



# Story Circle Journal

Volume 8 Number 3, September, 2004

The newsletter for women with stories to tell...

## Taking SCN to the Next Level



My, how we have grown! From a group of twelve women sitting around a table in 1997, we have grown to a national organization of over 575 with members in 38 states and several foreign countries. Having started out as a national organization with a strong membership in Central Texas where SCN began, we have grown to include an Austin Chapter, an Internet Chapter and a vibrant Older Women's Legacy (OWL) contingency. Our national monthly e-letter is sent to almost 2400 women and our award-winning website has averaged as high as 80 hits a day.

Through the SCN website, e-letters and the *Story Circle Journal*, women receive information about classes, workshops, writing and reading circles, and women-focused programs that empower women to tell their stories, discover their identities, and choose to be the authors of their own lives.

My, how we have grown! We now have a half-time Executive Director and Web Mistress, Peggy Moody, and the editorship of our *Journal* is transitioning from the able hands of our founder, Susan Wittig Albert, to our highly qualified and experienced assistant editor, Jane Ross. We reach out to women who cannot otherwise receive the benefits of SCN through our *Sugar Bowl* and *Sisters Helping Sisters*.

However, as in every successful organization, we do have growing pains. Your dues cover about one third of our expenses. All other expenses must come from funds generated through gifts and pledges, programs, and sales of books and related items. For the first time, we are asking our members to provide additional support above and beyond membership dues.

In a few weeks, we will begin our annual fund drive. You will receive a letter asking for your assistance. You could help by raising your basic membership to Supporter [\$50], Sponsor [\$100], Patron [\$200], or Benefactor [\$400+]. You could contribute to celebrate your birthday, your friend's birthday or "just because." You could help fill our *Sugar Bowl*, which currently covers the memberships of 23 women. You could even give a gift membership to your daughter, your mother, or your best friend.

Any contribution is most welcome and very much appreciated. Story Circle Network has been on the leading edge of honoring women's memoir writing since its inception. We exist because women like you believe in the power of our stories.

*Judith Helburn*

Judith Helburn  
President, Story Circle Network

*More details on the  
fund drive on p.2.*

### **Life-Writing Contest '04 Winning Stories**

*Ruby Red Zinnia*

by Ellen Collins (First Prize!)

*Shifting Directions*

by Susan Schoch

*Dressing Myself* by Diane Linn

*Land* by Diane Pattara

Congratulations to our four winners! Read the stories, beginning on p. 17.

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## *Taking SCN to the Next Level*

### *Your Fund-Drive Questions Answered*

This month, the SCN board is rolling out a plan to move from a single level to multiple levels of membership in the national organization. (See the letter from SCN President Judith Helburn on the cover of this issue.)

#### **Why are we doing this and why now?**

SCN has reached an important transition point in the life of any non-profit that aspires to reach a wide audience. It's like that transition in the life of a small business, one that was perhaps originally based on the owner's passionate interest. To take her business to the next stage, in terms of the company's employees, outreach, and sales, new investments are needed. Where do those investments come from? In a small business, the first place the owner would turn might be to family and friends. In the case of SCN, the family and friends are *you*, our members. We are asking for your support, in the measure you are able to provide it, at a variety of membership levels, from the \$50 Supporter level to the \$400 Benefactor level. With your help, we can move SCN to the next level.

Since January '03, SCN has committed to paying a half-time Executive Director and to paying a contract rate for the services of the editor of the *Journal*. The publications workgroup has plans up its sleeve for some more ambitious publications in the next few years that will provide more and better publishing opportunities to SCN members. And the next retreat and the 2006 conference promise to be even bigger and better than ever.

Regardless of level, all members will receive the same basic benefits—subscription to the journal, the newsletter, and other publications that are available without extra charge to members, plus discounted fees for SCN events sponsored by the national organization. Individuals who opt to join at a higher level will have the benefit of knowing that they are contributing to the long-term growth and financial health of the organization.

#### **How is this different from the first annual fund drive, announced in March '03?**

The main difference is that the new membership levels will give SCN a systematic method for raising additional funds over the coming years, while keeping a base membership rate that is affordable to all. The membership levels will also create an opportunity, for those who are interested and able, to demonstrate a commitment to SCN by making a larger financial contribution to the organization. And this is an opportunity that's available to all.

At the same time, the SCN board is initiating a membership level that will apply to other organizations and non-profits. SCN is itself a member of the Association of Personal Historians and it's our hope that reciprocal memberships in a variety of similar organizations will widen SCN's reach to members of other groups with similar goals.

The funds raised through both the new individual and organization membership levels will help to ensure the long-term financial health of SCN. So starting next month, look for SCN President Judith Helburn's letter in the mail and join the other family and friends of SCN who are helping ensure that *your* organization continues to flourish and grow.

—Jane Ross, Assistant Editor

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*When the storyteller tells the truth, she reminds us that human beings are more alike than unlike.... A story is what it's like to be a human being—to be knocked down and to miraculously arise. Each one of us has arisen, awakened.*

—Maya Angelou

## *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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ISSN: 1093-7528

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#### **Membership Rates**

*One Year \$25 US*

*\$30 Canada and Mexico*

*\$35 elsewhere*

Foreign Memberships: International

Postal Money Order *only*, please

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

**Missed Issues:** We try to ensure that *Story Circle Journal* arrives in your mailbox four times a year. If you miss an issue, send us a note and we'll mail you a replacement.

**Change of address:** If you move, please tell us.

*LifeStory Lite ...stories to make you smile*

Some of us lead funny lives. Or, when some of us write about our lives, it just sounds funny. SCN member **Pamela Troeppl-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-troeppl.com>.

*"The world needs more laughter," Pamela says, and we agree—especially Pamela's brand of laughter!*

It's Cinco de Mayo! Yes, the fifth of May. It comes around once a year, because to do it twice a year would make all the other days jealous. Or not. It's time to break out your unused high-school Spanish and make all the waiters in Mexican restaurants glad they speak English!

It's also Remove Stitches from Son's Hand Day, a lesser known but equally significant celebratory day. I'd prefer to celebrate the day with some nachos and salsa, but no. I have to play doctor. Salsa would just mess up my aim with the scissors.

Why, might you ask, does your son have stitches? Because he's male, 13, and was not the recipient of a brain at birth, I might answer. Ok, the first two answers were correct. The last one is mere speculation on my part. However, I do have some evidence to support my assumption. You see, he stuck his hand in a blender.

Yes, a blender. Another 13-year-old boy, who shall remain nameless, turned the blender on. Before the Great Blender Accident, the boy was considered a "best friend" and "all round skating dude." He has since been declared persona non-grata around these parts, mostly because he insists that he turned the blender on by accidentally bumping it.

Mm...hmm. That's an accident like Pearl Harbor was an accident. You can't just bump a blender and have it go off on its crush ice and fingers setting. It doesn't happen. Those buttons take force to make them move.

I was standing at the kitchen sink while the boys were attempting to make ice slushies. My son says, "Hold on I need to get something." Had I known that something was not something across the room but in the bottom of the blender, I would have intervened. You see, having been born female, I was the lucky recipient of a highly technical tool that informs me of things like "stove = hot," "knife = sharp," "politics = circus" and "blender = keep your freakin' hands away unless you want to lose a digit." This is called common sense. This is apparently something a 13-year-old boy does not have a setting for and whose software does not recognize any commands from. I'm sure they come with the tool; they just don't use it.

I heard the blender turn on, and then a little girl screamed. At least that is what I thought at the time. It was either that or former presidential candidate-cum-yee-haw-yeller Dean was

suddenly in my kitchen. Turns out that a 13-year-old boy who has just had his fingers pureed in a blender sounds exactly like a little girl shrieking. Who knew?

I immediately grabbed his hand and shoved it under the cold water faucet in the kitchen sink. I'm trying to wash blood away and see if he still has all his fingers or if I need to go on a hunt for body parts. Thankfully I could tell that he was intact, albeit a tad shredded.

He was writhing around, still screaming as I'm deciding that yep, an ER visit is in order.

Later in the week, the friend calls and this is the conversation: (I've taken the liberty of translating it from Skater-Speak to something that you might be able to understand.

*My son:* Dude, how come you turned it on, man?

*Friend:* (I can't hear his responses so you won't be reading them here.)

*My son:* Dude, did you see the blood? Was the ice all bloody?

*Friend:* (Again, I have no clue.)

*My son:* Dude, I seriously wanted to pick up the blender and smash it in your face when you did that.

Now I'm thinking: "Yeah. When would that have been? While you were screaming and writhing in my arms as I tried to see if you still had all your digits?"

*Duuuuuuude.*

This is the boy who, when told not to cut up grapefruit while I was running an errand, did just that. ER visit number 4,571.

I was hoping that by the time he'd reached the ripe, scarred, old age of 13, that common-sense thing might have a chance. Now I'm pretty sure it's not going to kick in any time soon. Although, I do see a new career opening up for him. I can see the movie now.

*Dude, Where's My Fingers?*

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*For most of my life, I've refused to learn any but the hard way; I have done a great many stupid things at least once.*

—Marion Winik

## Take a Bow! Spotighting Our Story Circle Volunteers

# Marie Buckley: True Words of Thanks

After four years as editor of the Story Circle Journal feature, "True Words for Real Women," Marie Buckley is stepping down. In those four years and 16 Journal issues, she has edited several hundred pieces of life-writing for the "True Words" pages and has nurtured over 100 women through the process of submitting their work for publication. Marie will continue as a member of the Internet Chapter, and will continue facilitating writing e-circle #2. **Judy Fettman** has written this tribute to Marie.



I "met" Marie Buckley in cyberspace over four years ago, on the newly initiated SCN Internet Chapter bulletin board. Along with Susan Albert and Peggy Moody, we were the Internet Chapter's pioneers, getting this fledgling chapter up and flying! Marie served as the first president of the Internet Chapter, and, as membership chairperson, I

was in frequent contact with Marie. As we were setting up the structure and forming the first writing e-circles, we often emailed each other every day—even many times a day—to the point that my husband complained, "You're always glued to that computer! For God's sake! Get a life. Are you addicted?"

Over the past four years, Marie and I have talked "virtually" about everything—by email of course, occasionally in a chat room, several times by phone, and on two occasions where we actually met face to face. We have shared with each other our interests in writing, our stories about Marie's toddler parrots and my adolescent children, books we love, and our failing body parts, many of which have been removed now that we are both middle-aged. She has commiserated with me about my husband "King Marke," who thinks he is entitled to everything. I sent her stories I'd written about my favorite Aunt Edie. She sent me several chapters of her *Adventures of Menopausal Woman*. She gave me her favorite recipe for vegan slaw, and, using Microsoft Publisher, I created a mock-up of the Hillsboro, Oregon, newspaper featuring a story, complete with pictures, about the invasion of the Buckley house by alien cats with glowing green eyes and ears. When one of her baby parrots died, she shared a sweet elegy with me. We sent each other drafts of stories, works in progress, as both of us are works in progress.

Marie encouraged my writing. When I screamed (through 2,000 miles of cyberspace) "I can't write this!" she advised, "Get your tuschie to the cushion!" When I did, she said, "Way to go, Writer-Woman!" She nudged me to submit a story to *Dog and Kennel* and cheered with me when it was published.

Marie was born and raised in Nebraska. She has worked at an art museum and as a freelance writer. In 1989 she earned her teaching certificate, and has been teaching ever since. Marie came to life-writing in 2000 when a friend introduced her to the SCN newsletter. Since then she has enjoyed sharing stories with other women through SCN and local writing

groups. Recently Marie cobbled together three different teaching jobs and a writing group or two. In addition to her passion for life-writing, Marie cares deeply about animal rights and the environment. At home she also cares for eight parrots, six cats, and, so far as I know, one husband.

Only Marie would empathize with my being a night person by sending me a sign for my bedroom door, "What can you expect from a day that starts with getting up in the morning." Like me, she's a horse of a different color. She told me that it's okay to be a square peg, even if the hole is round. Her favorite expletive is "Acckkk!" a word she has learned from her parrots. On Wednesdays, she often sent out Wacky Wednesday Words, like "lassipedes"—which means, of course, tired feet. At the end of each message, she summed up her current mental status: "Marie, the Wild Woman," or "Marie of Many Duties and Little Time," or "Broke but Happy."

For writers, email is Heaven, but even better is meeting someone like Marie in person. Early in 2001, on a trip to San Francisco, I planned a brief stop in Portland. I was anxious to meet my cyber-friend—anxious as in "Would she like me?" or "What would she think when she saw that this soul came embodied in flabby flesh and sagging skin?" but also as in "I can't wait." What a paradox cyber-friendship is, knowing someone so deeply before you know her height and the color of her hair—so much unknown and yet so much intimacy! I wondered if our relationship would survive our meeting in real life. Maybe I was afraid that I would be disappointed. Or, as my "real" friends worried, would "Marie" turn out to be a "Mike?"

As I was checking into the hotel the evening before we were to meet, the desk clerk handed me a bag. "A woman left this here for you," he said. Inside I found a fanciful gray raccoon face with a black nose, two perky gray ears, and two eyes that were binoculars! The next morning I sat waiting in the hotel lobby, watching for Marie through my new raccoon eyes. Marie was exactly the warm and funny, whimsical and intellectually sharp woman I had come to know in our emails. Since then we have seen each other only once more, at the first SCN Conference in 2002 in Austin and what an occasion that was—together "for real" with so many women we had gotten to know through the Internet Chapter and writing circles.

