



Story Circle Journal

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The newsletter for women with stories to tell...

Truth and Invention: When Strong Women Tell Tales

by Susan Wittig Albert

In her keynote speech at the Stories from the Heart Conference in February, Susan Wittig Albert's inspiring words shed light on the fine line between literal truth and the "invented truths" of literature. She talked about her own search for family truths and showed how this search paved the way for the creative inventions of her fiction. Susan generously agreed to share her speech with all the SCN membership in the Journal as well as on our website.

I want to talk to you this afternoon about truth-telling, tale-telling, and invention. Let's start with a cautionary tale, one that is much on everybody's mind these days, since it happened on Oprah, and everything that happens on Oprah, while it may not be true, is certainly news and almost certainly sensational news.

I'm talking, of course, about James Frey, whose memoir, *A Million Little Pieces*, has sold nearly four million books and keeps on selling. The topic of Frey's memoir—addiction and treatment—was dramatic, and his treatment was . . . well, highly dramatic. (Visceral and vivid, stark and brutal were words that appeared in most of the reviews). When his agent shopped the book around as an autobiographical novel, a dozen publishers rejected it. Shopped as a memoir, it sold almost immediately. Why? Because people assume that what is contained in a memoir is true. And we love to read truths about the human condition, don't we?

Unfortunately for Frey, some elements of the story were incredible enough to command disbelief. "Not true," cried the skeptics.

"True and moving!" cried Oprah, in a phone call to Larry King Live. "Redemptive!"

And then the pressure mounted, the fact checkers got out their magnifying glasses, and the confessions began. Frey said he invented a lot of it, and was sorry. His agent said she believed every word of it—but now she doesn't trust him and she is no longer representing him. A publisher said that hiring a fact checker to check every fact in every published memoir would double the cost of producing the book, so forget that. And Oprah said she no longer felt redeemed. She felt betrayed.

But all this hoopla about the truth of memoir is not new. Mary Karr—remember *Liar's Club*?—was among the first to be charged with exaggerating her experience of her dysfunctional family. But because she was writing about what went on in her family, only her family complained—and who can lay claim to truth when it comes to family?

And there have been others. Norma Khouri, the author of a memoir called *Honor Lost*, described herself as a lifelong Jordanian, but turned out to have emigrated to Chicago when she was three, and admitted to making up names, dates, and locations. The author of *Running with Scissors* was sued for libel by his family, who claimed that he had done too much dramatizing, told too many lies—but it's sold nearly three

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"... a wonderful, exhilarating, exhausting, gastronomical, mental, emotional, spiritual, truth-telling conference."
—Anne Kurtz, Spring TX

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Letter from SCN's President



Stories everywhere! Not only in the conference sessions and coming from the podium, but in hotel rooms, across tables in the coffee shop, over dinner down the street. The fortunate women attending Stories from the Heart III had stories to tell! It is a joy to have been included with these strong women. I'd like to share a few thoughts that I offered at our opening session.

I've known some strong women in my life—my mother, my grandmothers, my teachers. Lots of strong women, but none stronger than the women of Story Circle Network!

I walk almost every morning—that's my thinking time. One morning I got to wondering about our bodies—this was probably in the uphill part of my hike. What's the strongest muscle in our body? Do our muscles make us strong? I did a little research and I discovered some very interesting facts, and as you might expect—some conflicting ones. The physiologists are not much more certain than I am.

To begin with—there's no question—women are strong. One study put out that the strongest muscle is—guess what—the muscle that belongs exclusively to us. If strength is measured by amount of force a muscle can deliver “pound for pound” or “ounce for ounce” then the uterus is the winner! So whether we have one or have parted company, whether we've used it or not, we come by our potential for strength from the day we are born!

But wait. There are other opinions. If you like trivia questions or lists of “little known facts,” you may have seen the tongue mentioned as the strongest muscle—or maybe some guy meant to say: most active muscle! But as a matter of fact, the tongue is actually sixteen muscles, and that's fine. We have so many stories to tell—we need all the muscles we can find.

We don't have to go far to find the muscle that the Guinness Book of Records gave its award to back in 1992—and that the *masseter* or the jaw muscle—it can really bite down on a good story.

But there's another school that supports quite a different part of our bodies. A muscle we SCN women need about as much as we need our tongues and jaws, 'cause we don't just tell our stories—we write them down. And to do that, we have to sit ourselves down. So let's hear it for the *gluteus maximus*—long may they sit at a computer screen or a journal!

And the eyes—don't forget the eyes—large and strong in relation to the small size and weight of the eyeballs they control. A good thing too, for we are an observant crew and need to keep looking around.

I'm sure you know where I am going! Take the eyes, and the jaw, the tongue, and the glutes. Strong women need them all, but the muscle that works the hardest across our lives, which is pulsing the day we are born, which works for a with us every minute of every day, is our heart! That's where our stories begin. And when I hear the stories of other strong women, they go straight to my heart, and they stay there.

I salute you strong women with all those strong muscles—let's continue to use those muscles to sit, to see, and to say what is in our hearts. I'm honored to have started my term as President of SCN by being a part of this outstanding conference. There is, of course, more to SCN than the conference. To those of you who couldn't be with us, there are many ways you can expand your involvement in SCN. If you are a member of a Circle, you can submit a story to our Anthology. All members may submit to this journal. If you are not a member of a writing circle, think about forming one. Lisa Shirah-Hiers has lots of ways to help you do it. And mark your calendar to join us at Writing from Life on May 13. It's the day before Mother's Day. What a great gift to yourself and your family to come and tell your story.

Patricia Pando

Patricia Pando
President, Story Circle Network

Story Circle Journal

STORY CIRCLE JOURNAL is a quarterly newsletter, published in March, June, September, and December. It is written by and for women who want to share their experiences. Its purpose is to encourage readers to become writers, guide women to set down their true stories, and encourage the sharing of women's lives. This newsletter is provided for information and is not intended to replace qualified therapeutic assistance. If you have special mental-health needs, please see a healthcare professional.

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Conference Keynote Speech Continued: Truth and Invention

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quarters of a million copies and the movie is scheduled for fall. Benjamin Wilkomirski, who wrote a prize-winning Holocaust memoir of a Polish boy's childhood in a concentration camp, was revealed to be neither Jewish nor Polish, and the book was discovered to be a complete hoax. Lillian Hellman, the famous author of the memoir *Pentimento*, is known to have invented a great many elements of the story, some of which were incorporated into the Oscar-winning movie *Julia*, which was promoted as being "true to life."

So Frey's exaggerations, embellishments, dramatizations, lies—whatever you want to call them—are not really anything new, when it comes to memoir. And some of the memoirists who are crying "shame shame" are themselves unreliable narrators of their own lives, if we measure reliability by the yardstick of facts.

Now, those of us who have been reading and studying memoir—and writing it ourselves—know exactly what this is about, don't we? Of course we do. It is about memory, and its inherent unreliability. It is about ego, and its gaudy desire to parade itself out there in the world. It is about myth-making, and the myths we make and which in turn make us. It is about the fear of being boring, of writing a story that nobody will read. (In Frey's case, and in others, it probably also has a lot to do with making money, but we won't go there.)

Those of us who write and read memoir are always dealing with memory and ego and myths and myth-making. For one thing, the minute we begin to tell our stories—whether we're writing something short for the *Story Circle Journal's* "True Words from Real Women," or a book-length memoir—we know that we are using a variety of fictional techniques and devices. We're using exactly the same sort of bag of tricks that novelists and other tale-tellers use.

You're familiar with them, I know. Take dialogue, for instance. Stories come alive when the characters talk to one another, don't they? But memory is tricky. Can you remember that long, intense conversation you had with your Significant Other last week? Or even the short, casual conversation you enjoyed across the lunch table just ten minutes ago?

And yet most memoirs are rich in dialogue. They are studded with conversations, like precious gems, that are supposed to have taken place years ago, decades ago, a half-century ago. True, or tale-telling? Of course, it's both. The reported conversations illustrate and illuminate real events and real relationships. They are invented, yes, of course (invented: a word I want you to remember; we'll come back to it later). But these inventions take us farther toward the truth—an often illusive truth that remains just out of our reach.

Let's take another example of the uses of invention. Let's take time, for instance. The truest story would take a lot of time, wouldn't it? It would take exactly as long to tell it as it took to live it, because it would include . . . well, everything. But that's not possible, of course. We select only what's important to our story, and tell that part. We leave things

out—we leave out the boring stuff, the repetitive stuff, the going-to-the-bathroom stuff. We expand, contract, collapse time, skip forward and backward in our stories. In other words, we tell the truth—as much of it as we are capable of—by inventing a story line, a tale.

Or take settings. Say you want to tell a story about what happened at your grandmother's house when you were eight. The memoirist Mary Karr, for instance (she complained that James Frey has the "moral credibility of a sea mollusk") can somehow manage to remember the rooms of thirty and forty years ago, down to the last ashtray, the pattern of the wallpaper, the food on the table.

But that's what we want, isn't it? Memoirists are writing a story, and we want it to be visually rich, with details of place and setting that help to set the mood, to locate the truth. Lili Wright, author of *Learning to Float*, says: "Memoir is a work of art, it's selective, it's subject to memory. A memoir is art, it's literature. It's not journalism, it's not a documentary."

But faced with the raw distortions or outright lies of a James Frey or a Norma Khouri on the one hand and the artistic inventions and reshapings of memoirists like Vivian Gornick or Ruth Reichl, or Barbara Gates or Kathleen Norris—to name just a few of the over one hundred women memoirists we have read in Story Circle Network's reading circles—what are we to say?

How is it that we can write the story of our selves, how can we tell an interesting, compelling, commanding story, and still tell the truth?

How can we invent, and yet be truthful? And what can we learn about ourselves in the process?

To begin to answer these questions, let's start with the word itself: invent, a verb. Most of us are probably most familiar with one of its meanings: to create or produce something new and unknown—to invent the spinning wheel, the light bulb, the Internet. When it comes to literature, we're familiar with another meaning: to devise something false or fictitious, to fabricate or make up. But the root meaning of the word is in-venire: "to come upon, to discover, to find out." Invention is a way of coming upon, of coming into, of discovering the truth.

What, then, is the kind of truth we're looking for?

The only answers I can give, of course, are the answers that grow out of my own story. The kind of truth I was looking for was the truth about my past, which I hoped would shed some light on the chaos of my present. Some twenty-plus years ago, at the age of 45, I left my career and embarked on a wild love affair with a Gemini. When the inevitable breakup began to happen, at the same time that I was dealing with career-leaving fallout, I was compelled to begin writing memoir. Oh, I called it "keeping a journal," but most of my



Susan Wittig Albert, at the podium with introducer and SCN President Patricia Pando in the background

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Conference Keynote Speech Continued: Truth and Invention

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journaling was about the past, not the present.

I wrote to find out who I was. I wrote to figure out why I chose the work I had chosen, why I had loved the men I had loved, why I lived where I lived, why I did what I did. I wrote to discover what lies I had been telling myself all my life, and why. I wrote to come upon the truth about my birth family, and when I thought I had found it—or fragments or threads or shards or splinters of it—I shared it with my brother John. Between us we tried to figure out what was real, what was imaginary, what was accurately remembered, what was invented.

John and I grew up with an alcoholic father, born in 1903, who was the product of an adulterous affair. My grandmother (socially prominent in our small Illinois town) slept with a family friend, with the predictable result—at least, that is the family story, told by my father's older siblings. And since that was the family story, that was the story my father believed about himself. In addition to being an alcoholic, he was most likely bi-polar (this disease wasn't readily diagnosed back then). My brother John and I and our mother were all co-dependents, to use another term that wasn't in our vocabulary at the time.

Often people in families like mine don't know the difference between what is true and false, between what is real and imagined, what is fiction and what is fact. I focused on facts. In my memoir work, I became obsessed with facts. For two or three years, I had the feeling that each fact I found—pictures were facts, addresses were facts, letters were facts, even family stories might be facts—was another step on the road to some sort of sanity, some sort of truth.

And with each fact I found, the shape of my life—and the stories that had shaped my life—became clearer. I understood why I had married so young, and forgave myself for it. I saw why I had worked so hard to succeed, and felt—yes, felt, in the deepest parts of my heart—the terrible price I had paid for that success, and the price my children paid. I recognized that all the men I had been involved (some I married, some I merely slept with) were alike in some important ways, and that they all had something in common with my father. I began to see why I had chosen those relationships, and why I had failed to choose others that might have led to more growth, to a larger sense of self. I began to be a witness to myself, to observe myself, and in my observations, learn true things.

And here is where strength comes into it. The more of the truth I uncovered as I wrote, the clearer and stronger I became—clear, strong, and compassionate, too, because this was no blame game I was playing. And because I wasn't writing to sell books, I didn't have to worry about agents or editors or publishers or readers. Heck, I wasn't even writing to publish. I was writing only for me, only to recover what was lost, only to discover, uncover, come upon my own story, only to kick out the old demons, only to get it down on paper so I wouldn't forget it again, or get confused again. I was writing

to get it said, get it true, get it right.

And that happened. Not right away, but gradually, along the way. Not in the first 50 pages, or even in the next 50. Or in the 50 after that, and after that. I can't tell you how many pages I wrote in this search, this journey—there are dozens of notebooks, boxes of loose typed pages, hundreds of thousands of words.

