



# Story Circle Journal

Vol. 11 No. 4, December, 2007

The newsletter for women with stories to tell...



## Stories from the Heart IV

**Uplifting ... warm ... illuminating ... open-hearted ...  
encouraging ... inspiring ... embracing ... a work of  
art ... inclusive ... compassionate ... exhilarating**

—a few of the words used to describe our last Stories from the Heart conference

Join us in **Austin, Texas, February 1–3, 2008** for  
SCN's fourth national lifewriting conference.

**Stories from the Heart IV** will bring together women from far and  
near to celebrate our stories and our lives. Through writing, reading,  
listening, and sharing, we will discover how personal narrative can be a  
healing art, how we can gather our memories, and how we can tell our  
stories.

We welcome women who are readers, writers, and storytellers. There  
will be opportunities to deepen our writing skills, to laugh, to explore  
difficult or hidden issues, to expand our relationships with other women,  
and to discover different modes and media—such as art, yoga, and digital  
media—for sharing our stories. See our conference program on p. 4.

Register by **December 15** to receive the special early registration  
rates. Use the form on the back of this *Journal* issue, or sign up  
online at:

[www.storycircle.org/Conference](http://www.storycircle.org/Conference)

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## A Letter from SCN's President



There is a danger in living in a house with a big attic. Things tend to go up and never, ever come down. Lately, I have been busy up there on the long-deferred task of going through my mother's boxes. A sentimental journey indeed, especially when I find a calendar. She had the same version every year—a plain one with big squares where she chronicled our lives—my Girl Scout field trips, my sister Nan's violin lessons, the trips to see Grandmother and Grandfather on the farm—the small, and sometimes large events, that composed our lives and linger in our memories.

As I sit in this dusty Georgia attic, my Texas childhood flips in front of me like some of the sequences in old black and white movies—the ones where the seasons go by, sometimes even years, as calendar pages turn. One minute the heroine is at a Florida beach, and then flip, flip, flip, she's relishing a cup of grog at a ski lodge in the Alps. That's the way it is with time. Where does it go, we ask?

I feel like I have lived the last two years of my Story Circle life on one of those quick-time calendars. First, the great Stories from the Heart Conference in 2006, then a Writing from Life, lots of productive board meetings, the chance to meet and become friends with SCN members from across the country, and most especially the excitement of our tenth anniversary year cram those twenty-four pages. I feel fortunate to have lived each one of them.

But calendars are not all about looking backwards. Right here on my work table is my almost brand-new 2008 date book. Almost brand new? That's right. I've already entered several SCN dates there. The very first, written in red and starred, is **Stories from the Heart IV, February 1-3, 2008**. A can't-miss event. The Monday after is the first SCN Board meeting of 2008. That will be a red-letter day as well; it is when we will welcome our four new board members: Sharon Blumberg, Robin Edgar, Becca Taylor and Olga Wise. They will bring us new ideas and energy from across the country—Indiana, North Carolina, Houston, and Austin.

Four of our returning board members will be taking on new roles as they assume leadership positions. Hooray for Penny Appleby, Joyce Boatright, Hazel Baylor and Helen Lowery. It's not goodbye for me, nor is it for our four departing board members Sue Bilich, Judith Helburn, Leilani Rose, and Jane Ross. They may be leaving the board, but they certainly will remain a vital part of SCN. I know our new Executive Committee will be looking to them often for advice and counsel.

I'm handing the office of president over to the most capable Penny Appleby. Penny has been a SCN member from its very early days and a board member for almost as long. She leaves the office of Secretary-Treasurer. Was anyone ever better qualified to be SCN President?

I'll still be a SCN activist—I'm going to up my involvement as a book reviewer for our newly launched book review site, [www.storycirclebookreviews.org](http://www.storycirclebookreviews.org). You might want to get involved as well—you can learn how on the site. I'm also going to be working with Susan Albert to bring more online classes. This will bring double-barreled SCN opportunities for members as they both take and teach classes. Look for more about this exciting project early in the New Year.

This holiday season, I will likely once more look to SCN for help finding gifts. Memberships make great gifts—so do SCN's publications, especially the hot new cookbook, *Kitchen Table Stories*—check them out on our website or in this *Journal*. A gift to SCN to honor a dear one is another great way both to celebrate someone you love and to help our organization.

Remember! Any gift or increased membership to SCN between now and January 1, 2008, will generate a matching grant!

See you in the New Year,

*Patricia Pando*  
President, Story Circle Network

## Story Circle Journal

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

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### Membership Rates

One Year \$35 US  
\$45 Canada and Mexico  
\$50 elsewhere

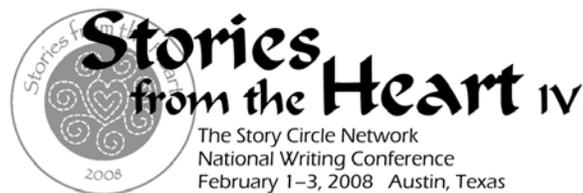
Foreign Memberships: International  
Postal Money Order *only*, please

**Back Issues:** Back issues are available either as first-run or photocopies. 1-9 issues: \$5 each; 10 or more, \$3 each. Add postage as follows: \$1.25 for 1 issue, \$5 for 2-5 issues, \$7.50 for 6+ issues.

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

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

# Conference News



## Pre-Conference Workshop

### *Mapping Our Stories* with Susan Wittig Albert

A “personal map” is a representation of our personal understanding and awareness of the places we inhabit, based on our daily practices, life experiences, and cultural values. Whether our maps focus on the external geography (the physical places in which our life stories take place) or our inner geography (the way we feel about those settings), they help to clarify not only our understanding of a particular place and its local and larger contexts, but its role as the setting for our personal stories. In this workshop, we will look at and discuss several life-story maps, construct our own, and write about them. ❖

Be sure to sign up for Susan Wittig Albert’s pre-conference workshop when you register!

### Share Your Talents at the Conference

Would you like to spread the word about your writing, crafts, or services to SCN members at the Stories from the Heart Conference in February, 2008? Well, you still can:

**Donate an item** for the silent auction. Contact Judith Helburn at [thelburns@sbcglobal.net](mailto:thelburns@sbcglobal.net).

**Become a sponsor** for a part of the program. Send an email to [storycircle@storycircle.org](mailto:storycircle@storycircle.org) with “Conference Sponsor” in the subject line.

**Be a vendor.** Sell your crafts or writing-related wares at the vendor tables during the conference.

Deadline for applications extended to December 7.

More details on our website. All proposals are subject to approval by the Conference Committee.

### Be a Worker Bee at the Conference

Behind the scenes, members are already very busy helping put everything together and we need a few more “worker bees” to do various jobs. We need: Hospitality volunteers, lots of registration table volunteers, other volunteers (just ask). It’s a great way to give back and meet others.

You don’t have to live in Austin to help with some of these needs—you just have to know you’re coming to the conference! You can call Penny Appleby at (512) 306-8936 or email her at [penny.appleby@attglobal.net](mailto:penny.appleby@attglobal.net) to sign up.

## Conference Hotel

Wyndham Hotel  
3401 South IH-35, Austin TX 78741  
512-448-2444 / fax: 512-443-4208

See the hotel website for more information: [www.wyndham.com/hotels/AUSWC/](http://www.wyndham.com/hotels/AUSWC/)

To get the conference rate (\$99/night plus tax, double occupancy), call the hotel directly (512-448-2444) and make your reservations no later than January 9, 2008. Room rate includes complimentary airport shuttle service, parking, and high speed wireless internet.

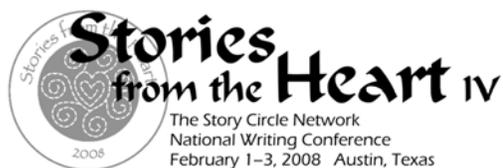
## Sisters Helping Sisters Our Conference Scholarship Program

Deadline for Applications Extended to Dec. 15

If you are a member of SCN and have an annual family income of \$50,000 or less, you may apply for a conference scholarship. These will be awarded in amounts ranging from \$75 to the full conference cost, depending on need and the availability of funds. Additionally, we may be able to assist with travel/lodging (but we can’t confirm the availability of travel/lodging money until January, 2008). To apply, go [www.storycircle.org/Conference/frmregister.php](http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/frmregister.php) or write to us, telling us how much aid you need (for registration, childcare, travel/lodging). Tell us about yourself and your reasons for applying for a scholarship. One of the objectives of Stories from the Heart IV is to return to our communities and share our discoveries with others. In approximately 200 words, explain how you will help the SCN achieve this objective.

Scholarship awards will be based on perceived need, the thoughtfulness of your response, and your interest in sharing what you learn in your community (for example, by starting a writing circle or developing other women’s story-sharing activities). We want to encourage the attendance of a diverse group of women who want to share their stories and help other women enjoy the benefits of women’s storytelling and story-sharing.

If you request a subsidy, you must pay a \$75 deposit towards your conference fees. If you receive a subsidy, you will then pay the remaining fee (the \$220 full conference fee, minus the subsidy, minus your \$75 deposit). This amount must be paid by **January 1, 2008**. If you do not receive an award, your deposit will be returned or applied to your full registration. ❖



# Conference

<b>Friday, February 1</b>	Detailed descriptions of conference sessions are on our website: <a href="http://www.storycircle.org/Conference">www.storycircle.org/Conference</a>		
Registration Opens	12:00 noon		
Pre-conference Workshop	1:30-3:30 pm	<i>Mapping Our Stories</i> , Susan Wittig Albert	
Conference Welcome	4:00-5:00 pm	Penny Appleby, President Elect of SCN, welcomes attendees	
Dinner break	5:30-7:30 pm	Dutch treat dinner in hotel restaurant or at nearby eateries	
Keynote Speech and Dessert Reception	7:30 pm	<b>Nancy Slonim Aronie:</b> <i>We Are All Alchemists; How to Turn Your Sorrow into Gold</i>	
<b>Saturday, February 2</b>		<b>Track A Circles of Creativity</b>	<b>Track B Nuts and Bolts</b>
Session 1	9:00–10:30 am	Coming Full Circle <i>Joyce Boatright, Lisa Shirah-Hiers, Sandi Stromberg</i>	Panel: Blogs & Life-Writing: Finding Our Voices Online, <i>Susan Albert, Moderator</i>
Break	10:30–11:00 am		
Session 2	11:00 am–12:30 pm	Money Matters <i>Carolyn Blankenship</i>	Harvest Your Family Tree <i>Cindy Bellinger</i>
Lunch Break & Free Time	12:30–3:30 pm	<i>Musical Memories and Anecdotes.</i> Sue Bilich and Helen Lowery with Greta Gutman on piano After lunch, visit our vendor area	
Session 3	3:30–5:00 pm	Panel: Cooking Up Memories <i>Jane Ross, Moderator</i>	Making Your Pages Picture Perfect <i>Sharon Lippincott</i>
Evening activities	6:00–8:00 pm 8:00–10:00 pm	Dutch treat dinner Open Mike, Storytelling from the Heart	
<b>Sunday, February 3</b>			
Session 4	9–10:30 am	The Magic of Metaphor <i>Jan Golden, Patricia Daly</i>	Giving the Critic the Slip <i>Helen Leatherwood</i>
Break	10:30–11:00 am		
Session 5	11:00 am–12:30 pm	Exploring Our Cultural Traditions? <i>Linda Wisniewski</i>	Pane: From Pen to Print <i>Paula Yost, Moderator</i>
Closing Luncheon	12:30–2:00 pm	<b>Luncheon Speaker: Susan Lincoln of HildeGirls</b>	

See detailed descriptions of all sessions on our website

**[www.storycircle.org/Conference](http://www.storycircle.org/Conference)**

Topics and speakers are subject to change.

# Program

## About Our Speakers

We are proud to introduce our major speakers—three women who really know what it takes to tell our stories!

Our Pre-Conference Workshop “Mapping Our Stories” is presented by Susan Wittig Albert, founder of SCN and best-selling author of *Writing from Life: Telling Your Soul’s Story* as well as three mystery series.

Our Friday night keynoter is Nancy Slonim Aronie—nationally-known radio commentator, writer, writing coach, and founder of the Chilmark creative writing workshops—talking about “How to turn our sorrows into gold.”

At lunch on Sunday, we will hear from Susan Lincoln, singer, voice teacher and founder of HildeGirls. At the 2006 Stories from the Heart, she had us on our feet singing music to inspire and uplift. Not to be missed!

