



Story Circle Journal

Volume 7 Number 3, September 2003

The newsletter for women with stories to tell...

With Courage and Common Sense

After nearly four years in the making, Story Circle's first collection of memoirs—*With Courage and Common Sense*—will appear in early October, according to the publisher, the University of Texas Press.

The book is an anthology of 105 short memoirs written by some of the nearly 500 women who participated in the grant-funded Older Women's Legacy Circle program, in 1999 and 2000. Their stories were first collected in booklets, and the best were gathered into this collection, which documents the life experiences of a unique generation of over-sixty women. It was edited by Susan Albert and Dayna Finet, who wrote an introduction describing the OWL-Circle project. It includes an introduction by Liz Carpenter, widely-acclaimed speaker, journalist and writer, and former press secretary to Lady Bird Johnson. Carpenter writes:

Much of the time our society stereotypes and dismisses old women as ridiculous, troublesome, irrelevant, and (worst of all) boring. These memoirs contradict the assumptions. The women who wrote them have experienced solid, hearty lives, with a characteristic vitality enduring into old age.

Women who were 60 or older at the turn of the twenty-first century have lived through some of recent history's most momentous events—and yet these women often believe that their personal lives and stories are insignificant, not worthy of being recorded for future generations. To change that perception and capture some of these life stories before they are lost, the Story Circle Network developed the Older Women's Legacy (OWL) Circle Memoir Workshops.

With Courage and Common Sense is a unique book, for it not only presents a selection of memoirs but it documents the development of the workshops themselves, and, for that reason, will be of interest to women's studies classes and researchers and teachers who work with seniors. Organized thematically, the memoirs describe women's experiences of identity, place, work, family life, love and marriage, loss and healing, adventures great and small, major historical events, and legacies to keep and pass along. Taken as a whole, they chronicle far-reaching changes in the ways that women participated in the world during the twentieth century. They show how women learned to surmount obstacles, to courageously make the most of the opportunities that came their way, and to move quietly and wisely beyond the limits that were imposed upon them.

The OWL-Circle Memoir Project produced not only the workshops but also the workshop material: the OWL Circle Workbook and the Facilitator's Manual that accompanied it. The Workbook and Manual were tested in several editions and are now available as a workshop kit from SCN, for teachers and workshop facilitators who would like to create OWL-Circle memoir workshops in their own cities. A new book, *Your Life, Your Story*, is also available for those who are unable to participate in workshops. You'll find an order form for all three items—*With Courage and Common Sense*; *Your Life, Your Story*; and the workshop kit—on p. 20.

In the coming months, SCN will be sponsoring a number of Austin-area activities related to the release of the book. These include an invitation-only reception for the contributors and their families, book signings, and OWL-Circle reunions. Watch our monthly e-letters for details!



It's time to start planning for *Stories from the Heart II*, SCN's second national women's life-writing conference!

Register now.

See pp. 18-20

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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. And read "For SC Facilitators," p. 22.
3. **Join the Internet Chapter** and connect with a Story Circle on-line. See www.storycircle.org/ecircles.shtml.
4. **Contribute your story** 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. **Check out our Older Women's Legacy Circle** project (for seniors 60+). To see what's going on, go here: www.owlcircle.com. And be sure to subscribe to our OWL-Circle e-letter 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 website.
12. **Contribute to one** of our book collections. Currently, we are soliciting manuscripts for a book of nature memoirs. See p. 23 for details.
13. **Share your writing achievements with us.** To see what other life-writers 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.
14. **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!
15. **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 e-letters: 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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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

Let's Play Hide and Seek!

This is the last in a series of four 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.

Can I come over to your house for a game of hide and seek? We'll have such fun! I can hear the giggles already! Peeking around corners, poking into closets, unfolding big handmade quilts.... Oh, we are definitely seeking but not for some giggling hidden child. We are seeking your own memories.

Walk through your house and seek out those things that make you pause and smile. Why are these things in your home? How do they contribute to the person you are? Let's play hide and seek!

When I walk down the hallway in my house, I see a framed picture of my parents on their wedding day. My grandfather made the frame that holds the photo and when I pause in front of it, I am three years old again. I am sitting up high in Grandpa's big red Chevy pickup truck, his hand over mine on the manual gearshift, and we are driving to his workshop. My feet shuffle through the sawdust on the concrete floor as we enter the workshop. I giggle as he pretends to mop the sawdust off my nose with his red handkerchief. He lets me pick something from the many handcrafted items he has made—a small wooden heart to hang on a ribbon around my little girl neck. He carefully chisels the date on the back of the heart, and the "jewel" is mine.

Your home is full of hidden memories like this one too, and they would be so easy to journal about in your scrapbook! Ask yourself these kinds of questions about your furnishings, the wall hangings, your clothes, your books.

- ❖ How do these things connect you to your past?
- ❖ What other memories are connected to these tangible things?
- ❖ Did someone special give or bequeath this object to you?
- ❖ Did someone special wear a coat just like the one you have now?
- ❖ Do you keep certain traditions in honor of precious childhood memories?
- ❖ In what way does this tangible thing provide you comfort and security?

For me to scrap a page about my grandfather, I could take a picture of all the picture frames I have in my house, the necklace tree, and the jewelry boxes he made for me. I would journal about his superior carpentry skills, his varnish-stained hands, and our trips to his workshop. I might write that whenever I talked to him on the phone, I would ask, "Am I still your girl, Grandpa?" (To which he

would answer, "You sure betcha!") The journaling would be the essence of the memory, while the photos would serve as a visual representation of my childhood experiences.

Now it's your turn! What do you see in your house every day that is "historically significant" to you? Choose a few of these items, and take pictures of them. Take pictures of the figurine from your grandmother. Take pictures of the desk your grandfather used in his study. Take pictures of the comb and brush set your aunt left you. Include a recipe card written in your mother's handwriting.

Then *journal!* Write about who gave you that precious keepsake, who else it makes you think of, the last time you saw the person, favorite terms of endearment, and how you knew they loved you. Then put your journal pages into your scrapbook, along with the pictures you have taken, or the object itself, if that's possible.

By creating scrapbook pages about these real-life memory triggers, you are not only sharing your memories with your family and friends, you are also paying homage to those who have touched your life so deeply. And the way you present your memories is absolutely specific and unique to you—you are the only one who can tell these stories in the right way, because these memories belong to you.

If you aren't a scrapbooker, or don't know how these stories would fit into your family album, consider creating a single page with a photo and your writing and frame the result. It will be a conversation piece, something people return to read again and again. You could also frame the completed memory and give it to someone as a gift.

So take some time and play hide and seek in your own home. Seek out those hidden memories, enjoy reliving those precious experiences. You might be surprised what's hidden in plain sight.

*We don't see things
as they are,
we see them
as we are.*
—Anais Nin

*Some memories are
realities, and are
better than anything
that can ever
happen again.*
—Willa Cather

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

*We all have stories,
and they must be
told. In telling our
stories, we affirm
ourselves.*
—Sophy Burnham

***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

Companions for the Journey

“Writing is one of the healing arts,” Mary Ann Moore says on her website, at www.retreatsonline.net/flyingmermaids. “Your creativity will admit you to a sacred space.” So we asked this writer, poet, and Story Circle member from Guelph, Ontario, to help us understand how we can use writing to heal ourselves. In this essay, she suggests that we make a special effort to find companions who may be able to help us heal.

We all need solitude to hear our own voices. Sometimes, though, the stories that emerge in that stillness are too much for us to handle on our own. That’s why I recently advised a friend, who is embarking on a memoir about her healing journey, to find companions with whom she can share her creative process.

Books are wonderful companions too, especially the ones in which women share their creative journey. Reading the diaries of women like Virginia Woolf and May Sarton are very helpful in that we get to see the day to day lives, so much like our own, and the process of the writing experience that led to the novels that made them well-known authors.

Finding a community of understanding is, I have found, the most beneficial support to women pursuing the healing journey of writing their stories from life. I facilitate writing circles and have attended many workshops. At one of them I got to write a story that took me 25 years to finish.

For five days in July 1999, I attended a writing workshop at Bridgewater Retreat near Tweed, Ontario, where Janet Lunn, best known as a children’s writer, helped us write our family stories. We worked in a studio attached to an old log house that reminded me of the farmhouses in the Ottawa Valley where I grew up.

Janet gave us some helpful advice on what didn’t work with our writing: in my case, the emotional detachment. The story, called “Slides: Ottawa Valley” (written before the workshop), gave the same emotional weight to the porridge at breakfast in the morning as to the falling into a cold, ice-bottomed puddle at recess. The same weight to getting my hair cut at the barber’s as being raped in the chicken house when I was seven.

Janet and the 13 other writers exploring the depths of their pasts gave me the support to plunge into mine. I realized on the second morning of the workshop that the center of my story was the childhood sexual abuse and its link to Jean, a relative and neighbor, who had been raped by her brother and couldn’t talk. By writing my story to Jean (now dead), I would find a way to get to the roots. I cried all through the writing, feeling lighter by releasing the story. I was learning what I teach: that telling our story helps us feel less alone and lessens the weight of what we have kept locked inside.

That story, renamed “Jean, Can You Hear Me?”, made room for joy. I read it to the group in a shaky voice. They praised my courage and hugged me. One woman had tears in her eyes because her daughter had gone through a similar experience. That’s the other gift in sharing the story. Someone else hears it and is touched by knowing she isn’t alone.

Dr. Dean Ornish, researcher, cardiologist and author of *Love and Survival* (HarperCollins 1998), has found that support groups that promoted intimacy and the sharing of feelings, were as important as the dietary changes, exercise, and stress reduction techniques he recommended to his heart patients.

Isn’t it great to discover that what we’ve known all along about sharing what’s on our heart is actually good for our heart?

Here are some suggestions for getting to those “big” stories.

- ❖ Choose an object to write about as a place to begin. For instance, I wrote about my relationship with my mother by describing a box of silverware she gave me for my eighteenth birthday. Describing that gift and others she gave me, as well as the way that wooden box is painted to reflect who I am now, describes a part of our life together.
- ❖ Describe how you’re feeling right now. As one woman in one of my writing circles suggested, start writing your grocery list and keep going. As you write, it will lead to you to reflect on the past. If there are feelings that disturb you, write about those too.
- ❖ Be easy on yourself. It often takes many versions to get to the roots. Your version today is what you can live with today.
- ❖ You don’t have to stay there. When you write about past trauma for instance, write to let it go, not to linger there to suffer again. You can remember something and make it part of the garden you are now creating.

