



Story Circle Journal

The newsletter for women with stories to tell...

Volume 7 Number 1, March 2003

SCN Announces Major Gift, Kicks Off 2003 Annual Fund

Board President Susan Wittig Albert announced recently that the Story Circle Network has received a major gift. The \$50,000 gift, from a donor who wishes to remain anonymous, is to be made over a period of three years. The first portion of the donor's pledge has already been received and has been added to SCN's new Annual Fund and used to support the Network's expanding program of activities and publications.

The gift is the second largest in the six-year history of the Network, according to Dr. Albert. In 1998, SCN received a generous \$100,000 grant from the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word to fund the OWL-Circle Memoir Project and encourage senior women write the stories of their lives.

The new gift, according to SCN Treasurer Penny Appleby, will be used, in part, to fund the new half-time position of Executive Director, which was approved by the Board of Directors at its October 2002 meeting. Peggy Moody has been appointed to that position. (See story on page 15.)

"In July, 2002," Appleby said, "the Board reviewed our five-year plan and agreed that one of our most pressing needs was to hire an Executive Director who could take over some of the work that is now being done by volunteers. Filling this position was at the very top of our list of Big Dreams, although we knew it was going to take some very special help and support from our Story Circle members and friends to make it come true." (See "SC Transforms Dreams to Reality," in the September 2002 issue of the *Story Circle Journal*.) "We were delighted when we learned that someone was able to step forward help us translate this dream into action."

"But one gift, generous as it is, is only the beginning," Appleby added. There is still a great deal of work to be done to ensure that SCN can live up to its financial goals, she said, and outlined several important ways that members and supporters can help SCN move forward. They can:

- contribute to the SCN's Annual Fund. (See page 22 for details.)
- help increase SCN's membership by renewing their own memberships and giving gift memberships to family and friends.
- make their on-line book purchases through SCN's Book Review web site, at www.storycircle.org/BookReviews. If they live in Austin TX, they can participate in Randall's Good Neighbor program. (SCN's Good Neighbor number is 10082.)

"We're delighted to accept this new major gift," Appleby said, "and want to use it to encourage others to contribute to SCN. It is a testimony to the strength and importance of our mission, and to the generous support we have had from women around the country."

*No journey carries one far unless,
as it extends into the world
around us, it goes an equal dis-
tance into the world within.—*

Lillian Smith

*If you travel far enough, one
day you will recognize your-
self coming down the road to
meet yourself. And you will
say YES!—*

Marion Woodman



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How SCN Can Help You Tell Your Story

If you want to dig deeper, look farther, write more often and more expressively, or discover other ways to tell and share your experiences, we're here to help. But SCN is like anything else—the more you put into it, the more you get out of it. Here are some ways you can get more out of what we offer.

1. Journal every day. You'll find journaling tips and guides in each issue of our *Story Circle Journal*. If you're a member of the Internet Chapter, you'll also receive weekly writing prompts by email—perfect for keeping your journal on-track.
2. Join a Story Circle in your community. Can't find one? Then start one! Our Facilitator's Guide will show you how easy it is to do this. For a free copy, go to www.storycircle.org/facguide.shtml.
3. Join the Internet Chapter and connect with a Story Circle on-line. See www.storycircle.org/ecircles.shtml.
4. Contribute your writing to our *Story Circle Journal*. And read the *Journal* from cover to cover—it's full of great ideas for writing your life story.
5. Take an on-line writing workshop offered by the Internet Chapter. For information, go here: www.storycircle.org/ICworkshops.shtml.
6. Read, read, read! Women's memoirs are "hot" in today's publishing world, and we try to keep abreast of the best. Here's a list of the books our reading circles have read over the past several years: www.storycircle.org/BookReviews/readingcircle.html. We've also reviewed a great many other books about women's lives—visit our book review site: www.storycircle.org/BookReviews for a look. Want to write reviews of women's memoirs and related books? Read our Reviewers' Guidelines: www.storycircle.org/ReviewersGuidelines.shtml.
7. Join our on-line Internet Chapter Reading Circle, or our Austin TX Reading Circle, or start a Reading Circle of your own. You can choose books from the SCN reading list and print out our on-line reading guides.
8. Attend our events. We offer Writing From Life weekends in Austin twice a year, a LifeLines writing retreat and a national conference every two years. Our Austin TX chapter offers five or six Be Our Guest programs each year. Want to attend events but can't join us in Austin? Start a Story Circle Chapter in your own community and create your own calendar of women's events! Here's how to get started: www.storycircle.org/ChapterGuidelines.html.
9. If you're sixty-plus, you may be interested in our Older Women's Legacy Circle project. To see what's going on, go here: www.owlcircle.com. And be sure to subscribe to our OWL-Circle eletter, while you're visiting that site.
10. If you offer writing-related classes, workshops, or programs, you are eligible to post information about yourself and your work on our Speakers Bureau pages. Posting on our site does **not** obligate you to any payment to Story Circle. You will have your own individual URL and will be able to put it on your brochures, handouts, and business cards. For an example, go to the Speakers Bureau (www.storycircle.org/SpeakersBureau), then choose a name from our list of speakers.
11. If you're ready to tell your story to a wider audience, check out our Market Watch (p. 23), where we list current publishing opportunities, contests, and writers conferences. You can also find the information on our web site.
12. Share the story of your writing achievements with us. To see what other lifewriters have been doing, take a look at our Members in Print and in the News page: www.storycircle.org/MembersInPrint.shtml, or see p. 23 in the *Journal*.
13. Give a gift membership to a friend or favorite relative. You'll find a form on p. 9. Let them know that you value their stories and hope that they'll write them down!
14. Stay informed. We're continually offering new programs and services. To stay up-to-date on what we're doing, subscribe to our monthly National and Austin eletters: www.storycircle.org/eletters.shtml.

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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!

Scrapbooking Your Story

Pass the Prompts, Please

This is the second in a series of articles designed to show you how to use a scrapbook to tell your story. It is based on the work of award-winning scrapbook artist, author, and teacher Angie Pedersen. Angie is the editor and designer of the website magazine, www.OneScrappySite.com. She currently teaches The Book of Me classes online and in stores throughout the country. Angie lives with her husband and two children in the Kansas City MO area.

Writing Prompts

If you're a member of SCN's Internet Chapter, you already know about writing prompts—quotations and ideas that are intended to boost your creative juices and help you get started writing. Once a week, we email these boosters—called "A Woman's Wise Words & a Week's Worth of Writing Prompts" to every SCN-IC member.

Here's an example of some Wise Words, by Anne Morrow Lindbergh: "If you let yourself be absorbed completely, if you surrender completely to the moments as they pass, you live more richly in those moments." And here's our prompt: *Write about the things that absorb you most completely. When do you feel able to surrender completely to the passing moment?*

Writing Prompts and Scrapbooking

Now, SCN's Scrapbook Queen, Angie Pedersen, has come up with some wonderful ideas for using writing prompts in your scrapbook—your very own book, which she calls "*The Book of Me*." (That's also the name of a book she has written.) Here are some of Angie's creative suggestions (borrowed, with her permission, from her website and book.)

—**Write first.** Jot down notes, memories, or sensory descriptions that come to mind. Angie suggests writing out your responses (in long-hand, or on the computer) before putting together your scrapbook layouts. Don't censor your thoughts, she says—just put it all down, and think of this as a working draft.

What would you write down in response to Lindbergh's "surrender" prompt? Your list might look something like this:

- Relaxing in a quiet place, close to nature
- Being with someone I love?
- Doing something that challenges me

—**Now, scrapbook.** Start looking through your stash of photos and memorabilia. What could you put in your scrapbook to illustrate the idea of "surrendering completely to the moment"? A photo of you, asleep on the beach, or sitting in a tree? Of you and your life-partner, enjoying a quiet dinner, or playing scrabble? Or you hiking across the autumn landscape, or knitting a sock, or painting a picture?

—Do "layouts." Create a page or two in your scrapbook to illustrate each of the things that "surrender" means, in your own personal experience. What's the story behind that photo of you, completely surrendering to sun and sand, on that beach? What is there about your loved one that allows you, in his or her presence, to surrender to the emotional pleasure of just being together? What happens when you get engaged with painting, or crafts, or physical activity—how does it help you to surrender, mentally and physically? Use the photos as memory prompts to help you write more, write longer, write *deeper*. Use your writing to try out different versions of yourself. How are you different when you surrender one way, or another, or another?

—**Include other stuff.** Photos aren't the only things you can scrapbook, of course. Memories come in all sorts of shapes and sizes and materials. The resort brochure (featuring your beach), a saved dinner menu or the tally from that Scrabble game, a sample of your knitting or painting, a leaf you picked up while you were hiking—all of these things are appropriate clues to that elusive idea of "surrender" and help you remember what it felt like.

—**Be creative.** Use color, pretty fabric, papers, markers (be sure these are all acid-free). Your pages are a record of the precious passages of your life. They are chapters of your story—your past, illustrated for present reflection and future enlightenment. Use your imagination and the many wonderful scrapbook supplies that are now available to spark them up, to bring them to life.

Throughout Angie's *Book of Me*, as well as on her website (www.scrappyourstories.com), you will find writing prompts to help you explore your life's story. These prompts, and her many scrapbooking suggestions, can help you to find out more about the

To name the world in your own terms, to tell your own story, is an act of authority and power. When you write, you are saying, in effect, "I have a voice. I have a story. This is what I have to say."—Rebecca McClanahan

One function of the imagination in autobiographical writing is to allow the writer to try out different versions of the self.—Marilyn Chandler

Today you are you. That is truer than true! There is no one alive who is you-er than you!—Dr. Suess

The Book of Me:
A Guide to Scrapbooking About Yourself
 by Angie Pedersen
 Available in bookstores nationwide
 To purchase online through SCN, go to
[www.storycircle.org/BookReviews/reviews/
 bookofme.shtml](http://www.storycircle.org/BookReviews/reviews/bookofme.shtml)
 For a signed copy, go to www.scrappyourstories.com

Writing and Healing

Let Your Voice be Heard

Linda Joy Myers, Ph.D., is a licensed psychotherapist with a practice in the San Francisco Bay Area. An SCN member, she teaches memoir writing and writing/healing. This excerpt comes from Chapter 2 of her book Becoming Whole: Writing Your Healing Story, and is reprinted here with her permission. You can purchase the book from the publisher for \$19.95 plus applicable tax and shipping. Phone 866-251-3741 (toll-free). MC/Visa accepted. We'll have more of Linda's story in our June issue.

Writing your true story heals both physically and emotionally. Expressive writing, writing feelings integrated with events, improves the immune system and has a positive effect on diseases such as chronic fatigue syndrome, arthritis, and asthma.

Disclosure and confession play a role in relieving stress and promoting health. As an ancient church sacrament, confession ritualizes the unburdening of shame and guilt, which enables the person to move forward in a positive way. In the confessional, the person finds words to say the unsayable—halting sentences woven with threads of shame and guilt, grief and regret. Confessional words pierce through the darkness, opening out into the light of hope and forgiveness....