Now as Marie leaves her post as editor of the True Words, pages of the *Journal*, I want to thank her not only for her steady devotion to the job, but also for the fun we have shared in our stories and our emails over the years. Marie is one of a kind! Thank you, Marie!

*A Reader Tells Her Story*

## *Hot Air Balloon Festival*

*Tricia Stephens is a writer and CPA who grew up in Mesquite, which is just outside of Dallas, Texas. She continues to live in the Dallas area with her husband and 2 young sons (2 and 4 years) but lately has been contemplating moving to the mountains. Her 18-year-old daughter recently enrolled in a life skills center for young adults with emotional issues, giving her a unique appreciation of life's path. Tricia is an active e-circle member and enjoys the friendship of all members she comes in contact with. Tricia's story was featured as the Internet Chapter's Story of the Month in February '04.*

A hot air balloon festival is a circus in the sky. There are many bright colors and many shapes of balloons. All the sights and sounds are exclusive to ballooning so the excitement and tension is high as spectators crane their necks and try not to miss anything. On the fringe of the field vendors sell hot dogs, pretzels, and drinks; and give the viewers a place to disengage a little and rest.

On the ground the crews first spread out the balloon. The basket is laid on its side so the propane can be lit and the balloon filled. At first glimpse the flat scene isn't much, but when fans are set in front of a balloon's opening and turned on the fabric starts to ripple and take on life. Then the propane is lit and a musty smell of the gas snakes through the air as a loud whoosh signals the flame being released into the mouth of the envelope. The heat builds until the envelope begins to bob and roll on the ground. As neighbor balloons join in the process it looks like huge colorful slugs are bumping into one another. They roll slowly into each other and slowly bounce back as the crew corrals the mammoth beasts, attempting to subdue them so the flame will not burn the fabric. The air is heated and expands until suddenly the balloon pulls itself and the basket upright and stands like a wobbly toddler.

One of the common races is the "rabbit and the hound." First the rabbit, a lone balloon, takes off with a brightly colored scarf to drop and be retrieved by one of the remaining balloons that are the hounds. Before the race begins bursts of flame punctuate the waiting as pilots and crew keep their balloons tethered to the ground, poised between land and sky. As soon as the rabbit takes off and has a head start the signal is given and the hounds ascend. Some lucky balloons catch air currents that propel them fast in the race along the same route as the rabbit. They look as if they are using steering wheels instead of the invisible air currents.

Once in the air the movements of the balloons turn fluid and graceful. Their appearance is contrasted against a clear blue sky. As clusters of balloons fly around each it looks as if kaleidoscopes are sprinkled across the sky. Some pilots show off with "touch and goes;" they hold back on propane until the balloon descends and the basket touches down on the ground with a slight bump, and maybe a little drag. If there's water, such as a lake to touch the drama is heightened as the basket creates a wake when it pulls through the water.

Between races while I wait for the balloons to return and to see who won I walk the field. The people crewing are

diverse and they like to show off their balloons and to tell about other festivals they've attended. I remember one man had casts on both legs half-way up from a fall he'd taken in Greece, Miss Kitty's balloon is a giant cat's head, and a dentist and his family have a basket twice the normal size to hold all of them. Some owners believed in lots of electronic gadgets and others are purists and believe in the crew following by sight alone. When the crew follows the drifting balloon they don't have the advantage of being able to see where the roads curve and turn, and even if they have maps air currents can shift the course without warning.

Often I see a couple in their 70s. The husband has a one-man balloon, a chair he sits in with the envelope above his head. I wonder how he became interested, and what sitting in a chair floating through the air would feel like. I see a black and white cow balloon, a house, a pig, a cat's head, and even a hot dog. They don't have the grace of traditional balloons on the ground or in the air. On the ground they are difficult to tether because their bulk makes them hard to hold. In the air they move with an awkward lobe that can be forgiven because seeing unusual shapes stand in the sky is so unique. The big cow balloon does indeed appear to lumber through the sky as a real cow would through a field.

At night the balloons don't fly, but the magic continues with what is called an "after glow." The balloons go through all the motions of setting up for a race. The difference is they are much closer together since no one will be flying. Signals are given and simultaneous jets of propane are sent into the envelopes. The black night sky comes alive as big globes of color appear across the field. The glow has an eerie, mystical quality. I make out shadows of the crews; they appear to be attending the needs of giants, and the sound of propane is all around me.

Leaving the parking lot after a balloon festival drivers jockey to form informal exits and beat the crowds. Watching the chase vehicles has rubbed off of a lot of viewers and people drive as if following invisible balloons. My car is filled with spent canisters of film, brochures, and memorabilia. I'm hooked on the excitement and telling everyone in the car why a top vent envelope is superior to a side vent envelope for flying in terrain with lots of trees. Like people who run off and join the circus I too want to experience the adrenalin rush, and here's a way I can do it with family and friends, and without saying goodbye to the comforts of home.

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

## *Nancy Rigg: Her Story Helps Save Lives*

*In 1980, Nancy Rigg had recently moved to Los Angeles CA from Colorado with her tall, handsome fiancé, Earl Higgins. They were looking forward to marriage and to working together as writers and filmmakers. But unprecedented floods in February swept away her fiancé and her dreams and changed Nancy's life forever.*

*Torrential rains had been battering LA for several days, but finally the sky cleared and Nancy and Earl took their dog for a walk. As they crossed a high footbridge spanning the flood-swollen Los Angeles River, Earl and Nancy saw a 12-year-old boy jump into the roiling water to recover his bicycle, which had been caught by the powerful current and pulled in. In a moment the boy was being swept away. Earl ran to the edge of the river to try and save him, but, when he too stepped into the water, he was quickly swept downstream to his death. (Nancy vividly describes the events of that fateful day in her article in the February 2001 issue of the Story Circle Journal.)*

*Nancy has devoted the past 20 years to promoting swiftwater rescue safety throughout the US and to educating the public about the dangers of flood waters. Just this summer, the TV show "Tactical to Practical" on the History Channel featured a segment on swiftwater rescue and included an interview with Nancy.*

*At our February 2004 Story Circle Conference, Nancy was the facilitator for the panel on "The Power of Story." In this interview, Nancy talks about the different ways she has told her story and how she has used its emotional power to create change.*

*I had never seen anything like the Los Angeles River after two weeks of drenching runoff.... It was a churning, violent, mesmerizing mass of muddy water rampaging at about 35-45 miles per hour downstream.*  
—Nancy Rigg

*Then, in one of those life-shattering moments that play again and again forever in your mind, Earl stepped into the water.*  
—Nancy Rigg

**SCJ.** *In your account of the events surrounding Earl's death, you tell how you were suddenly faced with the question: "Who am I now that I am no longer 'Earl and Nancy'?" How were you able to answer this question?*

**Nancy.** When you lose a spouse suddenly, whether it's due to death or divorce, there comes a point when you discover that you need to redefine yourself now that you are no longer a "couple." This is true even with the most loving and independent couples. For me, a piece of my heart disappeared with Earl down that river and the impact was profound on many levels, including my identity.

When you love someone deeply there is a subtle blending. You mesh on so many levels, that having that person torn away from you abruptly represents loss on many levels. I never realized until he was gone how much Earl and I had blended. Losing him meant losing an intrinsic connection to myself. For this reason it was a shock when I found myself staring at a stranger in the mirror after Earl died.

It took time for me to understand that with or without my partnership with Earl, I still had a lot of useful work to do during my time left on earth.

**SCJ.** *In the months right after Earl's death, what was the usual reaction to your story and how did you deal with the reactions that you got?*

**Nancy.** Because Earl and I had moved to Los Angeles only six weeks before he got killed, I did not have a wide group of friends or family living here who could lend support and quietly listen when I needed to talk. Although Hollywood

routinely exploits tragedy, people in the film business aren't "allowed" to experience it themselves.

Earl and I had moved to LA to build careers in mainstream Hollywood film and television production, but we had not yet become established in our careers when he died. In fact neither of us had found a job yet. After Earl was swept away, I was determined to remain in the area until everything related to his death was resolved, including the recovery of his remains. Because this was a prolonged process that ended up taking nine months, I needed to keep myself afloat financially, so I had to get out and look for work. This proved difficult on many levels, not the least of which was that grief hovered over me like a huge, black cloud.

Being an "unmarried widow" also put me in an unusual position as I moved into the world again. I found that being a real-life tragic heroine is anything but welcome at film screenings, job interviews, and dinner parties. The common response in those early days was, "Oh, your boyfriend died? That is so sad, but you're young, you'll find someone new."

Rather than attempt to reason with people who were clearly clueless about matters of life and death, I eventually learned to bear my sorrow in silence. My journal became my lifeline, because part of the healing process involves expressing what happened, working through the grief, exploring the trauma, and charting a future course through life. Those first nine months after Earl disappeared and before his remains were finally recovered were the loneliest I've ever known in my life.

**SCJ.** *Tell us how you began to tell your story in the media.*

**Nancy.** The first time I wrote an article about Earl's death and its powerful lessons was when the first anniversary of his death was approaching in 1981. It was the rainy season again and a crushing sense of grief and concern was consuming me as torrential rainstorms slammed into LA again. I knew that other children and would-be rescuers were still at risk and, unless warnings were sounded, someone else was going to get killed. Compelled to speak out, I wrote an article begging parents to warn their children to avoid flood-swollen rivers and flood control channels.

I was so determined to be heard that I called the *Los Angeles Times*, got the name of the op-ed editor, and drove downtown to hand deliver my typed article to her! I'll never forget the astonished look on her face. But time was of the essence and I was determined not to have my story lost in the "unsolicited manuscript" pile. This article, called "A Valentine to One Who Cared," was published as a guest editorial on Valentine's Day 1981.

Because of the article, I was contacted by the LA County Lifeguards, who had been trying for years to implement an inland flood rescue program. It was through meeting with the lifeguards that I launched my quest to establish a comprehensive swiftwater and flood rescue program in LA, never realizing what a monumental and lengthy task it would be.

When we entered a seven-year-long period of drought, my efforts all but dried up. I focused on healing and moving ahead with my life but I always knew there would be another trip-wire that would re-open the issue of swiftwater rescue.

**SCJ.** *How did your story help reopen public awareness of the need for swiftwater rescue?*

**Nancy.** In 1992, as the 12th anniversary of Earl's death approached, the long seven years of drought ended with torrential flooding and a 15-year old boy named Adam Bischoff was swept down the Los Angeles River in a journey hauntingly similar to Earl's. This time, due to advances in technology, the haphazard, scrambled rescue attempt aired live on television, clearly showing that rescuers had no plan in place to deal with incidents like this. Emotionally shattered, I paged through my old grief journals and found the name of the county lifeguard who had contacted me ages ago and called him. He asked me, "Will you speak out; will you tell your story?"

The LA City Council was pressed into holding public hearings. This marked the first time I spoke out before a government body. I was later told that my personal testimony had an immediate, profound effect on political leaders and emergency responders alike. If these hearings had ended up being a one-shot deal to placate the community before things went back to the old status quo, the swiftwater rescue program would never have been developed. My testimony evidently helped propel the issue forward.

**SCJ.** *You began being asked to do TV interviews.*

**Nancy.** Yes. As a result of television and newspaper interviews coordinated by the LA County Lifeguards, I found

myself serving as a spokesperson for the many families of victims who had lost their lives in swirling floodwaters. Adam Bischoff's family also contacted me and asked to join with me to create change. Together, we took on the LA City Council and County Board of Supervisors to raise awareness and secure funding for the pioneering LA County Multi-Agency Swiftwater Rescue Task Force, the first of its kind in the nation.

Drawing on my background as a writer and documentary filmmaker, I was asked to produce the first flood safety education video aimed at educating children about the dangers of fast moving floodwaters. This video, *No Way Out*, was distributed to schools throughout LA County and is still in use today.

**SCJ.** *What opportunities and challenges did TV offer you?*

**Nancy.** As I focused on ensuring that our new swiftwater rescue program survived budget cuts and other pressures that threatened to derail it during those first few years, the cable television industry "discovered" a new market that I call "rescuetailment," mining "exciting" television news footage and re-telling rescue stories. As a result, I found myself serving as the subject of several documentary TV programs focusing on flooding. I also co-produced a special for the Discovery Channel, which helped propel swiftwater and flood rescue onto the national stage.

I've always tried to remain open to opportunities to share my personal story in an effort to create awareness and change. But I've been very selective when choosing whom to work with and be interviewed by to avoid having Earl's last moments on earth be exploited for the sake of "rescuetailment" only. I've long been relieved that his death was not captured by news cameras back in 1980. It was bad enough to lose Earl once, but to have his death replayed again and again would have been tormenting.

**SCJ.** *You've also told your story before Congress.*

**Nancy.** That was in 2000. I was asked by a US Congressman to appear as a witness before a Congressional sub-committee that was studying why so many lives are lost in floods and what can be done to reduce the death toll. Standing before this committee in Washington, DC, one day before the 20th anniversary of Earl's death was like coming full circle.

