis like they suffered from eternal spring fever and lumbago, making it the only game I could play with them and win.

I watched those Big Girls with consummate envy. They held all of the class offices and were voted best *everything*. They played the piano and the flute and sang in the school choir ever so casually, as if they picked up the talent on their way home from the A & W root beer stand. During football season, the bouncy-haired cheerleaders waved their pompoms and turned cartwheels across the field before leading out the home team. Then, at half-time, the high-stepping twirlers strutted in their white boots with the marching band, swishing their satin skirts and tossing their batons in the air so easily it hurt me to watch. Oh, how I wanted to be like them—any *one* of them—more than anything else in the world. I wanted to be anyone except who I was. Their life seemed easy and magical, and they didn't know the meaning of "survival." Complete with a mother and father, their families looked picture-perfect. Even though I hated feeling disloyal to Mother, I envied the carefree life of my classmates.

With stars in my eyes, I walked from school to the boarding house, where Mother worked over her dough board. I day-dreamed of some distant day when I would miraculously be the football sweetheart and become senior class president. I helped out in the dining room by serving iced tea and coffee and drying the dishes. Then I walked home with my mother in the warm twilight, smelling the lilacs and hearing the kids play Annie Over. During that fourteen-block stretch, Mother talked about her oft-repeated prayer that she would be able to raise her girls to adulthood. She was horrified that anyone might think she needed assistance. Being the only daughter still at home, I was in a big hurry to help her prayer come true. I sat up until midnight and practiced my Gregg Shorthand and typing and looked to the day I would leave this town behind. I would fly away to a wonderful adult world where life would be perfect and easy, to a place where survival would be just a word in the dictionary.

Jackie Woolley got her writing start as a reporter for her high school newspaper. Her articles have been published in such national publications as *Christian Science Monitor*, *Off Duty Magazine*, *Christian Herald*, *Sunday Digest* and *Lutheran Di-*

gest. Her fiction and poetry appeared in college literary publications and *Sunshine* magazine. Word Books published her non-fiction book, *All the Things You Aren't...Yet*, in 1980. While completing her M.A. in literature/creative writing, she co-edited *Bayosphere*. For the next twenty years, she edited engineering reports. She continues to write books, putting them in her writing trunk until she decides what to do with them.



Acing Life 301

by *Mary Jo Doig, Raphine VA*

I used to feel that I'd seriously flunked Life 101.

I begin 101 soon after graduation, when my high school sweetheart, Cliff, and I have just broken up. I spend a lonely summer checking groceries in our small-town supermarket until late August, when my mom and I pack up the blue Chevy wagon and drive upstate, to S.U.N.Y., Oneonta, NY. I'm insecure and shy, but have decided I want a degree in English education because I love reading and writing.

My first transcript registers humble C's. My second records four B's and a C. I'm forming friendships, dating, and I belong to a few campus clubs. My third semester brings a letter from Cliff, now in the Navy. Toss it away unopened, my instinct says, but curiosity wins out. He's sorry about our break-up and can we mend our relationship? So naive, I do not yet know that if a relationship doesn't work the first time, it rarely does the second.

Evidently a secure relationship is my highest priority, for a year later I leave college to marry him. The events that follow this decision—well, some are sweeter than honey and many more bitter than vinegar.

Within a year, our daughter is born. Her lifespan is a brief flicker of eight days after two operations fail. The next three years bring two fine, healthy sons but before year five, Cliff has disappeared with another woman. With two babies, no spouse, no child support, no job and no degree, I begin to work days (checking groceries again at minimum wage) and to drink too much nights, for several months. Then a moment of truth clearly shows me I am heading for addiction and I screech to a halt. I will *not* stumble down Alcohol Road. My father has already shown me where it leads.

Thus, at age 26, I begin Life 201. It certainly is harder to fit college into your life when you are a working, poor, single mom, but my mother always said I did everything the hard way. Nevertheless I make dean's list and get that English degree!

I decide to raise my sons in the lovely, rural Catskills and, strongly drawn to human services, become a caseworker. Then I reacquaint with a former schoolmate. We are just beginning a serious commitment when he is killed in a violent accident.

Time passes somehow and a few years later, I am planning to build a small cabin in a wooded setting near a stream, where my sons can enjoy those natural surroundings they so love. A friend introduces me to Don and we begin to date, then we fall in love. Shortly before our marriage, my youngest son, Keith, and I are hit head-on one snowy night. Keith does not survive his injuries. Don, Chip and I quietly become a family of three.

