



Story Circle Journal

Volume 10 Number 3, September, 2006

The newsletter for women with stories to tell...

Be True To Your Innermost Self

*Nan Phifer is the author of the writing guide, *Memoirs of the Soul*. A presenter at the SCN Conference in February, Nan travels nationally to give memoir-writing workshops. When it comes to writing the truths about our lives, she encourages her students to write with what she calls "inventive interiority."*

A person's inner life, like the proverbial iceberg, is mostly unseen. How many of your friends and family know the longings you have felt? We seldom speak of them. Remembered prayers, as well as moments when our hearts surged with emotion or tears sprang into our eyes, are tucked away, out of sight, seldom revealed. The essence of who we are exists in a dimension beyond reach of the writers' debate about fact vs. fiction. Our intuitive responses, our impulses, our yearnings, and imaginings are our natural, naked selves. To write candidly about our inner lives is to write the truth.

We *are* our aspirations, our dreams, apprehensions, fantasies, even our misconceptions and lopsided perceptions, as well as the person who experiences certain actual events. We say *actual* events, but our dreams, longings, and imaginings are as actual as any external event, though they are out of sight, deep within us. They reside in the core of our being.

Swedish film director and writer, Ingmar Bergman, wrote in his memoir *The Magic Lantern* about an experience that never *actually* happened and yet was true. Bergman described a detailed scene of soft, quiet reconciliation with his elderly mother, shortly before her death. He imagined it. The reunion is what he wished had happened. It *actually* did happen in his mind and so became part of his experience.

As I rewrite my memoirs, a work in progress, I'll include my own inventive interiority. My external life is conventional, polite, modulated, and appears lacking in libido. With only a few confidantes do I speak of the feelings that pulse at the center of my being, but as I revise I'll follow advice I give to students. I tell them they're free to dramatize their personal narratives, license that gives hesitant writers freedom from personal criticism so they can reveal what they would otherwise hesitate to expose. To give myself similar liberty, I may label my memoir a novel.

We know that to describe scenes vividly we must provide sensory details and approximations of what was spoken. We must fabricate—not fabricate in the sense of to falsify—but to create in ways that stay true to the experience. I may begin my memoir with words such as: "As I begin to write this account, I relinquish my life, for I know that by recreating my story, my present memory of my experiences will eventually fade away, superseded by words that cannot precisely replicate what happened." No words can replicate lived experience. Documentation of the past is necessarily inventive. Eventually, the written version may replace the memory. I'll strain to peer back through the reconstructed version to the original.

(Continued on page 13)

*Congratulations to
the Winners of the
Susan Wittig Albert
2006 Lifewriting
Competition*

Pixie Paradiso (1st Place)
Sandra O'Briant
Lavon Urbonas
Gwen Hatley Whiting

Stories begin on page 3

In This Issue . . .

- Be True to Your Self...1*
- President's Letter...2*
- Writing Contest Winners....3*
- Successful Query Letters....8*
- Journaling for Professional
Growth...10*
- Meet Other Lifewriters:
Pat O'Toole...11*
- Take a Bow, Katherine
Misegades...14*
- Kitchen Table Stories...15*
- True Words from Real Women...17*
- Story Circle News Roundup...22*
- Circles—the Heart of SCN...23*
- Writing Workshops...24*
- LifeLines Retreats...25*
- Nature Writing Conference...26*
- The Back Page...28*

Letter from SCN's President



Your first lipstick! Do you remember? I certainly remember mine. It was a bright baby-girl pink in a gold case. My indulgent dad made a special trip to the Rexall Drugstore late on Labor Day afternoon so that I could make this important purchase. School started the next day. Junior high girls wore lipstick. How could I have forgotten? And, no, I was not about to borrow my sister's or, worse, my mom's. My first lipstick for the first day at Stephen F. Austin Junior High had to be new. It had to be my very own.

I thought about this the other day when a friend from those bygone Amarillo school days emailed me a picture. There she was, all those years ago, grinning into the do-it-yourself camera at Woolworth's, glamorous in her own first lipstick. She deserved it! She'd earned her lipstick money by mowing lawns, her message told me.

Lots of memories hover around September. For many of us, that was the beginning of the school year—a time of many new beginnings. Those time-to-start feelings return every year. Then, it was a pink felt skirt, crisp spiral notebooks, sharp yellow pencils, nervousness, and promises to myself (and my folks) that this year was going to be a straight-A year. Now, I look for something new to undertake or a return to some familiar endeavor that slipped by me during summer's lazy days.

If you are thinking about some new back-to-schoolish undertaking, Story Circle Network has plenty to offer. Circle members are busy writing and reading; many are eager to welcome a new member. There's not one nearby? Remember, Internet Chapter circles span the world. Or take an initiative and start a new circle.

Perhaps you are looking for a one-time experience? Story Circle has three great ones this fall. Robin Edgar will lead a LifeLines Retreat in North Carolina early in October, and Carolyn Blankenship has organized an outstanding Writing from Life two-day workshop in Austin later in the month. If you are looking for an online skill-honing experience we have that as well. Paula Yost will once again offer her online writing class. (I took it last spring—I know you'll relish the experience.) Learn about all of these on pages 24–25 of this *Journal* or on the SCN website (www.storycircle.org). While you are there sneak a peek at what will be coming up in March! Something grand!

I've made my September resolution. I'm going to write a letter to every Story Circle Network member. Watch for it! I'll thank you for being a member and supporting our organization. And, yes, I'll ask if you can help a little bit more either with time, financial support, or suggestions. We want to grow and help more and more women tell their stories and tell the world more of all of our stories. But I'll be asking more than that. I want to know what Story Circle Network means to you, how it has helped you grow and how we can do more. Look forward to hearing from me, and then, I'll look forward to hearing from you!

Patricia Pando

Patricia Pando
President, Story Circle Network

Our Contributing Editors



Mary Jo Doig
Lisa Shirah-Hiers
Linda Wisniewski
Patricia Pando (pictured above)

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

Announcing the Winners of SCN's Seventh Annual Writing Contest,

The Susan Wittig Albert Lifewriting Competition

Thirty-four SCN members entered this year's lifewriting competition. After two rounds of judging (involving 12 judges), four winners were selected. The entries were excellent, and the judges had a difficult time making selections. The subject of "facing the truth" was one that the writers felt passionately about, and passion has a way of producing good writing.

First Place Winner

The Cold Truth

Pixie Paradiso
Acton MA

In my anesthesia haze, I imagine the light boring through my eyelids is pinning me to the operating table like one of those hairless pigs I dissected in Honors Biology way back when. I can't squirm out from under the hard thing pressing against my right breast. It pulls my skin taut and then slices through. God help me.

"I'm going to give you a little more anesthesia," I hear Dr. Warner say.

It's cold in this room. My left leg is shaking of its own accord, a pale quivering lip. I want to reach down and hold it still. I can smell Dr. Warner's hands moving near my face. They smell of antiseptic and latex. The clang of sharp instruments on a metal tray reverberates between my ears.

"The tumor is deeper than I thought." It's Dr. Warner again. I can barely hear him now.

"Is that bad?" I want to ask, but my mouth won't form the words. Someone's cut the wiring between my brain and my face. I feel the hard thing scooping out more of my flesh. I remember yanking at the roots of the Wandering Jew choking out the lilies in my garden last summer. Then the memory softens around its edges and slides away from me.

I wake up half a day later in a plastic lounge chair the color of cooked oatmeal. A muddy pink basin like a kidney bean sits in my lap. What looks like half a clothespin is clipped to my right index finger. I'm finally wrapped in a warming blanket but I'm still shaking.

My husband Eric sits next to me flipping through the pages of *Sports Illustrated* and drumming his fingers on the edge of his chair. I try to shift my body in his direction. It seems to take about half an hour. "What did he say?" I ask, my tongue not quite fitting between my teeth.

Eric looks up at me. I notice how blue his eyes are. They're as blue as the sky the day we met. "Who?" he asks. There are fine lines around his eyes now. They weren't there before. Neither was the impatience in his tone.

"Dr. Warner," I say. Anxiety is worming its way into the

space behind my chest. How did this happen?

"He didn't say anything. He hasn't been by yet...hey, how much longer do you think we'll be here?" Eric checks his watch.

My mouth is dry and tastes like I've been sucking on rusty nails. I want some ice-chips. "Eric...do you think—"

Dr. Warner strides around the paisley curtain separating me from the next woman over. She's retching whatever's left inside her.

Dr. Warner takes my wrist between his thumb and forefinger. "Your heart was beating a little fast as you were coming out of anesthesia." He pauses. "It seems okay now." Dr. Warner drops my hand and looks down at a paper on his clipboard. "You're probably feeling it was a doozy," he says.

"A doozy?" What an odd way to characterize losing part of my breast.

Eric laughs. "He said you're probably still woozy."

Oh. "Yeah...I guess I am." I've been woozy since two weeks ago when I found the lump in the shower and a note from "S" in my husband's pants pocket on the same day.

"I brought the tumor to pathology myself," Dr. Warner says.

I'm not sure whether this belongs on the good or bad news side of the ledger and I'm too tired to ask. But I can tell by the way he says it that it's unusual. I have a ridiculous flash of him trotting down the hallway with a red ball pulsing and smoking on a silver tray.

"The pathologist didn't feel the need to do a frozen section. It doesn't look malignant." Dr. Warner puts his pen back in the pocket of his white lab coat. "You're going to die someday, young lady, but I'm certain it won't be from breast cancer." He smiles broadly. He's finished here.

I close my eyes. I just want to know. Please just tell me something for sure. The uncertainty is almost unbearable. "When will you have the path report?" I ask.

"Probably within the week," says Dr. Warner over his shoulder.

Four days later, I'm waiting on line at the grocery store, fishing in my bag for my keys when my cell phone rings.

I fumble it open and expect to hear my mother telling me she'll be late coming by to pick my daughter up for their annual birthday shopping spree.

Contest-Winning Stories

White Lies

Sandra O'Briant
Los Angeles CA

(Continued from page 3)

"There's no easy way to tell you this," Dr. Warner says. He sounds grave and apologetic.

I focus on the woman bagging my groceries. A short red thread is tangled in a buttonhole of her yellow sweater. Then I double over my shopping cart.

Dr. Warner tells me that he was wrong. I do have breast cancer. The lump I found in the shower turned out to be a stage-1 small (thank God), grade-3 nasty (oh, my God) malignant tumor.

"The inflammation around the tumor fooled me," Dr. Warner says. "Most cancers are hard to the touch and don't move around. Yours was spongy and mobile." He pauses. "I have to admit, though...it did look angry."

"Angry?" What am I to make of an angry tumor? Is my body pissed off at me? I sure as hell am pissed off at it. Or maybe it's given up on me expressing any dark emotion and has done it for me? Have I been sucking it up and acting the good girl for so long that my repressed anger morphed into a ball of mutant killer cells?

I'm sitting on the littered pavement beside my car, balancing the cell phone on my shoulder and pounding my head into my open palm. My groceries are wilting in the sun.

Dr. Warner is still talking, "There's little scientific evidence to back me up on this, but I believe this type of cancer in women as young as you is caused by stress."

Excuse me? I can't hold it in this time. "Stress caused my angry tumor? Why the hell didn't someone warn me not to get stressed or I'd end up with breast cancer? Isn't this something women should know? I mean...isn't this freakin' billboard material? Doesn't everyone have stress? I have two small kids, a full time job and a husband who I'm pretty sure is cheating on me. How can I not have stress? And one more thing...are you implying I did this to myself?" I stop because there's no air left in my lungs.

Dr. Warner can't wait to get off the phone now. He begins speaking in a soft, coddling tone...as if he's dealing with a psychotic mental patient. "You'll have to get yourself a breast surgeon and an oncologist. Call me if you need help finding one."

Out of habit, I dial Eric's number. I need him to tell me things will be okay. I get his voice mail. "Hi. It's Eric. Leave me..."

I put the phone down and hang my head between my knees. ❖

Pixie Paradiso is a very grateful and blessed breast cancer survivor. She lives just west of Boston and is an in-house attorney for a pediatric hospital. She has two wonderful daughters who challenge her to be the best she can be and who make every day a delight. Pixie is passionate about journaling and memoir writing. She fires up the computer just about every night after the girls go to bed. Maybe when they're eighteen she'll finally get some sleep.

My sister has been through two husbands, both tall and fair. There were children, one from each husband. They cheated on her, and she cheated on them. There was drinking. There were drugs. They slapped Charmaine around, and she was real sorry, and they always took her back. Or, she took them back. It depended on the whim of the week. They did this until it played out.

"Remember that time your dad came for a visit?" Charm said to me one day. She was in the hospital recovering from her latest beating. "I was around four."

I remembered, and felt guilty all over again. He'd come for my graduation from high school. His occasional presence always sent my brother and me into father-adoration hysteria. Some of it must have rubbed off on my little sister. Charm was the sweetest kid, shy and quiet, never a problem. She hung around my father's knees, staring at him adoringly, and asked, "Can I call you Daddy?"

"No," came his stern reply. Charm looked hurt, but she didn't cry. She never asked again, nor did she mention the incident, but the unraveling of my mother's past had been set in motion.

Her birth seven years after my parents' divorce had always needed some explaining. Back then, Mom had filled in the details in her own enigmatic way. "Your daddy thought you were beautiful," she'd say to Charm with a sigh. "But, he was a musician, and it just wasn't meant to be."