I never intentionally set out to become a national spokesperson for flood safety education and swiftwater rescue. But someone needed to speak out for those whose voices were silenced too soon. Other families were unable or unwilling to step forward, so the task fell to me. I am proud to have allowed my personal story to be a transforming event that is now helping to save lives not just nationwide, but worldwide.

**SCJ.** *How do print and visual media differ, in your experience?*

**Nancy.** I love both the written word and the world of moving images. With words, you paint pictures that are powerful and compelling. You, and a good editor and publisher, are in charge of how the story will be presented. The process is

*(Continued on page 8)*

*(Continued from page 7)*

relatively self-contained.

Unless you're a celebrity, with automatic name recognition, or you have the means to self-publish, it is a challenge in today's market to get a personal memoir published. I'm still working on this.

In documentary film and television production, the spoken word is important, but visual images really carry the story. The danger with television news footage is exploiting tragedies that belong to other families. As a writer, producer, and director, I have to approach this work very mindfully and carefully. Unfortunately, the entertainment industry is not known for its mindfulness, so creating meaningful, personal documentary projects is also a challenge.

Film and television production is also more collaborative than writing for the print media. Unless you're independently wealthy and can have the final say about how the program lays out, your work is subject not only to budgetary constraints, but also to opinions and input from every executive and filmmaker wannabe working up and down the production food chain.

Any meaningful creative project includes intrinsic challenges. When you make the leap from an idea to full production or publication, you simply have to be persistent and make choices based on your personal sense of integrity. As an artist, I believe in truth and simplicity. Regardless of whether it's a television or film documentary, a newspaper or magazine article, or a published book, I believe in letting the story tell itself. Keep it simple. By that I mean: you don't need to clutter up your documentary with fancy special effects or a thundering underscore or to twist what people say out of context to fit your preconceived notions. The same applies to articles and books. Keep it simple.

**SCJ.** *Tell us about a time when your story had an immediate and profound effect on your listeners and changed their actions?*

**Nancy.** I was asked to speak to a fire department that was in the process of developing a new swiftwater rescue program. The fire captain encouraged me to go into detail about how I was treated by on scene firefighters when Earl disappeared.

I quietly recounted how I was first yelled at by the firefighters who had to use bolt cutters to free me from the fenced-in area downstream where I had run along the levee, chasing after Earl and the boy, dragging my poor English Springer Spaniel behind me.

Then they totally ignored me while they joked and drank coffee leaning casually on their fire engine. They left me shivering with emotional shock and mild hypothermia in a downpour of rain, with no umbrella, jacket, blanket, or other protection, waiting for news of the rescue operations.

And when they finally called off the search and the fire engine pulled away, they left me standing alone by the river in a city I was totally unfamiliar with, stranded more than two miles downstream from where Earl entered the water, with no money, no keys to the apartment (our keys were in Earl's pocket) and no friend or family member to call for help.

About a week after recounting this story, the fire captain called and said, "You've ruined them! After listening to you

talk, my guys have never been nicer. They can't do enough for the families of patients we transport to the hospital or when we go on a rescue call. They're taking too long to get the work done and they're driving me crazy!" We both had a good laugh over this.

To their credit, the majority of emergency responders in today's world are far more attuned to the needs of "secondary victims," including witnesses and family members, even as they make every effort to attend to the "primary victim," the actual person needing emergency care.

**SCJ.** *You've talked about wanting to write your story as a way of promoting healing among survivors of disasters. And you were instrumental in advocating for fiancés of survivors of 9/11. Tell us more about this.*

**Nancy.** There are virtually no personal memoirs about surviving natural disasters, let alone man-made ones like the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. I moderate online peer support groups for survivors of disasters and families who have lost loved ones through drowning accidents, and I can't tell you how many times people have thanked me for providing some source of guidance and solace. Publishers would do well to realize that this is truly an untapped market. And because disasters happen all the time, books guiding people through the aftermath and recovery would have solid shelf life, like books about death and dying.

In terms of reaching out to survivors in the aftermath of September 11th, the loss of more than 350 fire-rescue and law enforcement personnel hit me hard on a personal emotional level. I had met and interviewed members of NY-TF1, New York's multi-agency urban search and rescue (US&R) task force, which was absolutely decimated that day. Although I was not close to these guys in the way I've become close with many of the folks who serve on the California US&R teams, it felt like a death in the family.

But what really got to me was when television news cameras showed families and friends of those who were missing as they distributed printed flyers describing their loves ones and featuring photos of them. I'd had to do the same thing, handing out descriptions of Earl to agencies up and down the river, while awaiting news of his fate.

I started to wonder about all the young couples, like Earl and me, who were engaged, but not yet married. The week before his remains were finally recovered, nine months after he disappeared, Earl was presented with the Carnegie Medal of Honor for Heroes, posthumously, in honor of his heroic attempt to save the young boy. The medal was mailed to his parents and I was informed that widow's benefits were available only to those who were legally married. What this

*Do you know who you are—really? Explore your hidden, secret selves with Carolyn Blankenship, at SCN's next Writing from Life Workshop!*

*(See p. 26.)*

meant was that I had all of the responsibilities of being a legal widow and none of the “benefits.” It was a tremendous financial blow on top of everything else, because Earl and I were typical of people in their 20s, totally unprepared financially to handle a sudden death.

For this reason, when the financial settlement for the families of 9/11 victims was announced, I vigorously advocated on behalf of couples who were engaged, who could clearly demonstrate their future plans together. I’m not sure how important sharing my story was at the time, but it boosted the effort to include engaged couples, as well as gay and lesbian couples, in the financial settlement process.

**SCJ.** *What has it taken for you to heal from the pain of losing Earl?*

**Nancy.** Healing is a gradual process that differs for everyone. In those early, bewildering days and nights following Earl’s disappearance, I had no guidebook. Because I was not a “legal” widow, I could not participate in any local widow support groups. General grief support was inadequate due to the trauma and lack of resolution, with Earl’s remains missing. My wise mother handed me a blank journal and encouraged me to chart my own course through this unknown territory. The ten “grief journals” that I filled over the next several years following Earl’s death were truly a lifeline for me.

The words I scrawled on the page were like little fireflies lighting the path on my healing journey. Love was my invisible guide, as well as the fuel propelling me forward. Because I was a witness to Earl’s death, traumatic stress exposure compounded what might have been a more normal grieving process. I felt compelled to remain in Los Angeles until Earl’s remains were recovered, never imagining that this would take nine months. I felt compelled to speak out about the need to develop a swiftwater/flood-rescue program and educate people about the dangers of moving water, never imagining that this would become a 20-year-long effort. In those early days it never felt like I had a choice to do this. I had to do this. I was compelled to take action by a force that was more powerful than any resistance or hesitation generated from within my own grieving heart.

I never imagined launching a rescue revolution, but that’s what happened. Progress remains slow; too many swiftwater rescue programs continue to be built on the graves of victims who could, and should have been rescued if only local emergency responders had the proper training, equipment, and response planning to begin with. But playing a key role in this lifesaving effort has been the central moving force in my own healing process.

**SCJ.** *What is the strongest life lesson you have drawn from losing Earl?*

**Nancy.** When you lose a loved one suddenly and traumatically, the “why” questions can consume you. The trauma itself can become a defining force and sometimes you feel powerless standing in its shadow. The morning after Earl was swept away there was a knock on my door. I opened it and found my father and mother standing there. They had

flown in from Colorado to give me support and assistance. It was a tremendous moment, knowing that I did not have to face the immediate aftermath alone.

After a teary reunion where, for the first time in my life, I saw my father cry, he asked to see where Earl disappeared. He needed to do reconnaissance, to see what we were up against. We walked to the footbridge spanning the river, which was still churning with runoff, like a flash flood in a box. As we stepped onto the levee, the cold truth hit me hard. The roiling water was a force beyond what anyone could survive and I knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that I would never see Earl alive again. My knees buckled and Dad grabbed me as I shuddered and cried, “Why? Why did this have to happen? Why did Earl try to rescue a child from this kind of water? Why did he die, when the child survived?”

“When I was on Okinawa,” my dad said quietly, “we were in a firefight that was like this river. Relentless. Unstoppable.” Before this moment in time, Dad had never spoken of his experiences as a Marine in World War II. As I quietly sobbed while he held me tight, he added, “My buddy to the right took a bullet. The guy behind me dropped. Another guy next to me was hit. Three guys to my left were gunned down. When it was all over, I was one of the only guys left standing. Nancy, you may as well ask why I’m alive as why Earl’s dead.”

In that instant, the why questions dissipated forever.

But my father had wisdom beyond the why questions. He looked me in the eyes and said, “This may be a defining moment in your life, but it is not *the* defining moment. This tragedy is not who you are or who you will become. Like someone coming home from war, you now have some hard choices to make. Don’t ever let this moment keep you from living the life you were born to live.”

In the safe embrace of my family, I learned that love is more powerful than any force in the universe. It transcends time and space and reaches beyond Death’s door. It is not the pain that matters. It is not the trauma or tragedy. It is how you choose to relate to it. If you cling to the truth and allow love to be your guide, no matter the pain, you will never go wrong.

I would encourage others who have endured traumatic experiences to be brave and write what is true and healing. You never know how your life story may inspire others who are struggling with similar issues to find the fortitude to move down a healing pathway instead of one that is self-destructive.

—Email interview conducted and edited by Jane Ross

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*Want to learn how to research  
your family history  
and write your family stories?  
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Details on back page*



## Books for the Journey

*Red Sky in Mourning: A True Story of Love, Loss and Survival at Sea* by Tami Oldham Ashcraft with Susea McGearhart (Hyperion, 2002.). Reviewed by Linda Wisniewski, Doylestown, PA.

The title is a paraphrase of the old saying, “Red sky at morning, sailors take warning,” but the sky was gray and stormy when the Hazana capsized, throwing Tami Oldham’s fiancé overboard. Losing Richard Sharp was just the beginning of Tami’s forty-one-day struggle to survive. This is the story of how she overcame her intense grief and loneliness, found the will to go on alone and, despite her physical and emotional wounds, sailed the crippled Hazana over 1500 miles to safety.

The story begins on September 23, 1983, as Tami and Richard leave Tahiti for what they believe will be a side trip on their cruise around the South Pacific and New Zealand. A British couple has hired them to deliver their boat to San Diego while the couple flies home on a family emergency. What happens after Tami and Richard leave Papeete Harbor will have you absorbed until the last page.

Tami’s descriptions of her fear and despair are so real that you can almost feel these emotions yourself. Though you know that she will make it through, you keep reading to see how she does it and to be reassured that she finds happiness again.

The story moves back and forth between her early sailing days, her romance with Richard, and the journey that she ultimately survives alone. The idyllic scenes of their lovemaking on the boat and islands in the South Pacific make the final outcome especially poignant.

As they fight to sail through a hurricane, Richard sends her below deck, saving her life. The last thing she hears is Richard’s scream before she is knocked unconscious. When the storm has passed, Tami awakens to find that Richard is gone, the Hazana’s motor and radio are useless, and all the masts are broken. She manages to figure out her position at sea using the stars, a map and some plotting instruments. Then she rigs a makeshift sail and heads for Hawaii.

Alone and questioning her fate, she is answered by what she calls The Voice—leaving the reader to decide if The Voice is God, Tami’s inner self, Richard, or the universe. The Voice ultimately talks her out of suicide and keeps her going on to find land or a rescue vessel. When she finds a box of cigars and a case of Hinano beer—Richard’s and her favorite—and goes up on deck to smoke a cigar and drink the warm beer, you know she has turned the corner. Somehow, this woman will survive.

It is not a direct path, however, from grief to hope. Tami slid into suicidal despair several times during her journey—even within sight of land at her journey’s end. When she realizes the island within her view is not her imagination, her relief and joy break through on the page.

As a Japanese research vessel spots her approaching and tows her into the harbor at Hilo, Tami wonders who will meet her. The days that follow are full of interviews, Coast Guard investigations, and reunions with family and friends. In her attempt to regain a normal life, she looks for someone to untangle her matted hair without cutting it off—a job which took three beauticians two days.

For readers unfamiliar with sailing, there is a glossary in the back of the book. I must admit that I got tired of flipping to it for definitions of boat parts and sailing techniques, but providing definitions within the text probably would have taken away from the narrative tension. For instance, brightwork is the term for the unpainted, wooden boat parts that must be cleaned and varnished. I learned that people like Tami make a living doing this.

The writing overall is smooth and engrossing. The story provides a fascinating look at the world of people who live on boats and sail around the world for weeks or even months in search of adventure.

Perhaps most important, *Red Sky in Mourning* is a strong testament to the human spirit, the will to live, the voice within, and what one strong woman can do.