Working with companions will help. But remember that your writing is first of all an act of self-compassion. Writing our stories is a way to learn to love and respect the young child, girl, woman in us who survived. As the poet Derek Walcott has written, “Give back your heart to itself, to the stranger who has loved you all your life, whom you have ignored for another, who knows you by heart.”

And forgive yourself for not doing it—until now.

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Embrace Your Creative Self!

A Reader Tells Her Story

A Different Journey

Linda K. Anderson is retired after 25 years as a healthcare professional with Kaiser Permanente in Portland, Oregon. She lives in SW Portland with three rescue cats and a dog who is training for pet-assisted therapy. Linda volunteers at the Oregon Humane Society and works with at-risk teenage girls. She is currently working on a book about her experience as a kidney dialysis patient.

Have you ever thought about what it would be like to not pee ever again? That's what happens when you have kidney disease.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's go back to 1994 when this was the furthest thing from my thoughts. In September, 1994, I was told that I had glomerulonephritis. My kidneys were spilling protein into my urine, and thus my legs were swelling and I experienced shortness of breath. Eventually my kidneys would fail, because this spillage would create scar tissue in my kidneys. The nephrologist prescribed diuretics and cholesterol medication and I felt one hundred percent better. What's to worry? I thought I had the world by the tail, and in March of 1995 I celebrated my fiftieth birthday with a grand party of 50 friends. What a great time and such an affirmation that I had done everything right and life was good! That's when I started to realize that life is not a destination but a journey.

For the next few years things went along pretty normally and the only intervention was to increase my medications. Then in June of 1998 my regular nephrologist was on sabbatical. The physician filling in told me that my kidney function was down to twenty percent and I should think about getting a fistula [a surgically enlarged vein that provides access for dialysis] put in. Yeah, right! What did he know? He wasn't my regular doctor and I wasn't about to have something done to my arm that would be permanent and disfiguring! I decided I wasn't giving in and went to California for a healing retreat. I spent two and half weeks there and returned, thinking I was okay.

But as time progressed, the lab results indicated that my kidneys were indeed failing. Again I was in denial and let my sister talk me into working with a practitioner who did not allow me to take any medicine. My blood pressure became so high and I had such bad headaches I thought I would die. Finally, my good friend Daphne insisted that I go see my regular nephrologist who had now returned from sabbatical. Dr. Kauffmann told me we really needed to get the fistula put in so I would be ready for dialysis when my kidneys failed. I cried. There was no avoiding the inevitable. I was going to be a disabled person and have a deformity!

There are two treatments for kidney disease: dialysis and transplant. Neither of these treatments are a cure. I decided to begin dialysis. The surgeon put in the fistula in March of 1999, just before my 54th birthday. I was hoping I wouldn't have to use it because I would get a transplant.

I was assured that all would go well. A fistula requires minor surgery, as the process involves taking a vein and an artery from inside your arm, bringing them to the arm's surface and sewing them together so there are both an arterial and a venous access for the needles. The surgery took about an hour, and I was in recovery for another hour.

Now I had this thing in my arm that felt like an electric buzzer! I joked about it, saying that it was my life force and if folks wanted a hit they could just hold my arm. The fistula was in my right arm and limited what I could do until it healed, (or "matured") which took about three months. I had to squeeze a tennis ball constantly to make it tough enough to withstand having a 15-gauge needle—about the size of a ballpoint pen—put in it every other day for dialysis.

As my arm was healing, my kidneys were failing. I felt like I was living in a septic tank—nauseated, bloated, and not breathing very well. Finally on June 4, 1999, I had to go on dialysis.

I showed up with no idea what was going to happen to me. The dialysis unit looked like something out of the movie *Coma*. Twenty-six chairs were lined up on the wall with people hooked up to machines. Daunting! But I'm brave and can handle anything, so I marched in and announced that I was a new dialysis patient and asked where I should go. The staff looked at me in bewilderment. Finally, one of the nurses said hello and directed me to a chair. They asked me my dry weight, and I said I didn't have a clue what they were talking about. (Dry weight is the weight used to calculate how much fluid needs to be taken off.) They sat me down in a chair that looked like a recliner, took a look at my fistula, and told me it wasn't a good fistula and wasn't ready. Now I was starting to panic, as I was so toxic that I couldn't wait any longer for them to clean my blood. I said, "I beg your pardon but two doctors have said this fistula is ready."

The technician put me on the machine while the nurse looked over his shoulder. I was hooked up to this machine without a clue as to what was going on except that I couldn't move because I had needles in my arm and my blood was running through the machine. I nearly froze to death. No one warned me about how my body temperature would drop because the blood was running outside of my body. There were no blankets or anything to keep me warm, so for four hours I had to endure the cold. Finally, we were getting to the end of my run and I started having horrible cramps. They were like giant Charley horses in both legs and all the way up to my waist. It turned out they had over-dialyzed me because they hadn't figured my dry weight correctly.

After they pulled out the needles, it only took me five minutes to stop bleeding. Boy was I glad to be out of there! As I left, the tech said, "Come back again." I replied, "Like I have a choice."

I cried all the way home. I called a friend at 10:30 p.m. and cried into the phone, "I can't do this!"

But I did do it, and I'm celebrating my fourth year of dialysis. The journey continues.

Meet Other Life-Writers and Learn from Their Stories...

Pat Flathouse: Helping OWL Circles Take Wing

Pat Flathouse is a member of the Story Circle Network Board and the coordinator of the Older Women's Legacy (OWL) Circle program, which brings writing groups to women over 60 in Austin TX and throughout the country. Pat keeps busy setting up new OWL Circles (writing groups) in the Austin area, taking phone calls and answering email inquiries about the OWL-Circle program and the OWL-Circle workbooks, and attending SCN Board meetings. And although her position is a volunteer one, she has found that her work provides some unique rewards.

Each story you have to tell is important and valuable, not just to you, but to your family and to other people, too. Each story is a part of that valuable legacy of ideas and experiences, hopes and dreams, that you will leave to those who follow.

—Pat Flathouse
Your Life, Your Story

Your memories are something like the bits of fabric that go together to make up a quilt...The overall design of the quilt does not emerge until the pieces are arranged and sewn together.

—Pat Flathouse
Your Life, Your Story

SCN. How did you become involved in SCN and the OWL-Circle program?

PF. My initial involvement with the program was serendipitous. In the summer of 2000, I learned about Susan Albert's book, *Writing from Life*, and I went right to the store and bought that book. I read it and worked on the suggested writings from cover to cover. It was just what I needed at that time. I also saw that there was going to be a Writing from Life weekend soon, so I called my daughter-in-law Kara and told her that I thought she would like the workshop. She agreed to come from the Texas Panhandle to attend if I would go with her.

I met Catherine Cogburn at the workshop. We talked and finally she said, "Do I have a job for you!" Curious, I accepted an invitation to have lunch with Catherine, Susan Albert, and Peggy Moody the next Monday to discuss this job. I was being asked to coordinate the Austin OWL-Circle Memoir Workshops and assist with the other ongoing OWL projects, on a volunteer basis.

At first I was not sure I could do the job but found it intriguing. It just seemed a perfect fit for where I was at that time. Soon I was immersed in learning about teaching older women to write their stories. I decided to enroll in an OWL Circle myself to see what it was like to be in a group—a marvelous experience. It took me a while to learn all that had gone before in the development of the program, but soon I was sailing through the work and enjoying it immensely. I also enjoyed working with the OWL-Circle facilitators who actually lead the groups. Before long, Susan asked me to join the SCN Board and that has been most enjoyable, meeting such a marvelous group of women.

SCN. Tell us about the path that brought you to this role.

PF. I began my teaching career at the Texas School for the Deaf and then moved into interpreting and tutoring young deaf children as I

began my family. I stayed home with my four boys until all were in school. Then I became a director of religious education for a local parish and also did some consulting, teaching of adults, and work for the Diocese of Austin, while I earned my Masters Degree in Religious Studies.

Having three sons in college at one time led me back to teaching once more and I taught first grade for three years in Lubbock, where I became interested in counseling and working with families of at-risk children. While in Lubbock, I earned my doctorate in educational psychology and counseling (with a focus in stress management and wellness) and then began working as a school counselor part time while working with the Wellness Program for the school district, leading groups for stressed school administrators. I also taught a few courses at Texas Tech and other local colleges.

When we moved back to Austin, I decided to take some personal time and discern what my next adventure in life would be. I made some quilts, learned to do stained glass, did some woodcarving, and dug a pond in my backyard. Writing was not, and had never been, one of my "things" until I got hold of *Writing from Life*.

SCN. What is the most valuable thing you have gained from your involvement with SCN?

PF. After going through Susan's book and attending the Writing from Life workshop, I was hooked on life-writing. Finally, I had found a way of writing that freed me to write my way. When I wrote my dissertation, I was often criticized for being "too chatty" in my writing and I struggled to conform to their way of writing. Now that I have found SCN, I know that my chatty writing is A-okay because it is my voice. My gift from SCN was discovering how to write without the schoolteacher critic sitting on my shoulder. I want to pass this wonderful gift on to other women my age.

SCN. Tell us about some of the women who have been helped by OWL Circles.

PF. One of the most exciting things about the program is to see women, who first told me that they cannot write, want to keep on writing when their five sessions are over. I have also seen women forming new friendships and making booklets for their families.

Last fall, a woman attended one of the OWL Circles at the urging of her daughter. I believe this woman was probably in the early stages of Alzheimer's and initially had a very difficult time with writing. She almost never shared her story and I could often see the confusion in her eyes when asked if she wanted to read. At first, she was not writing very much on her paper. However, about the third session she began to write and share almost every time. Her stories were wonderful and the group was very affirming. By the last session, this particular woman was writing very well and we were amazed at the improvement from the very first session. I think this is a perfect example of the benefits of writing for women who are aging and perhaps beginning to have memory problems.

SCN. As I understand it, an OWL Circle even helped one woman find peace in the final weeks of her life.

PF. That's right. Mildred attended my church and I knew her brother. She had Parkinson's Disease and was very limited in her ability to function in our OWL Circle. However, her brother thought it would be good for her to be out with other women. He also wanted her to begin writing down some of the family stories. She required a great deal of help just writing out a two-to-three sentence story from the writing prompts. Mildred attended each of the five sessions of the OWL Circle and went on from there to a women's retreat at the church, the next weekend. After the retreat, she seemed very happy.