And with each word, each paragraph, each page, something was happening. The truths I was coming upon, discovering, uncovering—inventing, in the truest meaning of that word—those truths made me stronger. More than that, those truths changed the way I viewed my past, and they transformed my future. Confronting the truth honestly, deeply, consistently was transformative. It changed me, in a direction that was growthful, positive, powerful. Telling my truth to myself helped me to re-invent myself. Understanding my past, sorting through my memories, recreating my story, helped me to understand who I was so that I could better—more hopefully, more clearly, more strongly—invent the future. Having been a memoirist, an explorer of the deepest and farthest and wildest and most dangerous regions of memory, having been a teller of the truths I found there, I could become a teller of tales. The teller of the story that is me.

In *Unreliable Truths*, Maureen Murdock says (page 59) that every memoirist must find the metaphor for her own life:

“The metaphors we choose in the writing of memoir take us to a deeper level of knowing the self. The self is not an entity already formed, but an awareness in process. The metaphor we use to tease that awareness into consciousness is what makes the narrative interesting.” (I would say: makes the narrative possible.)

As an example, she cites food writer and memoirist Ruth Reichl (whose book, *Tender at the Bone*, we read in our reading circle). “[Reichl] discovered that food was the metaphor that helped her make sense of her world” (page 57). And Murdock cites herself, her own story, her own metaphor: her mother's hope that she would be a nun, would “take the veil”:

I became driven to be a ‘good girl,’ to make a difference, to be outstanding. Although I did not enter the convent, I metaphorically took the veil. I excelled in school, tutored kids after school, tallied the church collection on Sundays. I had my own mission: to save my mother—from her mood swings, from alcohol, from herself. Failing that, I would save the world.... (page 62)

In writing my story, I discovered that work and career were the metaphors that allowed me to frame my experience, to give it meaning, give it significance and importance. So in 1988, I began to work on the book that came to be called *Work of Her Own*. It was the part of my story that concerned my

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The Conference Revisited



Open-hearted, uplifting, encouraging, inspiring, supportive, embracing, illuminating......these are just a few of the adjectives that come to mind when I attempt to describe my experiences this past weekend [at the conference]. It was truly a life-changing event. I have never—not ever—felt so safe or so accepted and appreciated What an awesome group of women! I feel as if I made 100 new friends.

The bonding was immediate and intense and with it came a depth of healing I am sure I will explore time and time again in my writings over the months to come. To be able to come together without bias or competitiveness, with only open hearts and outstretched hands, to lift our voices in song, and to witness each others experiences...this indeed was powerful and empowering!

I am delighted to be a part of this process and this group and feel that not only will I benefit personally but now I also have the means...to contribute in a positive way to the broad circle and sisterhood of women that spans this globe Mother Earth.

—Candi Duke, Dallas TX

It was a pleasure and an honor to be part of such a fine event! I learned a great deal about myself and grew in ways I never anticipated from my participation. The chance to bond and share with so many marvelous women was amazing, and so just what I needed. Sometimes we don't know what we're missing until we "step out of the box".

Thank you so much for the opportunity! I hope to stay active with the Network, and am excited about starting a story circle here locally.

—Michia Guy, Pinetop AZ

Ave Generosa will henceforth be imprinted forever in my DNA. The power of over a hundred women singing to each other: I bow to your generous gift of giving. I am paraphrasing, but, oh my, the spirit was filled to overflowing in those moments.

I felt so blessed that the session I led came after the luncheon with Susan Lincoln and her singing because the air was dancing with creative sparks, which burst open in a rush of wordplay in the Luck of the Draw writing session. Women, dealt a writing prompt from a creative deck, wrote furiously for fifteen minutes. The sharing was nothing less than magnificent: from sweet memories about the unanswered prayers of lustful youth to the tender memories about mothers and their legacies.

The open mic participants were so numerous that the group had to be divided into two. My only regret: I couldn't hear them all. In the room where I listened were stories that ranged from one single powerful sentence to the masterful opening scene

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I am still "high" from the conference. I had such a wonderful, wonderful experience... Thanks go to all of you who worked so very, very hard to make the conference a "work of art."
—Fran Reynolds, Columbia MO



Susan Lincoln



Who was there?
145 women came from 20 U.S. states and 1 from Canada

How far did they travel?
Our furthest traveler came from Seattle, Washington (1770 miles).

65 of our participants (45%) had to travel two hours or more to get to the conference.

Conference Keynote Speech Continued: Truth and Invention

(Continued from page 4)

work, and my journey to what the Buddhists call “right livelihood.” Here is a paragraph, to give you a sense of what I learned about myself.

Ten years after receiving my doctorate, I accepted the vice-presidency of Southwest Texas State University. I had climbed fast and hard and loved the feeling of being accepted, of being chosen, that marked each promotion. More and more, I felt like a member of the inner circle. But I was paying a high price for my career gains. I regularly worked sixty to seventy hours a week, and I had little energy for a personal life. The year I accepted the vice-presidency, my second husband and I divorced. My three children were in their twenties and busy with their lives. My father and I were estranged; I felt uneasy with my mother, who seemed to represent the very feminine passivity that I had rejected.... Friendships with other women were measured over lunch in crowded restaurants. I had no hobbies and no time for personal reading, movies, or television. The unremitting stress at work brought backaches, headaches, chronic fatigue, and insomnia. I ate too many restaurant meals, drank too much at parties, smoked too much, and spent too much money with too little to show for it. Relationships, begun uneasily, were abruptly broken off. In rare moments of honesty with myself, I admitted that I was lonely, with a deep, disturbing loneliness that I could not bury even in work. I was empty, with no inner life, no spark of meaning to vitalize my actions. What I was suffering, I learned later, was what Jungian psychologist June Singer has called “the sadness of the successful woman.”

But the book, *Work of Her Own*, is not just my memoir about leaving my career and finding new work. It is a collection of women’s stories about their work lives, their work memoirs, gleaned from my interviews with over a hundred women—no mean feat in the days before the Internet, when we did things like this by letter and by phone and face-to-face. The research and writing took me over four years. It taught me a truth so valuable that it, in its turn, evolved into the metaphor that has shaped my life ever since.

It was a very simple truth: that it is our shared stories—our women’s stories—that transform us. *Work of Her Own* had started as a way for me to explore the story of my work life. But the book changed as I went along, and I changed as I went along, for each woman who shared her story with me taught me something new about my own story.

It was a remarkable learning for me: a true invention, a coming into an unexpected truth. Suddenly I knew I wasn’t alone in my rejection of the career culture. Other women had been down that road before me, were going down that road with me, and would come down that road behind me. And if we each learned our truth—or if we each learned that little part of the truth that was ours and shared it with another, we could

all become strong, become healed, be transformed, be strong.

And that is the true beginning of the Story Circle Network, whose tenth year is just now beginning. *Work of Her Own* was written between 1988 and 1992, and Story Circle Network did not officially begin for another five years, until after I had written *Writing from Life* and had something to offer women who wanted to write about their lives.

But the truest beginning of Story Circle Network lies in those hundreds of thousands of words of unpublished memoir at the back of my closet, and between the pages of this book, a book of shared women’s stories that taught me something about the power of story, and what it means to be a teller of true tales.

And to those of you who are readers of my China Bayles mysteries, let me say that *Work of Her Own* also sparked that series of tales. This happened in two ways. When I interviewed women who had left their work, I met a number of ex-lawyers, women who were running from the law, trying to find new work that was more satisfying than their competitive, combative legal careers. Their true stories became China’s fictional story—China Bayles, the protagonist of that series, also a former lawyer, who found new work in a Texas herb shop.

But it is to one particular woman I interviewed for that book—Barbara Burnet Smith, who is the woman I named “MaryAlice”—that I owe the idea of making China’s story into a series of mysteries. Barbara was tragically killed last year. But when I interviewed her for *Work of Her Own* in 1999, she was writing the Purple Sage mysteries. She was the first person to suggest to me that I ought to be writing women’s mysteries. The rest is history. Or rather, her-story.

And as a novelist, I have gone on turning women’s true stories into fictional tales. Some of you have read the Victorian/Edwardian mysteries I write with my husband, as Robin Paige. These novels contain the fictionalized lives of real people. And then there is my new series, the Cottage Tales of Beatrix Potter, based on her true story.

So you see where my memoir-writing has led? Twenty years ago, I had to tell my story, had to write it, had to invent, discover, learn the metaphor of my life up to that point. In *Work of Her Own*, I honored that metaphor and abandoned it, moved past it into a new metaphor, the metaphor of sharing, which led to Story Circle Network, which led to you.

I will always know that Story Circle Network is the most important work to arise from all that tortured memoir work. Through you, I have learned to know and love and respect strong woman, women who are not afraid of their facts, their truths, their metaphors, their inventions. And whether you are writing a factual narrative about your life for your family, or writing memoir that goes deep into an emotional wilderness, or turning autobiographical facts into fiction, you are writing your life. You are inventing the truth. We are inventing the truth. We are doing it together. And that is what makes us clear, keeps us honest, and makes us strong. ❖

More Conference Feedback

(Continued from page 5)

of a historical novel. It is so hard to explain how it feels to bear witness to someone else's creativity and her story. I felt satiated, yet greedy for more.

Even between sessions, I learned so much. I met Becky and Ann and Liz and they were all writing memoirs about fascinating bloodlines... their own! How did I ever live without this wonderful organization that gives voice to the back-story of humanity?

—Joyce Boatright, Houston TX

When I left [the conference] on Sunday, *I was filled to the brim* with creative ideas, wonderful sharing from other women, and something refreshed, zestful again, in my own writing. ...

Every workshop I attended was led by a knowledgeable, intelligent, generous woman. They gave away their own writing or marketing or prompt tips, and the reading of writing done in class just underlined my inherent belief that we're all creative. What wonderful depth participants plunged to in their writing. There was laughter, and there were tears, and I could feel the spark of ideas. I know I got ideas.

But more than that, I got filled up again, I got refreshed. I pour it out all the time and sometimes feel starved and weak and flat. The variety of the workshops brought out my greediness. While I was moving and totally enjoying my physical self in an incredible movement/journaling class, I could hear laughter from the class whose title had "tattoo" in it. I understand they got temporary tattoos. I wanted a tattoo, too.



I really appreciate the stretch of the program committee to include workshops like the movement one. Writers do stay too much in their head, and we were shown how to integrate and become more whole. I know from the writing shared that I wasn't the only one moved to new places and wanting to be more respectful of and to my body.

As for the luncheon with Susan Lincoln, it sent shivers down my spine and brought up all my playfulness and a sense of reverence for that which cannot be explained, which is so much a part of writing...that flow that comes out of nowhere.

To chant to the sacred mother, to the rose she unfolded, was just wonderful for me. And to look around the room and really see all the women there was the rose unfurling among us.... Well done, Story Circle. We in Houston salute you and hope to grow some more members for you!

—Karleen Koen, Houston, TX

I expected to find a well run conference, informative sessions, and friendly women. I found all of this but so much more. ... *Warmth, knowledge, strength, compassion and inclusiveness* enveloped the day creating a haven of trust that has induced me to do all that I can, to write the messages from my heart. I could say that this was a nurturing experience, which it was. I could say that this was a lively and fun time, which it was, but what I really want to say is that of the many conferences that I have attended, with diverse subjects, no conference had moved me in such fashion. If what I experienced yesterday could be poured out all over the world, what a powerful, peaceful, enriching, enlightening wonder of a world we would all live in.

...Story Circle Network is more than a cyber-gathering of sharing women; the conferences and events affirm what we all know. When we actually get an opportunity to meet, greet, exchange, learn and grow, we increase the depth and power of the Circle and each other.

—Marti Weisbrich, Round Rock TX



I felt so at home among all those I met. ... On one weekend I grew into my fe-nominal womanhood.

—Sandra Agnes Shackelford,
Green Bay WI



Rosemary Daniell

Who helped plan and run the conference?
20 women helped plan it, another 37 volunteers helped run it, and 30 women were speakers, presenters, or members of a panel.

Who gave from the heart?
13 SCN members and 12 businesses and service organizations made generous cash donations or donated items for door prizes and goodie bags, 7 subsidies were granted to cover all or part of the participant's conference costs



Books for the Journey

Storycatcher: Making Sense of Our Lives through the Power and Practice of Story, by Christina Baldwin (New World Library, 2005. ISBN 1577314913). Reviewed by Mary Ann Moore, Nanaimo BC, Canada

Christina Baldwin has led the way of story since publishing her first book on journaling 30 years ago. *One to One: Self-Understanding through Journal Writing* was followed by *Life's Companion: Journal Writing as a Spiritual Quest*. Next, *Calling the Circle: The First and Future Culture* described the way of council, for us to use in whatever context we meet with others. This is the methodology Christina and partner Ann Linnea have shared around the world through their business PeerSpirit, Inc. Christina's fourth book published in 2002, *The Seven Whispers: A Spiritual Practice for Times Like These*, invited readers into a dialogue with soul. All of these approaches to story have led to the richness of Christina Baldwin's most recent offering, *Storycatcher*. The very word invites us to step into our stories and to see ourselves and our story through the "spiral of experience." The spiral is engaged when "something happens to shake up the status quo of our lives."