Psychotherapy has been called the modern day confessional. Mimicking the priest in a darkened, closed confessional, Freud positioned himself in the shadows of a dimly lit room, a sacred, private space in which clients could reveal secrets and hidden truths. His treatment rule was that they were to speak freely about whatever arose in their minds. This was a revolutionary, even dangerous, idea in Victorian times, when repression and suppression of thoughts and desires were the order of the day. In therapy, as in the confessional, feelings, worries, and the secrets of the soul are whispered and formed into words.

James Pennebaker, a psychologist at the University of Texas, wondered if writing would offer the same relief as spoken disclosures. For a decade, he and his colleagues investigated writing in various settings and with a large range of populations, including prisoners and crime victims, arthritis and chronic-pain sufferers, new mothers, and people with various physical illnesses, across different social classes and demographics. They found that it is indeed healing to translate experiences into words, to put events and feelings into perspective through written language....

Even though Pennebaker is a psychologist, the intensity and depth of the trauma expressed in the subjects' stories impressed and surprised him. Middle- and upper-middle-class students wrote about tragic and traumatic events, such as depression, rape, suicide attempts, child sexual and physical abuse, drug use, and family violence. Participants often expressed powerful emotions associated with these stories, and even cried, but almost all of them were willing to participate in the study again. Consistently it has been found that writing a deeply true emotional story has a positive effect on health.

In *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Expressing Emotions*, Pennebaker (1990) discusses how writing about emotional events that had previously been kept secret promotes the release of stress and the integration of a more complete understanding of events. He concludes that simple catharsis, or explosive release of emotions, is not enough. Feelings and thoughts and a new understanding need to be integrated with what happened to create a new perspective.

So if you want your writing to be healing, pay attention to the emotional content of your words. Keep writing until you have causally linked events and feelings. Your first efforts may be filled with negative or unintegrated emotions and confusion. Write an emotionally difficult story several times in different ways. After a while you may find yourself writing from a positive perspective—such as what you learned from the event, or how a negative experience made you change your life in a positive way—thereby continuing the process of self-understanding and healing.

Here is what one of my students, Clare Cooper Marcus, wrote about her experience:

I'm lucky—writing comes easily to me. Between the ages of five and eleven, I attended a small, country school run by five eccentric women who insisted that we write at least one essay a week. It was assumed that we could write, and we did.

Fifty years later, my body and emotions thrown into turmoil by a diagnosis of breast cancer, it seemed the most natural thing in the world to record my feelings in a journal. I wrote while sitting, wracked with anxiety, in the hospital waiting room. I wrote about my fear of death, of pain, of not-knowing. I wrote sitting up in bed after my mastectomy, I wrote in the hospital garden, drinking in nurturance from the hundred-year-old Valley Oak tree, the squirrels running up its rotted trunk. I was writing myself into hope.

Writing was for me a form of Zen practice. It helped me stay in the present moment, aware of each feeling and insight arising, then falling away like leaves drifting by on a stream of consciousness. Writing at such a time was an exercise in mindfulness. Although I also spoke my feelings out loud, to friends, to a therapist, to members of a support group, it was writing that enabled me to go deeper, to give my soul a voice. I believe it was writing as much as medical treatment that enabled me to heal.

Think about the stories in your life that connect into a meaningful whole. What do you need to do now to bring together the frayed threads of your life? What secret stories could you tell that would free you from the trap of silence? Give yourself permission to begin writing your healing stories. Write for twenty minutes several times a week, and see what emerges from your pen. Visualize a creative friend to write to, who listens and asks for more. Write into acceptance, support, and encouragement. Write into a warm listening space, and let your voice be heard.

*A Reader Tells Her Story**Every Meal a Celebration*

Marie Buckley, the writer of this issue's Reader's Story, joined Story Circle Network at the beginning of 2000. She served as the Internet Chapter president for the IC's first two years and has facilitated E-circle #2 since its inception. Marie is an assistant editor of Story Circle Journal and leads life writing groups for women in Hillsboro, OR, where she lives with her husband, nine parrots, and four cats. This piece was published in the December 1, 2002, issue of The Sunday Oregonian.

When D.J. meowed, I knew someone had entered the bookstore. I worked at the store one morning a week and on this wet, gray November day, I'd seen only a few people hurry by outside in the wind and rain. It wasn't going to be much of a day for business, and I'd been thinking about how the loss of my husband's job and benefits over a year ago meant the upcoming holiday season wasn't going to be much for us either.

Shelving the book I was holding, I stepped into the aisle. The man I saw was small and trim. He was dressed in a long-sleeved black shirt, crisp black jeans, and polished black boots. He wore a white cowboy hat atop short gray hair.

"It's a dismal day out there, isn't it?" I said.

"Tha-tha-tha that all depends on how you look at it," he said, smiling.

The realization that the man had a profound stutter caused me to pause, but it was also his words. After a moment I replied, "Yes, I guess the day does depend on that."

The man picked up a book and asked me how much it was. Again, he had great difficulty stating his question but took his time with careful, steady concentration. D.J. meowed once more, and I told the man about the talkative store cat.

He must have still been thinking about my first remark to him because he said, "I've got a brain tumor and they can't operate. It's affected my speech center. When the doctor told me, I told him that from this moment on every day was going to be a holiday and every meal a celebration." I stared at him in silence. He continued, "When I go up to the hospital, I spend some time with the really sick kids so their parents can have a break. The kids like me even though I have trouble talking. Those kids are the candles in my life right now."

I blinked. "Yes, I bet they are."

"Do you know Mel Tillis?" he suddenly asked.

"I sure do," I said. "I'm a secret fan of country music."

"Well, then you probably know that Mel had a bad stutter,

but when he sang, he didn't stutter at all."

I nodded.

"My doctor said to me, 'Why don't you try singing, Bill?'" the man continued.

"What happened?" I asked, eager for him to go on. "Did you?"

"See what you think." Bill licked his lips and with only a few seconds hesitation, began to croon a country ballad. I wish I could remember the words Bill sang, but I wasn't listening to them. I only heard the clear sweet sound of Bill's voice.

When he stopped. I immediately said, "You sound wonderful! And you look great when you're singing."

"Thank you," Bill replied. He seemed genuinely pleased. "I'm 58 years old and in better shape now than I was five years ago. I exercise every day, and I feel good."

"You look and sound first-rate," I said, and I really meant it, because he did. We talked some more and I learned that Bill liked horses and that he'd been in Vietnam. He said something about Agent Orange but so quickly that I hardly heard it.

Then someone came in the store and Bill turned to leave. As he moved toward the door he said, "I'm getting radiation and the tumor's shrinking."

"I know it must be," I said. "I enjoyed your singing."

"Well, thank you," Bill replied cheerfully. He tipped his hat to me and stepped outside into the rain.

I called after him, "Come back again!"

I don't know if he heard me and as I lost sight of his white hat in the rain, I thought about how I wanted to remember Bill. Bill, for whom there were no dismal days because every day was a holiday and every meal a celebration. I pictured him in black, with a white hat, shorter than I. Then I stopped.

No, Bill wasn't shorter than I. He was tall—much taller. And the upcoming holiday season was going to be a much better one than I had first supposed.

A Sketch From Down Under...

We'd like you to meet Ruth Bell, one of our new members, from Down Under. ("Go find that atlas," Ruth says, "and look up Toowoomba, and then Bundaberg, Queensland, Australia.") Ruth is a retired teacher with a special interest in the learning of indigenous peoples. Here's a tiny bit of her story:

"Greetings from Australia!. Yes I have lived with roos, crocs, sharks and a variety of snakes and spiders, but here in Toowoomba, the mornings are interrupted only by crows! In thirty-seven years of marriage we have lived in fourteen towns in Queensland and reared three sons. We have three grandchildren under four.

"Like all of us, I believe I have many stories to tell, many learnings to express on paper and a deep desire to do so. I write

to share experiences, to make others laugh, to entertain.

"I enjoy diversity in peoples and places, especially those different to myself. How I would love to travel your land, pack on back, hat on head, and bus to bus, meeting you all, exploring the vastness of your landscapes. A people watcher, said to be perceptive and empathetic, I blossom in outdoor environments and wilt in enclosed hothouses of humanity.

"A sketch in words: Twenty kilos too heavy, vertically challenged, legs like my dad who was a front row footballer, shape like my g'ma who from the back was a wobbly pear, dressed in bike pants, flowing shirt, red helmet matching my red racing bike, flirid, peddling at top speed along shaded bikeways. I swim/ride three times weekly for fitness."

Welcome to SCN, Ruth! We'll look forward to hearing more of your story!

Meet Other LifeWriters and Learn from Their Stories...

Words from the Wise: An Interview with PJ Pierce

Story Circle Network member PJ Pierce is a freelance writer based in Austin TX. Her book, *Let Me Tell You What I've Learned: Texas Wisewomen Speak*, was published in 2002 by the University of Texas Press. For the book, PJ interviewed 25 well-known Texas women and the result is a distillation of the wisdom of these inspiring women. PJ began her career in journalism at age 10, when she and her friend Candace O'Keefe edited a neighborhood newspaper for three successful years. PJ earned a B.A. in German and journalism and an M.A. in German. Her professional career includes stints in public relations and nearly ten years' teaching in high-school journalism and German. A wife and mother of three adult children, she is an avid long-distance bicyclist, a master swimmer, and has hiked the Grand Canyon rim to rim.

Lots of solutions happen around a casserole. If you can put a meal on the table, you will find that it comes in handy, even if you are plotting a revolution.

—Liz Carpenter, in *Let Me Tell You What I've Learned* (all the following quotations appear in this book)

There seems to be a general feeling that if you are funny, you're not serious. But people don't know how many brain cells it takes to be funny.

—Ann Richards

I get from the soil and spirit of Texas the feeling that I, as an individual, can accomplish whatever I want to, and that there are no limits, that you can just keep going, just keep soaring. I like that spirit.

—Barbara Jordan

SCN. *Tell us a little about your own background in PR, journalism, and teaching? What were the projects you were involved in that set the stage for your book?*

PJ. I began my professional career as a PR writer for Santa Rosa Hospital in San Antonio, the largest Catholic hospital in the U.S. I wrote features for the hospital's publications and on occasion for the San Antonio daily newspapers. I was also assistant to the chief PR photographer. Hospital PR was one of the most exciting jobs I have ever had. However, because my husband was in medical school at the time, I needed to find more time in my schedule to be with our two little girls who were preschoolers. So I began teaching high-school journalism--the hardest job I've ever done to this day. I ended up teaching journalism for about 10 years. Being the publications director in four different high schools during those years turned out to be really fulfilling because of my contact with teenagers. I have a rapport with that age-group and I was able to push them to perform beyond what they thought themselves capable of. The publications I advised won awards on the state and national levels and many of my students went on to become highly-regarded journalists as adults. My last teaching assignment before I retired was to create the journalism department at the brand new Bowie High School in Austin in 1988. I advised the newspaper and taught journalism and photojournalism there for two years. One of my former Bowie students is covering the state legislature for the *Austin American-Statesman*. We had lunch just the other day. Another student became a successful film editor in Hollywood. We are still good friends today.