When Mildred died a week later, her brother found materials from the women's retreat and her notes from her OWL Circle writings by the chair where she had died. He told me she was very proud of her stories. He asked if we could prepare a booklet of the stories to be placed near the casket at her funeral for everyone to see. The family expressed such gratitude to us that we had taken the time to make room for Mildred in our OWL Circle and to prepare the booklet of Mildred's stories. It was a very moving experience to have been involved in the last few weeks of Mildred's life.

SCN. There's a natural synergy between OWL Circles and faith communities like your own church. How would you explain this synergy?

PF. I believe that there are several things at work here. We, as a people of faith, thrive on the telling of stories. We learn about faith through story in Scripture, we tell our own faith stories, we examine where we are going through story, and in stories we discover our common faith journey. It is the same with the design of the OWL Circles. We learn about our lives through writing and telling our stories, we share our stories with others in our group, we have the opportunity to examine where we have been through the telling of our stories, and we discover the common journey that we are on as women in the final third of our lives. That also helps us know where we are going.

The parish administrator at my church saw the OWL-Circle program as an excellent opportunity for ministry to a group of women who were not being served in other groups by the church and as a way to pull these women into the church and offer something for their benefit. It has worked so well and the word spreads all the time. Almost every week someone stops me and asks when the next OWL Circle will be held. I have women stop me at the grocery store and ask to be put on the next list. OWL is becoming a familiar word in the parish.

It is also a wonderful bonding experience for women over 60. Often the women attend our church but do not all know each other when the group first begins. However, by the end of the five sessions they have become great friends, and they continue meeting and become a support for each other. One group that I was in had two new widows. They often shared stories about their changed lives and they are two regulars in the monthly sessions of the group that has continued to meet for two years.

SCN. Tell us about the new workbook for OWL-Circle graduates, *Your Life, Your Story*.

PF. Over the past couple of years I have seen three needs connected with the OWL-Circle program. First, women want more writing experiences after attending the five OWL Circle sessions. They always ask what they can do next. Second, some women cannot attend an OWL Circle but want to begin writing. And third, some women just want to know what belonging to an OWL Circle would be like. I began to see that writing a new OWL-Circle booklet with new writing experiences would be a nice way to meet all of these needs, so Catherine Cogburn and I sat down last summer and began planning a new booklet. In the spring, I put the

I try to lead at least one OWL Circle a year, just for the joy of the experience.
—Pat Flathouse

I have long been interested in doing genealogy, but I quickly learned that genealogical information can be very sterile without the stories to flesh it out.
—Pat Flathouse

The success of Your Life, Your Story has been beyond my wildest dreams! I have women buy one book and then come back and buy five more for their aunts, mothers, sisters, or daughters. Women are hungry for easy instructions on how to write their life stories.
—Pat Flathouse

finishing touches to the booklet. It's based on the OWL-Circle workbook but with all new materials, plus a sixth chapter that gives all kinds of ideas about writing. It was a very exciting project to work on and I learned a lot about putting such a book together and getting it printed, thanks to the wonderful support of Catherine and Susan Albert.

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SCN. You are also working on your own writing project, I understand.

PF. I have long been interested in doing genealogy, but I quickly learned that genealogical information can be very sterile without the stories to flesh it out. I decided that I would create a book similar to the OWL-Circle workbook to help people begin to write their family history stories. This has been another interesting venture and, because of it, I became acquainted with Jackie Taylor, a Mormon missionary at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City. Jackie is now my best cheerleader and is giving me wonderful ideas in helping me with this book. She has also become a wonderful friend. I went to Salt Lake City recently and she spent two days reading, critiquing, and offering suggestions for the book. The rough draft of the book is complete now but I have a lot of tweaking to do before I am ready to let anyone else see it. I am excited to see what will happen with this book. Writing something like that is very hard for me, but I think the end result will be worth all the hard work.

SCN. What are your hopes and aspirations for the OWL-Circle program for the future?

PF. I would like to see the program grow and become established in some other areas of Austin. I would also like to develop some other OWL-related activities that have been requested, such as a family history writing group, perhaps a spirituality group, and a stress management group. And I'd like to develop workbooks to meet those needs. I would also love to be involved in some research on the health benefits of using the OWL-Circle program with women experiencing memory and other health problems.

The success and popularity of the OWL-Circle program has been overwhelming as I look back over the two and a half years that I have been involved. The program is doing wonders to bring women over 60 together and to help them conquer their fears and insecurities about writing. Perhaps the greatest joy of this job is that I get to see the great happiness that writing stories brings to senior women, like Margaret Anne DeBarbrie and Mary Jane Crownover from



It's time to start planning for
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 See pp. 18-20



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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!

Your Life, Your Story: A Book to Help You Capture Your Memories, by Pat Flathouse with Catherine Cogburn and Susan Wittig Albert (Older Women's Legacy Circle Program of Story Circle Network, P.O. Box 500127, Austin TX 78750-0127). Reviewed by Judith Helburn, Austin TX.

A few years ago, after my granddaughter was born, my daughter Robin gave my husband and me one of those grandparent memory books that many greeting-card shops carry. I did my duty and tried to remember my first prom dress and other such "important" items and events in my life, but I finally gave up and went to my own personal writings from my SCN writing circle. I copied a dozen or so pages, stuffed them in the back of the grandmother book, and gave the book back to Robin.

If I had received *Your Life, Your Story* instead, I would have created stories from my life for my grandchildren that were more meaningful than pretty dresses and birthday parties. Those dresses and parties might have been very important in my life, but they also might not.

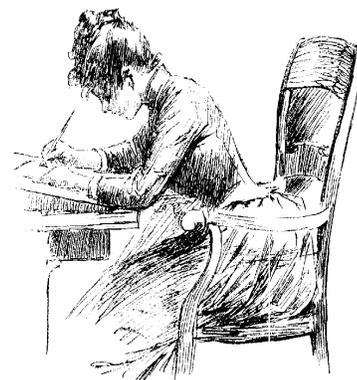
Your Life, Your Story is a map—one that helps you, the reader, begin writing stories about what is truly important in your life. It also gives hints and writing suggestions that can take you way beyond the covers of this short 62 pages booklet. However, even if you only follow the five chapters of writing prompts in *Your Life, Your Story*, you will find, when you have finished, that you have before you the highlights of your life so far.

The idea for this book began with the Older Women's Legacy Circle Project in 1998, which was funded by a grant from the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word of Houston, Texas. After Story Circle Network conducted 48 free, guided memoir-writing workshops in the Austin TX area, many of the nearly 500 women in the project did not want to stop writing. However, some were not able to continue in OWL groups. These women and numerous others from across the country requested help to continue on their own. And here it is.

The book begins with an introduction by Susan Wittig Albert, which includes the history of the project, suggestions for how and when to write, and cautions about those gremlins who seem to hang around. Then, it is time to write! Chapter 1 is about "The People Around You." What are your strengths and what are your family stories? Onward to "Memories," in Chapter 2 and writing about memorable times and treasures. Here, you'll find a suggestion to check your memory with others who share it. You might even want to check the Internet for what was happening at that time. Chapter 3 is all about "Love and Work," with suggestions to list all those you have loved and who loved you and to write about some of these loved ones. You'll be prompted to think about your life's work too. How many different kinds of work have you been involved with? What was your passion when you were young? How about now?

Our stories are not only about what we have done but also about how we feel. "Sad Times, Happy Times" comes next with suggestions for writing about the difficult times and the uplifting. There is a suggestion to tell a tale on yourself—what funny or awkward situation did you get yourself into? One of the nice results of aging is that we can laugh at or be sympathetic towards the young women we once were. We have perspective. Chapter 5 covers "Your Accomplishments and Your Legacy" and includes an excerpt from Susan Wittig Albert's book *Writing from Life* titled "So You Want to Keep Writing."

The last chapter, "Other Aspects of Storytelling," includes short essays about self-publishing, writing about and interviewing others in your life, scrapbooking, and other ways to tell your stories—a treasure trove of inspiring ideas for life-writers.



You gain a part of your sense of self—your identity—from hearing the stories of your relatives, telling you who your ancestors were, where you came from, and what values and beliefs your family has held.

—Pat Flathouse
in *Your Life, Your Story*

Love has come to you in many forms and through many relationships.... The stories of our loves tell of the women we are.

—Pat Flathouse

Loss teaches you about what matters most. As you cope with loss, the depth of your character expands.

—Pat Flathouse

Life continues to teach you as long as you remain able to see and listen.... Learning never stops as long as you keep paying attention to life.

—Pat Flathouse



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 "Saving Time."

In One Year and Out the Other

You can't do it. I can't do it. Even Bill Gates can't do it. With enough money one can do almost anything. Except save time. There are articles, books, and workshops about saving time. I've read some of them and listened to those time management experts. I've spent a lot of time trying to learn how to save it.

I can multi-task with the best of them, plan menus while making beds as the dishwasher washes and the hamburger thaws. I can discuss a project as I eat lunch. I can talk on the phone while my tea steeps and I make a list of things I need to do. That's using time, and using myself up along with it.

Time goes at its own pace, minute by minute, hour by hour, year by year, no matter how well or poorly we use it. In my retirement years I'm beginning to do something else with time—savor it.

I can't keep my 90-year-old mother around forever but I can savor time with her. I concentrate on the feel of her surprisingly strong hand clutching mine. I will hold that moment when she eventually leaves us. I will remember how her eyebrows went up when she was being silly, though now she hardly speaks a coherent word.

I savor the time I sit and write, letting my imagination go where it will. I can savor the smell of the summer rain softly freshening my lawn and the sound of the cat purring in his sleep in my husband's chair.

I can bring back memories of when my children were born, their school days, and my own school days before that. I savor those times.

If I could save time, what would I do with it? More of the same, no doubt: writing, family activities, volunteering, reading, enjoying, complaining, eating, fretting. I don't want to save time. I want to see what happens next.

You can't save time, nor can I, nor can Bill Gates with all his money. It's easier said than done but we can learn to savor it.

It's About Time

When I was a kid, no one I knew had a watch. Our parents woke us with their alarm clocks; no one had a snooze button. In the summer, the birds woke us. We knew it was time to come in from playing when the streetlights came on. We went to bed after watching *Get Smart*.