My brother and I accepted this version of the affair that produced my sister with few questions, even though Charm looks completely different from the rest of us. We're all tall blonds. Charm is petite and cinnamon-coffee dark with tightly curled blue-black hair.

"Your father was Sicilian," Mom said. We anxiously believed that somewhere below the boot of Italy, there was a whole flock of people who looked just like our sister.

"I want to find my real father," she said now, thirty-five years later.

We had the name of the man Mom claimed to be Charm's father. With the Internet, the rest was easy. So Charm called this guy, Sam Gianni in Michigan, and said she was his grown-up daughter in Santa Fe just calling to say Hi! Yes, he told her, he was a musician who had traveled there to play for the opera, but no, he was not aware of the birth of a daughter and what's more, he didn't remember our mother.

All hell broke loose at that point.

Sam's loss of memory regarding their affair hit Mom's vanity dead center. Her bedroom eyes snapped open, but turned hard and small in the depths. "Just like a man," she said. Her slipped feet pounded off in the direction of her room, but her shoulders slumped like the little old lady she is. She refused to discuss the matter further.

A few weeks later, we went out for drinks—my little sister, Mom, and I. While sitting at the bar together, Charm started begging for the truth. Again. "Who's my real father?"

she said. "Why won't you tell me?"

"I've got a confession to make," Mom said in her smokiest storytelling voice. "Around 1963, when I was bartending at the El Corral...something happened." She took a slow puff of her cigarette, drawing in deeply since it's a low tar brand, her only concession to the Surgeon General's report.

"Business was slow," she continued on the exhale. The nimbus of smoke surrounding the three of us excluded everyone else at the bar; we were in our mother's world now. "I locked up early to get a head start on inventory. I was in the backroom when I heard a noise behind me." She paused here, and looked Charm right in the eye.

"A man was standing there. A black man. He said not to be afraid, that he wouldn't hurt me if I didn't scream. He emptied the cash register...and then he raped me." Charm and I gasped.

Mom looked pleased. "I had been with Sam earlier that day. So, you see, I really don't know who your real father is." Charm stared at Mom, her mouth slightly open.

It could have happened like this. Or maybe not. Mom's older sister, who was seventy-eight last year, and the family informer, told on her. "Your mother was dating a black guy back then. I don't know why she can't admit it." My aunt tapped her fingers and stared off into space. "He played the saxophone at the jazz club."

Sam the Sicilian's instrument was the violin.

Mom doesn't understand why it's so important to Charm to know her father. "I was the one who took care of her," she told me. In my mother's world, the fathers and the truth are always expendable. "I know you all think I'm a bad mother," she added, a question beneath her armor.

"No, Mom, it's not that we think you're a bad mother," I said. "It's that we think you're a bad liar."

That day in the hospital with my sister, I remembered another incident from our shared past. In 1968, Charm was five, and I was home for a weekend from college. My brother and I, along with our little sister, had driven over to a shopping center to buy shoes. A demonstration for Black Power was in progress in the parking area. A lot of that went on in those days.

As I helped Charm down from the car, a tall, very thin, and very dignified, Afro-haired young black man stepped apart from the crowd and approached us. He was carrying a stack of leaflets with various slogans printed on it. Ignoring my brother and me, he stooped low and handed Charm one of the papers.

"Here you go, sister," he said to her.

My brother and I laughed, standing there in the hard sunlight. My memory is an unrelenting snapshot: our heads tilted back in the same way, our blond hair and strong teeth gleaming mercilessly bright above the rare blue-black luster of our sister's curly-topped head. We laughed back then, looking into each other's eyes, and never told Mom, nor kept the memory alive for Charm.

No father ever came to claim Charmaine.

No son of Sicily, memory restored and classically trained, arrived to lift my sister's spirit on lofty waves of Bach or

Mozart. No ebony patriarch appeared to teach my sister about her roots, dark and deep, black pride reverberating on the complex notes of his sax.

"Black is beautiful, sister," he could have told her. "Take pride." ❖

Sandra Ramos O'Briant's work has appeared in *Café Irreal* and *Best Lesbian Love Stories of 2004*, and is included in *What Wildness Is This: Women Write about the Southwest* (University of Texas Press, Spring 2007), and *Latinos in Lotus Land: An Anthology of Contemporary Southern California Literature* (Bilingual Press, 2007). Excerpts from her first novel, *The Secret of Old Blood: The Sandoval Sisters*, have appeared in *La Herencia*, *FriGG*, and *The Copperfield Review*. Her book reviews have been published on *La Bloga* and *Moorishgirl*. Please visit her at www.sramosobriant.com.

Duplicity

Lavon Urbonas
Rancho Cucamonga CA

Kate worked quietly. She didn't want to disturb John. He had been sleeping all evening in preparation for his long drive to Boston. Now that the children were tucked in for the night, Kate felt it was safe to go about her business with no interruptions, no little eyes to see and no little mouths to tell.

She opened the trunk of the 1950 Rambler. There was plenty of space for the picnic basket she had packed full of his favorite snacks. It fit next to the duffel bag, the one John had used in the Air Force. The plan was for Kate and the children to take the train and join him in Boston after he found an apartment. She had packed the duffel bag full of clothing for herself and the children in order to lighten the baggage she would be taking on the train. After his summer training session, the family would travel back to California together by car. She opened the bag and added an extra pair of jeans for Jimmy and a sun suit for Lisa.

Staring at the dim light in the car trunk, Kate pictured John driving solo across country. He kept the ten-year-old sedan in good shape, and he was a good driver; she wasn't concerned about his safety. *He'll make it OK. This will be good for us, I suppose, being away from one another for a little while. It hasn't been easy this last year. Even the kids seem to sense we're not the same somehow.* She opened his suitcase. *I hope we can recapture something—whatever it is we've lost—on our trip this summer.*

Kate reached into her apron pocket and pulled out a small book—a lavishly illustrated love poem she had found when last browsing through the bookstore. On the flyleaf she had written, "For my husband, with hope for our future and with all the love I know how to give." She tucked it under his white shirts.

What in the world...? Under the shirts was a stack of envelopes held together with a rubber band. They had not been mailed; each one simply had his first name on it in cursive

(Continued on page 6)

More Contest-Winning Stories

(Continued from page 5)

writing. She picked them up cautiously. *That looks something like Jenny's handwriting...*

Kate removed the rubber band and put it around her wrist. She took the letter from the first envelope with a sense of foreboding and, holding it near the trunk light, began to read. "My darling John, Can it be true that last night was our last meeting for three whole months? I think I won't be able to stand it until you return." In dazed disbelief, Kate didn't want to look at the signature, but she couldn't stand not to. She turned the page over. "Jenny!" she gasped. The sound echoed in her head and around the garage as if she had yelled it into a canyon, and she wondered if the whole neighborhood had heard her.

Suddenly fearful of being caught—as a child she was taught that nice people don't read other people's mail—she refolded the letter carefully and returned it to the envelope. One was enough. She counted the rest—twenty-three—resecured them with the rubber band and replaced them beneath the stack of white shirts. She, too, seemed to want them hidden. But the shirts could not cover up what she had read. Neither could the suitcase lid, nor the car trunk lid. Just before closing the trunk, Kate removed the book and the duffel bag, then stashed them in the kitchen pantry.

I should have recognized the signs. She thought of the other women who had attracted him—several girls in high school who were prettier than she, the sexy college coed who pursued him even though he was married, his sister's coquettish friend whose flirtation titillated him. *But why Jenny? And why would Jenny do this to me? Talk about a double cross! Why...?* She couldn't unravel whose betrayal cut more deeply, her husband's or her best friend's. The timer on the oven pronounced sentence; it was time to awaken John.

Kate put the lamb chops in the broiler, checked herself in the mirror and went into the bedroom. They had shared several bedrooms over their eleven-year marriage, but this one in the suburbs of Los Angeles they had shared for only one year. They were here so that John could attend the theological seminary. He was also serving as Christian Education Director at the local Community Church where Jenny was the choir director. Kate sang in the choir. She had admired Jenny's musical talents and looked upon her as a mentor of sorts in this new church and community to which Kate and John had come as strangers. Jenny, at forty-five, was fifteen years older than John, plumpish and—now that Kate thought about it—a bit frumpy. Jenny and Sam had four children. As families they spent a lot of time together, and the two women became close friends—or so Kate had believed.

Taking a deep fortifying breath, Kate sat down on her side of the bed and shook John gently. "Hey, mister, it's time to get up." This was her usual way of waking him. "Soup's on, and then it's time to hit the road." He groaned. She left the bedroom before he was completely awake, not wanting to confront him with the evidence she had discovered in his

suitcase. Right now it seemed that his being far away—from her and from Jenny—was the best thing. No, she couldn't talk to him about it now. Not now. If they started spilling their feelings tonight, John would miss his entire three-month pastoral internship and then be late for September classes. *And I need time to think.*

Kate removed the wine glasses from the table. Drinking a toast tonight no longer fit the occasion. And she didn't want to dampen her defenses. John came into the kitchen in his unbelted bathrobe, blonde hair boyishly tousled, still drowsy, yawning and stretching and scratching his head. *I wonder if Jenny has ever seen him like this.*

During dinner Kate was grateful for the dim candlelight and that John was too bleary-eyed to see through her forced smile. It was his favorite dinner: lamb chops, mushrooms, asparagus, popovers and lemon meringue pie. These were ingredients they could ill afford, but she had rationalized that this was a special occasion. Instead, it was a discomfiting tête-à-tête, neither being eager to engage the other in dicey conversation.

At midnight they said their tepid goodbyes. "I'll see you and the kids in a couple of weeks," was John's last remark. *Don't be too sure,* she thought. His Rambler pulled out of the driveway. Kate stood there motionless long after he was out of sight, finally, grudgingly, acknowledging a sense of relief at seeing him go. Alone in the warm California summer night, she shivered. She had never felt so cold and empty and bereft in all her twenty-nine years. ❖

Lavon Urbonas is a retired Registered Dietitian, having worked primarily with senior citizens. Now she is trying to find the time to write about something other than food and nutrition. She contributes an Ask the Dietitian column to the Pomona, Calif., senior center newsletter. Mother of two and grandmother of two, she would like to leave captivating memoirs for them. Creative writing is a hobby. Two of her stories have appeared in the *Pomona Valley Review*; one in *Growing up on Memory Lane*, published by Small Town USA; and several, she's proud to say, in the *Story Circle Journal*.

The Interloper

Gwen Hatley Whiting

Marietta GA

She was coming next week, my parents said. She would stay in my room, they said. I must clear a drawer for her, they said. They had said enough. I didn't say a word. I just walked out the door giving it a little slam. All the way across the back yard and down into the pasture I walked, muttering to myself. Well, I might have to give her my room but I don't have to like it or her! She wasn't going to make me like her, no matter what!

She was my great Aunt Ann, my father's youngest aunt, coming to visit us from her home in Texas. I had never met her, even on our trips to Texas to visit Granny, because she lived in another part of Texas, many miles away. Daddy

thought she was special. He told stories about her piano playing ability. She could play anything, he would tell us, because she could play music “by ear.” So what, I grumbled. Who cares?

I was just ten years old. After years of sharing a room with my three sisters, I had just moved into a room of my own. Now, this “aunt” person was coming to take it all away from me. Mom said it was because my bedroom was the closest to the bathroom. I told her that was the reason she shouldn’t be in my room. The smell and noise from flushing toilets was really awful. Mom didn’t buy my logic. The worst part was that I now had to sleep in my youngest sister’s twin bed with her, and I would never hear the end of it. This all just stunk and I didn’t care who knew it, in a quiet sort of way, of course. Mom didn’t mind if we didn’t like something, but she didn’t want to hear about it more than once. Then we were supposed to keep it to ourselves and work it out.

I was starting to feel a little guilty. Maybe I shouldn’t be so selfish. I know I should be nice to her, but, darn it, I am always the one who has to be good, and nice to everyone, even when my other sisters were being brats! I suppose if I keep this up I’ll have to go to confession, I thought, being a good Catholic girl and all. Unfortunately, you are supposed to be sorry when you tell the priest your sins and I wasn’t sorry at all. I kept thinking of all the little things I had done to fix up my room, arranging everything in just the right place. Now, she was going to mess it all up. There’s not much I can do about it, I guess, but I’m not going to like it.

She arrived the next Sunday. Everyone made a great fuss over her and that made me a little sick. When my mom introduced us, Aunt Ann smiled at me. I just looked down at my shoes and mumbled, “Hello.” Mom showed her to her room. It is not her room, I thought. It is my room! I was walking away when she said, “Gwen, honey, would y’all show me your room? I know if this was my room, I’d have a hard time sharing it with some old aunt from Texas.” I looked up at her, suspiciously, to see if she was smiling that “grown-up” smile that said, “I’ve got you all figured out.” It wasn’t there, that smile, she just seemed to be waiting. Well, I wasn’t going to give in that easily. I quickly showed her where her drawer was and where to hang her clothes in the closet. Then I said I’d better go help Momma. I didn’t want to stay too long with her; she might say something nice.