*I watched the aqua and teal  
ocean colors commingle  
and dissolve into the deeper  
seas’ midnight blue. San  
Diego or bust, I mused.*

—Tami Oldham Ashcraft

*I steered the boat into the  
wind and the mainsail  
cracked and flogged as  
Richard launched the  
canvas up the sail track.  
With the boat turned  
downwind, the roller-furling  
jib escaped as slickly as a  
raindrop on glass.*

—Tami Oldham Ashcraft

*Day three, we were still  
pounding into the wind.  
Hazana held up well, but  
we felt fatigued. A 35 knot  
squall hit later in the  
day....The clap of a wave  
against Hazana’s port bow  
startled me. I ducked my  
head to block the spray.*

—Tami Oldham Ashcraft

# 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 "In the Kitchen"



## My Kitchen Is.....

At Easter,  
a nest for sheltering  
eggs, bunnies, daffodils, and  
spring,

come Thanksgiving,  
a cornucopia of  
turkeys, pies, chrysanthemums, and  
grace,

for Christmas,  
a tannenbaum decked with  
cookies, puddings, carols, and  
love,

each birthday,  
a surprise present of  
cakes, ice cream, balloons, and  
wishes,

and everyday,  
my kitchen is a comfort place for  
sunrises, coffee, friends, and  
prayer.

Joan A. McLaren Henson  
Tualatin OR

## Announcing the New Editor of the Story Circle Journal's True Words Pages

With this issue, Marie Buckley steps down from the position of editor of these pages and passes the editorship to Mary Jo Doig. A warm thank you from the *Journal's* editors to Marie for her hard work over the past four years (see the touching tribute to Marie on p. 4). And we welcome Mary Jo to the editorial team of the Journal.

The new True Words editor, Mary Jo Doig, has been an Internet Chapter member of SCN since January, 2000. She is a member of writing circles 2 and 9, and has facilitated e-circle 7 since January 2003. Her story *Acing Life 301* was a winner in the 2002 SCN Life-Writing Contest. Currently Mary Jo is writing her memoir while balancing her commitments to her family and friends, to SCN, and to her day job. She's looking forward to getting your stories (see panel on p. 13).

## Bread + Jam = Friendship

My childhood hometown in Central Pennsylvania was the picture of 1950s Americana. The neighborhood didn't change much. The residents of Reno Street had been there for many years and would likely stay for many more to come.

There was one exception—the home directly across the alley had been sold at a public auction when widower Hesketh moved in with his daughter.

The new occupants were quiet and a bit, well... odd! Or so we thought. Mom was quick to hush us as we discussed this fact at the breakfast table.

"They're not odd. They're Dunkards," she stated matter-of-factly.

"Dunkards?" We giggled at the sound of the word. The boys began dunking their toast. Mom sighed and shook her head.

Other than knowing that they always had laundry hung on the line to dry before anyone else was even up, we had no clue how they spent their time. Their simple dress, complete with white or black bonnets, made them all the more mysterious.

Waking to the smell of freshly baked bread, I wondered who it was for this time. Mom always made it for someone else or as a bake sale donation. We rarely enjoyed the crusty treat ourselves. My mouth watered at the thought of enjoying a slice of still-warm-from-the-oven bread.

Just then, Mom came in the back door carrying a Mason jar. She had taken a loaf of bread as a welcome-to-the-neighborhood gift. They had given her a jar of homemade jam.

That was one of the only times Mom made bread and didn't give it all away. Every time I smell fresh baked bread, I remember the golden-crust loaves Mom baked. I also remember the day that the Dunkard ladies sweetened not only our bread but also our lives by sharing a bit of themselves.

Lee Ambrose  
Naples FL

## Coffee Haiku

### First Cup

In the morning first  
I converse with coffee  
Fuel of the Gods.

### Coffee Tears

I crave coffee  
to taste life's bitterness  
And to wash it down.

Janice Heiss  
San Francisco CA

## More True Words . . .

### Dried-On Egg

You insisted on going alone, so I thought  
I'd clean the kitchen while you were gone.

Glass and silver first, my mother  
had said, the greasy stuff last. It sounded  
easy, but she always rinsed right away  
and left no advice about dried-on egg.

I was standing at the sink when you came back—  
You were slow, hesitant to speak,  
but you brought yourself unmistakably  
to say, "Acute monocytic leukemia."

The sudsy water turned into hard cement.

As you wished, Albert was with me through the funeral.  
He was with me when the casket was closed.  
He watched me pull at my wedding ring, twisting  
it up as far as the middle joint before  
thrusting it back into place so firmly that its gold  
dug into the webbed flesh between my fingers.

We did Europe—Albert and I and the ring.  
He indulged my attachment to it  
with a sort of paternal grace, amused  
when a stranger in Rome mistook me for his wife.

Back home, he remained caretaker  
accepting our relationship, I thought,  
as a mutual comfort blanket. But last night  
when I was rinsing some egg-tarnished forks  
he startled me, asking without warning,

"Don't you think we should get married?"  
"Why?" the answer was too quick to be kind.  
"Why not?" the question too incisive to be ignored.

The faucet had begun to ooze cement.

"Because. . ." I hesitated—I lied—  
"Because it would spoil the mystique."

Mary-Agnes Taylor  
Austin TX

### In The Kitchen

To be honest, the kitchen is my least favorite place in the house. Perhaps because it's small. It's long and narrow and many times can be a high traffic area. I have never been a person who likes to cook, which adds to my reason. But for a large family like mine—husband and four kids—it sometimes turns out to be a meeting place.

The kitchen is a room that draws everyone together, whether it may be cooking from an easy to follow recipe (I do that a lot) for a family dinner, preparing a scrumptious Mexican dip as an appetizer, or baking a pineapple upside cake that Dad likes so much. Add a spoonful or two of whipped cream and mmm. . .

I have a nice, square shaped window in my kitchen where I enjoy looking out to our side yard where we have a very large grown mango tree. The tree is so big the branches extend into our neighbor's yard giving us both the comfort of shade on hot summer days. I feel relaxed looking out the kitchen window.

As I fill the dishwasher and empty the sink, I watch two squirrels race across the phone line. Shortly after, I catch a glimpse of them with food between their teeth racing back to the tree. I have to wonder how they keep their balance so well. I continue watching until I no longer see them as they hide behind a branch, perhaps going to feed their young.

I have enjoyed watching the two squirrels during the month of August cautiously make their way down the tree to nibble on a fallen mango. I always call my kids to see this.

"Isn't nature amazing? Now that's a Kodak moment," I tell them. Right in front of the kitchen window.

Carmina Hernandez  
Miami FL

### The Mandel Bread Pan

My kids were all in bed and I was cleaning up the aftermath of macaroni and cheese and algebra homework. Something was stuck in the oven drawer and I couldn't get it to shut. After a one-sided wrestling match, I finally pulled the whole darn thing out, falling backwards and landing on my bottom. Accompanying this thud were the drums and cymbals of pots and pans crashing to the floor. I could finally see the culprit: that pesky mandel bread pan had managed to squirm its way out the back again and wedge itself between the drawer and the wall.

It's not really a baking pan at all, but the bottom of an old aluminum ice-cube tray, the kind they don't make anymore. My mother used this oddball utensil to bake her famous mandel bread, a semi-sweet Russian pastry that was my "If I were lost on a desert island and could have only one thing to eat" food. She discovered it was just the right size to bake my favorite treat in her toaster oven so she didn't have to turn on the big oven and heat up the whole kitchen.

Using a broom handle, I fished for this sacred vessel, dented and stained from years of service. Gently dusting it off, I carefully placed it back in the drawer so I can pull it out and bake mandel bread in my toaster oven on my mother's birthday.

When my daughters marry, I plan to give them a set of old and dented aluminum ice cube trays with their grandmother's mandel bread recipe, so they can carry on the tradition of love and good eating.

Robin A. Edgar  
Charlotte NC

### Joe's Specials of the Day

The restaurant where Daddy worked as the head chef was very popular, most likely because he was an excellent cook and customers sought him and his great "specials." But also, I am sure, because he was a good ole Joe, a buddy to all. Patrons of the restaurant frequently went into the kitchen to slip him a few dollars, for the extra red sauce he'd given them or because of his trip from the kitchen to their table for a personal greeting. I liked to go and sit in a booth after school some days and put nickels in the little juke box above the table, have a coke or two and get to see my dad for a few minutes. He peeked at me every so often through the little round glass window in the red, leather upholstered kitchen door and gave me a wink.

When things weren't too busy, he'd bring me into the kitchen to say "hello" to the rest of the crew. There was Mary, the salad lady, a very large woman with teeth missing in front, sitting on a stool in front of a big round silver bowl filled with shredded lettuce, and Harry the dishwasher, who was, clearly and sadly, a very retarded man, who nodded shyly in my direction without really looking at me. Daddy treated them both like they were the king and queen of England. The waitresses called him "Daaaaddy" in a sing-song manner when I was around, but it didn't make me laugh. He certainly had the ability to charm, but I was ferociously protective of my property.

Daddy's kitchen was spotless; you could see your face clearly in the shiny stainless steel cabinets. He'd stay until long after I went to bed to see that "his" kitchen was ready for the next day. Sadly, Daddy died young. But I'm sure that where he is, the meals are delicious and the kitchen is clean. I hope he saves me some of his "special" lasagna.

Beverly Galante  
Austin TX

### In the Kitchen

My earliest memories are of my grandparent's farmhouse kitchen in Ohio, where my job was staying out of the way. A table was pushed to a corner of the kitchen. I was told to stay there and sort silverware while women carried pots of boiling water and steaming food from the summer kitchen to the main kitchen and then to the dining room. They were busy-busy-busy and talking-talking-talking.

The main kitchen had simple open shelves covered with curtains, green-and-black spattered linoleum flooring, a white porcelain sink, and a monstrous black stove that scared me because the burners lit with a thwupt!

The women talked about people I didn't know. Sometimes they'd tell a story about a movie star that usually ended with "That just goes to show you...." They also talked about good recipes.

Whenever I could I sneaked away from the kitchen to the parlor. I crawled over an ornate cast iron register, under the big claw-footed oak table and between the legs of mismatched chairs. I was getting close when I could see the gold and red glow of the overhead Tiffany lamp and hear the tick-tock of the pendulum clock that hung on the wall. When I could touch the oak columns that separated the dining room from the parlor, I was there in the hush and comfort of a holy place. Though only a wall separated the parlor from the kitchen, it was as good as a world away.

The men were there. One man might be dozing off in one of the plush burgundy easy chairs. Others might be reading the newspaper or having a conversation of a few words followed by silence followed by another word or two. The men talked quietly about important-sounding things in the world: politics, the economy, jobs, and the weather. Yet they were as calm as they were serious, and I felt safe. I liked smelling the pipe smoke. I could hear the ticking of that pendulum clock.

As soon as I was discovered missing, someone would come get me and haul me off where I belonged—in the kitchen.

Melinda Sherman  
Northport NY

### Looking Ahead

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

***Fat and Thin***—December 2004 (due October 15)  
***Decay and Regeneration***—March 2005 (due January 15)

If you can send your writing via email or as a Word attachment, the editors will love you. If you type your story on an Internet computer, all you need to do is **highlight** the text, **copy** it, and **paste** it directly into an email message. (This will eliminate lots of extra typing!) Send your work to Mary Jo Doig: email [maryjo\\_d@yahoo.com](mailto:maryjo_d@yahoo.com).

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

## More True Words . . .

11:54 am on 27th June 2002

11:54 am on 27th June 2002,  
the kitchen table is draped in pale golden cotton  
topped with blue and white crocheted placemats.

In the center of the table is a white doily  
upon which sits a beaker from Nova Scotia  
that is filled with a zinnia and herbs from the garden.

There are two pie plates on the table,  
one with peaches and one with tomatoes,  
both ripening into the true succulence of summer.  
It rained finally yesterday, and the soil drank the water  
as quickly as it fell.

I just folded a load of laundry from the dryer,  
and the neat bundles of towels wait patiently to be put away.

I sit in the chair closest to the door—  
your spot where you liked to drink your coffee,  
watch the birds and curse the squirrels for stealing their food.

11:54 am on 27th June 2002,  
it is fifteen months, six days, sixteen hours,  
and 24 minutes

since we said "I love you"  
and your tongue moved the last time  
curling and forming an "L" against the back of your teeth.

I held you as the number that was your heart beat  
ticked down like a kitchen timer  
waiting for a pie or casserole to be done.

When the peaks and valleys of the lines  
on the screen slid into a straight edge,  
I helped the nurse remove the tabs stuck to the hairs  
on your chest.

When you didn't jump, I knew that it was true.

11:54 am on 27th June 2002,  
I have learned that the sun comes up every morning without you,  
that seeds still push their way to the surface,  
that the grass still needs mowing  
no matter how many times I cut it.  
Grief, I have learned, is something that doesn't get better—  
instead I have become accustomed to its presence,  
accepting its power as a symbol of your love and guidance.

Kerri Habben  
Raleigh NC

### In the Kitchen

I didn't even learn to cook until I married at 19, fleeing my home as fast as my nearly grown feet could take me. I bought a cookbook at the campus bookstore and with grim determination began the process of teaching myself to cook. But I thought I had missed out on the experience of holidays in the kitchen with family creating confections with love.

So my friend Pam and I planned a cooking date. We sent our husbands to the movies. We set our giggly pre-teen daughters to making gingerbread houses on the kitchen table. Pam and I, cookbooks in hand, covered every available space with ingredients for double batches of the recipes we'd always wanted to try, chocolate truffles, frosted cookies and cream cheese fudge with crushed lemon drops. I've never made the recipes again.