Our lives are filled with stories—television commercials, newscasts and e-mail chains are stories. Coworkers share stories on Monday morning. Her theme throughout the book is authentic stories. It takes courage to tell them, but sharing our wisdom is what we need for survival. And storycatching is "a skill we can remember and practice and encourage in each other."

All of the charts, tools, and prompts in the book come from Christina's own poignant and powerful story—her experiences as a young writer; her family, especially her brother Carl; and world events like the Cuban Missile Crisis. Reading of her own beginnings and answering the questions she poses at the end of each chapter will help you remember what's important to you. You may write those thoughts down and appreciate your own insight as you reflect on your life's story.

In the second half of the book, Christina includes the stories of others: a young woman in Africa, a grandmother in Arizona, a visionary Danish friend, two Episcopalian priests. Each has something in his or her life that resonates with our own. The gift is that resonance, but it is also the vision—how they took their stories into the world.

Christina has identified four activities required to work with self-story: linking (to another's story), editing (through therapy or journal writing), disorienting (what could be a "sudden reversal in circumstances"), and revisioning (a foundation for our life's work).

The Arizona grandmother Christina writes about is Kit Wilson, a psychotherapist who is an alcoholic and has a family history of addiction. Kit works with her family stories through journaling and time away to grieve and commune with the spirit of her dead mother. As Kit says, "I am contributing to my lineage backwards and forwards, through the personal work I've done to heal myself." The compassion she began to feel for and from her mother is personal work that will help her in her practice. It is also of great benefit to family members such as her grandson, also an alcoholic. In the section titled "Writing and Talking in the Seven Generations," Christina includes a list of what storycatching in the family line requires, including saying what is, without drama, and being ready to forgive.

From the personal, Christina takes us to the impersonal state of the workplace. But, as she points out, it isn't a place without story. People work there after all, and the organization or institution also has a story. Christina describes the work of Toke Paludan Møller, a Danish man who is "a spiritual warrior for story space." Toke has favorite questions for his work in an organization, and Christina includes a list of them. When Toke works with a group of people, he thinks about three levels of story: "the individual story, the organizational story, and the species story." Christina and Toke, among others, are part of a vision called the Art of Hosting, where a team of hosts volunteer to hold the space for the three levels of story. What results "is a community of people who are practicing the power of conversation to change the world."

From the story of the self that begins with our birth story, we continue through a process of remembering, speaking, writing about our own lives. We decide "what we want our lives to include and what kind of a legacy we want to leave behind, and then we are challenged to act on this story—to become who we say we are." Can we as storycatchers change the world? From my own experience and from the stories Christina shares, her vision and her dedication, I know we can. Your story begins with a question: How might you help story survive? ❖

Story is both
the great revealer
and concealer.

—Christina Baldwin

In serving as the heart
of language, story
imparts four distinct
gifts...

- 1) story creates context;
- 2) context highlights relationship;
- 3) context and relationship change behavior and lead to holistic and connected action; and
- 4) connected action becomes a force for restoring/restoring the world.

—Christina Baldwin

Meet other lifewriters and learn from their stories

Susan Lincoln: Singing the Circle

A high point of the Story Circle Conference was the Saturday lunch presentation by Susan Lincoln, at which she had the 100+ SCN women on our feet singing the medieval sacred music of Hildegard of Bingen, the 12th Century head of a German abbey who was an advisor to popes and a woman of deep intellectual and spiritual power.

Susan Lincoln, a professional singer and voice teacher, visited Hildegard's abbey in Germany in 1998 and had a profound, life-changing spiritual awakening. Returning to the U.S. she founded women's song circles called Hilde Girls. After the conference, Story Circle Journal talked by phone with Susan about her life and her views on why women are drawn to Hildegard's music and to circle.

SCJ. *What is it about the music of Hildegard of Bingen that appeals so strongly to women who are at the stage of life of wanting to reflect on their life experiences?*

Susan It has to do with women discovering their sense of what power really is and that power is a grounded spiritual heart. It's a beingness that says, I'm so glad to be alive and to be a human being and to be a woman, and to know that there is only the Circle. How can I share that, every minute of my life? How can I live that? How can I have a career in this? How can I share this with my friends and family? How can I wake up feeling this way? There's a clarion call inside many women's hearts, and Hildegard's music is like one of the shaman's tools for us. Hildegard's music enlivens women's sense of purpose and grounded spirituality.

SCJ. *Hildegard did not write her music to be conventionally pretty or easy, but when you hear it, you know it's from the heart of someone who felt true connection to the divine.*

Susan I certainly have that experience with the music more and more as I sing it. I started learning the music in 1990. It was difficult for me to sing in the beginning because I kept approaching it intellectually. I was trying to learn it, memorize it, figure it out, and it wasn't until I had that experience at the abbey that I got it that these songs were given to her as ecstatic releases. You have to get in there and sing them to really get that, which is why I love Hilde Girls so much. When we sing this music, we allow our body and spirit to vibrate through the same portal that Hildegard used.

Hildegard wasn't a rule breaker but she broke the rules. We need that. At this time, the rules are rigid and masculine. Not even a healthy masculine—it's a wounded masculine without the balance of the feminine. The world is out of

balance. Women need to come forward with what we know, and in a loving way. In an irresistibly attractive way. Not pounding someone over the head with it.

Hildegard's music is encoded with wisdom. She wasn't a trained composer. She received these songs from the Living Light and they had a resonance with wisdom. It's in those notes; it's in those intervals and the relationships of notes to each other and the fact that her music is like a long, universal inhale and exhale. My experience, and what I hear all the time from women, is that when we sing her music, we remember things about spirit, about love, about what power really is—"power" meaning being in alignment with your true self, dripping with love.

SCJ. *One of the obvious similarities between Hilde Girls and SCN is the idea of women coming together in a circle. What inspirations led you to create song circles for women?*

Susan Women have been circling and empowering each other and singing together probably from day one. When babies were born, they sang; in the red tents they sang. I think its abnormal *not* to sing. It's become normalized not to, but I think its natural for women to circle and sing. So I think I'm just doing something that might even be in our DNA. It's just so completely organically natural and right.

Recently, I've looked back at my professional life up to this point and seen how directed I've been and how I've been shaped by my own choices and shaped by the irresistible draw to spirit, right up to the moment I went to the abbey and sat in the chapel of St. Hildegard and heard the nuns singing.

It's a cloistered convent so the nuns are completely out of sight. When I heard them

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When babies were born, they sang; in the red tents they sang.
—Susan Lincoln

When Hilde Girls started out, I thought it was about Hildegard and her music. ... really it's about women redefining power as the embodiment of love.

—Susan Lincoln

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singing, something new happened inside of me. These women sing together six to eight times a day. What could *we* do if we circled this consciously? What could *we* do if we gave ourselves permission to bond like this and not have to become nuns and not have to adhere to any religion, dogma, or particular spiritual path? What if we came together and our offering was becoming *one voice and one heart*.

Earlier in my teaching career, I'd had a business called Heart Song. This was taking people who'd been afraid of singing, amateur singers, and helping them shape songs with piano accompaniments and give these fabulous transformational recitals where everybody just cried the whole time. Then I had this vision of starting song circles, but what were we going to sing. *Kum-by-ya*? The music has to be pure. As a singer I know when a song is written as "Hey, pay attention to me" or "Aaaah—take me to that deep place."

SCJ. *So you'd already had the idea of creating these groups?*

Susan This *all* happened in the abbey. Birthing my two kids and this experience in the abbey are up there in the same "oh, my goodness" category of numinous experience. So while I'm having this experience, my mind and my heart are going very fast. I'd learned two or three of her songs but I didn't sing that day in the abbey. I just had this vision and cried and cried and cried.

I went back down through the vineyard, and my husband Craig and I returned to our hosts' home down the Rhine and I thought I was done. But it wouldn't let me go and I had to go back the next day. This was complicated. We were on a concert tour with six other people. I didn't cancel performances but it was not easy to get away from the activities planned. But I had to go back and I had to sing. So I went back and sang and had a similar experience as the day before; that feeling when you think you're going to fly away. But I *got it* about the music. It had been difficult for me up to that point and all of a sudden the music was so easy. I seriously was "being sung." I got it: this is not difficult music. This is easy music if you're in your heart and on your knees to divine love. And that's what I was going to go back and share with women.

I've had two sessions of Hilde Girls a year since then. Looking back on twelve sessions of Hilde Girls and retreats and workshops around the country and in Europe, I've really been given the incredible honor of being in these circles. It really is like heart science.

I think women are the teachers and healers for our world today—the archetype of the feminine as the Teacher. Anybody choosing this archetype is going to have an irresistible draw to circle, to sing, to write, to tell their story, to hold and empower each other.

SCJ. *I certainly agree with that.*

Susan I know you do. Everyone in SCN agrees. It's what you're doing through the story of the self and writing. We're all doing the same thing—we're finding woman as love and

power and medicine. I wasn't kidding when I said to the women at the SCN conference, I'm absolutely certain that women hold the medicine for the universe. So every time one of you in SCN claims your voice for just who you are or any woman in Hilde Girls or in any other circle claims her voice, I bet 1000 women claim their voices somewhere in the world.

I've seen so many miracles. My own personal story is such a miracle. I've come to trust love late in my life, and I get to watch on a daily basis a capacity for love in myself that I didn't even know was possible.

People talk about competition as the heart of why America is great. But I couldn't disagree more. I think competition is destructive—*despite it*, we're doing all right. But when we hold each other, when we contain each other—like the women of SCN or Hilde Girls do—when we hold someone's essence strongly for them, they can't help but want to become it. That's what love does. It so generously abounds.

SCJ. *The absence of judgment, withholding any judgment, is crucial in any circle.*

Susan Yes, sometimes withholding judgment but I would say it even more strongly—practicing *non-judgment*. Practicing complete and total acceptance of someone's essence. Which means you look past the human stuff, because we are all hiding the same secret: We think we're not enough.

SCJ. *I have to wonder though why the guys aren't getting it. We women are working so hard.*

Susan I think it's just not their time yet. My husband said something, several years ago, when he was giving the sermon at a church service and it blew my mind. He said: "Women. Do not give up on us. We need you. You are going to be our midwives. And if you don't know your own power, you will miss helping us. So you've got to do it first and we'll come with you, but we don't feel safe with you yet, because so many of you have your hand on your hip, saying: 'Well, hurry up. It's about time.'"

And now women are gaining the ability to help the men, saying: "Welcome to the land of heart. We're so glad you could join us." I see it more and more. My husband and I still do mixed gender events and I have a lot of men friends and I'm seeing so many changes, fast, deep in the heart. Those men, they're the pioneers for the other guys. It's coming, I am sure of it.

Women are just barely over the cusp of understanding that power isn't power over or power under. This is a pretty new paradigm and it's starting to become embodied by women. Women and power—those are two words that just don't go together easily. It's as if you have to put a suit on or become a woman patriarch, or play the same war paradigm games to have any power. But it's not true. These times are different and require a new understanding. It's not an easy thing to get. It's scary. The ground drops out from under you, which is a good thing but it doesn't feel like it when it's happening.

I've talked to a lot of men and they all tell me they want

women to be strong and sure of themselves. But if we try to use the masculine model of power, we get conniving, manipulative, and bitchy. When real feminine power happens, the power of the heart, the men see: “Oh, women have a different system and definition of power. They become more loving and our whole family works better.” This kind of shifting takes time, patience, and partnership.

SCJ. *You started a new Hilde Girls group this week. How did it go?*

Susan It was wonderful. It seems like every session, women are deepening their ability to support each other and they come in almost where the last one left off. Even the new people. And the women who have been doing this for a while are so good at containing that the new ones just walk into this love fest. It’s delicious. My daughter is in this session for the first time. It’s really fun for me. She’s 25 and she’s in her second year of law school. So here’s this opportunity to share and strengthen our love in the circle.

SCJ. *Why do you think it is that this Hilde Girls group is further along on the journey than the group before?*

Susan The invisible power of the circle is working more strongly and the matrix builds power. When I end the spring Hilde Girls, I know the fall one is coming, so the circle’s not done. The spiral continues to spin. The portal’s still open, the very first Tuesday we meet. The women are willing to go into a deep trusting bond with each other. It’s exciting. The little scientist in me is thrilled. I’m jumping up and down in my lab coat because I love watching the evolving of goodness. People are changing fast and it’s very rewarding. Myself too. I’m just getting more and more playful and outrageously, irresistibly joyful. I’m not that way all the time but when I am, it’s big.

SCJ. *We could see that at the conference!*

Susan Yeah. It’s fun. Everyone wants to feel happy and alive.

I’d like to add something about people who have influenced me. Besides Hildegard and the nuns, there is one specific person in my life who has been very important and that’s Amma. She’s a Mahatma, a realized being, from India who embodies the divine mother and, when I experienced the quality of love I felt in her presence, then I knew what to take out as a reference and offer to women. So she’s very important to me and continues to be.

She comes to the US and offers free programs in Dallas. She’s called “the hugging saint.” Her website is Amma.org. Her works of self-less service and charity in India will blow your mind. Go see her and get in her arms when she comes, around the 4th of July. All you have to do is walk in and get a number and, when it’s your time, you go to the front of the room and they put you in her arms and she whispers something in your ear. I’ve sat for days in the room just watching her love people so I could get what unconditional

love looks like: whoever is in her arms is the most important child of God. Now I understand what unconditional love looks and feels like.

