

Story Circle Journal

Volume 8 Number 1, March, 2004

The newsletter for women with stories to tell...

“Even Better Than the First!”

“Even better than the first Story Circle conference!” was an echoing comment heard over and over again at the recent *Stories from the Heart II*, SCN’s second women’s memoir conference, held at the Red Lion Hotel in Austin TX, February 6–8.

From the pre-conference panel on self-publishing (chaired by Jan Seale), to Liz Carpenter’s insightful keynote address, through all of the Saturday and Sunday workshops and presentations, and down to Wilhelmina Delco’s funny and inspiring closing talk and Judith Helburn’s wrap-up, the conference was an enormous success.

Numbers can’t tell the full story, of course, but they can help. One hundred ninety-five women registered for all or part of the conference—an increase of nearly sixty percent over the 2002 conference and well over the 175 people we had aimed for. Twenty-seven women offered 90-minute presentations, 20 panelists participated in our four panels, and 18 vendors took part in our Works of Heart Marketplace. Throughout Saturday and on Sunday morning, the meeting rooms were full of women listening, writing, reading, and talking, and, during the breaks, the hallway was crowded with women who wanted to share their stories.

But it’s quality, not quantity, that counts. Here are a very few of the fascinating ways that the presenters helped us think about the many different ways we can tell our life stories.

—Beck Whitehead, of San Antonio TX, taught us how to create a handmade book.

—Donna Remmert, of Austin TX, inspired us to dream our stories and story our dreams.

—Linda Joy Myers, of Richmond CA, helped us write about ourselves through time.

—The *Truth Be Told* team, from Lockhart TX, demonstrated how they work with women in prison.

—Janie York, of Ithaca NE, inspired us to quilt our stories.

—Suzanne Zoch, of Ruidoso NM, showed us how to translate our stories into pictures and sound.

—Mary Jane Nordgren, of Forest Grove OR, encouraged us to listen.

—Nancy Rigg, of Los Angeles CA, and Billie Davis, Jodi Davis, Anna Jaworski, and Sharon Wildwind, all inspired us with the power of their stories.

—Penny Appleby, of Austin TX, and Mary Jo Doig, Judy Flournoy, Judith Helburn, and Carolyn Scheider, shared their experiences of reading and writing circles.

But as wonderful as the presentations and panels were, they’re only a part of the story, for there were a great many other opportunities to share our stories and to take delight in the stories of other women.

—At lunch on Saturday, three members of the Paradox Players (all of whom are also members of SCN) performed eight stories from SCN’s new

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A few responses to the question: what two or three things will you remember most about the conference?

Outstanding workshops and learning experience

The content of the sessions and the professionalism of the presentations

The support, encouragement, caring and friendliness of everyone was so great!

I read at Open Mike and I’ve *never* done that before!

Presenting my poetry to an audience for the first time

The people I met, the stories I heard and the information I gathered

1. The women! 2. The women!

3. The women!

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A Letter from SCN's President...



It is 2004, and *Stories from the Heart II* has come and gone. Liz Carpenter, who tools around on her little red scooter, had us roaring with laughter, at the same time that she offered insightful commentary on the importance of memoirs during her keynote address. And Wilhelmina Delco, retired Texas State legislator, had us nodding in delighted recognition as she brought the conference to a close with her remarkable stories of women's achievements.

Between Liz's opening and Wilhelmina's closing, we were privileged to enjoy session after session, all led by talented, creative women who enticed us and coached us in the myriad ways we might leave our

legacy. We schmoozed and mingled and networked and hugged, passing our energy from one to another to yet another. I came away from the conference with a wonderful buzz, a headful of ways to tell my story, and a heartful of joy—and I know that others did too. I hope you were there to share the energy and information and joy with us. But if you weren't, we hope that we'll be able to communicate at least some of that to you throughout the year.

I am the first president of Story Circle to follow our visionary founder, Susan Wittig Albert. I certainly won't be replacing Susan. For the most part, I'll be carrying on what she and the Story Circle Board—a wonderful, spirited group of women who have labored for seven years to give birth to this organization—have already put in place. It is good and solid and it works. Yes, of course I'll tweak here and fiddle there. A new person brings a different view and a different approach, and Story Circle needs to grow and change as new opportunities for growth are offered. The board and I are open to suggestions, and we hope you will offer them. SCN members live in 45 different states and seven foreign countries, and we want to serve you, wherever in the world you live.

When I wrapped up *Stories from the Heart II*, I asked for ideas from the people who were there. I ask again. How about creating a mother/daughter project—any ideas? Our conference panel on mothers and daughters was a great success, but what kind of long-distance project can we create? We might even throw in grandmothers (gently, of course). But that's just one idea, and you must have dozens of others swimming around in your head. What would you like to see happening at Story Circle? If you'll write and tell me about them, I'll pass your ideas along to the board, and we'll see what we can do—together. You can email me at helburn@mail.utexas.edu, or write to me, Judith Helburn, 5914 Highland Hills Dr., Austin, TX 78731.

If you are not already involved in reading and writing circles, I encourage you to start one. It's easy! Just put up a sign at your library or in your church or synagogue or community center. And read "How to Start a Story Circle" on our webpage (all the way to the bottom on the toolbar). You can also send \$1.00 to Story Circle Network, P.O. Box 500127, Austin, TX, 78750 for a printed copy. There are some good ideas there. Members of informal circles do not need to be members—but there are so many advantages in being a member of Story Circle Network.

At least I think so; don't you?

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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LifeStory Lite ...stories to make you smile

Some of us lead funny lives. Or maybe, when some of us write about our lives, it just sounds funny. Story Circle member Pamela Troeppel-Kinnaird is a freelance writer in Shoreline WA. Her work has been published in the Chicago Tribune, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and other major newspapers. She is the mother of four children from four to 14. We'll be publishing several excerpts from her humorous life stories; you can find lots more at <http://www.pamela-troeppel.com>. "The world needs more laughter," Pamela says, and we agree—especially Pamela's brand of laughter! This piece is entitled "Carpet War."

"Mmm-hmm," I mumbled to my three year old.

Not quite an answer, but when I'm working on my computer I tend to tune out what is going on around me. It's sort of a protective measure for me and a cue for my children to take advantage of Mom when she's least likely to assess what they're asking to do. That way, she might give them permission to—oh, say, get a belly button ring with an unsterilized needle from a guy named Spike.

Okay, that hasn't happened yet, but it's only a matter of time until my 14 year old figures out that I'm most vulnerable during one of my computer-induced-trances and gets permission to mutilate her body in some grotesque fashion.

My three year old has already figured it out. Yesterday I was working along, with my nice little trance blocking out the unwanted sounds of children fighting over the television, ringing phones, and my son skateboarding through the kitchen. The only thing I remember for sure is Ashley asking something about Jello and the I-can-do-it-myself statement that follows anything I say about helping her. The next thing I remember is mumbling something between a "Not now" and a "Wait till later." These useful expressions are meant to stall my three year old until she forgets what she so desperately wanted to do and goes off in search of something less of a bother to Mom in her trance. Unfortunately, it didn't quite work out that way.

Have you ever opened a package of gelatin and dumped it into a glass of water? There's not nearly enough to actually make it turn into Jello, but the mixture does have that general consistency, especially if the water-Jello mixture is stirred with a broken bamboo back scratcher. My trance can be broken, but it generally takes a rather loud noise or a sudden shriek of pain from one of my children. I've also found it can be broken by my five year old screaming something about Jello all over the living room carpet. Green jello, which is nowhere near the color of my carpeting.

So today we had a carpet-cleaning day. As it turned out, I had to throw away an area rug that was decorated with poinsettias, a holdover from my Christmas decorating. I hadn't put it away with the rest of the decorations because I couldn't figure out what I did with the rug that lies in that spot the other 11 months of the year. We don't have a gargantuan house, so you wouldn't think I'd be able to lose something like an area rug, would you?

Nope, not so. I've lost bigger and more important items

over the years. (My brain comes to mind.) Oh, well, no matter. Now the space is empty. The rug got tossed because I decided I was tired of cleaning up Jello and other indescribable fluids deposited by both children and dogs. The poinsettia rug became a casualty of a war waged by kids and mutts.

Make no mistake about it, this *is* war. There's been a line drawn in the sand, er... rug, and I'm defending the right of my carpeting to retain its bright colors without fear of some child or animal spilling something horrendous upon its acrylic fibers. Actually, the carpet did just great, right up until the point where we moved into our house, where it had been laid only the day before. In the ten years since that auspicious day, neither the carpeting nor I have fared well. The rose hues of the living room carpeting are still there, albeit semi-concealed under stains of unmentionable origin.

I suppose I could mention a *few*: food, mostly milk. Did you know that nothing rots your carpeting faster than milk? Mine is living proof. Drips from bottles of warmed milk from three different children spot the carpeting throughout my house. They're like a roadmap of the past. The beige carpeting down the hall and in the bedrooms is worse. I think they should simply ask you at the flooring store whether or not you have children and pets. If you answer in the affirmative, they should steer you in the direction of carpeting that will *not* lose its original color because it is already a dingy gray color, with ready-made spots of unknown origin. So ten years after you lay it down it will look the same. There won't be any anguish over the change in color.

Oh dear. The original rose coloring of my living room carpeting shows through where the thrown-away area rug spent the last eight months. This isn't good.

I wonder if they're still selling little area rugs with poinsettias on them?

I will clean house when Sears comes out with a riding vacuum cleaner.—Roseanne Barr

I hate housework. You do the dishes, you make the beds, and six months later you have to start all over again.

—Joan Rivers

Cleaning your house while your kids are still growing is like shoveling the walk before it stops snowing.—Phyllis Diller

Take a Bow! Spotighting Our Story Circle Volunteers

Catherine Cogburn: Rediscovering Our Wholeness

In this article, we feature SCN Board member Catherine Cogburn, Director of the Older Women's Legacy (OWL) project in its grant-funded phase and co-designer in 1999 of the OWL workbook. More recently, Catherine worked with the current OWL program coordinator Pat Flathouse to create a book for OWL-Circle graduates to use on their own, called *Your Life, Your Story*.



When a friend phoned Catherine Cogburn, back in 1998, and asked if she wanted to join her on the board of Story Circle Network, Catherine knew nothing about the organization. Her friend promised that there was no fundraising involved. That was enough information for Catherine to agree to join the board.

Little did she know that she would soon find herself very actively involved in an organization that would mean so much to so many women. In a telling stroke of synchronicity, at the same time she was invited to join the board, she received a flier about SCN in the mail and a friend invited her to join a new Reading Circle run by SCN. Clearly a higher power wanted her to be a part of this organization.

Catherine joined the board in early 1998 when SCN was getting ready to apply for a grant to fund the OWL project. When the grant came through, Catherine was asked if she wanted to be involved with running the project. In late 1998, SCN received the grant check and by 1999 Catherine was employed as Co-Director of the OWL project. For the first six months, Catherine and a group of six other women worked hard to write, test, and refine the OWL Workbook. Catherine continued to co-direct the OWL project through its grant-funded phase, which ended in 2000. With the assistance of a group of paid facilitators, she helped bring free OWL writing workshops to almost 500 participants throughout the Austin TX area.