Pam missed her family several states away and I missed the experience of being a woman, in a kitchen, sharing secrets with the sugar. When our husbands came home we drank wine and punch. The girls showed off their creations and Pam and I showed off ours. Everyone laughed and the guys insisted on sampling every one of the four different kinds of cookie and the five different kinds of candy. We bragged about how many ingredients had been used, and then divided our prizes and went home.

By the same time next year our friendship lay in tatters. She accused me of trying to steal her husband. It could have been true. He was a handsome man and there had been a time in my life when I wouldn't have been particularly squeamish about such a theft. That was how she'd gotten him, he having previously belonged to her next-door neighbor. But it wasn't true; I didn't even realize he was unhappy enough to be stolen.

The falseness was what hurt the most. Didn't she understand that her friendship, her standing by me in the kitchen dusted with flour was sweetened by more than spilled sugar? I didn't want more men; I wanted a friend.

Jemmie Russell  
Austin TX

### Bake Me Home Again

I grew up in a kitchen. Oh yes, there were other rooms in the house somewhere but none as special as the kitchen. My earliest memories surround me as I watch Granny Vi whip up one of her famous cakes. It seemed to me that it took just forever for the old yellow mixer to get the cake batter just the right consistency. I watched the brown swirls; pink whirls and yellow spirals twist into a delicious batter. I enjoyed beater after beater of delectable tastes and textures.

Preparing the pans for the oven was a complicated dance of coating and dusting. She moved gracefully from the counter to the sink to tap the edge of the pan and make the flour stick just right. Somehow she managed to pour just the right amount into each pan, leaving just a delicate coating for me to lick up with the spatula.

Then the quiet game, we had to be very careful not to make a loud noise she said if we did, the cake might fall! The smell coming from the oven was rich, warm and delectable. She never used a timer. Her nose told her when the cake was done.

Out of the oven they came and were placed on an old wire rack to cool. This in my child's mind also took way longer than I thought it should. But no matter, for now was time to

make the frosting.

The ancient mixer united butter with powdered sugar to turn out the most scrumptious part of the cake. With a wide handled knife, she artfully applied the finishing touches to the masterpiece. Each was a study in color and artwork. Decorations might include anything from homemade paper carousel horses to edible canopies of candies or confections. She was an artist of the highest order in the kitchen, a tradition that she handed lovingly to me with worn hands and a warm heart.

Laylee Muslovski  
Deer Park TX

### A Tale of Two Kitchens

In Texas German farm kitchens, we spelled love: F-O-O-D. During my childhood, even as late as the 1950s, in our wooden farmhouses warmed by butane space heaters, the kitchen might be the only room heated during winter.

Grandma's kitchen, always shuttered against the hot Texas sun, felt dark and cool even in summer. We grandkids sat on a long bench nestled close to the long, rectangular wooden table covered with a checkered oilcloth. Grandma liked her coffee with two tablespoons of real sugar and tan with dairy cream straight from her beloved Jersey cows. Coffee came from a Maxwell House jar (with the little white "Good to the last Drop" at the bottom of the label). Grandma liked to pour her coffee into the saucer to cool and slurp it. Her love came from a cellophane Mrs. Baird's package: day old angel food, German chocolate, or white layer cake. Served straight from the package, a hearty wedge cut off or rather mashed off with a kitchen knife and plopped, like as not, on a chipped saucer. When we finished, she rolled the cellophane closed, turned the package around and pushed it up against the sugar bowl to keep it closed.

Sunshine flooded Aunt Annie's kitchen where starched flowered curtains graced the many large windows. Also wooden, her table, square and smaller, offered a freshly laundered cloth boasting homemade snickerdoodles, crunchy, with a cracked surface of cinnamon and sugar or ranger cookies, heavy with corn flakes, oatmeal, coconut and pecans. I never saw a Mrs. Baird's wrapper anywhere in her kitchen. Aunt Annie poured her coffee from a pulsing percolator into matching cups, straight, black, and strong. A dainty sipper, she would never have thought of drinking her coffee from a saucer.

Which kitchen did I visit more? Did I prefer one to another? After school and on weekends, my blue hand-me-down bicycle with its broken kickstand lay on its side in either yard on any given day. My bare feet rested under both tables. The food on both tables tasted like love.

Bonnie Watkins  
Austin TX

### Grilled Cheese Toast

The making of grilled cheese toast  
Is one of the fondest memories I have.  
Saturday morning cartoons  
Accompanied us along the smoky path.

One skillet, half a loaf of bread,  
And one stick of butter.  
Raised by a hardworking, gone-all-the-time dad  
And a seasonal appearance from our mother.

At least when the cheese toast was gone,  
We still had each other.  
In the kitchen stood me,  
My little sister, and two young brothers.

We made it through the smoke.  
We made all kinds of shapes out of the toast.  
We made the most out of being broke.  
We found sanity and discovered a gourmet hope.

Till this day no matter how full the fridge,  
I'll never forget grilled cheese toast.  
Put a lot of hunger pains under the bridge.

Iris Allen  
Lockhart TX

### Windows over Kitchen Sinks

When I was a little girl, I hated to wash the dishes. My mama would pull up a chair to the sink, and there I would be, struggling valiantly, I might add, to get whatever Mama burnt for supper off the sure-to-stick-every-time pots and pans. My mama was not a very good fire-tender, and it was a given that at least part if not all of every supper would be burnt and end up soaking in my dishwasher.

Of course, I eventually outgrew the chair and began to stand on my own two feet. But it was ages before I started really taking advantage of the window over that double sink. When my mama became less a mama and more of a stranger, when life seemed too hard, it was always through that window, congealed grease and soapsuds in hand, that my pain and bewilderment would dwindle down to specks of dust, and I would see in their place freedom.

I escaped through that window every night of my adolescence, and when I was no longer a child but a grown woman in her own home, it was even then that the kitchen window offered me endless hours of dreams without barriers.

I would look through many, many windows as the years passed. I would stand at the sink looking out at the world. If a place didn't have a window over the sink, then it wasn't the place for me. Sometimes those sudsy frames became the place where the tears I couldn't let go of anywhere else would die their little deaths.

I have to tell you that I miss washing dishes, as crazy as that sounds, and I miss looking out the window. But mostly I miss the dreams.

Katherine Boyett  
Lockhart TX

## *Austin Reading Circle Members Share the Joy of Books*

Since 1998, members of the Austin Chapter of Story Circle Network have had their very own reading circle. All the books selected are about women's lives: memoirs, autobiographies, biographies, and fiction. Most of the books are not bestsellers so that members will be introduced to writers and books they may not have heard of.

Reading circle members have a lot to say about the benefits they derive from the group discussions. They enjoy the mix of ages, occupations, and backgrounds. As one member claims, "The varying perspectives and experiences of the people in my group enhance the reading immeasurably for me." Another says, "What I like most is the diversity of experience—in terms of books and group members. Next I like the discussion and exchange of ideas. And finally, I like the discipline of regular reading." It's true that in the midst of busy lives and multiple roles, reading for pleasure is often neglected.

Austin's reading circle has developed a system to ensure that everyone has a say in which books are chosen. From a master list of suggestions, each member selects a book and a month in which she'd like to facilitate. The facilitator submits questions to guide participants in their reading and preparation. The circle also makes an effort to choose books that are readily available in paperback and posts the selections on the website where any SCN member can access them. From the link to Amazon.com, members can purchase the books, and a portion of sales goes to SCN. (There is also an Internet Chapter reading circle available for those outside Austin.)

The reading circle members are encouraged to submit reviews of the selections to the SCN website's book review section. This allows everyone to see what Austin members are reading. The site's book review section also links directly to Amazon.com.

Among the books reviewed recently and described on the Story Circle website is *Funny in Farsi*, *Growing up Iranian in America* by Firoozeh Dumas, about Dumas' move from Iran to America in 1971 at the age of seven and the challenges she and her family faced adapting to a very different culture. In *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*, Sue Monk Kidd tells the story of "what happens when the wife of a Southern Baptist minister... suddenly discovers an alternative religious tradition that speaks more strongly to her personal longings." *The House on Beartown Road: A Memoir of Learning and Forgetting* by Elizabeth Cohen chronicles the year her father, an Alzheimer patient, came to live with her and her baby in a New York state farmhouse. The great diversity of selections ensures everyone will have something they can relate to and, at the same time, be challenged to see life from a different perspective.

Austin's reading circle members believe that there is a lot women can learn from books by and about other women. The explosion of memoirs in recent years is testimony to the fact that lives of ordinary people are just as fascinating and

important to our understanding of history as those of well-known personalities. Work by other women can be profoundly inspiring as we seek to put our own experiences into words.

What makes SCN's reading groups unique is this focus on women. One long-time member explains, "Reading about other women's lives, we see how similar all our stories really are." That can be incredibly validating.

For more information on how the Austin Chapter reading circle works, check out the Story Circle's website at [www.storycircle.org](http://www.storycircle.org). Look down the left hand side until you get to "Austin Chapter" then click on "Austin Circles." From there select "Reading Circles." Consider starting a Story Circle reading group in your own area. Then you'll be able to say, as one enthusiastic Austinite has, "The reading circle is truly one of the joys of my life!"

Austin Reading Circle coordinator Peggy Moody reports that the group's new meeting date is the second Monday of each month. The circle has space for several more members. To find out about joining, contact Peggy at [pmoody@pobox.com](mailto:pmoody@pobox.com).

—Lisa Shirah Hiers

### *Austin Writers Featured*

Austin Chapter members, **Mary Faloon**, **Sofia Harber Bowden**, and **Louise LaBauve Saxon** all have pieces in the just-published *Writing Austin's Lives: A Community Portrait*, a beautiful, 400-page, joint publication of the Austin History Center Association's Waterloo Press and the University of Texas Humanities Institute. The book features 127 of the nearly 800 true stories about life in Austin submitted to the Humanities Institute in 2003. More info at: [www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/huminst/wal/book.html](http://www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/huminst/wal/book.html).

### *A Website of Your Own*

It's true!  
Every writer needs her very own website.

Peggy Moody, creator of SCN's award-winning website, can help you design a website that tells your story and showcases your work.  
Contact Peggy at [pmoody@pobox.com](mailto:pmoody@pobox.com)  
512-250-5085

*Story Circle Network's Fifth Annual*  
***Life-Writing Competition***

*Thirty-five SCN members entered this year's life-writing competition. After two rounds of judging (involving 12 judges), four winners were selected. The judges all agreed that the entries this year were the best we've had, and that it was very difficult to choose among them. As far as we're concerned, every writer is a winner!*

***First Place Winner***

**Ruby Red Zinnia**

Ellen Collins, Vienna VA

It's March. My mother has forgotten my birthday, and sometimes she thinks I'm a waitress. When I visit her in the nursing home, her nails are polished but she tries to take off her clothes in the day room where the residents sit like tired travelers. That's the way with Alzheimer's; the disease takes away the genteel mother I knew and replaces her with a woman who curses and unbuttons her blouse in public.

On the wall a sign announces, "The Season is Spring. The Next Holiday is Easter." Children's construction paper daffodils hang on the doors, and outside the real flowers nod in the thin early sun. My mother's brown eyes look up expectantly when she sees me. I am here, and today maybe she will recognize me as her daughter before her mind swims away and I am the waitress, a nun, a stranger with familiar eyes. I avoid her eyes, afraid of them. I am afraid of what she will see. She wants the world from me, and she wants me to be her savior. She wants me to take her away from here, to return her with a snap of my fingers to the world where she drives a car, combs her own hair, and lines her shoes up on the floor of her closet. I don't want to be here. I can't do anything she asks. I am not worthy of this love.

It's May. One Sunday morning the nurse calls me to say I have to come over because my mother has been throwing plates and screaming and they don't know what to do with her. There are 26 stop signs and 9 traffic lights between my driveway and the nursing home. I slow down approaching the green lights, willing them to change to amber, buying myself a little more time. That's the way with Alzheimer's; the disease has turned my feelings upside down and I don't know if I am the daughter or the mother. I want to be strong. I want to be consoled. I want it all to go away.

When I arrive, my mother is slumped in her wheelchair on the patio, head down on the tray. She looks like she would

break if I touch her, bird bones, silver hair insubstantial as cotton candy. She is not the mother who arranged peonies in a cut glass bowl, layered her lingerie with tissue paper in a dresser drawer, or talked about God for hours on the phone with her friend Marie. "You don't know how much pain I am in," she moans, barely lifting her face from the tray. "I'm constipated and they won't give me anything." Her fingers pluck at her blouse, then fall listlessly in her lap. Her eyes are blank, unreflecting mirrors, still as glass. I check with the nurse, who tells me my mother did have a bowel movement, but has forgotten. That's the way with Alzheimer's; the mind wanders down tangled paths and present and past lose their edges and distinctions.

It is a lovely spring day, and my mother always loved flowers, so I wheel her around the grounds so she can look at the gardens. She taught me about roses and "cut-and-come-again" zinnias and how to make petunia plants full and bushy. Now she hangs her head down and won't talk. Finally she asks to be taken back inside. She is agitated and she starts to scream in the day room, calling for Jesus, for her dead brother, for salvation. I pat her head, stroke her shoulder, calming the child she has become. Standing behind her wheelchair, I start to cry, and I feel lost. I don't want anyone to see my tears, and yet at the same time I want someone to come hold me, tell me it is all right to cry, tell me there will be peace.