When I started working, time took on a whole new level of importance. Patients are scheduled for me every thirty minutes. I bought a watch with a second hand so that I could be more precise with their time. I don't remember when I stopped taking it off at night, but it's been many years. I shower in it; I sleep in it. When the band rots off, I buy a new one. The latest feature on my watch is *Indiglo*. I use it to see how much time I have to sleep when I wake up in the middle of the night and can't see the alarm clock.

The other day, a patient was upset because he believed that I was two minutes late for our therapy session. "Oh no," I assured him. "I set my watch by the satellite clock in my kitchen. That keeps perfect time." As I illuminated the *Indiglo* feature, I noticed that while the stem was depressed, the second hand stopped moving. While I knew I hadn't been sleeping well lately, I had no idea that I had been checking the time so often that I caused the watch to run two minutes slow! Obviously, some changes needed to be made.

I still sleep wearing my watch. It saves me 3.5 minutes every morning looking for it. When I wake up in the middle of the night, however, I ignore my *Indiglo* button. I resist the urge to snatch up my alarm clock and hold it an inch from my face so I can see the numbers. I take a deep breath; try to release any thoughts about the impending day. I'm trying to make my life less structured, less stressful. It's about time.

Writing is the only thing that, . . . when I'm doing it, I don't feel that I should be doing something else instead.

—Gloria Steinem

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The Good Times

When I think back in time, I see I didn't treasure the moments. Now I think, "Oh how I wish I could go back to some of them." For instance, when I was in sixth grade, getting ready to pass to seventh, my mom brought me this lovely white dress with ruffles and blue lace and handed me my first pair of high heels. How pretty they were, light tan, with ankle straps. My heart was happy. My eyes lit up, bright as the sun. I got chills all down my back and a smile as wide as the Mississippi River. I'll cherish that moment for the rest of my life!

I remember a funny time long ago that's saved forever in my memory, when Mom was supposed to be on a diet. I was in the kitchen cooking a nice meal and the whole time I was cooking Mom was in her room, the food smells rolling under her door. I had to go the store to get something and hollered to let Mom know I was leaving. As I reached my car I realized I had forgotten the coupon, so I walked back, opened the door, and there was Mom, bent over the stove eating. My eyes got big as silver dollars. She smiled and told me that the smell from the food woke her up. She had to sample it to make sure it was good.

"Mom, I thought you were on a diet," I said. We both laughed. Oh, I'll never forget that funny time!

When I was a teenager I thought Mom was being mean to me because she wouldn't let me do the things I wanted to do. I know now that Mom wanted what was best for me. In remembering, I've learned that Mom was right, and if I could move back the hands of time, many things would change!

Now, I'm learning not to waste my time. Time is valuable; you can never make it up. But in time, you can start a glorious future.

Katrina Lloyd
Marlin TX

*I shall live badly if I do not write, and I shall write badly
if I do not live.—Francoise Sagan*

A Contest in Time

The contest required entrants to explain in a hundred words or less the reason historic Tuscany is the perfect place for love and romance. After convincing myself that I was up to the challenge I began quickly writing the first thoughts that came to mind. These indelible impressions were as fresh as Tuscan mozzarella. After all, I had returned from the region only a month earlier. The most compelling reason for entering the contest was the desire to experience again the stimulation of my senses, Italian-style. Struggling to define those feelings, I scribbled draft after draft, attempting to express the reverence I sensed Italians have for the transcendence of time coupled with the present in a sweet note of perfect harmony.

Although my presence in Italy required adherence to a strict schedule during a too-brief stay, I found myself disassociating from my companions as novel sights, sounds, smells and tastes permeated my consciousness. The evidence of centuries of existence through expression of passion is evident in this soulful land. Here the gift of life is an art form to be cherished, as the silent emphasis of Tuscany's historic past lingers like the last note of a glorious fine wine.

I had to come to terms with leaving Italy prematurely. Not knowing when I could return made my departure bittersweet. I felt that I was missing a key ingredient in the secret of a fulfilling life. It was with this mindset that I first read about the contest. The winner would receive a six-night, all-expenses-paid trip to Tuscany. Having all the appearances of a good omen, I completed my entry, ignoring self-doubt, and dropped it in the mailbox. By summer's end the winner will be announced. But the best part was reliving the essence of this tantalizing place as my pen committed to paper something like the magic of love at first sight.

Skylar Scott
Cave Creek AZ

*The best time for planning a book is while you're
doing the dishes.—Agatha Christie*

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:

Camouflage—December 2003 (due October 15)
Black and White—March 2004 (due January 15)
Sidewalks—June 2004 (due April 15)

If you can send your writing via email or as a Word attachment, the editors will love you. If you type your story on an Internet computer, all you need to do is **highlight** the text, **copy** it, and **paste** it directly into an email message. (This will eliminate lots of extra typing!) Send your work to Marie Buckley, marie@aracnet.com. If you 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 . . .

Saving Time

If I could save time in a bottle, I'd have vintage years stored in the cellars of my soul. On occasion I could browse through the racks and run my fingers along the labels, stopping to reflect on good and bad, happy and sad, on lessons learned, and stones left unturned.

I do as much with my writing in letters received or sent: savoring times well spent; sharing thoughts on how life's turned out to be; the *shoulda, coulda, woulda*; the thoughts on here and now; the time that's at hand to save our land for a brighter and better tomorrow.

When my children were young, I started each of them a scrapbook. It's been a great source of togetherness: going back in time, searching pages, telling stories encouraged by a picture or tickets to museums, by ribbons won in races and napkins from our favorite places. All these things take part in saving times gone by.

It was the rose pressed between the pages that caused me to reflect. I was late, running through the house. My daughter was in the tub, shouting, "Mom, slow down, we're gonna make it!" I was trying to save time. Then I was getting out of the car, running behind her wheelchair. She screamed again, "Mom, stop!"

I did, catching my breath. I looked at my 8-year-old daughter, thinking she must be hurt, and asked, "What?"

Her gaze was caught in the beauty of budding dwarf roses as she pointed and said, "Sometimes you have to stop and smell the roses."

I couldn't help but laugh. As I sat on the edge of the brick outlined flower bed, I pulled her into my lap and we smelled the fragrance of slowing down enough to enjoy each other. I took a rose for her.

Checking my watch, I hurried off to our meeting, only to find that my watch was fast and we were early, saving and savoring time.

Janie Elliott

The Long Story

It was a wonderful time! We were on our honeymoon and enjoying our first trip to merry ol' England. Armed with lists of the "touristy" things, the recommended antique shops and the great flea markets, we were eager to begin.

Harrods was first on our agenda. The grand store was only a few miles walk from our hotel but we decided to take the tube to save time. At the bottom of three deep escalators and busily chatting and observing the local culture, we had no idea of how far down, down really was. To our chagrin a sign at the train's platform advised that the next train to Knightsbridge Station (Harrods) would be 24 minutes late! We couldn't just stand there and waste time for almost a half-hour. About the same time we both eyed the steps and decided they were for

us.

The curved stairs were thirty in number before being divided by a short landing. Up and up we climbed. Legs began to ache, heads began to pound, our gait became slower and slower but we remained confident that the light of day would be around the next bend.

It wasn't. All we could see far above us were steps and more steps. We remembered reading about the Londoners sleeping in the tube stations during World War II and now we knew why. We were sure we were almost at the center of the earth.

Some 48 minutes later, huffing and puffing we finally reached the street. On the last leg of the journey a pleasant-looking Brit in jogging clothes put his arm on my husband's shoulder and laughed. "You Yanks, you're always trying to save time but this isn't the way to do it." Apparently he was in training for some sort of an athletic ordeal and "climbed the steps two times a week to get in shape." At his invitation we joined him for a "pint" and had a good laugh at our escapade.

You can bet we resolved never, never again to climb the steps of the London tube to save time.

The Magic of Saving Time

I have a female cousin, four years younger than I, who is losing the race with breast cancer. We have been sending old-fashioned handwritten letters to each other for nine months now, and we have both experienced the joy of finding a juicy letter in our mailboxes every three or four days. Time is a big theme in our letters: saving time, spending quality time, wasting time, painful time, earthly limited time, timeless time. You name it, we've written about it.

Walking with my cousin through her days, I have reflected on how I use my time. I am gifted with twenty-four hours each morning, and that fact doesn't come with any guarantee that I will be alive long enough to use all twenty-four hours. Time comes and goes no matter how I spend it. There are so many times I wish I could save some of my time and give it to my cousin. No matter how efficiently I function in my day, multi-tasking as proficiently as possible, I can't give her any of the time I've "saved up" to lengthen her lifespan. Or can I?

I use my "saved time" to mail her letters full of my experiences, thoughts, feelings, and reflections, and they arrive in my cousin's hands with a magic quality. An old-fashioned letter has the magical ability to suspend my cousin's pain and fear in an unconscious place while she savors my good letter with a cup of herbal tea. And then she spends her time (usually in the middle of sleepless nights) gifting me with a response full of wisdom about what matters in the time we are given.

As the months go by, I am saving more and more time to write my cousin. Our letters afford us a way to share our "saved" time with each other, and this sharing magically lengthens both our life spans.

Quan Yin's Reminder

Drowning, flailing.
 I am all over the place!
 They all shout, Me! Me! Me!
 pulling on their pound of flesh
 while I stagger and stumble,
 trying to hold
 to the calm at the center. . .
 losing it. . .
 lost it.
 Blasted to fragments
 and tears of frustration.
 Can't do it all; never could.
 Late and weary to the bone
 there are only scraps left
 and the dogs of tomorrow
 are snapping at those.
 I scrape myself together,
 push back at time,
 and offer what I have
 on the altar of desperation.
 The Goddess of Compassion
 smiles her little smile.
 Her downcast gaze
 fixed on the universe
 within.
 Beneath my frantic
 scrambling,
 eternity sleeps.
 Trudge on.

Carolyn Blankenship
 Austin TX

Saving Time

When I worked, saving time was a big issue. The company's goal was to find better ways to do things allowing more work to be done using fewer resources. This meant increased profits with less cost. At home, time was scarce and had to be budgeted to fit the necessary things into the time that was remaining.

Now that I am retired, saving time has an entirely different meaning. Now I wonder why I might want to hurry. What do I plan to do with the time I will save? It's not as if time can be put into a bank to use at a later time. Each day stands alone. There is no guarantee of tomorrow; there is no reason to save time for it.

With retirement comes the need to fill each day to the max with anything that might bring pleasure, satisfaction, or peace. A nap can be as meaningful as a movie or lunch out. Reading a book might be more enjoyable than visits or TV. Volunteer work can bring more pleasure than normal employment ever did. It's nice sometimes to just do nothing.