Pre-Conference Presenter, Susan Wittig Albert



<b>Track C</b> <b>Putting Our Hearts on Paper</b>	<b>Track D</b> <b>Myriad Methods of Storytelling</b>
Solitude: Balm and Mystery <i>Barbara Miller</i>	Place as Character <i>Paula Yost</i>
Break	
Accessing Your Inner Muse <i>Lisa Shirah-Hiers</i>	Digital Storytelling <i>Martha Meacham</i>
<i>Musical Memories and Anecdotes.</i> Sue Bilich and Helen Lowery with Greta Gutman on piano After lunch, visit our vendor area	
Here Be Dragons <i>Susan Albert</i>	Writing and Yoga <i>Regina Moser</i>
Dutch treat dinner After dinner: Open Mike, Storytelling from the Heart	
Words That Heal <i>Pat Flathouse</i>	Weaving Our Stories <i>Barbara Heming</i>
Break	
Finding Our Way Home <i>Jeanne Guy</i>	Word Paint <i>Linda Pritchett</i>

The full conference registration fee includes all general and breakout sessions, Friday evening reception, conference-sponsored meals, and break refreshments. Dutch-treat dinners are *not* included. The pre-conference workshop is optional and costs an additional \$30. Check the registration form on the back page for other registration options.



Keynote Speaker Nancy Slonim Aronie



Sunday Luncheon Speaker Susan Lincoln

*Meet other lifewriters and learn from their stories*

## *Nancy Slonim Aronie: Writing from the Heart*

*Our Friday night Keynote speaker for the Stories from the Heart Conference, Nancy Slonim Aronie is best known for her commentaries on National Public Radio's "All Things Considered." Nancy is the owner and facilitator of The Chilmark Writing Workshop on Martha's Vineyard where she offers weekly workshops each summer. An inspiring speaker, commentator, writer, and workshop leader, Nancy shared some thoughts on what drives her with SCN's Lisa Shirah-Hiers.*



*Like the children you have watched, like the child you once were, you can now choose to resee the world in awe and wonder. But it takes work. It takes practice.*

—Writing from the Heart, p. 38

*You can't give if you're depleted, and if you're running on empty, you have nothing left to give. Creating has a lot to do with giving: giving to yourself, to your soul, giving to the world.*

—Writing from the Heart, p. 46

**SCJ:** *Tell me about your busy life. How do you juggle it all?*

**Nancy:** In the 1970s, I read *Be Here Now*, Ram Dass' book, and it changed my life. I try very hard to be here now. If you are in this moment, then you're not thinking of what you should have done a minute ago or what you're gonna do in three minutes....you get the full moment. I make lists; I prioritize. Eating is always at the top of the list. While I'm eating I do stuff.

**SCJ:** *How do your workshop participants lives change when they find their voices?*

**Nancy:** It isn't just that they find their voices. They transform because people listen to them. People go very deep because they feel safe. They get insights they wouldn't ordinarily get. When you're just writing or thinking, you're not hearing yourself, but when you read your work out loud, you are literally listening from a different part of your brain. You get very real, very truthful, and the language is your own, and the rhythms are your own, and you tell the truth about your story.

**SCJ:** *How do your various roles—wife, mother, writer, facilitator—feed each other?*

**Nancy:** I think being the mom of a handicapped boy keeps my heart open. In my workshop I talk a lot about what's going on in my life and because a lot of it is hard and I cry easily, I think I model that it is OK to cry in front of people and not look too attractive. (I've checked myself out in the mirror in the middle of a cry and it's not a pretty picture!) Many, many people are frightened of crying because they think they won't stop. Or they're ashamed. Or they grew up in a family that said "You better cheer up. Don't come out of your room until you're smiling." But here whatever you feel is welcome, respected, and, in fact, cherished. I have hard stuff in my life with this kid, and then I have incredible celebration with him and my husband and my other kids. That feeds into it as well. The work I do definitely helps with the family because I'm so filled. The room is filled with love. When I go out into the real world and see how cynical, angry, empty and sad people are, I'm so grateful that I live in 'La La' land. Most of my time is with people who are searching, opening their hearts, deepening, wondering, healing. You can't really beat that for spending your time.

**SCJ:** *Has listening to other people's stories changed your life?*

**Nancy:** I think the group is what changes my life—over and over again watching people fall in love with each other, cheerlead each other. I've heard awful, awful ruptures that people have lived through—abuse and emptiness and tragedy. [The stories] reinforce what I already know—that everybody has something that breaks their heart. Everyone.

**SCJ:** *What advice would you give new writers, teachers and workshop facilitators?*

**Nancy:** To writers I would say just keep writing. If you get into a class or workshop where you do not feel safe and you suddenly get a constricted throat, and your shoulders are tense, and somebody in the room says, "You know I heard something just like that,"

or, “You know how you should end that...”, if there is anything that doesn’t feel right I would say, get out. Drop the class, leave the workshop, get away from this teacher. For teachers and facilitators I’d say go from the brain into the heart. In the embryonic stages of creative work, what we really need is nourishment. You plant a seed. If you start chopping at that seed it cannot grow. But if you water it, put some food on it, and get some sunshine on it, that’s gonna turn into a flower. If you are a teacher you are a gardener.

I was once on a softball team. I loved it. My husband bought me this beautiful glove for our twentieth anniversary, and he was teaching me to catch. I was really getting good. [At practice] the coach would make fun of me. “Come on molasses legs! Move it!” Well I’m a terribly slow runner. I [asked] the guys on the team, “When he insults you, does that motivate you somehow?” They said, “I’ll show the jerk. That’s what it does to me.” I thought, maybe that’s the difference between guys and gals. I don’t need to be told what’s wrong with me. I don’t get motivated by that; I get stopped. I would advise teachers to find the good stuff. If you *have* to tell them about grammar, find something great in the same paragraph. Comment on that first. You can hear anything after somebody says something good to you.

**SCJ:** *What do you wish you had known before you began?*

**Nancy:** It’s what I still need to know, which is how to listen better. Listening is a skill. With my kids I was an entertainer and a cheerleader. I was gonna give them all the encouragement that I didn’t get, but I didn’t get quiet enough

to hear who they were. They will defend me. So will my husband. But I have moments when I think if I had just had some wisdom or some advice from somebody! It was the same thing with the very first workshop that I did. (I’ll probably talk about this at the conference.) I was clueless. I learned by seeing it done wrong, then I did it wrong, and then I did it right. Facilitating is about being skillful at calming down the insecure ones who are the first to beat up somebody else because they’re not feeling very good about themselves. I’m really good at that now. I can get a group safe.

Sometimes it takes time. My [summer] workshop [sessions are] Monday through Thursday. My husband calls me every Monday night and says, “So how was it?” I’ll either say, “Unbelievable,” or, “Nah. It’s gonna take ’til tomorrow.” If I say, “It’s gonna take ’til tomorrow,” that’s because there was one person who was just not quite able to go with their heart. By Tuesday, everybody melts.

**SCJ:** *Tell us how you came to write your book Writing from the Heart?*

**Nancy:** This is a funny story. I had called my college’s alumni office trying to get some kind of publicity for the workshop. I asked [the person I spoke to in the alumni office] if she would come to the workshop and write about it if she thought it was worthwhile. She loved it. She wrote this amazing piece.

So [I got a call from a] publisher who had gone to the University of Virginia. She said, “I’ve heard you on NPR. I’ve just got my alumni magazine [and read the article about you]. Would you like to write a book on writing?” And I said, “Oh, thank you. I don’t think so.” And I just figured—I don’t know what I figured. But I wrote her name and her phone number down.

For the next three days I kept talking to myself saying, “Are you an idiot? Someone is asking you to do what you know how to do. You know this.” I finally called her and they answered, “Disney productions.” I thought I had a wrong number, so I dialed it again and they said, “Disney productions.” When she came to the phone I said, “You’re like...ah...big!” She said, “Yes....” And I said, “Well I was thinking about it and I think I wanna do it.” She said, “Great. Send me a proposal.” I asked her how to do that and she got very cold. She said, “No. I think you should find out.” So I found out. I wrote the proposal. I sent it in. She called me two weeks later and said, “Everybody loves it. We’re giving you a \$25,000 advance.” Can you even imagine such a thing? We were completely broke so it was a miracle.

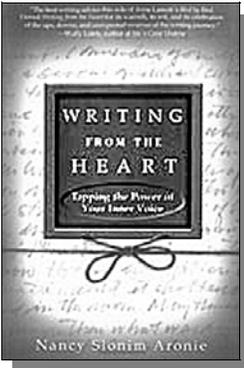
**SCJ:** *What are you most looking forward to at the Stories from the Heart Conference?*

**Nancy:** I came to teach a Story Circle workshop in Texas a couple of years back and I loved everyone who came. It is an amazing organization....so diverse, so filled with genuine hearts. I just loved it. I’m looking forward to seeing everyone that I met last time.

*(Continued on page 8)*

*Nancy Slonim Aronie’s*

## *Writing from the Heart*



*Visit Nancy’s website:*

[www.chilmarkwritingworkshop.com](http://www.chilmarkwritingworkshop.com)

*or call (508) 645-9085 to order books and audio commentaries and to learn about Nancy’s writing workshops.*

**Hear Nancy Slonim Aronie speak  
at the Friday Keynote Reception at  
the Stories from the Heart conference,  
February 1, 2008.**

**Her topic:** *We Are All Alchemists; How to Turn  
Your Sorrow into Gold*

(Continued from page 7)

**SCJ:** *What makes you really feel alive?*

**Nancy:** I love dancing with my husband. I love when I am rewriting something (which is funny 'cause I never knew how to rewrite before). I feel very alive when I'm writing. It's so present, you know? You're just totally there. What makes me feel really alive? Walking in the woods, being with my kids, my family, friends, ...and chewing.

**SCJ:** *Is there anything else you'd like to tell SCN readers?*

**Nancy:** I'm very, very grateful that I get to do what I do. Every time the school year comes around I thank God that I'm not going into a building, wearing panty hose, standing at a blackboard, even though I loved every kid. I am so lucky to have so much autonomy. I am married to the most easy, Zen, funny, wise man. I have gratitude for the people in my life, the place I live, health, and my teachers. I have a lot of good teachers. ❖

—Phone interview conducted and edited  
by Lisa Shirah-Hiers

### ***Nancy Slonim Aronie's Writing Credits***

*Writing from the Heart: Tapping the Power of Your Inner Voice* published by Hyperion

*Life Out Loud: A collection on cassette of Nancy Slonim Aronie's National Public Radio commentaries.*

*NPR Commentaries: 1986-Now*, an updated CD version of Nancy Slonim Aronie's National Public Radio commentaries.

### ***Nancy's Teaching and Journalism Credits***

Nancy Slonim Aronie has been a commentator for National Public Radio's "All Things Considered." She was a Visiting Writer at Trinity College in Hartford, CT, wrote a monthly column in *McCall's* magazine and was the recipient of the Eye of The Beholder Artist in Residence award at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. She gives writing workshops and lectures at Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health, Omega Institute, Rowe Conference Center, Wain-Wright House and The Open Center in New York City. As a teaching fellow at Harvard University Nancy taught Literature for Social Reflection and received the Teacher of the Year award two years in succession.

## *Thank You*

### *To Our Generous Donors*

A big Thank you!!! to all of our generous donors this year! These women are helping to support our programs, publications, and projects. As of November 20, 49 donors, supporting members, patrons, and benefactors have donated over \$2000.

Lucy Ann Albert	Stephanie Kadel-Taras
Penny Appleby	Pat LaPointe
Duffie Bart	Mary Jane Marks, in
Hazel Baylor	honor of SCN's
Denise Bell, in memory	10th Anniversary
of Joanne C. Dick	Phyllis Martin
Deborah Berger	Susan Mason
Sue Bilich, in honor of	Pat O'Toole
Judith Helburn	Patricia Pando
Ann Bishop	Ann Patrick, in honor of
Teddy Broeker	Susan Wittig Albert
Mary Caliendo, in	PJ Pierce
memory of	Donna Remmert
Erica Marie Caliendo	ExxonMobil matching
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Andrea Copeland	Dorothy Ross
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Pat Flathouse	Mary Carol Schaedel
Martha Fleming	Jan Seale
Susan Hanson	"Sharing Our Stories"
Joan Harman	writing circle, in
Judith Helburn	memory of Ligia
Joan McLaren Henson	Jimenez
Arlene Howard, in	Lisa Shirah-Hiers
memory of my mother,	Sandra Simon
Linda May Roman,	Tricia Stephens
on her birthday	Sr. Mary Sullivan
Oct. 17, 1909	Carol Wessling
Jazz Jaeschke	Connie Williams
Donna Johnson	Linda Wisniewski

If Story Circle Network has made a difference in your life, consider upgrading your membership to the Supporter, Patron, or Benefactor level or making an end-of-year donation. More information at:

[www.storycircle.org/Donations](http://www.storycircle.org/Donations)

Click "Make a donation" to contribute.