When Hilde Girls started out, I thought it was about Hildegard and her music. And it’s so hilarious to me now. Because really it’s about women redefining power as the embodiment of love. I can hardly wait to see what it is going to be in another several years.

SCJ. *Connecting to the music of Hildegard on your visit to the Abbey in Germany was a powerful, spirit-expanding, turning point for you. What can any of us do to seek that turning point in our own lives?*

Susan It’s what Joseph Campbell talked about: follow your bliss. Don’t settle for anything less than “*kriya*”—that’s a Sanskrit word meaning “the shudder of the soul.” Aim for that all the time. Hold it up as your gold standard. Really figure out for yourself, what are the activities, the people, the places that satisfy my spirit and make me want to open up like a flower. Do those. Pick those kinds of people for your friends. Don’t spend time judging the ones who *aren’t* that, just move towards the ones that *are*, and do it fast.

Be filled with loving kindness towards yourself. See every single little miracle as the biggest miracle. Keep a passionate sense of inquiry. Be in a constant quest for love and goodness. Sniff it out and snoop it out everywhere, and grace will pave the way. You might be fortunate and have one of those dropping-to-your-knees numinous experiences, or you might be fortunate and have a life with daily ordinary miracles.

—Phone interview conducted and edited by Jane Ross

Susan Lincoln’s recent CD’s include *Mother Heart* and *Openings*. Her website is www.susanlincoln.com. For more on Hilde Girls, visit www.hildegirls.com

Mother Heart
Songs for the Sacred Feminine
by Hildegard of Bingen

Artist Susan Lincoln



Available through www.susanlincoln.com

Take a bow! Spotighting our Story Circle Network volunteers

Jackie Newman: Strength and Energy

Outgoing president of the Austin Chapter of SCN, **Jackie Newman** has been blazing new trails her whole life, just like her childhood cowgirl heroines, as **Lisa Shirah-Hiers** discovered when she interviewed Jackie for this article.



Though she kept a journal in her twenties, Jackie Newman says she gave it up when she realized she "...spent a lot of time whining and bitching in the journal. "I believe that we eventually become what we think about. And becoming a whiny, bitchy complainer was not what I wanted to be." Instead, Jackie created a busy and satisfying life for herself pursuing entrepreneurial goals few of us would tackle and returned to journaling and lifewriting just five years ago.

Born and raised in Minneapolis, MN, Jackie Newman was elected Phi Beta Kappa, graduating cum laude with a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics and German from the University of Minnesota. She taught math for 3 years, adult education for 5, worked as a realtor for 10, and wrote realty training manuals before launching her own Public Records Search business. She built that venture into a very successful business with 50 employees and over 200 clients before she sold it in 1999. Meanwhile, she had opened an auto glass business in Copenhagen, Denmark, learning fluent Danish in the process. Most recently Jackie was asked to write an industry standard as a joint project for two auto glass trade associations here in the U.S.

Jackie joined SCN in 2001 and Carolyn Scheider's writing circle immediately after. As usual, Jackie threw herself into the organization with her fully committed, energetic heart, joining the board in 2004 as Austin Chapter President. She says she "loves participating in projects that are mentally stimulating and different enough to cause me to have to organize my thoughts and actions. [SCN] has certainly shown me a side of life that I never saw in the entrepreneurial/corporate world." As Chapter President she has most enjoyed getting to know the other members and watching the circle members enjoying themselves at Be Our Guest meetings. The Austin Chapter holds Be Our Guest events several times a year with a speaker, writing prompts and refreshments. These events give Austin women a chance to see what SCN is all about and many join as a result.

"I wish more women knew that they need not be afraid to join [SCN] and to write. It's not about perfect or beautiful writing. [Women's stories] are an emotional and creative outlet for the events in a woman's life...often significant for

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Lisa Shirah-Hiers is a freelance writer and piano teacher from Austin, Tex., with many published articles to her name.

One Person's Trash Is Another's Treasure Jacqueline Newman

Both girls had graduated from college and moved away. Suddenly I was free to change the furniture or even get rid of some of it. But best of all, I could fix up their bathroom.

It was the largest bathroom in the house and it really needed work. Over the many years that they shared that bathroom, both of them showered daily and there were always wet items drying on the shower door or hung from the faucets. The wallpaper was slowly curling off near the ceiling from the relentless humidity. The plastic covers on the light fixtures were cracked, the grout around the tub was black from the mold and the glass shower door was coated with a thick layer of soap scum. Early on I had given up nagging them about the general lack of cleanliness.

I chose new wall paper, new floor tile, new window coverings, new lights, and a new water-saver toilet. I painted the vanity, the woodwork, and the ceiling. I spent days scraping the scum off the shower door, and carefully removing all the black grout with a razor. The wallpaper hanger did his job, the electrician hung the new lights, and the tile layer installed the new floor. He had to remove the toilet to lay the tiles, so I paid him extra to carry the old bowl downstairs and place it on the back porch. This was in October.

We lived on a corner and the mailboxes were located beside our unfenced backyard, so the old toilet lounged nicely in view of all the neighbors as they picked up their mail. My younger daughter Karen has an overdeveloped sense of propriety and regularly asked me on the phone from Atlanta if the toilet was gone yet. After several weeks I was able to gleefully tell her not only that it still was there but that some tiny tadpoles was swimming around in the rainwater that collected over the winter. This telephone dance lasted for several weeks, and to her dismay, I kept her informed about the developing pond life in the bowl.

During one weekend in April, my business partner, Fred, was staying at our house. As he and I discussed Karen's upcoming visit to Austin the following week I was reminded that it was time to get rid of the back-porch throne or listen to her nagging me throughout her visit. Fred quickly printed up a sign and carried the porcelain treasure out to the curb. Within a few minutes he was back in, with the sign taped to his chest.

"Put that sign back out there. I want to get rid of the toilet!" I told him sternly.

"A pickup truck stopped as soon as I set it down out there," he laughed. Then he just stood there grinning at me with the sign taped to his chest.

Free to a good home, it said. ❖

The Archangel of Math

Stephanie Barko
Austin TX

In 1991, I had full blown Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, a mortgage in the 'burbs, and Calculus II standing between me and my degree. I had also been abandoned by a man I wished to marry and was 150 miles from any friend or family.

Despite my challenges, it was a time of hope. I hoped for a remission from Epstein Barr virus. I hoped that my savings would outlast my school years. But most of all, I hoped for the Archangel of Math.

During this time at school, I met a student named Renee. Renee was an RN considering a career change. She had curly black hair, a weight problem, and an abusive husband who doubled as a military lawyer when he wasn't at home.

To me, however, Renee's most noteworthy trait was that she was intuitively brilliant at math. I befriended her immediately. Nurses are natural caregivers, and she wrapped herself around my exotic virus and math anxiety like a fur rug. With diplomacy, humor, and single-minded resolve, Renee decreed that I would pass.

By this time in my life, the racing Type A cheetah in me had given way to an exhausted lioness, post-hunt. Autoimmunity had quieted down my hunting days. After years of family-of-origin therapy, and moving to my hometown-of-choice at 37, I was ready to settle into my true self, unencumbered by childhood baggage. All that was left to do was get well and pass calculus.

On some nights, the sound of Renee's wing beats around my dining room table were louder than others. I particularly remember late nights before exam days. These were the nights of mornings when holding my blow dryer felt like a hundred pound weight. These were the days when my doctor couldn't explain how I was getting out of bed in the morning.

During this time, Renee would copy equations, solve them next to me, and explain the proofs. She brewed the

coffee and kept me up studying as if she were pacing an overdosed barbiturate patient back to consciousness. She called our instructor when we got stuck and asked him for hints. She pushed me when I was down. She kept telling me, "You can do it!"

Although Renee wasn't much for alternative medicine, there was another thing about my illness that I knew could save me—patients who had something to live for got well, and in this context, my degree took on epic proportions. Not only was a sheepskin diploma entrée to a new profession, it was my ticket back to life.

A year and a half after I was diagnosed with CFS, my energy came back. The semester before I graduated, my cat of the last 11 years died, assuring that nothing from my former life carried over to the next. I grieved, graduated, joined a new industry, and turned 40.

Renee ran out of money and went back to work full-time. She dropped out of business school and looked into master's programs in public health. She divorced, moved to Dallas, joined a synagogue, and became a Nurse Practitioner.

Our paths diverged, but we kept in touch. I could never forget the person most responsible for my degree.

Looking at my graduation pictures, there's me in my cap and gown, gaunt, maxed out, and relieved to have made it to the finish line. There's my cousins who came in from Houston. And next to me is Renee, luminescing in the sunlight, looking like the Archangel of Math. ❖

Stephanie Barko lives with three adult males: her partner Jim Stoneking and their two cats, Henry and Chakotay. Current projects that are providing yeast for Stephanie's writing include: promoting authors and artists, moderating a book group, rehearsing for a reading, questing for Machu Picchu, and investing in Austin's lower zip codes. Stephanie's story, *The Archangel of Math*, received high marks from the judges of the 2005 Susan Wittig Albert Lifewriting Contest.

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each woman in ways she doesn't see or understand at the time...but only later when she writes about the incident."

Jackie is grateful to the mentors she's had—in her case the mother of a high school friend. "[She] had a Ph.D. in English and was the principal of an elementary school. She encouraged me very strongly to attend the university. At the university there were a couple of women professors I admired along with my two high school women math teachers."

Jackie knows how important women's stories are, not only to themselves, but to those women who follow. "I've been fascinated by Eleanor Roosevelt since I was a child...I also love Abigail Adams' letters to her husband throughout their long marriage. Abigail Adams was a woman ahead of her time who took over the family farm, invested wisely, and was her husband's political advisor 200 years before such behavior became really accepted. I was fascinated with both these ladies observing how they freed themselves from cultural bonds and

truly made their own paths."

Her fascination with these strong women is not surprising considering the many paths Jackie too has carved. Entrepreneur, businesswoman, industry leader, she likes sewing, gardening, going to the opera and throwing parties in her lovely Austin home. She also likes to read Danish "to get a feel for another viewpoint." She reads avidly. *A History of God: The 4000-year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam* by Professor Karen Armstrong, *Galileo's Daughter: A Historical Memoir of Science, Faith and Love* by Dava Sobel and *Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd are among recent favorites. She's also proud of her 44-year marriage to her high school sweetheart, her two daughters, and granddaughter.

Jackie's energy and enthusiasm is as contagious as her devotion to SCN. She is fearless too. As she puts it "don't be afraid to stand up for something you believe in. I've been a risk taker all my life and have had mostly wonderful experiences as a result. Go for it! Make your own trails!" ❖



True Words from Real Women

The theme of this issue's True Words section, edited by **Mary Jo Doig**, is "A Spring to Remember."

The Shingle Billye McSpedden Dallas TX

With excitement coupled with anticipation
the shingle was hung.
With careful budgeting came the desk, the chair,
the books, the framed diplomas.
With the years came clients, recognition, and
independence.
With the years came middle age, AARP,
and old age.
With the years came weariness and depression,
the closing of the office.
With the closing of the office, careful consideration of the
desk, the chair, the books, the framed diplomas, and
the shingle.

A Spring to Remember Grace Forrest-Maestas Polvadera NM

April 1, 2004: He is arrested. DWI.

May or June, 2004: In the weekly letters, the Sunday visits via phone through glass at Valencia County Detention Center, he begins to become obsessive about saving enough to buy the land in Cuba, northern New Mexico, that another inmate needs to sell.

February 11, 2005: His 10-month sentence fulfilled, I go for him. On the way home, he needs to stop for a bottle of vodka and a rock of cocaine.

February 22, 2005: The money is exchanged, the deed to the land is signed and transferred.

April 3, 2005: I lie next to him for the last, the—final—time, waiting for someone from the funeral home to come for him.

The letters. The visits. He would build me a cabin of logs facing east over the small lake, facing the Jemez Mountains where he was born. He would make a wide window under which would be a wide and good work table so I could sit, make my dolls, looking up now and then to see him fishing as the sun rose.

He repeated this, like a mantra, in those twice weekly letters, the 47 Sunday visits to the county jail.

April 3 is Arbor Day. I will load up the truck. Dogs, the tent, a tree. Maybe a mountain mahogany, for the color of his

skin. We will sleep and dream, his dogs and I, then plant the tree and watch the sun rise, see if we can see him fishing. ❖

Spring Crop Dusting Bonnie Watkins Austin TX

"Daddy's planting oats, girls," Mama called.
"We'll miss Wednesday night covered-dish supper
at church."
My sister and I shivered with delight;
Oats planting meant spring crop dusting.
Our job was to be the human targets
That marked off the rows for the pilot
Droning overhead with his bee-buzz of an engine
Stinging our skins with tiny pellets of fertilizer.

Striding wide, we stepped big to the next row,
Eyes pinched tight to seal out the next spray
That ringed our sweaty necks with tiny beads
A necklace as fine to us as rubies.
Hand in hand we marched
To the next row.

The Plain Brown Package Barbara Smythe West Covina CA

My grandmother handed me a small box wrapped in plain brown paper and went back to her gardening, a blue figure with a big yellow circle on top, surrounded by the blobs of pinks and reds and yellows that were her prized tea roses.

