



Story Circle Journal

Volume 8 Number 4, December, 2004

The newsletter for women with stories to tell...

LifeLines Writing Retreat to Feature Author, Teacher Maureen Murdock

The wildflowers should be in exuberant bloom across Texas next April when we'll take some rural back roads lined with color to Round Top, Texas, (a little over an hour's drive east of Austin) for the second SCN **LifeLines** Lifewriting Retreat. Join us for this women-only weekend lifewriting event, led by Maureen Murdock, at the beautiful Festival Hill campus in Round Top.

Maureen Murdock's 1990 book, *The Heroine's Journey: Woman's Quest for Wholeness*, gave us a whole new way of looking at the life challenges faced by most women as we journey from childhood through to our later years. Through her books and writing classes, psychotherapist, writer, and teacher, Maureen Murdock has been helping women reclaim and write their own life stories. (You can learn more about Maureen Murdock and her work on pages 8-11 of this issue, in an interview, and in an excerpt and book review of her most recent book, *Unreliable Truth: On Memoir and Memory*.)

The LifeLines retreat will begin on Friday evening with dinner, followed by our first workshop session with Maureen. We'll sleep in double-occupancy accommodations (two twin beds in each room) in the Artist's Residence building. Dinner on Friday evening, three meals on Saturday (including continental breakfast), continental breakfast on Sunday, and drinks/snacks during breaks are included. Workshop sessions continue Saturday morning and afternoon with Maureen. On Saturday evening we will watch a video and take part in a discussion session led by SCN President Judith Helburn. Our final session with Maureen will be on Sunday morning.

The retreat center, Festival Hill, is the home of the International Festival Institute, founded in 1972 by world-renowned concert pianist James Dick. The unique 200-acre campus contains major performance facilities, historic houses, and extensive gardens, parks, and nature preserves. You can view the Festival Hill website at www.festivalhill.org.

Registration fees for this weekend retreat are \$325 for SCN members, \$350 for non-members. (Non-members who choose to join prior to the end of the retreat on Sunday, April 10, 2005 will have a portion of their registration fee applied to their dues.) The fee includes a double-occupancy room and five meals. To register, please use our online form or use the registration form on page 23 and be sure and read the registration options and cancellation policies listed there. We look forward to seeing you in April. ❖

To sign up for the LifeLines Retreat, visit the website at
www.storycircle.org/LifeLines
or use the registration form on p. 23.



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Letter from SCN's President



Thank you, thank you to all the members of SCN who have contributed to our annual fund drive and/or upgraded their membership. We know that *you* know how important even the smallest contribution is. If every dues paying member gave just \$10, we could continue to expand our services. Those of you who have put off sending your donation to SCN, please sit down today to write that check. Our honor roll naming donors who contribute \$25 or more in any way will be posted in our March Journal. But do know that we honor all of our members.

Some great news for SCN: Texas State University in San Marcos, TX, which has a substantial archive of writings in their Southwestern Writers Collection, will be acquiring the archives of our first University of Texas Press book, *With Courage and Common Sense*. And, they are interested in the materials from our upcoming book, *A Land Full of Stories: Women Write about the Southwest*. Please recall that all of the contributors to the first book and half the contributors to the second book are "jest gals" like you and me. Story Circle Network is continuing its mission of raising public awareness of the importance of women's personal histories.

Our second LifeLines Retreat, featuring Jungian analyst and author, Maureen Murdock, is coming up fast, in April '05. Take a drive through the beautiful wildflowers of Texas to Festival Hill and be one of only 50 women participating. Read more about Maureen and the LifeLines retreat in this *Journal* issue. Our first LifeLines filled up quickly and had a waiting list of 20 women so sign up soon.

I became acquainted with Maureen's work around 1990 when I studied her *Heroine's Journey* in a class. Her book taught me that I didn't have to be just like a man to be successful.

Email, as most of you know, can bring unexpected blessings. One of our Board members received an email about a UCLA study on friendship among women, which was so intriguing and interesting that the Board has decided that, for 2005, SCN will feature women's friendships and support. See Linda Wisniewski's article on p. 3 of this issue and look for more articles on "Tend and Befriend" throughout next year.

The Board of SCN attended a retreat very skillfully led by member Hazel Baylor. Thanks to the cooperation and contributions by all the Board members, we came away full of enthusiasm and energy. We pledged to remain focused on the many ways to help women tell their stories. We pledged to reach out even more to those who may continue to think of their lives as uninteresting and insignificant. We are looking for ways for women from outside of the central-Texas area (where SCN began in 1997) to be more involved in SCN as a whole and in our decision-making process. We continue to help National SCN and our Chapters to work well together. Maybe, as a member suggested, we will create Regions so that women in various areas of the country can gather more easily for programs such as Writing from Life. These are exciting times for SCN.

Judith Helburn

Judith Helburn
President, Story Circle Network

Story Circle Journal

STORY CIRCLE JOURNAL 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. If you have special mental-health needs, please see a healthcare professional.

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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.

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Tend and befriend

Forget “Fight or Flight”—It’s All About Friendship

Recent research confirms what we all knew in our hearts—that friendships among women have a positive effect on our health and happiness. **Linda Wisniewski** tells us about the science that explains why belonging to a Story Circle is so nurturing.

Are women really hard-wired to be more sociable than men? Not long ago, many feminists believed that the differences between men and women were due to the way boys and girls are raised, especially in early childhood. Recent studies, however, suggest that it may be “nature over nurture,” at least where friendship is concerned.

Boys and girls are often raised differently, but it’s beginning to appear that females possess social skills from birth. Studies on day-old babies show that girls stare longer at human faces than mechanical objects, while boys do just the opposite. Cambridge University psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen, who performed many of these studies, writes about them in *The Essential Difference: The Truth about the Male and Female Brain* (Basic Books, 2003). “On average,” he says, “women engage in more consistent social smiling and maintained eye contact than does the average man.”

Researchers tracking baboons in Kenya recorded the amount of time each female spent socializing—sitting near and grooming each other. The females with the most elaborate social networks had the best chance of their offspring surviving. Susan Alberts of Duke University, one of the researchers on the Kenya study, suspects that the friendly females were less vulnerable to predators and healthier because of all the grooming they received.

Chris Schetter, a UCLA psychologist, has documented a similar pattern among human mothers. In 2000, she interviewed 247 pregnant women and found that those who got the most support from family and friends delivered higher-weight babies.

UCLA psychologist Shelley E. Taylor suggests that women respond to stress differently than men. In her book, *The Tending Instinct* (Times Books, 2002), Taylor theorizes that while men exhibit the well-known “fight or flight” response to stress, women turn to one another. She says that over time, women who formed strong bonds with other women were more likely to survive, as were their offspring. “Female ties have evolved to ensure that certain vital functions

important to life get maintained,” says Taylor, whose research started with an “aha!” moment at work. Taylor and her colleague at UCLA, Laura Klein, noticed that when women workers in their lab were stressed, they cleaned the lab and had coffee together. Their male co-workers, under the same pressures, holed up somewhere alone. When both scientists found that 90% of stress research was done on men, they realized they were on to something.

Taylor calls the female stress response “tend and befriend,” and believes there may be a biological reason for it. The hormone oxytocin, which is released into a woman’s bloodstream after childbirth, facilitates mother-infant bonding. Oxytocin is also released during stress and is enhanced by estrogen. When women actually engage in nurturing and socializing, more oxytocin is released, producing a calming effect. Testosterone, which men produce at high levels when under stress, tends to reduce the effects of oxytocin.

Another type of hormone, endogenous opioids, are also associated with feelings of relaxation and nurturing, and are released along with oxytocin when a woman nurses her baby. Scientist Larry Janner of the University of California, Irvine, gave opioid blockers to 22 men and 29 women. The men were unaffected, but the women spent more time alone, called their friends less often and said that when they did socialize, it was less pleasant than usual.

Even before these studies, women knew that friends would help them through the thorny patches of life. Our ancestors shared child-care duties while the men were out hunting. Our stay-at-home mothers in the 1950s had their coffee klatches. Victorian women met for afternoon tea. Now, in the age of the Internet, women are sharing their stories online through groups like the Story Circle Network.

Journalists Ellen Goodman and Patricia O’Brien documented their 25-year friendship in the book, *I Know Just What You Mean: The Power of Friendship in Womens Lives* (Simon & Schuster, 2000). They have worked hard over the years to maintain their strong connection, in the face of many changes. They lament the fact that in our stress-filled lives, many women feel they have to give up time with friends in order to keep up with job and family pressures. “Women can’t

...while men exhibit the well-known “fight or flight” response to stress, women turn to one another.

Linda C. Wisniewski teaches memoir workshops at Bucks County (PA) Community College and works as a reporter for the *Bucks County Herald*. Her personal essays and memoirs have been published in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, *Mindprints*, *Cup of Comfort for Sisters* and several literary magazines. In 2003, she was nominated for a Pushcart Prize for a memoir piece she started in an Internet story circle.

(Continued on page 21)

A Land Full of Stories

The calls for submissions for A Land Full of Stories: Women Write about the Southwest, attracted over 400 entries for this new SCN anthology, to be published by University of Texas Press. **Kara Flathouse** submitted this evocative story, "Sandia Sunrise." And **Paula Yost** reflects on the process of selecting and editing stories for the volume.

Sandia Sunrise

Kara Flathouse

Pampa TX

My eyes open to the darkness of the room and I will my body to remain still. I know the moment I move I will be sick and I will have to throw myself across the room to the bathroom. The new life growing inside of me seems to be wreaking havoc on my ability to function normally. My husband snores loudly by my side, oblivious to the war that is being waged inside my being. It is still dark outside, but I know that soon the sun will begin its ascent over the Sandia Mountains that are right outside the bedroom window of my husband's aunt and uncle's house. I brace myself for the complete upheaval any motion will bring, take a deep breath, and slowly sit up. I am anxious to go outside and watch the sun light up the eastern sky. My body reminds me that I will have to spend at least a few of my waking moments in the bathroom trying to appease my upset stomach.

Finally, I am able to make my way down the winding stairs, quietly and slowly, and out onto the back porch. As I slide open the back door, cool mountain air washes over my hot skin. I inhale the early fall air with deep healing breaths as I curl up on one of the cushioned lounge chairs taking in the last few moments of darkness and gazing at the endless stars that mark the sky overhead. In front of me the porch ends with a decorative metal fence that separates suburban yard from the short green of the fairway. My eyes follow the downward slope of the golf course until I can see the twinkling of lights from the city of Albuquerque below. And there to the left, stretching upward toward the starry skies is the dark form of the Sandia. I have been told that Sandia means watermelon and in the evening, as the sun sets, for one glorious moment the mountain takes on a glow reminiscent of the fruit's flesh.

Says **Kara Flathouse**: Writing has been an important part of my life since I was a young child. My mom encouraged my love of literature by reading great classics to us every night before bedtime, starting when I was three. As an adult my writing has been further encouraged by SCN, my mother-in-law, and family. I hope to leave a written legacy for my daughters to enjoy some day.

At the moment, the color of the mountain is still hidden from me. Slowly, miraculously, orange and red light begins to streak across the sky from behind the mountain. I am reminded of childhood fairies and envision them dancing across the dark sky in lines of red and orange calling to the stars and moon that it is now the sun's turn to shine. The sounds of the crickets and frogs stop as the songs of morning doves and the calls of mockingbirds announce the new day. I am lulled by the echoes of the early morning and can feel a sense of calm settling in the pit of my stomach. I have not heard one human sound since stepping out onto this porch, and

yet I know my spirit is not the only one witnessing this morning as it unfolds and comforts me.

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The glow behind the mountain is becoming stronger and I know that soon the sun will come out of its hiding place. Hummingbird feeders and bright vibrant flowers surround the porch. The white roses trailing along the fence beside me give off a sweet fragrance that now seems to be soothing my very sensitive sense of smell. As the sun seems to burst out from behind the Sandia I am bathed in a sea of glowing orange. The sun takes the chill from the air and with its warmth beckons all creatures from their nocturnal dwellings. Tiny fluorescent green hummingbirds, radiant in the morning light, begin to converge on the feeders. I have never seen so many in one spot. They quickly flutter from feeder to feeder; I am amazed by their sugar-fed energy. Occasionally, one will rest on the cactus in the next yard and I am able to study its bright green feathers and ruby throat.