*Sharing our stories*

## *Blogging Our Stories*

*As a stay-at-home mom, Kara Flathouse was amazed to discover a world of writing and sharing possibilities that suited her lifestyle perfectly in the computer world of the "Blogosphere." She shares her experience of starting and maintaining an online web-log or blog.*

A few years ago, at a women's Story Circle gathering, blogging was described to me as an online diary. I remember thinking that people would only read your blog if you were famous or had a really exciting life. I didn't put myself in either of those categories so the whole blogging world stayed unknown to me, until recently.

Several months ago a friend of mine started blogging as a way to sell the retro aprons she makes. When I checked out her website I realized she used her blog not only to sell her handmade items but also as a means to communicate with other home schooling moms such as herself. Even though I do not home school, I am a mom who has recently switched gears to stay at home and raise my three young daughters. I began to think blogging would be a great way to keep my writing brain working while allowing family and friends to keep in touch with all our happenings.

I took the plunge and began my own blog this summer. It was easy to do because there are several sites out there that guide you through the set up. Places like blogspot.com and typepad.com will take you through the process in minutes. The hardest part of start up for me was deciding on a name for my blog. I finally came up with Eskimo Kisses (rubbing noses) and Air Hugs (like blowing kisses but using hug motion instead), in honor of my two oldest girls, since the site is mainly about family life.

The amazing thing about this is that it has opened up a whole new world for me. I've met other stay at home moms who are raising their families on the same principles I am. We share some of the same interests, frustrations and also help teach one another new things. I now have friends that stretch the globe from Texas to Australia. For me blogging is like sitting down with a cup of tea to chat with friends, but the best part is I don't have to clean house before they come over or even get dressed!

Blogs come in all shapes and sizes. SCN member Janet Riehl, uses her blog to create connections across the arts that spans generations and cultures. Others like Sharon Lippincott and Joyce Boatright center their blogs on the craft of lifewriting. Anyone can blog, and you'll be surprised by how many people will actually visit your site each day just to check in.

If you're thinking blogging may be in your future our fellow SCN members have graciously shared a few tips with us. First, Judy Fettman suggests that you may want to consider changing people's names to pseudonyms to protect their privacy, given that a blog is public domain. She also

adds that blogging is a good outlet for your feelings. Marjorie Witt agrees by saying that blogging can be "good, cheap therapy."

Blogging is another avenue that women can take to express themselves through their writing and a wonderful way to share their life stories with one another. Susan Wittig Albert articulates it best when she says, "I think blogging is the very best thing the Internet has offered us—right up there with email. I get to see pictures of my grandchildren and read the daily business of their lives. I can keep in touch with a dozen people whose blogs I read, and more who read mine. And all this while I live out here in the country, miles from anywhere. What an amazing world we live in!" I agree, what an amazing world! ❖

Says **Kara P. Flathouse**: I joined SCN with my mother-in-law Pat about seven years ago. I am currently a member of e-circle #2. We recently moved to a rural area outside of Amarillo, Texas, where I have been busy collecting memories of country life and the day-to-day adventures of my young family. My greatest challenge is finding time to put those moments on paper, but when I do I find myself joyfully immersed in the writing process.

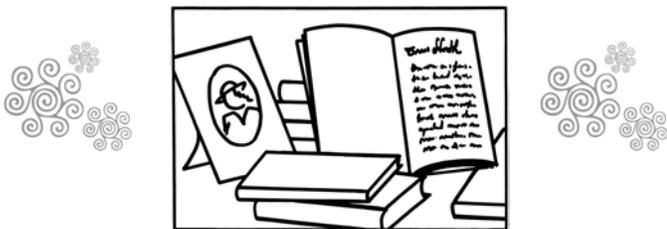
Visit Kara's blog at: [www.eskimokissesandairhugs.blogspot.com](http://www.eskimokissesandairhugs.blogspot.com). Another 30 SCN members' blogs are listed at: [www.storycircle.org/blogs.shtml](http://www.storycircle.org/blogs.shtml).

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

Sign up on our website:  
[www.storycircle.org](http://www.storycircle.org)

(scroll down to "How to Join..." in the purple navigation bar)

or mail in the form on p.27.



## SCN Relaunches Book Review Site

Susan Wittig Albert

“We love books that tell the truth about women’s lives,” we say on our Story Circle Book Review website ([www.storycirclebookreviews.org](http://www.storycirclebookreviews.org)). And it’s true!

That’s why, early in its history, the Story Circle Network launched what is now the largest and most comprehensive women’s book review site on the Internet. Peggy Moody and I began it in 2001. Then Paula Yost assumed responsibility and began building it to the extensive site it is today, with over 400 reviews. Working with an enthusiastic team of SCN reviewers, Paula created a wonderful resource for women readers and authors around the world.

Now, in SCN’s tenth anniversary year, we’ve opened a new and exciting chapter in the development of our book review website. Over the summer, Paula Yost and I teamed up with Linda Wisniewski and Peggy Moody to renovate and relaunch our site, expanding the kinds of books we review and adding helpful user-friendly features. You can search the site, check out your favorite author, and order directly from Amazon. (Every book you purchase through our site earns money for SCN!)

There are more features in the works and on the way. Soon, we’ll be launching monthly author interviews and a regular e-letter, letting you know about new books by, for, and about women. We have lots more ideas for interactive features that will make SCN’s site more interesting and helpful.

### *We Need Your Help*

But we need your help to carry out these great ideas! We are receiving more and more new books from publishers and authors, and we need more reviewers to help us handle the load. As a reviewer myself, I know that I read with greater interest and care when I’m going to write about a book. And I also know that reviewing is a great way to add to my portfolio of published writings—and to my personal library! (Reviewers keep the copies we send them.)

So if you love women’s books as much as we do and you’d like to share your love, visit the website at [www.storycirclebookreviews.org](http://www.storycirclebookreviews.org) and click on “Becoming a Reviewer.” Take a look at the way we’re spotlighting our reviewers (yes, you can have your own page on our site!), and then send us a sample review, using our easy online form. We’d love to have you join our team and help us show the world that SCN is *the* organization for every woman who wants to tell the truth about her life. ❖

## True Words from Real Women

To Jane,  
In Response to the Question,  
*What Do You Read?*

grace forrest-maestas  
Polvadera NM

Mostly, anymore, aside from the Buddhist texts, I read this acre of land. I read the thin delicate trails of insects in the sand. I read how the native grasses I plant grow and seed. I read the invasive strength of Kochia and Pig Weed, their fierceness. I read the birds who live here, who show me how to live. And the mountains in the West who watch over me, the mesas to the East. Read my dogs. The remaining guinea hen, Fiona. My place in my neighborhood, my barrio. The sound of the engine in the old Datsun truck. I read the smell of the first fire of this season in the wood stove and I think of a bird that fell into the stove pipe this summer. I read how I wake often in the night, almost always at about 2:20 a.m. ... wondering about all of it. Wide awake. ❖

When she isn’t reading her land, grace reports she reads:

Buddhist texts, many, Chogyam Trungpa in particular:

Mary Oliver	Mary Oliver	Mary Oliver
Annie Dillard	Natalie Goldberg	
Louise Erdrich	Loren Eisley	
Rainer Maria Rilke	Barbara Kingsolver	
Jimmy Santiago Baca	Anne Lamott	
Arundhati Roy	Robert Bly	
Pattianne Rogers	Stanley Crawford	
Carl Jung	Rudolph Steiner	
Barry Lopez and Terry Tempest Williams		
and Derrick Jensen, <i>The Culture of Make Believe</i> and <i>Endgame</i> , Volumes 1 and 2. “He keeps me tethered to the task of being human in this day.”		

And yes, you can find many of the women authors on grace’s reading list reviewed on the new SCN Book Review website:

[www.storycirclebookreviews.org](http://www.storycirclebookreviews.org)

Encircling our lives  
Women speak from heart through pen  
Stories connect us.

—Pat Daly, Largo, FL

*Writing and healing*

## *Writing Our Way through the “Katrinas” of Our Lives*

*For Internet Chapter member **Becky Szymcik**, a disaster relief worker for FEMA, writing became a lifeline as she grappled with the horrors she witnessed in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. She soon found her writing sustained her through the many disasters she has witnessed since.*

“Disaster Relief—in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita has this phrase become an oxymoron? Many people—victims or not—will answer yes.”

The above is the opening statement of what I now refer to as my “mini Katrina memoirs.” I have been a disaster relief worker for 17 years, a profession that I love. But after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, I seriously questioned why I do what I do. My friend Beth is a member of Story Circle Network and had sent me a link to read one of her pieces. I noticed the link for submitting stories about Katrina and Rita. I started to work on a piece—maximum 1000 words—and found that my first draft was at least 3000 words. I spent several months working out what became a six-part series and I posted all six parts on the SCN website.

I’ve been a writer all my life. I wrote my first poem in second grade. I won a poetry contest in fourth grade. I submitted fictional stories instead of essays in English class. I wrote poems and stories for my family when I had no money for gifts. I write about my own life as fiction, creating chapters when I want to express something. I write romance stories for my boyfriend. I had no idea when I was hired by FEMA that my penchant for capturing feelings in writing would be a mandatory stress reliever for me in the disaster world.

I joined SCN when I was writing my “mini-Katrina memoirs.” I was still deployed to a disaster (flooding in New Hampshire) and working on my laptop in my hotel room after hours (as I am as I write this, in fact.) The writing helped me to settle myself somehow, even though the monthly topics were in no way related to my work or feelings about my work. I wrote for my circle and continued to work on the Katrina writing. By the time I was home in August 2006, I had written 10,000 words about Katrina and started my emotional recovery. Writing those memoirs and posting them near the first year anniversary was very cathartic. Two years later I realize how much I needed not only to write those memoirs but to share them as well.

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**Becky Szymcik** lives in Westboro, MA, and is a Disaster Relief worker for FEMA and a member of e-circle #12. You can read her complete Katrina memoirs at [www.storycircle.org/katrina/szymcik.html](http://www.storycircle.org/katrina/szymcik.html).

Writing about my high stress job has kept me sane for months now. I often fear that my circle gets tired of my work-centric stories, but it is what helps balance me. During Katrina, I was so dejected by the FEMA media bashing, I found myself writing an “email blog.” I was so hurt and angry that the real story was not being told, I would write about what I was doing and how hard we were working. I didn’t save any of those emails, but they helped me connect with my family and friends back home. That was something I needed very badly in those first days of Katrina. I didn’t realize until much later that the process of writing as well as the connection to my loved ones was what really helped get me through.

I question sometimes whether lifewriting is really for me; I often struggle with the monthly topics, especially when I try so hard to avoid writing about work. I don’t really journal—every so often I try and only keep it up for a few days; I prefer writing fiction, or at least writing my own words, thoughts and emotions in the third person. While pondering how I would approach this article, I realized that writing about work is therapeutic and it is the reason I joined SCN. My job is often sad, heartbreaking, devastating, and frustrating. Most of the men I work with aren’t affected—or least don’t admit to being affected—by the emotional impact of a high-stress job like FEMA. Most of the people I’ve shared my Katrina writing with are women. I need to write about work and discuss what I feel and see and do, and the women around me—whether my family and friends or SCN members or fellow female FEMA workers—have reacted positively to whatever I’ve shared. I think that if my stories remain work centric, my e-circle will understand that right now, while I work this high-stress job, it is what I need to focus on, in order to keep this job and my own sanity.

In the emergency management world, we discuss “lessons learned” from each disaster. The lesson I’ve learned from writing about work is that every forum and format for my self-expression is valid whether I share it or not, but that the sharing is sometimes as important as the writing itself. Some of my e-circle members have written about their high-stress jobs, and I value that perspective. Writing about these stressors is much more than venting or even therapy; it is recovery. ❖

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## Kitchen Table Stories

# Falling in Love with Panettone

*Arlene Howard went in search of the delicious Italian Christmas bread called Panettone on a trip to Milan. Her adventures became a favorite family story and baking her own Panettone a favorite Christmas ritual.*

“Come in now,” my mom called. Reluctantly, I stopped playing hopscotch.

“You’re old enough to go to the store by yourself. Get a box of fresh ravioli for dinner.”

We lived on 40th Avenue in San Francisco. Down the street and around the corner was a small Italian delicatessen. I remember fresh pasta, cold cuts, crusty loaves of Larraburu sourdough bread, and barrels of candy.

“Ciao. What does your mama want today?”

“A big box of fresh ravioli.”