My freelance writing includes stints writing features for the *San Antonio Express News* and writing for various magazines such as the *Southwest Airlines* magazine during the airline's infant years. Interviewing has always been one of

my strong suits. I began honing my interviewing skills as a high-school journalism student. Talking to people was something that came easily to me. I think that my years as a teacher helped me even more. So when I began interviewing those well-known women for *Texas Wisewomen Speak*, it was not too overwhelming an experience. Yes, I was intimidated at first, but that feeling soon passed. Now I can talk to anybody about anything. I have found that people are just people, no matter how well known they are. Those who are the least friendly usually are the ones who are the least secure in themselves. Most of the women I interviewed were extremely friendly and eager to talk.

SCN. *What inspired you to write this book?*

PJ. The book came to life on January 17, 1996, the day Barbara Jordan died. [Ed. *Barbara Jordan was a legendary U.S. Congresswoman, educator, and civil rights leader, the first African-American to serve in the Texas Senate since Reconstruction.*] Like others, I wasn't ready to lose her. Just shy of 60 years old, Barbara contained too much wisdom yet unspoken. It was too late to record her wisdom, so I vowed not to let the chance slip away again with other wise women from Texas.

Traditionally, young people in Native American tribes went to the tribal elders for advice. In today's fast-paced era of computers and advertising, a reverence for age and its wisdom is almost lost. And we are suffering from that void. As a native Texan, I wrote this book to preserve the wisdom and advice of our tribal elders. I wanted each of these 25 well-seasoned women to say, "Having spent many years on this earth, let me tell you what I've learned."

SCN. *How did you choose the 25 women to interview?*

PJ. Over a year's period, I gathered the names of about 100 women, each of whom fit my criteria

of having passed the half-century mark in her life, being well-known in her field, whether regionally or nationally, and having lived a significant part of her life in Texas. Then I culled the list to a workable group of 25 women who formed a group representing a cross section of career paths, ethnicity, and all geographic areas of Texas.

SCN. *Why include only women? Why only Texas women?*

PJ. Let's face it. Few women have made it into history books and women's wisdom hasn't been recorded on paper to the extent that men's wisdom appears in print. Throughout our existence, women have been in the background while the books were being written. What were they doing? Seeing to it that their children and grandchildren were fed and clothed, that they learned how to get along with others, and that they got as good an education as possible. If we were lucky, we got to spend lots of time with our grandmothers, learning from them. But most of the wisdom of our grandmothers was never written down. It's time that omission is corrected.

Why include only Texas women? America is full of wise women. But a perception exists that Texas women are different--feistier perhaps, more likely to think that anything is possible. It is a characteristic that some call "the mystique of the Texas woman." Whether the mystique is true can be debated, but it does seem to be there. Distinctive Texas traits helped us battle the elements on the frontier, and the same traits remain to this day, when Texas women have come onto the national scene as strong politicians, for example.

Naomi Wolf of Washington DC, author of *Fire with Fire*, put it this way: "Texas women seem to welcome power much more than do some other middle-income women. They aren't afraid that power will defeminize them. Maybe it has something to do with the state's history. Women here seem very solution oriented."

SCN. *Barbara Jordan was the only woman you included who was no longer living. Why did you include her?*

PJ. Barbara's spirit set the tone for the book. Shortly before she died, I had planned to interview her to get her answers to questions that, to my knowledge, no one had yet posed to

her. Although she had been quoted extensively about government and ethics, I wanted to ask her questions about what she had learned to be most important in life.

Barbara once said, "I get from the soil and spirit of Texas the feeling that I, as an individual, can accomplish whatever I want to, that there are no limits, that you can just keep going, just keep soaring. I like that spirit." This is the kind of attitude I hoped to capture from other Texas wise women, so I used Barbara's life story her words, gathered from various sources, to set the stage for the book.

SCN. *Did you ask the same questions of every woman? What are some of the questions you asked?*

PJ. I made a list of 22 core questions to ask of every woman. It was typical for one woman to relate to some questions and another to relate to different ones. During the course of the interviews, impromptu questions would naturally come up as each conversation took its own path. The typical interview lasted two hours or less.

Some of the questions were: If you were a young woman starting out to build your life today, what would you do differently? What is most important to tell generations coming behind you? What new insights have you had since you have gotten older? What are some principles by which you live? Do you have specific advice about nurturing yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually, setting boundaries, balancing your life? What excites you about the future?

SCN. *How willing were these well-known women to answer such probing questions about their lives?*

PJ. I was pleasantly surprised at the candor of most of the women. Most talked freely about the ups and downs in their lives--about their failures and disappointments as well as their successes and happy moments. If one was clearly uncomfortable with a particular question, I took the subject as far as she was willing to go and then moved on. Later in the interview, when she felt more at ease, I might raise the uncomfortable question again. That tactic provided a chance for her to reconsider, sometimes opening up a course of discussion that she became willing to pursue. If not, I left it alone.

I believe that I have a spirit that is not going to disappear.

—Barbara Jordan

I am Texan enough that I refer to half of my relatives as "sister" or "brother," even if they are really aunts and uncles. I even have an Aunt Sister.

—Linda Ellerbee

I prefer the term Chicano to Mexican American because of the connotation. Chicano has come to mean a reclamation of our heritage; it means self-determination.

—Carmen Lomas Garza

I am told that I should be careful about criticizing the CIA--that I might get bumped off.... If you hear that I committed suicide, I didn't!

—Sarah McClendon

SCN. Do you use the women's own words verbatim in the book?

PJ. Each chapter contains the woman's biographical sketch, which I wrote myself, and Author's Notes (my first-hand impressions of the circumstances during the interview, including the woman's surroundings and personality). The bulk of the each chapter is made up of the woman's own words, taken from her interview and edited for clarity and space demands.

SCN. Your daughter took many of the photographs for the book. How did that come about? Tell us about that collaboration.

PJ. My daughter, Summer, was a senior photojournalism student at the University of Texas when I began interviewing women for the book. I trusted her abilities from the start. As we traveled the state together, she would photograph the women as I interviewed them. She and I have always gotten along well together and we made a good team. I learned to respect her skills and her opinions and insights more and more during the year of travel and interviewing. Today she is a top-notch photojournalist, and I rely on her judgment in photography and in many other areas. Summer is already one of the wisest women I know--and she is only 26 years old. She has lived in Minnesota for the past four years, and I am hoping that she and her husband will move back to Austin when he finishes his veterinary residency. (They are getting married next month in Austin.)

SCN. As you worked on the book, what was the most difficult part of the process? And the most rewarding?

PJ. The whole process of interviewing and writing was thrilling. I enjoyed the interviewing process the most. I finished all of the 28 interviews within a year, and then the writing began. The writing itself wasn't the hard part. The difficult part was disciplining myself to concentrate on that project and not to get distracted with a myriad of other projects. I suffered from Graves Disease--a severely hyperactive thyroid during that time--and writer's block. (Perhaps they had something to do with one another.) I disappointed myself because it took a year longer to write the book than I had anticipated.

As I look back on the process, I can see that the last year was highly productive and deeply gratifying. I fell into a regular routine of spending two full days alone each week in my writing retreat in the woods about an hour and a half from Austin. My Sunday House, as I call it, was my salvation. I would spend Monday to Wednesday of each week in Austin taking care of domestic chores and tying up the loose ends of my daily life so that I could drive to the country each Thursday morning. By Wednesday I was giddily anticipating my two days alone in the woods. Those 48 hours each week were my creative time and a present to myself as I crafted chapter after chapter. I remember writing that last word in November 2000. A big smile spread over my face and I took some deep breaths and congratulated myself! And I still remember taking the three reams of paper--three copies of the completed manuscript--along with the black and white glossies of each woman, and putting them on my editor's desk. It was quite a feeling.

SCN. What kind of responses have you gotten since the book came out?

PJ. The response from my readers has been added bonus to my having gotten to know these women and having been privy

continued on Page 18



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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!

Let Me Tell You What I've Learned: Texas Wisewomen Speak, by PJ Pierce (University of Texas Press, 2002. ISBN 0292765932). Reviewed by Donna Remmert, Austin TX.

Before picking up PJ's book, I felt I needed perspective for my life. Even before finishing the introduction, I knew that I would find it in this book. As I read one fascinating story after another, I made a list of friends to whom I would give the book. They include a niece just graduated from college, a friend interested in entering the political arena, a single mom who feels guilty about her passion for artistic expression as a painter. I can't give my own copy to anyone because I'll want to read it again someday. My husband has temporarily laid claim to the book and his response is as enthusiastic as mine.

The wisdom of the 25 wise women featured in this book is profound and inspirational. PJ Pierce's wit and wisdom is revealed in her Author's Notes, where she offers the insights she gained as she interviewed each of these women. Another example of the author's wisdom is her involvement of her just-out-of-college daughter in the interviewing process and the inclusion of her mother in the Epilogue, as yet another Texas wise woman. I think these personal touches make an important statement.

This reader-friendly, entertaining book is full of remarkable insights about living life with a purpose while also taking time to smell the roses. I salute these high-profile Texas women for their willingness to reveal intimate details about their lives. They have all crossed the half-century mark and they represent a cross section of career paths, ethnic groups, and geographic areas of Texas.

It was the quest for solutions to injustices in society that spurred many of these women to make meaningful changes in the system. While they were fighting for solutions, they naturally made names for themselves along the way and are considered pioneers because they broke barriers for themselves and others. Many were the first women to accomplish what they did. For example, every married woman in Texas owes Dallas attorney Louise Raggio a debt of gratitude. Louise changed our lives when, in 1967, she headed up the otherwise all-male Marital Properties Task Force and helped push new laws through the Texas legislature. For the first time, married women in Texas could buy or sell property, secure a bank loan, start a business, and have credit in their own names.

Another pioneering woman is sculptor Glenna Goodacre, who broke barriers in the male-dominated art world and made a reputation for herself. Two of her best-known works are the Vietnam Women's Memorial on the Mall in Washington, DC, dedicated in 1993, and the U.S. golden dollar coin that features Glenna's image of Sacagawea, issued in February 2000.

And Liz Carpenter helped found the National Women's Political Caucus and handled the press during the 1970's and 1980's as she and other powerful American women campaigned to get women elected to office and the Equal Rights Amendment passed. Although the ERA was barely defeated, the ground swell created by that 15-year effort helped prepare the nation for today's successful female politicians.

I'm not a native Texan, yet I loved reading about "the mystique of the Texas woman." Texas women have a feisty, humorous, and assertive way that fascinates me. PJ Pierce's book is full of examples of this feistiness and of entertaining and compelling wisdom. US Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison quotes her great-great-grandmother who, in 1849, wrote home to Tennessee, "Out in this new country, I see no one but strangers, but they are the kindest people I have ever met with." Kay says, "That's the kind of stock from which we [Texas women] come."

Let Me Tell You What I've Learned: Texas Wisewomen Speak is a book worth reading. Though each woman's story is unique, it also connects with tales told by women everywhere. PJ Pierce captures the spirit of all Texas women in her writing, making it clear that she too is a Texas wise woman, born and raised in Amarillo. Her web site is www.pjpierce.com.