The sun has now cast the Sandia in its light and the dark form has slowly begun to take on shape, exposing the red and brown colors of the earth. I glance down at my own form, hidden under my baggy shirt, and realize that in the coming months my body will take on a more motherly shape. I have surrendered to this place. It is my sanctuary. I am filled with a deep sense of peace and awed by my surroundings. Since the moment I found out about the new life growing inside of me, I have been battling sickness and despair at how such a small being could create such turmoil in my body. All my joy and gratitude of being given such a miraculous gift was buried months ago as the morning sickness took root. Here, in this place, for the first time, I feel peace and an amazing awareness of self. I am able to embrace motherhood without turmoil for the first time, as I am reassured of my place amongst God's magnificent creations. ❖

*A Land Full of Stories**An Editor's Experience*

By Paula Stallings Yost
Yantis TX

The excitement is building, and many SCN members have donated their time and talents to the creation of our latest book project—*A Land Full of Stories: Women Write about the Southwest*.

When the call for submissions was made for the proposed book earlier this year, we asked participants to contribute writings celebrating their experiences in the natural world of the Southwest that would demonstrate and illuminate, not only the rich diversity of landscapes and environments, but the extraordinary range of women's voices and women's experiences of the land. To achieve the broadest geographical coverage, the editors defined the southwest region as extending from the Gulf Coast across the Texas Hill Country to the dry deserts of west Texas, southern Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, southern Colorado, and southern California. We received entries from nearly 300 authors—about 450 individual items of poetry and prose, from which we selected just 52 pieces for inclusion.

Working by e-mail and online, co-editors Susan Wittig Albert, Susan Hanson, Jan Epton Seale, and I spent the next four months reading, evaluating, and discussing each submission. We were fortunate to have the expert technical help of Peggy Moody who set up a website for the judging process. Her website enabled the editors to read entries and enter comments and scores online. Peggy programmed the site so that average scores were calculated automatically, which helped us greatly in the process of selecting the best entries. Without this, the editors' jobs would have been considerably more difficult and time-consuming. Says Susan Albert, "Having the pieces available online was like having them on file in an office, where we could drop in whenever we had time and leave notes for one another on what we liked about the pieces we were reading. It was really interesting to see

how all of us responded to the different submissions—and it was heartening to see that we made reasonably similar judgments. Also, as we did the editing, we shared our work (via Word document attachments to emails) so that each piece had at least two editors; three in some cases." The technology really made a difference.

Judging was based on such writing components as: setting; self in writing; voice and style; coherence and organization. Once the judging was completed in late July, acceptance or non-acceptance notifications were sent to all the entrants. As the editors worked, they were attentive to possible organizational ideas that seemed to grow out of the prose and poetry they were reading. In the end, the work seemed to naturally arrange itself into eight different sections: the way we live on the land; our journeys through the land; nature in cities; nature at risk; nature that sustains us; our memories of the land from times past; our kinship with the animal world; and what we leave on the land when we are gone. The pieces selected from this group of submissions will comprise about half of the book.

This collection of writings by women includes a variety of literary forms—memoir, creative non-fiction, essay, poetry—with pieces by both established and new writers. Through August and September, the editors read, evaluated, and selected the remaining pieces, which were taken from the published work of women naturalists and nature writers. We reviewed the work of some 35 authors, choosing pieces that fit within the selected topics of the book. Currently, permission to use the previously published work is being sought. Finally we contacted Kathleen Dean Moore, professor of philosophy at Oregon State University and a published nature writer, to invite her to write an introduction to the book.

The draft manuscript of some 90,000 words was submitted to Theresa May, Editor-in-Chief at the University of Texas Press, in late September. It has been read and presented to two external readers for review. If those reviews are positive, the manuscript will be submitted to a faculty committee for final review in December or January. Once the faculty review is complete and the book is approved for publication, it will be placed on the Press's publication calendar. The earliest possible publication date is Spring 2006. The University of Texas Press also published Story Circle Network's first memoir collection, *With Courage and Common Sense*.

For the authors who submitted stories, all this work happened behind the scenes and no doubt one or two wondered, "Why does it take them so long to get back to me?" Rest assured, the editors of *A Land Full of Stories* were very hard at work. Selecting stories and editing them for an anthology of this size is a major undertaking, but one that will bring rewards to all who participated. ❖

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Personal historian and founder of Heirloom Memoirs, **Paula Yost** is a memoirist and publisher with a background in journalism and public relations. Paula is the editor of the SCN Book Review website and an SCN board member.

Take a Bow! Spotighting Our Story Circle Volunteers

Donna Remmert: Writing and Dreaming

PJ Pierce pays tribute to SCN Board member and host of a monthly writing circle and of many wonderful Austin Chapter events over the past four years, Donna Remmert.



One of the best things about Story Circle Network is the friends that you make and how quickly you get to know them. I have known Donna Remmert for only a few years, but because we have met monthly to share our life stories, it's like we've known each other all of our lives. I know all about Donna's parents and siblings and about the town of Black Creek, Wisconsin where they grew up.

And she knows a lot about me and my Texas family.

I met Donna in 2001 after she had published her first book, *The Littlest Big Kid*, in which she chronicled her 1940s childhood told through the voice of the little girl she was in the 1940s. I got to know Donna, the 1950s teenager, through each newly-completed chapter she brought to our writing circle during the next two years. And thus our writing circle members feel as if we played bit-parts in birthing *The Jitterbug Girl*, Donna's newly-published book. We delight in hearing about the fabulous success it is enjoying in the Wisconsin towns of Black Creek and Seymour. Donna reports, "I think that by now, everyone in both towns (combined population is 1,492) has read my books. People I wrote about are now signing autographs themselves. They feel as if my stories describe their lives as well."

Donna has credited a workshop she took from Susan Wittig Albert several years ago for triggering the flow of creativity to produce the stories that made up her first book. "Since then SCN has been a major part of my life," she said. "I enjoy having writers and readers as friends. They see the introspective value of analyzing their lives and others' lives."

Donna stresses that she has been well-served by SCN. In return, she has given untold hours and energy to the organization since she began her writing circle in 1997. Donna became a board member in 2001 and has played a major role in the life of the organization ever since. She has taught Writing from Life workshop sessions on themes such as "exploring your dreams" and "communicating through your attire." Donna has opened her home, on a bluff overlooking Lake Austin, not only to her monthly writing circle, but also to several "Schmooze the Muse" sessions on dream study. She has hosted several SCN holiday parties and bazaars in her home as well. She is the organizer behind SCN's successful "Be Our Guest" events, which have attracted standing-room-only crowds in the LCRA facility in Austin. But like much of

the work done by SCN board members, much of Donna's work has been behind the scenes.

Even though Donna and her husband, Jim, are planning a move to Boulder, Colorado as soon as their house sells, she hasn't stopped making things happen in SCN in Austin. "I am excited about a new project that fellow board member, Mary Elizabeth, and I are putting together," Donna said. "We are collaborating on a mini-workshop for SCN to include a mix of dream understanding and astrological information that supports dream interpretation." Mary Elizabeth is well-versed in astrology and Donna has spent years studying dreams using the Jungian theory of interpretation. Donna first studied under Dr. Montague Ullman, founder of the Dream Laboratory at the Maimonides Medical Center in New York, whose mission it was to train lay people to help others understand their dreams. Donna continued her studies at Jung Centers in Manhattan, Houston, and Austin. Presently Donna teaches dream workshops at Lake Austin Spa Resort.

Donna graduated with degrees in speech, drama, and English Education in 1960 from the University of Wisconsin. While there, she met her future husband, Jim. "Determined to marry a Catholic, I waited for him on the church steps after Mass one Sunday and asked him to come to my apartment for coffee. He was cute, with a crew cut and horn-rimmed glasses. After two weeks we were in love, and three years later we were married. My teaching salary and his winnings on the golf course supported us while he was in law school," Donna remembered. Forty-four years later, Donna and Jim are still married. Jim retired from Exxon in 1987 and they moved to Austin in 1993 "to build our dream home," according to Donna. They have two grown sons, David, a psychologist in Santa Barbara, and Stephen, a realtor, musician, and songwriter. Both sons are married and Donna and Jim are grandparents to 18-month-old Grace Caroline, named after her two great-grandmothers. "We are moving to Boulder so we can be with Gracie as she grows up," Donna said. "I am completely smitten with that little girl!"

Donna's plans for the coming years include writing a third book to complete the trilogy of her journey to adulthood. Her new work will chronicle her coming-of-age at the University of Wisconsin. Donna is a big advocate for self-publishing memoir. "It gives you the freedom to write your story exactly the way you want it written and market it to the people you most want to read it," she said. ❖

PJ Pierce is the author of *Let Me Tell You What I've Learned: Texas Wisewomen Speak*.

Self-publishing

My Book Came Alive!

Donna Remmert makes a visit to her hometown to promote her latest book and gets a welcome that's an author's dream come true.

As I flew to my home state of Wisconsin, I fantasized someone throwing rotten eggs at me. Why? Because I'd scheduled 12 book signing at which I'd be facing many of the people I hadn't seen since high school, and I used their real names in my book!

Most of the people living in the area of my hometown of Black Creek had already read *The Littlest Big Kid*, my childhood memoir. This was not a rotten-egg experience, but my childhood stories were mild compared to *The Jitterbug Girl*, the adolescent memoir I was now going to persuade people to read. The major characters in *Jitterbug* had seen pages where their names were mentioned, they had signed permission slips, and many had pre-ordered their copies of the book. Would they be at my signings? That darned old, rotten-egg fantasy nagged away at my calm as I imagined what my 10 days in Wisconsin would be like. Why had I used real names when I'd been warned not to? I shouldn't have, I thought, as I stepped off the airplane in Green Bay.

Well, now that I'm back to Texas and those 10 days are history, I know that this second-guessing was silly. My book came alive as I watched folks I once knew well but had lost contact with respond to stories about everything from necking and petting to polio and Communism on college campuses. I've received lots of letters thanking me for writing my memoirs, saying that it was fun remembering their lives as they read stories about mine. This is the response I'd hoped for! To my great relief, the only complaint I heard was from those wishing I had used *their* names in my stories. Whew!

My memoirs are happy and positive yet blunt and honest. I got away with saying obnoxious things about real people, religion, our town drunk, and much more because I wrote in the voice of a kid. Kids are often obnoxious, right? Also, I cloaked most of my personal and cultural commentary in humor or naiveté, two very valuable tools for storytelling.

Perhaps another reason no one threw rotten eggs at me is because my book promotion events were peppy and cute. Two of my teenaged great-nieces, Michaelen and Molly Wilmsen, dressed in 1950s costumes to read my stories, and they danced the jitterbug better than I ever danced the jitterbug! Their younger sisters, Annaleise, age 7, and Estee, age 3, also did their rendition of the jitterbug before our shows opened, and they helped me sell books by taking money and then asking people to make their own change. Rotten eggs at an event like this? Of course not!

My 10 days in Wisconsin had a wonderful, homespun appeal that isn't often present in my life. I was invited to lunch at the farmhouse of a friend I haven't seen in many years. I danced the polka at a museum benefit book-signing, not with a guy but with a girl, the way teenaged girls used to dance with

each other. A sixth grade class asked me to tell them how things were so very long ago, and they were amazed to hear that when my family finally got a television set in 1953, there was only one channel, and it started broadcasting at 4:30 in the afternoon. I was given homemade muffins, refrigerator art, roses, and stories written by a very old lady who went to school with my mother. Entire families gathered at my signings! It was a reunion I'll never forget.

I'll also never forget how cozy I felt staying with my stepmother. Lilas cooks and keeps house just like my mother did, and she speaks fondly of her and my dad. Staying with Lilas helped me feel as if my parents were still alive and participating in the excitement of my book.

My Wisconsin experience has, without a doubt, energized me to go on writing about my life. I'm grateful that a self-published author such as myself can experience press reviews, book signings, and the thrill of having fans who cheer me on. The fact that these fans are the very people my book is about makes it all the more wonderful. I believe that this is just about as good as it gets.

Well, maybe not. Maybe accolades from fellow writers or from people who don't know me feels even more wonderful. I've had a tiny taste of this through SCN. It's also just about as good as it gets. Thanks!

The real truth, however, is that nothing feels as rewarding as the writing process itself, and it's SCN I need to thank for being the impetus to inspire it in me. I am grateful to the women in my writing circle and to all my SCN friends for supporting me as a woman who wants to celebrate her life by writing memoir.

The Littlest Big Kid and *The Jitterbug Girl* show the fascination and beauty of plain ordinary living, where people do things that are kind, loving, and even heroic. People like this are all around us, and their lives often go unnoticed.