What about housework? Where is it written that the house must be constantly dust free? Who made the rule that meals

are always prepared by the same person? I'm not saying that these things aren't important, just that they're not a high priority. At retirement age, just how messy can two seniors make a house? How much laundry can there possibly be? Ironing can wait awhile, there is no rush.

One day a week my husband volunteers, and that's when I clean and iron and do the majority of the housework that will be done that week. Who cares if it isn't perfect the rest of the time? I don't. True friends that may visit won't check for dust. They want to play cards or sit and talk, they aren't there to judge.

Time—there's plenty of it. The only issue is how you choose to use it. Don't allow others to prioritize your life. We only live once, enjoy it!

Judy Watkins
 Hillsboro OR

Wasting, Not Saving Time

The Lords of Achievement, Quest for Success, and Responsibility demand and receive my homage. Yet I am devious. Whenever possible, instead of achieving and producing, I waste my time.

I waste time and have absolutely nothing to show for the hours I have spent. I waste time over a cup of early morning coffee with my husband, a glass of wine in front of the fire before dinner. I take time to teach my daughter how to knit and to sew on a button. I waste time going for a long walk with my daughter and my dog.

Rather than rushing through a workout, on weekends I waste time at the gym, focusing on my body, grateful for the strength I feel. I treasure the memory of the hours I wasted indulging in a weekly massage while I lived in Asia. I love to waste a day or a night reading a long luscious novel. I waste time browsing through a bookstore, or reading book reviews on the Internet. I find peace in wasting time in writing my random thoughts in my journal with no intention of ever letting them be read.

I am capable of wasting hours on the phone visiting with a dear friend who lives in another state. I want to hear how her job is going, which college her daughter is going to attend, what her next home improvement project will be. I skip a day of work after a business trip in Denver to hike and be restored in mountains and to visit with my aunt and uncle and hear how they arrived at the decisions that shaped their lives. I dream of days of rest spent with friends when we have time to tell our whole stories.

Long ago I read that it is where you waste your time that you will find your heart and the meaning of your life. So with no regrets, I will continue to waste my time as much as possible.

Mary Welker-Haddock
 Spring TX

The Fourth Annual Carol W. Landherr Life-Writing Competition

The topic for this year's life-writing competition focuses on our sense of place and the power of the environments in which we live. Contestants responded to these lines by Sallie Tisdale: "As much as we live in a place, we live in place; we inhabit a condition of the soul. We live where we have made definitions, and in the process of making definitions, we create a place in which to live." Now, we proudly present our four winners!

Closing the Door

By Karen Ryan, Erie PA

I steady my hand, turning the key in the front door lock. I know what I have to do. Perhaps this will be my last walk through this doorway. After six months of potential buyers wandering through, one Sunday afternoon after another, this house needs to become another family's home.

The house seems so open and empty. The vast white tile floor gleams under the Palladian window in the foyer. I glance into the unfamiliar white living room—neutralized from the bright blue of our family's time here. "It will be more appealing to buyers," the realtor said. These blank walls hold no memories; they wait to be filled.

I walk back through the bright sunny kitchen, past the sunflower covered walls to windows overlooking the backyard. Such a beautiful view, looking out over the ravine, surrounded by all those leaves. Too quiet, though. The wood deck feels desolate—no birdfeeders grace the railings, the plastic chairs and grill, long gone. I wander back into the family room, looking up into the skylights. Silence bounces off the vaulted ceiling.

I turn around and go to the kitchen cupboard to find the item I left—a lonely crystal goblet. I carry it to the sink and wash it carefully with an old soap-filled sponge. The water droplets on the glass glitter against the stainless steel. I dry it gently with the tattered remains of a roll of paper towels.

This is the last glass I have. I've saved it to "celebrate" the end of my life in this house. I had envisioned myself standing on the deck, throwing it hard against the big oak, hearing it shatter and fall to pieces to the ground. One of the goblet's mates had met a similar fate one angry day, after much too much wine, too many tears.

But I've changed my mind. I'm not angry anymore, just sad. I'll give this solitary glass to Mark, who still has a few left from his half of the set. It will be a peace offering. And this house, once our home, will finally be ready for a new family, no longer sending negative energy to those who walk through the doorway.

I take the goblet and close the door behind me, without looking back.

Karen Ryan has been teaching writing and literature at Gannon University in Erie, PA since 1991. She received her BS from Penn State and MA from Gannon in English. Karen has written essays that have been published in the local paper, as well as a short story that won second place in Pennwriters annual contest in 2002. Karen has also recorded an oral history of her mother's life for the family archives and/or future publication.

The Playground

By L. Hazel Davis, Chelsea MA

I wondered if I should tell Mama. The tetherball rope wound itself around the pole as I batted it back and forth. Other kids were playing softball on the far side of the blacktopped playground but, on my side, there was only me, the tetherball, and the traffic whizzing by on Lindell Boulevard. I watched for a moment to see if any of the cars were my mother's. They weren't, but I did see one of those new cars that my uncle just bought. Daddy said only playboys had Mustangs.

Mama'd be coming soon. She always picked me up at the white stone pillars that formed the entrance to the playground. Picking up my books and bags, I made my way across the asphalt towards our meeting place. I didn't want to be late, and it would take me a few minutes to cross the playground. It was huge. One whole city block!

After a few steps, I had to stop to pull up my knee socks and wondered once again why mine were always falling down. The other girls' knee socks never fell down. Did they hold them up with glue or what? But then, the other girls also didn't wear the dorky headbands that my mother put on me every morning. Passing the building for the big kids, I wondered what it was like inside. They were in fourth grade. It would be a long time until I was allowed in there to see.

I stopped at the only tree in the middle of the playground. Stepping into the sunlight filtering down through the leaves, I held out my hands so that the light would play across them. Would Mama be mad if I told her about what happened? She was always mad anyway. I glanced over at the horrible monkey bars next to the tree. Metal bars, too hot or too cold depending on what season it was, formed a ladder held up by metal poles at either end. I never could walk across the ladder hanging by my hands like we were supposed to in gym. Well, who needs gym anyway?

In the tree's shade, I looked down the long, sunny, black surface toward the cool, dark boundary of tree-lined Delmar Boulevard. There was a secret tunnel down there, which allowed people to cross Delmar underground. A lot of people didn't know that. The tunnel was dark and spooky. It made me feel funny thinking about how no one knew about it. I don't like secrets. Maybe I should tell people about the tunnel.

I looked around to make sure I wasn't alone on the playground and, sure enough, there were still a handful of kids left. I was never alone on the playground. Teachers or parents or kids—someone—was always there. Just then, Mr. Brown, my second grade teacher, passed me on his way to another building, and quickly I stepped out of his way. He was angry like Daddy.

I turned left and stood between the white stone pillars. Mama always came for me here. After only a few minutes, the blue Rambler drove up, and I climbed into the back seat. Children rode in the backseat for safety—that was my mother’s rule. She wanted to get one of those new cars with something called seat belts. Then I’d be even safer.

I don’t know why I picked that day to tell my mother. I’d been trying to tell her forever.

“Ma, a man came up to me and offered me candy if I would get into his car.”

How many times had she told me about men offering me candy to get into their cars? I knew that story better than *Sleeping Beauty*. Our eyes met in the rearview mirror, and Mama’s eyes were dark and angry. I was used to that though. Sometimes it seemed like she was angry all the time, but today it was just the normal, daily anger, not the yelling kind that made me cry.

“Where did this happen?” Mama gave me a little smile.

“In the school playground.”

“When?”

“Uh... I’m not sure. In the last few days, I guess.” Each day took so long, and sometimes I didn’t know what happened on which day.

“What did you do then?” Mama was pretending that she was relaxed, and everything was okay.

What *did* I do? I thought for a minute because that part of the memory wasn’t clear. The bad man in the schoolyard was sharp and clear in my head in a way that most memories weren’t. But then at the end, the image just trailed away. I didn’t really know how I’d reacted. Did I just stand there?

“I ran away,” I announced proudly.

My mother’s eye was the only thing I could see in the rearview mirror. Like she had only one.

“If that happens again, I want you to run down the street to Wendy Melechen’s house. Her family will take you in, and then you can call me and I’ll come and get you. You’ll be safe there.”

“Okay,” I nodded my head. It felt good to tell her. I’d wanted to tell her for the longest time. The longest time.... Maybe I *hadn’t* seen that man in the last few days. I replayed the scene in my head, looking for clues. I had been all alone in the schoolyard. The man—old, gray, dirty, like a bum—was standing near me with his arm out toward me, and I could see the white stone pillars behind him. There was something in his hand—candy, I guess—and he gestured back to his car. It was one of those cars named after the horse. But then the sharpness of the memory softened and seemed to fizzle away like a dream. The more I replayed it, the mushier it got.

I wasn’t so sure anymore. When would I have been alone on the playground? Was it at recess? Lunch? Before or after school? The weekend? I couldn’t figure it out, but it had really happened—I wasn’t making it up. I knew for sure I was alone in the playground when it happened. But when? Mama wouldn’t even let me ride my bike outside the backyard. How could I get to school when no one was in the playground?

That night, Mama kissed me good night and told me she was glad I had told her about the man with the candy. She reminded me to run to Wendy’s house if it happened again.

As I fell asleep, I felt good for the first time in a long time. Sometimes Mama could really help. Everything would be OK now.

Later that night, when Daddy got into my bed, I went away in my head. I went where I always go. I was back at school, in the playground. Walking from the white stone pillars to the middle of the blacktop, I had lots of space all around me. The schoolyard was big and open, and I could run in any direction. I could even run down to Wendy Melechen’s house. Mama said her family would take me in.

L. Hazel Davis lives with her cat, Sugar. Although she’s lived all over the United States, she counts the culture of the Midwest as the one that shaped her. She is a bookkeeper by vocation, a writer of fantasy by avocation, and oral storytelling is her hobby. Life-writing is new to her, and she’s eager to explore it further, especially with regard to place.

A World of Our Own

By Mary M. Elizabeth, Austin TX

Miss Freddie’s ranch was about ten miles out of Belton in Bell County. She had a huge white house up on a hill with sycamore trees all around it. It was way down a lane away from the road. Mama’s house was down the hill behind the Big House, and Uncle Rosie’s was back over another hill behind us. Mama’s house had trees around it, too. The shade always kept the house cool, even in the summer. We kept all the windows open all the time so the breeze would blow through. After workin’ all day or after school my three younger brothers and four younger sisters couldn’t wait to get down the hill back to our house. Because when we got there it was so cool and nice in the shade under all those trees.