Even at a time when women were supposed to be meek and quiet, I think most Texas women weren't good at that. My family certainly had women who spoke their minds.
—Linda Ellerbee, in

When I see kids who have potential that they aren't developing, I raise hell with them; I push them to do what they are capable of.
—Barbara Jackett, in
Let Me Tell You

When you grow up on the frontier, or close to it as I did, you believe there is nothing you can't do.
—Ann Richards, in
Let Me Tell You



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. The theme of this issue's True Words section is "Tracks and Trails."

The Road to Espanola

At dusk the arroyos fill with ghosts,
And the night wind carries a scent of rain,
For the Puyé chiefs are weeping.

Men and machines are despoiling the road,
The old, old lonesome road,
Smoothing the rises and filling the dips,
Making a wide strip of dullness
Meant for hurrying, not seeing.

A pox on the greedy machines
Pushing and gnawing mouthfuls of earth,
Smoothing the rises and filling the dips
While ghosts of the Puyé are weeping.

The jackrabbit runs as his house divides
Crumbling to dusty bits;
His grassy hummocks are broken and split
His world is turned outside in.

The roadrunner flees from giant jaws
Eating his hideaway;
His favorite run by the cactus is gone,
His whispering grasses hurried.

The mountains frown down as rushing rains,
Spawned in their cloudy cliffs,
Obediently follow concrete paths
Underneath concrete bridges.
And on the night wind the scent of rain
For Puyé ghosts are wailing.

The machines roll on and the strip grows long
And the concrete bridges beckon
To men and machines that hurry by
Cottonwoods bent and sighing.
Though the smooth, dull strip may save a life,
A way of life is dying.

And as darkness falls on the concrete scars,
The night wind carries a scent of rain
For the Puyé chiefs are weeping.

Althea Murray
Austin TX

Road of Torture

When I was in high school, I walked a mile home from the bus stop. A combination of parental guilt and exercise led to this ritual. "When I was your age," my father would start in, "I walked twelve miles in the snow, to school." I was not of athletic build, rather shaped like a zipper, with gangly, crooked, weak limbs and over 6 feet tall by age 14. Any form of exercise was challenging!

Initially, I would seek out the cute boy next door on whom I had a major crush and hope he would escort me home. That scheme mostly failed and I was accompanied only by my vivid imagination.

Walking past storefront and saloon, I crossed the street and up under the freeway overpass. I wandered along the freeway frontage and then turned left to face my formidable opponent: the long, steep hill. Using my fertile imagination, I reined in my awesome girl-power to envision the boys, now ascending the peak, instantly trading places with me at the bottom. I was now at the top, and they were below, puzzled as to how this had all transpired.

The undeniable torture started in my junior year. Bill lived in the first house, atop the hill. He greeted me with a shower of rocks and yelling out, "Hey Fuge." "Fuge" being his abbreviation for Mt. Fujiyama. I grew to dread not only the hill, but also Bill on the hill.

At our twenty-fifth reunion, Bill approached me warmly. He turned to his wife saying, "I teased Carol a lot when we were kids!" Teased me? He explained how he 'had been in a bad place', at that time. I responded that I too was struggling, but I didn't pelt people with rocks. While he never apologized, it almost seemed like a confession to cleanse his soul to admit his 'teasing' of this tall girl.

I felt vindicated. I had grown into a beautiful and self-assured woman, and the perpetrator was still clinging to his shady past as his reason for his inexcusable behavior.

Carol Larson
Petaluma CA

Once, when I was a young lady and on a night express, I was awakened by a man coming in from the corridor and taking hold of my leg. Quite as much to my own astonishment as his, I uttered the most appalling growl that ever came out of a tigress. He fled, poor man, without a word: and I lay there, trembling slightly, not at my escape but at my potentialities.—Sylvia Townsend Warner (1893-1978)

Braddock Avenue

It's early morning, but still as black as midnight when I step out for my walk. There is frost on the ground, and steam rises from my mouth as I stride from the house. I turn onto Braddock Avenue, where General Braddock marched with his soldiers on July 9, 1755, attempting to take the French fort at the fork of the Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers. Braddock Avenue is busy, even at six o'clock on a Sunday morning. How many have traveled this way, I wonder. It has been my path for the past three years, walking on weekends, a three hour stretch of time for my legs and my soul.

As the day lightens, I pick up my pace. I want to get to the park before it gets too bright. I keep my head turned from the busy street, walking on the overpass, barely seeing Braddock Trail in Frick Park below me. Wouldn't it be nice to be waking on the trail instead of on the sidewalk?

But no, it's not safe to be alone in the park this time of day. I hurry past the old stone church, where services won't begin for several hours. I come to a wooded area alongside the road, protected from the street by a low, stone wall. My eyes continue to sweep the woods as I walk. Despite my diligence, I almost miss them: a group of deer in the distance grazing in the field beyond the trees. I pull my eyes from them to look closer to the road. There, right in front of me is a deer acting as a scout for her group. Close enough to almost touch, she takes my breath away. She is stock still, staring at me while the traffic rushes past on the street behind me. I keep moving, trying to keep her in my sight as long as possible, trying not to alarm her. As I pass, she sprints off to join her group. I continue down my path hoping for another encounter next week.

Erin Philbin
Pittsburgh PA

That is what learning is. You suddenly understand something you've understood all your life, but in a new way.

—Doris Lessing

Tracks and Trails

I knew about the sick horror of suicide when my father-in-law shot himself. I knew about cold terror when my 21-year old son wasn't expected to recover from a traffic accident. I thought I was prepared for anything. But I didn't understand the utter helplessness and confusion I felt when divorce was suddenly thrust upon me. When I got a series of wake-up calls (breast cancer, skin cancer, chest pains), I went into a state of numbness. This wasn't my life. It belonged to someone else.

I live in an imperfect body on an imperfect planet. My faith doesn't give me easy solutions, but it gives me strength to endure and confidence that death merely changes my existence. Today, while I try to connect the dots, I remind myself that the tracks and trails of life equal change. And there's always the promise of transformation.

My sons say I am a survivor, an eternal optimist. When life tosses me lemons, I set up the lemonade stand. So, here I am again, worn juicer in hand, about to embark on a new relationship. Shaky? You bet your life. This Kodak moment is a leap of faith. Like the old mapmakers used to say when they got to the edge, "Beyond this place there be dragons." (quoted in *Out of Africa* by Isak Dinesen).

Einstein once said that there are two ways to live your life: to live as though there are no miracles or to live as though everything is a miracle. Every day I wake up to this thought.

Phillip Brooks once wrote, "Do not pray for easy lives; pray to be stronger. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers; pray for powers equal to your tasks. Then the doing of your works shall be no miracle, but you shall be a miracle. Every day you shall wonder at yourself, at the richness of life which has come to you by the grace of God."

Jackie Woolley
Round Rock TX

The journey is my home.
-- Muriel Rukeyser

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.** We're looking for stories rich in evocative detail, showing something of the struggles, challenges, and resolutions of real people living real lives. We're not looking for generalized, abstract truths about life. We want to read your stories, not your essays! Please make sure that your stories are **350 words** or less. We may edit your submissions for grammar and spelling. Here are the upcoming topics and deadlines:

Buds and Blossoms—June 2003 (due April 15)

Saving Time—September 2003 (due July 15)

Camouflage—December 2003 (due October 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 do 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

Hiking the Housatonic

In 1973 when my husband and I were first getting to know each other in Hartford, Connecticut, we became interested in hiking because of a book entitled *The Connecticut Walk Book*. We used this book to map out our ten-hour Saturday hikes, and we bought a wildflower identification book so we could learn to name such spring flowers as columbine, anemone and Solomon's seal. The only other equipment we bought was good leather hiking boots, and we were ready for the adventure of beginning our relationship with each other.

At Talcott Mountain we walked cautiously on the narrow Metacomet Trail to avoid the steep drop off and to take in the beauty of the view over Hartford. At Reservoir Six we found a glowing patch of yellow marsh marigolds, floating in a small creek, looking like giant buttercups. As we ventured out into New Hartford, we followed a trail along Satan's Kingdom Road, and in New Britain, we climbed up Rattlesnake Mountain, where the hiking book warned us to watch for poisonous snakes hanging over the great rocky ledges. One bright, clear day at Penwood State Park Trail we were excited to discover that the birdfoot violet actually does have leaves that look like the tiny foot of a bird.

But the trail that came to symbolize the beauty of our relationship was the trail we followed along the rocky shoreline of the Housatonic River. The curvy river that runs 148 miles south from Western Massachusetts to Western Connecticut provided us with a place to talk and to get to know each other. I look back on that time as the beginning of a precious adventure with my husband, which culminated in twenty good years of companionship and parenthood.

Karen Boyle
E. Palestine OH

One Unbroken Moment

It was a sweltering summer evening in the worn bleachers. Flushed visitors were fanning themselves and simultaneously applauding the high school graduates. Beaming parents, supportive siblings, and lively classmates clapped and chanted enthusiastically. Camera buffs clicked away as I struggled to find my niece in the sea of students. There she was, a bit self-conscious, her willowy body swathed in her blue and gold gown, but grinning shyly from ear to ear as she received her diploma.

Following the ceremony, it was customary for well-wishers to descend upon the football field where the graduates were waiting. We patiently navigated our way through the jovial crowd and miraculously found our destination. The blinding stadium lights made us squint. Taped music filled the desert air, and I could not help rocking back and forth to its lilting rhythms.

As I casually perused the joyful audience, one family diverted my attention. As they were quietly gathering next to me, I noticed their conservative attire and gentle, dignified air. They formed a loose circle around their graduate, an earnest, dark-haired, luminous young woman. They spoke to no one, but rather focused their loving, unwavering gaze on her. They hesitated to lose those fragile moments that mark the ending of one chapter and the beginning of another. It was evident they did not want to let go of their member, yet realized that this auspicious occasion marked a turning point for her. The moment was bittersweet and poignant.

I came away from that commencement exercise with a deeper appreciation for the ebb and flow of life. Moments of heart-felt significance can never be relieved or recaptured. Like drops of water, they disintegrate unless they are jealously guarded. After they disappear, we must patiently wait until they choose to find us again.

Heidi Childers
Pacifica CA

On The Legacy of the Earl of Sandwich

Herb Tiedemann is a hungry man. Through the swirling fogs of morning to the crisp sunlight of afternoon he has mapped the geology of the Cumberland Plateau, Brunton compass strapped to his belt, clipboard of maps in one hand, pen in the other. For the past hour he's been increasingly conscious of the beige canvas pack slung on his belt. Thoughts of thick breads crammed with meats and cheeses tease his imagination and his empty stomach.

It is the first lunch his bride has ever packed for him. They're just back from their honeymoon and this morning, when she asked what he wanted for lunch, he had said, "Sandwiches—anything but peanut butter and jelly."

Now he takes two neatly wrapped packages from the bag. They seem a bit small. . . but there's also an apple, a crush of potato chips and a large, homemade brownie. What's this? Four tiny squares of bread, crusts carefully trimmed, spread with homemade mayonnaise and thinly sliced cucumbers.

Frowning, he unwraps another. His eyes widen in disbelief. four diminutive triangles of toasted raisin bread, also crustless, filled with cream cheese and chopped olives. A bite or two, three at most, make swift work of it all.