One of the most gratifying results of all the effort that went into the workbook and workshops was seeing the participants' work in print, both in booklets of stories given to workshop participants and in the recently published collection of OWL stories, *With Courage and Commonsense*. To affirm the value of the women's memoirs and give them permanency, stories from each of the workshops were collected and compiled into a booklet, five copies of which were distributed free to each participant in that workshop. Catherine is quoted in the introduction to *With Courage and Commonsense*, saying, "Most of the participants had the feeling that their stories weren't 'good enough' to be published. So the booklets played a critical role, boosting their self-confidence and

assuring them that their writing, and their experience, was important and valuable. They were delighted when they got their copies of the booklets and immediately shared them with friends and family."

Before joining Story Circle Network, Catherine was a consultant with the international consulting firm Drake Beam Morin. She worked with Fortune 500 firms to provide career counseling and psychological assessment testing to employees affected by corporate downsizing. An L.P.C., she is now psychotherapist in private practice, specializing in relationship issues and life-writing as a tool for personal growth.

The OWL project fitted well with Catherine's work as a counselor. "I had already been using writing as a healing tool with my clients. I've always been interested in the journaling process and the problem solving that seems to occur naturally when we write."

One of the primary tools that Catherine has been using for a long time in her practice, and one that she incorporated into the OWL Workbook, is an exercise that helps people achieve a better appreciation of themselves. It's called simply, *Who Am I?* She has her clients write for 10 minutes every morning for a week and make a list of who they are—all the one or two word phrases that would describe something about themselves: good, bad, ugly, whatever comes to mind.

Catherine explains, "That little exercise seems to help people get a deeper appreciation for their wholeness." They become less stuck in one particular aspect or story about themselves and can see everything else that they are. The phrase Catherine likes to use a lot in therapy is "I am _____ (fill in the blank), except when I'm not."

Catherine believes strongly that women should be encouraged to tell their stories to pass on to future generations and to define who we are and the ways in which we have shaped society and our culture. Of the Story Circle Conference in February, Catherine says: "What impressed me the most about was the wonderful gathering of women that occurred out of our efforts, the depth of the sharing, the talent that is out there, and the commitment from these women to themselves and their families and the world. It's really impressive." And she expressed her gratitude to SCN and to its founders for providing "a great deal of healing to a whole lot of people."

In her spare time, Catherine likes to visit with friends, to go to movies, to sew, and to do projects around the house. Says Catherine, "I'm hoping for the best for the future, globally as well personally."

Article by Assistant Editor Jane Ross.

A Reader Tells Her Story

Ironing

Claudie Aguilar was born and raised in France. She lived in Santa Fe NM during her long married life, and then moved to Austin, Texas where she's living the exciting "third chapter" of her life with her boyfriend Clark. She adores her two children (now 25 and 26) and loves to travel, read, visit art galleries and museums, make collages, and spend time with her girlfriends. Claudie read this piece at a Be Our Guest program in Austin, and everyone laughed—perhaps because they, too, have an ironing story to tell.

Today, when I hear the word “ironing,” I think of how failure to communicate can, and does, ruin a relationship.

A few years ago, the word “ironing” would have just made me think of my mother. As a typical French wife of her generation, she ironed everything but the kitchen sink. While growing up, I was sure I would not be like her.

As a young married woman, I ironed very little. Later, when I wore other clothes besides jeans and T-shirts, I ironed more. When my husband was promoted to management and his clothes got fancier, I ironed even more. And when I worked in a CPA office and wore better clothes too, I ironed a great deal more. So, I've gradually become more like my mother.

But back to “failure to communicate.” When I started working full time after years of raising children and being a homemaker, I still tried doing most of the household chores I had done before. I soon discovered I was not Wonder Woman. My husband helped some but had a hard time adjusting. He loved the money I was making, but he still hoped he could come home from work and relax all evening long.

One day, I told him I had to do less because I was feeling terribly overwhelmed. I suggested that he take over ironing his clothes. He had more than once volunteered to iron, so I figured he didn't dislike that task. However, my suggestion angered him. Surprised, I told him that I would still iron his clothes sometimes, but could he please iron them the majority of the time, at least for now?

He became angrier and demanded to know, on the spot, whether I would or would not iron his clothes. He very firmly demanded a yes or no. By now, I too was angry, so I gave him what he wanted. I said, “No.” He never forgave me for my answer.

Several times I asked my husband what it was about the ironing that caused him such anger, because I really couldn't figure it out. After all, wasn't this just fair and normal division of labor? He never answered the question and continued to resent me for this new ironing arrangement. I, in my turn, resented him for resenting me, and our relationship suffered one more blow.

After too many blows, I made an announcement: either we went to marriage counseling or I was moving out. In prior years, my husband had always refused marriage counseling. This time he went, but with much reluctance.

During one of our six counseling sessions, I mentioned the ironing issue to the therapist as an example of how difficult it was for me to understand my husband's strong resentment

towards me. By the end of that session, I finally understood the mystery of the ironing issue.

When my husband was a young boy, his mother was so strict that he hated her with all his might. Fortunately, his savior was his grandmother. She took him under her wing and gave him all the love he needed. I had always known that he worshipped his grandmother for this reason. What I hadn't known was that she also used to iron his clothes and that fact meant a great deal to him. He was fussy about his clothes and wanted them heavily starched. Grandma was glad to oblige.

I was stunned—stunned to learn that ironing was deeply connected to his grandmother and that having his clothes ironed was, for him, proof of being loved.

Discovering this, after two years of resentment over the ironing issue, I felt very sad. For him, for me, for us. How many more “secret connections,” like this one, were hiding in his heart? Connections that might explain his other resentments?

Had I known about Grandma and the ironing, I would gladly have asked him to do some other task. But he held all his feelings inside, keeping me clueless about what angered him. Indeed, I think he was often clueless himself. Finally one day, I could take no more silence and resentment and our marriage ended.

Now, my ironing is both a chore and a romantic activity. When I iron the shirts of the man I love, I am reminded that he is in my life and that we love each other. When I touch his shirts, I also touch him.

Today, I even iron pillowcases. When I iron those pillowcases, it's such a sweet reminder that I have a home, a physical and emotional home. The man I love and I sleep on these pillowcases, close to each other, while the night stars shine above us.

My second favorite household chore is ironing. My first being hitting my head on the top bunk bed until I faint.

—Erma Bombeck

I'm eighteen years behind in my ironing. There's no use doing it now, it doesn't fit anybody I know.—Phyllis Diller

People can say what they like about the eternal verities, love and truth and so on, but nothing's as eternal as the ironing.—Margaret Mahy

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

Dr. Billie Davis: Becoming a Real Person

Billie Davis has a unique story to tell. Her autobiographical account, "I Was a Hobo Kid," relates her experiences as a migrant child. It originally appeared in the Saturday Evening Post in 1952, was reprinted in Readers Digest and many anthologies, and was made into a video entitled A Desk for Billie by the National Education Association.

I caught up with Billie at the Story Circle Conference in Austin where she was participating in a panel on the power of story to inspire and create change. As she told me in our interview, it was through telling her own story in the Saturday Evening Post article that she discovered an important calling in her life as a sociologist and educator.

SCJ. *Billie, please tell us a little about your unusual childhood.*

By the time I was six, I had developed a philosophy: You will not be a camper always if you go to school and get real smart. Anybody can be clean and smooth and live in a nice house if he is smart. And school can make you smart.

—Billie Davis in "I Was a Hobo Kid"

I lived in a state of constant longing and frustration. I would peek into the windows of empty schoolrooms. Sometimes after school hours I would slip furtively inside the building for a fleeting glimpse of a classroom and some books.

—Billie Davis in "I Was a Hobo Kid"

Billie. My people were the true homeless migrant workers. I was born in 1923 in Oregon when my parents were picking hops. We traveled from there all up and down the coast picking fruits and vegetables crops. We traveled in much of the West, picking oranges and grapefruit in Texas and Florida. My Dad liked to shuck some corn in Nebraska and harvest the wheat in Kansas and then we'd travel up to Idaho for the truck gardening and peaches, then out to Oregon and down the coast. The first thing I remember was traveling in an old car, probably a Model T Ford.

Sometimes my dad would say, "I'm sick of doing the rich man's dirty work," and he'd go down to the river and cut willows and make baskets. And my mother would make crepe paper flowers. In all the places we traveled to, I'd go out and sell the baskets and flowers and I became very aware of *community* and this is the core of my story. As an outsider, I had an opportunity to see what a community really was—more so than the people who lived there, in many respects. In neighborhoods, I knocked on doors. In the towns, I went into the stores. I'd walk into a barbershop, for example, and quite often the men would be joking and pleasant. I liked the barbershops. Since I'd started out as early as I did, I wasn't afraid. I'd ask, What's that? What's that? People would tell me, Well, that's a library; that's a courthouse; that's a fire station.

SCJ. *From an early age you became aware of communities. But how did you first start to join a community?*

Billie. My first really definitive experience was a library. I asked a lady who bought a basket to tell me what a library was and she told me that anybody could go there and read books. *Anybody could go there.* So I went into the library and I was fascinated. I was about six at the time. We

didn't stay anywhere long enough for me to get a library card and borrow the books and I didn't have any address. Libraries didn't have children's sections like they do now in the magnificent libraries of today. It was just an old-fashioned library with shelves of books. But the library gave me a real goal: I wanted to learn to read the books.

My next climactic experience was the Sunday school. We used to camp by the river or out by the stockyards or the city dump where there were wide places where you could pitch a tent. I saw the children going by on the bridge. I asked my mother, "Where are they going?" She said, "They're going to Sunday school probably, because it's Sunday." They looked so beautiful. In those days, I called them the clean smooth children. That's a paradox for today. Kids nowadays want to be wrinkled and tattered. But in my day the wrinkled, tattered people were the hobos and the bums, and the clean smooth children had shiny shoes and ironed clothes. I thought that was wonderful.

I went down the road and I came to this little church. This was a small town probably in Kansas or Nebraska; it was probably one of those times when my Dad went off to shuck corn. There seemed to be a river, like the Platt River, but I couldn't say exactly where it was. And I went into this little church. The children went down into a basement room and I followed them. Again I wasn't afraid. I was reluctant—I stayed away from them because they were "real people." I sat down in a little red chair and listened to the story about Jesus, and that impressed me. The teacher said, "You are children of God." I thought, "Ah, if I could be a child of God, I wouldn't be a bum."

Usually, the kids would laugh at us and throw rocks and sticks. They'd say, "Look at the gypsies and the dirty bums." I'd hear people say, "Don't go down there by the river. Those gypsies probably have lice and probably steal chickens." And so when I first went to church, that's when I got the idea I wanted to be what I called a "real person" and live in a house.