Four years later Polly is born and then Susan. I am so content and happy, thriving at being a wife and partner in our business, a stay-at-home mom, an active church and community member. And I often say I'm content to live out my days with my family in this beautiful part of God's good earth.

Quite inauspiciously, however, Life 301 arrives about fifteen years into my second marriage. I do not seek this journey into my dark side; rather, life brings it to me. Stirrings begin after my father's death a few years earlier and become full-blown after my uncle's death. My mind and body are telling me strange, terrifying things that I can connect to nothing. Clearly, something is very wrong.

I find a therapist—Sallie—who is incredibly patient and talented, and I gradually uncover a whole other part of myself, a small, shattered, lost self, split off by the trauma of childhood incest. I enter the world of clinical depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Prozac, long-term therapy, and (voluntary) admission to a psychiatric ward when I believe I cannot go on living. I often feel I am in the middle of a dark, raging ocean with wave after wave battering me.

Sometimes I fervently wish my life would return to the way it used to be. Yet once this voyage is started, there is nowhere to go but forward—or die spiritually. Painfully and ever-so-slowly, I work through the terror, the rage, the horrific betrayal, gradually embracing and integrating my long-separated young self. By the time I complete Life 301 several years later, I no longer feel that I failed 101. I better understand the choices I made back then, that they seemed to meet my deepest longings at the time.

As the stormy waves lessen, I see occasional blips of light on shore. I am changing: I feel stronger, more confident, more peaceful. Some unhealthy life-long behaviors and perceptions are finally making sense to me. And as I start to emerge on the other side of darkness, I wonder at times if my marriage will survive. In the end, when Don and I finally face the question, it does not.

A year after our divorce is final, I resign from my long-term, highly-demanding profession because it is no longer fulfilling. In fact, I cut loose from everything familiar and move to a warmer climate. On my 58th birthday, an age when many women have retired or soon will, I sign a six-month lease for a tiny cabin in the woods of the Blue Ridge Mountains. I furnish it sparsely, for I am here to re-create my life. I work by day but keep my precious other hours open for exploration and growth. The tools I use during these two cabin years of solitude cost little: daily meditation and affirmations, reading, journaling, time nurturing my relationships with my children, time with my cat Hilary, exercise, time with nature. I join Story Circle Network and become linked with talented women throughout the country. My personal work and my circle writing begin profound changes to my life.

Before Life 301, I would have answered the question of "Who Am I, Anyway?" by describing myself in terms of my roles: wife, mother of three, active church and community member, avid reader, writer, quilter, biker, preparer of healthy foods, successful professional. Today I answer differently: I am still most of the above, but, more importantly, I am a woman who has worked very hard to find my authentic self, to find

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deep, inner peace and rich spirituality. I live quite simply, fully in the moment, and seek to bring kindness, honesty, and compassion—in healthy ways—to all whom I meet. I remain a human services professional, but writing is also my passion. I know now I have much to share and skills with which to do so. In my worn paperback copy of *Folk Medicine*, there's a healing beverage I've often made of honey, vinegar and warm water. Looking back, I see now that when vinegar flooded into my life, somehow there was always some honey for the healing needed to continue on with my journey.

And, so—though I often stumbled through Life 301—I've given myself an A+ for the course. Now, another beginning: Life 401.

Mary Jo Doig writes, "My life-long passion for mysteries led me to the Story Circle Network, which I joined in January, 2001. Within the year I understood what a stunning gift I had given myself. Presently I belong to Writer's eCircle 2, Risky Writer's eCircle 9, and Reading eCircle 1. The women with whom I share stories, feedback and book reviews have enriched my life in more ways than I could have imagined. In February, 2002, I bought a small home in Raphine, VA and bid an emotional farewell to my cabin. I have completed a young adult novel and am presently writing a memoir about my two years of cabin solitude."



There's Always Brahms by Lisa Shirah-Hiers, Austin TX

I wore my white tights and my best dress—the long one with an off-white background and an intricate pattern of sage green leaves. In the gymnasium of the old school I played an arrangement from Dvorak's *New World Symphony* and a Chopin prelude. When I rose from the piano, the audience of teachers and parents applauded vigorously. I felt proud, happy and loved. I was nine years old.

On the way home I asked my mother "Is there a job where you play the piano and people clap for you?"

"Yes, honey. That's called a concert pianist."

"I want to do that, Mommy. I want to be a concert pianist."