Herb Tiedemann is a kind and gentle man. When he gets home he says nothing but eagerly eats a larger dinner than usual. The next morning when his bride begins to fix his lunch, he gently shows her how to make hearty sandwiches of meat and cheese.

All is satisfactorily explained—the only sandwiches she has ever seen were those made for Coke (Coca Cola) parties and afternoon teas. Other than peanut butter and jelly, of course.

Sunnye Tiedemann
Murray NE

The initial mystery that attends each journey is: how did the traveler reach her starting point in the first place?

—Louise Bogan

Tracks and Trails

I hardly know what I'm doing this frosty December morning as I scramble to dress and be on my way. The phone has awakened me with terrible news. Between sobs my sister Terry tells me her husband has been killed in a car wreck as an ice storm inches its way down the New Jersey Turnpike.

I know the trail to her home by heart. Head north from Maryland, cross the Delaware river, move along the Jersey back roads, meet Highway 40 and arrive in a small town outside Atlantic City. Baltimore disappears behind me while I recall the trip I'd made only six short months ago to attend a most joyous occasion. It had been Terry's wedding day. After being a widow for several years she'd found someone to love, and she and Bruce made the perfect couple.

The Delaware Memorial Bridge looms ahead. The last time I'd been on the bridge it had been loaded with cars carrying floats and surfboards and smiling vacationers on their way to the Jersey beaches. Now on this gray winter day the bridge seems to be empty of happy faces. While I speed along the farm roads my eyes scan the frozen barren fields, so different from June when the land was lush with up-and-coming cabbages, corn, asparagus and tomatoes. The garden stands where I'd often purchased fresh vegetables are now stocked with Christmas trees and eye-catching decorations for a season that won't bring us joy this year.

Huge thick flakes are filling the air now as my car makes fresh tracks in the snow and eventually runs alongside the paths of other relatives and friends arriving at Terry's home. Some day, tracks and footprints in the snow may speak to me differently, but for now they tell me of arriving floral deliveries, limousines heading to church and cemetery, visitors stopping by to visit and to comfort. Then with the first breath of spring, the tracks and the snow will be no more, reminding me how transient our seasons and our lives really are.

Trudie M. Eklund
Austin TX

Trails Through the Land of Enchantment

My best friend George decided to personally deliver his latest woodcarving masterpiece to his daughter Robyn in Albuquerque. It was a bust sculpture, which her family concurred "looks just like her." Reluctantly we left picturesque Sandia Mountains where crisp air quality lures throngs to Albuquerque's Annual Balloon Festival—but we'd already been there, done that.

Colorful Turquoise Trail beckoned. Spanish missionaries once trod there; Confederate soldiers camped there, and Kit Carson marched the Navajo people over it in their "Long Walk" to incarceration at Fort Sumner. Quaint Cerrillos once mined gold and silver as well as "crown jewel" turquoise. Madrid once supplied coal to Santa Fe Railroad, but now this ghost town attracts visitors to today's fun-filled artistic destination.

Boasting an exciting past, Santa Fe attracts hordes of

visitors who tour stately St. Francis Cathedral, view Loretto Chapel's mysterious staircase and enjoy the ambience of the Plaza where Spanish soldiers once occupied the presidio, now known as Palace of the Governors. Who could resist photographing examples of unique pueblo architecture with varied earth tones? Our high point was dancing that evening in the lounge of historic La Fonda Hotel—only topped by next day's exploration of fabulous art galleries.

Taos trails afforded the opportunity of seeing a "live Pueblo" where elders still live within ancient sacred walls of adobe structures built before 1600 (still without heat, water and plumbing). Artists living nearby invited us to shop. I smile occasionally at the "storyteller" figurine I purchased. Like kindred spirits we each spin stories under Southwestern skies.

Cimarron shuns modernity, clinging to its Old West image in contrast to the musical "*ca-ching*" of electronic slot machines in Indian casinos. Sci-fi devotees still flock to the UFO Museum at Roswell. Deming has not produced documents in my genealogy research, but makes me feel closer to my parents who supposedly married in that area.

Mother Earth continues to impress us with majestic mountains, forests and wonders such as the surrealistic, eerie world we experienced at White Sands National Monument. New Mexico can truly be called the Land of Enchantment!

Pat O'Toole
Sun City AZ

A Brighter Trail

The tracks that I have left throughout my life up until now have really not been that good. If someone were to follow my tracks, it would lead them to darkness, loneliness and sadness. Throughout my life I have been looking for happiness, love, caring and respect. And I have looked in all the wrong places. My tracks have led me to dead ends where I have had to make another track. But I only found more darkness.

Then one day I found a trail that was already going somewhere, a trail that was made by someone else. So I followed it. It was different than where I'd been. It was bright and beautiful. I felt warmth and happiness as I was walking down this trail. I'm still not at the end.

I think maybe that I am halfway, but it looks like the further I go down this trail, the brighter and brighter the light gets, and the more warm and happy I feel. I am at a place in myself where I feel content with who I am and the things around me. I am taking one baby step at a time so I don't miss anything along the way. And I do hope many people follow this same trail that I found and am following.

Lois Bell
Lockhart TX

It is good to have an end to journey towards, but it is the journey that matters in the end. -- Ursula K. le Guinn

I am one of those who never knows the direction of my journey until I have almost arrived.

-- Anna Louise Strong

More True Words

Tap Shoes

I had my first pair of tap shoes when I was ten years old. What big dreams I had, I would be a star (or maybe a dancing teacher). I worked hard, I practiced a lot and I drove my family crazy.

Although I was never a star, I was never discouraged. I loved dancing and I continued to take lessons until I was fifteen. Over the next forty years I let my dreams of dancing fade along with so many other dreams. Then, in my mid-fifties the local newspaper advertised adult tap dancing lessons. Could I still dance? Would I remember any of the steps? Would friends and family laugh when they heard about it? Did I really care what others thought? No, I didn't care. I cared only for my own happiness. I enrolled in classes and went to the dance togs store to purchase a pair of tap shoes. I wore those shoes for six years before the sole on one shoe separated from the upper part and the screws would no longer hold the taps in place. It was decision time. At sixty-one years old do I quit taking lessons or do I buy a new pair of tap shoes? How much longer do I think my knees will hold up? Do I think I'll ever get the use out of another pair of shoes? Do I want to spend the money on shoes that may never see much wear?

Yes, I want to dance in the next recital. The group I dance with is wonderful—ten ladies and one man, all over forty years old. How could I not continue with this group? I know I will continue to dance as long as my health holds out and an instructor can be found. I get more satisfaction and pure fun out of my tap classes than anything else I do. Yes, I will buy new tap shoes and it will probably be the best investment I ever made.

Judy Watkins
Hillsboro OR

The Veteran

I survived a war. The war of my childhood. Much of it must have been covert, because it seemed to go unrecognized, unacknowledged. I suppose when the casualties can still walk and talk, have no visible gaping wounds, people are justified in not knowing, not noticing.

Everyone's ignorance only made the fighting, the survival, that much more of a battle. It is difficult to garner support, allies, when your enemies parade around as the good guys. No one volunteers to save you unless you really look like you are being besieged. Nobody believes your battle scars are real, unless they see bruises and blood. If only they could have seen on the inside. Then they would know. Believe.

Peculiar thing about my war—the parties kept changing sides. Highly confusing when you never can discern who your allies are for sure. You are always on guard. Always suspicious. Wondering what you did wrong to lose them and why did they turn again?

My family battles had three players, my mom, Dad, and me. Mom was the enemy. But Dad, he kept changing his mind.

Usually he chose her side. But every once in awhile he'd take up my cause. I would be filled with so much hope, such a feeling of being saved. It did not happen often, though, and Dad always caved when the firefight got heavy.

It is both funny and sad. I would be so surprised each time my father abandoned our united front. Each time he abandoned me. Why do we, as children, hold out such grand faith for people, over and over, even when it is clearly unearned, undeserved?

I don't know why or when my mother declared the war. I have often thought if I could just isolate the very moment it all began, that I would have the key to stopping it. I wonder if the conflict was brewing decades before, or if it started the day I drew my first breath? I wonder if my father had any idea how it all began? If he did, he never told.

Denise Lanier
Hollywood FL

Then and Now

As a child growing up, most of my choices were because of what I believed, or choices good or bad that I made. I was mostly a follower and wanted to belong. I never seemed to quite fit in. I had all my needs met and parents that loved me and did the very best they could. I also had an older brother and a twin sister. But somehow, it was never enough. I was missing something and couldn't figure out what it was.

As a teenager, my choices and beliefs were more dramatic, as most teens were. I chose drugs and alcohol. I believed those were what I needed, or that they were the things that I was missing.

As an adult, I chose all of this plus abusive men, women, situations, and risked my life. But today, because of Talk to Me, the love and finding out how to breathe, I have found myself.

God and myself is what has been missing. I now try to make the right choices that go with my right beliefs. When I make mistakes, I don't quit. I choose people who can teach me something good. I feel whole today. I step out in faith and confidence. It's taken my past, as well as my present, to make me the lady that I am now.

Shelly Hicks
Lockhart TX

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SCN Appoints New Executive Director



The Story Circle Network's Board of Directors recently appointed Peggy Moody, of Austin TX, as the Network's first Executive Director.

"This half-time position will enable us to do our work a great deal more effectively," says board president Susan Albert. "And since we've worked with Peggy for nearly five years, we already know what a skilled and competent person we're getting. We're delighted that she has taken the position."

Peggy's involvement with Story Circle goes back to March, 1998, when she attended the very first meeting of the brand-new Reading Circle sponsored by SCN—and she has attended almost every meeting since. An avid reader, she confesses that she reads everything she can get her hands on. She joined the SCN board in 1999, and was elected board Secretary in 2000. She became SCN's webmistress shortly after.

"It is Peggy's creative and committed web work that has enabled SCN to move forward in so many directions," Susan Albert says. "Without her, we would never have been able to establish our Internet Chapter, create our conference website, develop the book review site, send out our e-letters, or manage any of the other on-line activities and programs that we offer."

Peggy's ability to work with both large and complex structural problems *and* small details became evident early. She spent her first two years of college at the University of Texas at Austin, where she majored in Computer Science and Math and was accepted into the elite Freshman Engineering Honors Program. She completed her BS in Computer Science at the University of North Texas, where she won a Sun Oil scholarship and was graduated *Magna cum laude*. She has worked for IBM for twenty years. For the past eight, she has telecommuted, working part-time from her home office. Her specialty (of course!) is web-page creation, and she writes HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language) faster than most of us can talk.

Peggy and her husband James, a computer programmer, have three children, aged seventeen, nine, and seven. In her spare time (Peggy is one of the best-organized women you'll ever meet!), she enjoys knitting, rubber-stamping, and bread-baking.

Peggy's commitment to the Story Circle mission goes deep. "I believe that it is important for women to tell our stories," she says, "and to hear and read about other women's stories—for our own mental health, and as a legacy for our families." Since her earliest days on the Board, she has worked to help move Story Circle into the electronic age. Her special interest is in SCN's Internet Chapter. "I believe that the Internet Chapter helps women all over the world reach out and connect with others in order to form new friendships and tell our stories to a new audience," she says. "The internet is a powerful tool that is helping Story Circle spread its message to women who might otherwise not have an opportunity to be a part of our organization."