Eagerly, I sat down on the grass with the package and proceeded to open it. It was one of those summer-warm days in late spring when the earth is bursting with new life. The sky was a brilliant azure blue canopy over my head, the grass a carpet of green at my feet, and the big elm tree looked like it was wearing a chartreuse green umbrella. Tucked inside the box were the long-awaited eyeglasses from the eye specialist's office forty miles away.

I carefully took them out. I cautiously put them on and I couldn't believe what I saw. Instead of a solid green carpet beneath my feet, there were blades of grass; brown branches covered with thousands of leaves, their stems and veins clearly visible had replaced the lime green umbrella over my head. And the sky—not just a blue canopy, but filled with white puffy clouds! I began to dance with delight discovering something new with each turn.

“Look, Grandma! Look at your roses! I can see every petal! Oh, Grandma! Everything is so beautiful!”

I turned to see if my grandmother was looking, and to my astonishment, I could see her face clearly. She was no longer a blue blur with a yellow circle on top. I could see the print on her blue skirt, the ties holding the yellow straw hat on her head, and the trembling smile on her face. She reached out her arms to hug me, but I was too excited by the wonderful sights of my newly discovered world to stop my dancing.

There have been other spring days and other small boxes, but none so magical or transforming as the spring day my grandmother handed me the plain brown package with the miracle of sight inside. ❖

Never?

Susan Janes
Glencoe IL

Once free of sports commitments, my boyfriend and I, like a dozen other seniors or more, socialized after the 3:30 bell. One day before high school graduation we wandered the grounds of our school building—past tennis courts and playing fields to the football bleachers and back. The sun’s spring-warmed rays had painted winter’s smudgy gray landscape with Monet’s pastels.

Afterwards, we headed to the second floor to an old closet, or maybe it was a former conference room. Whatever it was, the administration had converted the small space into a Senior Only Lounge.

The romantic dazzle of spring followed me inside. I let it sweep me away from the moment, past graduation festivities and the lazy promises of summer, and into the foggy future. Although the mysteries of college life lay ahead, I contemplated my marital future.

Oh where, I wondered, where is my future husband at this very moment? What is HE doing? Wearing? The female cosmic question blossomed as pink and urgent as the dogwood trees.

One thing I know, I thought as I scanned the room, HE is not here, in this Senior Lounge. Absolutely not, without a doubt. I would not marry a soul in here, including my boyfriend, doll that he is. Not even the cheerleader captain’s boyfriend. He is really smart, but he and Cindy don’t joke and laugh like my boyfriend and me. He’s an outstanding athlete and all, but his friends are Calculus Club nerds. Besides, his hair is too short.

Another once-over examination of the guys and I concluded: *they are juvenile, really juvenile. Never. Never one of the boys in here.*

The cosmic forces plotted mightily against my confident game with fate, and it won. Six and a half years later I walked the matrimonial aisle, not with my imagined man, but with Cindy’s boyfriend. I won part of the game, however: a peek at my future HE. I saw the face I would come to love. I saw what HE was doing and wearing during that very moment of dreamy reverie on a forsythia-sweet afternoon. ❖

Spring Frost

Eveline Maedel
Nipigon ON

I scrape autumn frost off the window.
It holds gray November skies
in icy grip, silence broken
by farewells from southbound geese.
Winter arrives, cloaked in
long, cold nights.

I scrape spring frost off the window.
Rays of sunlight creep over
Doghead Mountain
coaxing birds to sing,
filling the air with hope.
The promise of warmer days to come.

My Texas Spring

Dita Dauti
Austin TX

I often think about the days when the troubles started. I feel the need to try to make sense of the times. Early eighties: big hair, heavy make-up, winds of change, crumbling political systems. Yugoslavia was a prosperous country in the Balkans.

I like to sit on my back porch overlooking the University of Texas tower. I like to steep my coffee in that old-fashioned way, like my mother, grandmothers, aunts, and other ladies in the Balkans. The smell of the coffee awakens my memories. Light Texas breezes frolic through the rolling hills. They play with my hair, and in their earthy spring fragrances are memories of the scents of Kosova.

I rock myself towards the early spring of 1980. Avid reader, dreaming of becoming a chemist or a medical doctor; teachers’ daughter working in Stanterg, a mining town ten kilometers northeast of Mitrovica, main city in the northern region. By 6:30 a.m. I was already into my twenty-minute walk down the steep hill to catch the bus filled with the miners returning from their night shifts to Mitrovica. Another bus would take me to my high school in Zvecan, a town seven kilometers north of Mitrovica. I knew every curve, hill, rock, tree, every driver, and every person on my way to and from school. Winters were harsh; many times I had to walk for many kilometers if the bus broke down or if the roads were icy.

We seniors met before school at Miki’s, our favorite coffee-house, breathlessly talking about our dresses and our futures. But our lives took turns that we could never have imagined. As spring was approaching our revered President Tito got sick. By mid-April his medical situation worsened, and on May fourth he died.

Two weeks before our graduation, our country was devastated. A statewide mourning period was declared. “What will happen?” people asked.

More True Words . . .

(Continued from page 15)

Deep down, I knew. There would be no prom. In my young heart, I sensed that other things would change, too, things I couldn't name. I wanted everything to stay the same.

Years later, I feel tears rolling down my face. ❖

Of Peonies and Piss Ants

Lee Ambrose

Naples FL

In my childhood garden, the peony bushes with their intriguing blooms were part of a mysterious ritual by which the passing of days were marked—not only by me, but by the large black ants on the bushes.

Mother would yell from the kitchen window. “Get away from those bushes! They're covered in piss ants.”

That was her name for the large black ants that worked so industriously to help the buds open. In Mother's eyes, the bushes were hotels for the ugly ants. She had no use for the bushes, the blooms, or the ants. In a declaration of war on the piss ants, she would douse the bushes with buckets of warm water hoping to chase away the ants.

And so it was that the mental battles between Mother and the ants, Mother and Mother Nature, and Mother and me were waged simultaneously each May. I couldn't wait for the graceful blooms of the peony bush. Mother couldn't wait for the disappearance of the piss ants. And, I am certain that Mother Nature couldn't wait for her busy little workers to no longer have to endure Mother's torture.

To their credit, the ants remained focused and fearless. They worked at their own pace and systematically helped those tight buds bloom into magnificent flowers.

The wispy white of the flower occasionally blushed with a hint of pink or red along the petal edges. Much the same as a small child's cheek bears a hint of Auntie's lipstick after a loving kiss, I like to think that the touch of color is the kiss of those piss ants as they bid farewell to the flowers.

And so, each May, Mother chose to see only piss ants. I waited for the delicate peonies with their big, beautiful blooms. The ants diligently performed the jobs they were given—in spite of Mother's torture. Hopefully they understood that their job was an important one in the big scheme of things. Hopefully they knew that I appreciated their diligence—and the end result of all their labors. ❖

The Baby

Suzanna Pearl

Dallas TX

My first baby was born in early springtime. It was wintry cold as we drove to the hospital, breathing. When we came home with our baby, the day was welcoming—sunny and warm.

We were married almost eleven years before we had this daughter. At first, neither of us had wanted children. We worked hard, we were busy, our life felt interesting and full.

Time passed, and I began to want a family. My husband did not. For months, we went to family therapy and discussed having children. The therapist saw patients in his house. His yard was filled with children's toys. Was my husband completely honest in those sessions? I don't know. I, certainly, was not. I wanted children's toys in our yard, and I was determined to move us in that direction. Stalemated, the therapy ended.

I was in my early thirties, and my ob-gyn had begun to talk about high-risk, older patients. I made a selfish leap of faith: I told myself that my husband could not make this decision with me, but that he would surely love our child. I tucked away my diaphragm, in its little container, under my socks.

When I was pretty sure that I was pregnant, I went to a new ob-gyn. Yes, I was pregnant! Elated, I ate chocolate fudge ice cream, and then, with cold chills of nervousness, told my husband our news. His grin confirmed my hopes—he was pleased.

I had gestational diabetes, which taught us a new, terrible kind of fear, and the birth was rougher than we had imagined. And suddenly, we had a daughter—beautiful, tiny, with spiky dark hair, huge eyes, and a little pointy chin.

For years, my mother-in-law had feared that I would derail her son's future by trapping him into family responsibilities. She sent us articles about other ways, besides having children, of contributing to the future.

They came to visit us, and I tentatively offered her the baby. To my surprise, she instantly, hungrily, grabbed the baby into her arms. We took a picture in the yard, near the daffodils. ❖

To Nova

Vicki Elberfeld

Park Ridge IL

It is full spring. The trees are glorious green as we walk these woods together one last time. Tenderly, my small, white dog picks her way along the stony trail that leads down to the river. Her long, pink tongue laps the soothing water. I stoop to pick a dandelion and blow its fairy seeds into the wind. Then her eyes meet mine and ask, “What next?”

She looks a little tired. “Home,” I say, and, “easy, girl” as she forgets to look and slips her footing. I carry her across the rocky parts and set her down again. I strain to slow my pace recalling times she'd bound ahead, pulling against her leash.

We reach the car, but do not wish to go. My eyes take in the trees, my ears the starling's song. She lifts her head and inhales the entire forest.

Back home she sleeps while I rush round to clean the house and pack. The time has come. I sit with her and look into her eyes. She's lost some weight; her eyes look larger now.

“I must go to Wisconsin tomorrow. I’ll take a writing class and meet amazing people, and we will share the stories of our lives.”

Humbly she looks up at me. She does not understand. The vet says she has cancer of the tongue. “Two weeks, maybe four,” he said and sighed. Tomorrow starts week four.

I hold her, pet her, rock her. Like a baby she sleeps at the foot of my bed while I have fitful dreams. Next morning we wake together. I give her meds and half of the whole chicken I cooked for only her. I tell her Dani, who loves her and always takes good care of her, knows that finally she can have all the oily cat food her doggie heart desires.

“I’ll come back. I’ll come back. And if your tongue is pink and you still eat, we’ll walk the woods together one more time.”

I turn to go, the guilty mom abandoning her little one in need.

I walk Wisconsin woods all by myself. The trees are taller here, the people finer even than I thought, the glittering lake so grand it dwarfs our slender river. But my ears are deaf to the call of the birds. All I hear is the cry of a small white dog. ❖

Deep in the Earth

Robin Reger

Archer City TX

When spring stirs my soul, I remember the earth
 The smell and the touch—the taste of it in the air
 Dry and brown on the farm, hot to our feet as we danced
 over plowed furrow
 Fertile and promising, waiting for rain
 Orange-red in the hills, sifting through the air to color our
 white summer clothes
 Bright, rich fire in the reflection of summer sky
 I remember the earth
 The call to stir its secrets, to dig its treasures
 Wet down with the garden hose, we concocted castles and
 cakes,
 Delved tunnels and forged roads, explored and invented
 under the backyard mimosa
 We threw it and ate it, buried prizes and grudges
 Washed off to cover ourselves again
 I remember the earth
 And pickups stuck in clay or sand
 And ant beds and pasture wildflowers
 And horse corrals churning with the smells of a full day’s
 work
 And windmill water, spilling into the mud where bullfrogs
 sang
 Spring stirs my soul
 Whispering the sounds and the smells of summer
 The warmth, the wet, the wind
 I remember the earth.

One Spring Day, 2001

Mary Wall

Matthews NC

It had been almost a year since we moved into this house. The previous spring had been hectic—I had retired early so we could move closer to my daughter. Having cared long-distance for an aging parent, I knew the problems of living far from family. I vowed not to do that to my children, even though they were the ones who had moved away. I convinced my husband to sell our home of forty years and to move the 600 miles. He, the sentimentalist, had a hard time, but my desire prevailed.

We moved at the end of spring. We didn’t have time to do much planting, for it was summer before we were settled—no time to tinker with putting bulbs in the ground. It was a big adjustment, so we took it slowly, feeling our way in a new area.

After the first excitement of moving, I began to wonder if I had made the right decision. I could see myself accomplishing what I had promised myself to do in my retirement, but were we really home? Did we make a mistake by giving up our big house and beautiful garden to start all over again? Would we have time to make this house into a home of love and beauty?

I was sure I would miss the flowers we had grown in our old yard and I dreaded what I foresaw as a dull spring.

Then the tulips appeared! One spring day I walked outside and there were the red smiling faces waving in the March breeze. I hadn’t planted these bulbs, my favorite spring flowers. Another hand had put them in the ground, but they were here to brighten my day. Seeing the happy red heads of the tulips, I knew we had made the right decision—we were truly home! ❖

A Spring to Remember

Arvinell McClaren

Austin TX

It was the spring that I learned to read! The first phrase that I could decipher as a five-year-old was “in the garden.” Although the phrase was in the hymnal at church, I more frequently found it in a message my mother had printed on a used envelope and safety-pinned to my nightgown while I was sleeping.

Mother’s circadian rhythm, along with the family rooster and a very noisy flock of guineas, woke her before dawn. She had never learned to love the house nor housework. She

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*Join us for Writing from Life,
 a one-day writing workshop
 on May 13 in Austin TX. Details on p. 23.*

More True Words . . .

(Continued from page 17)

fought the urge to be outside with nature just long enough to cook homemade biscuits and eggs for my daddy and brothers before they were off to work and school. Then, knowing that a cool, dewy spring morning held some of life's greatest moments, she quickly wrote the note, attached it to my gown, then was out the door and into the garden.