We can change this! ❖

THE JITTERBUG GIRL:

CLASS OF '55

by Donna Van Straten
author of *The Littlest Big Kid*

Donna Van Straten Remmert's lively and endearing stories unveil the ironies of American life in the 50s.

The Jitterbug Girl can be purchased through SCN's book review website. (ISBN 0-9710959-1-4)

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

Maureen Murdock: Memory and Myth

The guest presenter at our April 2005 LifeLines Retreat, Maureen Murdock is a psychotherapist, creative writing teacher, and a many-times published author. She lives in Oakland, CA. Her books include the very influential book, The Heroine's Journey: Women's Quest for Wholeness. She is also the editor of Monday Morning Memoirs: Women in the Second Half of Life, a collection of stories by the women in her writing classes. In 2003, she published Unreliable Truth: On Memoir and Memory. In our interview, Maureen Murdock talked to me about her recent book and about the role of myth in our life story.

SCJ. *Your book, Unreliable Truth, is part memoir and part essay about the meaning of memoir and the craft of memoir writing. When you started the book, did you set out intending to write it in this way? How did it evolve into the final blend of memoir and essay?*

Maureen Murdock. The book actually began as an essay about the similarities between myth and memoir. I had been teaching myth, literature and religious studies for five years at Pacifica Graduate Institute and began to see a parallel between myth and memoir in terms of how we humans try to make meaning out of our lives. Both genres address the basic questions mythology poses: Who am I? Where am I going? Who/what is my tribe? Why am I here?

At the same time I was contemplating the relationship between memory and identity because my mother was suffering from Alzheimer's disease and her loss of memory affected her sense of herself. As I wrote, the book became more and more about my relationship with my mother and less and less about myth. When I showed the first draft proposal for the book to my former editor at Shambhala, Emily Sell, she said, "This book is about your mother. Explore that deeper." I resisted at first but then realized she was right.

SCJ. *The book's title is of course an oxymoron. We usually think of truth as something we can rely on. Tell us what you mean by "unreliable truth."*

Maureen Murdock. A memoir is the writer's particular memory of an actual, not imagined, incident that occurred in her life. It is her angle of perception on what happened; her emotional truth of the event. What is important for the memoirist is not what actually happened but what she makes of what happened; what meaning she gives to it.

The memoirist tries to the best of her recollection to give the truth of the event, but someone else experiencing the same event, say a sibling, may say, "That's not the way it happened." Well, perhaps that's not the way it happened for them. But I'm more interested in the memoirist's truth; in the memoirist being a reliable narrator of her truth.

I have a favorite quote by Jenny Diski, from *Skating to Antarctica*, which applies here:

"Memory is continually created, a story told and retold, using jigsaw pieces of experience. It's utterly unreliable in some ways, because who can say whether the feeling or emotion that seems to belong to the recollection actually belongs to it rather than being available from the general store of likely emotions we have learned? Memory is not false in the sense that it is willfully bad, but it is excitingly corrupt in its inclination to make a proper story of the past."

As we write our memoir we have the chance to examine our memory of the event. Did it really happen this way or am I making myself sound better/or worse than I was?

SCJ. *In Unreliable Truth, you illustrate your thoughts on memoir writing with vignettes from your own life story, giving many tantalizing glimpses into your life, yet leaving many gaps in that story. Some readers may be left wanting to know the whole story. Tell us about this decision to hold back a part of yourself in this book.*

Maureen Murdock. In *Unreliable Truth* I was struggling to find my voice as a memoirist rather than as a teacher. In the past, I have written academic books on the woman's psychological journey in which I have used vignettes from my own life to illustrate stages of development. However, memoir is much more self revealing and

Women ... have a quest at this time in our culture. It is the quest to fully embrace their feminine nature, learning how to value themselves as women and to heal the deep wound of the feminine.
—Maureen Murdock in *The Heroine's Journey*

my initial impulse, as I said before, was not to write a memoir per se but to write a combination of personal memoir and reflection on memory and identity. The decisions I made about voice and about how much of my own story to include had a lot to do with the purpose of the book. I wanted the reader to think with me about their own life. My memoirist's voice is still evolving.

SCJ. *In a recent interview you have said, "The story we tell about ourselves becomes the story we live." How does this work in ordinary women's lives? Does this mean that, by deliberately altering the story of who we are in our lifewriting, we can change the course of our lives?*

Maureen Murdock. When I said the story we tell about ourselves becomes the story we live, I was not suggesting that we deliberately alter the story of who we are in our lifewriting. We tell the story of who we are and reflect upon it. As we tell a particular narrative, or more correctly, as we write a particular narrative, we have the ability to see the whole picture involved in the memory and observe particular patterns we repeat in our lives. Then we have the choice to continue to repeat the pattern—or not—in the future. As we make those choices, we begin to create a new narrative. For example, if I'm a person who is prone to rescuing others, and I write incident after incident about my rescue missions, I can look at my compulsivity and decide whether my "heroics" serve the other person or myself or not. But I don't see the whole pattern of my actions until I write the memories down.

I'm not changing my story; hopefully if I reflect upon my story with enough depth and wisdom, the insight I gain from my story will change me. You can't write memoir without self reflection. Writing memoir changes your attitude about yourself and others and can change the course of your life.

SCJ. *You've written about how memoir serves a purpose similar to that of myth. It allows the reader to see the work of archetypal themes in ordinary lives. How can those of us who are practicing lifewriting in Story Circle Network's Writing Circles learn to recognize and incorporate the mythical themes and archetypes at work in our own life stories?*

Maureen Murdock. Look at the domains of myth: Who am I, Where am I going, Who is my tribe, and Why am I here? Start to see how mythic themes are reflected in your lifewriting. For example, take the theme of "Where am I going?", the path metaphor. Where are you on your life's

journey? Are you writing about a rite of passage such as birth, menses, first sexual awakening, first love, marriage, giving birth, divorce, or death of a spouse? Are you writing about longing, love, friendship; about the loss of a community, a job, a sense of identity? If you begin to see what you are writing about in terms of a stage in your journey, it may give you a sense of being companioned by others who have made the same journey. It may give you a sense of inspiration, of hope.

In terms of "Who is my Tribe?" I continually take note of all of the recently published and not so recently published books about the search for the father or the search for the mother: Barack Obama's *Dreams from My Father*; Louise Steinman's *The Souvenir*; Sebastian Matthews's *In My Father's Footsteps*; Kim Chernin's *In My Mother's House*; Jackie Lyden's *Daughter of the Queen of Sheba*; and Terry Tempest Williams's *Refuge*, to name just a few. I myself was "searching" for my mother as she was losing her memory and searching for a way to bring closure and healing to a difficult relationship.

Vivian Gornick, who wrote *Fierce Attachments*, a memoir about her relationship with her mother, noted that it took her the whole book recalling their life together in the 1950s in the Bronx alternating with walks they took in Manhattan in the 1980s to trace out the fact that at the heart of their attachment lay a single insight: she could not leave her mother because she had become her mother. Such an archetypal bond has a strong hold on an individual and can explain some of the choices one makes in life. I think that memoirists are our contemporary mythmakers helping us find meaning in our lives as they reveal the wisdom they have mined from their memories. ❖

—E-mail interview compiled and edited by Jane Ross

Other publications by Maureen Murdock include: *Father's Daughters: Transforming the Father-Daughter Relationship* and *Spinning Inward: Using Guided Imagery with Children for Learning, Creativity and Relaxation*.

The journey begins with our heroine's search for identity. This "call" is heard at no specific age but occurs when the "old self" no longer fits.
—Maureen Murdock

The descent cannot be hurried because it is a sacred journey, one not only of reclaiming the lost parts of oneself, but also of rediscovering the lost soul of the culture—what many women today view as reclaiming the Goddess.
—Maureen Murdock

Join us at the LifeLines writing retreat and explore the mythic themes in your life story with Maureen Murdock. Registration information on p.23.

Excerpt

Unreliable Truth: On Memoir and Memory

Maureen Murdock blends two voices—that of the daughter writing about her mother and of the teacher of lifewriting—in this excerpt from her recent book, published by Seal Press (2003).

As my mother's illness progressed and her memory deteriorated, the part of her identity she most fiercely clung to was her girdle. Like most women of her generation, she wore a girdle every day; no outfit was complete without what she and her friends called their "foundation." When her health failed, she refused to remove her girdle; she wore it day and night, whether awake or asleep. She was determined to wear it even when I tried to give her a massage, several months before her death.

"Mom, take off your girdle so I can massage your lower back." She ignores me as she climbs onto her bed after removing her blouse and bra and tossing them onto a chair. This action surprises me because my mother has never allowed me to see her even partially naked. Women didn't do that in the fifties. I pull the top sheet over her lower body and nudge her gently to the middle of the bed so I can sit down beside her.

"I'm going to put some oil on your back, Mom. Is that okay?"

"Whatever you say, dear."

I enjoy massaging my mother's back because she was never a woman who welcomed touch and I am grateful that she allows it now. There's also never been a time before in my life when my mother said, "Whatever you say, dear." Not to me, not to my father, not to my younger sister. No, my mother argued about whether it was night or day. She was a rigid perfectionist with a code of order in which things were either

black or white; she brooked no gray. We took off our shoes when we came in the back door; tracking mud into the kitchen could result in plates flung crashing to the floor. The dulcet tones of this woman calling me "dear" are an anomaly. Who is this imposter, this sweet, acquiescent aging woman? For the first time in my life, I'd like the sharp-tongued firebrand back.

I start to massage her left shoulder and rub oil down the length of her spine. I'm immediately struck by how small she has become. I massaged this same back the year before, when she had fallen in the kitchen, incurring a concussion. But it wasn't the same back then. Then, it was swollen and bruised. Then, she let me pull down her ever-present girdle. But not now.

"I have to have my girdle," she says as I try to coax her to take it off. "I can't do without it."

"Why, Mom? Why now?"

"You know I always wore a girdle. I need it."

"But I can't rub your lower back with your girdle on."

Silence. The girdle remains. I surrender.

My mother remembered her girdle as part of her identity. Her sense memory retained the scaffolding of her disposition.

One of the hallmarks of memoir writing is its intimacy with its audience. In writing this vignette, my intent is not to humiliate my mother, but to show her determination. My mother's refusal to take off her girdle was a metaphor for her desperate attempt to maintain some control over her life, even as she was losing her mind. The fact that it was such a losing battle made her defiance even more poignant and my inability to alleviate her suffering even more final.

Not long after my mother died, I read John Bayley's memoir *Elegy for Iris*, about his wife, Iris Murdoch, and her struggle with Alzheimer's. Bayley's description of the nightly "trouser wars," during which he could not get his wife to relinquish her trousers, helped me understand my mother's ritualistic attachment to her girdle. No doctor could explain my mother's behavior to me, but writing my account of the girdle wars and reading Bayley's memoir made its meaning clear. Both helped me sort out the puzzle pieces of our relationship.

In writing about my mother, I am trying to put her back together by passing her on to the future in the only way I can—as memory. When I write about her and the complexity of our relationship, I try to bring her alive in the most honest way I can—for a moment. This moment. In another moment, I might write something quite different. ❖

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*Unreliable Truth:
On Memoir and Memory
by Maureen Murdock*

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Maureen Murdock uses vignettes from her own life to illustrate the process of memoir writing in action.
Order through the SCN book review website at:

www.storycircle.org/BookReviews

Look for **Maureen Murdock** on the Alphabetic Index.

Books for the Journey



Unreliable Truth: On Memoir and Memory by Maureen Murdock (Seal Press, 2003. ISBN 1580050832). Reviewed by Linda Wisniewski, Doylestown, PA.

In the process of writing about our lives, says psychotherapist and author Maureen Murdock, we have to leave things out. Writing memoir is ultimately about making choices. Selecting aspects from her own life, Murdock reflects on them to better understand herself, to connect with the reader, and to demonstrate how we can do the same.

Her new book about the selective nature of memory has a dual format. The first half, "To the Best of My Recollection," contains stories from her childhood and focuses especially on her relationship with her mother. As a psychotherapist, Murdock wanted to understand how her mother's memory loss led to the healing of their strained relationship. Writing about it, she found the process itself was transformational. Her stories illustrate the elusive and subjective nature of memory. Some of the same incidents were 'remembered' differently by the author and her father. "The job of writing memoir," she says, "is to find one's truth, not to determine the accuracy of what happened." The memoirist "both recounts an event and muses upon it," but since remembered events are not happening in the present, "we have to use our imagination to reclaim them.... we can never separate the remembered event from our imagination."