As Executive Director, Peggy will continue to do much of what she has done in the past, but will also take on new respon-

sibilities, helping to shape SCN's role as an important and powerful voice for women storytellers and writers. "I'm looking forward to working with the Board, SCN's chapter officers, and the organization's members," she says. "It's going to be an interesting challenge!" But since Peggy's life has always been full of challenges, we know she'll meet this one with energy, skill, and commitment—and with pizzazz!

Peggy's Favorite Family Recipe

One of the easiest ways to get acquainted with somebody is to ask her to tell you what she likes to cook—and eat. Here's Peggy's recipe for *chalupa*, and a little taste of what she's really like, deep inside. We're sure you'll agree that Peggy's story about herself is as crisp and spicy as a *chalupa* itself!

Growing up in San Antonio, my family ate lots of Mexican food. I don't remember when we started having it on Christmas Eve but it's now a long-standing family tradition: tamales, tortillas, and everyone's favorite: the *chalupa*.

Start with a *chalupa* shell (a flat, crispy, fried corn tortilla). Spread with refried beans. Then grated cheese. Chili meat. Guacamole, lettuce, tomatoes, and onions. Jalapenos. Picante sauce. The order is important. Newcomers to these Christmas Eve dinners are always treated to a cacophony of "That's not the right way!" "Put the beans on first!" "You forgot the cheese!"

It's a silly thing, but fun. The beans provide a sticky canvas for the palette of colorful toppings. Cheese next, so it will melt on the warm beans. Meat next, if you want. Then the cool, crisp veggies. Jalapenos, if you dare. Top with picante sauce. And take a big bite. Mmmm! Crisp but smooth, warm but cool, bland but spicy. Something for everyone. And each ingredient a necessary part of the dish.

The *chalupa* shell holds all the disparate parts together - like the family house, into which my family moved 40 years ago, just a month before I was born. The beans - like my mother, sticking tight to the house, the foundation, and, like, quicksand holding too tight to the rest. But holding nonetheless.

Cheese—like my dad, melting into the heat of the beans. Enjoyable by itself, but subsumed into something less well-defined by the heat of the beans.

The meat—like my younger sister Becky, sometimes spicy and sometimes bland, but just a normal, everyday, hearty ingredient. The cool, crisp lettuce and tomatoes, flavorful onions, and smooth guacamole—like my older sister Nancy, at once cold, acidic, and deliciously spicy and tasty. Jalapenos—like my brother Bobby the rebel, living far from family for most of his adult life: dangerous, different—an acquired taste not for the faint of heart.

And finally the picante sauce—like me, somewhat spicy (but not too much so), slightly dangerous (but just a bit!). A mixture of the tame tomato, the biting onion, and the spicy jalapeno. Without it, things are more cool and calm—but perhaps less interesting.

The *chalupa*: a recipe for a family.
Pass the beans!

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



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

Stories from the Heart II

The Story Circle Network National Conference

February 6 – 8, 2004
Red Lion Hotel

Mark your calendars and start making plans now to join us in Austin for the *second* national conference of the Story Circle Network!

Stories from the Heart will bring women from around the country to celebrate our stories and our lives. Through writing, reading, listening, and sharing, we will discover how personal narrative can be a healing art, how we can gather our memories, and how we can tell our stories.

We welcome readers, writers, storytellers, and any woman with a past, present, and future. There will be opportunities to explore difficult or hidden issues, expand our relationships with other women, and discover different modes and media—such as art, dance, and drama—for sharing our stories.

Our Speakers

We are very proud to introduce our major speakers—two women with some of the best stories you've ever heard! Our Friday night keynoter is Liz Carpenter—nationally-known writer, journalist, memoirist, and former press secretary to Lady Bird Johnson.

On Sunday, at lunchtime, we will hear from Wilhelmina Delco, a former member of the Texas State Legislature, an admired educator, and a civil rights activist.



Our Conference Website is Open Now!

To register, sign up for our Conference E-Letter, or catch up on the news, visit our website:
<http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/>

Watch the June issue of the *Journal* for a print registration form and hotel information!
We're looking forward to seeing *you* in at Stories from the Heart II.

Stories From the Heart II

Story Circle Network National Memoir Conference

February 6-8, 2004

Call for Presenters

Stories from the Heart II will bring together women from around the country to celebrate the stories of women's lives and discover different modes for sharing our stories: through personal essays, autobiographical fiction, poetry, drama, dance, music, art and more. The conference aims to encourage women to explore hidden or difficult chapters of our life stories; to expand our relationships with women of diverse cultures and communities; and to return to our communities and share our discoveries with others.

For additional information, see <http://www.storycircle.org/Conference>, email conference@storycircle.org, call 512-454-9833, or write Story Circle Network, P.O. Box 500127 Austin, TX 78750-0127

Conference Program

The conference program will feature **24 presentations organized into four concurrent tracks, with six 90-minute presentations in each track**. Each presenter will receive a \$30.00 discount from the full conference fee. The ideas sketched out below are just suggestions—be creative! The program tracks are tentative and subject to change.

Tentative Program Tracks

- **Track A. Finding Your Voice**

Some possibilities include creating a distinctive voice; using a child's point of view; exploring significant events in our lives; writing about trauma; writing about the self and the natural world; using stories to reframe experience; using different techniques for writing memoirs (could include writing about particular topics), writing as healing; journal writing.

- **Track B. Serious Stuff**

Some possibilities include finding a publisher; self publishing; fictionalizing your story; genre options for personal writing (autobiography, memoir, fiction); organizing and leading life writing and memoir workshops; writing a family history; feminist theory and women's self-narrative; theories of narrative and autobiography.

- **Track C. Stories in Many Voices**

Some possibilities include telling stories that reflect multicultural experiences; telling another person's story (your mother's, grandmother's); telling stories that include several points of view; relating the history of a community, business or organization.

- **Track D. Media Options to Enhance Your Stories**

Some possibilities include telling stories through media such as sculpture, dance, art, oral storytelling, and scrapbooking or enhancing stories through the use of genealogical research and specific techniques for reviving memories.

Panel on Self-Publishing. In addition to these program tracks, we are planning a two-hour panel discussion on self-publishing on Friday afternoon, chaired by **Jan Seale**, author of **The Nuts-&-Bolts Guide to Writing Your Life Story**. The discussion will be designed to help attendees learn and practice specific methods for writing, publishing, and marketing their work. Panelists will receive a \$15 discount from the full conference fee. If you are interested in being a member of this panel, please contact **Paula Yost** at qutxpin-psyost@peoplescom.net, with a list of your self-published work and a brief description of what you have learned from the experience.

Submitting a Proposal

Go to www.storycircle.org/Conference/frmpresenter.shtml and fill out the proposal form. Or send us **all** of the following information: Name, address, phone, email; whether you're a member of SCN; title of your presentation; 25-word synopsis; 200-word description; the track to which you think your presentation should be assigned, and a one-page description of your relevant experience. Mail to Story Circle Network, P.O. Box 500127, Austin TX 78750-0127. Or email to conference@storycircle.org.

Austin Chapter Announces Programs for 2003

Austin Chapter President Carolyn Scheider announced recently the chapter is planning four *Be Our Guest* programs for the spring and summer. These Sunday-afternoon programs are designed to introduce Austin-area women to the healing pleasures of life-story telling, writing, and sharing, and to the benefits of becoming a member of the Story Circle Network. If you live in Austin, please come, bring a friend, and enjoy the programs! All are held in the Colorado Room of the Lower Colorado River Authority, at 3801 Lake Austin Blvd. (Copy and clip this column and post it on your refrigerator!)

Sunday, February 23. Learn how to tell your story through poetry from Jazz Jaeschke. Jazz is the author of *Significance*, a collection of poems recently published by Plain View Press. Chapter President Carolyn Scheider will convene a short business meeting. Jazz's writing circle will share their stories.

Sunday, April 27. Carolyn Blankenship will offer a mini-writing workshop called "The Magic of Myth & Metaphor." Discover the magical, mythic dimensions of your own personal story. Judy Flournoy's writing circle will read their work (tentative).

Sunday June 29. Fabric artist Beth Kennedy will show us that our lives are material creations. Join us for a fascinating presentation called "Quilting as a Way to Tell Stories." Donna Remmert's writing circle will share their stories.

Sunday August 17. It's an Open Mike afternoon! The floor is open to all SCN Austin Chapter members who are not in a writing circle, as well as members who have published books from which they'd like to read. Watch for information on this event, including possible signup and/or reading length. Any member who would like to sell her book(s) may do so at this event. The Chapter asks authors of books to donate 10% of their proceeds to SCN.

SCN 2003 Anthology Published

Each year, SCN publishes a collection of memorable stories written by its members, which is mailed free of charge to each new and renewing member. The guest editor for the 2003 collection, called *True Words from Real Women*, was Jane Ross, of Austin TX. This year's collection, SCN's third, contains 39 stories, written by women all over the country.

Jane chose stories from those contributed by Story Circles and OWL Circles, and from SCN stories available in various locations on the website. "I organized them according to the flow of life events and experiences," Jane says, "starting with stories from early childhood and proceeding through adolescence, early adulthood, marriage and children, then into the losses and illnesses of midlife, to the mature and reflective stage of the wise woman."

In the 10 years Jane has lived in Austin TX, she has worked as a freelance writer and editor, web designer, OWL group facilitator, cafeteria monitor, and harp mover, among other things. She has been an active member of Story Circle Network since 1999.

PJ Pierce: Words from the Wise

continued from Page 8

to their lives and to their wisdom. While I was spending those hours in my little niche office in the loft of my Sunday House, I would say to myself: "This is good stuff!" I wondered at the time if other people would find these women's words as remarkable as I did. And now that the book is being read by a wide audience, I am hearing that, yes, people--both women and men--are loving what they are reading! I get enthusiastic mail every day, thanking me for writing this book. Getting these women's wisdom would have been enough for me, but receiving such great response from readers has reassured me that I was on the right track. I was feeling the pulse of Texas women and their need to hear wisdom from our tribal elders.

SCN. *What advice would you give to a Story Circle member from another state who was thinking of doing a similar project?*

PJ. Try a smaller number of women! At first I wanted to do 35 or 40 women because I couldn't bear the thought of cutting out all those wonderful women I wanted to get to know. I'm glad that I talked myself down to 25 women. And then, as I finished about 18 chapters, I thought: 25 may have been a bit too many. The project became unnecessarily involved because of sheer volume. Otherwise, I am proud of the outcome. I believe I went about the interviewing and writing in the right way.

SCN. *How and when did you get involved in Story Circle Network? What effect has your involvement had on your writing life?*

This SCN interview was conducted and the story written by Assistant Editor Jane Ross.

Let Me Tell You What I've Learned: Texas Wisewomen Speak by PJ Pierce

Twenty-five Texas women, ranging in age from 53 to 93, share the wisdom they've acquired through living unconventional and full lives.