SCJ. *What was it about that early Sunday school experience that kept you coming back?*

Billie. It was an emotional experience. I've never been really mystical, although I realize that, if there is Providence, then God led me. At the time, I just wanted to be like the real people and if Jesus would love me and make me a real person then I was all for that. After that I started looking for churches. Eventually I claimed the church and felt I was welcome there. I had good experiences.

I was the kind of person who could sit through a session and then run away. I didn't expect to be made to feel at home or anything like that. I was an outsider. I didn't really belong there. We often say that, when people come into church, we have to make them feel at home. They'll feel resentful if nobody speaks to them. Well, that didn't enter my head because I was a different creature.

We didn't stay too long in one place in those early years. But later I did become very much affiliated with the church. In my teenage years I joined the Salvation Army and they sent me to a leadership training school.

SCJ. *How did you manage to fit schooling into this wandering life?*

Billie. The first school was in Fort Laramie, Wyoming. Fort Laramie was an old fort town where they had a carnival celebration. My dad got acquainted with some carnival people and they went to the carnival to sell novelties. The people at the carnival said they were sending their children to town to the consolidated school because a bus would come right by the place where the carnival was.

I said to my mother, "I want to go to school, I want to go to school." I was already eight years old and my sister was less than two years younger. So we were both old enough to go to school. So we got on the school bus and went to school. The school was cogniscent of the migrant children and they were very kind to us. That was a very good experience. The film *A Desk for Billie* is about that experience, of beginning school as a hobo kid.

After that, I went to school wherever we went. My parents laughed about it and sometimes they were reluctant to let me go. They needed me to work in the fields. Until I graduated from high school, I was still going out to sell things on weekends. I estimate I went to about 40 schools in all.

Then finally we were in California and it was time for me to go to high school. I went to a consolidated high school. I stayed there part of one year. Then the next year we went to

Bakersfield CA. By that time, they had the farm labor program and there was relief. We were staying in a little shack on the edge of town. These shacks were set up especially for the migrants. They didn't have electricity or running water. We used a common place to get water and the director of the camp or the janitor or somebody came around and turned on the electricity at night and then turned it off in the morning. We didn't touch the switches ourselves. There, I graduated from East Bakersfield High School.

SCJ. *What was it that enabled you to accept your situation and take the best that was offered to you and use it to your advantage?*

Billie. I attribute that partly to the religious factor. I really did get into the Sunday school and the church and that kept me thinking that there was a possibility and I didn't want to throw away my chances. I was angry but I didn't want to be angry with the people. Rather than be angry I wanted to join them. I did a few spiteful things because I was mad at people for treating me that way but all in all I decided that it was to my advantage to take the opportunities to go to school, to go to the library, to go to church, and to get what the community had to offer. So much is there, if you'll just open your eyes and take advantage of it.

SCJ. *How did you begin your career in Christian education?*

Billie. By the time I graduated from high school, I had become very much affiliated with the church. I wanted to become a Christian journalist. I had heard about the Gospel Publishing House in Springfield, Missouri. The Sunday school paper had an advice column by "Cousin Clara." I wrote her a letter and said I wanted to be a Christian journalist; what would she advise me to do? She sent back a regular form letter, saying obey your parents and so on.

But this is where the miracle happened. Soon after that, they were just beginning a Sunday school journal, a magazine for teachers and Sunday school counselors. The director of the Sunday School Department was talking to this Cousin Clara, saying he needed Christian writers. This was during the war. It was hard to find people. Cousin Clara pulled out my letter and he wrote to me and asked if I'd like a job. So I worked in an aircraft factory in Bakersfield long enough to buy a ticket to Springfield. I spent a few years there and that's where I met my husband. He also was training in the field of Christian education.

There were many schools as the years went by. There were proud new consolidated schools of yellow brick. There were sand-scratched wooden cubes along Nebraska lanes, and powdery crumbling red brick cubes in little square towns in Kansas....Every school held a mystical secret beauty.

—Billie Davis in "I Was a Hobo Kid"

In my early years I knew nothing of life in a house.

Constantly I stumbled over such terms in lessons and tests as windowsill, curtain rod, cabinets, highboy, lavatory, drawer pull, mantle, casters, ladle, light switch.

—Billie Davis in *Eye on Psi Chi*

At night, after the others had settled on our family bed behind me, I would sit on the ground in the small place left near the front flap of the tent. Before me would be an overturned orange crate, and upon it an ancient kerosene lantern to give light as I did my homework.

—Billie Davis in "I Was a Hobo Kid"

SCJ. *It's a long journey from being a six-year-old homeless kid selling baskets of paper flowers to being a college teacher with a doctorate in sociology. Tell us how you came to go to college and how you chose sociology.*

Billie. I started going to college in Springfield. Before I finished and graduated, we had already moved a couple of times. (With my husband, I went from one kind of moving to another. Altogether I went to seven colleges.) I was taking classes at Southwest Missouri State College in 1952 when I wrote my story "I Was a Hobo Kid" and sold it to the *Saturday Evening Post*. Because of the story, I soon began getting all these invitations to speak. We were living in Springfield and my husband was still working in the Gospel Publishing house.

After I completed my BA at Drury College (now Drury University) in Springfield, I enrolled at the University of Missouri in Columbia, which had a great journalism school. But I decided that, more than the technique of writing, I needed to have something to write about, so I switched to the masters program in sociology.

In my sociology and psychology studies, I learned that the two great needs of mankind are meaning and belonging. You need to have some meaning, some purpose, to life, and you need to belong. So many people today don't have any meaning in their lives and they don't belong anywhere. That's the problem of our society in a nutshell.

SCJ. *Tell us about your missionary work.*

Billie. In the 1960s, my husband and I went to the mission field to do Christian education work. We traveled in all the countries of central and south America and the West Indies. Altogether we have a service record of 42 years. We were in Costa Rica for four years and in Chile for four years, and then they put us back into Miami. From there my husband flew a little airplane out to the West Indies, while I got a job at the university part time and worked on my doctorate.

Even with all I've done in my life, what I'm most proud of is my daughter, whom we adopted in Costa Rica. She was seven and was an abandoned child. We were teaching in this little bible school in Costa Rica. One of the native women, a banana seller, had brought this little girl with her to bible school. She might have been the girl's aunt. They call everybody *Tia* so we don't know if she was a real aunt or an adopted aunt. She smuggled this little girl in and was living in the girls' dorm with her. One time when I was out in the little

cabin that we used for a faculty office, this little girl came to the door. I asked her name. I found out she had been told to stay in the dormitory because they were afraid she would be sent home. When I found her, I took her in. Finally we found out where she came from and got a lawyer and adopted her. She is now a grown woman and lives in Bakersfield CA.

SCJ. *Recently you've written about being a marginal person, in the sense of living at the margins between two cultures, and how marginality can actually be a benefit. How is that?*

Billie. I talk about this in my 1997 article in *Eye on Psi Chi* [the journal of the National Honor Society in Psychology]. If you are a marginal person you can learn to look both ways. As I grew up and got involved in the church and the schools, I was at odds with my people. They were angry at me for trying to "go over there and act like those nasty-nice school teachers, those high-falutin' rich people that kick you in the teeth and push you down and don't give a man a chance." They wanted to know, "Why do you want to do that?" Even among the hobos, I was an outcast. I didn't belong. I learned to be a marginal person, living in two worlds.

There is an advantage to being a marginal person. You develop a double consciousness or double vision that gives you two different perspectives on society. Psychologists now recognize that the adjustment needed for optimum multicultural relations to occur is to yield part of one's birth culture to merge with another. We call this becoming the 150 percent person; the person who is more than whole.

—Interview and article by Jane Ross

Billie Davis's writing credits include *I Was a Hobo Kid*; *Teaching to Meet Crisis Needs*; *The Dynamic Classroom*; *People, Tasks and Goals*; and *Renewing Hope*. In addition, she recently authored a chapter in the book, *A Christian World View*, and she contributed to the book *The Ripe Harvest*. She has been published in such periodicals as *Country Folk* and *Christian Education Counselor*. Billie was recently included in a biographical book entitled, *People of Purpose, People Who Make a Difference*. She is a winner of the Awakening the Giant Writing Award and has been awarded the Meritorious Service to Education from the Missouri State Education Association, the Outstanding Achievement award from Florida Federation of Business and Professional Women, and the Migrant Educator award.

—Credits provided by the Writers' Hall of Fame

I can see in the acorn the oak tree. I see the growth, the rebuilding, the restoring. There is so much we can draw understanding from. One of the lessons is the development of courage. Because without courage, you can't practice any of the other virtues consistently.

—Maya Angelou

I have met brave women who are exploring the outer edge of human possibility, with no history to guide them, and with a courage to make themselves vulnerable that I find moving beyond words.

—Gloria Steinem



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 "Black and White."

From the Darkness into the Light

"If we were meant to mix, we would be the same color," I'm told. I am five years old in Houston, Texas. It is natural for Negroes to enter our home through the back door, sit on the back of the bus, and have their own schools, restaurants and hospitals.

Our maid says, "I stays in the Fourth Ward." A form of amusement is our family drive through the Wards on Sunday to see the Negroes all dressed up in their colorful clothes.

A Negro mother approaches our house, swatting her son every step of the way. He gasps between sobs saying, "I'm sorry I took your trike." I think, "I'm glad I was born white."

My first-grade friend shouts "Nigger!" I tremble as the black lady says, "If you ever use that word again, I'm gonna put all of you in a garbage can."

As a teenager I sit in the section for whites at the Negro high school football game. My crowd finds the strutting twirlers laughable. After the game we go to the drive-in for a hamburger and a Negro youngster offers, "I'll jitterbug for a nickel."

The Negroes sit in their section in the balcony at the movie, while I giggle at the antics of a slow-talking, lazy Stepin Fetchit.

The one Negro on the payroll of Shell Oil Company in 1950 is the janitor. I tease him about getting paid on Friday and being broke by Monday. I entertain others by repeating his answer, "Miss Linda, if you was black one Saturday night, you wouldn't want to be white no mo'."

People are standing in the aisle of a crowded bus. I spy an empty seat in the second row and sit down. Looks of hatred and foul language are flung at me. I am sitting by a Negro. I remain seated, unintentionally making a small step for civil rights.

"We're all created equal," I tell my five-year-old son.

Linda Reynolds
New York NY

Saturday Afternoon Adventure

Life moved slowly in our small Central Texas town during the 1940s. School kept us busy during the week and Sunday meant Sunday school and church. When Saturday came along, however, we knew that fun and adventure were just around the corner.

Saturday afternoons, I gathered with my friends in front of Kerrville's Rialto Theater. Clutching our fourteen cents for admission and an extra nickel for a bag of popcorn, we eagerly anticipated thrills and excitement as we waited for the theater doors to open.

This was nearly sixty years ago and Technicolor was in its infancy. There were a few musical extravaganzas, but the movies we relished were almost always of the black-and-white variety.