It was just a three room wooden house and it was old, it wasn’t even painted, but Miss Freddie said it was ours. We moved out there in 1960 when I was 13 and my youngest sister was three. Mama stayed there almost 18 years working for Miss Freddie. Uncle Rosie had already been out there for years. Mr. Efreem the foreman was there every day. They all taught us about the ranch and the animals and about living in the country. It was a good place to be a child and to grow up. And Mama was happy ’cause we lived too far away from town to get into trouble. We were happy ’cause our step daddy couldn’t hurt Mama no more. Miss Freddie treated us like we were her children ’cause she didn’t have none of her own. We were like a big family and her ranch really was our home.

Miss Freddie owned thousands of acres. Her house was at the highest point and from there we could look out over the fields to the south. The land sloped very gently down toward the tree line at the Little River, and the huge blue sky swept right off the hilltop out to forever. I felt like if I just leaned forward into the air and held my arms out, an updraft would lift me and I’d sail out over those fields like a hawk.

I could look down on the loops of the river winding through pecan bottoms. I’d see the meanders of the creeks, the white dotted cotton fields, and the corn fields with their spiky rows. I’d see the cattle herd slowly shift its size and shape as it bunched together and spread out on its daily graze. I could see

four oil wells, the barns and sheds, the square corrals for the horses, Miss Freddie's big house and Uncle Rosie's and our little houses. From up in the sky it all looked like a big quilt and the county road was a black ribbon at the north boundary.

I'd see the tanks where we swam and fished shining like little round mirrors. I'd see the woods where we hunted. We ate everything we caught. Mama cooked rabbit, squirrel, possum, armadillo, logger head turtle, bass, and catfish. We had our own garden with tomatoes, green beans, black-eyed peas, sweet potatoes, and collard greens. I could see that secret place where Salado Creek joined the Little River where my brothers Mike and Terrell James said they found arrow heads.

After school and on weekends us older kids worked. I helped Mama with chores and laundry in Miss Freddie's house. We all fed the chickens, goats, and pigs, and a hundred other chores depending on the season. We picked up pecans in the bottoms. Mike and I shoved bales of hay off the hay mow for the cattle while Uncle Rosie pulled it around the field with the tractor. The cows followed with slobber hangin' off their lips.

On summer days we worked in the fields. We picked cotton, chopped cotton, and picked corn. Out in those fields that sun sat on our backs like a fire and sweat ran down our faces like tears. My littlest sister, Nonie Marie, brought us water. She was just back and forth, back and forth, the whole time bringing us water. Sometimes Mike grabbed the bucket from her and threw it as us. It felt like a quick slap with a frozen hand but in two seconds we were just wet and hot again. We didn't mind the work 'cause we knew we'd swim in one of the tanks when it was done, and 'cause it was the reason we could live at Miss Freddie's.

On summer nights we slept outside in the yard on mattresses and big pieces of cardboard. The littler kids would stay close to Mama. Mike and Terrell James and I would be on the outside of the group but close enough to hear Mama tell stories. The trees stood over us like guards. We listened to them whisper their secrets in the breeze. We could smell the land and the crops and the animals. We lay on our backs and the sky and all the stars were like a big sparkly blanket hung over us. When we saw shooting stars Mama told us to make a wish. We knew all the phases of the moon. It was so quiet and still. And there weren't any lights 'cause we were away from Miss Freddie's house and the main road. We could hear all the critters in the woods. First it was the crickets, and after dark it was the owls calling to each other back and forth. And sometimes coyotes yipped and cried, especially when the moon was full. We knew they were out there, but they didn't bother us. To us they were just part of our world and they belonged there as much as we did. If we'd had all of Miss Freddie's money, we wouldn't have felt any richer or more blessed 'cause we had a world of our own.

Mary M. Elizabeth grew up in Iowa City, IA. She earned undergraduate and graduate degrees in Social Work and Library and Information Science from the University of Iowa, as well as a degree in Psychology from the University of New Mexico. She says, "I moved to Austin in 1990 and graduated into early adulthood. I have numerous honorary doctorates from various branches of the School of Hard Knocks. I have been writing and re-writing since childhood."

Hope, Our Poster Child for Clean Air

By Dee Stover, Concord, NC

It took a personal tragedy for me to discover the reality of "Environment." It is the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat. It is the toxic chemicals that spew into our air and water and enter our food supplies. I learned a simple and, in retrospect, obvious truth in July of 2002. A truth that impacted my family profoundly and left me a sadder but wiser environmental activist! *If you are smelling it, you are breathing it!*

A few weeks before her wedding, my daughter, Wendie, began a great job in the field of research at a major university. What a wonderful stepping stone for her, coordinating studies on pediatric seizure drugs. Because life was beautiful for this healthy, happy, easy-going twenty-six year old, she didn't even object to the temporary space that was allotted her. Her "office" was a laboratory that had been converted to a junky storage room. A path had been cleared through the piles of boxes, old lab equipment and journals, leading to a space on the lab counter large enough for her computer and telephone. Not a very appealing work space, by any stretch of the imagination, but it was tolerable, except for the smells. Sometimes they weren't there at all, and sometimes they were overwhelming. She joked with co-workers, "If you find my dead body, look for the smells!"

As happy as she was in her marriage and new job, she began experiencing some alarming health changes. Attributing it to long hours at work, she began having headaches, which soon became migraines, heart palpitations, breathing difficulty, irritated eyes, even nose bleeds. She was tired all of the time and never seemed to feel well. In spite of those issues, she wanted a baby.

Wendie and Bobby love children and they desired a family, sooner rather than later. When she went off the pill, her reproductive cycle disappeared. Months passed and the doctor put her on fertility drugs. A pregnancy in October ended at barely six weeks. A second, in December, ended in January at eight weeks. In May she was pregnant again. "Mom, we have named this baby Hope because we really hope it sticks." On July fifth, she brought home my precious grandchild's first portrait, only a tiny dot on an ultrasound, but its little heart was beating. She rejoiced at her morning sickness, allowing herself the luxury of knowing that Hope was thriving. On Thursday, July eleventh, another ultrasound and a visible little egg sac throbbing fiercely! That following Tuesday, the "rotten eggs" got the best of her, sending her home from work early. Two days later she had one more ultrasound, this time to establish a due date. Hope was no longer viable. With a weak and erratic heartbeat, Hope was not going to stick. Three days later Wendie experienced her third spontaneous abortion and our family's grief was all but unbearable.

In trying to process the unthinkable, I turned to my computer. I typed the words "spontaneous abortion" into a search engine and spent hours wading through the endless blur of resources. Through this blur, the word "embryotoxin" jumped off my computer screen. After more hours of mind-numbing research, I had found "reproductive toxins" and

“neurotoxins” and the symptoms associated with these poisons. Were they in the smells? A thorough search of the room gave us the answers we sought.

The “bus fume” smell came from her air vent in the ceiling. The intake was on the building’s loading dock. Signs on the dock instruct truck drivers to turn off their engines, but rarely do they ever comply. Wendie was breathing diesel fuel emissions drawn through the intake. Many of the components of diesel fuel exhaust are harmful, but carbon monoxide is an embryotoxin.

The “rotten egg” smell was worse. At the end of the lab counter, under the air vent, was a sink, hidden behind boxes and journals. It had a dry trap. I never gave much thought to the traps in sinks and assumed that the U-shaped pipes were there to catch things that fall into the drain. The U is there to trap water in its bottom, forming a seal that prevents gases from escaping the drain. Wendie was breathing sewer gas spewing from that drain like water from a hole in a hose. The gases shot up into the air vent and were pulled across the room to the exhaust vent in the wall above her head. The major component of sewer gas is deadly hydrogen sulfide, which smells like rotten eggs and is heavier than air. The poison was sinking down into her face.

The diesel fuel exhaust was only present when trucks were at the dock. The sewer gases were intermittent according to the air pressure in the soil stack that runs from sewer to roof. Both of these gases are asphyxiants. When inhaled, they are absorbed into the red blood cells instead of the oxygen needed to sustain life. Hydrogen sulfide is also a reproductive toxin. Most universities have a department of environmental health and safety. It was discouraging to discover that there exists a standard procedure to cover up environmental complaints, avoiding litigation and fines. OSHA cannot make an employer recreate an exposure once it is gone. They soon found out, though, that hell hath no fury like a mother whose child has been harmed.

I began a campaign of letters and emails. I sent Wendie’s story to government officials, Congress, the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Institute for Health, and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. These

are just a few of the dozens of agencies that learned of my outrage. I wrote to all of the doctors at the university and the professional organizations to which these “environmental engineers” belonged. I had some sympathetic answers to my mail but the response was disappointing until I received a call from an epidemiologist at the School of Public Health. The doctor told me that I had done my research and was right on target. He expressed his dismay that his university would do what he called the “norm” for industry, affecting a cover up. North Carolina-OSH cited the school for eight violations, none of which pertained to the “smells.”

I know that what I did saved someone else from the same torment, possibly even saved a life. Wendie was at the university for six more weeks before moving on to a better and safer position at a private company. Her reproductive cycle returned and she is now free from the symptoms that plagued her for over two years. As for me, I will never stop being angry for our loss. I learned more than I ever wanted to know about environmental toxins and the hazards that come with them, and I will continue to fight for better protections.

We are anxiously awaiting the birth of a baby! That anxiety will be there until we hold this beloved child in our arms. Every month that goes by, though, each milestone passed, gives us a renewal of Hope!

Doreen Stover was nicknamed Dee shortly after birth when her big brother couldn’t pronounce her given name. She has been happily married for 34 years and is the mother of three children. “From my earliest childhood [Dee says] I can remember aspiring to be a mom, and since my children are now grown, grandmom has become the new priority. As you can see from this story, becoming a grandmother has given a whole new dimension to my life and a reason for activism. A grief and now a joy!”

Some memories are realities, and are better than anything that can ever happen again.—Willa Cather

Editing Assistance

Jane Ross, Assistant Editor of the *Story Circle Journal* and editor of the 2003 *True Words Anthology*, is available for private editing services.

Jane has worked in publishing for nearly twenty years and has worked on dozens of books as a copyeditor and proof reader.

Short works to book length manuscripts
Contact Jane at
Phone (512) 451-3129
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Stories from the Heart II

The Story Circle Network National Conference

February 6–8, 2004
Red Lion Hotel
Austin, Texas

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.