- 300 pages, 25 chapters
- foreword by Liz Carpenter
- includes photographs, introduction, and author's notes

Available through bookstores. To order through amazon.com and benefit Story Circle Network, go to the Story Circle Network Book Review site and click on the link to amazon.com:
www.storycircle.org/BookReviews/bookreviews.html
 ISBN 0-292-76594-0 (pb)

Creating Your Family History***Think Family History as You Plan Your Family Reunion***

This is the fifth 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.

Family Reunions

One of my favorite family photos was taken at what my mother's family affectionately calls "the old home place" near Milan, MO. The sepia snapshot, taken in the front yard sometime in the 1930s, shows a crowd of over a hundred people in shirtsleeves and summer dresses, arranged in four rows, with the children sitting on the grass in front. It was a Franklin family reunion, the star of which was my great-grandfather, James King Franklin, with his multitude of descendants. (They had *big* families back then!)

In my great-grandfather's day, family history was almost entirely an oral tradition. These days, however, we know how important it is to make a family record of our family history and genealogy, so that the stories preserved in the oral tradition won't be lost forever. And a reunion is the perfect place to begin or continue your family history

Time and Place. If you're involved in choosing where your family is going to get together, perhaps you could suggest that it be held near an important family place: an old homestead, a family cemetery, the town where the family settled after that long journey across the ocean or the American plains, the site of a famous battle in which a family member fought. You might want to hold the get-together on a date that has some historical significance for your family—a grandparent's birthday, for instance, or a wedding anniversary, or the anniversary of your great-great-grandmother's arrival in the United States.

A Family Reunion Booklet. Of course, you'll be corresponding by mail or email with the family members who will attend, making arrangements for places to stay, a meeting place, travel, and so on. This is a perfect time, while you're connecting with those far-flung family members, to get enough information to create a Family Reunion Booklet—a page for each branch or section of the family, with photographs and some basic information. (This is not a difficult task, if someone in the family has some desk-top publishing experience.)

With a little more work, you can also collect some family history at the same time, by asking family members to write two or three paragraphs summarizing what's happened in their branch of the family over the past quarter-century (or some appropriate period).

And with just a bit *more* work and planning, you can collect some of those wonderful family stories. Here are a few ideas:

- ask people to write down their favorite funny family story;
- ask people to write down what they most like to remember

- about their grandparents or great-grandparents;
- ask people to recall what they loved/hated most about the family when they were children;
- ask for favorite family recipes, with a brief note about where the recipe came from and why it's special. (Beware: this activity can escalate—you may find yourself compiling a family cookbook, complete with family photos, history, and tributes to favorite family cooks!)

Create a Family Display. If someone in the family has done genealogical work, ask them to create a display showing all the relationships on your family tree. Invite all family members to bring photos, maps, and copies of historical documents to add to the display. If family members have important family heirlooms—Grandma's butter churn, Great-Grandpa's letter box, Great-Aunt Rachel's photograph album—ask them to add them to the display, so that younger family members can get a sense of historical perspective.

Plan a Story Telling Time. Set aside some times when people can tell family stories, and encourage older members to join in. Some families have fun remembering legendary ancestors: heroes and heroines, outlaws and in-laws, famous and infamous. Someone may even be willing to tell about their favorite family skeleton! If possible, tape record the stories and transcribe them, to put into your family reunion booklet.

"In the Good Old Days..." Ask family members to bring period clothing or ethnic costumes for an afternoon's dress-up. Invite other family members to demonstrate old-time crafts and activities, such as churning butter, making ice cream, spinning or quilting, using an old-fashioned tool. Maybe some family members can play a guitar, ukulele, or banjo, and lead people in a sing-along with songs from the 40s, 30s, 20s, teens. It's all part of the family heritage! Take photographs, write down what people did, and add these records to your booklet.

Who's Who and What's That? Everybody has old mystery photographs in their albums and drawers, and the family reunion is the time to solve the mystery! Ask people to bring a photo to share. As others identify the people, places, and times of the photos, write down the information and make it part of your history.

Write It All Down. Family reunions are important, one-of-a-kind occasions, perfect opportunities to begin and continue your family history. The older members of your family will appreciate sharing their stories, and the younger members will gain a stronger appreciation of their heritage. It's all part of the story!—*Susan Wittig Albert*

Take a Bow! Spotighting Our Story Circle Volunteers

Lee Ambrose: Rising to the Writing Challenge

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 Lee Ambrose. Lee wears many hats within the Story Circle's online community, as e-circle member, facilitator, and member services coordinator. She is another one of the wonderful women who help to keep the Story Circle dream alive and growing.



Lee, wearing one of her many hats!

Originally from Pennsylvania, Lee Ambrose completed nursing school and moved to the New Jersey shore and from there to the southwest Florida area. She loves the sea and cannot imagine living anywhere that is not graced with its presence. Lee is married to husband number two, Tim, has three grown daughters, one grandson, and two granddaughters.

Lee still works full time in a family practice office but looks forward to off duty times. During those moments, she can be found reading, playing the piano, sewing, quilting, and of course writing. Lee's home is in Naples, Florida, one of the most pristine communities in the country, where she has lived for over 27 years. While neither Lee nor her husband would trade Florida sunshine for cold snowy northern climates, they hope to one day relocate—farther south, to the luscious Florida Keys.

Lee shares her home with her husband and her grandson Caleb, “one of the most adorable miracles on earth,” who was born (three months prematurely) two years ago. She has been granted guardianship of this sweet babe and couldn't be happier! “He is such a delight,” Lee says. There is one other member of her household who does not always share her delight with the patter of little feet and the clutches of wee hands—Maggie, Lee's feline friend. Whenever Lee is writing, Maggie can be found curled up in her lap or sitting next to the keyboard. Lee wonders if Maggie is secretly one of her muses.

Says Lee, “A few years ago, while taking some creative writing courses at the nearby college, I discovered a side of me I had previously not known. I have tried to nurture that side of me and in doing so, have become passionate about the craft of writing.” Lee learned about Story Circle Network from *Personal Journaling* magazine

When she joined the Story Circle Network in 2001, Lee had no idea just how many wonderful friendships would be forged or how many challenging writing opportunities she would discover. At first, she tested the waters by joining one of the regular writing e-circles. She soon discovered that each writing opportunity challenged her in a way she had never been challenged before. Next, she entered a risky writer's e-circle. Again, the rewards and challenges served to spark even more drive. She had written off and on for many years, but never regularly until she joined SCN. “The support of fellow circle members has been phenomenal,” she adds.

Next, she began facilitating a risky writer's e-circle and helped to put together some of the information on the facilitator's web page, soon becoming the member services

coordinator. With each step, she reports, “I become more involved with the SCN process. I am more amazed at the resilience of women as they share their stories. What a gift the act of sharing one's story with others can be!” With each step, she became more aware of herself and the stories she has to share. She soon realized that there is nothing she would like more than to be able to spend her days nurturing the passion she has developed for writing and story-sharing.

Lee has the beginnings of a historical fiction story that she hopes to one day complete and have published. In the meantime, most of her writing is for SCN. Becoming part of this wonderful group of women was a great motivating factor in her writing life. She found she became more focused and disciplined because of the supportive network within the groups.

Thanks to Story Circle Network, Lee says, “I think I have finally figured out what I want to be when I grow up! A writer! After nearly 30 years as an RN, I am ready to hang up my stethoscope and begin a new path.”

This article was written by Assistant Editor Jane Ross.

A Life Writer's Prompt

- *There is no cure for birth or death save to enjoy the interval.* —George Santayana
- *You may have a fresh start any moment you choose.*—Mary Pickford

Birth is a fresh start to life, and presents us with a life of possibilities. It requires a complete change of mind; attitude, beliefs, thought patterns. Spend some time in the coming week thinking and writing about births and fresh starts.

Monday: What does *birth* mean to you?

Tuesday: How does your family honor or commemorate *birth*?

Wednesday: How do you honor *birth*?

Thursday: How do (how can) you bring *birth* into your life?

Friday: What *birth* are you looking forward to?

Saturday: What *birth* has been important to you?

Sunday: Read over what you've written. How do you feel about it? What does it reveal to you? Can you see a *birth* that is about to take place or needs to?

—This prompt was created by Margaret Knorr, who lives in Charleston, WV. Her website is devoted to journaling. www.geocities.com/mairearad.

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@tstar.net

SCN Board Elects 2003 Officers

The SCN board met at the Red Lion Hotel in Austin on January 13. Among important items on the agenda were the election of officers for 2003, the approval of the 2003 budget, and the first report from Peggy Moody, the new Executive Director. Officers for the year: Susan Albert, President, Judith Helburn, Vice President and President Elect, Penny Appleby, Secretary and Treasurer. Leilani Rose reported that 73 members have joined SCN since the October board meeting. The board accepted the anonymous gift to the Annual Fund, with thanks.

During the last quarter of 2002, Board members contributed 610 hours to help SCN achieve its mission and its goals, bringing the total to nearly 2800 hours for the year—a spectacular contribution of wisdom and woman power!

Austin Chapter News

The Austin Chapter's Holiday Party, at Jackie Newman's lovely home, was a wonderful success. PJae Stanley entertained with song and story, Carolyn Scheider's Writing Circle read from their work, and chapter members contributed food and drink. The get-together included four generations of women from one single family, reminding us that our stories aren't just *our* stories, they are our family's stories as well. Chapter officers for 2003: Carolyn Scheider, President; Jackie Newman, Publicity; Danelle Sasser, Treasurer. Other volunteer positions: Donna Remmert, Programs; Linda Jones, Hospitality. The chapter now has 179 members. It offers seven writing circles and a reading circle, and is planning four Be Our Guest programs in 2003. (For details, see p. 18.)

Internet Chapter News

The Internet Chapter has now grown past the 200 mark, with 213 members currently enrolled. The chapter offers 12 writing circles and a reading circle, and sends out monthly e-letters to keep chapter members informed of on-going activities. On its website, the chapter features a "Story of the Month" selected from the writing circles. So far this year, stories by Leslea Smith and Erin Boyle have been posted. Members also receive "A Woman's Wise Words and a Week's Worth of Writing Prompts," which are sent out each Monday. The chapter also hosts a valuable Computer Clinic, written by Chapter President Melanie Albert's husband Chris. (Thanks, Chris!) For more information, or to join the chapter, go to www.storycircle.org/InetChapter/.

A New Circle in The Woodlands, TX

Evelyn Cook, SCN member from The Woodlands, TX, writes that she has started a new circle. Here's her report. "Several years ago I facilitated a Story Circle in our local library. Interest dwindled so I attended an Austin workshop and the National Conference to satisfy my hunger for writing with others. In September, 2002, I attended a Creative Writing/Non-Fiction class at Montgomery College Academy of Lifelong Learning (ALL). At the last meeting I invited anyone interested to meet me at the local Starbucks to practice writing every Thursday. Seven people showed up. We write for 15 minutes using the prompts from *Writing from Life* and then read what we've written. Each participant has a unique voice and is comfortable sharing life stories. *The Villager*, our local newspaper, printed a guest editorial that I wrote describing the coffee shop meetings. The ALL newsletter wrote an article about us, too. We have used the *Story Circle Journal* and the website to find on-line publishers. Thanks for the support you provide for women writers!" If you live in or near The Woodlands and would like to know more about this new circle, email Evelyn Cook, at ecook@pdq.net.