“Aspetta.” (Wait a minute.)

The Italian man who owned the delicatessen placed two dozen fresh ravioli in a large flat white cardboard box and tied it with string. “For you, *bambina*.”

I handed him three dimes and a nickel.

“Take a root beer candy from the barrel,” he told me.

*I like being eight*, I thought.

We had fresh ravioli that night and many more nights that year.

Soon it was Christmastime. The delicatessen was filled with all kinds of treats. On Christmas Eve, the delicatessen owner gave me a large golden cellophane wrapped package.

“Take it home to your Mama.”

“What is it? What is it, Mom? Open it. Open it.”

“Oh, my. *Panettone di Natale*. We’ll have this special Italian Christmas bread after dinner. Wait till you taste it.” My first bite of that delicious confection was the beginning of my love affair with panettone.

In 1986, my husband Alan, our nine-year-old daughter Allyson, and I arrived in Milan in early December for a four-month stay. On the first evening, we drove around and around the city to get our bearings.

“Alan, stop!” I shouted. “There’s a *panetteria*.”

In the window, round loaves of panettone were bedecked in yards of clear cellophane and red, green, and white ribbons. My husband, who wasn’t really fond of stopping suddenly in traffic in the middle of a strange city, did find a place to pull over. Good food is a heady persuader. “I’ll meet you at the corner by the green clock,” Alan said.

We bought the most beautiful *Panettone di Natale*. We smiled as we walked to the corner. No Alan. Where was he? Fifteen minutes ticked by slowly on the hands of the big clock, then thirty, and then forty-five. It was cold. It began to drizzle.

“He’s lost and he won’t ask for directions,” I thought.

After one hour, my daughter cried out, “Oh look.

There’s Dad.”

I wasn’t smiling as I got in the car. “Where did you go?” I demanded.

“The *polizia* said, ‘*Uscire di qui*.’ (Get out of here.) The only way I knew how to find you was to back track to the apartment and start over. There are a lot of one-way streets. It is opening night at La Scala. You know, you’re lucky I got back here at all!” He was frustrated. Very. I was mad. Very. On reflection, I am not sure why I was.

Not much was said on the ride back to the apartment. Soon we were there. After dinner we opened the beautiful package and ate the most wonderful panettone. It was perfect with the traditional drink of Asti Spumante. We began to giggle; soon we were laughing—at what is now known in our family as “The Lost Corner” story. It has gotten much funnier over the years.

When I was a young bride, I made panettone from a recipe found in *Gourmet, Volume II*. The cookbook had been a birthday gift along with a box of Betty Crocker cake mix from my husband when he was my boyfriend. I have always wondered if the gift, wrapped in a brown paper bag, was a test.

During the first years, I kneaded the panettone by hand; then I got a KitchenAid mixer with a dough hook. Finally, I bought a bread machine and dumped everything into the pan. Now I use the bread machine to do the hard work—the mixing and kneading and first rising. After shaping it, I bake it in the oven. Over time, the recipe has evolved, but it remains a delicious, rich, buttery Milanese Christmas bread filled with citron and golden raisins and adorned with sugar and almonds.

Making *Panettone di Natale* each Christmas brings back memories of growing up in San Francisco, the “lost corner” in Milan, our holiday parties, and visiting Venice another December. The memories fill me and my family with smiles and laughter. Perhaps you will fall in love with panettone, too. ❖

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**Arlene Howard**, an SCN member since 2007, lives in Rancho Mirage, California, with her husband Alan, her Saint Bernard Nala, and twenty-year-old cat Katisha. A retired librarian, Arlene writes a travel column “Desert Destinations” for *The Desert Woman*. Writing, visiting her daughter, quilting, watching old movies, and gardening with her husband keep her busy.

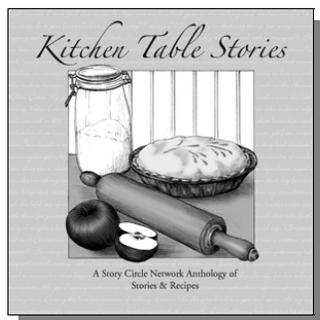
## Kitchen Table Stories Editor's Report

**Jane Ross**

Our new cookbook-anthology *Kitchen Table Stories* (KTS) has been, if not yet a runaway bestseller, a very successful small-publishing project benefiting SCN to the tune of \$1600 so far. *Kitchen Table Stories* was the first book of this scale that SCN has published under its own imprint and it is generating interest that we never anticipated.

Within two weeks of publication on Oct. 26, we had virtually sold out of our 703-copy print run of the Special Edition. We sold 489 copies during our pre-order period and, based on this, ordered 700 copies from the printer. We needed to send 75 free copies to contributors and others and we estimated an additional 140 copies would be sufficient to cover sales at the conference and into next year. (Not!)

The book was listed on Susan Albert's book order web page on Nov. 1, and in just two weeks we received orders for all the remaining copies, rather overwhelming Susan. We've already ordered a reprint from Morgan Printing and will resume selling through Susan's web order page after Christmas, when copies are available and she will have time to again fulfill orders.



### *Panettone di Natale* The Recipe

- Visit the web page for our delectable new cookbook *Kitchen Table Stories*  
[www.storycircle.org/cookbook](http://www.storycircle.org/cookbook)
- Click the link to our book order page at print-on-demand publisher Lulu.com.
- Click "Add to Shopping Cart" to purchase a copy of the Trade Edition.
- Wait for your copy of the book to arrive.
- Open to page 31.
- Measure, mix, and bake.
- Enjoy a delicious slice of panettone while reading the charming stories in the book.

From mid-November on out, visitors to Susan's book page were referred to our new *Kitchen Table Stories* Trade Edition web page on Lulu.com (the print-on-demand service we used to publish *Starting Points*). Cover artist and designer Katherine Misegades quickly revised the KTS cover art for the new edition, which is perfect bound (not spiral) and has a lighter weight of paper but is still a good-looking book. Look for KTS on Lulu.com at: [www.lulu.com/content/1386635](http://www.lulu.com/content/1386635)

The book launch party was a big success—lots of books sold, delicious food, great readings, lovely venue. The Austin Chapter underwrote the costs of the party, which doubled as a Holiday Party and wrap-up for the chapter. Party pics (photography courtesy of SCN's Penny Leisch) are online at: [www.storycircle.org/cookbook/ktslaunch.html](http://www.storycircle.org/cookbook/ktslaunch.html)

In mid-November, we got word of a surprise publicity opportunity for the book. A press release about the book launch party caught the eye of the Food Editor of the *Austin American Statesman* newspaper. She contacted me, interested in including the book in an article about locally produced cookbooks that would make good holiday gifts, due to run Nov. 28. For the book to be included in her article, we needed to have copies in a retail outlet in Austin. I called the consignment buyer at our local independent bookstore, Book People, and dropped a copy off at the store. They reviewed the book in a day and agreed to take the last 12 copies we had on hand on consignment to coincide with the *Statesman* article, and the Food Editor was happy to hear that. We'll resupply the bookstore once the reprint comes in. These bookstore sales will bring the book to a whole new audience.

The success of *Kitchen Table Stories* depended in large part on the contributing authors trusting SCN volunteers to edit and present their words in a way that would make them look good and to get them their copies in time for holiday giving. We needed plenty of author preorders to make this work. Judging by the many complimentary emails sent in by authors, we exceeded our author's expectations and it seems created a book with an appeal that goes well beyond the "family and friends of SCN" that was our core market. The goodwill created, together with the team-building benefits of this project and the nice profit we made for SCN, make it all worthwhile! Any further publicity and extra sales are, as they say, gravy.

Thank you to all who took part in this project. It's been a grand team effort! Special thanks to SCN's Executive Director Peggy Moody for her tremendous web-design, technical, and administrative support. Couldn't have done it without her! ❖

### *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](mailto: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.

*Story Circles—the heart of SCN*

## *Sharing Stories in the Midst of War*

*What would it be like to facilitate a story circle in a war-torn country where many women are illiterate? Khadijah Lacina of Ma'bar, Yemen, knows from first-hand experience.*

Let's face it...every woman has a story to tell, she just has to be made to know in her heart that she is important enough to tell it.

I started our story circle here in Yemen almost a year ago now, and it has undergone a lot of transformations, as have the women involved. We started out right before war broke out—just three of us, two Americans and a Yemeni woman. Our first meeting was pretty funny, as I had to do a lot of translating because the other American's Arabic was not all that great. The idea of simply writing about her life was pretty strange to my Yemeni friend. The oral tradition is strong here, as the illiteracy rate is very high, especially among women. So, I told her, "You talk, I'll write." And the idea caught on...

Currently there is a core of about six women in our group, with others dropping in and sharing as they are able or moved to do so. We started out talking about the war—what else? It is an obvious topic when your tea cups are rattled every few minutes with the dropping of shells. One day we sat sharing our writings and there was a huge BOOM. I asked if that was a bomb, or thunder? One lady said she hoped it was a bomb or she would never make it home through the valley in the rain!! Trust in Allaah, as well as a sense of humor, seems to see most of us through all the strife and unrest.

I see that a lot of what we write about is coping...with ourselves as Muslim women, students, mothers, and wives, as well as with the outside stresses that come along with dealing with a war at our back door. In the group are women from Yemen, America, France, Morocco, and Africa. Culturally we have a lot of interesting differences, but we all share our love of our religion and a commitment to be the best that we can be in all of the roles we have chosen to undertake. The youngest woman in the group is a graphic artist from New Jersey—she often illustrates her stories as she writes them, doodling like crazy in the margins of her notebook.

That may be different than a lot of story circles—we write our stories in notebooks as opposed to the computer. Most of us do not have electricity, so it is much more practical. I have been journaling on paper most of my life, so it is natural to me. I think it is therapeutic for my Circle members as well, as they see their words take shape on the page, straight from their hearts and minds. We seem to have overcome any language barriers, speaking most of the time in Arabic, but falling back to English when things get a little tough to grasp. And, of course, I have to write out the words of my friends who can't write for themselves.

I would like to get my members writing more poetry...I see it in their words, and I think they would really enjoy adding a new dimension to their writing. I use a lot of ideas from the book, *Poemcrazy*, as well as ideas from my journals. I save all of the weekly SCN prompts, and use those as well. Sometimes when I come up with something a little off the wall, my members look at me like I'm a little weird—but they always come through for me in their writings.

All in all, it has been an enriching, exciting endeavor to lead this story circle here in Yemen. I have seen the growth of the women themselves through writing, as well as hearing other people's stories. There are so many differences in our lives and some of our perspectives on things, but we all share the bonds of our Islaam and our journeys through life as women. I hope to continue with our story circle for a very long time!!

—Khadijah Lacina, Ma'bar, Yemen

### *Fun Ideas for Expanding Your Circle*

**Lisa Shirah-Hiers, SCN Circles Coordinator**

Keep your circle exciting! Throw a "Be Our Guest" night where members can bring other women. Offer door prizes: chocolate, a sample *Story Circle Journal*, a pretty diary and pen, or a good book. (See our wonderful new book-review website for ideas: [www.storycirclebookreviews.org](http://www.storycirclebookreviews.org). More about the new website on p. 10.) Ask for an RSVP so you know how much room you need, and have circle members bring refreshments, paper goods, a pretty cloth and flowers for the table. Remind guests not to "critique" but to encourage and that the stories you share together are private. Then let your stories fly!

For a list of circles near you, a Facilitators' Guide, sample *Journals* and SCN brochures, visit [www.storycircle.org](http://www.storycircle.org) or email us at [freerangecircles@storycircle.org](mailto:freerangecircles@storycircle.org).

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*Want to meet up with your own e-circle sisters or learn how to start a free-range circle? Why not plan on coming to the **Stories from the Heart Conference**, February, '08 in Austin, TX. Early-bird registration rates continue through December 15. Register online or using the form on the back page of this issue.*

*Creating connections through our circles*

## Road Trip, Life Journey

*They had been "SCN Circle Sisters" in e-circle #7 for many years. At last they met in a circle of support and love. Lee Ambrose, Mary Jo Doig, and Mary Sullivan, share this travel diary of the trip that Lee and Mary Jo made to Long Island, New York, to attend Mary Sullivan's jubilee celebration of 50 years as a Cenacle Sister, a testament to the life-affirming power of sharing our stories.*

### Travel Day

**Lee:** Most mornings I hate the 5:15 a.m. alarm, but not this day. After a long wait and much planning, it was finally time to drive the four hours from Tennessee to Virginia. It had been seven months since Mary Jo Doig and I first met face to face and now we were going together to Mary Sullivan's celebration. I was meeting Mary for the first time and I was so excited I could hardly contain myself on the drive. When I got to Virginia, I knew we had another eight hours of drive time but that didn't matter.