Avoiding the house and all the fuss over Aunt Ann became my mission for the day. I rode my bicycle, climbed trees, hiked around the pasture, swang on the swings—anything to keep from having to go in the house and be nice. From my perch in the barn window, I could see the flurry of activity through the now light-filled windows of the house; all in the service of this interloper. This was a new word I had just read in a book and was trying on for size. I thought it worked nicely. As I sat stewing and building my case against liking my aunt, I heard some music floating out of the house. At first, it was a trilling of notes and a few tentative chords. Suddenly, strains of a rousing ragtime medley came bursting forth. I recognized these songs as favorites of my mom and dad.

You have to understand something about me. I love music

of all kinds. All through my childhood, music was my solace and the expression of all things vital and alive inside of me. If she had been a real witch instead of one only in my imagination, she could not have chosen a better spell to weave around me, to pull me under her spell.

As though by an invisible and gentle tether, those magical notes pulled me slowly out of my hideaway, across the yard and into the music filled house. I couldn’t believe it. No one else was anywhere to be found, only Aunt Ann, sitting at the piano, eyes closed, hands like water over pebbles in a brook, first bouncing and jumping then smooth, silky waves of movement. Her body swayed slightly as her foot gently tapped to the beat she created.

I couldn’t stop myself. With eyes wide, I hesitantly approached the side of the piano, mesmerized by the sound and sight and beauty of the music. She saw me then, and I started to turn away to avoid the expected rebuff. After all, I had spent the whole day trying to show her how unwelcome she was in my life. She didn’t frown or turn away. She just smiled and let her eyes fall to the empty half of the piano bench beside her. When she looked up she winked and went back to her music without missing a beat. It was all the invitation I needed. I moved over to the bench and slid on, careful not to bump those magical hands.

We sat there for what seemed like hours, my aunt and I. And some part of every day of her visit found us sitting next to each other on that hard piano bench. Sometimes we’d sing; seldom did we speak. The music was what we shared.

I couldn’t figure out a way to tell her how sorry I was for being mean when she first arrived. What if I told her and she hadn’t noticed. Then I would have to explain what I was talking about; an embarrassing prospect to be sure. What if I reminded her and she stopped wanting me to sit with her while she played; too dangerous a thought to consider. Instead, one morning I slipped out early and picked some violets. I arranged them in a jelly jar and when she wasn’t in her room, sneaked them onto her bedside table.

That visit was the last time I ever saw my Aunt Ann. She never mentioned those flowers to me, but I’ll always remember her, sitting tall and straight at that piano, making her wonderful music, with the little jelly jar of violets sitting jauntily at the end of the keyboard. ❖

Gwen Hatley Whiting writes: I am woman, partner, mother, nurse, educator, writer, friend, daughter and more. Currently, I teach Psychiatric/Mental Health Nursing at Kennesaw State University. I have been a nurse for 35 years and in private practice as a grief counselor for 25 of those 35 years. I have always written, and dreamed of writing more, but never tried to write professionally until now. I am a member of the Zona Rosa writing group in Atlanta, Georgia, and try to attend as many writer’s conferences as I can. I live in a woodland aerie in Marietta, Georgia, a recent transplant from the Chicago area of Illinois. I have two grown children, who are the joy of my life, a husband who is wise, passionate and patient, and a loving, if slightly quirky family

Publishing Our Stories

Ten Tips for a Successful Query Letter

Linda C. Wisniewski reveals a few of the secrets to success that have helped her publish dozens of freelance articles over the past few years.

Want to increase your odds of becoming a successful freelance writer? Would you spend ten minutes to find out how? If you answered yes, congratulations! You've taken the first step to writing success.

Does the above paragraph look a little different from what you usually read in the Story Circle Journal? That's because it is. I've written it as if I were sending a query to *Story Circle Journal* editor Jane Ross, pitching my idea for an article on how to write a query letter.

Now take a look at this paragraph:

My name is Linda C. Wisniewski. I live in Doylestown, PA and have two grown children. I have worked as a librarian and I love to write, although I'm still a beginner. I have written some stories and now I want to write about query letters for your magazine.

A bit tedious, isn't it? I've written dozens of articles, but that doesn't impress an editor if I can't get to the point about what I'm offering them today. Editors want articles that sell their magazines, and most don't want to use the same writers over and over. They're always looking for a fresh voice. But before they get to your name and credentials, they want to know what you can do for them.

Here are some tips that have worked for me:

1. Research the magazine first. Read article titles and ads to get an idea of their demographic. Are the readers young women, retired, businesspeople? Look at the ads or the section of their website for advertisers for clues.
2. Read the writer's guidelines on the Web. If they're not obvious, sometimes you can find them on their website under "Contact Us." Otherwise send a SASE (self-addressed stamped envelope) with your snail mail request. And follow these guidelines. If they say they want 800 words, don't send them 1200.
3. Address your query letter to the editor by name and spell it correctly. You can often get the name from the magazine website, or call the phone number on the masthead of the magazine.
4. Keep your query to one page, says SCN's Lisa Shirah-Hiers, a successful freelance writer. This will show your writing style is succinct and lively. Lisa also says, in an email query, don't use "Query letter" as the subject line. It tells the busy editor nothing. Use your proposed title instead: "Ten Tips for Writing Your Life Story for the Work at Home section of the Fall issue."
5. Get a copy of the *AP Style Book* and follow its rules for

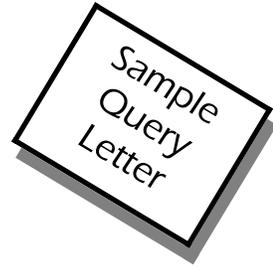
punctuation, spelling and grammar in your letter. It's the standard for most newspapers and magazines and shows that you are savvy, even if this magazine has variations of their own.

6. Write an eye-catching lead paragraph (the "hook") that reads like the blurbs in the table of contents of the magazine.
7. The second paragraph is your "pitch." This is where I put the word count (it shows I read their guidelines), who I will interview, key points covered and when I can have it in their hands. If you do this well, even if it's not quite what the editor wants, she may get back to you with a request for something similar. For example, I pitched a story about a mystery readers' convention emphasizing that Mary Higgins Clark was a keynote speaker. The editor of *Active Times* wanted a story about the people who attended the convention—middle-aged and older mystery readers—as a destination-type article. Using bullet points makes your pitch easy to read and helps you outline your story. Offer a "sidebar" like the little lists in *USA Today* and popular magazines, and offer digital photos if you can get them. You can save the editor time if you can do this too.
8. Put your credentials at the end. Do not use phrases like "I've never been published before," or "This will be my first article." If your pitch does its job, it doesn't matter if it's your first or your ninety-first article. Unless the editor is your mother, you won't get the assignment on sympathy.
9. Send "clips" if you have them, i.e., copies of published articles, especially if they are on similar topics. For example, I don't send my memoir pieces to information trade journals. In that case, I would just state my credentials. For example, "I have twenty years' experience doing research...."
10. Keep the closing brief and clear and state that you expect a reply. For example, "Thanks for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon." Give the editor a few weeks to respond, then follow up with a note or phone call. My query to *The Quilter* got lost on the editor's desk. When I called her after a month, she asked me to send the query again and assigned me the article.

The sidebar to the article you're reading is an example of a query letter that worked for me (see facing page). Of course, yours will be in your own style and voice. But don't worry. Writing them gets easier with practice.

And the result of all this preparation? You'll get to write about subjects important to you and to send your words out in the world, touching the lives of people you may never meet. ❖

Linda C. Wisniewski
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(215) 222-2222
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July 6, 2005

Laurette Koserowski, editor, *The Quilter*
All American Crafts, Inc.
7 Waterloo Rd.
Stanhope NJ 07874

PASSING ON THE COMFORT

The Quilts and the Women Who Made a Difference

During the next three years, nineteen historic quilts will tour the U.S. and Canada, returning to some of the communities where they were made during World War II.

Dear Ms. Koserowski:

In 1980, an American woman discovered the quilts in a Dutch farmhouse and found the owner, a woman whose inspiring story will warm the hearts of your readers. An Keuning-Tichelaar saved lives and comforted refugees with quilts sent to Europe by the Mennonite Central Committee in the U.S. and Canada. This quiet woman is a testament to the power of compassion and individual acts of courage by ordinary people.

Lynn Buller, the young woman who found An and her quilts, has written a book about them called *Passing on the Comfort*. "A quilt is a blanket with a heartbeat," says Lynn. When you read their story, I think you'll agree.

I'd like to write a feature story for *The Quilter Magazine* with the following elements:

- ✓ Interview with Lynn Buller on her friendship with An,
- ✓ Interviews with MCC quilters on the WWII project,
- ✓ Stories from the wartime adventures of An.

Sidebars on:

-  Tour schedule of the quilts for 2005 and 2006
-  Contact information for the Mennonite Central Committee
-  Patterns used in the quilts

I would be happy to provide photos to your specifications. I've enclosed a few clips of my work and a SASE for your reply. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Linda C. Wisniewski

An invitation to all SCN members and especially to those who have never sent a query letter but would like to try.

If you have an idea for an **informative** article that you feel would be of interest to the readers of *Story Circle Journal*, study Linda's tips and send us a query letter to journaleditor@storycircle.org or to the editorial address on p. 2.

In each issue of the *Journal* we have room for one or maybe two articles proposed by readers. While we can't promise to use every proposal that comes to us, we will treat every query with all respect and in a timely manner. And we'll give you feedback that we hope will help you as you work towards publishing in the mainstream press.

Linda Wisniewski lives in Doylestown, Pa. She has been a frequent guest contributor to the *Journal* and has now joined the *Journal's* group of Contributing Editors.

Journaling

Journaling for Professional Growth

A Spanish teacher of 15 years in her hometown of Munster, Ind., SCN member Sharon Blumberg discovered that journaling can be a powerful tool for self-reflection and personal growth in her profession.

The article that gave me the idea of journaling about my profession was “A Gardener’s Journal,” by Carl H. Klaus, which appeared in the August 2000 issue of *Personal Journaling* magazine. Klaus wrote, “In every one of my entries, I try to take stock not only of the plants, the weather and other circumstances, but also of my immediate thoughts and feelings—for the garden, after all, cannot be separated from the gardener.” This same process can be easily applied to any profession.

In all journal writing, we seek to answer the basic questions of who, what, where, when and why, at an unconscious level. A professional journal entry is different from a personal journal entry only in that the writer focuses on events and feelings that are directly related to one’s job. Just as the personal journal helps us grow and develop as a person, a professional journal helps us grow and develop in our profession.

I was a late bloomer with my teaching career. I had taught for a few years before I chose to stay home for eight years to raise my two fine children. In 1992, I was yanked from freedom’s womb as I returned to the world of teaching. I obtained a position to teach Spanish and Language Arts at a junior high. This is where my first lifewriting took shape. A disastrous first year of teaching forced me to turn to writing to reflect on what had gone wrong:

“It was not until after my first evaluation, nine weeks into the school year, did I discover how poorly behaved my classes were. Subsequently, the principal and I worked together to develop management strategies. My later evaluations were much improved, but not enough. . . . my teaching contract was not renewed. Why I was so devastated and shocked I will never know, but I was, and still very determined to teach.”

The following fall I failed to obtain a teaching job. This was one of the lowest points in my career. So I signed up to substitute teach for the local public schools and some day care centers. On one assignment at a day-care center, there was a sad-looking baby with sniffles and a mournful whimper. He appeared to be around ten months of age. My journal records the experience: “I gently cradled him in my arms as he peacefully drifted off to sleep. I felt as if we were one being, . . . both of us presently misplaced from our desired destinies and longing to be someplace else.”

In the fall of 1995, I accepted my current position of seventh-grade Spanish teacher. Over these years I have faced many challenges and triumphs. This past year was a significant milestone in my career because I had completed ten years at this junior high school. Last fall, since I had moved into a refurbished classroom that looked like new, I was given a new desk to accompany the new decor. I truly felt as if I

were starting a new chapter in my teaching career. In addition, I took on new responsibilities in the school as a teacher leader. I wrote in my journal:

“As I watched the custodians load my dilapidated old desk of a decade into a moving cart and wheel it away, I could feel something new and exhilarating in the air. Excitement stood before me as my new desk awaited me.”

With the start of the school year, I started writing my professional goals, as a form of self-evaluation, and this led me to start journaling in earnest for my profession.

Upon the first few days of the school year for the fall of 2005, the principal and superintendent visited our classrooms. They wanted to welcome us all to the new school year. In my journal, I wrote:

“As they entered my classroom, the superintendent stood transfixed by my 25 homeroom students. The students sat in silence without moving a muscle. The superintendent commented in amazement, ‘What wonderful seventh graders you have!’ Then my principal exclaimed, ‘Very nice, Mrs. Blumberg!’ Then the two exited the classroom together This all felt so surreal to me, like a dream but a good one at that.”

As the year progressed, I kept separate binders and notebooks for different topics. For example, I had a journaling binder for classroom management notes and a separate journal book on my first view of Spain as a Spanish teacher, last summer. And I wrote two kinds of entries. In my classroom management binder, under each core class, an event with a specific date attached to it became a “dated entry.” An “event entry” was a generalized statement such as, “At the end of the year I allowed my students, on a rotating system, to participate by serving as ‘Maestros.’ This helped to make my classes more exciting. This is when the students, instead of myself, called on their classmates for the answers to their homework, while showing the answers on the overhead.”