Second Indiana OWL Circle Gets Underway

Lynn Mills (lynn_at_work@hotmail.com) has convened her second OWL Circle, using the workbook kit she purchased from SCN. About the group, Lynn writes: "There are seven women in this group. Two of the participants are 'repeaters' from the first group. We will meet from January 9 to February 6. I plan to offer the class again, sometime in the spring, but have not chosen the dates as yet. I am really enjoying meeting and working with such a varied and fascinating group of women; those in both groups have been wonderful!"

At the close of her first OWL Circle, in October, 2002, Lynn compiled an attractive 37-page booklet containing the stories written by participants. She plans to offer continued opportunities for memoir writing to her "graduates."

Austin OWLs Write On

Four OWL Circles are meeting in Austin TX this spring, for those who have completed the OWL Writing Program and want to continue with their writing. Three are closed to new members, but if you are an OWL graduate and just can't put down your pen, you should get in touch with Pat Flathouse at 347-7687. A new group is forming and will meet on the last Tuesday of each month from 1:30 to 3:30, in the St. John Neumann Social Hall.

There's no Story Circle meeting in your town? That's an easy problem to fix!

Start your own Circle!

For information, call 512-454-9833 and ask for a copy of our Story Circle Facilitator's Guide.

Or (easier yet!) go to www.storycircle.org and download it!

SCN's Annual Fund: How You Can Help!

At its July meeting last year, the SCN Board approved a plan for 2003 that set a goal of \$20,000 for SCN's first annual fund-raising program.

"The recently-announced major gift to SCN takes us one giant step toward that goal," board president Susan Albert says, "but we still have a distance to go. We can get there, but it's going to mean rolling up our sleeves and getting to work."

Rolling up our sleeves and getting to work isn't a new idea at Story Circle. We've been doing that very thing ever since we began, just six years ago. Last year, for instance, our Writing from Life workshops, our Schmooze the Muse programs, and our benefit play, *Waiting for MacArthur*, raised nearly \$4,000. This year, these fund-raising activities will be repeated, with the profits going into the new Annual Fund.

In addition, says Penny Appleby, SCN treasurer, "we'll be encouraging members to participate directly, by making tax-deductible donations to the Fund, by renewing their memberships and giving gift memberships, and by making their on-line purchases through our website."

What will SCN do with the money it has raised? "We are pledged to fund our new Executive Director's position, of course," Appleby says. "We are planning an expanded National Conference for 2004, we have begun some important outreach programs in our local African American community, we are offering free memberships to women in need, and we are looking toward the development of our second volume of women's memoirs." In addition, she adds, there are the regular, on-going expenses of publications, website programs, and the office. "We have a great deal of imagination—we're only limited by woman-power and funding!"

It's easy to help SCN help every woman tell her story. Your gift will be much appreciated, and your name will be added to the roster of our donors. Your generosity will strengthen SCN now and through the years to come.

Yes, I want to help support the Story Circle Network!

Here's my check for \$25 \$50 \$100 \$150

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Yes, you may publish my name.

Mail your check to Story Circle Network,
PO Box 500127, Austin TX 78750

Or go online at www.storycircle.org and click on "Make a Donation"

We will send you a receipt for your records.

SCN is a non-profit 501c3 organization. Gifts are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law.

SCN Partners with UT Humanities Institute in Life Writing Project

The Story Circle Network has joined its efforts to those of the Humanities Institute of the University of Texas at Austin, to support UTHI's new lifewriting project.

The program, called "Writing Austin's Lives," is a citywide lifewriting initiative. "It focuses on the concept of community-building through reflection on our shared and different stories," says Dr. Evan Carton, Institute Director.

"Every life is a story," Dr. Carton says. "When we listen to another person's story, that person becomes real to us—a flesh and blood individual whose life differs from, yet in some way connects to, ours."

But in a large, heterogeneous community, people usually don't know the stories of their neighbors, let alone the stories of people from different neighborhoods and ethnic backgrounds. To help people learn more about the lives of others in the city, the Humanities Institute will be encouraging central Texans to write and submit their true life stories. These pieces should reflect on these subjects: "Where I Live"; "What I've Experienced"; or "How It Feels to be Me."

UTHI will be working with a number of Austin organizations to host a series of free, public lifewriting workshops around the city this spring, led by university and writing community volunteers. It plans a competition, with awards presented later in the year. It is seeking funding to publish a collection of the best stories. "This published collection will be a unique portrait of central Texas at the edge of the 21st century," according to Dr. Carton, "and an important piece of local history."

The scope of SCN's partnership in this initiative is now under discussion. Since our experience is defined, in part, by the places we have lived, the topics of "place" and "environment" are important to every lifewriter. SCN may participate in the project in these important ways:

- adopting the topic as a focus for this year's SCN-sponsored lifewriting activities;
- introducing it at Austin Chapter Be Our Guest programs;
- including a segment on "the experience of place" in our two Writing from Life workshops;
- suggesting it as a topic for our Austin-area and Internet writing circles;
- publishing our own collection of stories about place on our website, in the *SCN Journal*, and/or in our 2004 anthology, *True Words from Real Women*;
- using "sense of place" as the topic for our 2003 LifeWriting Competition; and
- inviting UTHI to participate in our 2004 National Conference, *Stories from the Heart II*.

"This is the kind of project," SCN president Susan Albert says, "that can be duplicated in other communities. It uses lifewriting to strengthen our connections to each other and the place we live. SCN is delighted to participate."

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

Send news of your publications and writing-related activities to Nancy Rigg at njrigg@mediaone.net, or to Peggy Moody at news@storycircle.org for posting on our website.

Renee Howard Cassese's essay, "Summer Tomatoes," about her father's gardens, was accepted for online publication in *Full Circle Journal* in the April, 2003, issue. Her essay, "Soulful Dahlias" is in the current issue of *Personal Journaling*.

Sarah Jordan's novel for older children, *The BossQueen, Little BigBark and the Sentinel Pup*, will be published in the fall, 2004, by Tricycle Press. The characters are three lady dogs who tell a story about change, growing up, and growing old.

Jazz Jaeschke's poetry memoir, *Significance*, was recently published by Plain View Press. It is available on amazon.com.

Pamela Kinnaird's article "Out-of-work worries: Do we pay our mortgage or our health insurance?" was published in the 01/09/03 issue of the *Seattle Times* newspaper. Pamela also has a story in *Nudges from God* published by Obadiah Press in December, 2002. It's an anthology of true life stories and is available on amazon.com.

Katherine Gannett has had two poems, "The Beach" and "Morning Dew," published on www.poetry.com. (Search for "Katherine Ware.") "Morning Dew" also appeared in the 10/27/02 issue of *GRIT*.

Angie Pedersen was recently interviewed for an article titled "Turning Point Journaling" in the Jan/Feb 2003 *Memory Makers* magazine. Her website, www.onescrappysite.com, was recently mentioned as a resource in three national magazines.

Seton Cove of Austin TX has published *Along Life's Path: A Book of Reflections*, which contains essays from SCN members **Jazz Jaeschke, Judith Helburn, Mary Jane Marks, and Sarah Silvus**.

Marie Buckley's essay, "Every Meal a Celebration" appeared in *The Sunday Oregonian* (1/12/02)

Linda Joy Myers' book, *Becoming Whole: Writing Your Healing Story*, has just been published by Silver Threads, San Diego CA.

Stories by nine SCN members were among the 46 stories anthologized in *The Noble Generation: Stories of the American Experience*. Members whose work was included are: **Barbara Carr, Trudie M. Eklund, Linda Reynolds, Carolyn J. Scheider, Lita de los Santos, Donna Remmert, Pat Flathouse, Paullette MacDougal, and Judith Flournoy**.

LifeWriters' Market Watch:

WRITER'S DIGEST 72nd Annual Writing Competition: more than \$25,000 in prizes will be awarded in 10 categories, with one winner chosen from all entries—1,001 winners in all. For more details on how to submit your entry, go to www.writersdigest.com/contests/writing_comp03.asp. Deadline: May 15, 2003; Late Entry Deadline: May 31, 2003

WOMAN'S WORLD magazine is looking for heartwarming stories about friendships, neighbors helping neighbors, family traditions, recipes or precious objects passed down across generations, special relationships (with a teacher or grandchild, for example). We'll pay a \$50 lead fee for a story we publish. We pay a subject fee as well (if the story is about you). Query Amy Oscar at aoscar@bauerpublishing.com.

SMALL TOWN USA may be just the market for your story about small-town experience. The editor, Devon LeHar, is looking for stories up to 2000 words, memoir or fiction, and will pay up to \$100 for print publication. He has offered a special invitation to Story Circle members, so when you communicate with him, please let him know who sent you! Go to the site: www.smalltownusa.net and click on Story Guidelines.

A CUP OF COMFORT's publisher is now sponsoring several inspiring true-story contests. A Cup of Comfort is a series of creative nonfiction anthologies featuring positive stories about the relationships and experiences that inspire and guide our lives. All contributing authors receive a monetary fee and publishing credit, and one grand prize is awarded per book. For writers' guidelines contact the editor, Colleen Sell, P.O. Box 863, Eugene, Oregon 97440, USA, e-mail wordsinger@aol.com or go to www.cupofcomfort.com.

EJ PHILLIPS is gathering material for two more books. These are to be works of inspiration similar to *WOMAN: What She Has Done with Where She Has Been*. For more information go to www.ejphillips.com and, for guidelines, contact EJ at ejphillips@cybermesa.com.

TAPESTRIES ANNUAL 100 pages seeks poetry (24 lines), short stories/pieces (1,000 words). Must be unpublished and original. Theme for 2003 is peace. Must be positive. Heritage, local folklore. Payment 1 copy if accepted. Life Program, Mount Wachusett Community College, 444 Green St., Gardner, MA 01440. E-mail: davpat@myexcel.com. Deadline: 03/30/2003

COLERE, a journal of cultural exploration published by Coe College, wants fiction, poetry, essays, or artwork. No more than five poems or 20 pages about cultural experiences abroad or at home. Submissions, guidelines, or subscriptions (\$5

“An inspiring, inspiriting weekend...now I know how to tell my story, and what’s more, I can even imagine myself actually writing it, in bits and pieces, as I go along!”—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, May 3 & Sunday, May 4, 2003

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/

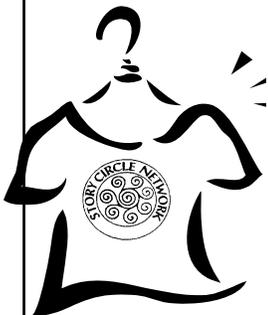
or write or phone Story Circle Network, PO Box 500127, Austin TX 78750-0127, 512-454-9833

“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

“Stories are medicine.”—Clarissa Pinkola Estes

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*Front: “...for women with stories to tell”
Back: “What would happen if one woman
told the truth about her life? The world
would split open.” —Muriel Rukeyser*

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