The book is sprinkled liberally with quotations from other memoirs to illustrate the different approaches to this writing genre. Examples included are Isabel Allende's musings on the death of her daughter in *Paula*, May Sarton's journals, which opened up the genre to millions of women, and Anne Lamott's spiritual memoir, *Traveling Mercies*.

Murdock writes of the healing power of memoir as it helps us understand the meaning of life and death, the universal myths that underlie our lives, and the unique nature of contemporary women's memoirs. "The deepest memoir is filled with metaphor," she writes, citing examples like food, a woman's body, and the different roles we assume. I especially liked her explanations of the archetypes and myths that run through our lives and inform our stories. This reminded me of her excellent book, *The Heroine's Journey*, which goes deeper into myths as they relate to women's lives. Murdock tells us that both memoir and myth are a search for meaning. Myth, she says, "explore(s) such themes as heroism, betrayal, the search for the mother or the father, love and the cycles of death and rebirth. Memoirs explore the very same themes in the stories of everyday lives. Memoirists are our contemporary mythmakers."

Some of the author's memories in this book corresponded to my own—the distant mother who loses her memory, the feminist divorcee of the 1970s who "wouldn't be caught dead" asking for alimony, and the Catholic girlhood, lush with sacred rituals. Her concept of the "root memory," which she defines as "an early smell, taste, sound, vision, or texture ...that mysteriously signals who we will become," is a wonderful way to look at the familiar and significant things we remember and how they relate to themes in our lives and writing.

The second half of the book, "On Writing Memoir," is a concise course, which should be especially appealing to the first-time writer. It explains the essential elements of memoir: a selected aspect of a life, universal theme, intimacy, relational style, emotional truth, self-reflection, humor, and the narrator's voice. Most chapters end with a writing suggestion. There is a glossary of terms and an extensive bibliography of published memoirs, many of which are quoted throughout the book.

As we attempt to know ourselves better through writing, we may give other people insight into their own lives. Whether you write to discover hidden truths, to understand your relationships, to heal an old wound, to find community, or to record your personal history, this book will help you process both your writing and your life. ❖

*...rather than simply
recounting an
incident or a
memory from her
life, the memoirist
both tells the story
and tries to make
meaning out of it.*
—Maureen Murdock

*For a piece of
writing to be
called memoir it
must include self-
reflection. Without
it, the recollection
of an incident
lacks depth and
cannot lead to
transformation.*
—Maureen Murdock



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 "Fat and Thin."

Fat and Thin Katherine Boyett, Lockhart TX

I remember sitting in front of the television with wide eyes, happily watching flickering black-and-white images of comedians who used their size as a gag. There were Laurel and Hardy, Abbott and Costello, Gleason and Carney. They were great, and though you laughed at their girth or lack thereof, it was so harmless, so without malice.

Not so now. While sitting with a group of women one day recently, I was mesmerized in a different way by their laughter as it shrilled painfully around me when a large woman passed by. The laughter was not because of some humorous thing she had said, but because to laugh at what they perceived as her obvious flaw was easier than addressing any one of their own hidden ones. Then the situation repeated, except this time a woman who was painfully thin walked by.

There are different names these days. There are bulimia and anorexia, depression and addiction, diabetes and AIDS. There was a time not so long in our collective past that to be heavysset meant you were affluent and to be thin meant you were a finicky eater. How our world is changing, and though all the screens have color now, the picture has lost its laughter, all its humor. ❖

I've Learned the Secret! Judy Watkins Hillsboro OR

I've learned the secret! After years of trying to be thin I now know how to feel good about my body and the person that I am.

My mind has known the size my body should be. My closet has the right-sized clothes in it, so that must be my size. My body hasn't always wanted to be the size my mind thought it should be so from time to time it was forced to visit places like Jenny Craig, Weight Loss Clinic, Weight Watchers, and a multitude of diet plans. Somebody had to be in control and my body could not be trusted to do what was right.

I had always felt fat. Clothes were always too tight and uncomfortable. Tucking a blouse into a skirt or pants and wearing a belt was taboo. What can a person do? I wanted to feel pretty and look nice. Why did I have big hips? I knew the big stomach came after two cancer surgeries left scars making it look like a pie cut in wedges.

After three-quarters of my life has passed I have finally

found the secret to looking good and feeling pretty. The answer didn't come easily, but it came none-the-less.

In Goodwill an outfit took my eye. It looked like how I wanted to look. *What size is it*, I wondered? There was no label but I guessed it would fit, so I tried it on. Wow! For the first time in years something fit without bulges. I liked the way I looked. I felt good. That was when I learned that the size is not important. If my feeling of self-worth and self-confidence can be gained with a larger dress size, why have I been fighting it for so many years?

My body is well exercised and I am healthy, so I'm ready to give up the battle of being slim. Is it possible that my body knows more about what size it should be than my mind?

I am more than the size I wear. Who made up the fat and thin rules anyway? ❖

Your Choice Joan A. McLaren Henson Tualatin OR

Spiders spin a web so thin,
yet it keeps the flies snug-in.
I can thread my fat shoe lace,
but it never stays in place.

Knitting yarn is soft and thin,
stills it weaves the pattern in.
I tie my goats with fat rope,
yet they manage to elope.

Wedding bands of thin, fine gold
treasure close the love they hold.
School class rings so fat and wide
soon let go that old school pride.

Our life lines are measured on
electric cardiograms:
Tall, thin lines say, "Carry on."
Fat, flat lines tell life is gone.

The gifts of life come pre-tied
with thin strings or ribbons wide.
Make your choice, but be advised
each one holds its own surprise!

Pumpkin Girls Can Find True Love, Too

Linda Shelton
Ellensburg WA

Fat and thin, fat and thin—all my life I've been fat and thin depending on what I needed at the time. Whenever I needed a new lover or husband I would diet until thin, then, once in love, I'd snuggle into the relationship and slowly grow fat like a contented frowsy cat. The weight came easily with contentment and happiness, but then the spouse or lover grew impatient with my new girth and the hurt began: the insults and name calling, and one husband refusing to have sex with me until I lost weight. I'd lose, then gain, and lose again.

I've literally lost hundreds of pounds. The longest I've stayed fat was sixteen years. Shrouded in a protective layer of fat, I went to college, got a degree, a career, raised my children, and remained celibate. I was safe in my adipose cocoon, but I wasn't happy and I was very lonely.

Then I decided I wanted a relationship. I dieted and lost an incredible 130 pounds and met a very nice man who fell hopelessly in love with me and I him. We've been together for over two years and now I'm fat again—not as heavy as before but definitely needing to lose forty pounds. He loves and desires me but I feel like a fraud, like I've deceived him. He fell in love with a thinner person.

So I struggle to diet. We both have "puffed up," as he calls our gaining weight, since our union. Happiness, contentment, and good cooking all contributed to our weight gain. I feel ashamed that I gain weight so easily and that I presented myself as something that I'm not—a thin person.

My heart's desire has always been to have a good relationship with someone I love and who loves me for who I am—fat or thin. He teases me about my weight and affectionately calls me his "pumpkin girl." It stings a little but I know I'm loved and accepted and desired.

There are happy endings and dreams do come true and pumpkin girls can find true love, too. ❖

On the Edge
Nancy Rembert
Lockhart TX

When I was a teenager, I used to go on fasting binges, not eating for weeks at a time. If I could not encircle my waist with my hands, with my fingertips touching, I would refuse to eat until the desired results were achieved. I did not know I was teetering on the edge of anorexia.

I had a problem with low self-esteem as a teenager, though it wasn't immediately apparent to a lot of people. Going to school and working a full-time job pretty much left me with no time to fraternize within my peer group. No one noticed my struggle to remain "skeleton skinny".

The mirror often lied to me, or perhaps it was my eyes that deceived me. There were days when I looked all right to myself. I would see the thin me, and on these particular days I felt inner peace.

Then there were those days when the mirror revealed a very obese and unattractive stranger. At these times, I would feel the weight of the world on my shoulders, on my heart, and on my spirit, and that old familiar feeling of futility and uselessness would shroud me and cloud my thinking.

Nothing felt right. I felt empty and alone. There was no one to talk to. God most certainly was not available, or so I thought.

These feelings followed me into middle age. It was after my "husband-ectomy" that I realized I was not alone in those feelings. Though the worst of them had been left behind in young adulthood, I still felt the desire to feel one hundred percent okay with myself. I got help through counseling and self-help groups. I discovered an outlet for all of those pent-up frustrations I had carried for so long.

Now it doesn't matter whether I'm fat or thin. While I still prefer to be thin, I don't have this driving need to look like "Skeleton," and while I don't want to be fat, I'm aware that losing excess pounds sensibly is the only way to do it.

Fat or thin, today I am okay. ❖

Fat to Thin and Back Again

Renee Pfenning
St. Paul MN

I am a fat person. While I prefer to think of myself as "chubby," I am fat. I weigh sixty percent more than when I graduated from high school. That's right, sixty percent more.

I managed to maintain my high school weight until my second child was about two. Between the stress of motherhood and a disintegrating marriage, I found comfort in junk food. The pounds added up until a few years later when I went on a strict diet to control gall-bladder problems. Suddenly thin, men who had looked right through me before started looking at me. My husband started putting down his book and watching me as I dressed and undressed. He bought clothes for me (a first) and we went dancing (another first).

He thought it was a compliment when he said, "I feel good with you on my arm." Instead of feeling good, I felt dirty. I wanted to be the same woman he married and the mother of his two sons, not a mistress.

My boys saw something different, too. At ages four and seven they talked it over, then came to me and said they "wanted their old mommy back." They gave me a candy bar and said it was because they loved me. I ate that candy bar and countless more.

Quite awhile after my divorce, I was spending a lot of time with a male friend. One day he listed everything he was looking for in a partner. That list was me, until he got to the physical requirements. There was a height/weight ratio. I had too little of one and too much of the other. So we could be friends, but he couldn't have a "relationship" with me. Another candy bar.

And so, years later I am fat. The fat is a layer of protection. It is my way of making sure that when someone looks at me, it is me they see. I know I need to lose weight, for my health. But it is hard to lose my protection. ❖

More True Words . . .

Not My Mother Sonja Borstner Woodlands TX

I don't want to write about my mother finally losing weight effortlessly. Her best friend Carm thought she was dieting without including her. But my mother was losing weight, the doctors said, because she had Hodgkin's disease, and she continued losing for the two years she was injected regularly with intravenous, cancer-fighting drugs.

I don't want to write about how my mother became the thinnest I'd ever seen her. I was more familiar with her round physique that occasionally loaded her small frame and the bathroom scale with 200 pounds.

So I'm not going to write about my mother's, 45-year struggle with weight and self-image.

I'm writing, instead, about the fat and thin crayons we use in the Waldorf kindergarten. Most preschoolers don't have issues with fat or thin. They are, however, more used to thin crayons than fat.

They learn new skills when they sculpt color with the fat, block crayons. Like a watercolor wash, the children spread wide bands of color and blend them to make new hues. Rainbows, a favorite, are more dramatic with color masses than mere color lines.

You hold the crayon balanced on its edge and sweep it across large paper. You can rub over and over to deepen the shade. You can draw lines with the corner. You can create meadows, mountains, molehills.

You can even draw your mother wearing the bright blue silk blouse you sewed for her on her last Christmas. ❖

The Ruination of Pearlie Louise LaBauve Saxon Austin TX

This tale is about fat and thin pocketbooks and the forward thinking of my mother, Lois LaBauve, who married my dad just before the stock market crash in 1929. He was to be the new Superintendent of Schools in Oakwood, Texas, and she would teach English and Spanish. When the crash came, people struggled hard to cope with their losses. Having little to lose, my parents were not harmed much financially. They felt lucky to have jobs.

Initially, they boarded with the Knowles family, the town fat cats, who were known for their philanthropic outlook. Tramps begged daily at Effie Knowles' kitchen door, just looking for "a little mouth of something," as one pencil-thin hobo put it.

Within a year, my parents were able to rent a small house of their own for \$15 a month, but the stresses of teaching and keeping house were wearing and on Saturdays, Mother needed a break. She asked Mrs. Nettles, a neighbor, for the name of

anyone who might help and was given the name of a young black woman.