These different notebooks and kinds of entries can all be intertwined later to create one’s professional memoir. Writing a professional memoir is a way for the journal writer to look at how far she has grown as a result of her experiences. This could serve as a form of therapy and catharsis. Published memoirs of this sort can serve as a wonderful reservoir of resources for the aspiring professional in training.

Teaching seventh grade continues to have its victories and challenges, but journaling for professional growth has been very therapeutic for me. Even though much time has passed since I traveled those unpaved highways of the novice teacher, I often reflect on what I learned along the way. My journals help me to see the real professional growth that I have achieved. ❖

Meet other lifewriters and learn from their stories

Pat O'Toole: A Time to Dance

When Pat O'Toole attended the SCN Stories from the Heart Conference in February this year, she brought with her a copy of her autobiography, A Time to Dance. A fascinating and delightful mix of reminiscences, stories from her life, and scrapbook items, Pat's 420-page self-published memoir captivated those of her fellow Story Circlers who got a chance to dip into it. The title of the book refers to Pat's lifelong love of dance and her career, which she shared with her husband Weldon, as a dance teacher.

The Journal interviewed Pat by email to find out more about this spirited woman, her life, and her writing.

SCJ. *Tell us briefly where you were born and raised and a few of the places you lived.*

Pat O'Toole. Being an "Army Brat," I was born at Ft. Devans, Massachusetts (now an industrial complex near Boston). We lived in the Panama Canal Zone for my first few years of school. After the tropics, we experienced freezing weather at Ft. Ontario, New York. My dad was sent to Ft. McKinley in the Philippine Islands for three years. (This trip undoubtedly started my travel hobby.) I graduated from Sturgis High School, South Dakota, where my dad retired. Mother chose our next home in Columbus, Ohio, to be near her family—at last!

SCJ. *How did your interest in writing and memoir start out?*

Pat. I had been an avid scrap-booker since a little girl and had also kept journals during various phases of my life. The news editor of our Tustin paper in Orange County, Calif., always printed my breezy stories about various ballroom dance groups. His wife became president of our women's club and I became her Press and Publicity Chairman.

When my two daughters were quite young, I became addicted to Contesting. I gained a lot of experience trying out all sorts of writing forms in contest entries. My writing "career" as press chairman for the Women's clubs and dance clubs gave me opportunity for further experimentation in writing news columns. Having won a few contest prizes for limericks or sentence endings on "why I use Rinso..." I was determined to win the contest for the most club newspaper column inches about federation club activities. It was a big thrill for our women's club when we won the top prize! I continued to be a "dilettante writer" through the years.

SCJ. *What prompted you to turn your life writings into a book?*

Pat. Having been challenged by many Orange County, Calif., golf courses—my husband suggested we move to Sun City, Arizona, a fabulous retirement community of nearly fifty thousand people—and many golf courses. They have clubs for practically every activity. I joined all the tap, hula, and line dancing classes and eventually one in memoir writing. I attended more writing groups—and wrote spasmodically. As the Millennium approached I set a goal to complete my autobiography, titled *A Time to Dance*, by my July 4th birthday in 2000. After the book was printed and sent to family and friends, there was a void in my life. Luckily, I discovered Story Circle Network.

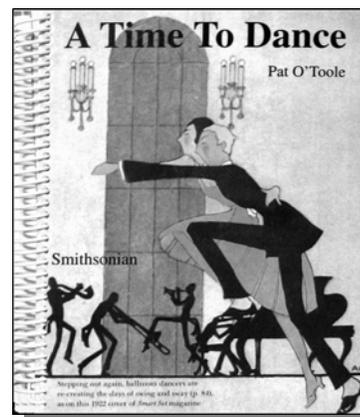
SCJ. *How did your plans for writing your book develop? Who encouraged you in the writing of it?*

Pat. I felt I had led an interesting life. I had a strong belief that the world was changing so rapidly that 50 years from now my little bit of history would be of interest, and I encourage my daughters to record as much as they can. I attended three different writing groups and definitely feel that a group helps to keep a writer motivated. Usually everyone looked forward to reading her memoir gems to a "captive audience." Each had a unique story, written different ways, and we learned from each other's style of writing.

(Continued on page 12)



It may have been Alex Haley who offered words to the effect, "When an old person dies, a library burns down." I hope this capsulized "library" of my life will be a source of enlightenment and entertainment to all my readers.
—Pat O'Toole



(Continued from page 11)

I had an older sister who had been at many events I mention in the book. We discussed our memories from time to time, or I would telephone her to churn up some details I had forgotten.

SCJ. How long did it take you to put together the 400+ pages of material?

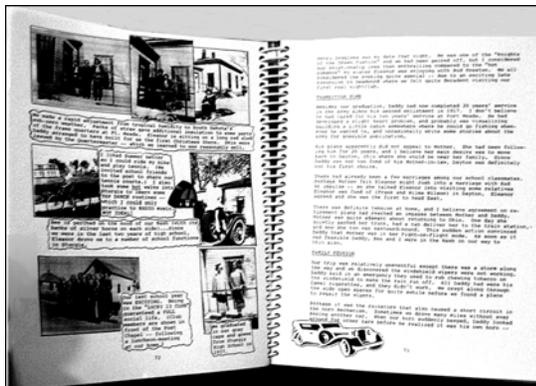
Pat. It was accomplished over a five-year period. Sometimes I took trips and quit writing for months. But I forced myself to keep returning, to join another group and start again. Since I had secretarial training, I felt I had a more personal interest in typing, editing, and proofreading. Meanwhile an old newspaper process called “half-toning” enhanced older photos. (Print shops have much to offer.) Photos, cartoons, and other materials were selected and enhanced as writing progressed.

SCJ. Who was the audience you had in mind for your book?

Pat. My younger sister was deceased before I began to write. I felt her children would enjoy knowing as much about their mother as I could remember to tell them. Due to the expense of having 30 copies of my book printed, I only gave copies to the people most important to me. I tried to keep my prolific verbiage under control, but my travel stories used a lot of space, so my 400+ pages surpassed others in my writing group. (One succinct woman settled for just 28 pages.) I lend my four “circulating copies” to friends, keeping track of where each book has gone. Occasionally I may have to call and remind them to return my book and can only express regret that I have no books for sale or gifts.

SCJ. Do you have any aspirations to sell the book more widely?

Pat. No movie company has approached me asking to film the story of my life, yet! Seriously though, I don’t have any further aspirations for the book—although it was one of my most worthwhile life accomplishments. I completed that phase over five years ago, and have moved on to new challenges. Also, it would be necessary to separate my writing from decorations because lots of that material is under copyright. I



would have to obtain copyright permission if I considered a commercial endeavor instead of just using the pizzazz decorations for my own friends and family.

SCJ. Reading your account of the social life you had during the war, I was reminded of some of the World War II movies full of handsome young men in uniform and pretty flirtatious bubbly girls, the kind of movies made to boost morale for the war effort. Did it feel like you were living in one of those movies?

Pat. Yes, I was definitely living in one of those movie-like atmospheres. I joined the War Effort at Wright-Patterson Airfield in Dayton, Ohio. There was hardly a more exciting place to meet lots of servicemen than there. I shared an apartment with two other girls, and it was called “Club 565” by two brothers we knew from our hometown of Columbus. Between the three girls we had lots of servicemen taking us out or visiting our apartment. We often played Charades and the house served the “in” drink of the day, Rum and Coca Cola. And yes, the horrors of war were relatively distant for me. My dad was not in the Army due to a heart condition, and I only had my sisters’ husbands’ to be concerned about. I tried to boost their morale by writing reams of letters. It was exciting to receive so much real mail and “V-mail” [“Victory Mail,” which was shipped overseas as microfilm] instead of junk, back then. I was also writing to my West Point friend and had the great opportunity of visiting him at West Point for June Week!

SCJ. After the war ended, a turning point in your young adult life was the strike by dance teachers at the Arthur Murray Dance Studio where you taught dance in your twenties. It seemed like this changed and matured you quite suddenly.

Pat. It was not just that incident. Both of my sisters had married servicemen and moved away. I was suddenly the only daughter at home. I didn’t want my mother’s apron strings to bind me too tightly—so I decided to stay in Washington, D.C., after a vacation there. It was necessary to obtain a secretarial job until Washington’s Arthur Murray Studio had a teacher opening. I think the whole breaking-away-from-home process matured me.

SCJ. You were so fortunate to find Weldon O’Toole as a partner who shared your love of dance, your fun-loving spirit and entrepreneurial flair. How did you cope with losing him after 42 years of marriage?

Pat. My husband, Weldon, was a spiritual searcher. I went along on the search and gained my own faith. We had often discussed the fact that when one departed the world first, the other must go forward and continue to enjoy life. As a widow who loved dancing, that’s what I did. It was not difficult to find enthusiastic dance partners. Within a year I lucked out by meeting My Best Friend George and have been traveling and dancing with him ever since.

SCJ. *If you had any advice for our members who are thinking of writing a memoir similar to yours, what would you tell them?*

Pat. Writing a whole book is an overwhelming experience. Don't think whole book. Think about fun chapters. Write the happiest vignettes first. Trickle the other more mundane parts in to pull it all together later. Keep writing. Think: "Life is hard by the yard—but it's a cinch by the inch." Then just keep writing fun-happy and not-so-happy events inch-by-inch. Next thing you know you can have a printer bind them all together. Your family and friends will love you. That movie mogul might even want to make a movie out of your life!

SCJ. *Is there anything else you would like to tell our members about yourself and your writing?*

Pat. My teacher-daughter suggested I start journaling again and to try poetry. I'm having a wonderful challenge learning all the things I never knew about poetry. I'm in Jazz's Poetry E-circle 4, sharing email with a wonderful group of women. If any Story Circle members would like to question me about my memoir-writing experiences, write to patotoole7@aol.com and brighten my day!

Cheerio!

—Email interview conducted and edited by Jane Ross

Nan Phifer: Be True to Your Innermost Self

(Continued from page 1)

Our selection of subjects from among many autobiographical events is an inventive part of the writing process. I certainly won't waste time on uninteresting data, the sort of dry information listed on passports and résumés. I'll go straight to the experiences most meaningful to me, the times when my heart banged, times when I lay awake at night whether from terror or lust, times when tears stained my prayers, times when I wondered how I could live through the coming day. The events I'll choose to recall are not the ones my mother would choose; in fact she wouldn't recognize me from my selection. She would probably say, "This is not *my* daughter!" and that's okay.

As we write the stories of our lives we'll probably give more space to the things we've said and done than to our feelings and thoughts, for it is in doing and saying that we define ourselves. However, the inner life should be included because it is the heart of our stories, the vitalizing force, and it's an inventive part of ourselves that is incontestably true. ❖

Nan Phifer lives in Eugene, Ore. She invites you to visit her website, www.memoirworkshops.com; and you may write to her at nanphifer@mac.com.

True Words from Real Women

Love's Harvest

LuAnn Kennedy
Mertztown PA

When harvest comes around again,
We'll reap a love so true
When geese fly south with jay and wren
That's when the baby's due.

When autumn leaves are flutt'ring down
And wind blows fresh and cool;
When Jack-o-lanterns fill the town,
We'll hold a life that's new.

When all prepare for giving thanks
With lots of drink and food;
When rich and poor share tasty shanks,
We'll add one to our crew.

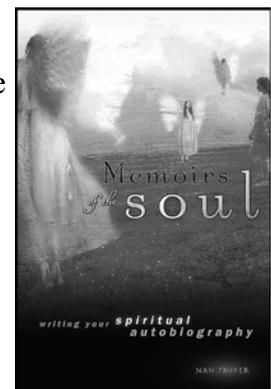
When harvest comes around again,
We'll reap a love so true.
When geese fly south with jay and wren,
That's when the baby's due.

Memoirs of the Soul: Writing Your Spiritual Autobiography by Nan Phifer

A Writer's Digest Book
ISBN 1-58297-080-7

www.memoirworkshops.com

Memoirs of the Soul
guides readers on a voyage
of self-discovery and
through a writing process
that produces
polished memoirs.



Take a bow! Spotighting our Story Circle Network volunteers

Katherine Misegades: Knitting Together Stories

SCN's Internet Chapter has enabled Katherine Misegades to be an active SCN member even though she lives far from other SCN members, in Fort Wayne, Ind. Just over a year ago, Katherine took the plunge and became the facilitator of her own Internet circle. Lisa Shirah-Hiers offers this tribute to Katherine.



Katherine Misegades joined Story Circle Network after writing a brief piece for SCN's 9/11 website. Shortly after, she took an online course from Susan Wittig Albert and joined the Internet Chapter and an online story circle. Says Katherine, "I welcome the motivation to write two pieces a month—one for my e-circle 14 and

another for e-circle 12 where I'm a member. I find the variety of writing styles interesting. I especially enjoy the supportive feedback and ensuing discussion that sometimes occurs."

Katherine doesn't keep a journal. She credits SCN with helping her record her life experiences. "I look at the collection of little stories I've composed since I joined SCN and am amazed that there are so many. I'd never have written them if it weren't for SCN. I'm thankful to have had such an opportunity." She plans to collect her stories together and give them to her children (two girls and a boy) and grandchildren (two boys and a girl).