Before I had a chance to become alarmed at waking to find myself alone in the house, I would hear the familiar crackle under my chin. Later in the summer, the note would say "picking figs" or "in the pea patch" but the garden was by far the more frequent springtime destination because of its proximity and almost-year-round need for action.

I quickly climbed into my play dress and bloomers, then ran barefoot with a menagerie of pet kittens and puppies right on my heels through the dewy grass to find Mother, who was already lost in her own brand of meditation as she gathered vegetables or their nemeses—the beetles, bugs, and cutworms that competed for our potatoes, squash, and tomatoes.

The pets busied themselves with things that went buzz over their heads or in the ground while I munched on tiny English peas or made toad houses by covering my feet with the damp dirt. I have lived most of my life in an area where rocks are easier to grow than vegetables, but still fondly remember that some of the best times of my young childhood were spent in the garden. ❖

Loose Threads

Susan Mason
Buchanan VA

Listening to other women's stories exposes my heart to the reality of humanity's commonality. I envision each of our lives as threads in a universal tapestry of many colors—

threads thick and rich with time and experience, some cut short although saturated with color. There are dark threads interwoven with brilliant threads.

This is a love song for my grandmother, Ethel May: daughter, mother, seamstress and tailor, gardener, Grand Mother, great and great-great-grandmother. She was born in the spring of 1900 and crossed over to the arms of her mother in the spring of 2005—a mother she'd known for only six days.

I do not remember a time without my grandmother. In my grandmother I saw other possibilities. My grandmother was everything my mother was not. My grandmother lived alone. She worked outside the home. She drove a car!

During what became our final visit in the summer of 2004, I remember her sitting in her now vintage sewing rocker, her arthritic hands curled around another plastic-canvas project in her lap. The rocker was one of a pair of upholstered rockers with Danish-modern legs, angled to the rocking seats and backs. The open maple arms were covered in the same black tweed fabric shot with gold thread. This rocker is now honorably positioned in my morning room facing the dawn horizon.

When my grandmother stood up, bits and pieces of thread fell from her lap, some clinging to the arm of her chair. She grasped her wheeled project caddy with one hand, laughing as she plucked the threads from her clothing and chair, dropping them into the little wicker basket on the floor between us.

"I'm always trailing loose threads," she observed.

Each of us is a story: we have a clear beginning, a complex middle, and an unknown ending. Each of us is here to discover our plot line—our meaning and purpose. Part of mine is gathering my grandmother's loose threads to honor her offering to our ever-expanding collective tapestry of story. ❖

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:

The Beach—June 2006 (due April 15)

Harvest—September 2006 (due July 15)

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

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

Spring on Wings
Sonja Borstner
 Woodlands TX

In a desolate suburban space I called the Steel Yard, my husband Leigh stored lengths of wood and steel, miscellaneous car parts, formerly-useful machinery, rusty wagons, garden tools gone awry, an airplane propeller—all in an open shed. My neighbors called their comparable space their backyard.

Two springs ago we hired Andy to transform our yard. His design was lovely. We could afford half of what he proposed. Then Andy and his assistant set to work hauling flagstone, crushed granite, trees, shrubs, plants for a perennial garden. They performed magic with a mandate, manure, manpower.

Where my vision halted at the potted impatiens on the patio now lives a charmed home for nature's creatures—permanent residents and frequent visitors, those with roots and those with wings—including my angelic husband. ❖

A Day at the Ball Park
Erin Declan Philbin
 Pittsburgh PA

My 10-year-old, Brendan, calls me from the top of the stairs. "Mom, my nose is bleeding!"

I dash up the stairs, grabbing one of my stashes of Afrin and cotton balls. This isn't a bad one and within minutes our early morning routine is restored. My mind flashes back to two springs ago.

It was a warm Sunday in April, and we were at Brendan's baseball scrimmage. It was his first time at bat, his first year of kid-pitch baseball. I never forget the sound of the ball hitting him right in the eye and breaking his nose. It all comes back to me in a rush. He is strapped to a backboard for the ambulance ride to Children's Hospital, and they do surgery to repair a broken nose.

By Thursday night, he is feeling better, and ready to return to school the next day. He wakes up at 3 a.m. His nose is gushing and he is vomiting blood. Christopher carries him to the car and tears back to Children's Hospital. They admit him for the day, but then send him home saying that as long as we are able to stop the bleeding, he is okay.

The next two days are cycles of nosebleeds and vomiting blood. We try to hold out until Monday morning so that we can meet with the surgeon who did his repair. By Sunday night, we are desperate. Again, we drive him to Children's. This time, he is admitted and given two blood transfusions. He is back in surgery Monday morning. Two open arteries and a broken septum are discovered. Apparently, Brendan had re-fractured it rolling over on his nose in his sleep. A wizened surgeon wearing a skull cap with neon geckos all over it explains that Brendan will now always be prone to nosebleeds. He shows us how to stop them.

Spring is just beginning, but for us, baseball season is over forever. My son heals. We breathe a sigh of relief as spring eases into summer. ❖

Seasons and Life
Doris Anne Roop-Benner
 Richardson TX

Spring comes and the earth is
 bursting with signs of
 still living plants from
 the well rested earth
 Just like humans who
 give birth to
 a well rested soul
 Summer comes and brings
 warmth to encourage the
 fullness of flowering
 Just like humans who
 grow in the sunshine of
 sincere love
 Autumn comes and cools
 the sap and forces the
 beauty of Fall to
 wither on the vines
 Just like humans who
 are aged in beauty and
 slow down to
 appreciate their contribution to this world

Winter comes and freezes
 the earth to let it rest
 Just like humans who
 must die to have and know
 real peace

And then comes the spring.

Be Part of a Writing Circle

Need help starting a story circle in your town? From the SCN home page www.storycircle.org look for the heading "How to Start a Story Circle," in the navigation bar. You can request a free copy of our handy Facilitators' Guide.

Or contact the Circles Coordinator, Lisa Shirah-Hiers at freerangecircles@storycircle.org.

Want to join an established writing circle? To see the current list of writing circles that meet around the U.S. and the world, visit www.storycircle.org/circles.shtml

If you already lead a writing circle, be sure and let us know, so we can add you to the web page. That way, you and your circle members who are SCN members will be eligible to submit stories to our anthology as well as for other benefits. Email storycircle@storycircle.org

More True Words . . .

A Mishmash Beverly Galante Wimberley, Texas

A vine here, roses there;
In the corner of the yard
An errant tomato plant.

A little fenced in garden,
The lawn a sea of blue;
Never mown until the flowers faded.

White, purple, yellow,
Imperfect, a mishmash,
Unrestrained but not abandoned.

Nature's reward apparent
In enchanted observation.
Mom had grown old but it was spring.

Spring in with a Scream Sharon Blumberg Munster IN

The incident occurred late March at the junior high where I teach. It took place during my plan period in the afternoon. As part of a Crime Scene Investigation Unit for eighth grade science, a "crime" had to be solved by the students. In order to solve the case, students would conduct interviews, take pictures and do lab tests. Teachers were asked by the eighth grade science teachers to dress up as a Scream character from an outfit that was left in a bag, in the staff lounge. Once in that attire, we were to briefly walk through the eighth grade hallways to "terrorize" the students. At the end of the unit, students were to guess who were the teacher "culprits."

One afternoon at the beginning of my plan period, a colleague asked me to don myself as the character because she was too claustrophobic to do it herself. The irony was that this action seemed so unlike me, yet it felt exhilarating and liberating!

Meanwhile, with the assistance of a few staff members, I transformed myself into this Scream character. I put on a Scream mask, oversized sweats attire, plastic gloves, and oversized shoes the size of barges.

Upon my appearance through the dim labyrinth of corridors, students began to disobediently trickle out of their classrooms. Some snapped away at pictures as they trailed me close behind. A few students started to touch me, hoping to unveil my identity. However, with the good fortune of having the Dean randomly there to escort me, I was protected.

Within minutes, droves of students followed my footsteps as if I were the Pied Piper of Hamelin. Some students even tore through the gym, knocking over skaters as they rollerbladed for their Physical Education class. Finally, to put my task to fruition, I soared my way back to the sanctuary of the staff

lounge for my retreat. The entire incident seemed so surreal.

The following day the teachers reprimanded the students for their inappropriate behavior. They did this to reinforce the behavioral guidelines that accompanied the project.

For weeks afterwards, students incessantly questioned me for information because I was a suspect. I felt like a celebrity!! In May I was announced over the PA system as one of the culprits. ❖

Hope Reda Rackley Carmel Valley CA

The lids of my eyes bow to the darkness
Entering the secret room of my mind
The dreamscape illuminates the hidden
Thunderous nightmares gallop over desert lands
Whirling sand storms—blinded lost disoriented
Falling falling falling through snow white skies
Winds subside.
Brilliant scarlet moons penetrate my heart
A dagger of radiant red hope pulses deep in my veins
I awaken from the winter of my soul
And rise to kiss the day.

A March Morning Memory Lavon Urbonas Rancho Cucamonga CA

This would be the last spring my husband and I would spend at our vacation home high in the Southern California desert. Age had gotten the best of the house and outbuildings, and—the real deal breaker—of our ability to care for them. I rise from a fitful sleep, the silence broken only by the echoing yip of coyotes. Dusky images of rabbit and quail emerge.

I look out from our aerie through the rose-colored spectacles of sunrise. As the blush fades, earthy hues gradually come into focus. They are Nature's colors and shapes: granite rocks rearing up through the hilly terrain, casting monster gray shadows; manzanita trying to re-green after last year's drought; penstemon showing off opalescent blue blossoms; and primrose-like flowers I have yet to identify, scattered like yellow jellybeans beneath the prickly scrub.

The countryside, imitating a giant chia pet, has soaked up the recent rain and sprouted green. Manmade creations and colors also take shape with the dawn. The blue house down the road is beginning to match the sky, and the farthest one looks less like a Thomas Kincaid painting as the morning rays turn off its outdoor lights.

Other than the mist rising off the lake, nothing obstructs the endless vista from our sky-high summit, but the lowlanders are in a fog. Thirty miles away, reflecting the sun, it resembles an ocean of freshly whipped meringue, filling the valley and oozing between the hills. It begins to rise, creeping ever farther up and over the rolling hills, enveloping them one by one.

Within two hours it is mingling with the vapor above the

lake. The lake disappears, then the two houses, one by one. The atomized meringue is at our gate. Droplets of it, gray now at eye level, hug our cabin and cut us off from the rest of the world, engulfing me in nostalgia.

I begin to sing to myself, *Brigadoon...Brigadoon....* And I start wondering what kind of world we would find if a hundred years were to pass before we are awakened by another dawn. ❖

A Seed of Hope

Marti Weisbrich

Round Rock TX

Hope springs eternal—a saying that had little meaning to me until I heard these words: “You have a small lump in your right breast that needs to be checked.” These chilling words were said to me in March, 1991. Instantly, a beautiful spring day in California turned dark and gray. The old saying that your life flashes before you when faced with terrible news was so true.

Driving back to my office, I couldn't bring myself to go in and tell my husband my news; we worked together in our computer business. I found myself driving to the local bookstore to search for any and all books having to do with breast cancer. Nancy Brinker's book, *The Race Is Run One Step at a Time*, leapt off the shelves into my hands and to this day, I don't know how I made it home. The book became my bible and helped me to understand what I might be facing with clear, concise, loving, and realistic language. What I remember is that when faced with crisis, I shut down and went on automatic pilot. I had been an excellent student so I treated this as a research project; I would gather all of the information that I could and then I could deal with my news.

My husband came home, took one look at my face, and knew that something was wrong. I had told him that I would probably go shopping after my yearly appointment so he wasn't concerned when I didn't return to the office. He sat quietly and after I finished telling him, he hugged me and said it would be okay. Our twin daughters were 21-years-old so they would be able to understand what might lie ahead and, for me, this was a very good thing. The bad thing was that my biopsy could not be scheduled until a month later in April.

Spring had always been such a special time for us; we loved gardening and had already gotten the ground turned and seeded with several types of flowers and vegetables. Watching tiny sprouts poke up and then grow into lovely flowers and tasty veggies never ceased to amaze us. Watching those first seedlings filled me with hope that all would indeed be okay.

Hope also took a new form that spring because a few days after my shock, my husband came home with the news that we were going to take our first trip to the Hawaiian Islands in May, specifically to Maui, a place we both had dreamed of visiting some day. I asked him how he could make plans for a vacation when we did not know what April would bring. He replied, “I am planting a seed of hope.”

Whenever I became fearful, I focused on our trip in May. The seed of hope planted that spring turned into a reality, for

my lump was indeed benign and spring of 1991 was indeed a spring to remember. ❖

Serengeti Love

Kathy Stanley

Portland OR

Love has found me again
She is the Serengeti plains
Endless and full of bright shining lions and graceful
giraffes

She is the sight of the great migration
Wildebeests, zebras, gazelles
two million strong, plodding along
eternally, traveling in search of the rains.

Love has found me again
Her face is the face of each lion,
leopard walking, stalking the Serengeti grasses
sprawled out on kopjes, lounging in acacia branches
She is the mother cheetah teaching cubs
camouflaged in tall grass on a hot afternoon inching ever
so closer to grazing unsuspecting gazelles
She has found me again and I can do no less than
surrender to her mighty call.

