



# Story Circle Journal

Vol. 11 No. 1, March, 2007

The newsletter for women with stories to tell...

## A Letter From SCN's President



*I remember my tenth birthday. How exciting to be **two whole hands old!***

If anyone asked my age, I was still young enough not to be embarrassed to stick up both hands, every finger flying. Next year I'd be too old to do it—all out of fingers.

Decade years are exciting. We mark our lives by our tenth, our twentieth and thirtieth birthdays.

This is a big year for our organization. Story Circle Network is ten years old. Two whole hands. You'll notice the celebration throughout this journal with our new anniversary logo and the notices of the exciting

celebration activities.

Special anniversaries are good time for reflection as well. In January, the SCN Board had a special day-and-a-half retreat to consider where we came from, where we are today and the directions we may take in the future.

Ten years ago a few women banded together under the leadership of Susan Wittig Albert. The belief in the importance of their own stories and the stories of all women bonded them as they established Story Circle Network. Most of those early members lived in Texas, but the vision was for all women—in the nation, indeed, in the world.

Today we are truly national. We have members in 45 states, throughout Canada and across the world sharing our stories. Our incoming board reflects this national perspective. Early board members all hailed from Central Texas. Today, many members are from the Austin area, but Houston and Weatherford, Texas, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Kentucky and California have representation as well.

Not only do our members span the nation, SCN has writing circles meeting for members to write and share in Oregon and Florida, in Oklahoma and Illinois, and more. In Canada, Jan Golden reports that one 99-year-old member of her OWL group is beginning her memoirs. When Donna Remmert, a pioneer member who joined in our first year, moved from Austin to Boulder, Colorado, she didn't leave SCN behind. She started a new circle in her new home.

Story Circle members participate in many ways. Many of you helped us kick off this anniversary year by responding to our member survey. The hard-working survey committee has analyzed the data and board members used these results as a guide during the retreat. Thanks to all of the responders SCN will be able to continue and

*(Continued on page 2)*

Visit the website for  
the June  
*Land Full of Stories*  
conference at

[www.storycircle.org/  
WhatWildness/  
landstories](http://www.storycircle.org/WhatWildness/landstories)

or register by mail using  
the form on p. 27.

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## Letter from SCN's President

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expand the things you value and grow in the directions you want to explore.

This anniversary will be full of explorations and celebratory events. This issue of the journal is full of them! Come and join us at the Texas events (LifeLines, Be Our Guest, Writing from Life, Land Full of Stories) or take part in our opportunities for the far-flung (the cookbook and Susan Wittig Albert Writing Contest, the Book Review website, and, of course, the True Words from Real Women section in every issue of the Story Circle Journal).

If you want to volunteer to help with a SCN project or if you have an idea for one—let me know. E-mail me at [ppando@gmail.com](mailto:ppando@gmail.com). Story Circle is all about sharing—our ideas, our friendships and our stories. We have much to look forward to this special year and all those stretching in front of us.

*Patricia Pando*

President, Story Circle Network

## A Letter from the Story Circle Journal Editor



A very warm thank-you to all our members who responded to our first member survey (all 177 of you). I was part of the Survey Committee that created the survey and has analyzed the results—a lot more work than we bargained for. The results are in and they are a treasure trove of great information about what you like about SCN, what you value, what you'd like to see more of, and what you think we could do better. We've summarized a few of the main survey findings on p. 3 and there's much more on our website. We hope you'll look these over to find out more about who we are as an organization.

Wearing my other hat as *Story Circle Journal* Editor, I want to say a personal thank-you for all your feedback on the *Journal*. It was very gratifying to see that the *Journal* was chosen as one of the services that SCN members value most highly, second only to the opportunity to participate in a writing circle. A heart-warming 74% of respondents said they read more than half of every *Journal* issue, with a third reporting reading the *Journal* from cover to cover. What more could I ask?

Of course (and excuse my Texan here), y'all had some criticisms and suggestions for improvements and we're fixin' to make changes to the *Journal* over the next year to include more of what you want. Starting this month, we'll replace the single long book review with two shorter ones and we'll include photos of contributors where available. You had many wonderful suggestions for articles you'd like to read in the *Journal*, suggestions that I will be pursuing throughout the year, starting with critiquing guidelines by Judith Helburn and tips on facilitating circles from Lisa Shirah-Hiers, in this issue.

An enthusiastic 61 of you said that you would like to contribute more of your own writing to the *Journal*. With that in mind, I've tried to outline for you the opportunities that exist for members to see your writing in print through SCN's various publications. See my article on p. 18. For those who are just starting to think about publishing your writing, why not make this the year that you send us those True Words stories. And for those who are already published authors, think about challenging yourself by looking for new ways to get your writing out into the world. And don't forget to share the experiences you have on your writing journey with your fellow SCN members.