After graduation from Indiana University with a B.S. in nursing, Katherine served as an officer in the Navy Nurse Corps for six years. She was a medical-surgical instructor at Mercy School of Nursing in Charlotte, NC, for four years before staying home for ten years to raise her children. Since then she has worked for 23 years as a graphic designer. "Since I was in the Navy during the late '60s, it was a sad time with so many returning wounded from Vietnam. I did, however, enjoy teaching nursing and being involved in the educational process. My interest in creating illustrated educational materials grew during this time so I went back through college in graphic design to learn more about production of this sort of thing. I produce illustrations and designs for commercial printing, multi-media and Web production. I never went back to nursing as a profession but did have clients for whom my nursing background was helpful. Both my nursing and design jobs were interesting to me in completely different ways. I prefer my design jobs and especially like doing pencil and pen and ink illustrations."

She has supported a variety of humanitarian organizations including Feed the Children, Habitat for Humanity, and the Carter Center. She's also edited and produced a magazine for a

non-profit antique farm equipment collector's organization. "Antique machinery of all sorts interests me because I'm constantly amazed by the ingenuity humans show creating intricate solutions to everyday problems. I have model trains, antique car and tractor models, books about printing, weaving, etc."

Katherine has seen how SCN helps women tell their tales and connect with each other. "The main thing I've noticed is the courage and determination that comes through in peoples' writing. I have a deep admiration for many members who rise above the circumstances of their lives and set their courses for continued growth and improvement." She is dedicated to her own life journey as well, saying, "I frequently read books about life management skills and adjusting one's attitude. Most of them rephrase what I've already learned from experience but that gives me reassurance and positive feedback. I find women's stories inspiring and significant. They provide a different perspective of history, culture, and society. I especially enjoy reading historical diaries like Mary Chestnut's journal during the Civil War. Primary resources in history usually give a different picture of a situation than do history books. It puts history on a more personal level—one to which I can relate. About the time I received a letter and photo from a friend who was in harm's way in Vietnam, I found a century-old letter in a back pocket of our family Bible. My great-grandmother's brother had written her shortly before he was lost in the Battle of Atlanta in 1864. I also found his photo, a button from his uniform, and his schoolbooks. Even though the two letters were written 100 years apart, they were parallel to each other in content—two homesick lads writing home."

Katherine says "I collect heroes. Harriet Tubman, Abraham Lincoln, Nelson Mandela, Bishop Tutu, Sequoyah, and President Carter are a few.... The trait I admire most in other people is generosity of spirit. When I was a little girl, I wrote a letter to Winston Churchill and he sent me a handwritten note in response. To this day, I am touched by the fact that he would take the time to respond to a child. I admire people who hold to their vision and rise above adverse circumstances."

Her love of history even extends to her hobbies. "I love to read, research, and write fiction and historical material. I also design garments for hand knitting, and publish patterns for other hand knitters. I do a variety of needlework including knitting, crocheting, tatting, quilt-making and embroidery."

(Continued on page 16)

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

Kitchen table stories

Stone Soup

Beverly Galante is a writer, an artist, and a performer in plays and musicals. Living in Wimberly, Tex., she belongs to SCN's Austin Chapter, the internet chapter, and a recently formed Wimberly writing circle.

"I thought you'd like these vegetables, but some of 'em are a little bruised," I said as I ran into the kitchen and dumped my cache onto the table from inside my wadded up tee-shirt.

"They look fine to me," Mom said as she expertly cut away the rotted parts and plunked them into a large pot for our supper of *stone soup*.

We lived in the big city of Boston in a four-story apartment building on a block of similar red brick buildings. Next door was a market with wooden floors and lots of sawdust and smells that were all mixed up but mostly smelled like very ripe fruit. There were always lots of flies around. Caramel colored strips hung from the ceiling inside the doorway, covered with the dead flies that stuck to the gummy surface intended for that purpose. There was a tobacco store next to it that had newspapers and magazines and also sold liquor. Behind the block of stores was a large alleyway always filled with empty boxes and other stuff that I liked to raid for anything that looked useful. At times, the proprietor threw out bruised fruit and vegetables that looked fine to me and so home they'd go. Always grateful, Mom never asked where they came from. I can still feel the exhilaration that I felt when I made a coup and escaped with the loot before the shop owner could catch me. Frequently we'd be chased away to go play somewhere else, but we always came back to see what goodies we could find.

There was a monastery across the avenue with 182 stone steps leading up to the back of it. I counted them almost every time I went there. Of course you could have gotten there much easier by going around to the main entrance on another street, but it was a long walk around and up a hill anyway. I also thought these steps were a test of endurance for the virtuous. On the monastery property was a chain link fence around a very large garden that was tended by nuns. One summer, when I was about ten, a friend and I climbed the fence and raided the garden. We tucked as much as we could in our shirts that we folded up in front of our tummies and then stashed some in a kerchief. We tried to get out of there as fast as we could, but one time we were a little too slow because of the extent of our bountiful burden.

"Not so fast!" we heard as we were nearing the top of the fence. A nun caught the end of my shorts and I heard a ripping sound. Then I felt the sting of a slap against my thigh. "You naughty little girl!" She was red-faced and breathing hard from running after us. I threw my loot to the other side and,

with one big burst, over the top I went and jumped to the ground below.

"Ouch!" But I didn't have time for tears. When I got home, bedraggled and dirty, I told Mom that the nuns were happy to give me the vegetables, since they were bruised anyway. Surely she didn't believe me. She looked suspiciously

at my scruffy self and torn shorts but resignedly accepted my "little white lie" and once again seemed grateful for the gift.

Across the street from our apartment block were woods, pretty rare in any city. No matter where in the world we lived, Mom always could spot something natural and delightful. The woods were full of blackberry vines and when the berries were in season I'd put on my yellow slicker, and Mom and I went picking. We'd come home scratched in the places that clothing didn't cover but with full pails. Eventually, I abandoned the slicker because

it was too cumbersome and put up with the nicks and cuts. Nobody seemed to know about this place except Mom and me. I found a bunch of square berry trays made of thin wood behind my favorite market, a bit stained from discarded fruit but not broken or dirty. These are the ones that are made from

(Continued on page 16)

Next door was a market with wooden floors and lots of sawdust and smells that were all mixed up but mostly smelled like very ripe fruit.

Stone Soup

Place a stone in a large pot (optional). Cover with many cups of water (enough to cover the vegetables you use). Chop up as many onions as you want to into small pieces. Do the same with:

- | | |
|----------|-----------------------------|
| Tomatoes | Any kind of squash you like |
| Celery | Broccoli |
| Garlic | Potatoes |
| Turnips | Radishes (sometimes) |
| Spinach | |

Add hamburger if you are rich enough to have some. Add all the spices you find that seem to go with the veggies you've chosen (you *could* read the label on the spice jar). Add lots of salt. Add not so much pepper. Bring to a boil, lower the heat and let simmer long enough to make everyone in the house drool. Serve with squishy white bread slices smeared with margarine.

(Continued from page 15)

plastic now. Can you just imagine the germs? People weren't as mindful of germs in those days. I carefully filled the trays with the berries and piously shared my bounty with the old ladies in the neighborhood. They would squeal with delight when I showed up at their door. Often they would invite me in and offer me milk and cookies. I thought it was a fair trade. Mom made delicious pancakes or muffins with the rest of the berries.

But my favorite dish was the soup she made from everything she could get her hands on. Each time she made it, we would shout, "Yay! Stone soup!" My mouth waters at the thought of it; and the memory of the smells that came from the top of the old gas stove still linger with me today. ❖

Says **Beverly Galante**: I have had a short story published, several poems in various venues, some articles in regional and local magazines and newspapers and a couple of contributions published in the True Words pages of the *Journal*. I also wrote the story to a musical called "Beans 'Bout Boston," lyrics and music by Hi Diggs, which was performed in several colleges throughout New England. And last but not least, I have finished a fictional novel (finally) and am continuing to write my memoirs. My email is fumpart@yahoo.com.

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 **ppando@gmail.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.

Take a Bow, Katherine Misegades

(Continued from page 14)

Knitting has been an important part of Katherine's family for several generations. Her great-great-great grandmother taught each of her grandchildren—including the boys—to knit socks. It was her solution to the dilemma of keeping a dozen children supplied.

Though Katherine says she's learned something from everyone she's met, she calls her mother the most influential person in her life. "She was positive, sensible, adaptable and constantly interested in and doing something until she died."

Katherine calls her life simple and quiet. "I spend most of my time working in solitude. When I was young and searching for one simple thing to hang on to as a guiding principle in my life amidst the turmoil of the world, I decided I'd strive to be a good steward of God's grace. For me, that means to offer love without strings attached and to forgive over and over again. This is often not an easy course to take, but the times I've been successful assure me that it is the right one for me. When it seems to me that I have failed, I just consider it a low point in an ongoing process and press on." ❖

True Words from Real Women

Soul's Harvest **Carolyn Blankenship** Austin TX

I will die in comfort
on a sunny Easter Sunday
with wildflowers waving
at the mashed-potato clouds
and Lutherans, Episcopalians,
and the Baptist Temple choir
raising alleluias in the air
like steps to heaven
or wherever it is that good souls go.

I count myself as one of those good souls,
though you may fairly ask how could a good
soul do some of the awful things I've done?
And I might say I think I have inherited
goodness from my mother,
who loved gardens, and my aunt
who loved Jesus
and kept a prayer list for her friends
and loved ones, making their concerns
her own, then wrapping them in love
and giving them to God.

If the values of the world
were even half-way sane,
people would stand in line
to get on that list, would pay
whatever it took
to charities of their choice, would rise
to any occasion for the gift
of sitting down before her kindly face
and have her take in her arthritic hands
all their cares and worried woes,
which would then be bundled into prayer
and offered up in heartfelt faith
to Something Greater,
to be washed and folded and returned
with some small miracle laid on top,
delivered on the wings of grace.

My mother just grew flowers
and that was grace enough.

Carolyn Blankenship is the organizer of and one of the presenters at the October *Writing from Life* weekend writing workshop in Austin, Tex. See p. 24 for more information.

True Words from Real Women



The theme of this issue's True Words section, edited by **Mary Jo Doig**, is "Harvest." True Words from Real Women is a selection of short pieces of lifewriting by our members. Why not contribute your own True Words to the Journal? Future topics are listed on p. 21.

Bumper Crop

Joan Givens
Bellevue NE

Unlike my husband, Rog, I'm not of the land; I'm a city kid. I don't have those experiences of harvest engrained in my soul. I don't have stories of hard work, which begins in late June and is part of farm life until November.

I haven't built shock bundles to dry wheat, oats, barley, or rye. I haven't joined six to eight other families for two weeks in July as they thrash grain. I've never driven a stacker tractor, rake, or sweep while putting up prairie hay. I don't really understand the dynamics of the entire family pursuing one goal: harvest.

But I've encountered my own "bumper crop," in the form of shiny, three-year-old faces coming to preschool for the first time. I've struggled to learn the names of blonde-haired, blue-eyed boys who look so alike. I've greeted the freshly scrubbed faces of children sporting new frocks. I've comforted tears of separation, some of which are brimming in mothers' eyes. I've readied the room, hanging photos and setting up play centers, feeling as if I'd just purchased my own back-to-school crayons.

I won't reap the fruits of my labor until next spring or summer. Harvesting this bumper crop in the fall is but a beginning, a promise of what is to come. I look forward to joyful days, anticipate the progress of each child, and give thanks for the opportunity to spend time where it really counts.

Maureen Murdock suggests finding a metaphor for life. Mine is a child. The child teaches me the difference between childish and child-like. The child helps me see life through her eyes, fresh and full of wonder. The child beckons me to live life with abandon, free from self-censoring.

Coffee Harvest

Ligia Jimenez
Austin TX

When I got married, I went to live on a coffee plantation. It was located about 200 km from Medellín, my hometown in the mountains of Antioquia, Colombia. My husband owned 85 acres of land with coffee trees. I got married in August just when harvest started.

At the hacienda, there is a headquarters for the people who pick the beans. Groups of 30–40 people come to the hacienda. Some are families.

Then harvest starts. Each picker has a basket that has to be

filled many times a day. Each basket has a price. We send the coffee pickers their lunch at 11:30: *sancocho* (meat with potatoes), yucca, *platano verde y maduro* (cooking banana or plantain), all well cooked like a soup. For dessert, they have *masamorra* (corn cooked like a soup) and *panela* (hard brown sugar). At 4:30 we send dinner: beans, white rice, and *masamorra*.

At the end of the day, the coffee beans are taken to the *maquina despulpadora* (peeling machine), which peels them and sends them to the tanks where they are washed, then put to dry in the sun and put in big sacks.

The people work all week and Saturdays they have a party. They drink, dance, and eat till one or two in the morning. Some have fights and sometimes hurt each other with machetes.

On Sunday, they are paid for the work of the week. They take a good bath, wear clean clothes, and go to the next little town to go to Mass and to the *tiendas* (small markets) to buy their weekly groceries for the family, some clothes, and whatever they need. Some of them get drunk. At the end of the day, they go home to have a good night's sleep and get ready for Monday.

I had a very good time on the coffee plantation and a very bad time with my husband, who was going after all the women in the fields.

Now, 60 years later, I always have dark-roasted Colombian coffee in my house and enjoy one or two cups every day.