I lived then in a quiet and introspective world of my own, dreaming. When I practiced, I lost myself in the music, and when it was finished, I bowed gracefully, imagining the thunderous applause. I dreamed of pretty formal dresses, world tours and a tall, dark man awaiting me in the wings. I entered the Lawrence Conservatory of Music in the fall of 1983.

I majored in piano performance, but soon changed to composition when I realized that I wanted to write music as well as play it. If performers were lauded, composers were held in absolute awe. Whenever I announced my major, people looked astonished and grew tongue-tied. I thrived on their view of me as special, gifted and talented. I craved the outside approval as I had craved the applause when I was nine. It was through others' reactions to me that I knew myself.

Music for me had always been as much about carving out an identity as it was about a love of the art. But the love was genu-

ine. I had a true passion for Bach and Villa-Lobos and Brahms. I hoped it was enough.

My grades in theory were good, and the school soon recruited me to teach ear-training and sight-singing. I discovered that I loved teaching as much as I loved music. By the end of my junior year I knew what I wanted to do. I would earn a doctorate and become a professor. My mother was ecstatic. Finally her dream-prone daughter had selected something reachable. I entered the University of Texas at Austin in 1988.

I had hoped a love of and talent for music and teaching were enough. They were not. The trouble began when I was finishing my Master's thesis—a wind quintet in three movements. I was overworked that semester, with a full-time job organizing a music conference and a full load of doctoral courses. My writing slowed down. I just couldn't get the last movement right. My professor had no sympathy for my schedule or my fatigue. He continually harassed me, suggesting I change majors, dogging me to write better and faster, and finally embarrassing me with a joke insinuating a sexual liaison between me and another professor. As I discovered later, he had a pattern of sexually harassing and discriminating against women, and a reputation for squeezing students he didn't like out of the program. Somehow I had made a powerful enemy. I was deeply in debt, exhausted and depressed. Although I completed my Master's, I was warned not to try finishing my doctorate. I quit.

This experience was even more devastating than it might have been because it threatened my fragile identity. My sense of myself as a musician had been too dependent on what my professors and peers thought. That quest for approval had become more important than the music. When I lost the approval, I lost the ability to compose. I just froze. I was tormented by self-doubt and recrimination. If I was not a musician, who was I?

The next ten years were the hardest of my life. For a while I taught piano lessons and worked as a radio announcer on a classical music station. But I couldn't pay my enormous student loans. Those debts and family obligations made it impossible to transfer to another graduate program. I was stuck. Finally, I took a secretarial job. When my husband got a large raise, we decided to start the family we had delayed for so long because of my career. In March of 1999 we had a baby girl and I became a stay-at-home mom.

I have delighted in my daughter at the same time that I grieved my lost career. Being home with Sarah has given me the time I needed for reflection. Rearing a young child grounds me in the day-to-day immediacy of life. I realize now how fragile my sense of self had become. My ambitious career dreams had overshadowed my deep self, the soul that is not defined by what we do or the roles we play.

I would not have chosen failure as a path to myself. I would not have wished the pain of lost dreams nor the insecurity of a life without outside acclaim. I would not have chosen this long and painfully anonymous road, but I have learned to appreciate the sacredness of the landscape. When the audience had left and the stage lights dimmed, I found in the silence and darkness a special brand of peace. When I stopped worrying what others thought of me, I discovered the richness of my own thoughts and opinions and could finally make the self-determined choic-

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"An inspiring, inspiriting weekend...now I know how to tell my story, and what's more, I can even imagine myself actually writing it!"—a participant

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

*with Susan Albert, Carolyn Blankenship, Catherine Cogburn,
Judith Helburn, Donna Remmert, and Paula Yost*

Telling, Sharing, and Shaping Our Stories

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

Saturday, October 5 & Sunday, October 6, 2002

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

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

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

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

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

There's Always Brahms....

es that have shaped my life into something lovelier than my old lofty dreams. No, this path is not what I would have chosen, but it is just what I needed. I know now that I am not only a thinker and a writer and a musician, but a lover of children and cats and birds and gardening, not only a wife and mother, but a soul that soars when I listen to rain on the roof, my daughter's chuckle and my husband's low, sweet voice. I dig among the daisies and I am grounded. I enjoy a quiet cup of coffee while my little Sarah sleeps and I am grateful. And at the end of a busy day, when the house is clean and the bills written and the groceries put away, there's always Brahms.