It's July. I bring my mother nightgowns in pastel shades, the kind the nurses can put on her without having to raise her arms. Her arms have grown stiff, and she curls her legs in a fetal position. She hardly talks now, just stares or sleeps. She has forgotten how to swallow, and when the nurse feeds her, the food just stays in her mouth. She will only eat ice cream, baby food custard, and strained peaches. I bring in little jars of Gerber's, but I am afraid to feed her myself. I am afraid she will choke. She opens her mouth for the nurse, she takes a spoonful of sweet fruit, and she swallows when her throat is gently massaged. That's the way with Alzheimer's; my mother has become a child again, but there is no young brightness in her eyes. She only sees inside of herself. I am no longer a daughter, no longer a waitress, no longer anything. All I can do is bring nightgowns and baby food. I hold her hand and even I have forgotten how to speak.

It's August. Bees are loud outside the window. Children's voices rise from the playground next door to the nursing home. The sign says, "The Season is Summer." My mother no longer opens her eyes. Her skin is transparent, and she moans when the nurse tries to shift her position. "It will be very

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The author of our first-prize-winning story, **Ellen Collins** is a sixth grade teacher in Fairfax County, Virginia, where the best part of the day is writing with her students. She has a BA in English from Manhattanville College and a Masters in Education from Marymount University. She has led writing workshops for teachers and non-teaching adults and hopes to become a writer in residence in the schools when she retires from active teaching in the next few years.

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## More Contest Winners

(Continued from page 17)

soon,” the hospice nurse tells me. All morning I sit beside her bed with friends who have come to be with me. We listen to her breathe. A gardener brings in a zinnia, ruby red for her name, and places it in a vase next to her bed. Her breath slows, stops, starts again. Morning slides into afternoon. There is no life outside of this room. I don’t hear the phones ringing, don’t hear the soft scrape of crepe-soled shoes on the linoleum floor, don’t feel hunger or thirst. I have always been afraid of this moment, of death. But we are all here, circling her bed, when she stops breathing. I feel arms around me. I don’t want them to stop touching me. I’m not sure if I will be able to walk.

I lost her as a mother long before this afternoon in August, lost her to a disease that redefined the roles. Mother to daughter. Daughter to mother. Who am I now? No one can tell me. ❖

### Shifting Directions

Susan Schoch, Idledale CO

It was just days before her thirteenth birthday. With one ankle bent to rest her foot on edge, her hands pulled back into the sleeves of a too-big shirt she’d borrowed from me, Carolina stood looking out and away, on the rim of a compelling abyss. There was no guardrail to keep her from falling thousands of feet. I clenched the camera to keep from reaching out, then began to back away, to see my daughter whole against the endless vista.

We were in Utah, perched on a high spit of sandstone called Island in the Sky. Checking out of our motel, I had described the dramatic landscape and the lenient trail, and had finally persuaded Carrie, after days of refusal, to take a short walk through the desert spring.

The original plan had been camping. Wanting to make her birthday special, and feeling stuck in endless winter at home, the idea seemed inspired. When she was small, climbing the slick rock, playing in the sandy washes, and burning her marshmallows at a campfire was easy fun. Back then Carrie was easy, too. A happy, loving pleasure. But these days we were living on different sides of whatever barrier Carolina could put between us—TV, music, phone calls to friends, the closed door of her room. Camping together would get us away from all that, I thought. Might bring her closer.

The idea floundered. As I reminisced about sunny hikes and star-filled darkness, Carolina’s face grew tightly unwilling. She would be missing those very things I was hoping to avoid. Another impulse took hold, a kind of bribe. “If you go to Utah with me,” I promised, “I’ll teach you to drive.”

Three years before she could be licensed, Carolina was consumed with a longing for liberation, and she just knew that it came with a car. She’d been pleading for us to teach her to drive and we’d been resisting. But I had learned at the same age, Utah had miles of empty road, and we needed this trip. It was an unexpected turn. Taken by it, she agreed to the plan.

And stuck with it until I began stowing gear in the car. Only the thought that soon she’d be driving overcame her irritable reluctance. It was a long ride to Moab. The landscape changed from mountain winter to pale spring green to redrock desert. Oblivious, Carolina wore her shades and headset, and slept a lot. The tinny overflow of her music played against the white noise of road sound. We weren’t angry, but we weren’t speaking much. When we did, she made it clear that she wanted a motel room. And to drive as soon as possible.

Angrily sharing a tent sounded miserable. When we got into town, after a stop for gas and a soda, we checked in at the Red Rock, with daylight still left. Enough time for a walk in Courthouse Wash, I mentioned. Her eyes rolled. Or into town? No. Carolina sprawled on the bed with her icy cupful, impatiently waiting.

At a big gravel parking lot, pocked with sturdy weeds, she gained some humility trying to master the clutch. There was a lot of bucking and halting in that first go-around-and-around. Then she sat up straight and focused, feeling the speed of second gear in a short run down the empty road. I wasn’t overbearing. She was teachable. Both of us were satisfied for the day.

Back in Moab, darkness covered the knobby bluffs, and Carolina was generous in her small triumph. We easily agreed on a restaurant. But the food was slow to come. As blood sugar sank, so did her face. Sullen, she didn’t eat, wished she’d brought a friend. I wished Carrie would talk to me.

The next day, after some insistent shopping, we took another road, out past the potash mine. Carolina got set, and popped the clutch. The engine died. She started up again, popped it again, but this time the car stuttered and went. We glanced at each other with pleasure. Moments later, I was shouting, “Shut it off! Shut it off!” The temperature gauge was buried in the red.

Then the hood was up. A belt had broken. No, we couldn’t drive it that way. Or fix it. I had no cell phone. We’d have to hike the miles to town. I’d been in worse jams, but the prospect had Carolina glum. No sooner had we grabbed our daypacks and started off than a smothered roar announced an approaching car. I waved it down. Two young German tourists, reluctant to spend their Jeep rental time on a rescue, nonetheless squeezed us in with their gear and turned back, taking us as far as the mine.

Though the place looked abandoned, the door of a small building unexpectedly opened. The two nice ladies inside pointed out a payphone and suggested who to call. While we waited on sticky plastic chairs, Carrie was quiet as I chatted with the bored and curious women.

The tow truck belonged to a Navajo with plenty of experience. In no time, we were climbing into the cab and

*Life’s most important questions are never simple. Explore the delicious ambiguities with Jazz Jaeschke, at SCN’s next Writing from Life Workshop! (See p. 26.)*

heading toward Moab. Always charmed by old men, Carolina listened with care as he and I talked, making the best of a slow ride. He told things cowboy-style, full of humor and without self-pity. Sharing life stories, we learned about his family, his work at the mine, and a stint in the service. By the time we said goodbye, he was a friend. Sitting in a café while the mechanic worked, Carolina wondered aloud at my ease in talking to these people I didn't know. A conversation arose, sharing observations of kind strangers. Relief lowered the bar.

"I don't need to drive anymore," Carrie stated. Now that she knew what it was, she could wait until she was older. I assured her that the belt was just old and worn. It wasn't her fault. She smiled, and tears welled but didn't fall. "There's plenty of time to try again," I offered. Still, Carrie-like, she knew when she was done.

Next morning, she led the way at Island in the Sky, following the old path's blind meanderings through the piñon-juniper flat. Finally, we broke through the trees. Receding layers of colored canyons, and snowy mountain heights, were spread before us. We climbed to the highest edge, where far below two shining strands of river merged, and out in front of us was open air and expansive possibility.

Leaning into the steady wind, Carrie let herself have the pleasure of that high place, grinned without thinking of her braces. Caught up in beauty, she gave in to love without feeling confined. Even let me take her picture.

Then we drove home. With her headphones and sunglasses on, and without much conversation, we rose out of the desert and crossed back over the divide. Now, Carrie is twenty-one. Her dad and I met her in Greece to celebrate her birthday. Walking in Athens, she linked her arm in mine. Crazy traffic, we agreed. "I was the only one of my friends who could drive a stick shift on Paros," she said, sharing her pride. ❖

A poet, essayist, and sporadic photographer, **Susan Schoch** is also the mother of three daughters, and is married to a wonderful man who is a talented ceramic artist. Her small desktop publishing business is currently focused on family histories, memoirs, and other projects that are meaningful to her, including a collection of the best old children's poetry, to be read aloud to her four dear grandchildren.

### **Dressing Myself**

Diane Linn, Bryan TX

My mother, eighty-six, still offers me her old clothes. I take them, help her shed decades-old dresses, some her own design. They fit. From shoulder to knee our bodies match. The gym finally gave me muscles; hers have shrunk. Her hair, silver since middle age, still hangs below her waist, makes a snowy nest atop her small, regal head. Recently she talked of cutting it. Mine, ever greyer, grows long. I'm not really trying to look like her, to replace her in the mirror before she vanishes.

She has not always seemed so precious. She used to embarrass me; indifferent to what others wore, insisting on her

own sense of style, of line, of color. When she was in high school, she had intimidated my father's family, who didn't realize her beautiful clothes were self-designed, and homemade, from remnants in her mother's dressmaking business. They worried he couldn't afford her. As a child I couldn't see her everyday beauty. At my own 10th high school reunion, in 1972, friends asked if she still looked "just like Audrey Hepburn." She did. And I still longed to look like everyone else.

Growing up, I hated Mother's sense of certainty about clothes, about everything, and her power over my life. When I was eight I wanted to trade her for my best friend Penny's mother, Marge. Marge sang, played the piano, and baked bread. She gave us Twinkies or Ding Dongs with Hawaiian Punch for after school snacks. I wanted to live at Penny's house, eat squishy white bread, gravy, and pie every night. Mother's snacks were celery with peanut butter, crackers and cheese. She discovered health food ahead of the crowd: dinner was brown rice, steamed vegetables, measured portions of meat, which I had to finish to qualify for dessert. No pies, just fruit or occasionally a miniscule scoop of ice cream. Since Penny had a grumpy, frightening father, combining her mother with my father, who whistled and told jokes, seemed perfect. It was a hopeless plan. When Daddy finally came home each afternoon, I endured his and Mother's seemingly endless embrace, awaiting his attention, resenting her.

Most days, until he arrived, Mother and I stayed in neutral corners. When we engaged in battle, I lost and was ordered to my room. Fortunately I had books there, since sometimes she forgot to tell me I could come out again. I was banished for insolence and sarcasm, for failing to complete chores to her standards, for ignoring her police whistle summoning me to dinner at precisely 6 p.m. Somehow I never heard it, though my friends could. It puzzled me. Mother even seemed to think that I knocked over the milk on purpose and deliberately left my expensive, ugly shoes under a tree. I wouldn't have dared.

Climbing trees was where I dared. I was fearless. It was the only thing I did better than Mother, who never took it up. When she dressed up to go dining or dancing with my handsome father she looked like a fairy tale queen. I realized I was a changeling and would never escape my lonely tower unless I climbed down by myself. So I climbed. Out of windows, high into trees. It was a great way to show off, hanging by my knees from slender branches, terrifying visiting relatives.

I was in high school when Mother discovered Consignment Stores, selling "real clothes" for a fraction of what department stores charged for "shoddy workmanship." When I left for college, I reclaimed her elderly raccoon coat from a cousin's attic and bought a Russian-styled fur hat to match. It covered my eyebrows; I looked like an escapee from the zoo, quite unlike my glamorous mother in an old photo. Looking back, my fashion independence, my various wardrobe strategies, have brought mainly defeat. But I finally learned why so many of my outfits stayed in the closet: they were the wrong color. The Color Me Beautiful chart I read at forty directed me to wear the very colors Mother had chosen

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## More Contest Winners

(Continued from page 19)

for me when she was in charge; I had rejected them as hers.

These days, I mainly buy gym clothes. Having abandoned my career, I don't need to dress for success. I've even given up thrift shops. Except in Honolulu, where I fall under Mother's thrall, paddling behind like a dutiful duckling as we forage for replacement items in her tropical, eccentric-old-lady uniform: white voluminous shorts, light weight cotton T-shirts, wide brimmed straw hats. I am still inventing my own uniform, but at least I know my colors. We don't care what anyone else thinks, but we are picky. The game requires we discard as much as we buy: it is part of our vow to escape clutter. She and my father will soon move to a small apartment and must unload fifty years of stuff. I am lightening my own load on general principles; jettisoning suits from the wrong job, years of fashion mistakes, diet souvenirs.

She still cherishes her things; they suit her. She looks forward to dress-up occasions planned for apartment residents. But she goes dutifully through her closets, her shelves, offering me souvenirs from her decades of world travel, carefully chosen household items from my youth. I don't want the things, just her. But on each visit home I fill one suitcase. The crystal beer flutes and Venetian wine goblets once reserved for her special occasions are safely stored on my high shelves. Hand-mended silk mantillas from Spain, and a peculiar fur hat with baubles over each ear, which my husband has forbidden me to wear in public, are in my cedar chest. The floor-length gold lamé sheath she wore to my grandmother's ninetieth birthday party, and fifteen years later at her own fiftieth wedding anniversary celebration, hangs in a garment bag heavy with mothballs. Through the protective plastic window it shines; I see her wearing it in old photos, glowing like visiting royalty.