Seen through our seven-year-old eyes, the cactus in these movies was always green, skies were a vivid blue, and the hero, of course, always wore a white hat. How we clapped and cheered for that hero as he and his trusty horse appeared over the crest of the butte. No matter who he might have been—the Lone Ranger, Gene Autry, or Roy Rogers—he always had our full support and devotion.

Along with the make-believe, however, there was the stark reality of World War II, as viewed through the weekly newsreel. After seeing the sobering battlefield scenes (also, thankfully, in black and white), we saw clips of patriotism and sacrifice on the home front. We saw women in transition, changing from the traditional role of wife and homemaker to factory assembly-line worker. There were Americans patiently standing in line to receive rationed goods, planting Victory Gardens, purchasing war bonds, and in general giving their all for the war effort.

Today, although our entertainment comes in glorious color, I sometimes find myself searching the television program or the video store shelf for a good old black-and-white movie. After all, what could be better than spending the evening with a bowl of popcorn and a copy of *Casablanca*!

Diana McDaniel
Austin TX



There's no Story Circle in your town?
Start one!



More True Words . . .

A Life Lesson Learned

Sometime between my fortieth and fiftieth birthdays, I learned that “the good life” is all about attitude. The difference between a bitter person and a happy one is not the events that took place but the attitude with which each person greeted those events.

When Steve and I got married, I’d been living on my own for more than half my life. I’d left my parents’ home when I was barely 17 and got married when I was 38. Not only did I acquire a husband but also two stepchildren—a healthy, intelligent 15-year-old stepson and a physically and intellectually-impaired 12-year-old stepdaughter.

Although their mother technically had custody of them, they spent lots of time with us and, within a year of our marriage, Melissa lived with us full-time. The change from single to married with a handicapped stepchild was traumatic.

Because Steve and Melissa had been a “couple” long before he and I became one, I was an outsider in my own marriage for the seven years before Melissa went off to college. I was the only one of the three of us who considered this a problem.

Even though Melissa was not capable of graduating from college, her years there were literally a godsend for all of us. She learned life skills and Steve and I bonded as a couple while she was gone. Because of this bonding time, we now share the responsibility for her care in ways we couldn’t before. Since she lives with us full-time, that’s a good thing.

I’m very grateful for the lesson about attitude because I want to come to the end of my life and feel good about how I met the challenges that came my way. I want to be a happy, peaceful, old woman, not a bitter, old grump that nobody wants to have around. It’s all in the attitude!

Lynn Mills
Indianapolis IN

A World of Gray

I live in a world of gray. This has not always been so. I was born and raised in a black-and-white world. I knew with unswerving accuracy that black was black and white was white.

My enemy was my enemy, not my friend. My friend was my friend, not my enemy. There was right; there was wrong. But wrong was not right, nor was right wrong. I thought and saw the way a child thinks and sees. But now, just one year shy of a full seven decades, I perceive only gray. This is how I grew into this realization.

Several years ago I worked with an active alcoholic. We formed an international organization—trained people throughout the world; traveled extensively; were responsible for the lives of many. I suffered all the consequences one experiences when one is with an active alcoholic. I became

bitter, resentful, and angry. I had so many pieces to pick up, take care of, juggle so that the movement would not fall apart.

I lost my sense of humor. I was simply aware of how hurt I was; of the burdens I had to carry because the other could not carry them and sloughed them off. I was critical, judgmental but I was right. After all, I was not an alcoholic!

Black and white. I wanted this person to tell me her behavior was wrong; that she had slipped up on so many details; that she was sorry and wanted my forgiveness. But then God taught me that I had to say, “I am sorry. I ask your forgiveness.”

It took me years before I could manage to say those words to the active alcoholic. It took me years to look only at my own behavior and know I was responsible for what I said, or didn’t say, or did or didn’t do. I could not fault another. I could not judge another person.

God was gracious to me. I was led from a world of black and white into a world of gray.

Mary Sullivan, r.c.
Highland Park NJ

Memorable Mishap

I don’t believe in bad luck, but I grew up with a father who believed wholeheartedly. Whenever something major went wrong, he was thoroughly convinced he had been hexed.

In my eleventh year, Dad bought our first, very own house, a three-story duplex, where we lived on the first floor and rented out three other apartments. Dad did all the repair work himself. He was obsessed with having the outside of the property looking “spiffy,” so every spring he would touch up all the wood trim on this enormous building.

To get himself to the third floor and top of the edifice, he had to climb up a series of three extension ladders. My mother and I would help push the extensions upward, and Dad would gingerly climb each rung, higher and higher. Then my mother and I would wait at the foot of the first extension, bracing it so it wouldn’t shift while he started to paint.

All throughout the ascent, Mother would mutter under her breath, “He’s going to kill himself this time.”

One spring, when the usual preparations and ladder ascent were accomplished, just as Dad reached the pinnacle of his journey and lifted his paint brush for the first stroke, the paint bucket slipped off its mooring. It plummeted vertically down all three stories (I can still see it in my mind’s eye in slow motion), hit the ground with terrific impact and spewed white paint everywhere, but most especially all over his beloved, freshly washed black Chevrolet sitting in the driveway.

Mother was aghast and dared not say a word. A string of curses came raining down on us from above. But my little sister and I, guffawing and crying with laughter, were bent over double, hugging our bellies. This was indeed the utmost in bad luck, but the best laugh I ever had, even to this day.

Cora Stephens
Flower Mound TX

Between White and Black

I hold my first grandson, Baby J, close. He's barely two hours old.

I stare into his eyes. Is there a tinge of blue there? It looks like there could be. His infant skin is fair, almost white. His face bares an uncanny resemblance to the face I saw almost thirty years ago when his father was born. His weight feels familiar, *déjà vu* familiar. He weighs 9 lb., 12 oz., the exact birth weight of his father. I count ten fingers and ten toes. His feet are big, just like his father's.

Baby J's mama lies on the bed. Her skin is dark against the white hospital sheets. My son reaches out his contrasting white hand. Their black and white fingers entwine.

I hug Baby J closer and the old tapes begin. My father's words: "They're no good, they don't belong in our neighborhood, they can't be trusted, send them back where they belong, blacks and whites don't mix." Cruel, hurtful, uncaring words spoken over and over until the day he died.

I shudder as Dad's words continue to haunt me. I think about my own prejudices, the prejudices that I must fight off. I look back at Baby J. He's beautiful. I'm filled with love, love that I haven't felt in years. But the tapes keep playing, over and over.

Eleven months pass. Baby J grows darker. Each time he visits, he's just a wee bit darker. Each time he visits, we bond, closer and closer. The old tapes play softer and softer; they are just a murmur now, almost silent.

Marjorie Witt
Lafayette, CA

Grown-up at Last

I bought the black and white linen sheath dress in Dallas just before I returned to school at Abilene Christian University. The crisp, slim skirt hung just right. The pretty

buttons ran up the bodice in a slightly provocative arrangement. The large white collar draped fashionably around the shoulders.

After I returned to school, my first cousin unexpectedly called me. Handsome Billy Dan and I had not seen each other since I was ten years old and went to his eighteenth birthday. He had hardly noticed me. Now he was passing through town and remembered I went to school in Abilene. Would I go to dinner? Absolutely.

When I walked into the parlor of the dormitory in my black and white dress, he half rose from the chair, his mouth falling open.

"Jackie?" he asked.

"Hi, Billy Dan. What a surprise to hear from you," I said.

The dorm mother frowned at me, and I knew she was wondering who my date was. When I introduced him as my cousin, her look plainly said, "I don't believe you."

He had mentioned on the phone that we might go to the café on the highway, but now he selected one of the nicest restaurants in town. It had a large array of silverware on the table, with real linen tablecloths and napkins, and numerous waiters dressed in black and white who hovered over you, so I knew it must be expensive.

"Would you care for a glass of wine?" Billy Dan asked.

I laughed, feeling very suave and mature for my seventeen years. "This is Abilene," I whispered, "not Dallas."

Remembering my mother's dating admonition to always order the least expensive item on the menu, I boldly ordered a filet mignon.

All through dinner, he kept looking at me with a funny grin. "Well, well, well," he said. "It's been a long time. You've grown up. That's for sure."

I shrugged, feeling the black and white dress had helped me pass some sort of important test for adulthood.

"It happens," I said.

Jackie Woolley
Round Rock, TX

Looking Ahead

Each issue of the *SCJ* is loosely organized around a particular theme. While we do accept non-thematic writing, we give precedence to stories written on the theme of a particular issue. **Members only, please.** We're looking for stories rich in evocative detail, showing something of the struggles, challenges, and resolutions of real people living real lives. We're not looking for generalized, abstract truths about life. We want to read your stories, not your essays! Please make sure that your stories are **350 words** or less. We may edit your submissions for grammar and spelling. Here are the upcoming topics and deadlines:

Sidewalks—June 2004 (due April 15)

In the Kitchen—September 2004 (due July 15)

Fat and Thin—December 2004 (due October 15)

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

More True Words . . .

Not So Black and White

Just twenty years ago when a girl turned up pregnant and unmarried, she was shipped off to live with relatives in another town or to a home for unwed mothers. A young single mother just didn't keep her baby in those days; the "right" thing to do was give the child up for adoption.

That's what happened to my sister Kim when she got pregnant in college. Even though she was legally old enough to make this decision on her own, I don't know if she even considered keeping her baby.

Looking back on it, I feel very ashamed of how unsupportive I was of my sister during this time. As her older married sister wanting a baby of my own, I was so filled with envy over her pregnancy that I didn't sympathize with her plight. Shortly after her daughter was born, I announced my pregnancy, but somehow it felt like the birth of this first unknown grandchild spread a dark cloud over my joyful news.

My sister later married and now has two children, a son and a daughter. I don't believe my niece has ever come forward wanting to know her birth mother, but I'm sure my sister must still think about this first child of hers, at least every year on her birthday.

Here's what troubles me: Kim didn't keep her child because an unwed mother raising a child alone was socially unacceptable. Yet, shortly after my son was born, my marriage fell apart, so ultimately I ended up as a single (unwed) mother raising my son alone. Was my niece any less a part of my sister, of our family, because there was no marriage license between her parents?

I'm not arguing that their lives would have been better if mother and child had remained together. In so many ways, giving a child up for adoption under such circumstances is the most loving solution. Sometimes I just start to think about this missing link in our family and I wonder, what if . . .

Karen Ryan
Fort Myers FL

Our Zebrascape Era

When I showed my flamboyant husband, Weldon, an advertisement for zebra sheets he was wildly enthusiastic. They conjured up indelible memories of his favorite trip—our photo safari through Africa in 1981.

We remembered our first incredible sight of the Serengeti plains—the thundering herds of wildebeests and exotic hordes of black and white zebras charging among them.

Our new condo decor required numerous zebra sheets, not only as bed covering, but for a ruffled dust cover, curtains and cushions. Artifacts, batiks, masks and green foliage completed the scene. Africa in Arizona!

This inspired Weldon to buy a white golf car. My job was to copy the zebra design on sections of stencil paper to help a sign painter transfigure the car. Upholstered zebra fabric seats and white fringe-around-the-top further embellished the transformation. An enthralled newspaper photographer featured the zebra-car several times in the local paper.