Lisa Shirah-Hiers graduated *summa cum laude* with a Bachelor's In Music Theory/Composition from Lawrence University Conservatory of Music in 1988. She received a Master's in Composition from the University of Texas at Austin in 1993. She has worked as a piano teacher, radio broadcaster, writer, secretary, waitress, and even live-in housekeeper. She currently divides her time between caring for her young daughter, gardening, writing and volunteer tutoring through Literacy Austin. She is currently working on several essays, short stories, and a fantasy novel for young adults.

Of Homes and Hearts

In the June issue, we printed Patricia Fiske's poem, but cut off the last line. We're reprinting it here, with our apologies.

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
my heart, ready for occupancy

Take a Bow! Spotighting Our Story Circle Volunteers

Spirit Soaring: Wings of Creativity

We are continuing the stories of some of the special women who have made the Story Circle Network such a stunning success. In this article, we feature Judith Helburn, SCN board member; Coordinator of Stories from the Heart, 2002; writing circle facilitator; and teacher. Story Circle is very grateful to Judith for her long-time support, guidance, and hands-on help—another one of the wonderful women who help to keep the Story Circle dream alive and growing.

If you attended *Stories from the Heart*, our first national conference, we hope you got a chance to meet Judith Helburn, the Conference Coordinator. You might have been in the audience when she made her welcoming remarks, or perhaps you participated in her Friday afternoon seminar: *Spirit Soaring: Wings of Creativity*. But if you didn't get a chance to meet Judith in person, it's probably because she was busy helping other people.

That's the story of Judith's life, it seems: helping other people—and for almost five years now, the Story Circle Network has been on the receiving end of Judith's generous gifts of time and energy. She has been a board member almost since the beginning, served a term as vice president of the board, and contributed to an infinite number of programs and activities.

Judith, a native of Wisconsin, earned her undergraduate and graduate degrees in Education and Library Science at the University of Wisconsin. and worked as a school librarian, public librarian, medical librarian, and medical library researcher. She and her husband Beber moved to Austin TX when he took a position in the UT School of Business, and Judith took time out for her children. In the late 1970s, she served as Assistant Law School Librarian at the University of Texas, and after that, as a Law Library consultant. She also put her library experience to work as a volunteer, helping to set up the library for the Jung Society in Austin TX.

In the early 90s, Judith became involved with Spiritual Eldering, a multi-faith organization committed to the spiritual dimensions of aging and conscious living, and in 1997 was

certified as a Spiritual Eldering instructor. Since that time, she has worked in a variety of educational settings, offering classes and workshops at Beth Israel Congregation, Hospice, the Jung Society, Austin Metro Ministries' Older Adult Connection, the Seton Good Health School, the Deva Foundation, and the Texas Governor's Conference on Aging.

Judith was also an active and creative participant in the Older Women's Legacy Circle Memoir Workshop program, where she facilitated several memoir groups and helped with the evaluation and redesign of the program. In 1998, she made a video called "Getting Off Our Rockers"; currently, she is helping Beth Israel create a video history of the congregation. When Story Circle began offering its Writing From Life Workshops, Judith volunteered to help, and has been a regular facilitator in the workshops. She has a special interest in oral story-telling, and recently led a Be Our Guest program in story-telling for SCN's Austin Chapter. She also leads a regular writing circle for the Austin Chapter.

Judith's many other creative activities have included making and selling bead jewelry and making hand-built pottery. A recent pottery project was a Hanukkah menorah for her granddaughter. She travels frequently, trekking to Thailand, Nepal, and Tibet with friends, and visiting polar bears near the Arctic Circle. On a visit to Zimbabwe with her husband last summer, she had a different adventure, and had to be airlifted to a hospital in Johannesburg, where she sacrificed her appendix. This summer's trip, we hope, won't be quite so dangerous. As we're sweltering in a Texas July, Judith is cooling off in Scotland!

OWL-Circle Austin Plans Fall Activities

Pat Flathouse, director of the Austin Older Women's Legacy Circle Memoir Workshop program, is planning several important activities for the upcoming autumn.

A workshop and get-together for current and former OWL-Circle facilitators will be held in September. The session is designed to let people know what's going on and ask for their help in creating new programs in the Austin area.

One or more OWL-Circle memoir workshops will begin in September. If you are 60 or older and would like to participate, call the number below. Be sure and let your friends know—you don't have to be a member of SCN to attend these workshops.

Pat will have a table at the St. John Neumann's Ministry Fair the last week in August. She and Catherine Cogburn are also starting work on a new OWL workbook for older women who can't attend the OWL workshops but would like to write about their lives. An email newsletter is being planned.