The Great Gardening Summer

Valerie Lima
Fayetteville AR

It was a great gardening summer with just the right amounts of heat and rain. Our double-dug, French-intensive raised beds were producing abundantly. I was also sweating abundantly as I canned dozens of quarts of long-simmered tomato sauce, quarts of dill pickles and bread-and-butter pickles, pints of relish, quarts of peaches, pints of various jellies. All went onto my groaning shelves, much better than money in the bank.

It was steaming hot as I picked and blanched bushels of beans and corn to freeze along with freezer-strawberry jam, quarts of blueberries, vegetable soup, zucchini parmesan casseroles, frozen tomato juice to make into tomato sauce in the cooler fall weather. The hard work was worth it as the harvest cornucopia was overflowing.

More True Words . . .

(Continued from page 17)

What satisfaction to raise the lid of the large freezer chest in the workshop and see all the fruits and veggies. Nothing enhances a Thanksgiving meal more than the fragrance of fresh green beans wafting through the house as they are being prepared. Or peach jam on toast in January when icy blasts coat the trees.

One day in October, my husband was busy outside in the workshop as I canned. The following day I concentrated on more freezing. Hours later, I was ready to deposit my precious cargo in the freezer.

As I opened the door to the workshop, I was assailed by a horrible smell. Did an animal get in and die? I couldn't see anything. I raised the freezer lid and was horrified. Everything was in various stages of defrosting, floating in a murky sea.

My husband had disconnected the freezer to use another tool, and then forgot to re-plug the freezer. Our harvest of fresh fruit and veggies had turned to a harvest of garbage. More work as everything needed to be set up for composting, and the liquid goo needed to be hand-dipped out.

We did not receive the benefits of the harvest that summer; the good earth received the benefits in the form of compost and extra liquid. Perhaps next year we would enjoy the harvest.

Storyteller: Harvester of Silent Voices

Gloria L. Cordova
Los Alamos NM

I am the voice of the storyteller. I give voice to the unspoken stories of simple, strong phenomenal women. I elicit the telling and sharing of the story of their becoming, their claiming of *self* in all the fullness of beauty, wholeness, and good. I am their *hermana*, the sister of the women of the upper Rio Grande Valley, the northern New Mexico women, the *mestiza*, the wondrously beautiful racial and ethnic mix of Spanish, Mexican, Sephardic Moor, Indian, old-world/new-world woman.

I tell about the strength of women who know their depths because they know how deeply their pain dwelt. I want to tell of the beauty, the sensitivity, the brilliance, the humanity, the love of these women. They are Latinas who reclaimed and reconstructed their personal identity, were transformed by bringing the unconscious to consciousness, and found their way by laying down their path while walking.

I tell their story to a world enriched by knowing and appreciating their becoming, their story of their process of knowing who they are. I tell their story to their brothers, to their families, to all those who never knew or may never know these women, the *prietas*, the *güeras*, the *coyotas*, the Chicana, the Mestiza, the Mexicana—*las mujeres de la tierra del sol*.

Late Planting Sandi Stromberg Houston TX

My mother knew everything. When I ran into a problem as I plowed through my homework, I would ask her: "What does 'perturbed' mean?" or, "How do you say 'ugly' in Spanish?" or, "How much does one apple cost if the price of four apples is 26 cents?"

And she would always know. She'd answer: "Upset, kind of angry." "*Fea*." "Six-and-a-half cents."

As I grew older and the questions grew harder, she still knew.

But my dad was another case. When he stopped working to go back to school and my mother supported us as a secretary, she read the long novels for his English literature class during her lunch hour and while we slept, then wrote synopses for him to study.

She typed all his papers, correcting his grammar and spelling, and helped him study for exams, quizzing him over and over until he got everything right.

The lesson I harvested was: This is a woman's job—to be smarter than her husband. Perhaps I even decided that women simply were smarter than men.

So it didn't bother me to marry my first husband, who wasn't stupid but around whom I could run intellectual circles.

It seemed perfectly natural to correct him when he was wrong about a fact, an event or experience, just as my mother had corrected my father.

I typed all his papers in college, kept track of his business expenses when we married, paid the bills, arranged and carried out 17 moves, handled the bureaucracy of living in four foreign countries, was a gourmet cook, freelance writer, and stay-at-home, be-there-for-my-kids mom.

That's what women did. They weren't either/or in my book; they were both. That made me a mature, responsible adult. Then, one day my husband walked out the door and I no longer knew what I thought I'd known.

I had to start over, planting new seeds rather late in life, to reap a new lesson. I didn't have to be *she who knows*.

Johanna's Harvest

Susan Ideus
Magnolia TX

When she still lived on a working farm, harvest was a defined period of time, each day full of hard productive labor. There were crops to harvest, meat to be processed, fruit and vegetables to be canned, frozen, or made into sweet or savory spreads. After harvest came winter and this was the time to prepare.

Now, though, her farming days were behind her. Widowed and alone for some years and slowly losing her eyesight, Johanna revisited harvests past: newly-mown hay ready to bale, freshly-picked juicy sweet fruits, and crispy garden-fresh vegetables. At the end, she could look with pride at the shiny colorful jars lining her pantry shelves, a veritable

kaleidoscope of love, sweat, and sustenance. With harvest time came friends and family, gathered at this farm one day, down the road apiece the next, all pitching in to get the work done and enjoying the fellowship and laughter along the way. How she'd loved those days!

Johanna didn't feel so useful these days. She couldn't get around well and there wasn't much to do in her little house for just herself. Still, she had her memories to keep her company. She sighed—there would be no more harvests in her life.

But wait, hadn't she just gotten a call from her daughter-in-law? A note from her granddaughter? A visit from the grandson she'd helped raise when his own mother died? Johanna fixed herself a glass of iced tea and went to sit on her sun porch in her favorite rocker. Memories of her past softly settled over her, gently wrapping her in a blanket of reminiscences.

Her family—what joy they brought into her life! She and Albert had raised four children of their own, and then their grandson. They all grew and married, giving her more sons and daughters to love. Then there were the precious grandchildren and, even now, the great-grandbabies.

"No more blues for you, Johanna," she chided herself.

Here was her greatest treasure, worth immeasurably more than could be imagined: her life, her love, her family.

Johanna's harvest.

The Old Ways

Sandra Pinkerton
Cedar Rapids IA

Let me sleep in the forest and the sounds of nature awaken me with a gentleness unsurpassed by the city sounds.

The stars hang above me like tiny, twinkling Christmas lights not like the harsh, bright artificial lights of the city.

My feet bare on the soft, cool earth not the hard, cold, gritty feel of concrete.

The whispering of the trees sway rhythmically to the music of Moriah, spirit of the wind.

Legends, myths, and wise, old storytellers have shaped and molded me through the years.

The power and magic of those stories have given me the strength and stamina in the face of adversity.

Ceremonies have rejuvenated me, brought me back to a world of mystery, magic, and color.

The old ways will sustain me, instill the knowledge, and bring the teachings of my great grandmother to my conscious mind.

The Lonely, Limp Radish Leaf

Pat Daly
Largo FL

One spring when I was about 12 years old, my mother decided on the spur of the moment that she would plant a vegetable garden in our back yard. My mother did not believe in planning or following directions. She thought that directions were for the un-creative, those who couldn't think for themselves and figure out a way to get something done. She

loved to wing it.

She came home with packs of seeds, retrieved a strong cooking spoon from the kitchen drawer, and started digging. Every day mom checked on nature's progress. She got excited over every tiny, germinating seed that poked a green blade through the soil. Mother Nature, however, was not so cooperative. It would be a slim harvest. Mom was depressed.

Then I got it into my adolescent head to play a joke on her. I bought a huge radish with the leafy top still attached, and planted it among its struggling peers. I ran into the house and excitedly dragged my mother out to the garden.

"Mom! Come see what's growing in your garden!"

Mom looked at the lonely, limp radish leaf and exclaimed with wonder, "Oh my gosh, look at that!"

"Dig it up," I said encouragingly.

She hurried back to the kitchen for her big cooking spoon and gently dug up the radish. Mom was ecstatic.

"Look at this!" she cried with pride. "Look at the size of this radish!"

My joke backfired. Mom was supposed to dig up the radish and realize immediately that it had been planted there fully grown. She was supposed to laugh and throw the radish at me. Instead, she celebrated her farming instincts with all the neighbors.

"Now what, Brain-o?" I asked myself. I dreaded having to fess-up and watch her spirits sink in embarrassed sadness.

In the end, she appreciated the joke. She could laugh at herself and she was not angry with me. I loved her for that. She was a good sport. That was her real talent, which I hope has been planted in me.

Harvest of Ugliness

Bonnie Watkins
Austin TX

Ugliness, the kind that you read about in the newspapers, suddenly sprouted up in the middle of our polite, middle-class lives.

She burst into our lives, such a vibrant child, full of tinkling laughter, ready hugs, and sloppy kisses. As the first girl in a gaggle-to-be of grandchildren, we aunts watched her by the hour. Her games were our games. Her toys our toys. We rolled on the floor with her, let her crawl all over us, and sometimes fell asleep in corners with her, grateful that exhaustion had finally stilled her.

Her wide, white smile dominated a healthy, wholesome face through years of school pictures that arrived in the mail and took their places on the refrigerator with my sons and her other cousins. In high school and college, she blossomed into a true beauty and garnered every possible academic and extracurricular award.

Several boys and more men lost their hearts to her, but she found one Prince Charming. Their wedding portrait couldn't have been more perfect. Happy pictures of the perfect people and then the perfect baby took their place on the fridge one year after another for five years.

(Continued on page 20)

More True Words . . .

(Continued from page 19)

No one knew during those years when Ugliness first pushed her down or first split open her lip or blackened her eye. We only heard its shape ram into our world with the tumbled-out story over the phone. “Finally had to call the police. He’s never touched the baby. Tried everything. Counseling. Lawyers. Court. Divorce.”

What seeds produced such a harvest of ugliness? Had he also been a child of promise, the boast of his proud father? Did he say the wrong thing at the wrong time? Was his look at his father too accusing when the father snapped out sharp, ugly words at the mother? Did those same ugly words rip open his own tender young spirit and bruise it? Did a push, a shove, a fist, or a belt leave its mark?

May healing come to him, to her, and to all who have reaped this harvest of ugliness.

Autumn in the Backyard of My Childhood Home

Marilyn June Janson

Mesa AZ

October 31, 2005. Today would have been their forty-eighth wedding anniversary. I always wondered why they chose Halloween to get married. As a child, I believed that my parents’ marriage was cursed by witches and goblins. Their union was a difficult one, plagued by threats of divorce. While sadness consumed our house, I can recall rare times when Mom was happy.

Mom told me that she chose to get married on October 31 because autumn was her favorite season. She enjoyed seeing the vibrant green leaves turn to rust, brown, and red. In the backyard of our house, I shivered in the damp air and winced at the tepid odor of turpentine, while watching her paint landscapes. I listened closely as she taught me how to mix colors, add texture and depth to her subjects on canvas. With her face fixed with intensity, she brought life to leafless oak trees, their bony branches swaying in the light wind. The rose bushes, having shed their last bounty months ago, appeared unlikely to withstand the punishment from the cruel winter ahead.

She could have gone further with her art if she hadn’t decided to marry and raise a family. Mom had talent and style that set her work apart from other artists. Today, her pieces decorate my living room and library. I’ll never forget the sacrifices she made for me. Or the time I played artist and added some strokes of my own to one of her paintings. I was nine years old and she never scolded me. Art had created an escape for her, a way to retreat into a world untouched by my dad’s scorn.

Sadly, she never divorced Dad. Mom died a broken woman, full of regrets.

With one look at her work, I’m brought back to those brisk, autumn days in the backyard of my childhood home and remember her soft auburn curls blowing in the breeze, her steady hand as she painted.

Harvest of Symphony and Love

Marti Weisbrich

Round Rock TX

“Come, come and eat,” my father yelled in his richly accented Spanish voice. Dad, an immigrant to the United States from Spain, always had dirty hands from spending his Saturdays and Sundays in our little garden in central California. He lovingly held up his harvest: red tomatoes, green peppers, and peeking between his fingers, slivers of green onion. Underneath his arm was a loaf of French bread and on the wooden table in our back yard, he had placed a bottle of olive oil, sprigs of oregano, and two little glasses for homemade red wine. It was time for lunch. Fifty years later, I can still taste this simple delicious meal, orchestrated like a symphony.

Listen and you can hear an orchestra playing daily in the garden. *Delicato* is the wind, murmuring and swaying the leaves of the plantings in the garden as if to say, “Come join our dance.” Watch the frenzied buzzing bees as they prance, *agitado*, back and forth. Some days the music starts quietly with the tinkling sounds of raindrops and then the crescendo of thunder approaches a fanfare, heralding a spring storm. When the wind makes the stalks dance, I want to grasp the stalks and circle the corn tassels in homage to the offering to come.

Harvest: a time of gathering the fruits of our labor. The best sense for last, in my garden, is taste. Savoring the sweetness of strawberries, the juiciness of tomatoes and peaches, zing of a peppery radish, earthy taste of a just-pulled carrot, bite of Greek oregano, heat of a spicy pepper, heart-melting taste of fresh picked corn, the garden’s bounty dances in my mouth. As a child I experienced all of these sensations as I helped my dad with his garden. As an adult, I relive my wonder and awe that all of these good things come from my own hands. Each time I stick my hands in the dirt, I harvest my dad’s wisdom, joy and love—a blessed bounty indeed.