Our Zebrascape lasted 18 months. Weldon's health was failing. The suggested angiography procedure was unsuccessful and was followed by congestive heart failure. Life became a nightmare of oxygen tanks, compressors and several hospital stays.

Months of alternative chelation therapy were unsuccessful. A zebra sheet now covered the hospital bed beside our large one. Weldon asked me to bring his little golf car onto the patio outside the window so he could "just look at my little zebra." Realizing chelation therapy had not kicked in as we had hoped, we sold the "little zebra."

Weldon died February 23, 1992, and the decor depressed me. The mother of two newlyweds answered my classified ad. She said the young couple was planning a black-and-white color scheme, so I sold the sheets for a pittance. They were quite elated, and I was happy for them. It was now a time of new beginnings for them—and for me as well.

Pat O'Toole
Sun City AZ

The Real Winner

In a race, determining who's the winner and who's the loser is as easy as pie. It's black and white, right? The first one across the finish line is the winner, the last one is the loser. As simple as that! But not always.

The two summers my oldest daughter Crystal was six and seven, she was in a summer track program. In the regional track meet, the kids were allowed to enter three events. Both years, one of the events I entered Crystal in was the quarter mile race: once around the track. It was a long race for kids so young, but there were fewer than eight entered for this event and the top eight in each event got ribbons. So all Crystal had to do to get a ribbon was finish the race.

Both years the race went exactly the same. Crystal started out behind everyone else and never did catch up. Both years she gave up as she was rounding the final curve. Both years I went out to talk to her. I don't remember what I told her, but both times she decided to finish the race and she got her ribbon.

To everyone else, the winner of those two races may have been the first one across the finish line. But I know that the real winner was Crystal!

Kathy Bordman
Marlin TX

Still Developing

When I lift the box lid, a four-year-old girl with large brown eyes stares at me from a glossy black-and-white photo. Her face is framed by straight blond hair cut too short across the forehead, and she wears a pink dress with lots of petticoats. The next picture is of a tall thin man with black hair; his arm is around a petite woman with auburn hair in a red-and-white checked dress. All the photos in the box are black-and-white, but I see them in color. Each represents one of my childhood memories or an event I've heard stories about.

Looking at the photo of my parents, I wish I knew what they felt and dreamed at the time the picture was taken, when they were a new couple with a little girl. Mom looked rested and healthy, and Dad's face hadn't frozen into the stern mask of years to come.

Continuing through pictures of old houses, family, pets, and events, I want to walk into some of the pictures and revisit those times. There's a picture of a large brown tabby cat dressed in baby clothes sleeping in a doll bed on his back. I remember how he would run to get dressed when he saw me get out my dolls, and the low purr he bestowed in exchange for the attention I gave him.

Some pictures were of times whose approach I wish I'd seen in time to run the other way. There's a picture of me with dark circles under my eyes. I've been dressed up to go feed ducks at the pond with Dad. I didn't like being alone with him because he seldom talked, and I was unhappy because he and Mom had separated.

After visiting my past for an hour, my logical voice tells me to put the lid back on the box, that no part of my life stands alone. The little girl with the brown eyes is still here with all her frowns and smiles; she's joined with all the other parts to build my today.

Tricia Stephens
Carrollton TX

Black and White

"Honey, your childhood wasn't really that hard." I clench my teeth.

"Sweetheart, it just isn't my fault you're depressed. I was a wonderful mother."

That's it. Right there. In Mom's world there are wonderful mothers and evil mothers and nothing in between.

"I'm not saying my depression is your fault, Mom. It isn't about blame. I'm just saying the stress of being the eldest in a single-parent family didn't help. It might even have triggered this whole mood disorder thing."

She starts to argue. I say, "Let me finish. I *know* my problem is largely genetic. There's your coffee-cup-throwing grandfather and Dad's manic-depressive brother. And anyway, if it weren't genetic I could get off the meds and we both know I can't. But even my doctor says many people with the genetic tendency don't wind up with a depressive disorder because they never have a 'triggering event.'"

Her green eyes blaze. I mean really blaze. All three of us have that look—the one that would have got us all burned at the stake for witchcraft in the Middle Ages. So yeah, her eyes blaze. But she's silent. I back off. I've gotten good at that. You have to when you love someone who sees a world inhabited only by heroes and villains.

Years later, I will understand what that really means—to see the world in black and white. It means if you admit to one or two errors in judgment amidst the balance of caring and giving and wisdom, you're admitting to irrevocably and permanently damaging your kid. How could you live with that?

It's the essential difference between us. Maybe it's being bipolar that has taught me how to see gray. My psyche swings from black to white through every shade in between. Maybe that is how I've learned there are no heroes or villains, just ordinary people living as both and neither at the same time.

Lisa Hiers
Austin TX

The Chess Lesson

My eight-year-old has started taking chess lessons. I don't know where he got his fascination for the game; it certainly wasn't from his dad or me.

For several years, he has tried to teach himself using books at the library while I looked on in exasperation.

"Hey buddy, I don't think you can teach yourself chess from a book. Why don't you check out something that *actually has a story?*"

But Brendan was adamant. He continued to check out chess books and learned to set up the board. When he discovered that his dad knew the basic moves, Brendan hounded him until he taught him. When Brendan understood how the pieces moved, he asked to take lessons that were starting at school.

"I want to find something that is just for me," he explained.

After six introductory lessons, he decided to continue at the Pittsburgh Chess Club. I took him to his first lesson and waited for him out in the hall. He ran from the class with a huge smile.

"That was a blast," he reported. "The other kid creamed me during our match, but I can't wait to come back next week!"

I realize, as he sets up the board with ease, that he has found something that is uniquely his. I think the black-and-white pieces are lovely, but I have no idea what they are called, or how they move. I watch in wonder as he stares at the chessboard, biting his nails in concentration. He fingers the opposing pieces that he has already captured.

I watch as he and his dad move the pieces across the board in a dance. I don't know the steps to this ballet; I can't even hear the music. But as I watch my son smile, I know that it is beautiful.

Erin Declan Philbin
Pittsburgh PA

More True Words . . .

For Mothers (of Young Children) Who Wish to Write

Do not believe those who say
A writer must write six hours a day
Or four or two.
Yours is not the luxury of time,
Unbroken solitudes
But the rare brief minutes
The toddler plays alone.
Learn to write
In the frequent fifteen-minuteness of life.
Tune out the television's drone
And work however you may.

Write in the car (in the parking lot)
To the gentle rhythms of sleep,
Deep-breathing from the car seat.
Write with the baby in your lap,
Or while you stir the soup,
Or if and when your daughter naps.
Write to the dissonant counterpoint
Of "mommy mommy mommy"
Through the tight-closed door.

Write at dawn
Or late at night
Or in your head at the grocery store.
Or while you talk or read
Or changing diapers, supervising baths.
Write in spite of guilt
Because you must
Or face the dying of your dream.

Remember! She is watching.
She will see
That Woman can postpone her Self
For just so long
Before the starving soul grows cold
And atrophies.

Lisa Hiers
Austin TX

Woven with Love

When my granddaughter, Taylor, was four years old, we spent a week together, just the two of us. What a wonderful, special time that was.

The first day we watched the movie *101 Dalmatians*, which has always been a favorite of mine. Taylor fell in love with all the cute puppies. They were all she could talk about the rest of the afternoon.

Next we went shopping and found a rug kit of, what else,

a black-and-white spotted Dalmatian sitting against a bright red background. Of course, we had to buy it! Taylor said so.

We were both excited and anxious to begin our new project. So, that evening we began, with Taylor sitting beside me on the sofa, handing me the yarn one piece at a time. This worked fine the first night, but the next day Taylor had a different plan. She climbed up into my lap and said, "I want to do it."

I tried not to groan out loud. There is no way a four year old can work the latch hook by herself. So I convinced her to let me help.

I learned a lot about patience that week, working side by side with my granddaughter on that rug. After the second day, perfection no longer mattered. What was important was the two of us bonding together in love.

Later on when the rug was finally finished, I decided it was the most beautiful rug I had ever seen.

A few months later, my daughter Dawn went to check on Taylor who was taking a nap. Instead of being in her bed, she was on the floor, curled up on the rug we had made together, sound asleep.

Taylor is ten years old now, and that rug is still in her room. We have lived far apart for the past six years, but every time Taylor sees that black-and-white Dalmatian, she is reminded of how much Grandma Diane loves her.

Diane James
Marlin TX

Powerful Webs of Black and White

By profession I am a seventh-grade Spanish teacher. This has been a goal of mine for some time. However, between the chalk dust and paperwork, I dream of becoming a writer. I have contributed to some writings in my time, but not to the extent I aspire to. Until that day arrives, I will partake in the fruition of other writers.

You see, I am a hopeless packrat, especially with books. As I become entwined within the magnetic web of bookstores, I realize that it is futile to try and escape.

Once I am inside, I connect to Travel Narratives. From that point I soar over to Inspiration, then Education, and finally, Foreign Language reference. If the web takes hold, I become entrapped with another book.

Yes, another book to join the ranks of my uneven book-marked piles of black-and-white paper. They grip the corners of my family room, and they spill out from the numerous shelves in my home, upstairs and down.

As my book club patiently waits along with other important activities, I crave for the time to tend to these restless piles of black-and-white stripes.

Sharon Blumberg
Munster IN

SCN Plans Family History Workshop in Salt Lake City

Dr. Pat Flathouse, coordinator of SCN's Older Women's Legacy (OWL) Circle Workshops, has announced plans for a family history workshop to be held at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City UT. The four-day workshop, which is sponsored and organized by SCN, will be held Thursday October 21 through Sunday October 24. If you have an interest in genealogy, you won't want to miss this opportunity to be introduced to what is widely acknowledged to be the most important family history collection in the world.

The four-story library, which was founded in 1894 by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, houses over 2.2 million rolls of microfilmed genealogical records; 742,000 microfiches; 300,000 books, serials, and other formats; and 4,500 periodicals. A trained staff assists patrons to use these resources for genealogical research.

"The workshop will take place over four days," Pat Flathouse says. "We'll begin with an orientation on Thursday evening. On Friday, we'll have an introduction to the library and to some research and writing exercises, to help you begin writing your family history. Saturday, we'll learn how to do computer research, and there'll be some additional research and writing. The workshop will end on Sunday around noon, after a morning wrapup."

The \$375 cost of the workshop includes accommodations (double occupancy) at the Best Western Plaza Hotel, only a half block from the library, and all workshop fees. Meals and transportation are not included; participants will make their own travel arrangements. A deposit of \$100 is due by August 1, 2004.

For more information about the Salt Lake City trip and the Family History Workshop, email Pat at pflat@austin.rr.com or phone her at 512-347-7687. To register, request a brochure from Pat or visit the Family History Workshop website, at [www.http://storycircle.org/genealogy.shtml](http://storycircle.org/genealogy.shtml).