For information about these activities, call Pat at 512-347-7687, or email her at pflat@swbell.net.

LifeWriting Tips....

Best Friends

Take a sheet of paper and list every friend you have had in your life, leaving three or four lines between each name. Now, go back and answer the following questions for each person:

When and how did you meet?

What traits did your friend have?

What were you like before you met?

What were you like after you met?

Are the two of you still in touch?

Write a letter to each friend. Say what s/he meant to you, how s/he influenced your life. Add anything s/he needs to know that you've left unsaid. Journal about your findings and reactions to this activity.

—Margaret Knorr lives in Charleston, WV. Her website is devoted to journaling. www.geocities.com/mairearad. She also teaches journaling workshops at Inspired2Write.com.

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

Truth Be Told

Carol Waid, Suzanne Armistead, and Nathalie Sorrell are now members of a creative new partnership called "Truth Be Told," for which they are seeking non-profit status. Carol, Suzanne, and Nathalie will provide a series of classes and creative experiences based on their own life stories for women in prison. "Stories Worth Telling" (the Story Circle format) is led by Carol and Suzanne. "Telling Your Story" (the public speaking format) is led by Nathalie Sorrell with Mary Alice Davis assisting. The programs are held at the Lockhart Women's Correctional Facility in Lockhart TX. Participants have become Story Circle members through the Sugar Bowl gift program, and have contributed their stories to the True Words from Real Women section of the *Journal*. We all wish you good luck in this new venture, Carol, Suzanne, and Nathalie!

News from our Chapters

Have you noticed the new format of our monthly email newsletters? With the help of chapter officers Melanie Alberts and Carolyn Scheider, Peggy Moody designed colorful, easy-to-read e-letters to replace our old narrative-style letters. Chapter leaders are enthusiastic about the new format, and hope that people will find them more lively and interesting.

The Austin Chapter sponsored a Be Our Guest program in June at the LCRA Colorado Room. Judith Helburn led a fascinating story-writing exercise, based on her collection of picture story-starters. Judith's writing group read from their work. The next Be Our Guest program is scheduled for August 25. PJ Pierce will present her new book, *Texas Wise Women Speak*, just published by the University of Texas Press.

The Internet Chapter continues to grow, with 176 members currently enrolled. The chapter offers 12 writing circles, a reading circle, and various chapter activities. For information, see the chapter's web site, at www.storycircle.org/InetChapter/.

Schmooze the Muse Saturdays

This summer, Story Circle offered three Saturday writing-intensive workshops in the Austin area, led by Carolyn Blankenship ("Goddess in the Mirror: Reclaiming Our Divine Nature"); Donna Remmert ("Dream Writing"); and Susan Albert ("From Memoir to Fiction"). The workshops offered participants plenty of opportunity to explore and share their personal stories, discover some creative new approaches to lifewriting, and schmooze that elusive, reclusive Muse. In fact, the program was so successful that three new Schmoozes will be offered in the fall: Judith Helburn: Looking Back; Looking Ahead (September 14); Donna Remmert: Dream Writing (October 19); and Catherine Cogburn: Give Sorrow Words (November 2). Complete details at www.storycircle.org.

Hillsboro Oregon Story Circles Continue to Meet

Marie Buckley continues to offer four Story Circles a year (Summer, Fall, Winter, Spring) at the Main Street Bookstore, 211 Main Street. Her first group had four women, and enrollment grew to the point where she has had two groups meeting on consecutive nights. Time pressures have required her to cut back, but she is planning to facilitate a group in the fall and hopes also to lead another group, focusing on nature writing, at Jackson Bottom Wetlands, near Hillsboro. Marie edits the Main Street Bookstore newsletter, which includes stories from her Story Circle. For information, contact marie@aracnet.com.

Two Programs in Hicksville, Long Island

Renee Cassese will be presenting two programs this fall, under the auspices of Hicksville Continuing Education. One of the groups is a Story Circle, and the other is a course in memoir-writing for both women and men. These will meet weekly, beginning the second week in September. The Circle will meet every Monday, beginning in September. For details, contact Renee at rnee1000@aol.com

New Austin Circle Begins

Susan Jaeschke (Jazz, as she likes to be called) is leading a new Austin writing Circle at the Millwood Branch Library in northwest Austin. The group will meet on the first Wednesday of the month, from 7-8:45 p.m. For information, contact Jazz at sjazz@austin.rr.com, or 512-335-9517. Round Rock and Georgetown members, this Circle meets just off MoPac and Parmer—close enough for you, too!