Join us for interesting workshops, informative panel presentations, inspiring speakers, delightful entertainment, an Open Mike, a Story Wall, a Story Circle Marketplace, an Internet Chapter reception, the chance to meet other SCN members, and much more!



Our Speakers

We are 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.

At lunch on Sunday, we will hear from Wilhelmina Delco, former member of the Texas State Legislature and admired educator and civil rights activist.



Our Hotel

The Red Lion Hotel
6121 North I-35 at Highway 290
Austin, TX 78752
512-323-5466; 800-RED-LION

To receive the *low* conference rate (\$85/night plus tax, double occupancy) call the hotel directly (512-323-5466 or 1-800-RED LION) and make your reservations no later than January 29, 2004.

Looking for a roommate?

Go to our website, <http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/roommates.shtml> or write to the office and we'll post your information for you.

Works of Heart: Our Story Circle Marketplace

Our Works of Heart Marketplace will feature books, paper products, print-related services, and writing-related items. If you're a writer, artist, crafter, or small publisher with published/self-published books; artist-made paper, books, and cards; or other writing-related items to sell, we welcome you to apply for space in Works of Heart. We'll have a limited number of tables available in a hallway area, directly adjacent to meeting rooms, for Saturday only. Deadline for vendor applications is December 1, 2000. The application form as well as vendor guidelines, can be found on our website, at <http://storycircle.org/Conference/frmvendor.shtml>. Vendors must be members of SCN.

Visit our Conference Web Page

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

We're looking forward to seeing *you* at Stories from the Heart II.

Registration Form

Stories from the Heart, February 6–8, 2004

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

Session/Day	Membership Status	Early Registration (before 12/15/03)	Regular Registration (12/16/03–02/5/04)	Registration at the Door	Amount
Full Session (Fri/Sat/Sun)	Member	\$160	\$185	\$210	
	Non-Member*	\$210	\$235	\$260	
Friday only (Keynote Speaker)	Member & Non-Member/Guest	\$25	\$30	Not available	
Saturday Session Only (Includes lunch)	Member	\$75	\$100	\$125	
	Non-Member/Guest	\$100	\$125	\$150	
Saturday Lunch Only (Register by 2/5/04)	Member	\$25	\$35	Not available	
	Non-Member/Guest				
Sunday Session Only (Includes lunch)	Member	\$50	\$75	\$110	
	Non-Member/Guest	\$75	\$100	\$135	
Sunday Lunch Only (Register by 2/5/03)	Member & Non-Member/Guest	\$25	\$35	Not available	
Total Enclosed					

- Non-Members who choose to join prior to the end of the conference on Sunday, February 8, 2004, will have a portion of their registration fee applied to their dues.
- Cancellations are accepted until January 15, 2004, and are subject to a cancellation fee of \$50 for a full conference registration or \$10 for a one-day registration. There is no refund for Friday's lecture/reception.

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

Sisters Helping Sisters

If you are a member of SCN and have an annual family income of \$50,000 or less, you may apply for a conference scholarship. These will be awarded in amounts ranging from \$50 to the full conference cost, depending on need and the availability of funds. We are also willing to consider an additional \$50 for baby-sitting help. Additionally, we may be able to assist with travel/lodging (but we can't confirm the availability of travel/lodging money until January, 2004). To apply, go <http://www.storycircle.org/frmregister.shtml>. Or write to us, telling us how much aid you need (for registration, childcare, travel/lodging). Tell us about yourself and your reasons for applying for a scholarship. One of the objectives of Stories from the Heart II is to return to our communities and share our discoveries with others. In approximately 200 words, explain how you will help the Story Circle Network achieve this objective.

Scholarship awards will be based on perceived need, the thoughtfulness of your response, and your interest in sharing what you learn in your community (for example, by starting a Story Circle or developing other women's story-sharing activities). We want to encourage the attendance of a diverse group of women who want to share their stories and help other women enjoy the benefits of women's story-telling and story-sharing.

If you request a subsidy, you must pay a \$50 deposit towards your conference fees. If you receive a subsidy, you will then pay the remaining fee (the \$160 full conference fee, minus the subsidy, minus your \$50 deposit). This amount must be paid by **January 10, 2004**.

Stories from the Heart II: Conference Program

To whet your appetite for our second National Conference, we offer you the following wonderful menu of selections. We received a great many wonderful program proposals, and our selection committee had a difficult time choosing among them. Our final selections represent some bright new voices in Story Circle. They come from across the country and from Canada and will share a marvelous array of storytelling ideas, tips, information, and inspiration! Planning to attend? Register *now*, while you're thinking of it! (Our listing here is tentative, of course, and subject to change where necessary.)

Finding Your Voice

The Heart's Gift—Jodi Davis, Minnesota
 Writing as Spiritual Practice—Lana Landaverde, California
 Kick-Starting Creativity: Fun and Games to Add Depth to Your Writing—Jean McGroarty, Indiana
 You Can't Go Over It; You Can't Go Under It; You Have to Go Through It!—Frances Reynolds, Missouri
 Your Life is Your Art! You Are the Artist—Jeanne Ware, Texas
 Journaling a Fragmented Life—Sharon Wildwind, Alberta, Canada

Magical Methods of Storytelling

When You Shake the Family Tree—Sherryl Rogers, Texas
 Bringing Her to Life: From Memoir to Monologue—Naomi Sandweiss, New Mexico
 Handmade Books to Tell Your Story—Beck Whitehead, Texas
 Quilting Your Legacy—Janie York, Nebraska
 Presenting Your Story Creatively—Suzanne Zoch, New Mexico

Serious Stuff

The Healing Power of Journaling—Kathleen Baker, Florida
 Becoming Whole: Writing Stories to Heal the Self, Soul, and Family—Linda Myers, California
 Writing Women's Biography—PJ Pierce, Texas
 How to Be Your Own Editor—Jane Ross, Texas
 Poetic Laughter: Writing Funny Poems—Jan Seale, Texas

Stories in Many Voices

Mothers/Daughters: Connecting Through Our Stories—Tina Dubin, Texas
 A Priceless Legacy: Writing Your Family History—Pat Flathouse, Texas
 Listening Others into Story—Mary Jane Nordgren, Oregon
 Voices from the Natural World—Susan Hanson, Susan Albert, Texas
 Truth Be Told: Stories of Women in Prison—Natalie Sorrell, Carol Waid, Suzanne Armistead, Texas

Book/Workshop Kit Order Form

____ Send me ____ paperback copy/copies of *With Courage and Common Sense*, at \$22.50 (includes shipping).
 TX residents add \$1.85 tax.

____ Send me ____ hardcover copy/copies of *With Courage and Common Sense*, at \$44.50 (includes shipping).
 TX residents add \$3.70 tax.

____ Send me ____ copy/copies of *Your Life, Your Story*, at \$15 (includes shipping and applicable tax).

____ Send me the workshop kit, *Memoirs: Piecing Together the Stories of Our Lives*, at \$105 (SCN members) or \$155 (non-members). Shipping and applicable tax are included. Institutional purchase: \$205.

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 or use your credit card at www.owlcircle.com

Older Women's
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**Your Life,
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The Owl-Circle Program is a project of
 The Story Circle Network

A Story Circle News Roundup

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

Austin Chapter Update

The Austin Chapter (now at 162 members) held an open mike at its August Be Our Guest program. Nine women read their work. The chapter elected a slate of officers for 2004: Jackie Newman, President, Donna Remmert, Program Coordinator, and Danelle Sasser, Treasurer.

The chapter is planning its holiday party. This year's event, which will be held on December 7, will be a Creativity Bazaar. Artists who are members will showcase and sell their work. There will be books, jewelry, greeting cards, pottery, quilted art pieces, collages, painted boxes, stained glass, and more.

For information about the chapter's activities, or to join, go to the SCN website, at www.storycircle.org, or call the SCN office, at 512-454-9833.

Paula Yost Presents Workshops at Storykeepers Festival

On August 22-23, Paula Stallings Yost traveled to Missoula MT to present two workshops at the StoryKeepers' Festival. StoryKeepers is a non-profit organization dedicated to the promotion and preservation of oral and written histories through sharing and gathering stories. Paula's presentations included "The Healing Power of Stories," emphasizing the importance of journaling as a road to self-discovery and self-confidence, and "Story Circles" based on SCN's concept of story sharing. Paula is an SCN board member and Vice President of the Association for Personal Historians.

Owl Circles in Avon, IN

Lynn Mills is leading an OWL-Circle that is jointly sponsored by the library where she works (the Avon-Washington Township Library) and the local senior center. The group meets at the senior center. "This is the first time we've sponsored a program jointly," Lynn writes, "and it's going well. We have 10 participants who are quite enthusiastic. It is fun to see how much more comfortable with their writing skills the women are even just after one class; their stories are getting longer and more detailed each time they write."

At the end of the summer session, Lynn prepared a 32-page booklet that includes a color group photo of the participants, and stories by all the writers. The stories may be short, but most are rich in detail and written from the heart's deepest core. Reach Lynn at Mills@avol.lib.in.us.

Toronto Circles

Mary Ann Moore has a new theme for her Toronto writing circle, which begins in September: "Writing Your Way Home." She has created writing circles for Guelph, Elora,

and Bayfield, Ontario, with some designed especially for caregivers. Her circles, she says, are designed "to provide a safe place for women to tell their stories, to write what has heart and meaning for us, and to find the still center of ourselves." For more information, visit Mary Ann's website at <http://www.retreatonline.net/flyingmermaids>.

Philadelphia Circles

Sandra Pesini is leading two circles at her Philadelphia home. The Sunday circle meets weekly, writes from a prompt, and shares stories. The last writing of the evening is a response to a "fun prompt" brought by one of the members. The Monday night circle, Serendipity Ladies, has been meeting weekly since December. "We just had our first writing retreat at a campground," Sandra writes, "with the outdoors and summer to inspire us. It was a great time!" Sandra has also sent us a copy of the attractive booklet, "Reflections of the Heart," that she prepared for her group, complete with photos of the participants! For information, contact Sandra at Wrdowisdom@aol.com, or 215-673-3104.

Seniors for Literacy

The Nova Scotia Senior Citizens Secretariat, on behalf of Nova Scotia Seniors for Literacy Committee, recently requested 100 copies of the SCN Facilitator's Guide, to be included in the resource kit they are developing. The kits will be distributed to Community Learning Networks, public libraries, and seniors' clubs across Nova Scotia.