Anthology Update

By Jane Ross, Editor, *True Words from Real Women 2004*

By the time you read this, SCN's annual anthology, *True Words from Real Women*, will be close to completion. From the time the call for submissions went out in December until the January 31 deadline, I received 50 stories and poems from 34 members—enough to fill two anthologies and collectively the equivalent of a slim novel!

As the submissions came in, I was delighted to see how readable and enjoyable they were and determined that I would include something from everyone who submitted, even if that meant excerpting some of the longer pieces. After all, part of the mission of the *True Words* anthology is to provide a place where our members can see their work in print and be nurtured through the process of submitting for publication. No impersonal rejection slips here! We want those of you who are beginning the journey towards submitting for publication in the wider world of magazines, newspapers, and book-length anthologies to have started out with a positive experience.

A warm thank you to all who submitted writing. I hope, by the time my work on the anthology is done, that all these wonderful stories will knit together into a whole that is a credit to its many parts. And please look for your copy of the anthology to arrive in your mailbox in early April.



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Over the years, mine has become an unexpectedly all-consuming quest involving daily walks or runs, friendships, research, and imagination. I am continuing to find out not only about the terrain, but about myself.

—Barbara Gates, in
Already Home

I follow the spirit of journals I've kept over many years, where everything—personal diaries, maps, shopping lists, seismic reports, and tide logs—is always kept in the same notebook. I explore the terrain where I live through myself, myself through the terrain.

—Barbara Gates

What is beneath the pavement here? What is hidden deep in time? Drawing on my study, I try to imagine this area as it must have been before it was developed. I see broad tidal marches, pickleweed, and cordgrass swamps where sandpipers and bitterns feed and breed.

—Barbara Gates

Books for the Journey

Already Home: A Topography of Spirit and Place, by Barbara Gates (Shambhala Publications, Inc., Boston 2003. ISBN 1570624909). *Reviewed by Mary Ann Moore.*

Ocean View in Berkeley, California, is home to Barbara Gates, a freelance writer, editor and co-founder of the Buddhist journal, *Inquiring Mind*. Barbara spent seven years writing this memoir while observing everyday events in her family and on her block, exploring the natural and human history of her house and area and being in tune with the inner workings of her own mind. While writing and exploring, she found an interrelation among her observances and learned to truly inhabit her home by uncovering the many layers of its history.

Barbara wanted to be open to an identity that was more inclusive than her mortal self. To do that she needed to get to know her home place, including all of its darkness and blemishes. Her personal darkness included the diagnosis of breast cancer. Over the years, she said, she continued to find out not only about the terrain but about herself. She learned how self and terrain are inseparable as she was confronted by the impermanence of her body and an endangered world.

Buddhist mindfulness practice helped Barbara give names to new practices, such as “skunk practice,” when her dog Cleo encountered a skunk on their walk one day. “Skunk practice” became a new mindfulness practice that was inclusive. It didn’t leave anything out, no matter how dark or scary, “no matter how much it stinks.”

Through encounters with neighbors, research into the previous owners of her house and walks with her dog, Barbara also learned about the Ohlone Indian shellmound on the north bank of Strawberry Creek. Archaeologists have found that people lived on these mounds for thousands of years as far back as 3700 B.C.E. (Before the Common Era). Evidence shows the shellmounds were intentionally elevated villages with storage pits, earth ovens, and hearths on top of ancestral remains.

“Shellmound mind” became Barbara’s new experiment in her imagination. She asked herself, “Can I risk that ancient experience of home where categories such as household and church, garbage dump and cemetery—so separate in our current world—converge?” She began to see both garbage in the local dump and human remains in the cemetery as “stations in an immense recycling plant.” “I see the two juxtaposed in the vast shellmound home of our world—where life breaks down, feeds the gulls, the worms, the bacteria and feeds into new life.” Shellmound mind, Barbara said in an interview, “is a state of dynamic awareness, where dread, disgust, anger and other difficult emotions are compost for insights that enable us to live in place.”

The author set out to look deeply into herself and into her Ocean View neighborhood, where she discovered the whole cosmos. In doing so, she inspires others to step beyond the comfortable and take more risks. The risks can involve exploring new territory, including the garbage dump and the cemetery, observing the street outside your window, and entering new emotional terrain.

The title of the book comes from Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh who wrote about the whole cosmos being found in a piece of paper or in our bodies. He said, “...meditation means to look deeply, to touch deeply so we can realize we are already home.” *Already Home* is an invitation to cut doors in our fences, share dinners and silence with one another. The book also reminds us that as we sit comfortably in our warm homes, there are homeless people outside. As Barbara became intimate with the place where she lives, she said she “...settled more fully into a wide sense of myself [and] began to glimpse an inner sense of home.”

Barbara’s story truly inspired me. It is helping me connect to the land on which I now live in southwestern Ontario. *Already Home* is also a great tool for the “Writing Your Way Home” classes I teach. Visit her website at www.barbaragates.com to find out more about the author and her work. Her “Questions for Reflection” offer the reader an opportunity to reflect on her own home territory. Enjoy!

Writing about Place

As Barbara Gates says, in *Already Home* (see Mary Ann Moore's review, opposite), understanding the place where we live may be one of the most important ways to understand our lives, our stories, and our selves.

In one of SCN's conference sessions, Susan Hanson and Susan Albert led their group to explore the places that are the context of our lives. The writing prompts, the reading, and the discussion opened some fascinating ways to look at the world around us, and to see how the outer world often seems to mirror our own interior worlds.

Here are three of the prompts that were used in the session. Try them for yourself and see where they take you.

—**Choose a landscape** that is familiar and comfortable, and make a list of the shapes that you see there: the shape of the terrain, of trees, streams or lakes, flowers and plants, rocks. Then write, attempting to evoke a strong sense of place and incorporating as many of these recalled shapes as you can in your writing.

—**Write about a place** that has strong personal associations for you—a place that is somehow connected to your own personal story. Where is that place? What is your connection to it? What do you know about this place? How does it make you feel? How has this place shaped you?

—**"There is mercy in every place,"** William Cowper wrote in *Poems*, 1782. Think about a place that has been a vehicle for healing in your life. Why did you pick this particular place? How did it affect you?

The facilitators also discussed SCN's latest memoir anthology, a collection of women's memoirs about the Southwest. For a full description of the project, see p. 23.

*Suppose we are
already home
And this is what home looks like.*
—Dianne Connelly

Editing Assistance

Jane Ross, Assistant Editor of the *Story Circle Journal* and editor of the 2004 *True Words Anthology*, is available for private editing services.

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

Short works to book length manuscripts
Contact Jane at
Phone (512) 451-3129
5802 Wynona Ave. Austin, TX 78756
mjr@io.com
Website: www.io.com/~mjr

Schmooze the Poetic Muse!

On April 24, in Austin, Jazz Jaeschke will lead a Schmooze the Muse workshop on poetry called "Verses of Our Lives." Experienced poets and novices will be equally at ease with the guided exercises that delve into childhood, romance, and nurturing phases of women's lives. "We will wander the paths of our childhood homes, our gardens of romantic adventure, and our inner feminine wisdom of nurturing others," Jazz says. These paths include prompts to trigger memories and focus perspectives; resting points for writing and reflection; and exercises in distilling the essence of encountered sensations. Participants are asked to bring their journals, their imaginations, and their willingness to share. All other materials will be provided.

Jazz, who has led writing groups for several years, has published a book of memoir poetry. As a former poetry-phobic, she enjoys helping others discover the freedom and spontaneity of poetry as vehicle for expressing themselves.

The day-long workshop will take place in Austin at Ventana del Soul on E. Oltorf & Burlinson (1 blk east of I-35), from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. The maximum enrollment is 10, so register early. The cost is \$65 for SCN members, \$75 for non-members. You can register online at <http://www.storycircle.org/SchmoozeTheMuse.shtml>, or by calling 512-454-9833.

Writing from Life Planned for October

SCN's popular Writing from Life Memoir Workshop will be held in October this year, rather than in both May and October, as usual.

"With the national conference coming in February and several other writing activities planned for spring," WFL organizer Susan Albert said, "we decided that we would hold just one WFL workshop this year, in the fall."

The Saturday-Sunday workshop is planned for October 2 and 3, in Austin. Details will be available on the website and in the next issue of the *Journal*.

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Kitchen Table Stories

Questions I Didn't Ask My Grandmother

This is the second in a series of Kitchen Table Stories, edited by Patricia Pando. Patricia writes a weekly column on food and local history called "Stirring Up Memories," for the Bainbridge GA Post-Searchlight. She wrote this piece, "Questions I Didn't Ask My Grandmother," and she has plenty more stories in the oven.

But you have kitchen table stories, too, and we'd love to print them (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.

As a child, I loved to ask my grandmother about her own little-girl days. I especially wanted to know about living in a covered wagon as her family moved from the shady mountains of North Georgia to the hilly, dry, mesquite-dotted land of Central Texas. She looked exasperated.

"We went on the train."

"Oh!"

Later, she told me she did travel in a covered wagon, when in 1900, she, my grandfather and their baby girl, Alda, moved to the farm near Cross Plains where my dad was born. It was hard to make a living farming, but for almost fifty years, they managed—and managed to raise a family of seven as well.

Visits to that farm brighten my childhood memories. Riding a horse behind my Texas Ranger Uncle Clarence. Hunting for arrowheads with my dad. But mostly I remember the kitchen. Grandmother or one of the children brought the water in from the well under the creaking windmill. In one corner, the wood stove glowed—even in the summertime—and a view of the hill filled the kitchen window. A kitchen full of laughing women, clattering dishes, and the most exciting smells.

Smell is wonderful. Of all the senses, it most readily evokes memories—and what memories the smell of food can bring!

I smell bacon frying, and suddenly I am between sleep and waking on a pallet at the foot of my parents' bed, in the cramped south bedroom of that weathered dogtrot house. Grandmother is in the kitchen, putting on the second batch of bacon. The house is filled with its sleep-ending aroma. Aunt Alda climbs the steps to the dogtrot. "Cock-a-doodle-doo!" she crows. "You sleepyheads are about to miss breakfast."

We stretch and smile. My sister and I love brushing our teeth at the wooden washbasin and giggling all the way to the privy and back. Then we wash our hands at the kitchen sink and dive into breakfast before we trail behind Grandmother as she gathers eggs in the henhouse.

In the afternoon, when the big cedar tree throws a long shadow across the front porch, Grandmother sets out a plate of teacakes left over from dinner. She slips a pillow behind her back, sits down in her rocker and begins to shell the peas for tomorrow's dinner. Sometimes, when she finishes, she'll reach into her apron pocket and pull out her crochet hook and a ball of bright string. Her fingers fly as she works on a doily or a hot pad. It is the best time of day on the farm. When I am

about ten, she teaches me to crochet. I sit on the steps and share the moments.