Circle Opens in NW Dallas

A new Dallas Circle is meeting every other Wednesday at 1 p.m. in the Barnes & Noble café at I-35 and Hebron, across from Vista Ridge Mall. Led by Heather Young and Sarah Jordan, the Circle currently includes five women who write and share their stories. The group plans to integrate other activities, including field trips to writing/reading events, workshops, and critiques. For information, contact Heather (who has been an SCN member since 1997!) at hmfy@augustmail.com or Sarah at scjordan@mindspring.com. Members in Dallas, Richardson, Carrollton, Flower Mound, and Southlake, this Circle is for you!

There's no Story Circle meeting in your town?

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Start your own Circle!

for information, call 512-454-9833 or
download and print our Story Circle Facilitator's Guide
from www.storycircle.org

Writing the Truth, and Other Fictions....

In our last issue, we told you about a new book that Judy Fettman has self-published, entitled **Chorus Stories**, written for the friends in the choral society with whom she had shared four years of pleasure. In eight personal essays, she chronicled some of their activities and experiences. One of the women who appeared in the book, however, did not like what she read. Now, Judy writes about what can happen when various understandings of the truth collide. Her story illustrates a problem we often ponder at Story Circle: to what extent do our stories belong to us, and when do they become somebody else's story? And what do we do when the other person objects to becoming a character in our story? What do you think? If you'd like to share your thoughts on this subject with our readers, write to china@tstar.net, or to the editor, at Story Circle Journal, PO Box 1616, Bertram TX 78605.

by Judy Fettman

It was early Wednesday afternoon when a well-dressed woman in a business suit knocked at my door. Once again my stomach flipped and sank, just as it had for the past three days at the approach of a car in the driveway or the ring of the phone. "This is a summons to appear in court," I imagined her saying as I walked to the door and tried to swallow my fear.

No, it was only a Mayflower representative come to inventory the furniture to be loaded for our move to San Francisco. My pulse gradually slowed. Such had been my state of fear ever since reading a terse e-mail from one of the seven chorus members to whom I had given a parting gift of my first collection of short stories, *Chorus Stories, Tales of Four Years of Singing with the UMS Choral Union*. She wrote that I did not have the right to invade her privacy, or to "be inaccurate." She said that her personal life is her business, and said that I should have gotten my facts straight.

I was shocked to learn that what was for me a labor of love and was meant to be a joyful expression of our friendship had been interpreted as an invasion of privacy and was causing my friend so much distress. And me? I was puzzled, hurt, angry, and not a little paranoid: my friend is an attorney!

What had I revealed that she was so angry about? Was it the embellishments I had consciously layered onto the realities in order to express the emotional truth? Was it that I didn't disguise her identity and used her actual first name? Was it that I had mentioned that her husband had moved to another state to take an attractive job and that she had chosen not to follow, all common knowledge?

I thought I had carefully anticipated problems. I knew I did not have permission to use some of the photos I scanned from concert programs and so had given the book to only seven close friends. I had considered also giving this book to our conductor to express my appreciation for his years of patience and inspiration, but in the end didn't because I wasn't sure that he would appreciate my sometimes humorous portrayal of him. I had even thought about changing the names, but all eight of us knew each other well (I thought!), and despite name changes we would immediately recognize each other and ourselves. And that was the point--as I was leaving these dear friends behind, to reminisce and laugh about our wacky adventures as we had when they happened to us.

In her email, my attorney friend went on to correct my misinformation, telling me that she did not use milk chocolate in her brownies, or own the book, *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, and that Margie was not her best friend. Ackkkk! "Margie"? Should I have used a pseudonym here as I write this? And while I'm thinking of it, what about the embellish-

ments I've used in this little story? Does it matter that the woman who knocked on my door on Wednesday was not a Mayflower employee, but a Molly Maids supervisor doing a quality check? Does it matter that she was not wearing a business suit? From a writer's point of view it does matter. These details make the story more vivid. They establish early in the story the element of my moving, the context of the gift to friends. I embellished to serve the story. Does it really matter that it isn't literally true? And should I have had permission from the Mayflower lady or the Molly Maid supervisor to include them in this fictionalized memoir piece?

As far as I know my attorney friend is not suing me. But I still smart from her anger and the misunderstanding that my well-intentioned celebration of our relationship has caused. "Maybe I should just stop writing," I thought, "if I can't even share my joyful stories with friends!"