She is the magic in the African Dreamtime
the call of the doves in the sleepy late afternoon light
the sweetness of tiny dik diks that tippy-toe ever so
gently in the brush

She is Olduvai Gorge, our ancient ancestral birthplace
from whence we walked and populated the earth
She is Ngorongoro Crater
emanating with light from 30,000 sacred animal souls
residing inside her luscious green walls

Love has found me again.
She is the Nile Crocodile
lying waiting on the banks of the Grumeti River
whilst hammerkops watch hippos lolling around
She is the Black and White Colobus monkeys grooming
each other as red duikers slip away in the forest
She is the martial eagle perched on a tree surveying the
savannah for his next meal

She is the elephant families patiently waiting to take their
turns to drink at the pool as young males lock trunks
and play fighting in the grass.

Love has found me again and I must allow her to cut a
wide swath through my core
She has found me again and I can do no less
than surrender to the call, to walk the soil of beloved
Africa once more.

Love has found me again and I must be true to her and
follow her footsteps
into my future, one by one, she will show me the way
Love calls me back to her Serengeti plains and I must
hear her call.

❖

Story Circle News Roundup

Story Circle Board Report

The SCN Board met at La Madeleine restaurant on February 6th, 2006. President Patricia Pando chaired the meeting, which was attended by 15 members. Members reported their contribution of 386.5 volunteer hours to SCN activities since the last meeting. A total of 1,793 hours were contributed during 2005.

The board:

- Welcomed Carolyn Blankenship back to the board and regretfully accepted the resignation of Rebecca Roberts.
- Reviewed and approved the minutes of the October 2005 meeting and the treasurer's report.
- Reviewed and approved the proposed annual 2006 budget as amended to include estimated revenue and expenses associated with the planned SCN cookbook.
- Noted that SCN will celebrate its tenth anniversary in 2007 and supported the creation of the 10th Anniversary Celebration Planning Committee that will be chaired by Susan Albert. The committee will develop a list of proposed anniversary activities that will be presented to the board for consideration at its next May meeting.
- Authorized Patricia Pando to chair an E-Meeting ad hoc committee. The committee will develop recommendations for alternatives to in-person attendance at board meetings. The initiative reflects the board's strong interest in increasing the number of board members from areas other than Austin.
- Initiated the planning process for the spring 2007 LifeLines retreat. Susan Albert will be the facilitator.
- Discussed the positive feedback from attendees at the Stories from the Heart conference and thanked the conference chairs, Danelle Sasser and Peggy Moody for their leadership. Committee chairs were asked to complete their post-conference reports as quickly as possible.
- Asked Pat Flathouse to investigate a book proposal that was submitted to SCN and to present a recommendation at the next board meeting.

The next board meeting will be held May 15 at La Madeleine.

—Report by Leilani Rose

Internet Chapter

The Internet Chapter continues to grow. We have had a nice mix of experienced writers and first time writers requesting membership in the writing e-circle which makes for very unique and worthwhile writing experiences for all!

The most recent "call for facilitators" has generated some interest but there is always room to add another few names to the (very short) list of potential facilitators! You never know when we might need to start a new circle. Women who are

interested in becoming facilitators should contact Lee Ambrose (leesmuse@earthlink.net).

The quarterly Internet Chapter Newsletter has been terminated. In its place, there will be periodic news briefs mailed to the facilitators as a means of disseminating information on an "as needed" basis. In the busy lives that we all lead, it appears that this makes more sense and is a better use of everyone's time.

—Report by Lee Ambrose

Austin Chapter

I'd like to welcome Sue Bilich as our new Austin Chapter President, effective this month. Sue has participated in Writing Circle No. 1 lead by Judith Helburn for over a year and is very enthusiastic about SCN's activities. She also has a unique other persona that involves a lovely Russian accent, a product of her longtime interest and involvement in acting and stand-up comedy. When she was approached about the Austin Chapter presidency, Sue said yes, "because SCN has given me so much in the short time I have been a member." Sue has learned so much from the wonderful presenters and talented members that she wanted to give back. Says Sue, "I look forward to carrying on what has been so beautifully organized, working with everyone, learning from everyone, and helping to widen our circle."

—Report by Jackie Newman and Jane Ross

North Central Texas Region

On Saturday November 12, the Potpourri House in Tyler, Texas, a favorite of "ladies who lunch", was abuzz with holiday décor, music, and several fun groups including SCN members from North Central Texas. Nine ladies from Tyler and Dallas came together to lunch, to network, and to hear SCN member Paula Yost share her fascinating work as a personal historian. As an added treat, Paula also read a moving story about her special grandmother. Our time together was over too quickly and we look forward to continuing quarterly meetings.

—Report by Pat Turner, Tyler Story Circle

SCN's Mission: The Story Circle Network (SCN) is dedicated to helping women share the stories of their lives and to raising public awareness of the importance of women's personal histories. We carry out our mission through publications, a website, classes, workshops, writing and reading circles, and woman-focused programs. Our activities empower women to tell their stories, discover their identities through their stories and choose to be the authors of their own lives.

Spring Writing Workshops

Schmooze the Muse: Nighttime Illuminations

Date: Saturday April 15, 2006
Time: 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Place: Donna Remmert's home: 3301 Far View Dr., Austin 78730
Presenters: Donna Remmert and Mary Elizabeth
Cost: \$75 for non-members; \$65 for SCN members. The registration fee covers the cost of instruction, and handout materials. Enrollment limited to six. Coffee, juice, and a light lunch are included.

Your dreams can help you discover the nuances of exactly who you are and how your creative potential can be released. The symbolic imagery of dreams comes from the dreamer's personal unconscious as well as from the collective or archetypal unconscious.

In this exciting workshop Donna Remmert will help you understand your dream language. Mary Elizabeth will then use her knowledge of astrology to show you how your dream symbols may relate to your horoscope and illuminate the psychic processes going on in your unconscious.

This day of self-discovery promises to inspire in-depth stories about your place in the universe. Each participant will receive dream information by e-mail when registering, and each is asked to provide Mary with her birth data before the workshop so she can give her a copy of her natal horoscope.

Writing from Life Putting Your Heart on Paper

Date: Saturday May 13, 2006
Time: 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Place: Lower Colorado River Authority Complex, 3700 Lake Austin Blvd, Austin TX 78703 (See the map on our website for driving directions.)
Presenters: Carolyn Blankenship, Joyce Boatright, Pat Flathouse, Gwen McMath
Cost: \$120 for non-members, \$100 for SCN members
 Tea, coffee, and a light lunch are provided.

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

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

This workshop takes place the day before Mothers' Day. Why not treat your mother, your daughter, or yourself to this wonderful day of self-discovery.

HOW CAN I PAY? You can pay online (electronic funds transfer or credit card) or by mailing a check to the SCN PO Box number on the registration form below. Register online at: www.storycircle.org/frmenroll.shtml

MORE INFORMATION AT: www.storycircle.org/Workshops/

REFUND/CANCELLATION POLICY: We will refund your registration fee (less a \$15 cancellation charge) if you request us to do so by the 10th calendar day before the workshop. After that date, we will refund your fee only if we are able to fill your space from our waiting list. We reserve the right to cancel the workshop; if so, we will refund your full registration fee.

Story Circle Network, P.O. Box 500127, Austin, TX 78750-0127, 512-454-9833, storycircle@storycircle.org



Spring '06 Workshop Registration Form

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ - _____

Send this form with check or money order to:
 Story Circle Network,
 PO Box 500127, Austin,
 TX 78750-0127.

Sign me up for:

Schmooze the Muse: Nighttime Illuminations

Writing from Life

Phone numbers _____

Email Address _____

I am enclosing \$ _____

Kitchen table stories

The Turkey Roaster

Lisa Check lives in Mount Airy, Maryland, with her husband, three cats, and two angora goats. She remembers well the sights, smells, tastes, and love of Sunday dinners at Grandpa's house.

The turkey roaster is dark blue enamel with white flecks. You know that kind. Every family has owned one at one time or another. I've been the owner of ours for 28 years. It has a few chips in the bottom and the blue is not as shiny as when it was new. But still each time I use it, I am transported back.

Every Sunday, we had dinner with my grandfather. He did the cooking. My mother called him Daddy even though she was married with children. He lived by himself for over 10 years since my grandmother, his childhood sweetheart, had died in 1960. He took good care of himself in those intervening years.

We drove from Diamond Bar to Glendale, California in our cream colored 1970 Chevy Impala. It took nearly an hour by freeways and city streets to get to my grandfather's house. My sister and I argued loudly in the back while our parents tuned out our fighting and listened to music in the front seat. The music was easy listening to soothe their frazzled parental ears. We begged for the Beatles or Jefferson Airplane. "No!" they said, "that kind of music is horrible!"

We piled out of the car and into the house. It was filled with the warm aroma of roast beef or roast lamb. Grandpa was usually in the kitchen, fussing over the gravy or basting the meat and vegetables. He still had on a tie and white dress shirt with the sleeves rolled up. He protected his church clothes with a simple white apron. He kissed us all and went back to cooking.

As the oldest grandchild, it was my job to be his helper. When I was ten, I was deemed responsible enough to set the table and put out the dishes. But my favorite job was to help with the cooking. I loved being in the warm kitchen with him. He showed me how to make the gravy and talked softly about school and life in general. At some point it was also my job to pick the mint for the special mint sauce that went on the roast lamb. I did it so many times that I can no longer remember exactly how it started, or how he taught me what to do.

Grandpa's mint grew under the pine tree near the back fence. To get it, I had to cross the dichondria lawn. I did not cross it in the middle but rather around the edge so as not to leave footprints of crushed circular leaves in my wake. I snipped a large handful of the bright green spearmint. I held the entire bunch to my face and breathed in deeply. It smelled so sweet and pungent. I carefully brought the bunch back to the kitchen. Grandpa washed the mint and then we then

plucked off each beautiful, fragrant leaf. The yellowed or bug-eaten leaves remained on the woody stems. He chopped it up and plopped it into the warm sugary vinegar syrup. The sauce then steeped like a sweet and sour tea. The flame was on just enough to warm the liquid but not to boil. The mint then retains its clear, green color.

When the roast was done, he carefully lifted it out of the blue turkey roaster and placed it on a platter. The vegetables and potatoes surrounded the hot meat. We took our places around the table in the cherry paneled dining room. Grandpa would say the prayer in his half whisper voice. Then he stood, honed his long knife and carved succulent pieces of meat from the roast. After we each had a plate of meat, we passed the potatoes, cooked vegetables, gravy and mint sauce.

I tell this story each time I use that pan. The tastes, smells, and love of my family reside within it. Through that pan, I have inherited part of my family's stories and made a few of my own to share. ❖

Roast Lamb

1 leg of lamb, boned
Fresh rosemary sprigs
4-5 cloves of garlic
Salt and pepper

Remove the leaves of the rosemary from the woody stem. Peel the garlic cloves. Mince the garlic and rosemary together into a very fine mixture. Open the leg of lamb. Season lamb with salt and pepper to taste. Rub the leg with the rosemary/garlic mixture. Roll the leg and tie with butcher's twine. Roast in a preheated 325 degree oven for about 25 to 30 minutes per pound, or until meat thermometer registers 145-165 degrees, depending on how well you like it done. Baste every 20 minutes with pan juices. Let meat rest for 10 minutes to redistribute juices. Serves 4 to 6.

You can also leave untied and grill on the barbeque. This method takes less time than roasting in the oven.

You have kitchen table stories, too!

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

Lisa Check has been a part of Story Circle Network since 2002. She facilitates the Internet Writing Circle 13 and the Internet Reading Circle.

A reader tells her story

Guilty Pleasures: Sleeping Till Noon

In our "Reader tells her story" column, we print a selection from the fine writing found on the Internet Chapter's Story of the Month page. In this story, Marie Buckley 'fesses up to what the rest of us do our best to hide—she loves sleeping late.

Since childhood, I've been a night owl. Night owls are active late at night and awake throughout the wee hours, so naturally they like to sleep during the day. In the land of: "Rise and shine! The early bird gets the worm!" this makes night owls an anathema. Can you imagine? Sleeping until noon! Well, I never! The rest of the world is up doing good, hard work, and some people are still in bed!

My reputation on this score was shot years ago. I got used to diurnal people looking at me askance and clucking under their breath about my still being in bed after 9 or 10 or 11 a.m. Thus, sleeping until noon became my Guilty Pleasure.

A Typical Teenage Summer Day, circa 1964, at 12 noon: Carma, my little sister, comes tromping downstairs to my dark, cool basement bedroom where I am sleeping peacefully, sprawled all the way across my double-bed. She is sucking on a beef bouillon cube, straight up. Mother has sent her downstairs to wake me. I feel a small hand pushing on my back. "Meme, get up! It's noon and Mother wants you to come upstairs and fix lunch." I roll over and am groggily brought within inches of her small sweet face and large open mouth leaning over me. I open my mouth to respond. We breathe on each other simultaneously and yelp: "YEUW!"

"Your breath smells like a dead horse!" Carma pronounces.

"That bouillon cube in your mouth is horrible," I sputter. "Get away from me!"

"Not till you get up," she responds, backing a few steps away from my horsy breath. My body is limp as a warm dishrag. I roll away from her, and my eyes go shut. "Meme, get up!" comes her voice. "Get up or I'll breathe on you again!"