When times were really tough during the Depression, Grandmother didn't have the money to buy a ball of crochet thread. She saved every penny to send to Aunt Alda and my dad, both away at college. But that didn't stop her. She looked around and used what she found at hand. A stack of plain old feed sacks lay in the barn—the pretty printed ones she had already turned to aprons and tablecloths. She unraveled the rough sacks down to their threads so she could crochet Christmas gifts.

Today, I wish I could pull some teacakes out of the oven and invite Grandmother onto my front porch. There are so many questions I never asked her.

I'd like to know about my dad as a little boy. Did he get his own birthday cake, although his birthday was on Christmas Day?

Did he really win every spelling bee?

Did she worry when he quit school at fourteen to become a cowboy?

But I also want to ask about the kitchen, and about cooking.

How did you know when the wood stove was hot enough to put in the cake, and what did you do when it was too hot?

How did you manage to keep milk fresh when you didn't have a refrigerator—or even an icebox?

Questions like those, sitting in the shade and visiting about happy times and tough ones.

Grandmother's Farmhouse Teacakes

1 cup sugar

1 cup Crisco

3 eggs

3 teaspoons buttermilk

1 teaspoon soda

Nutmeg, vanilla and enough flour to make a stiff dough

Mix all ingredients. Roll out on floured surface and cut. Bake in a moderate oven until lightly brown. (I use a half-teaspoon each of nutmeg and vanilla and about three and one-half cups of flour. I roll the dough a quarter-inch thick and cut with an inch and a half biscuit cutter. In my 350-degree oven they brown in 8 to 10 minutes.)

Serve with lemonade and love.

Even Better Than the First!

Continued from page 1

memoir collection, *With Courage and Common Sense*, which was recently published by the University of Texas Press.

—In the seventh-floor Hospitality Suite, conference attendees shared soft drinks, wine, and nibbles while they also shared their stories.

—At the Open Mike on Saturday night, 36 women gathered to read stories they had brought and to listen to those of others.

—In the main hallway, people posted stories, photos, and other items on the Story Wall and traded brochures and business cards at the Heart-to-Heart Table.

—At the dinner hour on Saturday night, people with special interests (journaling, nature writing, OWL-Circle workshops, interviewing) gathered to share ideas.

—At the SCN display, people pored over the beautiful scrapbook created from items submitted by the women who attended the 2002 conference.

—At the President's Breakfast on Sunday morning, SCN president Judith Helburn thanked board members, presenters, and volunteers for their contributions to the conference's success.

Of course, none of these activities would have been possible if it had not been for the energy, determination, and hard work of the conference team. These women chaired our conference committees, some of them working for more than a year to make sure that the conference went smoothly. Let's have a big round of applause for their hard work and dedication!

Advertising: Susan Albert and Carolyn Blankenship

Door Prizes: Melanie Alberts

Entertainment: Donna Remmert

Evaluations, Scrapbook, Story Wall: Leilani Rose, Carolyn Blankenship

Notebooks, Bags, Badges, Signage: Catherine Cogburn

Hospitality: Jackie Newman

Outreach: Judith Helburn and Jazz Jaeschke

Photography: Pat Eick

Program: Paula Yost

Registration: Peggy Moody and Danelle Sasser

Sisters Helping Sisters: PJ Pierce

Site Liaison: Linda Jones and Judith Helburn

Works of Heart Marketplace: Rebecca Roberts, Beth Kennedy

Website: Peggy Moody

Volunteer Coordination: Peggy Moody

Conference Coordinators: Susan Albert and Peggy Moody

Stories from the Heart was a conference that none of us will ever forget. Sharing, learning, growing, making friends—it embodied the very best of Story Circle. Thanks to all who participated and to everyone who made it happen!

Women's Museum Trip Planned

President Judith Helburn has announced an important upcoming cultural event, an all-day visit to the Nasher Sculpture Center and the Women's Museum, both in Dallas, TX. The visit is planned for Saturday, June 19, 2004.

"The trip will begin with a bus ride from Austin TX to Dallas," Judith says. "We will go first to the new Nasher Sculpture Center, where we will spend approximately an hour and a half exploring the center on our own. After lunch, we will go to the Texas Women's Museum. There, we'll take part in a guided tour with an emphasis on women writers. We'll leave for Austin around 3:30 p.m."

The Nasher Sculpture Center houses the Nasher collection of modern sculpture, considered one of the world's foremost. The center, designed by Renzo Piano and landscape architect Peter Walker, occupies a full city block in the Dallas Arts District, adjacent to the Dallas Museum of Art.

The Women's Museum focuses on the unique, textured, and diverse stories of America's women. Using the latest in technology and interactive media, the Museum's exhibits and programs highlight women's role in shaping the history of our country and create a lively environment for discovery.

The bus trip is limited to 32 women. The cost has not yet been announced but is expected to be about \$65, including lunch and museum fees. Dallas-area SCN members are invited to join the group for lunch. If you're interested in taking the bus trip, please register online at <http://www.storycircle.org/museumtrip.shtml>, or telephone 512-454-9833. If you would like to join the group for lunch (location to be announced), phone the office or email storycircle@storycircle.org.

Intuition and "The Unseen Gate"

"Using our intuition means developing the ability to tap our inner wisdom for guidance in our day-to-day lives, as well as in our writing," Susan Albert says.

Susan will talk at the Austin Chapter's Be Our Guest program on Sunday, March 21, 2-4 p.m., in the Colorado Room of the LCRA, at 3801 Lake Austin Blvd. She will describe the "unseen gate" that is the portal to our intuitive powers and energies, and demonstrate some of the time-honored means of accessing that inner knowledge—meditation, the Tarot, the I Ching, rune stones. "These are some of the traditional ways to quiet our busy minds so we can listen to the voice of what we already know," says Susan, who began teaching meditation and the Tarot 15 years ago. "The program will include writing activities designed to help us record what we learn as we open the unseen gate," she adds. Susan's books will be for sale afterward, with proceeds going to SCN.

Be Our Guest programs, which are open to the public and free of charge, are sponsored throughout the year by SCN's Austin Chapter. Chapter president Jackie Newman says that two more are scheduled in 2004: in August and November.

Neat Stuff for Life-Writers (and for Gifts, Too!)

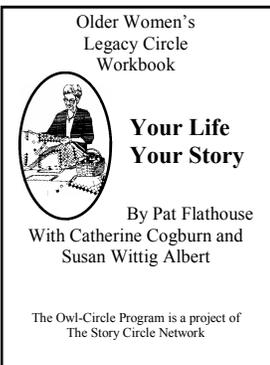
Discoveries: A Blank Journal Just for Women, with covers hand-crafted by the women of Story Circle. Introduction by Susan Wittig Albert.

As we become conscious of our journey, we also become conscious of the importance of recording what we learn along the way. **Discoveries** can become your map and can help you tell the story of your own life's journey. And because writing is often easier when someone gives us a warm hug and a whisper of support, we've added some women's wise words to its pages, reminding us that wherever our journey takes us, we are not alone. Perfectly purse-sized at 6" x 8", spiral-bound to open flat, 208 unruled pages. For a photo, go to <http://www.storycircle.org/frmdiscoveries.shtml>. **\$15.**

Your Life, Your Story: A Book to Help You Capture Your Memories by Pat Flathouse, with Catherine Cogburn and Susan Wittig Albert. Introduction by Susan Wittig Albert

Are you writing your life story? This book contains five chapters with suggestions, ideas, ways to organize your material, and writing prompts. A final chapter covers various aspects of life-writing by Story Circle authors, including tips for writing, capturing memories, using photos, interviewing, creating a family cookbook, and scrapbooking.

A valuable resource for any woman who wants to tell the story of her life but especially written for women over 60. Based on the highly successful, widely acclaimed Older Women's Legacy Circle workshop program of the Story Circle Network. Sturdily bound in plastic with a coil binding that allows the book to lie flat. A helpful resource, a wonderful gift. **\$15.**



With Courage and Common Sense: Memoirs from the Older Women's Legacy Circles. Foreword by Liz Carpenter, edited by Susan Wittig Albert and Dayna Finet

With Courage and Common Sense presents an extensive selection of memoirs from the OWL Circle project. Organized thematically, the stories describe women's experiences of identity, place, work, family life, love and marriage, loss and healing, adventures great and small, major historical events, and legacies to keep and pass along. Taken as a whole, the memoirs chronicle far-reaching changes in the ways that women participated in the world during the twentieth century. They show how women learned to surmount obstacles, to courageously make the most of the opportunities that came their way, and to move quietly and wisely beyond the limits that were imposed upon them. Paperback **\$18.** Hardcover **\$40.**

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Back: "What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? The world would split open."
—Muriel Rukeyser

Sizes: Medium, Large, X-large, 2X, 3X. **\$16**

SCN Order Form

- Send me _____ copy/copies of *Discoveries*, at \$15
 Send me _____ copy/copies of *Your Life, Your Story*, at \$15.
 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 _____ T-shirts in size _____, at \$16.

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

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City _____ State _____ Zip _____ - _____ Email _____

A Story Circle News Roundup

If you're facilitating or participating in a Story Circle, tell us about it! Write to Story Circle Roundup, PO Box 1616, Bertram TX, or email Susan Albert at china@tstar.net.

SCN Board Begins 2004 Work

At its January meeting, 17 members of the Story Circle board gathered to begin working for a successful year in 2004. President Judith Helburn chaired the meeting. Officers Leilani Rose (VP) and Penny Appleby (Secretary/Treasurer) were present. New members Mary Elizabeth, Marilyn McConnell, Diana McDaniel, and Jackie Newman were welcomed.

The board reviewed and approved the minutes of the October meeting, the treasurer's report, and the preliminary 2004 budget. The group developed new workgroup assignments, reviewed planning for the national conference, discussed this year's "Schmooze the Muse" proposals, and talked about membership and recruitment. Peggy Moody reported on website activity, and Paula Yost on the book review site. (Visits to the book review pages are up to 34 hits a day, from 25 at the last report.) Danelle Sasser reported for the Publications Workgroup; Jackie Newman for the Austin Chapter; and Peggy Moody for the Internet Chapter (since Lee Ambrose, chapter president, is a long-distance member of the board). Book sales were discussed. Judith Helburn reported on the current status of the LifeLines project (tentatively planned for April 2005, with Maureen Murdock), and Donna Remmert raised the possibility of staging SCN member Poullette MacDougal's new play as a fund-raiser.

The next board meeting will be held April 12, at a site to be announced.

Austin Chapter Party and Susan's Memory Quilt!

The Austin Chapter (currently at 218 members) held a holiday party on December 7 at the home of Donna Remmert. The party included a Creativity Bazaar, with member-artists showcasing and selling their work: books, jewelry, greeting cards, pottery, quilted art pieces, collages, painted boxes, stained glass, and more. It was a lively event, with plenty of wonderful holiday food. For photographs (thanks, Tim Newman!), go to <http://www.storycircle.org/AustinChapter/acparty03/>.

One of the highlights of the party was the presentation of a memory quilt to Susan Wittig Albert, retiring national president. The quilt, which had been secretly "under construction" for most of the year, was created with the help of fabric artist and expert quilter Beth Kennedy and a team of 31 contributors. The quilt included over 30 squares, framed, sashed, and lined with blue fabric.