The Horses of the Harvest

Joan Costello

Austin TX

It was October, 1943, on our northwest Illinois farm, near the Wisconsin border. Instead of helping my mom and a neighbor girl prepare the huge noon meal for five other neighboring farmers and their sons or hired men, I was busy watching the horses as they came prancing down our driveway with their empty wagons.

These mostly-matching two-horse teams were coming to help haul the cut stalks of corn from the Apple River corn field to be blown into our silo for the milk cows’ winter feed.

Mr. Hintz’s matching pair of bays was the favorite in my eight-year-old eyes. The bays were not huge like the cold-blooded draft horses, usually Belgians or Percheons, but medium-built Morgans with matching white stockings and blazes.

My dad's Belgian stallion could not be used on his team because this horse was so spirited. Instead, Old Skeex, a plain dark bay horse was teamed with Dad's Belgian mare.

We also used Old Skeex when making hay. My six-year-old brother Duane and I anxiously took turns riding Old Skeex, who was hitched to a rope-and-pulley to lift the stack of hay up into the barn's mow for winter food for the cows and horses.

This day I decided to ride Young Skeex, a spirited three-year-old Morgan thoroughbred, recently bought from a neighbor who raised race horses. Because of the busy harvest season, our hired man, who boarded with our family, had not yet trained Young Skeex. Needless to say, I was thrown right away, to which I attribute my bad back today.

Sixty years later, I still savor the bittersweet smell of the souring silage in the silo. I also recall when, later, the horses of the harvest were replaced by big red Farmall or green John Deere tractors.

Memories of the harvest are still my favorite time of year. Also October is my favorite month in Texas, as I share the harvest of our backyard banana trees here in Austin.

A Cornucopia of Possibilities

Erin Declan Philbin
Pittsburg PA

I'm an urban dweller with a black thumb. For me, there are no shiny rows of zucchini to deliver to co-workers, no tasty blueberries waiting to be picked. My garden is my wallet and every day can be harvest time. Tucked into the worn, brown leather clutch is my ever-growing, ever-changing bounty. The driver's license—my freedom—is slipped under the top flap, waiting to go for a ride. Here is my library card, my key to a world of adventure. Wedged into a slot where more mature adults have credits cards, is our family pass to the Carnegie museums.

Planted in the deep recesses, where I hear that some people keep actual money, I have a garden of dog-eared, but

well-tended collections of buy-some-get-one-free cards in various stages of maturity. Three more stamps and I'll have a free medium Italian ice at Rita's. Two more punches will earn me a free cup of coffee at Panera's.

Other specials lie deep in the darkness, waiting to be reaped: a six-inch hoagie from Subway or 40% off a regularly priced item at Jo-Anne Fabrics. I even have a buyer's card from Busy Beaver's Lumber, though I'm not exactly sure what I've ever bought there.

Another section of my wallet is planted with happy memories. They are used to fight the encroachment of checking account withdrawal slips, which would choke my entire wallet, given half a chance. Included in this section are several years worth of my sons' school pictures—all with a theme of toothy grins and bad hair days, prayer cards, inspirational messages, and a business card from the Cobalt Grille to remind me of a special lunch with my mother-in-law.

My wallet is bursting with a cornucopia of possibilities. Any day it is ripe for harvesting.

Gleaning

Patricia Dunn-Fierstein
Odessa FL

Oh, there are struggles.
None too easy at the end of the day.
Yet with my deep seeing
there are offerings—
Grace materialized,
or hiding behind jaundiced eyes—
Elder wisdom for the moons before me.
Bitter cure herbs
gleaned
if I dare to weep and dream.
Opening my Soul to the All.

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:

A Holiday Story—December 2006 (due October 15)

Awakening—March 2007 (due January 15)

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

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.

Story Circle News Roundup

SCN's 10th Anniversary, 2007

Many wonderful activities and events have been planned during the year of 2007—Story Circle Network's tenth anniversary. Some of these activities are described below. Watch for more details in each issue of the SCN Journal as we near the beginning of our anniversary year. And don't miss the Logo Contest for our anniversary year announced at right.

Writing Prompt E-book (working title: *A Woman's Wise Words*) will be available in late 2006 or early 2007.

LifeLines Lifewriting Retreat on March 16–18. For details, go to the Web page: www.storycircle.org/LifeLines.

What Wildness Is This: Women Write about the Southwest (University of Texas Press), an anthology of writings about place edited by Susan Wittig Albert and Paula Yost, will be published late March.

The **Land Full of Stories Conference** will be co-hosted by SCN and the Southwestern Writers Collection at the Library at Texas State University, June 8–9, 2007. There will also be a Thursday Field Writing Day at various locations in Austin and an outdoor activity on Thursday evening. The conference will begin with a workshop on Friday afternoon, a reception and keynote address by Kathleen Dean Moore (author of *Riverwalking: Reflections on Moving Water* and *Holdfast: At Home in the Natural World*), and sessions all day Saturday. The focus: women writing about place. Look for the call for proposals on p. 26.

An anthology/cookbook will be published in the fall of 2007, combining family stories from our members connected to food together with related recipes. Watch for more details and a call for submissions in early 2007.

Board News

The SCN Board took a recess during the summer. The next meeting will be a "virtual meeting" held via email in the fall.

Austin Chapter News

Ladies, we have another exciting year planned for you including the Be Our Guest, with a talk and book signing with Susan Wittig Albert, in November. Carolyn Blankenship is providing us with an additional opportunity to write our stories at the Writing from Life, and Rebecca Roberts is in her usual creative programming mode. We've also gained about a dozen new members over the past six months, many coming from our last Be Our Guest program. Keep your eyes open for upcoming events through your emails...remember, if you snooze, you lose. And please bring a friend with you to workshops, talk up Story Circle Network, because there are a million life stories in the city, county, country, and Internet. I look forward to seeing y'all soon.

—Report by Sue Bilich

10th Anniversary Logo Contest

Deadline October 1, 2006

The SCN Board announces a logo design contest open to all SCN members. We are looking for both a logo (artwork) and a slogan (phrase) having to do with SCN's mission (see our mission statement on the Back Page of this *Journal*) and celebrating our tenth anniversary. All entries should be sent as jpg or gif files to: Peggy Moody at storycircle@storycircle.org by the deadline, October 1, 2006. Finalists will be selected by the Logo Contest Committee with the Board to determine the winner. The winner will be announced and featured in an upcoming issue of the *Journal*. Her design will become the property of the SCN for use in our publications and celebrations!

While we have every hope of receiving a good selection, should there be no winners among the entries, the Board will look to other sources for an appropriate logo and slogan. The Board shall have sole responsibility for determining when, if and how to use the logo and slogan.

Internet Chapter News

Our Internet Chapter is buzzing with activity! The membership numbers are up. The participation levels are up. The enthusiasm for the topics in the writing circles and the titles in the reading circle is almost overwhelming at times!

Four women from the writing e-circles have recently stepped up to the challenge and assumed a role as facilitator for their own circles. Diane Warner, Becca Taylor, Grace-Forrest Maestas and Beth Carrignant have all been active in their circles for some time and now have taken their participation to a new level.

We have a wonderful group of facilitators in the writing e-circles and we are happy to have Beth, Becca, Grace, and Diane join those ranks.

The reading circle has been exploring some fantastic topics in the wide variety of book selections they have read over the past several months. The depth of discussions, the quality of the reading material and the enthusiasm of the members makes this a very active and unique group of reading and writing women. And yes, they DO write in the reading circle! Some of their recent selections include Carole Radziwell's *What Remains, Julia and Julie* by Julie Powell, and *Four Tenths of an Acre* by Laurie Lisle to name just a few.

The writing circles have explored some deeply serious topics as well as some delightfully fun and lighthearted ones. From "Refrigerator Magnet Wisdom" to "Dancing with the Soul" and from "If I Were a Flower..." to "Self Expression" the women of the 15 writing circles are sharing their stories in wise and wonderful ways each month.

If good books, stimulating writing prompts or both appeal to you and you've not yet joined our e-circles we hope that you will consider doing so soon!

—Report by Lee Ambrose

*Story Circles—the heart of SCN**The Comfort of a Circle*

This summer, Gloria Cordova experienced loss—the death of her cousin Anita—and joy the next day—the birth of Anita’s granddaughter, Laurel Elena. As she coped with the lows and highs of that week, Gloria turned to her companions in the Reading e-circle for comfort. Gloria shares her experience.

“Blessings and thanks,” I gratefully wrote to my dear Circle Sisters as I mourned death and celebrated life, for their beautifully expressive messages of condolence upon the death of my precious cousin, Anita, for whom I’d been doing hospice work for six months and helping provide companionship for the year before that. Their messages warmed my heart and provided me material for the eulogy I delivered for my cousin at the request of her daughter Kimberly. I credited my “Circle Sisters,” as I included their words in eulogy and comforted the family and friends gathered to celebrate Anita’s life even while grieving her passing.

Kimberly and Anita’s mother (my Aunt Virginia) were amazed that there could be virtual friends who are so dear and who would write me such precious messages. Of course, I know the Circle and its loving members and know that the women enCIRCLE with love. I shared their loving messages in my eulogy.

My fellow circle member, grace, wrote: What incredible intensity of emotion...to welcome Laurel Elena and to say goodbye to Anita! I can’t fathom. I have the Birth Day marked on my calendar for today...she came early...a day before the day Anita could wait no longer. Such a gift to the family...coming as a bridge, a teacher. She will be so special to you...I will await Laurel Elena stories that I am sure she will bring you. My heart will be with all on Friday.

Marti wrote: In times of grief, laughter and joy. In times of pain, healing love by the presence of a faithful and devoted cousin. In times of ending, a precious new beginning. And so the circle continues, Anita to Laurel Elena. May the sweet memories and special moments of Anita’s life be renewed by the wondrous moments and new memories that will be created by Laurel Elena. Most of all, may strength and grace be bestowed upon Gloria, the most special sentinel and guardian of this remarkable life story. Blessings be showered upon those who have left, those who have arrived and those who remain, faithful and loving throughout the evolution of this circle of life.

Sam wrote: It seems that life in its continuous cycle passes so many lessons to us on the way. Anita has finished her cycle with loved ones at her side and her granddaughter has come aboard to continue the legacy...how beautiful is that. She is now smiling from her spirit world knowing part of her is born. Bless you in this time of grieving.

Connie wrote: What a mystery life is. I am so sorry for your cousin’s death and so happy for the birth of her grandchild. Such sadness and such joy. Many blessings to you

and your family.

Susan wrote: The circle of life—what a sweet mystery! Your cousin will live on in her grandchild... My prayers are with you in this bittersweet time, as you grieve and yet rejoice. I have a favorite Shaker proverb: “Heaven and Earth are threads from one loom.” How richly the tapestry of your family’s life is being woven.

This is a Circle of friends for whom I deeply grateful and I’d likely not have found them but for Story Circle Network. ❖

Circle News

As of this writing the Story Circle Network now boasts 32 free-range story circles in Ontario, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Vermont, Washington and Wisconsin! (A “free-range” circle is a face-to-face circle that meets outside Austin and is therefore not affiliated with the Austin Chapter.) Kudos to the generous women facilitating these varied and dynamic writing and reading circles!

If you are interested in locating a circle in your area, check the “Free-Range Circles” list in the “How to Start a Story Circle” section of the website www.storycircle.org. If there is no circle in your area, we hope you will consider starting one! You can get ideas from the free-range circles list and lots of help from the Facilitator’s Guide (free to Story Circle Members).

For further information, contact Lisa Shirah-Hiers, Circles Coordinator at freerangecircles@storycircle.org.

Announcing the New Free-Range Facilitators’ Yahoo Group

We are pleased to announce that a new Yahoo group has been created for all free-range story circle facilitators. The group allows facilitators all over the country (and Canada!) to connect with each other by email, ask questions, and offer advice. A similar group exists for the Internet Chapter and has been a valuable tool for new and experienced facilitators alike. The new free-range facilitators’ group is already busily emailing each other and we expect some online friendships will soon result. Judith Helburn has graciously agreed to serve as moderator. Thank you Judith!

To find out how you can join the facilitators’ Yahoo group, contact Circles Coordinator Lisa Shirah-Hiers at freerangecircles@storycircle.org.

SCN-Sponsored Writing Events

Workshops, Retreats, Conferences

Online Writing Workshop

Memory to Memoir

With Paula Stallings Yost

Paula's course ... was the best I've had in twenty years of writing classes, conferences, workshops, etc. And last year, I graduated from McMaster University's Writing Certificate Program with As in every class, but I have learned much more from this course.

Fantastic—I couldn't wait to get her comments—she was so on target—it was such a help—I want to put her in my back pocket like a little iPod and listen to her suggestions whenever I write.

Overwhelmed by the idea of producing a life story? Wondering where to begin? Stop worrying and just do it. Sign up today to discover the rewards and relative ease of creating a memoir. The delights and benefits of reminiscence will be revealed as you write your personal or family history one great story at a time, learn effective life-writing techniques, relax and have fun with a variety of writing and memory-jogger exercises. This class is led by Paula Stallings Yost, experienced journalist/memoirist and founder of LifeSketches/Heirloom Memoirs Publishing—a company dedicated to the preservation of personal and family histories in book form.