Painfully thin, Pearlie was a willing worker. She washed, ironed, dusted, swept and mopped, while managing to cook a first-rate pan of cornbread on the side. Quite pleased, Mother asked what she owed her for the day. Pearlie looked down at her very worn shoes and answered shyly, "Oh, I guess about 25 cents."

When Mother handed her a crisp one dollar bill, Pearlie stared in disbelief. Never in her life had anyone paid her that much for a day's work.

The next time Mother went to the beauty shop, the operator asked if she knew what Mrs. Nettles was saying about her around town.

"No, what?" Mother asked in surprise.

"Why she's telling everyone who will listen that Mrs. LaBauve just ruined Pearlie."

In reality, I believe that my mother changed Pearlie's life for the better that Saturday. Not only did she fatten Pearlie's wallet, but from that time forward, it seems unlikely that Pearlie ever worked another day for just a quarter. ❖

A New Mirror Judy Miller Austin TX

I was fat most of my life—fat and ugly. I was born fat and ugly. Nothing about me was attractive and I covered it up with a smile, going on as if nothing mattered. I did not have anyone to talk with and feelings were non-existent growing up, until one day when I had my own children. At that time, love poured out of me like a waterfall bigger and greater than Niagara Falls. Years of having no feelings gushed forth into the word "love." I was lucky because I had six children and six chances to have more love in my life than anyone deserved. Once I was fat and ugly with no feelings, now I was fat and ugly with tons of feelings.

As my four girls grew up, I was amazed at how beautiful they were from the very beginning. My girls were thin and naturally beautiful and I was fat and ugly. What a combination!

We lived like any other family with regular food and snacks. We even feasted on pizza and McDonald's. Swimming, soccer, tennis, and other school sports dominated the school years just like all our friends. We were the typical American family, and the kids were thin and beautiful. Often I studied the children's photographs and marveled at what was right under my nose, in my house, under my care, the object of all my love, and the reason for my being.

Over time, as I got used to having so much love in my life, my mirror started to reveal a thinner and prettier person following me around. I didn't recognize her at first but soon she had my face. Once I stopped at the mirror to stare at her and I realized that she was me.

Love took away my fat and ugly. I guess my children returned my love by giving me a new mirror. ❖

Variations on Fat and Thin

Mary Sullivan, r.c.
Highland Park NJ

Fat or thin—a phrase that connotes so much! A saying that is always pertinent to women, as are the nuances.

When I hear or see this expression, a list comes to my mind of times that have been “fat” in my life and times that have been “thin or lean:”

My weight (growth or decline)

My health (wellness or sickness)

God (when His Presence seems rampant in my life and when He simply cannot be found)

Creativity (when ideas come readily and when nothing comes to mind)

Grief (when it seems as if it will never end and when it lies dormant under the activities of life)

Community (when I am blessed with people who mean so much to me and when I struggle with acceptance of those I find difficult to be with)

Family (when I feel blessed by those with whom I share a DNA and when I am separated from them by geography—physical or emotional terrain)

Silence (when it is so full I am fertile and when it is so empty I am sterile)

Time (when I luxuriate with vast amounts and when I pine for just another minute to fulfill a task)

Energy (when I can do everything and when I am incapable of doing anything)

Beauty (when I am sated and when I can only perceive ugliness)

Friends (when they are there for me and I for them, and when they are not there for me nor I for them)

Prayer (when my truth means Truth and when my hiding places stay hidden from God’s gaze)

Fat or thin. Fat and thin. Even to write this “story” I am fat and thin with ideas. ❖

Running to Nowhere

Aletta Bond
Hamilton MA

“Thump... thump... thump...” That was the sound of my feet hitting the pavement at 5:30 a.m., out for the first of my two runs for the day. The run would return me home by 7 a.m., in time to tend to my children and get them ready for school. As soon as the last one was dropped off, the running shoes were laced up and off I went for another 90 or so minutes. By now my legs were feeling like little stumps and I could not even feel my feet, but I continued on.

This madness continued for years and felt like a necessity to make me whole and worthwhile. I measured my self-worth based on my waist size and the numbers of miles I could run. If I ran a lot and ate very little, I could congratulate myself that day and consider it a “good” one. If I deviated only slightly from this path I was unbearable to be around. How did my family tolerate me?

I thought I would be happier with every loss of a pound, but in reality I was screaming for help. I wanted someone to reassure me that it would be perfectly okay to stop running and starving, but all I heard were a chorus of conflicting voices. They complimented me on my running ability, and how disciplined I was, and how fabulous I looked in my clothes. What I really wanted was for someone to tell me: STOP!!

Finally, the only voice that could tell me to change was my own. Peering into the future, I could see myself: a skinny, malnourished, unhappy, middle-aged woman. Around the time I was pondering this potential view, my legs decided to quit on me. The body was all done, and now my mind had to catch up and acknowledge it.

The struggle back has been a difficult one, but filled with more rewards than failures. Yes, I have increased my waist size and reduced my running tremendously. Now my life is filled with my husband and children, who bring more joy and happiness than being thin ever could! ❖

Looking Ahead

“True Words” is organized around a 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 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:

Decay and Regeneration—March 2005 (due January 15)

Prisons—June 2005 (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 Mary Jo Doig: email maryjo_d@yahoo.com.

If you do submit typed or handwritten stories, please make sure that every word is legible. Mail to: 531 Steeles Fort Road, Raphine, VA 24472.

For our June ’05 prompt, True Words pages editor Mary Jo Doig says: Prison bars can be literal or metaphorical. Consider a time or situation that caused you to feel or be imprisoned. How did you get beyond your prison bars? In what way did the experience change you?

More True Words . . .

Fatter and Wiser . . . Well, Fatter, Anyway

J. J. Zeikus

Austin TX

For 30 years I've worked on the university campus, and I see a fresh crop of teenagers every fall. I see fresh faces trying to navigate the forty acres during the first week of classes, all those stylish clothes: crop tops to expose the skin between the breasts and the navel, worn with hip-huggers, or whatever the modern term is for pants with a two-inch zipper to expose the skin between the navel and the pubic bone. I see flat tummies and smooth skin and wonder if I ever looked like that.

Decades of living and menopause have taken their toll: extra layers of fat and poochy, dimpled skin. I don't know what angers me more: the fact that it happened to me or the daily bombardment from the media telling me that thin is beautiful and fat is ugly. Working around those twiggy girls doesn't help.

One night as I walked to my car, I stopped at a traffic light beside a jeep filled with fraternity boys. One of them leaned toward me with a wolf whistle and said, in the frat-boy phrase of the year, "I want you to have my baby."

A dozen retorts flew through my mind; I'm a teacher and I had an opportunity to educate this young man—in a succinct lesson before the light changed.

Perhaps I should tell him about menopause. My female hormones come from People's Pharmacy on North Lamar, and no matter what they say about natural estrogens, my sex drive is barely alive. Maybe I should approach the biological impossibility of childbirth after a certain age. Or perhaps I should insult his teeny weenie. No, that's too juvenile. Maybe I should appeal to his conscience and ask him how he would feel if some guy said that to his sister or mother.

The light was about to change and I had to hurry. I leaned into the jeep, face to face with the young man and I said, "How old and how fat do ya have to be?" ❖

The Garden Doyenne

Mary-Agnes Taylor

Austin TX

She reigned like Beatrice
in a paradise of flowers
so complacent
that she did not move
when I opened the kitchen door.

Instead, her marble eyes
stared at me—
the triangular face ending
in a round black nose
the wing-like ears poised, pert.

A pale morning lit our pantomime.
Choreographed ebony hooves
moved like Dame Margot
toward the patio—toward
the potting shed that sheltered
my garden-club prize.

Step by step on spindle legs,
stretching the Nefertiti neck,
she approached the Pulpo—
the rare octopus orchid...

I slammed! the kitchen door.

She bolted!

The orchid's anorexic stem
quivered in shock.

Writing from Life Workshop Wrap-Up

Patricia Pando

Bainbridge GA

Some of us had known each other for years. Other faces were new. But it did not take long for the 30 women who gathered on a fine October morning in Austin TX to become open, honest, and sharing.

The 24 participants and six facilitators got acquainted as Story Circle Network President Judith Helburn asked us to introduce ourselves by telling of three of the many hats that each of us wear in our lives. This was such fun and so revealing that one of the participants suggested that we collect and share them. A great idea for next time!

Over the course of the day and a half, those of us attending Writing from Life: A Workshop for Women with

Stories to Tell told lots of those stories. And we wrote them down. And we shared everything from the dreams we have dreamed to the dreams we hold and hope for. We talked and wrote about the trips we've taken, the books we've loved along the way, the memories we want to revisit, and how our memories change when we change our point of view.

A splendid and fulfilling time. We left amid hugs and exchanged addresses with full notebooks, a new will to write, and lots of ideas. And we left behind some great ideas as well. We can keep on having these workshops for a long time—the evaluations we completed yielded 22 suggestions for new workshop segments!

I can hardly wait for the next one. And I won't have to wait long. A one-day Writing from Life Workshop is scheduled for February 12 in Austin. More details on page 21 and on the SCN website. See you there! ❖

Two Readers Tell Their Stories

With the Changing of the Seasons...

In our "Reader Tells Her Story" column, we print a selection from the fine writing found on the Internet Chapter's Story of the Month page. This month, two Internet Chapter writers feel the air turn cool for winter and warm again in the spring and savor nature's smallest gifts.

Reflections on Autumn

Katherine Misegades

Fort Wayne IN

Our Indiana spring was an extension of winter right into June. Our summer was short and pleasant, but our fall has been spectacular. Yesterday, November 2, I walked to church in 70-degree weather with the maples sparkling a translucent pink-gold around me. I remembered years when we had 10 inches of snow and bare trees by now.

Autumn is the time I work at adjusting my attitude about cold weather. I'm not keen on being chilled to the bone by an Alberta Clipper so, a number of years ago, I began a ritual of starting a new knitting project when the first leaf turned. Over the years, each garment was fancier than the last. I let my imagination run free and wrote the patterns down on bits of paper. People started asking for the patterns so I collected them into little books. My annual attitude adjustments garnered several good results. I now look forward to the chill when I am prepared to wear my mittens, socks, and sweaters. There have been times when the revenues from my little knitting pattern books were my only income. And, best of all, I have met so many enriching people through my knitting enterprise.

So it is with my life. I am at an age when winter is fast approaching, and I am adjusting my attitude for the changes. I have been blessed with good teachers. My mother and grandmother were my best examples. They continued being productive through the storms of old age up to the day they each laid their needles aside and traveled to the place where seasons no longer require attitude adjustments. ❖

Says **Katherine Misegades**: Craftsmanship is important in my work as a graphic designer and in my life. I have a motto I learned from my father. "In all you do, do your best so, when you've laid your tools to rest, you'll be proud to sign your name."

No writing circle in your area?

Find out more about the Internet Chapter's online writing circles on SCN's website:

www.storycircle.org/ecircles.shtml

or click on the link to "Internet Chapter e-Circles"

Thawing Out

Jackie Sedwick

Bellingham WA

It's been a long, hard, dry spell. The winds blowing; the cold snows; the skies dark. I can see the sun now. I can smell the breath of spring—of life. I can hear the rushing waters. I can feel the thaw.

My body is awakening. The juices are beginning to flow again. I'm relaxed. I'm warm. I know who I am.

Am I ready to dare to bloom? Yes! Yes! Watch me grow. Watch me glow! Catch my smile.

(This isn't about living in the Pacific NW. It's about living in me.) ❖

Sunday Afternoon

Jackie Sedwick

Sunday afternoon in the park with babies and toddlers; moms chatting and overflowing with pride, or perhaps laden with sorrow, confusion, and "just too much."

Sunday afternoon with a friend, or two, or three hiking in the hills of Colorado. Walking along a stream, seeing figures and faces in the rocks. Yes, slowly now—walk and gaze around you. Really see what's here. Really listen to the sounds around you. Truly listen to what is being said and what you are saying.

"Look, do you see that person there? That tree."

"Oh, look at the shape of the moss on this stone. Isn't it amazing? I see a shamrock." "You see a frog?" "Oh, yes, I can see it." "You see a tree of lights in it? Show me."

"What's that you've picked up? It's a perfect dowsing stick. No? It's an armrest for when you're in your sleeping bag. Wow! Who'd ever think of that?"

"You're amazing. This is cool."

Listen. We're closer to the stream now. I can hear it calling. I can smell its freshness. I can feel it in my body. Feel it. Be with it. This is what Sunday afternoon is all about.