As we made our way through Pennsylvania and New Jersey, I found myself reminiscing about the childhood and early adult years I'd spent in both states. We talked about the fact that the sum total of my familiarity with New York was New York City's Broadway. I had no idea what to expect of Long Island. In the days leading up to the trip, I'd imagined the sights and sounds of New York but mostly I'd imagined what it would be like to give Mary a real hug instead of my cyber hugs.

**Mary Jo:** I was alternately thrilled and peace-filled as we drove and talked about all the things our years of internet friendship have birthed.

### Mary's Celebration

**Lee:** The minute we pulled onto the Cenacle grounds, I was in awe. The peace and beauty set the stage for what was an incredible experience I'll not soon forget. I wanted to linger and take it all in, but I also wanted to hurry, park the car, and get inside to see Mary with my own eyes. That, after all, was the reason we were there.

As we signed the guest register, one of Mary's Cenacle sisters approached. Her eyes searched our faces and she quietly said, "You're the writers who drove so far to be here." I smiled; how did she know that? (I forgot that Mary Jo had been to the Cenacle before and that she probably recognized Mary Jo from other visits.)

Shortly before the celebration, Mary Jo gently placed her arm on mine and said, "There she is." Following Mary Jo's gaze to the doorway, I was delighted to see Mary greeting her visitors. As we made our way in Mary's direction, suddenly Mary trained her eyes on my face, beamed, and reached out at the same time I reached for her. We hugged tightly, one of the most wonderful hugs I've ever

experienced. "I'm so happy that we are hugging in person instead of over the internet," I said in Mary's ear. "Oh I hear your voice! I hear your *voice!*" she exclaimed joyfully in this most remarkable moment for us both.

**Mary Jo:** It was wonderful to return to the Cenacle and awesome to witness Lee and Mary's meeting. Teary-eyed, I slid into Mary's warm, welcoming hug, thrilled to see her again. Then more than a hundred of us gathered from across the country sat circled, facing the beautiful, spiritual woman at the podium. For nearly two hours, the room transformed into a sacred vessel for Mary's story and our celebration of her fifty years as a Cenacle Sister.

"I am so excited today," Mary began, her expression clearly reinforcing those words. "I have absolutely *loved* the planning and organizing of this celebration. And I am especially happy to have so many of the people I love brought together so you can meet each other." In her rich, Irish-timbered voice, Mary—using spoken words, songs, silence, and written words—shared the very human and profoundly moving story of her life. I hope one day Mary will write her story for us all to share.

### The Spaces between Visiting Mary

**Mary Jo:** I loved the quiet time we spent at my sister's home, the perfect weather allowing us to sit on the deck whenever we wanted. I was so inspired by all Lee's knitting projects, even that stubborn sweater that challenged her so. My sister, Jackie, and I treasured the delicious dinner we had together in Southampton, and discovered that Lee finds her weekly writing prompts everywhere, even on Starbucks coffee cups. It was great to share a snippet of the Hamptons with Lee, a ride on Fire Island, a walk on the beach, an introspective exploration around the majestic memorial for the Flight 800 passengers to Paris that crashed off its shores, a stray cat, and so much more.

**Lee:** Every minute was special. Even though I grew up in nearby Pennsylvania and know that New York has a coastline, I never equated going to New York with going to the beach. I was thrilled to be reunited with surf rolling in, the smell of salt air, the Atlantic Ocean. My recently broken foot rejoiced at the feel of sand between my toes! I loved that Mary Jo and her family have such history there on the island

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and shared it with me. Driving around the quaint neighborhoods and hearing of how her grandfather had built many of the homes was a treat for someone like me who loves it when buildings tell their own stories or become the characters in our stories.

Of all that we did together, just the two of us, I most enjoyed the discussions we had about our individual writing projects and our Sunday morning quiet writing/meditation time down by the sand dunes.

### *Leaving Day*

**Lee:** When Mary invited us to breakfast on Sunday morning, I never thought that we'd be fortunate enough to have private time with her. But, as I sat across the table from her, I watched as she quietly and politely engaged each of her still-numerous guests and then said, "I really need to talk to these two ladies before they leave." My heart flipped with joy.

We sat and talked like the sisters we have become over these many years of writing for Story Circle's e-circle #7. It was one of those times when it felt like you had known someone all of your life and that, even though you'd been apart for a while, you could pick up where you left off and never miss a beat. Only better! We had known each other for years. We had shared each other's joys and heartaches.

Mary's incredible memory spoke volumes to the power of the stories we write in SCN: so much common ground for three different women from very different walks of life.

**Mary Jo:** Next to sharing Mary's profoundly beautiful celebration, my favorite moment with Lee was sitting quietly

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**Mary Jo Doig** has been a member of SCN since January 2001, when she joined e-circle #2. A year later she placed third in the annual SCN writing contest. She has facilitated e-circle #7 since early 2003 and in January 2004 she was delighted to become True Words editor for the *Journal*. A full time human services professional, freelance writing, reading, cooking, quilting, and knitting are her loves—that is, right after her three great, grown children: Chip, Polly, and Susan.

**Lee Ambrose** joined SCN Internet Chapter in 2001, soon after it was formed, and was assigned to e-circle #7 where she remains an active participant. Presently, she also participates in the poetry circle and is the facilitator of circles 10 and 12. She is the president and member services coordinator for the Internet Chapter (2004–present) and writes reviews for the SCN Book Review site.

**Sister Mary Sullivan** joined SCN in January of 2002 and soon asked to be placed in an e-circle. She joined e-circle #7 in August of '02 and she has participated there ever since. In '04, she volunteered to facilitate a circle: e-circle #8. She joined the poetry circle as soon as it started and has been a member ever since. Her stories and poetry have appeared in the anthology and the *Journal*, and she has been a judge of the writing contest. Mary is a member of the religious Congregation of Cenacle Sisters.

with her on my front porch as she wrote, then shared a powerful poem about her dearest grandson. After we hugged and said our farewell, I sat and gazed at the mountains for a long time, sipping my tea, reflecting about Lee, Mary, and me—and how beautiful and blessed was our precious time together.

### *Reflections*

**Mary Sullivan:** I grew up with two wonderful older brothers. Each night from my bed I could hear them in their room as they conversed late into the night. I wanted a sister with whom I, too, could share my day, my secrets, and my dreams. It was not to be.

I entered religious life and found sisters in abundance. What I did not expect was to join Story Circle Network and find sisters there. For practically six years I have shared my dreams, secrets, and heartaches with these wonderful women. It has all been through cyber space. But it was my jubilee day that brought the utter joy of sitting with these two women who had driven so far to be with me.

SCN has brought their voices into my life and has enabled me to bring my voice into theirs. The celebration of my life as a Cenacle Religious for fifty years brought all my sisters full circle.

How grateful I was/am that Lee and Mary Jo cared enough to drive the distance, spend the time, and give shape to their stories in my presence and in the presence of my Cenacle Sisters, my Sullivan family, and my friends. ❖



### *A Message from the Editor*

The *Story Circle Journal* Editor Jane Ross sends her thanks and very best holiday wishes to all those who have contributed their words to the *Journal* during 2007. It has been a very great pleasure to work with you. The *Journal* owes its existence to our contributing editors and many other contributors:

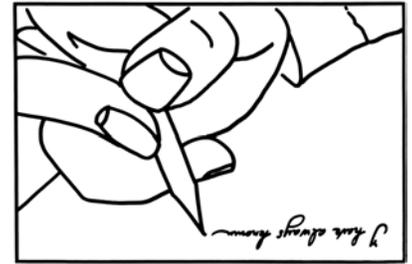
Mary Jo Doig, Lisa Shirah-Hiers, Linda Wisniewski, Patricia Pando, Lee Ambrose, Susan Wittig Albert, Judith Helburn, Paula Stallings Yost, Pat Flathouse, Renee Cassese, and all the contributors, regular and occasional, to True Words and other sections of the *Journal*.

And to our readers: Thank you and happy holidays!

*Jane* 

# True Words from Real Women

The theme of this issue's True Words section, edited by Mary Jo Doig, is "Lost Voices." 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. 20.



## Laryngitis of the Soul

Deborah Farrell  
New Albany IN

I have looked for it before. I know it isn't there, but here I am two decades later, looking again for a journal entry that doesn't exist.

I remember it being a month or two before I left. My husband said, "I feel like you don't love me any more." I said, "Don't be silly. Of course I do."

I said this even though my heart was already out the door. I lied, and I am not proud of this. Perhaps that's why I didn't write about it. I wish I had written about it. When did it really happen? I can't be sure. I yearn to know if my memory matches what I thought and felt at the time.

Three years ago I didn't write about the sudden, intense insight I had that a man I'd worked beside for seven months and barely noticed was the man I wanted standing behind me as I stood at the window watching birds at the feeder. That realization left me in a daze for the rest of the week. How could I not record such a monumental occurrence? What is wrong with me?

Apparently, intense emotion causes a paralysis, a sort of laryngitis of the soul, in me. Who would ever guess these things had happened from reading my journals? No one would, and this bothers me because I assume these gaps are a human condition. I read my mother's journals, and her mother's journals, and I wonder what monumental events they have failed to record. I can never know for sure, and I have come to understand that honoring their lives means embracing this uncertainty.

Honoring their lives also means I do not want their voices lost. It is a concern because I have no children. Where will these journals go after I die? This was an uncertainty I could not embrace. I say "was," past tense, for I do have a journal entry describing my elation upon learning that a women's history library would welcome the journals of three generations of women, unfathomable silences and all. ❖

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*You can communicate things that you feel and see...You are a voice...You don't have to ask anyone's permission.*

—Faith Ringold

## The Middle Passage

Mary M. Elizabeth  
Austin TX

We did not survive that nightmare. They threw us overboard when we got too sick and when we refused to eat and when we looked them in the eye and after they raped us and when they felt like it. Our last free moment was the timeless fall into blue oblivion. Bright images of our childhoods and our villages came back to us as we fell into the arms of death, forever free of the ominous present and the terrible future, obliterated even from the past.

We never learned where our families and our tribes were taken or why. We never knew they were torn from each other to have no names and no past. We did not feel the shame of being turned into farm animals, auctioned off, branded, bred, and beaten. Our corpses never hung from trees. We don't know who among the surviving great-great-great-great-great-granddaughters and grandsons are ours.

Our last words mixed with salt water and our bodies fed the sharks. And we dissolved in memory just as we dissolved in the sea. Not one of our names is known. Any who might have grieved for us are long dead and themselves forgotten, if ever known.

The only voice that speaks for us now is the endlessly whispering surf. ❖

## Heart Voices Are Never Lost

Lee Ambrose  
Johnson City TN

"Can you tell us, please, about the bedtime ritual you and Caleb have?"

"Your honor, please! The court doesn't need to hear this!"

"Withdrawn. Mrs. Ambrose, what does Caleb call you?"

"Your honor! It doesn't matter what the child calls this woman!"

"Withdrawn. Mrs. Ambrose, how long have you been Caleb's primary care giver?"

"All of his life," I whispered.

After what seemed an eternity, the judge spoke slowly and deliberately. "I am not going to deliver my decision today. But let me be clear—perfectly clear—that when my

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## More True Words . . .

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decision is made, this child will *not* be awarded to his grandmother. I know that you have raised him thus far, Mrs. Ambrose, but he has a father who wants him now and the law is very specific about these things.”

With that, the gavel fell and we were dismissed. Left to wait for the official notice of the judge's decision to arrive at some future point in time.

I wanted to jump up and scream. I wanted to ask why it didn't matter what Caleb called me. I wanted to ask how it was that someone who walked away from a premature baby and never checked on him for four years could suddenly waltz into the courtroom and have all the voice while I had none.

For nearly four years I had been the voice of care, concern, and reason for Caleb. I was Caleb's only voice. Now my voice didn't count for a single thing.

But what that judge failed to silence was the voice deep within my heart—the voice of unconditional and never-ending love for Caleb. He also didn't succeed in silencing Caleb's own heart voice.

I always find my voice when he is with me. I use it to remind him that I love him dearly. My voice was silenced that day in that courtroom but the love I have for the little boy who is my joy will never be silenced. ❖

### *Ancient Voices*

**Edith O'Nuallain**  
County Wicklow, Ireland

It's strange how you can lose something vital to your being and not even notice that it's gone, especially when it's your own soul. What was I doing when I lost myself that was so much more important than being fully alive, with joy in my heart, and hope-filled wonder in my eyes?