When did she become so precious to me? When she joined a burial society at seventy, gave me a copy of her medical directive, made me promise to obey it? When I hugged her at the airport and suddenly worried I might crush her? When I noticed, not that long ago, that I could swim faster, carry more? She insists on keeping her mother's old sewing machine, though she can't lift it anymore. It is almost as heavy as my heart when I contemplate the last time I will go through her closets. Meanwhile I empty mine, making room for more memory-laden garments, for more bits of her. ❖

**Diane Kamins Linn** retired early from social work, academic advising and putting husbands through graduate school, allowing her to indulge in reading and attempt memoir writing. She grew up in Honolulu and still considers it home. Marriage to a childhood friend, now history professor at Texas A&M University, took her to Ohio, Nebraska, Virginia and, since 1989, Texas. Her reluctant exile is compensated by husband Brian's support for travel and scuba diving and the opportunity to play research assistant. They will live in Washington D.C. next year while he is a Woodrow Wilson Fellow and she absorbs art.

## Land

Diane Pattara, Austin TX

The elderly gentleman from India stands up, slowly moves to the edge of the island patio, and shyly smiles at my mother and me. Suddenly a gust of wind blows over Lake Michigan, speeds through the streets of downtown Chicago to the suburbs, and sharply snaps my white jacket like a sail. I shiver even though it is a warm and humid June day. As the wind tries to blow us off course, I gaze up at the massive building complex my mother now calls home, its red brick and fake wood façade, the endless balconies like cliffs stacked one on top of the other. My mother and I drift closer to her gracious neighbor, and we both greet him at the same time. As his eyes slowly move from my mother's face to mine, his face lights up with a look that I know all too well. He points to my face, then to my mother's: the daughter looks like the mother.

I nod at him, smile, and quickly turn away. As I open the door for my mother, I touch her shoulder and feel her body go soft as a sponge slowly absorbing water. She climbs up the stairs; once again two steps ahead of me, leading the charge as she has done for all of her seventy-nine years. Suddenly we are in the hallway, facing the door to her world, with the green and yellow welcome wreath circling the peephole. I glance around the hallway and at the four doors on this floor—all gateways leading to the homes of elderly widows at the end of their long odysseys.

She eagerly opens the door, and I feel my childhood leap to life. Suddenly I am immersed in the deep red of the cherry wood dining room table, the gentle light coming through the sheer curtains, and the smell of early morning cooking. Waves of memories pass through me carrying me back to places and feelings I would rather not remember. My mother and I stare at our reflections in the round mirror over the couch as we hesitate at the doorway, just a few steps away from the lush greens of the lagoon portrayed in the large faded painting that dominates the tiny living room. My father picked out that painting right after I was born: an announcement to the world that the war was finally over and the lucky-to-be-alive infantryman was now a family man with a home on the furthestmost tip of south Chicago.

I force myself to walk into the living room and sit on the couch facing the painting. My mother sits in the rocking chair by the fireplace, a sign that she is ready to hold court. She begins her song of past injustices and petty quarrels with her neighbors and I can feel the rhythm but cannot hear the words of the stories I have heard so often. Her face is deeply lined, crisscrossed with crevasses, an ancient map with twin blue green lakes. This is my face twenty-four years from now. I am overwhelmed by a strong desire to leap up and throw my arms around the painting, to honor it as my oldest friend who will

*Stories can heal even the worst of wounds, the oldest trauma. Find out how to story your way to health with Paula Yost, at SCN's next Writing from Life Workshop! (See p. 26.)*



*Kitchen Table Stories*

## A Taste of Times Past

*This is the fourth 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. 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.*

### Grandma's Memories

By Judy Watkins

My grandmother's cooking has always provided me with fond memories. Her parents were Germans who emigrated to the U.S. in 1894 from South Russia. From my earliest childhood I remember Grandma in her garden growing vegetables for the family. On Sunday she would kill one of her chickens for dinner. She baked the bread for the family, and we could always depend on a pan of cinnamon rolls on baking days. The smells coming from Grandma's kitchen were heavenly.

Grandma's parents came from Russia to New York on a ship; then they took a train to North Dakota. They had three children when they came—but no possessions and no money. They lived in abandoned houses until they could build one of their own.

Their first house was built of sod with the walls whitewashed to make the room light. Grandma's father was a stonemason; eventually he built a house, barn and granary of stone. Stones could be gathered without cost, but wood had to be purchased.

Grandma went to school until she was fifteen. They lived near the one-room schoolhouse and the children and teacher came home for dinner each day. Their family boarded the teacher so there was always company in the house. Although the family spoke German at home, the children were taught to speak and to write English when they went to school. Grandma remembered that it was very difficult to learn.

The family was poor, and when she was a child they didn't have coats, mittens or overshoes. In the harsh North Dakota winters they had only their shoes and a blanket wrapped around them to protect them from the cold. Once Grandma was caught in a blizzard and froze her hands. The doctor considered taking them off before a medicine was found to save them.

Her parents had a 160-acre homestead; horses were used for farm work. Grandma helped in the fields. She drove a four-horse team, plowed, and drove the grain to the elevators. She also had to help with house cleaning and cooking. She resented that she had to work harder than her sisters.

Trees were scarce where they lived, so the family heated the house with coal. Grandma helped to dig the coal from a mine. Sometimes they would drive the wagon to the Hart River to gather wood for heating. In the summer they gathered buffalo chips to burn for heat. Although their house stayed

warm, the upstairs sleeping area was very cold. They raised chickens, ducks and geese and saved the feathers to make featherbeds to keep them from freezing on the cold winter nights.

Grandma remembered that the family stored food in the cellar to preserve it. Meat was butchered in the summer and hung in the well to keep it cool. A large garden fed the family and although she didn't recall canning foods, Grandma remembered making sauerkraut and pickled watermelon rinds.

Recently, as I was thinking of Grandma's cooking, I remembered the wonderful bread she made. After all these years I thought I remembered that she put potatoes in it. Could that be right? In a 1936 cookbook I found this recipe that looks as though it could be the right one. I tried it and made cinnamon rolls with caramel topping with half the dough. Oh, how wonderful they were! It was a labor of love to make them and to remember the days when I was a child at Grandma's house.

### Buttermilk Potato Rolls

(Makes about 46 clover-leaf rolls)

This dough is delicious. It may be prepared and baked as directed or it may be combined, covered, and placed in the refrigerator for 5 or 6 days.

Peel and boil 1 large potato; rice it while hot to give about 3/4 cup (Grandma squeezed the potatoes through a cloth bag)  
Cut into the potato 1/2 cup lard (yep, lard...I used oleo)  
Beat into mixture 1 yeast cake (I used package of yeast)

Stir in:

2 tablespoons sugar  
2 cups buttermilk (not cold)  
Add 2 well-beaten eggs  
7 1/2 cups sifted bread flour

Knead and allow to rise, about three hours (new yeasts don't take that long).

With well-buttered hands, form into clover-leaf rolls. Spread the tops with 1 well-beaten egg. Permit to rise again until doubled in bulk. Bake at 420 degrees for 20 minutes.

Try it. You'll love it.

*Judy Watkins treasures a tape made on her grandmother's ninetieth birthday. She used her grandmother's own words to help create this remembrance. Judy lives in Hillsboro, Oregon, and is a member of three SCN e-circles.*

*Writing Your Dream Stories*

## *Dreams Inspire Stories*

*Dreams are like little stories within our larger life story. Donna Remmert, of Austin TX, frequently teaches classes on writing about dreams. This is the third of three articles by Donna designed to introduce you to the importance of dreams in your life and your writing. She is the author of The Littlest Big Kid and Jitterbug Girl, a member of the SCN Board of Directors, and a Story Circle facilitator. She has studied dreams for many years.*

*I am on a steep cliff. I wonder if I can still fly. I feel panicky as I lose my balance, but then I flap my wings and, whoosh, I fly toward heaven. It's unbelievably thrilling! Suddenly, I plunge deeply into a lake, to places I've never been. I feel in awe of the underwater beauty. I wake up feeling peaceful as I swim to shore.*

In June's *Journal*, I used this dream to demonstrate how to use my six core questions when trying to understand a dream. I concluded that the message was that I can still fly (have adventure and experience heightened consciousness). It also affirmed that when I plunge into a lake (my unconscious) and go to places I've never been, I see beauty (undiscovered inner beauty).

This dream is a good example of *compensation*, a natural process often present in dreams. Because my conscious self had inadvertently developed an off-balance attitude about my limitations and endeavors at this time in my life, my unconscious self produced a dream that shows me the opposite point of view. Dreams are often compensatory. It's one of the ways in which nature participates in our process to become whole, and it's not in the least dependent upon us remembering or understanding our dreams.

My associations for this dream were that I had just been walking the beaches of Florida with my siblings and our conversations too frequently skipped to how old we're starting to feel. This was depressing for me, so I got up the courage to ride the ocean waves as proof that I'm not too old for doing things I love to do. This plunge was apparently not enough to convince me. I needed this compensatory dream as more assurance. Dreams are gifts of the spirit. I perform a small ritual of thanks each time I understand one of mine.

The final step in my dream writing process is to compose a story about myself that's based upon the message of the dream. First, I enter a very stream-of-consciousness piece in my dream journal. It's intimate and discombobulated. When a dream's message is something I'd like to write about as memoir, to share with others, I then write a story like the one below. I hope my story helps you see how dreams can help you write about yourself with more honesty and clarity.

### **Taking the Plunge**

Enough already! First, I go on a vacation with my siblings and all we talk about is how we're starting to feel old. Then, within the span of a few weeks, I discover that I'm hard of hearing, I start seeing "floaters" in my right eye again, I start major dental work due to wear and tear, and I'm told that my only recourse for my worsening degenerative disc problem is surgery! What's going on with me anyway? I'm not supposed

to age like the rest of humanity!

I step out of the shower and see myself from every angle, in the thousands of bathroom mirrors that surround me. Thank you, God, for inspiring humans to wear clothing! I think as I stare at myself. I brush through my wet hair and try to imagine how I'll restyle it to cover a hearing aid. Why not just let it show? Because I'm vain - that's why not!

As I spread a new kind of age defying lotion onto my face, it dawns on me that it hasn't made a difference. Who cares! Doesn't a 67 year old like myself deserve to have a few wrinkles? Do they make me any less valuable as a human being? And, is there anything that I want to do but can't because of my age? No, nothing!

Would I even want to be younger? How absurd that I'm obsessing about my age when I can't think of a time in my life that was more wonderful than now. These are rich, meaningful, and peaceful years, and I wouldn't want to start my life all over again. I've lived it well, and now I'm having fun writing memoirs and exploring new ways to flap my wings. I love discovering the kind of inner beauty that comes with age, and I really do sense a new kind of wisdom, a new dimension to my quest for spiritual and psychological completion.

I resolve to never again let our culture's attitude about age get to me. Of course, I know it will. Next time, however, I'll be a tiny bit more conscious and, therefore, less vulnerable. Thank you, dreammaker, for showing me a better way to think.

### *THE JITTERBUG GIRL:*

*CLASS OF '55*

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

Donna Van Straten Remmert has published a second memoir! Her lively and delightfully endearing stories unveil the ironies of American life in the 1950s. You'll laugh and cry as you read her perspective as a teenager, as if she's talking directly to you, her best friend.

To purchase, send a check for \$12.00 (includes postage) to Donna Remmert, 3301 Far View Drive, Austin, TX. 78730.

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

# A Story Circle News Roundup

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

## Story Circle Board Report

The SCN Board met at La Madeleine restaurant on July 12th. President Judith Helburn chaired the meeting, which was attended by 12 members. Members reported their contribution of 465 hours to SCN activities since the last meeting. A total of 1,522 hours have been contributed since the beginning of the year. The board:

- Reviewed and approved the minutes of the April meeting. The treasurer's report was also approved via e-mail following the meeting.
- Authorized the sale of the new *Writing from Life* and the new SCN tee shirt as a package for the discounted price of \$35 through the end of the year.
- Approved the allocation of up to 25 percent of the seats on the board to out-of-town SCN members and revised the attendance requirement for out-of-town members to one meeting per year.
- Established a requirement for all board members except chapter presidents to attend at least one national SCN event each year.
- Agreed to hold a SCN planning retreat for board members in September.
- Selected Lisa Shirah-Hiers from Austin and Patricia Pando from Georgia to serve on the board.
- To address concerns about accessibility and parking, approved a change in the planned location for the October 2-3 Writing from Life Workshop from Ventana del Sol to LCRA's Colorado Room.
- Authorized the initiation of a review and update process for Board Member Guidelines, the Policy and Procedures Manual and SCN Bylaws.

The next board meeting will be held October 11 at La Madeleine.