I miss it so! ❖

Jackie Sedwick is a birth doula, writer, spiritual counselor, Reiki Master, workshop facilitator, poet, copy editor; mother of seven, and grandmother of eleven.

Lifewriting Contest

This story by **Julia Hart** received high praise from judges of the SCN 2004 Lifewriting contest.

Mothers and Daughters Garden

Julia Hart
Des Plaines IL

In Chicago, spring comes slowly. My daughter and I are bursting to get out after the bone-chilling, dreary winter. A cold rain falls while the crocuses, daffodils, and dandelions tease us that summer is coming—someday—but we trudge outside anyhow.

My two year old and I dig in the sodden earth to plant mail-order strawberries. She squeals at the sight of a wriggling earthworm, afraid to touch it. She pokes holes and builds mud-castles. She wonders where the water from the hose goes. Then she kicks off her rain boots to caper stocking-footed through the muck, more delighted than any newborn lamb.

It's my mother's fault. She led my own little hands to pat seeds into the cold Minnesota soil years ago. She indulged my taste for rows of smiling sunflowers. Then she wiped my tears when the birds got to the seeds first. She harvested pink rhubarb from two enormous plants that towered over my toddler head. I still remember the sweet-tart rhubarb sauce as one of the first fruits of spring. We made day-pickles from the cucumbers whose vines ran out to smother the grass. Even frosty late-October yielded us sweet carrots one year. I've never eaten better tomatoes than the year we fertilized with a winter's worth of dog droppings. We'd giggle as we picked peas, eating our way down the row until there was nothing left to take inside. She taught me there's nothing better than green beans cooked five minutes after picking. Melt-in-your-mouth!

Today our little planting task is the languid exploration of a hobby. No hurry, no worry. Not so far past, our foremothers' kitchen gardens had the urgency of life itself, scratched out between chopping firewood and boiling soiled diapers. The family had to eat while war trampled Slovakia and the German states. Peas and carrots and tomatoes got stretched through the

Julia Hart grew up in Minnesota and is a graduate of the University of Texas in Austin. She currently lives in Illinois with her husband and daughter. Besides following her busy toddler around, she plays in a band, writes fiction stories for an on-line group and in summer loves to garden. About her entry for the competition, Julia laughingly adds that "mom [Jackie Newman, Austin Chapter President] made me do it."

Irish potato famine. Great, great, grandmother's garden was Sam's Club, WholeFoods, the butcher shop, and Joe's Liquor store all in one.

Once in this country, our great-grandmothers wielded hatchets to produce roast goose dinners and the autumn's new down pillows. Homemade plum wine toasted weddings and mourned lovers lost to arranged marriages or children lost to the 1919 flu epidemic. The backyard chicken coop stretched the Depression era dollar. My mother tells of teasing her uncle's geese until they chased her to pinch her legs with outstretched beaks, bestowing revenge for their fallen comrades. She remembers her grandfather's raspberry patch and the warm juicy berries to sweeten the bite of their thorny canes. Of late, she has mostly tended flowers but still plants a few tomatoes and herbs. Yes, the gardening roots in the family run as deep and wide as the family tree.

The good black dirt crumbles as I scrape it from my shoes and my daughter's boots. I still nourish it the old-country way with composted leaves and kitchen scraps. The next day dawns in the welcome warmth of a sunny 70-degree day. We start the seeds for tomatoes and cantaloupe in pots. I watch my daughter's little hands eagerly explore the potting mix, patting mud pies, and stirring in too much water. Lilacs perfume the air. I can't wait to giggle down rows of peas with her in June, eating more than we bring inside. "Why aren't they growing yet?" she asks after she waters the pots. "It takes time," I tell her, then secretly finish in my head, "...to train the next generation of gardener." ❖

*The gardening
roots in the family
run as deep and
wide as the
family tree.*

A Website of Your Own

It's true!

Every writer needs her very own website.

Peggy Moody, creator of SCN's award-winning website, can help you design a website that tells your story and showcases your work.

Contact Peggy at
pmoody@pobox.com
512-250-5085

Lifewriting Contest

The Devil Is in the Details

Contest judge **Sharon Wildwind** reflects on the judging process and the characteristics that distinguished the very best entries in this year's contest.

I had the honor of being one of several judges for this year's SCN Lifewriting Contest. Here is what I noticed as I read and evaluated the 30 plus stories that were submitted.

Four qualities stood out in the winning stories:

An exquisite attention to detail. Ellen Collins set the reader up for new complications by checking off, "It's March . . . May . . . July . . . August," each month bringing a new crisis. The landscape of Susan Schoch's trip to Utah with her daughter flowed through the story as easily as it did past their car windows. The vintage clothing that Diane Linn's mother loved not only dressed the two women but clothed the story as well. The amount of space Diane Pattara devoted to one painting in her mother's condominium set the tone for the relationship between the two women.

Short memoirs are like miniature quilts. It's important to pick patterns in keeping with the scale of the piece. The winners were able to pare their stories down to central events, then focus on details long enough to give the reader the "aha" moment, where she recognized her own experiences.

The perspective of distance. When Ellen wrote, "I avoid her eyes, afraid of them. I am afraid of what she will see. She wants the world from me, and she wants me to be her savior." I knew that she had moved beyond the pain of her mother's illness to a greater understanding of herself, her mother, and the relationship between them.

Sometimes writing is more than therapeutic—it's therapy. On one hand, writing is a superb tool for working through issues. No writer should feel constrained to polish a story to death before sharing it. However, unresolved conflicts and under-developed insight rarely produce a piece that is finished enough to win a contest. Raw emotions, which cut too close to the bone, lack finesse and resolution.

A wonderful tension of ambiguity. Susan and her daughter cycled through a teenager's moods and her mother's attempt to respond lovingly but firmly. Ellen never knew what crisis would come in the next phone call from the nurses. Diane Linn felt so embarrassed by her mother's outrageous tastes that she wanted to move in with a friend. Diane Pattara sustained a palpable tension of being a daughter who saw life from her own perspective but could still respect the women

her mother and grandmother had been. These stories had the feel of hand-pulling warm saltwater taffy: malleable in the hands but ready to spring back with a life of their own.

An easy command of grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Either the writers knew the rules backwards and forwards, or they proofread and corrected until there was no tripping over the smallest misspelled words or questionable commas. The technical aspects of writing sank into the background, where they belonged, and allowed the women and their relationships to come forward.

Among the less strong stories, the first thing that struck me was how many of the stories dealt with illnesses. Sadly, many women do perhaps define their intergenerational relationships in terms of sickness and sorrow. Some writers approached the topic rather predictably: my mother raised me; she got sick; she died a shell of her former self. While I know that each woman found it heart-wrenching to write about her mothers' decline, those stories didn't tell me anything new about women's relationships or about the experience of illness. Part of memoir writing is being able to look at old material with new visions—this is what we are all striving to do as we reflect on past sorrows and losses. So if you feel you are still weighed down by those past sorrows and losses, take heart in knowing that your writing is an important element of an ongoing healing process that takes just as long as it needs to take until you to break through to the other side of pain.

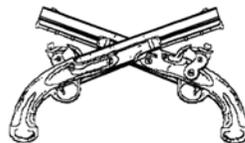
Congratulations to all the participants for your courage in writing and submitting. I'm eager to see your new stories next year. ❖

Some Welcome Home

The first book in the Elizabeth
Pepperhawk/Avivah Rosen mystery series.

By Sharon Wildwind

Captain Elizabeth Pepperhawk survived Vietnam, but will she survive Fort Bragg? Whoever dressed a dead body in World War II uniform and put it in her bed at Normandy House wants to shorten not only her military career, but her life.



Coming out March '05.
Order your copy through
your local bookstore.

ISBN 1-59414-275-0

Sharon Wildwind is a Canadian writer. Her first mystery, *Some Welcome Home*, will be published by Five Star Press in March 2005. She's currently at work on the second mystery in that series, as well as a romantic mystery, set in a nursing station in northern Alberta.

Kitchen Table Stories

Spicing Up Christmas Eve

Patricia Pando tells the story of a very unusual Christmas Eve feast.

A couple of years ago we spent our first Christmas Eve alone. No kids, no parents, no sisters, no brothers. Just the two of us—three, if you count Frank-the-Dog. No stockings to hang, and no getting up before dawn to fill them. No one to go down to the park with to sing carols and greet friends.

I bought a wreath and hung it on the front door, but was it worth it to drag the boxes of decorations down from the attic? Maybe we didn't need a tree.

After a few days, the mantle looked so empty that I bought a doggy stocking filled with crunchy chews and a squeaky toy mailman for Frank and hung it up. The red mesh looked so tacky that I went to the attic and got a real Christmas stocking. As long as I was up there, I found one little box of Christmas lights and a few Santa ornaments. Next stop—the nursery and a tree in a pot. We could plant it in the yard the day after Christmas.

But Christmas Eve still loomed long and lonely. Christmas Eve alone—it struck a chord. Often when I was a child and we were in the middle of our Christmas chaos, my mother told me with real longing in her voice about her first married Christmas Eve in 1935. She was in Houston, far away from her West Texas home. Even my dad, a newspaper reporter, wasn't there. He was off covering a breaking story.

She was lying across the bed, listening to Bing Crosby sing carols on the crackling radio, when a neighbor appeared at the front door with a steaming tureen of oyster stew and a brown paper bag of oyster crackers. Daddy didn't get home until after eleven, but she waited. They sat on the ugly purple couch in the furnished apartment, and Mother ate her first oyster. Later they walked into the front yard and arm-in-arm looked at the stars just as Christmas Eve became Christmas Day. When she returned the tureen, Mother asked for the recipe and copied it into her cookbook. How romantic.

Now here we were, another couple alone. It would be oyster stew for us on Christmas Eve. Romantic, yes, but still too lonely. I remembered our new-to-town friends. I checked. They didn't have Christmas Eve plans either. I would double the recipe.

Then Christmas Eve morning, my friend called to tell me they had an unexpected guest.

I could triple the recipe, I told her. No problem.

"He's from India."

"That's wonderful."

"It's not. He's Hindu. He can't eat oysters. Now, we don't have to come..."

"Don't worry. I've got a great Indian cookbook."

And I do. But I had no idea where it was and no time to search. I ransacked every book I could find and all of my cooking magazines. Finally, I patched together a recipe for spicy lentils that didn't call for a visit to the grocery store. With rice, we would be okay.

Promptly after the caroling, they appeared with their charming guest, wide-eyed at his first American Christmas. I'd decided to offer the traditional South Georgia appetizer. Our friends almost gagged at the sight of the boiled peanuts, but the young man gobbled them up.

"We eat these all the time in India. Very tasty. How did you know?" He loved the pickled okra, too.

He was tactful or I was lucky. The rice with sugar peas was nice, but the lentils—joy! They were just like his mother's.

"I have not eaten such food since coming to America. Nothing in San Francisco tastes as good as this." I hugged him and bagged up the leftovers for him to snack on the next day.

What a Christmas Eve!

We stretched out in front of the fire and decided it might not have been romantic, but certainly it was interesting. Maybe we'd have lentils every year and maybe invite more new friends.

We let Frank open his stocking early and went out to look at the stars as Christmas Eve became Christmas Day. ❖

Spicy Lentils in a Panic

(Good any night of the year)

Combine six cups water, two cups rinsed and drained dried lentils, one tablespoon chopped fresh ginger and salt to taste. Simmer around 30 to 45 minutes until the lentils are tender. Meanwhile, brown two cups of finely chopped onion in two tablespoons of oil (I used olive). When the onions are brown add a teaspoon (or more) of chili powder and a pinch of ground cloves. Combine the onions and the lentils in a serving dish. Sprinkle with curry powder (or Garam Masala for an authentically Indian flavor) and chopped cilantro (parsley does nicely if you can't get to the store). ❖

You have kitchen table stories, too!

We'd love to print them here in the *Journal* (800 words maximum, please, including recipe). Send via email or as a Word attachment to patriciapando@yahoo.com. In the subject line, please type Kitchen Table Stories. If you have no computer, type or write your story legibly and mail to Patricia Pando, 1600 Lake Douglas Road, Bainbridge, GA 39819.

And watch for the call for submissions for kitchen table stories for a new SCN anthology coming 2005.

Patricia Pando writes a weekly column on food and local history called "Stirring Up Memories," for the *Bainbridge GA Post-Searchlight*.