Now with further thought, a little distance, and a good measure of support from Story Circle friends, I will continue to write. But what lessons can we learn from this experience? Should we always get permission from anyone we write about? Should we always disguise characters, even among friends? Should we be careful what we write? (No, no, no! This one is a no-brainer! We don't need to encourage in any way that censor who always lurks in the left hemisphere!) Or maybe we just need to realize that despite our best intentions, in writing memoir (and in other types of writing as well) we may from time to time ruffle a few feathers. Perhaps, in fact, this kind of reaction indicates that we have succeeded in writing the truth.

There is a resolution of this story (a non-resolution, really). I apologized in person to my friend. I gave her a letter explaining the intent of the embellishments. I asked what I could do to mitigate any damage she thought I had done. Once again she responded with a curt e-mail, thanking me for my note but saying that she preferred not to be in touch until she was ready to contact me.

As Susan Albert assures me, "You haven't been a writer until some reader has written you a nasty letter. Welcome to the club...."

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Story Circle Members in Print, On the Web, & in the News

Send news of 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.

The University of Texas Press has just published *P.J.Pierce's* new book, *Texas WiseWomen Speak*. The book includes interviews with 25 well-known Texas women over age 50. It appears in both hardcover and softcover formats.

Linda Wisniewski's essay, "On Tents, Camping and the New York Yankees" will be published in the Home Forum section of the Christian Science *Monitor* on Aug. 15. Linda wrote the piece for the IC's e-circle #9. Linda also won second prize in a Writers Lounge essay contest for "Weeding in the Garden in Love," also written for her e-circle.

Donna Remmert's book, *The Littlest Big Kid*, won honorable mention in the "Life Stories" category for the 2001 Writer's Digest National Self-Published Book Awards competition.

Sr. Mary Sullivan's poem "Cardinal Points" was published in the April "Literature of Spirituality" issue of the literary journal, *Many Mountains Moving*. Her article "A Memory Theater" appeared in the June issue of *Personal Journaling*, in the "Your Turn" column.

Angie Pedersen has just published *The Book of Me: A Guide to Scrapbooking About Yourself*. "The book is a roadmap to creating a book dedicated to your history, your passions, and your dreams," Angie says. Go to www.scrapyourstories.com.

Mary Miller's article, "My Wide World of Sports," appears in the Spring/Summer 2002 edition of *Melpomene Journal*. Mary's article describes the way her four daughters taught her the lessons of life and sport. Mary lives in Lakeland, MN.

Mary Louise Lyman's poem "Summer" was recently published in *Rogue's Gallery*, the annual publication of Rogue Community College in Grants Pass OR.

Cameo Victor has just published a new limited-edition tarot deck. "You don't have to be a Miss Cleo to use it," she says. "The purpose is to learn more about yourself and your inner journey." Read more at www.selfguidedtarot.com.

Trudie M. Eklund's book *Where Are My Hugs*, has been published by Denlinger's Publishers, Ltd., P.O. Box 1030, Edgewater, Florida 32132. The publishers can be reached via www.thebookden.com and entering Trudie's name, or go directly to www.galaxymall.com/retail/eternity/hugs.html.

Lisa Shirah-Hiers of Austin, TX won First Honorable Mention in the Writing Smarter 2002 Contest of the San Gabriel (TX) Writer's League for her essay, "Grandma Wore Pants."

Market Watch: Opportunities for Publication

The Portland Branch of Pen Women announces their Sixteenth Annual Portland Pen Poetry Contest. Contest deadline is November 30, 2002. Rules can be obtained by sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: NLAPW, Portland Branch, % Joan A. McLaren Henson, Contest Chairwoman, 6071 S.W. Prosperity Park Road, Tualatin, Oregon 97062.

INKWELL Magazine: New reading period for Spring 2003 issue. Submit up to 3 unpublished poems, or fiction/nonfiction pieces (5,000 word limit) from October 2002 to January 31, 2003. Inkwell's Fifth Annual Short Fiction Contest (\$1,500 Prize) and Sixth Annual Poetry Competition (\$1000 Prize) will run concurrently this year. Deadline: October 20 postmark for both. Complete submission and contest guidelines available via SASE. Send to Editor, Inkwell Magazine, Manhattanville College, 2900 Purchase St., Purchase, NY 10577.

UNITEDPLANET.ORG Calling for the voices of every nation to submit poetry, fiction, & creative nonfiction addressing cross-cultural understanding, friendship, world unity, and peace. No entry fee. First Prize: \$500 and publication. Deadline: September 15 2002. Submit in native tongue and English by E-mail to voices@unitedplanet.org.