I roll to the far edge of the bed and drag my body to a sitting, then standing position. I weave around the room like I'm drunk. I just need a couple more hours of sleep, which Carma, bouillon cubes, and my mother won't allow.

I pull on some clothes, crawl upstairs, and make huge tuna sandwiches with gobs of mayo. I eat one or two while sitting at the dining room table and directly in front of the window air conditioner. I wash them down with Coke, straight up. Ahhh... I start to feel human. But after a night of reading and listening to songs on KOMA, I sure could have used a couple more hours of sleep.

Sleeping until noon during my teenage summers was one of a list of things that my stepfather, Carl, held against me. Carl, being industrious and hard working, was always up at 6 a.m. Never mind that he was conked out napping every

afternoon and falling asleep in his recliner right after dinner every night at 6:30 p.m. He was good; I was bad.

Adulthood or Married to Bill: Bill is the primary breadwinner for many years. I work part time, do fun and interesting things like read a dozen books a week, and eventually spend a lot of my time taking care of parrots. On the best days, I read and/or write all night until Bill gets up to go to work at jobs that start at 5 a.m. Just as the sun peeks its rosy face in the window, I am sprawled all the way across our double bed and sleeping well indeed. Wake-up time is noon or as late as 2 p.m.

On weekends, I even manage to get Bill into the night owl mode. On Saturday nights (prior to having parrots) we square dance until midnight, go out with the crowd until 1 or 2 a.m., come home and watch a late show on television, retrieve the Sunday paper just as it's being delivered, and read it while drinking sweet hot chocolate made from scratch. Between 6 and 7 a.m., we go to bed. Ahhh, sweet victory.

The Real World: Needless to say, but I feel compelled to say it regardless, I did spend years getting up early to go to school. Since 1990, I've gotten up incredibly early to go to work. However, I've never, never been able to go to bed at a normal or decent time and be able to sleep. The closest I've come to that is getting to sleep between 1 and 2 a.m. On a good night, this means I'll get four to five hours of sleep before rising to the early bird world. On a not-so-good night, I might get just two hours of shuteye.

Fortunately, I can get along well with very little sleep for a full five days and then catch up by sleeping until noon on weekends, holidays, or whenever possible. Since I'm 58 years old, I don't see this pattern changing in my future. What I do see is sleeping until noon being my always and forever Guilty Pleasure!❖

Marie Buckley is the facilitator of e-circle no. 2. A former English teacher, Marie is now a freelance editor and adjunct college instructor. She shares her home with a husband, several cats, and numerous parrots.

Marie won first place in Traditional Verse in the Oregon State Poetry Association 2005 fall contest for her villanelle "Tell Me." Marie wrote the piece last summer and sent it to her writing e-circle for the topic "Getting Lost."

SCN's First E-Book Is in the Making

Linda C. Wisniewski
Doylestown PA

In February, 2000, Story Circle Network founder Susan Wittig Albert began to send writing prompts to Internet chapter members of SCN. At the beginning of each week, subscribers receive an e-mail message containing a woman's quote and a related topic to jump-start their writing for the coming week.

I've used these prompts in my own journaling practice. I file the weekly messages in a separate e-mail folder, which has grown quite large over the past six years. Renee Cassese, a member from Long Island, keeps the prompts in a special notebook where she does the journaling that arises from them. Soon we will be able to access this rich collection any time via an e-book on our home computers. Thanks to the efforts of SCN member Candi Duke of Dallas, Wise Words and a Week's Worth of Writing Prompts will be available for purchase and download. Candi will provide hyper-links to the authors' quotes on the SCN website. A reader will be able to link from the subject of one particular prompt to a variety of similar quotes expanding her insights and inspirational possibilities.

Candi, who joined SCN in October 2005, says the Network's mission "resonated with my own aspirations to honor and reclaim the cycles and seasons of feminine experience and wisdom." For over 25 years, Candi has been writing memoir for self-discovery, healing, and growth, starting with a journal her grandmother gave her when she was a little girl. She eagerly accepted this project because she has "an insatiable curiosity for the internet and the world wide web ever since it's conception and first application. The

symbolic has been made manifest with this technological advance and I simply can't resist participating!"

"E-Publishing is the great equalizer to the Big Publishing Houses of old," says Candi. "As time passes, more and more people will have access to the technology."

The E-book project reminds her of Persephone's myth and her talk of sorting seeds. "Each prompt is a seed; of a story, of an awareness, or an incredible and delicious fruit, born of the fecundity of our own individual and collective experience."

All proceeds from purchase of the E-book will go to sustaining the Story Circle Network. Watch the *Journal* for news on its availability. ❖

Susan Wittig Albert Lifewriting Contest 2006

Falsehood is easy, truth so difficult.

—George Eliot

The truth will set you free. But first, it will piss you off.

—Gloria Steinem

Risk! Risk anything! Care no more for the opinions of others, for those voices. Do the hardest thing on earth for you. Act for yourself. Face the truth.

—Katherine Mansfield

Truth is a hard thing, often a painful thing. It can defeat us—or it can redeem us. For SCN's seventh annual writing competition, we invite you to write a story about learning the truth about yourself, your family, your significant other, or perhaps even your place in the universe. Watch the June *Journal* for details. The contest deadline will be July 15.



This membership
is a gift.

My name and address:

My phone and e-mail:

Join the Story Circle Network!

___ Annual Membership: USA: \$35 ;
Canada & Mexico: \$45; } International MO
International \$50.
___ Austin Chapter: \$18/yr (in addition to your national dues!)
___ Internet Chapter: \$18/yr (in addition to your national dues!)
___ Sample copy of the *Story Circle Journal*: \$5

Name _____

Address _____

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Email _____ Amount enclosed _____

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

\$70 Supporter \$125 Sponsor \$200 Patron \$400 Benefactor

Mail your check to
Story Circle Network,
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3/06

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.

Lisa Shirah-Hiers has had several stories published in *AustinWoman* magazine in the past year. Her article about Susan Albert, SCN, and the SCN Conference appeared in the January '06 issue.

Sandra Pinkerton's first published short story, "On the Yellow Line," appeared January '06, in *Lost Soles*, an anthology of short stories and illustrations.

Linda Wisniewski of Doylestown, PA, wrote an article for the March '06 issue of *The Quilter* magazine. "Passing on the Comfort" is about American quilts used to shelter European refugees during World War II. The story grew from a book review Linda wrote for the SCN website.

Ann Cabot, author of *Choose to Move: Stories, Advice, and Humor for Living Anywhere*, signed books and revealed her moving secrets on Feb. 18 at Borders Bookstore in Austin, TX. Ann also has an article in *AustinTraveler* magazine.

A revised edition of **Maureen Murdock's** classic book, *Fathers' Daughters: Breaking the Ties that Bind* has been published. More info at: www.springjournalandbooks.com.

Nan Phifer's article, "Memoirs with Sacred Resonance," is published in the current issue of *Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction*, Vol. 11, No. 4. Available through the organization's website: www.sdiworld.org.

Inner Outings: The Diarist's Deck of 33 Cards and Book of Exploration, by **Charlene Geiss & Claudia Jessup**, was published by New World Library. More info at: www.diaristworkshop.com.

Glenys Carl's autobiography, *Hold My Hand: A Mother's Journey*, was published by MacMillan in June, 2005.

Reda Rackley's story, "The Grapefruit," was published this year in an anthology called *Kiss Me Goodnight: Stories and Poems by Women Who Were Girls When Their Mothers Died*, edited by Ann O'Fallon & Margaret Vaillancourt. Reda's CD of "fictional memoirs" titled *Mud, Blood, and Blackberries: Stories to Honor Our Ancestors* is now available. More info from Reda at redarack@sbcglobal.net

Memories, Milestones, and Memoirs: Selections from a Writing Workshop, edited by **Emily Rosen**, has been published. More info at: www.authorhouse.com/BookStore/ItemDetail.aspx?bookid=34188.

Nancy Rigg's piece, "Life and Death in the Flood Zone," was published in the 9/11/2005 Los Angeles *Daily News*, here: www2.dailynews.com/ci_3017727.

Shawn Alladio's rescue work in the flood zone along the Gulf Coast was written about in half a dozen news magazines.

Grammar Resources on the Web

Writers often have difficulty with the grammatical/mechanical aspects of writing. Here are some links that will help you polish your skills.

1. A list of proofreaders' marks: www.m-w.com/mw/table/proofrea.htm
2. Rules for using commas, with many helpful examples: grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar
3. Rules for capitalization: dictionary.reference.com/help/faq/language/c/capitalization.html
4. Rules for using quotation marks: grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar
5. Suggestions for combining sentences to avoid "primer style": grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar
6. Excellent source for grammar/style: grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar
7. Rules for using compound adjectives. Almost everybody needs a refresher course on this one! www.kentlaw.edu/academics/lrw/grinker/LwtaCompound_Adjectives.htm
8. Help with using the dash to set off material in the middle of your sentence. www.kentlaw.edu/academics/lrw/grinker/LwtaDashes.htm
9. Manuscript preparation. This article is written by a pair of pros and will answer your questions about what your fiction manuscript should look like. However, editors set their own requirements, so before you submit, you'll want to ask for the publication's Writers Guidelines: members.aol.com/asterling/poetry/guidelines.htm
10. If you have questions about copyright protection, here is all you need to know, and then some: www.whatiscopyright.org

Links compiled by Susan Wittig Albert. If you'd like to suggest a link, email it to Susan at china@tstar.net.

A Land Full of Stories, SCN's anthology of women's nature writing, has officially been accepted by the University of Texas Press. The book will be published in Spring, 2007, in a national launch. Editors are SCN members **Susan Albert, Susan Hanson, Jan Seale, and Paula Yost**. Nearly 100 writers have contributed to the book.

Sharon Blumberg's latest research has been published in the *Encyclopedia of Haunted Places* by Jeff Belanger. She wrote about Reeder Road in Griffith, Indiana.

Stephanie Barko's story "First Love" appeared in Animal Trustees of Austin's fall '05 newsletter, *The Animal Companion*. Her poem "Louise" appeared in the second issue of Ohio's *Releasing Times*.

Thank You!

These generous women contributed to SCN's 2005 annual campaign at the supporter level or above or renewed their memberships as a Supporter, Sponsor, Patron, or Benefactor. Thank you!

Jan Acker, Portland OR
Lucy Ann Albert, La Mesa CA
Susan Wittig Albert, Bertram TX
Penny Appleby, Austin TX
Pam Arthur, Austin TX
Adele Azar-Rucquoi, Sanford FL
Stephanie Barko, Austin TX
Duffie Bart, Santa Barbara CA
Emilie Betts, Norwalk CT
Sue Bisher, Kingsland TX
Bonnie Conwell, Roberts WI
Kathie Cool, Austin TX
Mary Jo Doig, Raphine VA
Marsha Fowler, Austin TX
Judith Helburn, Austin TX
Jazz Jaeschke, Austin TX
Stephanie Kadel-Taras, Ann Arbor MI
Nancy Malvin, Troy IL
Linda McAffrey, Ferguson MO
Debi Meyer, Austin TX
Peggy Moody, Austin TX
Maureen Murdock, Sausalito CA
Ann Murphy, Austin TX
Pat O'Toole, Sun City AZ
Patricia Pando, Bainbridge GA
Barbara Peters, San Antonio TX
EJ Phillips, Woodward OK
PJ Pierce, Austin TX
Reda Rackley, Carmel Valley CA
Donna Remmert, Austin TX
Mary Ann Reynolds, Austin TX
Leilani Rose, Austin TX
Jane Ross, Austin TX
Danelle Sasser, Austin TX
Jill Martin Seibert, Austin TX
Lisa Shirah-Hiers, Austin TX
Sr. Mary Sullivan, Highland Park NJ
Tot Talbert, China Spring TX
Juanita Weisbrich, Round Rock TX
Marcia Wooldridge, Lafayette IN
Heather Young, Frisco TX

Please let us know if we have omitted your name from this list so we can recognize you in the next *Journal* issue.

Mark Your Calendar

SCN Events and Deadlines

March 26: Austin Chapter Be Our Guest, Austin TX (free)

April 3: Susan Wittig Albert book signing at the Westlake TX Barnes and Noble, in conjunction with the SCN book fair all that week (April 3-9)

April 15: Schmooze the Muse one-day workshop: Night-Time Illuminations, Austin TX

May 13: Writing from Life one-day workshop, Austin TX

July 15: Susan Wittig Albert Lifewriting Contest entry deadline (SCN members only)

Oct. 6-8: LifeLines Writing Retreat, Wildacres NC

Oct. 21-22: Writing from Life weekend writing workshop, Austin TX

Events are open to all SCN members and other women interested in writing about their lives. Most events require registration (except free events). Check our website for registration details, place, and time. Our online calendar is at:

www.storycircle.org/calendar06.html

Story Circle Network
PO Box 500127
Austin TX 78750-0127

Raffle Winners!

Congratulations to these winners of SCN's Benefit Raffle. They each get to be a character in a Susan Wittig Albert novel:

1. Janet Balletto of Warwick, Rhode Island (Beatrix Potter)
2. Sharon Baehr of Diamond Bar, California (Robin Paige)
3. Melissa Grody of Waynesburg, Pennsylvania (China Bayles)