Writing from Life Workshop

February 12, 2005 in Austin TX

Telling, Sharing, and Shaping Our Stories

With Carolyn Blankenship, Judith Helburn, and Linda Jones

Women are natural storytellers, sharing their experiences of work and love, children and challenge, bright hours and dark days. In this one-day 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.

This workshop is open to any woman who is interested in lifewriting, regardless of skill level or experience.

DATE/TIME:

Saturday, February 12, 2005, 9:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.

LOCATION:

Lower Colorado River Authority Complex
3800 Lake Austin Blvd
Austin TX 78703

COST: \$90 for non-members, \$75 for SCN members

HOW CAN I PAY?

You can pay online (electronic funds transfer or credit card) or by mailing a check to the SCN PO Box number below.

Register online at: www.storycircle.org/frmenroll.shtml

Mail checks to: Story Circle Network, P.O. Box 500127, Austin, TX 78750-0127.

Workshop Presenters

Carolyn Blankenship, a facilitator of a local writing circle and a former member of the SCN Board of Directors, leads workshops on dealing with grief and loss, journaling for insight and personal growth, women's mythology, and feminine spirituality.

Judith Helburn is President of the SCN Board of Directors and facilitates a local writing circle. She addresses audiences nationwide on the topics of healthy aging and spirituality. She created the video "Getting Off Our Rocker," and wrote a chapter in *Spiritual Elders: Women of Worth in the Third Millennium*.

Linda Jones, facilitator of a writing circle and member of the Board of Directors, is a skilled facilitator with experience ranging from college professor, to president of Toastmaster clubs, to work-related meetings. She is known best for her ability to engender involvement amongst participants in whatever group she happens to be running.

MORE INFORMATION AT:

www.storycircle.org/Workshops/

*A friend hears the song in my heart and sings it to me
when my memory fails.*

—Pioneer Girls Leaders' Handbook

Tend and Befriend, continued from page 3

help but see friendships as the 'treat' they can allow themselves only after the business of the day is done—if it's done," write Goodman and O'Brien.

Ruthellen Josselson, coauthor of *Best Friends: The Pleasures and Perils of Girls' and Women's Friendships* (Crown, 1998), says "that's really a mistake, because women are such a source of strength to each other. We nurture one another."

"There's no doubt," says Dr. Laura Klein of Penn State University and Taylor's co-researcher, "that friends are helping us live longer." The famous Harvard Nurses' Health Study found that, the more friends women had, the less likely they were to develop physical impairments as they aged. Researchers concluded that not having close friends was as detrimental as smoking or being overweight.

Social ties lower blood pressure, heart rate, and cholesterol. One study found that people with no friends were more likely to die over a 6-month period. Another study showed that those with the most friends cut their risk of death by more than 60%.

Whether we are 16 or 60, we protect our own health when we "tend and befriend." If we stay healthy, our families also benefit. Since many of us are caregivers, it's nice to know that science proves "tending" is good for us. We just need to make time to also receive that nurturing from others. So go ahead—call a friend, write her a letter, and bring her to a Story Circle. You know it's good for both of you! ❖

Ed's Note: The original research report by Dr. Taylor and her colleagues, which brought these findings to public attention, appeared in the journal *Psychological Review*, 2000, Vol 107, No.3, pp. 411–429. (Copies can be purchased through the American Psychological Association website at www.apa.org/journals/.)



Another Book for the Journey Don't Leave Home without This One!

Writing from Life: Telling Your Soul's Story, by Susan Wittig Albert (Penguin Putnam, 2004. ISBN 0-87477-848-4) Reviewed by Judith Helburn, Austin, TX.

Hurrah! Susan's book is out in a new edition. Susan Albert wrote the first edition of this classic introduction to lifewriting in 1996. The response was so very positive that she decided to start an organization that would further lifewriting among women, and SCN was born!

The new edition has a lovely, simple new cover and a new and updated foreword. The rest of *Writing from Life* remains the same guide, beginning with the birthing of both Susan and *Writing from Life*. Then it is our turn, and she coaxes us to begin our own story, then gently encourages us to look deep below the surface of our own lives. And when we are through following Susan's encouragement and leads, we have our own book, for ourselves and our families or even to publish.

Susan's book was a torchbearer in 1996, leading the way in helping Everywoman write her memoirs. As she writes in her new foreword, "there wasn't a great deal of public interest in women's stories," unless, of course, the writer was a celebrity or she was revealing a sensational lifestyle. Now, we can read about women struggling with cancer, by women struggling with cancer. We can read about real women who have made a difference in the lives of their community. We can read loving stories about Mama and Granny, or, on the other hand, stories in which women survived their ordeals with Mama or Father or some other family member or friend. As Susan says, "Everywhere we turn, women—those who live ordinary lives, as well as those who have had out-of-the-ordinary experiences—are telling their stories."

When we write our own stories, we begin to heal ourselves. When we look back on a difficult time of our lives and say to ourselves, "I have survived that experience and I am stronger for it," we progress towards becoming all that we can be. When we look back and view our family traditions and then write about them, we are leaving a legacy not only from ourselves but from our foremothers.

Writing from Life is a guide to help us sing our own stories just as Wise Old Women did so long ago, so that we, too, can pass on our history. Susan introduces us to each chapter with a rich mix of her own story, history, mythology, psychology, and other women writers' stories. The book is liberally sprinkled with quotations by women and about women, sometimes within the text and sometimes in the margins. She gives us writing prompts and makes suggestions for enriching our own writing, perhaps with photos or drawings, or with poems by others. She ends each chapter with a celebration. Always, she encourages. And each chapter leads us deeper into our soul.

For any woman who is intent upon telling her story, *Writing from Life* is a classic. I have read several books about memoir writing. Susan's book remains the best guide for Everywoman.

To order your copy, go to www.storycircle.org and click "Writing from Life Reissued" or use the gift order form on p. 27 of this issue.

Benefit Booksigning

SCN founder **Susan Wittig Albert** launched the first book in her new series of Cottage Tales of Beatrix Potter, *The Tale of Hilltop Farm*, at a delightful function in Austin TX on November 10. Susan talked to a group of 40 women about her inspirations in writing this tale, which is based on Beatrix Potter's life and includes farmyard and country animals who solve a mystery! She reported that she will continue writing her China Bayles and Robin Paige mysteries, even as she gets ready to start on the next book in the new series. The author generously donated proceeds from the benefit book-signing to SCN. Thank you, Susan!

Susan's book can be found online at www.mysterypartners.com.

As Maxine Kumin reminds us, "We are locked up in our own story," and when we hear the stories of other women ... we become aware of new options, unfamiliar choices, paths we have not yet taken.

—Susan Wittig Albert

Empowering as it is to read and hear the stories of other women, it is even more empowering, even more beneficial, to document our own lives, and most especially, to do this in writing.

—Susan Wittig Albert

LifeLines Lifewriting Retreat

More Registration Information

How can I pay?

You can pay online (electronic funds transfer or credit card) or by mailing a check to the SCN PO Box number below.

If you cannot pay the entire fee at the time of registration, you may take advantage of our installment plan: 1/3 at time of registration, 2/3 by 12/15, balance by 1/15:

- Member installment plan: \$110 at registration, \$110 by 12/15, \$105 by 1/15;
- Non-member installment plan: \$120 at registration, \$120 by 12/15, \$110 by 1/15

Register online at:

www.storycircle.org/LifeLines/fmregister.shtml

Mail checks to: Story Circle Network, P.O. Box 500127, Austin, TX 78750-0127.

What is included in my registration fees?

Your registration includes:

1. Five workshop sessions (Friday evening; Saturday morning, afternoon, and evening; Sunday morning)
2. Meals: Friday dinner; Saturday breakfast, lunch, and dinner; Sunday breakfast
3. Snacks/drinks during breaks
4. Two nights stay in double-occupancy accommodations (two twin beds in each room) in the Artist’s Residence building. Check-in time is 4 p.m. on Friday; check-out time is noon on Sunday.

What is “Sisters Helping Sisters”?

The Story Circle Board has approved a tuition subsidy called “Sisters Helping Sisters” for the LifeLines Writing Retreat. It is available to SCN members who have paid their \$325 registration fee (either in full at the time of their registration, or through the installment program). The subsidy will be paid by check when the awards are announced. You can find information about the subsidy, as well as the application form, online or call the phone number below or write to SCN. If you are qualified for this assistance, we hope you will apply.

What is the refund policy?

Cancellations are accepted until March 15, 2005, and are subject to a cancellation fee of \$50. After March 15, we will refund your money only if we are able to fill your place from our waiting list.

Will SCN provide transportation?

For those flying to the workshop, we will not provide transportation to/from the airport. However, we will serve as a go-between among those needing transportation. Let us know your transportation needs when you register.

Questions? Contact us via email: storycircle@storycircle.org or phone: 512-454-9833

MORE INFORMATION AT:

www.storycircle.org/LifeLines/



LifeLines Retreat Registration

Mail your check to Story Circle Network, PO Box 500127, Austin TX 78750-0127 or use your credit card at www.storycircle.org/LifeLines

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ - _____

Phone numbers _____

Email Address _____

I am enclosing \$ _____

Check here to request vegetarian lunch/dinners

This is a gift registration from {your name, phone, e-mail}

A Story Circle News Roundup

If you're facilitating or participating in a Story Circle, tell us about it! Write to Story Circle Roundup, 5802 Wynona Ave, Austin TX 78756, or email Jane Ross at mjr@io.com.

Story Circle Board Report

The SCN Board met at La Madeleine restaurant on October 11. SCN President Judith Helburn chaired the meeting, which was attended by 18 of the 21 members. Members reported their contribution of 633 hours to SCN activities since the last meeting. A total of 2,155 hours have been contributed since the beginning of the year.

The board:

- Reviewed and approved the minutes of the July meeting and the Treasurer's Report.
- Thanked departing board members Catherine Cogburn and Paula Yost for their significant contributions to SCN.
- Welcomed Lisa Shirah-Hiers and Patricia Pando to the board.
- Approved a minor change to the wording of the SCN mission statement.
- Agreed to host a spring 2005 Barnes & Noble in-store book fair which would feature a selection of books from the SCN book review website.
- Delayed consideration of increasing the charge for the Facilitator's Guide until January when the revised Facilitator's Guide is scheduled for release.
- Approved a recommendation to return to offering Writing From Life workshops twice a year instead of only once, as was the case this year.
- Authorized the formation of four ad hoc workgroups to develop recommendations related to directions identified at the board retreat. The workgroups are: Board Operations, Local Chapter Development and Operations, Writing and Reading Circles, and Financial Management. Recommendations will be presented at next Board meeting.
- Selected Jane Ross from Austin to serve on the board.

The next board meeting will be held January 10, 2005 at La Madeleine.

—Report by Leilani Rose

Austin Chapter

The Austin Chapter members have had a busy year. In addition to three "Be Our Guests" programs, there was a fun-filled day of writing called the "Writes of Spring," a Luncheon/Party for circle facilitators, and the "Sights and Sounds of India" at the Holiday Party in early December.

There are presently 12 writing circles operating in the Austin area. Of these, five are open to new members. If you're

in the Austin area and are looking for a writing circle to join, check the SCN website to find the contact names and phones for the facilitators of these groups.

Any Austin Chapter members who is interested in becoming a facilitator, please let me know at jacquelinenewman@msn.com.

—Report by Jackie Newman

Internet Chapter

Over the past year, SCN's Internet Chapter has continued to enjoy increased membership and participation. We are nearly 200 strong.

Reading e-circle members read a new book each month. Ongoing discussions have reached new heights in that circle members have become comfortable enough to write of their own story as it relates to the book and author.

There are a total of 12 writing e-circles including one poetry circle. A quick survey of the member list reveals that our members come from a variety of age groups and backgrounds. Nearly every state in the US is represented, as are many foreign lands.

The women of the Internet Chapter bring their own unique voices to the circles and to their writings. These Sisters in Writing are unconditionally accepting of one another's differences. They validate one another in the similar threads of their life stories. The overwhelming truth in this remarkable group of strong and sensitive women is that, no matter what our backgrounds may be, our shared stories enrich us all.

—Report by Lee Ambrose

Writing Austin's Lives Correction

In the last issue of the *Journal* we omitted to list one of the SCN writers included in the new book *Writing Austin's Lives*. Here's what we meant to say:

Austin Chapter members, **Sofia Harber Bowden**, **Mary Faloon**, **Christine Gilbert**, and **Louise LaBauve Saxon** all have pieces in the just-published *Writing Austin's Lives: A Community Portrait*, a beautiful, 400-page, joint publication of the Austin History Center Association's Waterloo Press and the University of Texas Humanities Institute. The book features 127 of the nearly 800 true stories about life in Austin submitted to the Humanities Institute in 2003.