I remember the day I woke up to a vision of a deep inner world that shook me to the very core of my existence. I was nine years old and sitting in class with about 40 other children. It was late autumn. The school heating system was up and running, with water clanking like bricks through the pipes. There were no thermostats and so very quickly the room grew overheated, stuffy, and airless, leaving us all tired and lifeless. The teacher told us to open page 39 of our religion books.

*In the beginning was the Word,  
And the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.*

Feeling as if a bolt from the sky had just hit me, I sat up straight, holding myself rigid, heart racing and breath coming in short, quick gasps. I had no idea what these words meant, yet something stirred within, jolting my soul awake to realms

previously hidden. Over and over I read them, savouring each one as they tripped over each other, experiencing the secret, inner delight of newly discovered knowledge. My whole world, my entire universe, had shattered wide, wide open and seemed to glitter with infinite shards of possibilities and promises. It was on this day that I found poetry.

But then something went wrong. By the time I was 13, I had forgotten and lost that newly found joy. Life became a duller, more serious affair. Recently, though, soundings of my lost self have begun to creep through the cracks of my being, whispering softly, gently, insistently. Ancient voices call me back, begging me to listen to them and write down what they say. ❖

### *Silent Migration*

**Tracie Nichols**  
Lansdale PA

It's the winter migration and there are water birds dying by the hundreds. An oil tanker had only one skin between its viscous cargo and the once vibrant ecosystem of the Delaware River. Torrential rains worsen the effects. When the current moves this rapidly the slick breaks up. It's nearly impossible to contain the damage. Already the choked river is casting up shiny, black globs on banks all the way to the estuary. The birds choke quietly, their silence an eerie accusation.

Wild birds are hard to catch. So far, folks seeking to help have caught only about fifty out of the thousand impacted birds. Of those, about twenty-five have survived. But survived to go where? Their home is gone, their flocks decimated. Can they migrate at all now?

What do we say to those birds drowning under the weight of crude oil, ingesting tar as they try to preen it out of their feathers?

“Wrong place, wrong time.” Or maybe, “We must have this stuff. Can't run an SUV without it.” Perhaps we say nothing at all. They're just birds, right?

I'm upriver from the spill so my back yard will be fine. But will I be fine? I feel wounded, as if I've lost a limb. Standing by and watching countless lives strangled by my need to be able to drive wherever I choose, I want to collapse into myself. I want to neatly close a door on their growing silence and the knowledge of my complicity in this. But their lives deserve more.

So, I keep the door open and look this tragedy full in the face. I grieve deeply. I gather my anger and outrage so I can start conversations with people about why fossil fuels are deadly and so I can listen and speak with passion and compassion. Mostly so I can speak in some small way for their lost voices. And when I next look a mallard or a Canada goose in the eye, it will be as just another colorful thread in the fabric of life, not as the one holding the scissors. ❖

## *Speechless in Miami*

**Sharon Blumberg**

Munster IN

In 1971, when I was in eighth grade, I vacationed with my family over winter break in Miami, Florida. It was an amazing and impressionable experience for a myriad of reasons. I loved basking in the warm December sun, as roaring waves lapped against the hotel's jagged coast. I enjoyed being able to watch my own olive complexion transform into a deep, coffee-brown tan. For me that was quite a novelty. I could not wait to show it off upon my return back to school.

However, what fascinated me most was the rapid-fire, flowing Spanish language I kept hearing. One waiter at the hotel where we were dining attempted to give us dining suggestions in Spanish. All I could muster from inside my foolish teenage head was a silly giggle, my uneasy response to a mysterious language that held me transfixed with intrigue. This fascination continued for the duration of our stay in Miami.

One sultry afternoon, my mother and I were searching to find the pool in this large, perplexing paradise. When we finally encountered some hotel workers, they spoke to us in Spanish and we spoke to them in English. We tried to motion and speak slowly but our efforts met with little success. The more we spoke and gestured, the more I felt a yearning sensation develop deep within. Then a realization dawned on me that this language would become something quite significant in my life. It was as if my future voice were echoing to me, from canyons of time, far out in the distance.

Following this experience, I took four years of Spanish in high school and majored in it in college. For 17 years I have been a Spanish teacher. This language has enabled me to help others learn how to satisfy this burning desire also. Through my teaching career, I have found not only my Spanish voice but other lost voices as well. I hope that through my teachings, my students' voices will flourish not only within the old, brick classroom walls, but across time and oceans. ❖

## *Hi Mom, It's Steve*

**Barbara Krause**

West Lafayette IN

Do you hear lost voices in your mind? I do. And—don't send me to the psychiatrist's couch yet—hear me out. I bet we all can remember the voices of our loved ones. I remember my Grandmommy crooning, *An elf sat on a buttercup*, to the newest grandchild and my gruff Grandpa rumbling, *Angels and ministers of grace, defend us!* when particularly upset by something. I remember my mother's giggle when we shared a silly joke, and Dad's belly laugh erupting when something really tickled his fancy. These dear people are gone, except in my memory.

The voice I long to hear most of all, however, belongs to a young man who is still very much alive: our son, Steve. On Mother's Day three years ago, he wrote telling us not to call any more and not to plan any more visits. We are no longer welcome in their home. He wanted to sever all ties with the family, including his brother and sister. He seemed to think he must choose between his little family of wife and child, and his family of origin. Our hearts broke.

I don't hear his calm, deep voice sounding across the phone miles any more. One night a few weeks ago I dreamed that he did call, and I woke up hearing that well remembered voice, saying as always, "Hi Mom, it's Steve," as if he thought I couldn't tell his voice from that of his siblings in a split second. It was as if he were actually there; my eardrum resounded with the sound waves. When I calmed, I wondered if he was thinking of us then and wanted to call.

So, along with the voices of long-gone grandparents, and not-as-long-gone parents, I add that of a son. Steve's is a live voice, however, and I continue to pray that one day again I'll hear that welcome voice when I pick up the phone: "Hi Mom, it's Steve." ❖

## *Homecoming*

**Mary Tuchscherer**

Lafayette CA

Scarlet begonias greet me as I peer through the window of my creativity room. I am cozy and prepared to write and reflect. In a few days I will guide a circle of women to compose their personal stories and spiritual legacies. A ten-year-old painting of fiery tulips sits before me. As my heart begins to journey, I am instantly transported back to the driver's seat of my old 1990 faded blue Mercury Sable. My car is packed with exactly what I need to succeed in graduate school: music for my soul, clothes to robe my body, books to expand my mind, and camping gear to enable me to explore the landscape of my life through nature. As I back down the driveway of my beloved Colorado home and steer toward I-70W, I am elated to embark on this journey to unravel the truth of my own voice. From the hush-hush of my mother's finger to the raised arm of my ex-husband, I learned the safety of being wordless.

Two weeks later, on August 10, 1996 in Oakland, California, I enter my first graduate class, Art As Soulwork. My limbs tremble. I want to board the windows of my soul. Terror strikes as I approach the empty white paper I have been coached to imbue with paint. My teacher compassionately instructs me to trust the process. Doggedly, class after class, I coat the paper with the colors of my soul, from dirty, dusky, whiskey-stained masks to crimson hues of blossoming flora. Slowly, the critic relents. For nine arduous yet glorious months, layers of dark, primal patterns, light, and promise are revealed. Trust in the creative process and in me grows deeper and deeper. Time quickly passes and the

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## More True Words . . .

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brushstrokes flow for my final creation. Images of fiery, golden tulips emerge. The vibrant colors of my soul have risen from the ashes. The words, “Rooted in my voice is the flame of life,” spread across the page. The deafening silence of my voice can no longer be heard. It is a homecoming; something lost has been found. ❖

### *Thanksgiving with Terence*

**Jerril Jean Henry**

Austin TX

Terence: Shakespearian actor, Vietnam broadcaster, magnificent voice and body language. A counselor who helped teens overcome substance abuse. Being 23 years clean and sober, he knew how to thrive.

Me: musician, stubbornly independent. I swore off men until I fell for his dancing eyes and hilarious stories. Our love was unconditional in spite of his past demons and my overweight, underappreciated body. Our dates were long imaginative conversations at comfy restaurants.

Thanksgiving, 2005: Three months into our romance, Terence was diagnosed with tongue cancer. Agent Orange? Smoking pot? Surgeons said, “Cut out the tongue.” (*What?*) Instead, he chose radiation resulting in constant, intense pain.

No more splendid conversations and great meals. His liquid diet whittled his weight down 50 lbs. Our new normal included written conversations and pantomime. He reserved his voice for counseling, joking, “I only chat for cash.”

Thanksgiving 2006: At mass, with raspy words, Terence said the “great good cancer” brought him closer to God and made his life the happiest ever. Our untraditional Thanksgiving dinner included my microwave turkey dinner and his Ensure. Normally eating in private, he became vulnerable—showing me what happens when he “eats.” Pouring Ensure in a tall glass, taking a deep breath, he drank

in one gulp, bowed his head, rocked back and forth, pulled a rosary out of his pocket, and meditated while his pain shot from 2 to 10.

Helpless, a pit in my stomach, wishing I could make his pain subside, I ate my salad contemplating every bite, grateful to taste, to feel the texture, to swallow without pain.

Later, Terence declared it was the most wonderful Thanksgiving ever. Confused, I asked how that could possibly be. He smiled, “I enjoyed the sound of your crunching salad, and imagined how fabulous it must taste.”

Living together was blessed with daily joys. He mastered the indignity of cancer with grace. Terence left this earth on Friday the 13th. His last whispered words to me were, “I love you sooo much.”

Thanksgiving, 2007: I will speak for Terence, thanking God for the blessing of his voice, strong and rich, weak and painful, magnificent. ❖

### *Lost to Fear*

**Barbara L. Miller**

Austin TX

The soft early summer sun was streaming in the bedroom window as I awoke. The luxury of sleeping late, which my fifteen-year-old body did with little effort, added to my sense that this would be a near perfect day. *What's to eat?* was my next thought.

A stark shift occurred as I entered the kitchen. There was Mom, sitting at the table with her head in her hands, softly weeping. The only times I had seen her in tears were when someone in the family died. This strong, controlled, efficient woman normally kept her emotions to herself. Pulling up a chair and putting my arm around her, I quickly diagnosed the problem as I looked up the block through several back yards. Three doors away the women of the neighborhood were gathered once again for another of their frequent coffee klatches. Their peals of laughter drifted through the open window.

“Why am I not part of that?” Mom whispered. We both

## *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 Garden Story*—March 2008 (due January 15, 2008)

*Hard Choices*—June 2008 (due April 15)

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

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

knew that she had been invited many times and had consistently made excuses for not joining in. It would have been beyond the generational correctness of the 1950s for me to point out that she was sitting here at the table because of her own fear of social situations. Her yearning to belong was suffocated by her fear of revealing her true self. Her authentic voice seldom was heard.

That day was the beginning of my own battle against Mom's fears instilled unconsciously within me. Tobogganing, horse-back riding, driving a car, engagement in intellectual discovery, dancing, swimming, and entertaining in my home were all tainted with a sense of doom. I would either get hurt or make a fool of myself.

Having conquered most of those demons myself, there is a deep yearning in my soul to hear the genuine voice of Gladys Theodora. Fears and doubts, planted in her childhood, multiplied and reinforced each other over a lifetime. By the time she died at eighty-five there was little left but the shell that once housed a gifted, loving, and gracious soul. ❖

### *Invisible Chains*

**Sallie Moffitt**  
Ovilla TX

She trembles  
At the thought  
Of leaving Him.

His familiar pose  
Gripping her arm  
Rearing his fist  
To her face,

Shackled by  
Fists of rage  
To a life  
Of bondage,

Tethered by  
Invisible chains  
Woven from  
Destructive words.

She wants  
To leave him  
But believes  
She cannot,

So she lives  
Terrorized  
By a roaring lion  
With no teeth.

### *Voices in the Trees*

**Ellen Collins**  
Vienna VA

On the grassy circle down the street from my house we climbed the gnarled apple trees. The branches were perfect for young arms and legs because they reached down and made laps and hand holds. It was a badge of honor to be able to scale the biggest tree, to reach up and haul yourself over the branch until you sat triumphant, higher than everyone else.

We ran around on the circle, playing tag, swinging around the tree trunks, barefoot in summer on the damp grass, sliding in winter on the icy patches. In autumn, the leaves fell to the ground and we piled them up and jumped in them, their dust clinging to our faces and our blue jeans. In spring, we stripped off sweaters and jackets and declared the winter over. In all seasons, our voices floated like clouds, like sunspots, like songs. The neighborhood rang with our words and our laughter, and sometimes with our tears and shouting. At dinnertime, mothers whistled for their kids to come home, each mother having her own special set of notes, and one by one we left the circle in the waning light and left the day behind us. The trees waited for our return the next day.