Are there programs in your community that would benefit from SCN's work? Visit our website, at www.storycircle.org, to see what we offer, free of charge.

Owl Circles in Guelph, Ontario

Sheryl Spencer writes that she has recently completed her second OWL workshop. "I have done both workshops through local churches on a partnership basis, where the church offers me free or discounted space and help with publicity, and I offer the workshops at a reasonable price. I have loved doing these workshops. I think the OWL program is masterfully prepared and follows a rhythm of topics and activities that can't be improved upon. . . . All of these women have raved about their experiences and have found the workshop powerful, not only in terms of the stories produced but also as a healing experience. I feel blessed to share these women's stories." She also reports that the groups have been smaller than she hoped, and that it has not been easy to get women to sign up. (Raising awareness of the benefit of life-writing is a big job for all of us!)

For Circle Facilitators**What is a Story Circle?**

This is the second of four articles about the rewarding, enriching art of facilitating a Story Circle. We hope you'll take the ideas in these pieces and put them to work in your own Story Circle. And remember: a circle doesn't have to be fine or fancy—simply invite a few friends to join you at your kitchen table, or in a favorite coffee house or bookstore or library. No bells or whistles, no need for expensive facilitator's training or certification. Just women and their life stories. That's what it's all about!

Good stories have the power to save us. We can all make a difference by simply sharing our stories with real people in real times and places.

—Mary Pipher

Do not overlook the most important teacher that you have, which is your own intuitive knowing. Ultimately, your greatest teacher is to live with an open heart.

—Pat Rodegast & Judith Stanton

For more information about facilitating a Story Circle, go to our website, www.storycircle.org, and click on Facilitator's Guide, under "How to Start a Story Circle." It's a free download. Or send \$2 to SCN, Facilitator's Guide, PO Box 500127, Austin TX.

What is a Story Circle?

A Story Circle is a group of women who come together on a regular basis to write, read, share, and celebrate the stories of their lives. It may be made up of women who have never met one another and have come together just for the purpose of reading, writing, and sharing. Or it might be made up of members of an existing organization—a church, for instance, or a reading group, or simply a group of friends. Circles vary in size, from three or four women to twelve or fifteen. (Larger groups may want to break into smaller groups for sharing.)

A Story Circle may be open-ended, the members continuing to write, read, and celebrate together for months or years. Or a Circle may be time-limited—that is, it may decide to meet for six to twelve weeks, and work through a set of topics, such as the ones listed in our *Facilitator's Guide* or suggested in the *Story Circle Journal*.

Who Leads a Story Circle? Could I Do It?

Of course you can do it! You don't need experience, just a willing heart.

A Story Circle may be led by a facilitator or teacher who chooses a place and time, invites participants to join the group, suggests writing topics, and keeps things going.

Sometimes, Story Circles are led by the group itself (this works well when members are already used to working together), or by individual members taking turns leading sessions, which may be held in participants' homes.

Unless the Story Circle is sponsored by a chapter (like our Austin Chapter circles), Story Circle participants don't have to be members of the Story Circle Network. We hope they will want to join, though, once they find out about the purpose of the organization and read the quarterly *Story Circle Journal*. And we hope that you'll let us know about your Story Circle, so we can feature it in our *Journal* and post it on our website.

How Do I Get Started?

If you're already a member of an on-going group or club, organizing a Story Circle may be as easy as deciding when and where to get together and what topics you want to write about.

If you're forming a new group, you'll want to give some thought to selecting members. Here are

some ideas for going about it.

Start by discussing the group with friends and relatives. They may not be interested, but they may know someone who is. Then, as you contact possible members, they can help with the recruiting process by talking to *their* friends and relatives. Or you may already have a mailing list or know friends who have mailing lists, and can mail a postcard announcing your idea for forming a Story Circle.

You might also contact the manager of a local bookstore. The store may have an on-going reading or writing group whose members would be interested in hearing your idea for forming a Story Circle. Or, you might ask the manager if you can put up a notice about the Story Circle on a bulletin board in the store. (Before you post notices, though, remember that you'll have to post a phone number or email, which involves some risk. If you're worried about this, you could ask interested people to leave their names and phone numbers with the store's manager, and you could get in touch with them.)

You might contact local teachers' groups, librarians, nurses' organizations, or writers' clubs, and explore local community and volunteer organizations, such as PTAs, churches and synagogues, and other women's groups. You might also try the local YWCA and women's centers. Most of these organizations have newsletters and might be willing to include a notice of your newly-forming Story Circle. And use your local newspapers, particularly those that target an audience interested in personal growth and development.

A Women's Circle

You may be contacted by one or two men who want to join your Circle. At SCN, we say no to this request, because we want to hear *women's* stories. Many women will allow a man to dominate the sharing, and most women will not be as honest and candid in their expression of feelings and fears if a man is listening, especially if they feel he is making judgments about the form or content of their writing. But even a non-dominant male, by his presence alone, will affect the nature of the writing and of the exchange. We hope you'll make your Story Circle a women-only experience!

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.

Beverly Galante's story "The Joy of Place" has been accepted for the anthology *Small Town USA*, appearing this fall. Beverly has also had two poems, "The Sea" and "Nostalgia," accepted for publication by the *World of Poetry*.

Renee Howard Cassese has had a personal essay entitled "The Bookmobile" accepted for publication in *Small Town USA*. Renee heard about *Small Town USA* through the SCN Market Watch webpage (www.storycircle.org/MarketWatch.shtml)!

Linda Wisniewski's short story, "Anything Could Happen," was published in the Summer 2003 issue of *JAW Magazine*. The story began in Susan Albert's "From Memoir to Fiction" on-line class. Linda also won special honorable mention in this year's *Byline Magazine* profile article contest, for her story "Peacetalks: Are You Listening?"

Jackie Woolley's article, "It's Not My Fault," will be published in the November 2003 issue of "Busy Freelancer," a monthly e-zine for freelancing parents. Check them out at www.writefromhome.com. Also, Jackie was named as a semi-finalist in the prestigious William Faulkner Creative Writing Competition, 2002, for her entry, *The Sound of Windmills*, in the literary novel category. The novel draws from her background, growing up in north Texas in the 1930s and '40s. See Jackie's website at home.austin.rr.com/jjbooks.

Theresa May's original musical, "Waking Sleeping Beauty," (co-written with two other playwrights), was performed in Austin TX by KidsActing during July, 2003. Theresa costumes seven shows a year for the troop; this is her first playwrighting credit.

Nancy Rigg of Los Angeles CA has been honored by the International Swiftwater Rescue organization. They have created an annual "Rigg International Swiftwater Rescue Challenge" event. Nancy was also presented with the Higgins and Langley Lifetime Achievement Award by the National Association for Search and Rescue's Water Rescue Committee, and the Canadian Distinguished Service Medal.

Deborah Linzer, whose daughter died tragically as a result of bad vehicle tires, was interviewed on ABC's "Good Morning America" on Monday, May 19th. You can read the article here: abcnews.go.com/sections/GMA/US/GMA030519Tire_investigation_hunter.html.

Women Write about the Southwest: A Call for Submissions

The Story Circle Network is preparing a selected collection of writings by women, celebrating their experiences in the natural world of the Southwest. As a whole, these writings will demonstrate and illuminate not only the rich diversity of landscapes and environments of the Southwest, but the extraordinary range of women's voices and women's experiences of the land. The collection will be made up of a variety of literary forms—memoir, creative non-fiction, essay, poetry—and will include pieces by both established and new writers. To achieve the broadest geographical coverage, the editors have defined the Southwest Region as extending from the Gulf Coast across the Texas Hill Country to the dry deserts of west Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, southern Colorado, and southern California.

When the manuscript is completed, it will be submitted to the University of Texas Press, which published Story Circle's first memoir collection, *With Courage and Common Sense*.

For details, rules, and information about the submission and selection process, go to <http://www.storycircle.org/WomenWrite/> or write to SCN, PO Box 500127, Austin TX 78750.

Life Writers' Market Watch: Opportunities for Publishing

Baby Boomer Anthology. Check out the call for submissions for an upcoming anthology of stories from women born 1949–64 at www.boomerwomenspeak.com, or contact Dotsie Bregel at dots@boomerwomenspeak.com.

The Noble Generation II is being compiled by the folks at Barnes & Noble, who welcome submissions from people all over Texas. Contributions should focus on the Great Depression, WWII, the '50s, and '60s. Guidelines at www.storycircle.org/nobleii.html. Deadline: Dec. 31, 2003

A Cup of Comfort is an acclaimed book series, featuring uplifting true stories about relationships and experiences that comfort, inspire, and enrich our lives. All contributors receive a monetary fee and free copy of the book. Currently seeking submissions of 1000–2000 word stories for the following anthologies: *A Cup of Comfort for the Spirit*, deadline October 31, 2003; *A Cup of Comfort for Mothers and Sons*, deadline November 30, 2003. For guidelines: email wordsinger@aol.com; or send SASE to P.O. Box 863, Eugene, Oregon 97440, USA; or visit the website at www.cupofcomfort.com.

A Cup of Comfort Devotional (Christian) invites submissions of devotional stories. For guidelines or to submit, please visit

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

*with Susan Albert, Carolyn Blankenship, Catherine Cogburn,
Pat Flathouse, Donna Remmert, and Jane Ross*

Telling, Sharing, and Shaping Our Stories

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

Saturday, October 4 & Sunday, October 5, 2003

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

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

Schmooze the Muse Saturdays

This fall, Story Circle offers two Saturday writing-intensive workshops in the Austin area.

Sept. 13. *Centering: Clay as Teacher and Tool for Telling Your Story*, led by *Rebecca Roberts*. We meet in a working clay studio. Using the media of clay and writing, we will explore and access some of our most basic archetypal energy, then write and read about the process. Rebecca is a professional potter with 30 years experience. Clay/supplies: \$7

Oct. 25: *Evolution of the Soul*, led by *Gale Gassiot*. Who am I? What is my life purpose? These age-old questions are the basis of this experiential class. Participants create a timeline of their life to mark the points at which the soul path evolves and life changes direction. Gale will share her spiritual toolbox of Hatha yoga, toning, meditation, journaling, and drumming. Gale teaches art and art as therapeutic experience.

Registration is limited to eight. \$65 for members, \$75 non-members. Call 512-454-9833, or use our on-line form at www.storycircle.org.

*Story Circle Network
PO Box 500127
Austin TX 78750-0127*

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