—Report by Leilani Rose

## Internet Chapter

The Internet Chapter currently has 190 members, with 90 belonging to one or more of the 12 writing circles, and 37 in the reading circle. Participation levels (as with any Internet activity) fluctuate; some of the writing circles have as much as 90% participation, while other circles have around 50%. The poetry circle is at its maximum membership capacity, and a couple of facilitators are waiting for new writing circles to be formed. Lee Ambrose (the IC's able and energetic president) had to go off-line for a short time to entertain Hurricane Charley, but otherwise, she has been busy keeping all the circles moving and growing!

## Austin Chapter

The Austin Chapter held its traditional summer Open Mike on August 15. This year's program was called "Sing to Our Hearts" and involved 16 SCN members reading from their work and selling books during the refreshment period afterward. Coordinator Donna Remmert reports that the stories covered a wide spectrum of emotions. Over 30 people attended the event.

The Austin Chapter currently has 12 writing circles, which meet monthly in various locations around the city; six of the circles are open to new members. There is also a Reading Circle (see article on p. 16).

## Women Write about the Southwest

Story Circle's new anthology is moving toward its planned submission to the University of Texas Press in September. The book, titled *Plains, Deserts, Canyons, Mountains: Women Write About the Southwest*, is a collection of unpublished and published writings celebrating women's 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 book's four editors—Susan Albert, Susan Hanson, Jan Seale, and Paula Yost—invited women to submit essays, poetry, and memoir. The invitation was extended in the Fall of 2003 and was open through April, 2004, publicized through the book's website, at [www.storycircle.org/WomenWrite/](http://www.storycircle.org/WomenWrite/), the *SCN Journal* and SCN's eletters, and through direct mailings to writers groups.

According to editor Susan Albert, the submissions were extraordinarily strong. "We read and considered nearly 300 entries," she said, "and had a very difficult time choosing among them." The editors' work was eased somewhat by webmistress Peggy Moody's creation of a work site where all of the entries were posted. "It was like an office where all the work was kept," Susan says. "We could go there and read and comment and make decisions. The website made our work much easier."

The work of selecting from these submissions is nearly complete, and 48 works of poetry and prose have been chosen and edited for inclusion. Now, the editors are choosing the published pieces that will be included. Working from a list of some 40 poets and essayists and over 60 books, they are choosing another 45-50 pieces.

"Once all the choices have been made," Susan says, "we will arrange them in the best order, assemble the manuscript, and submit it to the Press. We're hoping to have approval of the project sometime early in 2006. A big book like this is a major project!"

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

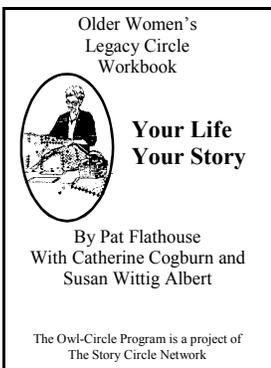
**Discoveries: A Blank Journal Just for Women, with covers hand-crafted by the women of Story Circle.**

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. Introduction by Susan Wittig Albert. Perfectly purse-sized at 6" x 8", spiral-bound to open flat, 208 unrulled 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

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.**

## Strut Our Stuff!

Share Story Circle's message with the world!  
Our T-shirts make great gifts for your friends, your circle, and for you!



Two styles to choose from in 100% cotton:

- ◎ **Feminine Style** in periwinkle (reverse has a quote from Susan Wittig Albert)  
Sizes: Med, Large, X-large, 2X, 3X. **\$18**
- ◎ **Regular Style** in natural (reverse has a quote from Muriel Rukeyser)  
Sizes: Med, Large, 2X, 3X. (1X sold out in this style) **\$16**

Check the SCN website for pictures.

## 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 \_\_\_ Feminine style T-shirts in size \_\_\_, at \$18.
- \_\_\_ Send me \_\_\_ Regular style 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

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

## Writing from Life Workshop

### Telling, Sharing, and Shaping Our Stories

With Carolyn Blankenship, Judith Helburn, Jazz Jaeschke, Donna Remmert, Jane Ross, Paula Stallings Yost

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

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

#### DATE/TIME:

Saturday, October 2, 2004, 8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Sunday, October 3, 2004, 8:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

#### LOCATION:

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

**COST:** \$120 for non-members, \$100 for SCN members

More information at [www.storycircle.org/Workshops/](http://www.storycircle.org/Workshops/)

Register at [www.storycircle.org/frmenroll.shtml](http://www.storycircle.org/frmenroll.shtml)

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

### Workshop Topics

**A. Travels, Journeys and Quests:** Judith Helburn.

Traveling to see friends, relatives and new places is just the beginning of our journeying. From there, we move to quests and pilgrimages, far and near, inner and outer.

**B. Answering Life Questions:** Jazz Jaeschke.

Tapping the wisdom within relative to ambiguous, problematic, or just plain curious conditions of our lives. We will write the answers that we hold within our innate wisdom.

**C. Points of View:** Jane Ross

Choosing a point of view is an important decision that goes beyond the choice of a first person or third person narrator (I or she). We'll write short pieces to explore the different results we get when we use different points of view.

**D. Our Dreams, Our Stories:** Donna Remmert.

Writing stories about your dreams can reveal powerful and even divine aspects of your personality that may have been kept hidden within you.

**E. Who's That Hiding Behind the Door?:** Carolyn Blankenship.

Using mythology as a guide, we will have the opportunity to discover and reclaim some of the abandoned and neglected parts of ourselves who have been waiting and longing for our attention.

**F. Healing Power of Story:** Paula Stallings Yost.

This session demonstrates the proven emotional and physical values of life reminiscence through writing exercises and mythological journey.



This membership is a gift.  
My name and address:

\_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_

Please send me \_\_\_\_\_ free  
copies of the *Story Circle*  
brochure to share with family,  
friends, or clients.

### Join the Story Circle Network!

\_\_\_\_ Annual Membership: \$25 (Canada & Mexico: \$30; International \$35. International MO only)

\_\_\_\_ Austin Chapter: \$18/yr (in addition to your national dues!)

\_\_\_\_ Internet Chapter: \$15/yr (in addition to your national dues!)

\_\_\_\_ Sample copy of the *Story Circle Journal*: \$5

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Mail your check to Story Circle Network, PO Box 500127, Austin TX 78750-0127  
or use your credit card by going to [www.storycircle.org](http://www.storycircle.org) and clicking on "Join."

## 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](mailto:news@storycircle.org).

**Sharon Bray's** new book, *A Healing Journey: Writing Together through Breast Cancer*, chronicling the experience of a group of women who write together, has just been published by Amherst Writers & Artists Press. Contact Sharon ([sharon@wellspringwriters.org](mailto:sharon@wellspringwriters.org)) to order the book.

**Katherine V. Gannett's** poem, "Standing on the Bridge," is a semi-finalist in a contest co-sponsored by the Famous Poets Society, and will be published in an anthology titled *Great Poets of the Western World*.

**Sarah Jordan's** book, *The Boss Queen, Little Big Bark, and the Sentinel Pup*, has just been published. Learn more at: [www.sarahclarkjordan.com](http://www.sarahclarkjordan.com). Order copies at: [www.tenspeedpress.com](http://www.tenspeedpress.com).

**Dalyce Due** (aka Emma Dawson) recently published her book, *My Secret Life with a Sex Addict: From Discovery to Recovery*. Order it at [www.bookstobelievein.com](http://www.bookstobelievein.com).

**Linda C. Wisniewski** of Doylestown, PA. won second prize for creative nonfiction at the Philadelphia Writers Conference in June for her essay, "A Connecting Thread."

**Susan Hanson** was chosen to be the Austin TX Barnes & Noble "Author of the Month" for August. Her new book, *Icons of Loss and Grace: Moments from the Natural World*, was recently published by Texas Tech University Press: [www.ttu.edu/books/iconsofloss.htm](http://www.ttu.edu/books/iconsofloss.htm).

**Linda Lipinski's** story, "An Unexpected Gift of Peace," has been selected to appear in *Chicken Soup to Inspire a Woman's Soul*, to appear Sept. 2004. And Linda's album, *A Legacy to Remember*, was the top winner for the State of New Mexico in the National Mail Order Association (NMOA) 2003 "Made in America" Hot Product Contest. Find out more at: [storycircle.org/NeatStuff.html](http://storycircle.org/NeatStuff.html) or at: [www.alegacytoremember.com](http://www.alegacytoremember.com).

**Penny Leisch's** instructional article, "Photos Close Sales," appears on the Write Craft website ([www.writecraftweb.com](http://www.writecraftweb.com)). Also, Penny's story, "V for Victory," will appear in the August/September 2004 issue of *Loving Pets* magazine ([www.lovingpetsmagazine.com](http://www.lovingpetsmagazine.com)).

**Tracy Pace's** new website is up and running at [www.tracypace.com](http://www.tracypace.com) with her CD ("War Music") and autobiographical poetry chapbook, *Poet on Zero Street*.

**Susie Kelly Flatau** was one of seven Austin-area writers/journalists invited to meet with three senior, journalism program administrators from the Republic of Kazakhstan. Under the auspices of the Freedom Support Act, Ms. Flatau discussed and shared writing experiences, ideas, techniques, and visions.

## Life-Writers' Market Watch: Opportunities for Publishing

**Glimmer Train's** Short Story Competition for new writers: First-place winner receives \$1,200, publication in *Glimmer Train Stories*, and 20 copies of the issue in which story appears. More information at [www.glimmertrainpress.com/shorawfornew2.html](http://www.glimmertrainpress.com/shorawfornew2.html). Reading fee is \$12 per story. Deadline: Sept. 30, 2004

**Girls Gone Stupid:** Stephanie Marston is seeking stories of up to 1200 words for *Girls Gone Stupid: Dumb Things Smart Women Do*. Chapter headings include: Working Stupid, Inspired Stupidity around the House, Stupid in Love or Lust, The Gift of Stupidity, Silliness in the Great Outdoors and around the Globe, Public Displays of Stupidity, Idiocy with Kids and with Your Pets, etc.. 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. Please keep a copy of your story, as submissions cannot be returned. Or email stories to [smarston@earthlink.net](mailto:smarston@earthlink.net). (We prefer emails!) Deadline: October 15, 2004

**The Fourth Quarter:** Seeking work for an anthology of poetry about retirement to be published by the University of Iowa Press. Submit up to 5 poems, unpublished, or ones for which you hold, or are willing to obtain, copyright. Indicate original publisher, date, and copyright status for published poems. Include a brief (3-line) biography and a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Payment: 1 copy of the book, discount on purchasing additional copies.

Mail poems to: Robin Chapman & Judith Strasser, P.O. Box 1123, Madison WI 53701. No email or faxed submissions, please. [The editors have indicated to SCN that they are "overwhelmed with poems about the down side of growing old, and about death." Work that is positive and focuses on the strength and power of aging may have a better chance for publication here.] Deadline: Dec. 20, 2004

**A Cup of Comfort** book series focuses on uplifting true stories about the relationships and experiences that comfort, inspire, and enrich our lives. Currently seeking submissions of 1000–2000 word stories for the upcoming anthology: *A Cup of Comfort for Spirituality*. For guidelines: email [wordsinger@aol.com](mailto:wordsinger@aol.com); or send SASE to P.O. Box 863, Eugene, Oregon 97440, USA; or visit the website at [www.cupofcomfort.com](http://www.cupofcomfort.com). Deadline Dec. 31, 2004

**The Senior Voice** is seeking contributions of prose, poetry, articles and photographs, from those in the second half of life, that capture the ordinary moments and celebrate the extraordinary experiences. Contact Carol Butler, 2516 Daybreak Dr., Dallas TX 75287, 972-862-2668 or fax: 972-862-7174, [cbutler@theseniorvoice.com](mailto:cbutler@theseniorvoice.com).

*Sign up today!  
Deadline  
approaching fast!*

## ***Research Your Genealogy & Write Your Family Stories***

### **A Writing Workshop at the Family History Library**

**Salt Lake City, UT  
October 21–24, 2004**

Join Story Circle Network on a trip to Salt Lake City and the famous Family History Library! During your visit you will learn to research your genealogy, compile your family history, and write your family stories. And because you'll be joined by other Story Circle members, you're bound to have fun doing it!

**Story Circle Network, the Family History Library, and the Best Western Plaza Hotel** will conduct workshops to help you gain new research skills and begin writing the stories of your family history.

The four-day workshop includes an orientation to the library, research and writing exercises, and instruction in computer research.

The program is organized and led by Pat Flathouse, author of *Your Life, Your Story*.

Cost: \$375 per person for SCN members, \$400 for non-members. Includes workshop fees and hotel (double occupancy). Meals and transportation are not included. Deposit of \$100 must be sent by September 6.

For more details, visit the website: [www.storycircle.org/genealogy.shtml](http://www.storycircle.org/genealogy.shtml)  
Contact Pat Flathouse via email: [pflat@austin.rr.com](mailto:pflat@austin.rr.com) or phone: 512-347-7687

*Mark your calendar  
for two great SCN weekend  
writing events coming soon*

### ***Writing from Life***

Story Circle's very special  
weekend memoir workshop

October 2–3, 2004

Austin, Texas

Details on page 26

### ***LifeLines Writing Retreat***

With Maureen Murdock,  
author of *The Heroine's Journey*

April 8–10, 2005

Round Top, Texas

Look for more details in the next issue  
of the Journal

***Story Circle Network  
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