The neighborhood is still there, though different people own the house where I grew up. Most of the people who live there are young professionals or graduate students now. It is not a family place anymore. The circle is there, but the apple trees have been cut down. I imagine that if I were to stand there on the grass I would still hear the echoes, the lost voices of the children of fifty years ago. On other streets, in other cities, those voices have called their own children home, have spun their own stories of those days long ago when the circle and its apple trees glowed golden in the innocence of their youth. ❖

### *Who Hears the Lost Voices?*

**Rhonda Speer**  
Lockhart TX

Where's that whisper coming from? It's inside my head, telling me to look out the window again.

*Wait! That's none of my business,* I hear coming angrily from within.

There's a lady lying on the walk in front of a store as I drive by.

*What? Another drug addict? An alcoholic, passed out? I don't care. She probably asked for whatever happened anyway.*

It's not exactly a nice neighborhood. Still I feel like I must reach out. I come back.

It's nothing like I thought. She's the store owner. She's been shot.

"Help!" I shout. "Someone call 911, quick!"

Doors slam. Blinds close. "Closed" signs go up all along the block. No one comes out.

It must be a gang hit.

This is supposed to be the Land of the Free. Instead, it's

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## More True Words . . .

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the Land of the Tormented just because we won't pay the gangs to "protect" us.

Who hears the lost voices? One who is one of them and knows their pain.

We must stand up and hold our heads high, even if our world is falling down around us. We must refuse to be pushed around for the rest of our lives.

Do you hear the lost voices too? ❖

### *Lost Voices Can Be Found Again*

**Duffie Bart**

Santa Barbara CA

Growing up in a secular Jewish family, my parents were forced to flee Germany in 1938, their beloved birth country. I was five, my brother nine. We did not understand our abrupt departure in the middle of the night, why we were on a boat, crossing the ocean. My parents came from a generation where children were not given explanations or included in conversation. We were taught to do as we were told and not to question.

We arrived in New York, in a country at war with Germany, where Germans were the enemy. My brother did not learn English as quickly as I and was taunted and ostracized for being German. I was angry at him for not hiding his Germanness. I became ashamed of being German, ashamed of my brother, ashamed of my parents who spoke German in public. I was desperate to be an American.

At home my parents quarreled and whispered in heated tones behind closed doors while I was trying to fall asleep. I was sure my mother was complaining about something I had done or said. In school I did not understand my teachers. I felt alone and lost; I lived in fear. I wanted to leave my parents' house and never look back.

And that is what I did. I went to college and rarely saw them again. I am now in my seventies and all these years I thought of them with resentment for not loving me, for not helping me. Then just today, for reasons I cannot explain, a strange thing happened. I was driving to my home in Santa

Barbara from an appointment in Los Angeles. The freeway was crowded and I needed to drive slowly. Lost in thought, I was suddenly surrounded by familiar voices filling the air: my mother's, my father's, and brother's, all three deceased for many years. I heard their voices clearly and in their voices I heard their love for me. I wept for many miles, grateful to learn what I had not known. ❖

### *My Mother's Face*

**Martha Meacham**

Driftwood TX

My mother was an artist. She shared her gift with adults who were seeking the artist within. Her media were oil paints and charcoal.

I sat for her evening classes as a portrait model. Expressionless. Still. I sat motionless for minutes on end.

Her students put pieces of my face on canvas or paper while my mother walked around the room coaching them.

At break I wandered around the chairs and easels in the old high-school classroom to see what had been captured of me, what of my essence had emerged from the flat rectangles in the room.

It wasn't like looking into a mirror. Each representation had gone through an interpretive filter of someone's own eyes and hands.

Sometimes my mother would take charcoal in hand and, in a little detail to the side, demonstrate how to make a corner of an eye or the tip of a nose look a little more like the parts of my face.

When I was about ten or eleven, I begged my mother to paint my portrait. She began the portrait one spring, but never finished. My adolescence intervened and I became her biggest critic. Issues of trust and betrayal wedged between us. After she died, I ended up throwing away the canvas with the splash of yellow forsythias in the background with a shaded, blocked-in oval foreground that never became my face.

When I look in a mirror, I see the portrait she painted of me: my green eyes, the now silver hair are her canvas.

In my face, I see her face. My hands are her hands.

I feel her presence within me and I know we are close in many ways. ❖

**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.

### *Special True Words Theme: How I Found SCN*

We all have a story about how we found Story Circle Network. We'd love to hear your story! To share your story (up to 450 words) on our website, please email it to Mary Jo Doig at [maryjo\\_d@yahoo.com](mailto:maryjo_d@yahoo.com).

A selection will appear in print in each issue of the *Journal*. Please follow the guidelines for all True Words stories (see the Looking Ahead section on p. 20) as to format, etc. There is no deadline for these stories.



## How I Found SCN

Renee Cassese  
Hicksville NY

They say that the journey is the thing, not the destination. Well, for me SCN is both a destination and a journey. I've been a writer since I could pick up a pencil and attach the right end of it to the paper. I wrote poems up until high school when I took a creative writing course and began to write short stories too. As with any endeavor we seek out instruction where we can find it. For me it was reading numerous books and magazines on writing. An ad in *Writers' Digest* introduced me to SCN many, many years after that creative writing class.

A place for women with stories to tell—well, that was me. I thought I had a million of them. I checked out the website and immediately ran out to buy Susan's book *Writing from Life*. I read it cover to cover and then went back and did all the writing exercises. I thought: *so that's what SCN is all about*.

That was when I hit my SCN destination (a place where I could get guidance in writing and meet other women who were writing about their lives.) I became a member and purchased all the back issues of the *Journal* that I had missed. I read them in my bubble bath, over a cup of tea, and out on the deck. Through the *Journal* I met many women and was introduced to ideas, instruction, memoirs, and books on writing as well as to the wonderfully happy, tearful, exciting, and struggling stories and lives of SCN members.

The next leg of the journey was to begin sending in stories to the *Story Circle Journal*. I've had the honor of having several of them published and seeing them amid the other stories that make up the tapestry of SCN. I was pleased with writing stories about my life and took the next step, which was sending some out to other publications and getting to see more of my personal tales published. The SCN market list was a great resource for finding places to submit my writing.

Along my SCN journey I managed to write my memoir, join some e-circles, and write an article for the *Journal* that appeared in the September 2007 issue.

At 58 years old my journey is not nearly complete. I still have many destinations to reach. I know along the way SCN and *Journal* will be wonderful supports and companions. And I thank everyone in this circle of writing women for traveling with me. ❖

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### *Hard-copy Submissions for the True Words Anthology*

Please, if at all possible, send us your anthology writing by email. If and only if you are really unable to submit your story by email, you may submit your story by mailing us a paper copy. Hardcopy submissions should be sent to: Anthology Submissions, Story Circle Network, PO Box 500127, Austin TX 78750-0127

## *True Words Anthology Call for Submissions*

All you reading and writing circle members, boot up your computers or pick up your pens! SCN's yearly anthology, *True Words from Real Women*, needs you! Each spring, we publish an anthology of stories and poetry to showcase the wonderful writing of our members.

Again this year, we will only be accepting submissions from women who are SCN members and **are active members of an official SCN circle**. If you are in an Austin Chapter or Internet Chapter writing *or* reading circle or you're a member of one of our official "free-range" circles, we want to hear from you. (Not sure if your circle is an SCN free-range circle? Check our website. Look for the "Story Circles in the US" link on our homepage navigation bar.) Because these official SCN story circles are at the heart of SCN's mission, we want to showcase circle members' work and encourage other members to form or join a writing or reading circle.

There is no theme for the anthology, and we accept prose and poetry and both short and long pieces, though greater consideration is given to shorter pieces. The word limit for prose is 1000 words and for poetry, 40 lines. We will accept up to three pieces per author for consideration. The deadline for submissions is **February 15, 2008**.

We hope to announce the editor for the 2008 annual anthology shortly, chosen from among a group of very well-qualified applicants who applied for the Journal Editor position this fall.

To avoid confusion with the True Words pages of the *Journal*, all email anthology submissions should be sent to **anthology08@storycircle.org**. Please be sure to include your name, city, phone, street address, and email address so that we may contact you if we have questions about your submission. Also, please tell us which circle you belong to. We look forward to receiving a wide sampling of stories and poems, representative of our increasingly diverse membership. Let us hear from you!

***True Words Anthology FAQ: I belong to a writing circle in my home town but my circle is not listed on the "Story Circles in the U.S." web page. How can I get it listed as an official Free-Range circle and be eligible to submit stories to the anthology?***

***Answer:*** The facilitator of the circle you belong to must be a current SCN member for the circle to be eligible for listing as an official SCN free-range circle. If the facilitator is you, then just contact the Circles Coordinator, Lisa Shirah-Hiers at **storycircle@storycircle.org** to get your circle listed.

If you are not the facilitator of your circle, why not suggest to your facilitator that she join SCN, too.

Remember, only fully paid-up members of SCN may submit work for the anthology. So, once your circle is an official SCN free-range circle, encourage your fellow circle members to join too and to submit their stories. ❖

SCN affiliated workshop

## Coming to Their Senses

*In August this year, SCN's Program Chair Carolyn Blankenship and Acting Vice-President Leilani Rose held the first of what will be an annual writing retreat in Red River, a small town on the Enchanted Circle in northeast New Mexico. They booked the Ponderosa Lodge, a comfy rustic inn with plenty of rooms for retreat participants and a big meeting room with a fireplace and lots of windows.*

*Carolyn Blankenship spoke to Lisa Shirah-Hiers about how the idea for the retreat was born.*

Our idea that we must always be energetic and active is all wrong. Creativity and imagination needs moodling—long, inefficient, happy idling, dawdling, and puttering.

—Brenda Ueland, *If You Want to Write*

It all began on a vacation trip to Red River, New Mexico, that the two friends took in August 2006. Carolyn Blankenship explains, “As Leilani and I sipped our coffee at Mountain Treasures, as we savored lasagna at Capo’s, as we sat by the river listening to Kevin Welch weave his musical spell, we found ourselves saying repeatedly, ‘Wouldn’t this be a great place to have a writing retreat? Somebody should do a retreat here.’”

No one else volunteered, so it looked like it was up to them to make it happen.

“Thanks to Leilani’s complete faith that we could pull it off, we began to talk about the possibility,” says Carolyn. “When we wandered back to our room at the Ponderosa Lodge and noticed that they had a meeting room, we began to get excited.”

Sitting in the hot springs at Ojo Caliente, relaxing in the red canyons of Jemez Springs, their ideas began to take shape.

Says Carolyn, “We went home to Austin and put the word out via email. Registrations began to trickle in and it became clear the retreat was really going to happen. We chose to limit the number attending because we wanted an intimate atmosphere with plenty of time for sharing, and our spaces filled up weeks before the event itself.”

The retreat began on Sunday August 12 with an afternoon session followed by a dutch-treat dinner at Capo’s, a wonderful Italian restaurant nearby. The remaining two days followed a similarly relaxed schedule with long afternoon breaks for shopping, napping, and exploring.

For the theme “Come to Your Senses,” Carolyn and Leilani chose prompts focused on touch, taste, sight, sound, smell, and intuition designed to enrich the writing and bring participants into the present moment. Session topics included: “Magical Metaphors”, “Getting Past the Inner Critic”, “Where Have You Been?”, “Poetry to Story”, “What’s That I Smell?”, “A Touching Experience”, “36 Flavors and More!”, “Writing from Down Under”, “Undelivered Letters”, “She Just Wants”, “What’s That I’m Saying?”, “The Music of Our Lives”, and “Body Knowledge”. The workshop closed with a “Conversation Cafe”, a guided dialogue, where participants explored the question “What have I come to my senses about?”

As Carolyn explains, “We were determined to create the kind of retreat we would want to attend, with a relaxed pace and plenty of time for visiting, shopping and sight-seeing, along with the writing. Sometimes magic happens. For us it happened this August in Red River. Sixteen women joined us to write and laugh and cry and share and give birth to the Red River Writers. Some amazing words poured out of the pens of these equally amazing women, so Becca Taylor gathered up everyone’s favorite pieces and created a beautiful anthology to remind us of the time we shared. We can’t wait to do it again next year!”

This retreat was an “SCN affiliated workshop,” meaning that it adheres to SCN guidelines such as women-only circles; non-critique style, encouraging feedback; privacy within the circle; etc. The SCN Board plans to develop a process to encourage future “affiliated workshops” and to spell out specifics of the interplay between these and the organization.