See the ad at right for ordering information.

Texas Book Festival

Diana McDaniel
Austin TX

Story Circle Network recently participated in the Texas Book Festival held October 30 and 31 near the Texas Capitol grounds in Austin. The Festival was well-attended and the SCN booth drew the attention of many visitors.

Prominently displayed was a collection of jackets from books written by members. Other displays included SCN books that were for sale: *With Courage and Common Sense*; *Discoveries* journal; *Your Life, Your Story*; *Writing from Life*; and the 2004 *True Words* anthology issue of *Story Circle Journal*. A free, two-page handout copied from a *Journal* back issue was a popular item.

Also for sale was the recently published *Writing Austin's Lives*, from which SCN received 40 percent of the proceeds.

SCN offered member authors the opportunity of reserving space to show off their books. Authors participating were: Susan Albert with *The Tale of Hilltop Farm*; Mary Faloon with her two books, *Fullness of Life* and *Fullness of Love*; Lynda Gaetano with *Up-South, Spring*; Debbie Harwell with *Candles in the Darkness*; and Michelle Stacy with *Letters to Mom*. Volunteers who helped make our booth a success were: Susan Albert, Penny Appleby, Diana McDaniel, Judy Miller, Danelle Sasser, Mary Ann Stafford and Louise Saxon.

Writing Austin's Lives: A Community Portrait

written by **The People of Austin, Texas**

Published by University of Texas Humanities Institute
& Waterloo Press

412 pages (illustrated); bilingual; \$26.95/\$17.95
ISBN 0-9754067-5-2 (hb) 0-9754067-0-1 (pb)

*** Winner: *Austin Chronicle* 2004
"Best of Austin" Critics' Award ***

What happens when you invite a group of people bound together by the place they live to tell their stories?

Writing Austin's Lives: A Community Portrait answers this question 127 different ways—through the vivid stories of life in a 21st-century American city as seen through the eyes and told in the voices of its people. The result of an unusual city-wide life-writing campaign, *Writing Austin's Lives* includes stories by writers of every age, every neighborhood, every ethnicity.

To order your copy through SCN, go to
www.storycircle.org/frmwval.shtml
or use the gift order form on p. 27.

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

Send news of your publications and writing-related activities to Peggy Moody at news@storycircle.org.

Janis F. Kearney's memoir, *Cotton Field of Dreams: A Memoir*, will be published by her independent press, Writing Our World Press, in December, 2004. For more information, go to www.writingourworldpress.com.

Lita De Los Santos's story "Love between Strangers" appears in *Noble Generations, Volume II*, published in November by Barnes and Noble booksellers.

Mary Sullivan co-wrote a daily meditation book for women titled *What Image Am I As a Woman of Prayer?* It can be purchased for \$6.95 plus postage from her: Sr. Mary Sullivan, The Cenacle, 411 River Rd, Highland Park, NJ, 08904-1999.

She also co-wrote, with SCN member **Rose Marie Dunphy**, a book titled *That First Bite—Chance or Choice: A Working Guide Empowering Choice for Those with Eating Disorders*, which sells at \$7.95 plus postage and can also be ordered from the above address.

Lee Ambrose has been invited to be a contributing writer for the quarterly publication *Still Moments*. The fall 2004 issue contains two of the stories she wrote for her SCN Internet Chapter e-circles: "Bread + Jam = Friendship" and "Leafing."

Lavon Urbonas has just had two of her stories published in the *Pomona Valley Review*, a student-edited publication of the English and Foreign Language Department at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, CA. Another of Lavon's stories has been accepted by Small Town USA, to be included in a book titled *Growing up on Memory Lane*. Learn more at: www.smalltownusa.net/stgmlexcerpts.html.

Lisa Shirah-Hiers' article, "Leap of Faith: Former College Vice President Susan Albert Solves the Mystery to Becoming a Successful Writer", was published in the September issue of *Austin Monthly* magazine. The article profiles Susan Albert, with info about her new mystery series based on the life of Beatrix Potter. Lisa also had two articles published in the *Hill Country Sun* in August and one in *AustinWoman* magazine in June.

Penny J. Leisch recently finished her e-book, *Writing & Photography: A \$Winning\$ Combination*, based on her successful workshops, "Writing and Photography for Publication." The book is now available on her web site, www.pennyspensandpics.com/wrtphotobk.html. This book will be an asset for many members who are publishing genealogy work and wish to include family photos, as well as for members who publish nostalgia or children's stories.

True Words Anthology Call for Submissions

All you reading and writing circle members, pick up your pens (or boot up your computers)! SCN's yearly anthology, *True Words from Real Women*, needs you! Each year, we publish a special "stories-only" issue of the *Journal* to showcase the wonderful writing done by our members.

This year we will only be accepting submissions from women who are SCN members and are active members of an Austin Chapter or Internet Chapter reading or writing circle or of one of the circles listed on the "Story Circles in the US" page of our website. Because these official story circles are at the heart of SCN's mission, we want to showcase their work and encourage other members to form or join a writing or reading circle.

There is no theme for the anthology, and we accept prose, poetry, and both short and long pieces, though greater consideration is given to shorter pieces. The word limit for prose is 1000 words, and for poetry, 40 lines, though longer pieces may be published at the editor's discretion. We will accept up to three pieces per author for consideration. Deadline for submissions is January 31, 2005.

Carolyn Blankenship is this year's editor, and she requests that submissions be made by e-mail if at all possible. Her e-mail address is cb@io.com. Please be sure to include your name, city, phone, address, and email address so that we may contact you if we have questions about your submission. Also, please tell us which circle you belong to. If you would like to submit hard copy, please send your writing to Carolyn at 1411-A Waterloo Trail, Austin TX 78704.

We look forward to having a wide sampling of stories and poems, representative of our increasingly diverse membership, but we can only accomplish that goal with your help. Let us hear from you!

Life-Writers' Market Watch: Opportunities for Publishing

The 12th Annual **Writer's Digest International Self-Published Book Awards**, co-sponsored by Book Marketing Works, LLC, will award more than \$10,000 in prizes for the best self-published books of the past few years. Whether you're a professional writer, part-time freelancer, or a self-starting student, here's your chance to enter the only competition exclusively for self-published books. For more information and the official entry form, go to www.writersdigest.com/contests/self_published.asp.

Deadline: Dec. 15, 2004

A Cup of Comfort book series focuses on uplifting true stories about the relationships and experiences that comfort, inspire, and enrich our lives. Currently seeking submissions of 1000–2000 word stories for the upcoming anthology: *A Cup of Comfort for Spirituality*. 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.

Deadline: Dec. 31, 2004

The San Gabriel (Texas) Writers League's 2005 "**Write Smarter**" Contest is soliciting entries in poetry, fiction, and non-fiction categories. Cash prizes will be awarded to first, second, and third place winners in each category, and all entries will receive at least two critique sheets. Final round entries will be judged by published authors or professional editors. Complete information and entry forms can be found at www.sgw1.org/contest2005.htm.

Deadline: Jan. 31, 2005



This membership is a gift.

My name and address:

My phone and e-mail:

Join the Story Circle Network!

____ Annual Membership: USA: \$25 ;
 Canada & Mexico: \$30 } International MO only
 International \$35.
 ____ Austin Chapter: \$18/yr (in addition to your national dues!)
 ____ Internet Chapter: \$15/yr (in addition to your national dues!)
 ____ Sample copy of the *Story Circle Journal*: \$5

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ - _____

Phone _____

Email _____ Amount enclosed _____

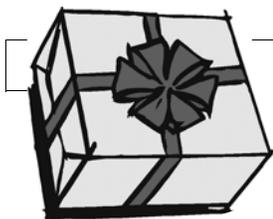
Become a supporting member and help Story Circle Network grow. Check here.

- \$50 Supporter \$100 Sponsor \$200 Patron \$400 Benefactor

Mail your check to
 Story Circle Network,
 PO Box 500127,
 Austin TX 78750-0127

12/04

More Holiday Gifts for the writers on your gift list
(continued from the back page)



*Wear Your Support for SCN
on Your Sleeve!*

✍ Our **T-shirts** make great gifts for your friends, your circle, and for you! Two styles to choose from in 100% cotton:

♥ **Feminine Style** in periwinkle (reverse has a quote from Susan Wittig Albert)
Sizes: Med, Large, X-large, 2X, 3X. **\$18**

♥ **Regular Style** in natural (reverse has a quote from Muriel Rukeyser)
Sizes: Med, Large, 2X, 3X. (1X sold out in this style) **\$16**

Check the SCN website for pictures.



✍ ...and don't forget to check out the other great gift ideas on our website. You'll find everything from handmade bookmarks to links to the many books published by our members. Go to:

www.storycircle.org/GiftGuide.html

More Book Ideas for Writers

✍ For those friends and family members who aspire to publish their memoirs and family stories, we suggest the inspiration of a delightful collection of stories from "regular folks":

With Courage and Common Sense, stories from the women in the OWL program, published by University of Texas Press, 204 pages, **Pb \$18. Hb \$40**

Writing Austin's Lives, stories from the People of Austin TX, published by the University of Texas Humanities Institute. 412 pages, illustrated with photographs. **Pb \$17.95**

✍ Or how about giving one of OWL Program director Pat Flathouse's two practical guides to writing family history:

Your Life, Your Story: A Book to Help You Capture Your Memories. 8½" x 11", coil bound, 62 pages. **\$15**

A Priceless Legacy: Writing the Stories of Your Family History. 8½" x 11", coil bound, 67 pages. **\$15 plus S&H.** (Available directly from the author. E-mail pflat@austin.rr.com.)

SCN Gift Item Order Form

- ___ Send me ___ copy/copies of the *Discoveries* journal, at \$15
 ___ Send me ___ copy/copies of *Writing from Life*, at \$18
 ___ Send me ___ paperback copy/copies of *With Courage and Common Sense*, at \$18.
 ___ Send me ___ hardcover copy/copies of *With Courage and Common Sense*, at \$40.
 ___ Send me ___ Feminine style T-shirts in size ____, at \$18.
 ___ Send me ___ Regular style T-shirts in size ____, at \$16.
 ___ Send me ___ copy/copies of *Your Life, Your Story*, at \$15.
 ___ Send me ___ paperback copy/copies of *Writing Austin's Lives*, at \$17.95.

Shipping/handling: For the first item, add \$4. For each additional item, add \$1. **Mail your check** to Story Circle Network, PO Box 500127, Austin TX 78750-0127

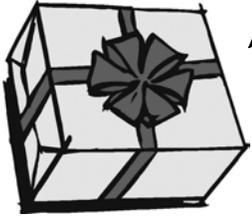
We must receive your order by December 12 to be able to deliver in time for Christmas.

12/04

Name _____

Address _____ Phone _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ - _____ Email _____

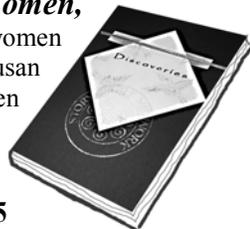


Holiday Gifts for Lifewriters

Support SCN
as you make your
holiday purchases.

Lee Ambrose (President of our Internet Chapter) suggests these gift ideas for the journalers and writers on your gift list.

 A new journal (and perhaps a fancy pen to go with it.) How about SCN's **Discoveries: A Blank Journal Just for Women**, with covers hand-crafted by the women of Story Circle, foreword by Susan Wittig Albert, quotes by women throughout.



Spiral-bound to open flat,
6" x 8", 208 unruled pages. **\$15**

 The book that helped launch SCN and that'll guide any woman on her writing journey, **Writing from Life: Telling Your Soul's Story** by Susan Wittig Albert. Pb **\$18**

 The gift that lasts all year, **a gift membership to SCN**. From **\$25**



 The gift of enrolment to our **Writing from Life Workshop (February '05)** or our **LifeLines Writing Retreat (April '05)**. See the registration information on pages 21 and 23. From **\$75**



More Gift Ideas on p. 27

To order two or more books and/or T-shirts, you may find it more convenient to order by mail, using the order form on p. 27. Purchase individual items online at www.storycircle.org/GiftGuide.html

*Give the gift that will
last all year—
a gift membership
to SCN*

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www.storycircle.org

Scroll down to "How to Join..." in
the purple navigation bar.

(Or use the membership form on p. 26)

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