Each student will compose four or five short stories that will be edited by the instructor and returned with helpful suggestions for improvement or expansion. Students also will work on methods for transitioning and organizing the stories into a creative nonfiction narrative, including a table of contents, dedication, etc. Writing guidelines, story ideas, and a bibliography of suggested reading materials will be provided.

Where: This is an online class. An introduction will be emailed to you upon receipt of your enrollment fee. The lesson plan, as well as further instructions, will be emailed to you on the first day of class.

When: October 11–November 22

Cost: \$225 for dues-paying members of Story Circle; \$250 for non-members.

Website:

www.storycircle.org/Workshops/MemoryMemoir.shtml

Writing from Life Weekend Workshop

Fall into Your Writing

Don't miss our autumn Writing from Life! We'll play with clay, poetry, and layers, write about myth and mysteries, and have time to visit and eat together. At our participants' request, we have extended the lunch break on Saturday to give time for reflection, visiting, shopping our book tables, more writing, or just relaxing on the deck overlooking Lake Austin. There will be the option to join the group for a Dutch-treat dinner across the street on Saturday evening, with a Conversation Café following.

Date: October 21–22, 2006

Time: Saturday 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (optional to 8:30 p.m.) and Sunday 9:00 a.m. to noon

Place: Lower Colorado River Authority Complex, 3700 Lake Austin Blvd, Austin TX 78703 (See the map on our website for driving directions.)

Cost: \$120 for non-members, \$100 for SCN members
Tea, coffee, and a light lunch are provided.

Accommodation for out-of-towners: please check our website for a list of nearby hotels/motels.

Website: www.storycircle.org/Workshops

Presentations will include:

- The Magic of Myth, and Writing in Layers (Carolyn Blankenship),
- Centering Ourselves with Clay (Rebecca Roberts),
- What the Poet Knows About Telling Stories (Lianne Mercer),
- Women's Mysteries: Writing Your Spiritual Autobiography (Ann Walters),
- Conversation Café (Leilani Rose).

Sign-up information, driving maps, lists of accommodation for out-of-towners, and much more are on our website at:

www.storycircle.org/Workshops

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

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

LifeLines Lifewriting Retreats



with Robin Edgar
in the mountains of North Carolina
October 6–8, 2006

Join us for a women-only weekend lifewriting retreat, led by **Robin Edgar** (author of *In My Mother's Kitchen*), at beautiful Wild Acres, situated on 1,600 acres atop a mountain called Pompey's Knob, near the Blue Ridge Parkway in Little Switzerland, North Carolina.

This retreat is open to any woman who is interested in lifewriting—regardless of skill level or experience. We want this to be an intimate retreat where we can really talk and listen to each other's stories, so we are able to accept only 12 participants. We expect these 12 places to fill very quickly, so please register as soon as you can!

Your registration includes:

1. Five workshop sessions with Robin (Friday evening; Saturday morning, afternoon, and evening; Sunday morning)
2. Family-style meals: Friday dinner; Saturday breakfast, lunch, and dinner; Sunday breakfast
3. Drinks and snacks during breaks
4. Two nights stay in double-occupancy accommodations (two twin beds in each room) in the South Lodge. Check-in time is 4 p.m. on Friday; check-out time is after breakfast on Sunday.

Refund policy: Cancellations are accepted until September 15, 2006, and are subject to a cancellation fee of \$50. After September 15, we will refund your money only if we are able to fill your place from our waiting list.

How can I pay? Registration fees for this weekend retreat are \$225 for SCN members, \$250 for non-members. To register, contact Robin Edgar at robinedgar@earthlink.net. Mail checks to:

**Robin A. Edgar, 5919 Lakeview Drive,
 Charlotte, NC 28270.**

Questions? Contact Robin Edgar at robinedgar@earthlink.net or phone (704) 365-6538

Website: www.storycircle.org/Lifelines/NC

Spring '07
LifeLines Retreat
with Susan Wittig Albert
At Festival Hill in Round Top, Texas
March 16-18, 2007

Registration is now open for this 10th Anniversary Writing Retreat with SCN's founder, best-selling mystery writer Susan Wittig Albert. Check out the LifeLines Web page.

Register and find more information at:
www.storycircle.org/LifeLines

Transformative Language Arts Conference

the power of words

October 6-9, 2006 at Goddard College, Plainfield, VT.

Liberating Yourself
 and the World
 Through the Spoken, Written
 and Sung Word

Featuring 40 writers, poets, storytellers, musicians, activists, educators, performers exploring and celebrating the art of words, including sessions on making a living, many manner of the expressive arts, and social change.


GODDARD COLLEGE
 Visit our website, email tlaconference@goddard.edu
 or call 802-454-8315 x278

TLA/06/07

www.goddard.edu

A Land Full of Stories

A Conference & Celebration of Writing about Place and Personal History

Conference dates: June 8–9, 2007
 Altek Library, Southwestern Writers Collection
 Texas State University, San Marcos, Texas

Call for Proposals

The Story Circle Network, in cooperation with the Altek Library's Southwestern Writers Collection at Texas State University, is planning a weekend writing conference to mark the publication of *What Wildness is This: Women Write About the Southwest*—SCN's new anthology of writings by women celebrating their experiences in the landscapes of the Southwest.

The conference will bring together people from around the country to tell their stories of the land through personal essays, autobiographical fiction, poetry, drama, dance, music, art, and more. Our program will include a reception on Friday evening and the opening of an exhibit related to the anthology and to SCN. The evening's keynote address will be delivered by Kathleen Dean Moore, Professor of Philosophy and founding director of the Spring Creek Project for Ideas, Nature, and the Written Word at Oregon State University. Moore is the author of three books of essays: *The Pine Island Paradox*; *Holdfast: At Home in the Natural World*; and *Riverwalking: Reflections on Moving Water*.

A wide variety of 90-minute workshops and panel discussions focused on writing about place will be offered on Friday and Saturday.

We are soliciting your proposal for a Saturday writing workshop. The list at right will give you an idea of what we are looking for and suggests some topics you may choose from. Whether you decide to expand one of these topics, combine several into a single topic, or create a topic of your own, your proposal should clearly indicate that the focus of the workshop is on writing and that you are offering substantial opportunity for participants to share and discuss what they have written. If you are proposing a workshop in other media (movement, photography, arts/crafts) writing may be adjunct to the experience but should still be included. If you have need for special equipment or space, please tell us what that is. You may submit as many as three proposals.

We will be accepting proposals through the conference website, www.storycircle.org/WomenWrite/landstories/ which will be launched on September 15. Click on "Workshop Proposals" for details. The deadline for receipt of proposals is January 15, 2007. Proposals will be reviewed and workshop facilitators notified by February 15, 2007.

Information about registration, fees, lodging, and other conference information will be posted on the website as it becomes available. We'll also have many more details in the December *Journal*.

Suggested Topics for Writing Sessions

- New Place, First Time:** first impressions of a place
- Belonging to a Place:** what it means to feel connected, rooted, emplaced
- Re-Placing Ourselves:** re-turning to, re-visiting a place after a time away, re-placing ourselves
- People in Place:** cultures, people, and artifacts in the landscape
- Person and Place:** writing about a person—someone you know, someone famous, someone you imagine—who is shaped by a place; or a place that has been shaped/developed by a person
- Animals in Place:** wild or domestic animals in specific places
- Objects in Place:** objects (natural or human-made) in specific places
- Senses of Place:** what we see, hear, touch, smell, sense in a specific place
- Memory and Place:** writing from memory about specific places
- Weather, Climate, and Place:** specific weather events (drought, tornado, hurricane), a regional climate (soggy South, arid West, frigid North)
- Home Places:** childhood homes, hometowns, homes imagined in a place
- Ancestral Places:** places where we feel a connection to earlier generations
- Living in a Small Place:** life in small towns, life in a neighborhood, life in a mini-community (nursing home, university)
- Journaling about a Place:** keeping a place journal
- Blogging about a Place:** keeping an Internet place journal
- Fictional Places:** an imaginary place with its own distinct topography, climate, plants, artifacts
- Secret Places:** private places, real or imaginary
- Solitary Places:** places where we go to be alone
- Celebrated Places:** how we feel in a well-known place (Grand Canyon, Gettysburg Battlefield, Auschwitz, Times Square, Lincoln Memorial, a Shaker village)
- Healing Places:** places that have healed our spirits, made us whole
- Safe Places, Risky Places:** places that make us feel safe and secure, places that seem dangerous or threatening

(Continued on page 27)

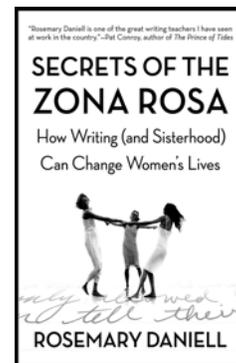
Also in the works as pre-conference sessions:

Field-writing activities in Austin and San Marcos, including bat-watching, wildflower sightings, glass-bottom boat tours, spelunking and more. Check the website after Sept. 15 to find out more.

Food in Place: foods that belong to certain places
Plants and Trees in Place: specific trees/plants that belong to certain places
Arts/Crafts in Place: writing about arts/crafts that belong to places
Music in Place: listening to/writing about music related to places
Making Music in Place: vocal, chants, sounds, simple instruments in relationship to the place where it's being made
Movement in Place: yoga, tai chi, dance, outdoors or indoors, in relationship to the place where it's being practiced
Photography in Place: telling the stories behind photographs of places
Poetry in Place: writing/reading poems about places
Garden Places: gardens, ours and others
Cityscapes: urban places
Working in Place: tasks related to place
Playing in Place: re-creative activities—sailing, hiking, swimming, dancing, making music—in specific places
Erotics of Place: earth's body, women's bodies
Spirit of Place: places that seem to have a special, perhaps even sacred spirit
Perspectives on Place: describing a place from different points of view: from an airplane, mountain, or tall building; at ground level or underground; through a microscope, telescope, a wide-angle lens
History and Place: historical places and personal and community history, real or fictional
Tradition and Place: traditions of culture, family, individuals
Politics of Place: political and environmental issues related to a specific place
Together in Place: the intersection of race, class, gender, and place
Borderlands: place, people, and margins
Protecting Places: environmental issues related to a specific place

Mapping Places: creating maps of places important to us, writing about maps and mapping
Stories about Places: oral storytelling/folklore about specific places
Dreaming about Places: our place dreams

**Secrets of the Zona Rosa:
 How Writing (and Sisterhood) Can
 Change Women's Lives
 by Rosemary Daniell
 ISBN 0-8050-7780-4
 Henry Holt and Company, 2006**



“Rosemary Daniell is an enormously gifted poet, novelist, and non-fiction writer . . . She is one of the women by whom our age will be known in times to come.” – Erica Jong, author of *Fear of Flying*



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 _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ - _____

Phone _____

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,
 PO Box 500127,
 Austin TX 78750-0127

9/06

Mark Your Calendar

SCN Events and Deadlines, Fall 2006 – Spring 2007

Oct 1: Deadline for entries to the SCN Tenth Anniversary Logo Contest (see p. 22)

Oct. 6–8: LifeLines Writing Retreat, with Robin Edgar, Wildacres NC (see p. 25)

Oct. 11: Fall Online Writing class begins, with Paula Yost (see p. 24)

Oct. 21–22: Writing from Life weekend writing workshop, Austin TX (see p. 24)

Nov. 12: Austin Chapter's Be Our Guest, talk and book signing with Susan Wittig Albert, Austin TX (free)

Jan. 15, 2007: Deadline for proposals for workshops for the Land Full of Stories conference (see p. 26)

March 16–18, 2007: LifeLines Writing Retreat with Susan Wittig Albert, in Round Top TX (see p. 25)

June 8–9, 2007: The Land Full of Stories Conference, San Marcos TX (see p. 26)

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

Read a Blog. Be a Blogger!

SCN members keep up with each other in lots of ways—in our circles, both face-to-face and through the Internet, through our print and online publications, and for some members through our blogs. (For those who haven't heard of a blog, the word comes from "Web log." A blog is an online journal.)

You can learn more about some SCN members by visiting them at the Web addresses below. Visit soon. Perhaps you'll be inspired to start your own blog.

Our online list of bloggers can be found at www.storycircle.org/blogs.shtml. If you are already a blogger or you get inspired to start a blog and want your name added to our list, send an e-mail to ppando@gmail.com.

Susan Albert	http://susanalbert.typepad.com
Melanie Alberts	http://widepathpoetry.blogspot.com
Lee Ambrose	http://creative4seasons.blogspot.com
Lee Ambrose	http://leessoulcollagecards.blogspot.com
Judy Fettman	http://reclaiming-my-self.blogspot.com
Eveline Maedel	http://www.ebenzerscribe.blogspot.com
Katherine Misegades	http://katherinemisegades.wordpress.com
Mary Moss	http://www.momprays.com
Linda Joy Myers	http://www.lindajomyers.typepad.com
Patricia Pando	http://trillap.blogspot.com
Margie Witt	http://www.wittbits.blogspot.com
Cheri Wright	http://patiopost.blogspot.com

Story Circle Network
PO Box 500127
Austin TX 78750-0127

Thanks for Your Support of SCN

Look for SCN President Patricia Pando's letter in your mailbox this fall and help support SCN by sending in your contribution to the annual fundraiser or adding a little extra to your membership renewal check. And thank you!

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.