The project began in January, 2003, at a board meeting that Susan had to miss. Various people made suggestions for a special gift, but when Paula Yost came up with the idea of making a quilt, everyone agreed. Peggy Moody set up a secret mailing list, and people got together on several occasions to do the work. At the first gathering, at the Quilt Store in Austin,

the group chose the fabric and decided on a general pattern. Beth Kennedy took the fabric home and laundered it, then cut and distributed the squares and rectangles and wrote up detailed instructions. Each quilt piece was unique, commemorating their creators' experiences with Susan over the years. There were quotations, symbols, embroidered and beaded herbs, satin stitches, hearts, flowers, words, and images.

The work was continued at a meeting at Linda Jones' house in the spring. This was followed by a meeting in May, at Judith Helburn's, and another at the Quilt Store in August, where the group gathered to tie the assembled quilt together. Rebecca Roberts sat underneath the quilt frame and poked the needle up in the right places. "Hurrah for agile Rebecca!" Judith Helburn said.

Beth also made the cover for a Memory Book and encouraged the contributors to fill it with pictures and a story from each one.

"I'm never at a loss for words," Susan said when the quilt was presented to her, "but I simply don't know how to say thank you. And when I think how hard you all worked—and in secret, too! It's beautiful. I'll treasure it always!"

Judith Helburn and Peggy Moody agreed that the hardest part of the entire project was keeping the secret, because Susan has a tendency to ask too many questions.

Contributors to Susan's quilt include the following SCN members: Lee Ambrose, Melanie Alberts, Penny Appleby, Jane Basey, Lisa Belli, Carolyn Blankenship, Marie Buckley, Catherine Cogburn, Judy Fetman, Susie Flatau, Pat Flathouse, Judith Helburn, Jazz Jaeschke, Linda Jones, Eleanor Jordan, Beth Kennedy, Ann Kriss, Peggy Moody, Jackie Newman, Laurie Park, PJ Pierce, Vera Preston-Jaeger, Donna Remmert, Rebecca Roberts, Leilani Rose, Danelle Sasser, Carolyn Scheider, Sarah Silvus, Gwen Wells, and Paula Yost.

The quilt and the scrapbook were on display at the Story Circle conference. If you couldn't be there, you can see photos of the quilt at the party's photo page (<http://www.storycircle.org/AustinChapter/acparty03/>). Click on the photos for closeups of the beautiful artistry.

Every Writer Needs Her Own Website!

Peggy Moody, creator of SCN's award-winning website, can help you design a website that showcases your work.
Contact Peggy at pmoody@pobox.com
512-250-5085

How SCN Can Help You Tell Your Story

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

1. **Journal every day.** You'll find journaling tips and guides in each issue of our *Story Circle Journal*. If you're a member of the Internet Chapter, you'll also receive weekly writing prompts by email—perfect for keeping your journal on-track.
2. **Join a Story Circle** in your community. Can't find one? Then **start** one! Our Facilitator's Guide will show you how easy it is to do this. For a free copy, go to www.storycircle.org/facguide.shtml. Or send \$1 to PO Box 500127, Austin TX 78750.
3. **Join the Internet Chapter** and connect with a Story Circle on-line. See www.storycircle.org/ecircles.shtml.
4. **Contribute your story** to our *Story Circle Journal*. And read the *Journal* from cover to cover—it's full of great ideas for writing your life story.
5. **Take an on-line writing workshop** offered by the Internet Chapter. For information, go here: www.storycircle.org/ICworkshops.shtml.
6. **Read, read, read!** Women's memoirs are "hot" in today's publishing world, and we try to keep abreast of the best. Here's a list of the books our reading circles have read over the past several years: www.storycircle.org/BookReviews/readingcircle.html. We've also reviewed a great many other books about women's lives—visit our book review site: www.storycircle.org/BookReviews for a look. Want to write reviews of women's memoirs and related books? Read our Reviewers' Guidelines: www.storycircle.org/ReviewersGuidelines.shtml.
7. **Join our on-line Internet Chapter Reading Circle**, or our Austin TX Reading Circle, or start a Reading Circle of your own. You can choose books from the SCN reading list and print out our on-line reading guides.
8. **Attend our events.** We offer Writing from Life weekends in Austin twice a year, a LifeLines writing retreat and a national conference every two years. Our Austin TX chapter offers five or six Be Our Guest programs each year. Want to attend events but can't join us in Austin? **Start a Story Circle Chapter** in your own community and create your own calendar of women's events! Here's how to get started: www.storycircle.org/ChapterGuidelines.html.
9. **Check out our Older Women's Legacy Circle** project (for seniors 60+). To see what's going on, go here: www.owlcircle.com. And be sure to subscribe to our OWL-Circle e-letter, while you're visiting that site.
10. If you offer writing-related classes, workshops, or programs, you are eligible to **post information about yourself and your work** on our Speakers Bureau pages. Posting on our site does **not** obligate you to any payment to Story Circle. You will have your own individual URL and will be able to put it on your brochures, handouts, and business cards. For an example, go to the Speakers Bureau (www.storycircle.org/SpeakersBureau), then choose a name from our list of speakers.
11. If you're ready to tell your story to a wider audience, **check out our Market Watch** (p. 23), where we list current publishing opportunities, contests, and writers conferences. You can also find the information on our website.
12. **Contribute to one** of our book collections. Currently, we are soliciting manuscripts for a book of nature memoirs. See p. 23 for details.
13. **Share your writing achievements with us.** To see what other lifewriters have been doing, take a look at our Members in Print and in the News page: www.storycircle.org/MembersInPrint.shtml, or see p. 23 in the *Journal*.
14. **Give a gift membership** to a friend or favorite relative. You'll find a form on p. 15. Let them know that you value their stories and hope that they'll write them down!
15. **Stay informed.** We're continually offering new programs and services. To stay up-to-date on what we're doing, subscribe to our monthly National and Austin e-letters: www.storycircle.org/eletters.shtml. And read every word of the *Journal!*

Women Write about the Southwest: A Call for Submissions

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

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

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 for posting on our website.

Pat Flathouse, Austin OWL-Circle Director, has just completed a new book entitled *A Priceless Legacy: Writing the Stories of Your Family History*. The nine chapters include exercises, ideas, and tips to help you capture your family stories. To order (\$18 including shipping), contact Pat Flathouse, pflat@austin.rr.com.

Penny J. Leisch won first place in the category of adult rhyming poetry in the 4th Annual Prairie Hill Writing Contest for a nostalgic poem "Barely Remembered". See www.prairiehillbooks.com (click on Writing Contest Winners).

Barbara Carr's new book, *Counting Places in the Presence of Our Ancestors*, was published in October, 2003. This and her previous book, *Dreamdancing with Ancestors*, were funded by a City of Austin Arts Commission Grant, which has provided a further year of funding to allow her to work on another book in her Ancestor series.

Lee Ambrose recently published her first e-booklet, *Feasts of Light: A Book of Christmas Rituals and Reflections*.

Life-Writers' Market Watch: Opportunities for Publishing

Living Stupid: Stephanie Marston, co-author of a title in the Chicken Soup series, is seeking stories of up to 1200 words for *Living Stupid: Dumb Things Smart People Do*. Chapter headings include: At Work, Around the House, At Play, In Love, Outdoors, On Vacation, In Friendship, With Children, With Your Parents, With Your Pets, By Yourself, During Sex. The more outrageous the better, but keep it clean. Fee of \$100 paid for selected stories. Send stories to Living Stupid, P.O. Box 31453, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87594-1453. (Submissions cannot be returned.) Or email stories to smarston@earthlink.net. (Emails preferred.) Deadline: March 15

Edgar Literary Magazine is a quarterly literary journal, featuring essays, fiction, poetry, and B/W photography. Submissions are ongoing. See www.edgarliterarymagazine.com for details. Deadline for the spring issue: March 15

Glimmer Train's Short Story Award for New Writers is open only to writers whose fiction has not appeared in any publication with a circulation over 5,000. (Entries must be unpublished.) Open to all themes, all subjects; stories not to exceed 8,000 words. First-place winner receives \$1200, publication in *Glimmer Train Stories*, and 20 copies of the issue in which it is published. To submit, go to www.glimmertrainpress.com and log in. Then click the short story award link. Reading fee \$12 per story. Deadline: March 31

The Noble Generation II is being compiled by the folks at Barnes & Noble, who welcome submissions from people all over Texas. Contributions should focus on the Great Depression, WWII, the '50s, and '60s. Guidelines at www.storycircle.org/nobleii.html. Deadline: May 30

Blue Mountain Arts invites submissions of highly original poetry and prose on love, friendship, family, special occasions, positive living, suitable for publication on greeting cards and in book anthologies. We pay \$300 for all rights and \$50 if your poem is used only in an anthology. For guidelines, email editorial@sps.com or write to Blue Mountain Arts, Inc. Editorial Department, PO Box 1007, Boulder CO 80306. See our website at www.sps.com/greetingcards/index.htm.

The Writers Publishing is a beautiful ad-free quarterly magazine full of short stories and poetry from around the world. Check out www.writerspublishing.ca. We pay accepted writers. Email editor Rebecca Tuck, wpublish@alberni.net, or write to: The Writers Publishing, Box 1110, Tofino BC V0R 2Z0 CANADA.

SCN Goes Theatrical!

Purchase tickets now for our benefit performance!

Love on Ice

Two comedies of frosty passion
and peculiar proposals

Hook, Line, and Sinker and **Head Over Heels**

written and directed by SCN member

P. Paulette MacDougal

Howson Hall, First Unitarian Universalist Church, 4700 Grover Ave., Austin TX

Wednesday, May 5, 2004

Light refreshments at 7:15 p.m. Performance at 8 p.m.

\$12 per ticket. Seating is limited to 110.

All proceeds go to benefit the Story Circle Network.

For tickets, call 512-454-9833 or go to the website, at <http://www.storycircle.org/benefit.shtml>

SCN's 2004 Life-Writing Competition

Story Circle Network
PO Box 500127
Austin TX 78750-0127

Details of SCN's fifth annual life-writing competition will be announced in the June issue of the *Story Circle Journal*, but plans are already being made for the contest.

This year's competition will ask writers to focus on mother/daughter relationships, one of SCN's special themes for the year. The exact topic has not yet been determined, but here are two of the quotations under consideration for use as prompts:

The woman who bore me is no longer alive, but I seem to be her daughter in increasingly profound ways.

—Johnnetta Betsch Cole

When I stopped seeing my mother with the eyes of a child, I saw a woman who helped me give birth to myself.

—Nancy Friday

If you would like to submit a favorite quotation from a woman author about the mother/daughter relationship for possible use in the contest, email it to Susan Albert at china@tstar.net or mail to PO Box 1616, Bertram TX 78605. Deadline for quotations: May 15, 2004. (The contest deadline has not yet been set, but is likely to be in July.)