ANTHOLOGY. Seeking experiences of the chronically ill navigating medical/social service systems. Want to illustrate both dismissive and compassionate transactions in the "systems" designed to provide "support." Poems; short, well-written, personal stories. No fee. Deadline: October 1. SASE for guidelines. Giburg, 255 Pearl St., South Hadley, MA 01075

CATHOLICS & Ex-Catholics. Editors seek poems, stories, essays for upcoming anthology: *Some Floating, Some Fallen*. Accepting works by writers in or now out of Catholic faith/grace. Will include both good and bad experiences. Deadline Oct. 15, 2002. See guidelines at www.fountainmountainpress.com or write: FMP, P.O. Box 2521, Orcutt, CA 93457.

Small publisher seeks submissions of novel-length fiction, narrative nonfiction, or literary-themed mystery or biography. Please no poetry, children's books or genre fiction. Please include SASE for return of manuscript. Submit synopsis and writing sample of approximately 50 pages to Quality Words In Print, LLC, P.O. Box 2704, Costa Mesa, CA 92628.

On the Page magazine publishes fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and photo essays that shed light on selected themes. Upcoming themes include Secrets, Cities, and Food. For submission guidelines, themes and deadlines, please visit www.onthepage.org. Send submissions by E-mail to editor@onthepage.org or by regular mail with SASE to PMB #74, 2124 Kittredge St., Berkeley, CA 94704.

Join us for LifeLines

Story Circle's First LifeWriting Retreat, March 28-30, 2003

"What? You mean, there *won't* be a national conference next year? Oh, dear!"

The only complaint we heard at the national conference in February (well, *almost* the only one) was that people would have to wait until 2004 to attend the next conference.

So with that concern echoing in our minds, the Story Circle Board of Directors began to talk about how we might bring people together in 2003. We came up with the idea of a weekend lifewriting retreat, to be held at a lovely, relaxing retreat center in Texas and led by one of the best and most inspirational lifewriting teachers we could find. So here it is, everybody! A dream of a weekend writing retreat, on its way to coming true. All we need now is *you*, and 49 other women to join us for a weekend none of us will ever forget.

LifeLines: A Story Circle LifeWriting Retreat will be held March 28-30, 2003, at Mo-Ranch, near Hunt TX. The weekend will be led by **Christina Baldwin**, the author of two landmark journaling books, *One to One: Self-Understanding through Journal Writing* and *Life's Companion: Journal Writing as a Spiritual Quest*.

Christina is an eloquent and thoughtful teacher who integrates the spiritual journey and the practical path and whose life exemplifies her philosophy. Stories are central to her teaching. "What if we really talked with each other . . . and listened to each other . . . and held each others' stories as sacred information that could co-inform our lives?" she asks. Her seminar, "The Self as the Source of the Story" has helped

many women put their experience into story. You'll find her not just inspiring but full of practical ideas about ways to tell your story.

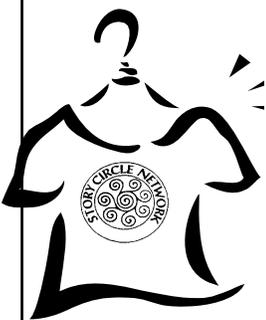
And you'll also find that Mo-Ranch will be part of the wonderful magic of our women-only weekend. Located in the beautiful Texas Hill Country 90 miles west of San Antonio, this 475-acre ranch is a serene retreat from the hustle of the city, with breathtaking views, secluded trails, spring wildflowers, and plenty of peace and quiet. We can't promise you bluebonnets (they usually appear about the second week in April) but we can promise double-occupancy hotel-style accommodations with two queen-size beds in each room and American-plan food service. (Included are Saturday breakfast, lunch, and dinner and Sunday breakfast. Friday dinner and Sunday lunch may be purchased.) The cost for the weekend is only **\$275** for Story Circle members, and **\$300** for non-members. This includes tuition, room, and four meals.

So what's the catch? Because we wanted an intimate retreat, where we can really talk and listen and hold each other's stories as sacred, we are able to accept only fifty participants. We expect these fifty places to fill very quickly, so please register as soon as you can. You can mail a check for your registration to Story Circle Network, PO Box 500127, Austin TX 78750-0127, or go to the website to register and pay via credit card: www.storycircle.org/LifeLines.

See you at the ranch, y'all!

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told the truth about her life? The world
would split open." —Muriel Rukeyser*

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