Though Carolyn and Leilani are not ready to take formal reservations for next year’s retreat, women interested in next year’s event should email Leilani at [lrose11@austin.rr.com](mailto:lrose11@austin.rr.com) to be placed on an “interested parties” list. There are already over 20 people on the list, so do it soon!

To find out more about Red River, local lodging, events and area attractions visit [www.redrivernm.com](http://www.redrivernm.com). Information about the Ponderosa Lodge is available by clicking on the Lodging Guide at the same website.

Mark your calendar for the next Red River Retreat August 10–12, 2008. ❖



**Lisa Shirah-Hiers** is a piano teacher and active freelance writer with many publishing credits to her name. Lisa lives in Austin, Tex., and is a Contributing Editor for the *Journal*.

## *Pine Ridge Reservation*

Helen Lowery

Driving, Driving, Driving.  
Pine Ridge Reservation  
Dry, and Dirt, and Dust  
Gods exhale blows hot over the prairie.  
Mirages of heat float above the pavement.  
Then there is no pavement  
Where White becomes Red.

Bouncing on the hard dry ground  
With cavernous potholes and washboard roads.  
Through the dust in the distance,  
There is a church  
A graveyard;  
On a hill  
Sitting guard over the valley below.

After their last courageous battle,  
They lie here now.  
The warriors,  
The Twohawks, Black Elks, Lame Deer  
Resting after their final battle  
Wounded Knee.  
My Indian heart breaks.

*Reprinted with permission from Darn Tootin', the Red River  
Retreat anthology, edited by Becca Taylor.*

## *High Noon, Big City*

Lisa Zalovick

The urban sky hangs o'er my head  
The bricks, the glass, they choke me  
Honking horns and fumed-filled air  
Their hollow future cloaks me.

As leather slaps the pavement worn  
And lights blink come and go  
I long for meadows wide and vast  
Where grasses tease my toe.

I park on bench of wood and steel  
Dim eyes close as I dream  
Of lilac waftings, breeze strewn hair...  
Of ponies painted cream.

The din of church bells feign replace  
Shrill taxis whizzing by  
While street side vendors turn to lakes  
Of sailboats, in my mind.

Lid shades release, a sigh lets go  
Watch chimes incite the feeling  
Brown bag I toss, and smooth my skirt  
The sky, my prison ceiling.

My leather slaps the pavement worn  
Reversed, my rut I trod  
Trade plains for cross-streets, sun for smog  
Fir tree for office pod.

## *Mark Your Calendar*

*SCN Events and Deadlines  
Spring 2008*

**February 1–3, 2008:** Stories from the Heart IV, SCN's national conference, Austin, Tex.

**February 15:** Deadline for submissions to the SCN annual anthology (see p. 23)

**June 14–15:** Writing from Life weekend writing workshop, Austin, Tex.

Our online calendar is at:

[www.storycircle.org/calendar.html](http://www.storycircle.org/calendar.html)

Events listed are open to all SCN members and other women interested in writing about their lives. Most events require registration, except free events.

## *Call for Workshop Proposals Seize the Opportunity!*

If you've been thinking you might like to facilitate a session at one of SCN's events, now's the time! The Spring '08 Writing from Life is right around the corner, next June.

Workshop sessions are 75 minutes long, and we ask that facilitators offer *at least* two opportunities for participants to write and share during that time. It is important to remember that these are *writing* workshops, not lectures or instruction. Women come to SCN's events because they love to write, share, and hear women's stories, so the bulk of the time in a session should be spent doing just that.

Sixty percent of the proceeds (after expenses) are divided among the facilitators for Writing from Life Workshops. The Program Committee selects facilitators after reviewing all proposals.

Proposals for Writing from Life should be submitted via our online form at: [www.storycircle.org/frmwflpresenter.shtml](http://www.storycircle.org/frmwflpresenter.shtml) (See the link on the SCN website home page.)

Facilitators must be members of SCN, and weight will be given to those who have attended at least one WFL Workshop, as well as those with facilitating experience. Proposals should include:

1. Title of presentation;
2. Brief description of session;
3. A short bio that relates your facilitating or other pertinent experience.

If your proposal is chosen, you will be asked to give us a more explicit description of your presentation, describing the methods you will use to involve participants.

We just know our membership is teeming with all kinds of talent and bright ideas—let us hear from you!

# Story Circle News Roundup

## Board Meeting Report

The SCN Board of Directors met at the Isis Institute on October 8, 2007. President Patricia Pando chaired the meeting which was attended by 14 board members. Members reported their contribution of 661 hours to SCN activities since March 19. A total of 2,474 hours has been contributed since the beginning of the year.

The board:

- Reviewed and approved the minutes of the previous meeting and the treasurer's report.
- Recognized Sue Bilich, Judith Helburn, Leilani Rose, and Jane Ross who will leave the board at the end of the year and thanked Patricia Pando whose term as President will end this year.
- Revised the By-Laws to separate the combined Vice-President/President-Elect position into two distinct positions and to authorize the board to modify the terms of office.
- Elected the following officers to one-year terms beginning January 1, 2008: President, Penny Appleby; President-Elect, Joyce Boatright; Vice-President, Hazel Baylor; and Secretary-Treasurer, Helen Lowery.
- Reappointed Patricia Pando and Lisa Shirah-Hiers and appointed Sharon Blumberg, Robin Edgar, Becca Taylor and Olga Wise to the Board of Directors for three-year terms beginning January 1, 2008.
- Approved a proposal for Online Workshops.
- Authorized the formation of a committee to develop recommendations for the OWL program.
- Approved the Strategic Planning Key Issues Document.
- Received reports on the Young Voices pilot program, the new SCN Book Review site, the *Kitchen Table Stories* Cookbook Anthology and *Stories from the Heart IV*.
- Approved the dissolution of the Austin Chapter at the end of the year together with related member notification and financial recommendations.

The next Board Meeting is scheduled for February 4, 2008, at the Isis Institute of Women's Studies in Austin.

—Report by Leilani Rose

## Haiku Contest

This past summer, SCN held a haiku competition. The winner went on to be entered in a competition for a grant. Alas, we didn't get the grant but we did receive eighteen entries, all wonderful 5-7-5 combinations; it's amazing how many ways seventeen syllables can describe SCN.

And the winner is....Congratulations to **Pat Daly** of Largo, Florida. Read her Haiku on p. 10.

## Internet Chapter Report

The Internet Chapter may well be your first step to publication. Seeing your stories and poems published in the quarterly *Journal* is a great place to start.

Internet Chapter members are writing, responding and sharing their stories each and every month. Want to come up with a compilation of your own writings? Did you ever consider that if you take your monthly submissions to an Internet Writing e-circle for a year, you'll have twelve stories or poems to get you started? Members who have been writing in e-circles for several years are telling me that they are beginning to write their own memoirs and are using the monthly stories as a foundation!

—Lee Ambrose, Internet Chapter President & Member Services Coordinator

**Thank you, outgoing board members!** SCN's members extend their warm thanks to Sue Bilich, Judith Helburn, Leilani Rose, and Jane Ross for their many years and hundreds of hours of dedicated service to SCN as members of the board. All the best with your future endeavors!

## Story Circle Journal Editor to Be Announced Soon

*Story Circle Journal* Editor Jane Ross will be retiring from the post in 2008. The SCN Publications Committee has received a number of excellent applications from very well-qualified members interested in replacing her. Deliberations are ongoing. The committee hopes to announce the replacement Editor in December and has roles in mind for all the candidates within SCN's very active publications program. Look for announcements in upcoming e-letters.

## SCN Strategic Planning

SCN President Patricia Pando

As part of the tenth-anniversary year the Board commissioned a member survey and held two retreats to consider current issues and the direction of the organization as it commences its second decade.

Four ad hoc committees were formed in the spring of 2007 to look at different aspects of our activities and operation. The committees presented reports that the Executive Committee and Executive Director used over the summer to create the first draft of a strategic plan.

This draft plan was approved by the board with minor changes at the October board meeting. Much work still remains to implement the plan in the year ahead, but this will form a solid basis for our ongoing planning efforts.



# Celebrating Women's Writing

STORY CIRCLE NETWORK—10TH ANNIVERSARY

*Here's what we've achieved in our 10th anniversary year*

*Held a LifeLines weekend writing retreat in the spring*

*Published three new books as well as our annual anthology and Journals*

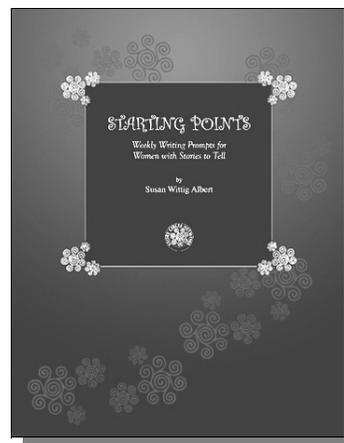
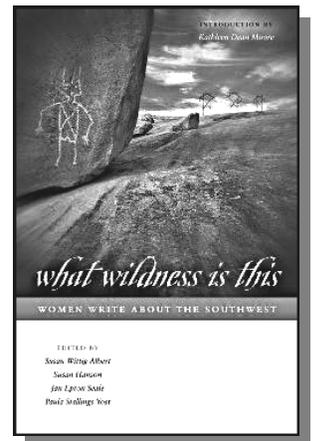
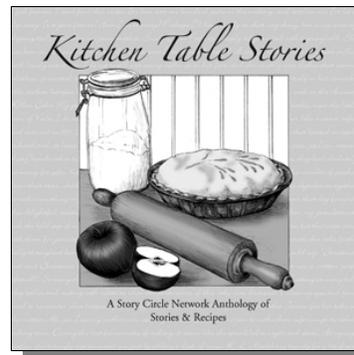
*Organized a nature writing conference*

*Ran a member survey and held planning retreats, culminating in a Strategic Plan for the future*

*Offered a Writing from Life weekend writing workshop*

*Supported two "Affiliated Workshops" in North Carolina and New Mexico*

*Held our annual writing contest*



*To order these SCN books, check our website:  
[www.storycircle.org](http://www.storycircle.org)*



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.  
\_\_\_\_ Internet Chapter: \$18/yr (in addition to your national dues!)  
\_\_\_\_ Sample copy of the *Story Circle Journal*: \$5

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

12/07

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

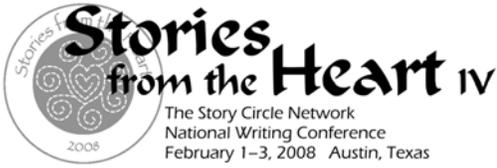
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Amount enclosed \_\_\_\_\_

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

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



Use this page and send with your check to:  
 Conference Registration, Story Circle Network, PO  
 Box 500127, Austin TX 78750. To register online and  
 use your credit card, go to [www.storycircle.org/  
 Conference/fmregister.php](http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/fmregister.php)

## Registration Form

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Current Member of Story Circle? **yes** **no**

If attending on Saturday or Sunday, please note your lunch preference:  chicken  vegetarian

Registration Type		Early registration* (through 12/15/07)  Member/non-member	Regular Registration (12/16/07– 1/31/08)  Member/non- member	Registration at the Door (cash/ check only!)  Member/non- member	Amount Due
<b>Full Registration</b> (Friday night welcome/ reception/keynote; Saturday and Sunday sessions, breaks, and lunches)		\$220/\$270	\$245/\$295	\$270/\$320	
<b>Partial registration</b> (please check all that apply)	Friday only (keynote/ dessert reception)	\$30	\$35	\$40	
	Saturday only, includes lunch	\$105/\$130	\$130/\$155	\$155/\$180	
	Saturday lunch only	\$35	\$45	**	
	Sunday only, includes lunch	\$85/\$110	\$110/\$135	\$135/\$160	
	Sunday lunch only	\$35	\$45	**	
<b>Friday pre-conference workshop</b> (not included in full registration; optional; extra charge)		\$30	\$35	\$40	
				<i>Total Enclosed</i>	

- \*Non-Members who choose to join prior to the end of the conference on Sunday, February 3, 2008, will have a portion of their registration fee applied to their dues.
- Cancellations are accepted until Jan. 1, 2008, and are subject to a cancellation fee of \$50 for a full conference registration or \$25 for a one-day registration. No refund for Friday's lecture/reception.
- Scholarships applications will be accepted through December 15 through our Sisters helping Sisters program. (See page 3 for details.)

**Story Circle Network Inc.**  
**PO Box 500127**  
**Austin TX 78750-0127**

Early registration rates end December 15.  
 Mail your registration form or register  
 online today at  
[www.storycircle.org/Conference](http://www.storycircle.org/Conference)