*Jane Ross*

Editor in Chief

## 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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PO Box 500127,  
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ISSN: 1093-7528

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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 for 1 issue, \$3.50 for 2–5 issues, \$6 for 6+ issues

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

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



# Celebrating Women's Writing

STORY CIRCLE NETWORK—10TH ANNIVERSARY

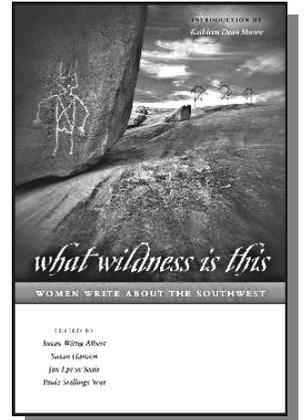
*New SCN-UT Press anthology*

## *What Wildness Is This*

Come and celebrate the March publication of our new anthology at a free Be Our Guest program on March 25 (see p. 24) and at the **Land Full of Stories Conference** in June (see pp. 25-6)

Read excerpts from the book on pp. 4-5 and see the interview with conference organizers and anthology co-editors Susan Wittig Albert and Paula Stallings Yost starting on p. 7. A podcast of selections from the book is available at <http://scn.libsyn.com:80/>

You can preorder *What Wildness Is This* at: [www.storycircle.org/WhatWildness](http://www.storycircle.org/WhatWildness)



*Online book of writing prompts*

## *Starting Points:*

### *Weekly Writing Prompts for Women with Stories to Tell*

Based on the weekly writing prompts that Susan Albert sends to Internet Chapter members, this online book will be available to all for purchase in mid-2007. More details in upcoming e-letters.

*Coming fall 2007 in time for holiday giving*

## *Kitchen Table Stories*

**Our first ever anthology/cookbook** will be published in the fall of 2007, mixing members' family stories about food together with related recipes. See the call for submissions on p. 10. Submission deadline is **March 15**.

*Our members have spoken*

## *SCN's First Membership Survey*

The results of our survey are in: 177 women answered our survey, (171 online responses and 6 paper surveys). This represents over a third of our membership—an excellent response rate.

SCN women love to write, and many respondents took every opportunity to tell us in detail what they like and don't like about our programs and activities. The answers to our question, "Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience as an SCN member?" together filled three single-spaced pages! Many of the responses to this question were full of praise. A few had some pans that we'll definitely be looking at over the course of this year.

The information we gathered from the survey is very comprehensive—much more than we have room to adequately summarize here in the *Journal*. So we'll be publishing summary information on the SCN website: [www.storycircle.org/survey.html](http://www.storycircle.org/survey.html)

We aren't able to share all the long-answer responses because some of them contain information that might identify the respondent. But we've summarized the applause and pans. And on p. 20 of this issue, you can read about the programs that more of our respondents requested.



### *Members' Ages*

- 3% are under 40
- 18% are 41-50
- 33% are 51-60
- 33% are 61-70
- 13% are 71 or older

### *Employment*

**39%** of members are in full-time paid work  
**33%** are not in paid employment. (24% are retired; 5% are full-time home-makers )  
**28%** are in part-time paid employment

### *Ethnicity*

**93%** are Anglo  
**7%** are women of color

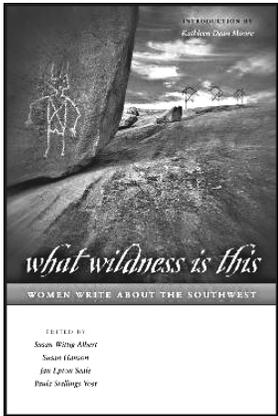
*(Continued on page 20)*

New SCN anthology

# What Wildness!



Say the editors of *What Wildness Is This*, "This small sampling of the writings will give you a taste of what you'll find in the book. We hope you enjoy it and that you'll want to read the whole anthology."



Late the next morning, we hike slowly along the wide, sandy bottom of The Gulch, skirting boulders, gnarled cottonwoods, and willow thickets, as the towering Wingate sandstone walls fold around us. We have no heavy packs, no camp to set up, and no destination. We are at play in an Anasazi world, those ancient lives flickering behind the thinnest of veils. When the tamarack-fringed mouth of a narrow side canyon

beckons, I yield, leaving Dawn behind. I slip through the trees, scramble over a couple of boulders, and slide into cool, smooth earth. Swallowed by serpentine mystery, I ease my way through the canyon's twists and turns. With the curved sandstone walls arching out over me and then tilting back again, I move alternately in sun and shadow. The sky, when I can see it, is a mere ribbon of intense blue high, high above. Finally, the canyon narrows so that I can stretch out both arms and run my hands along its sides as I walk.

The wild, open chaos of yesterday playing at the fringes of my consciousness, I am intent now on this stark simplicity. The supple walls ripple and curve above me, spiraling toward the sky. Sometimes dry and smooth, sometimes seeping and slick, they shape themselves to my fingers. Up near the rim where the sun still strikes, the walls gleam in iridescent red; here below, in the filtered light, they envelope me in muted, soft garnet. Eventually, the canyon narrows so that I can no longer move forward. I stop. Arms wedged against sandstone, I am held fast. For a moment, the walls seem to pulse, to contract and relax in a dizzying play of color and light. The sandstone grazes my cheek. I turn, brush it with my lips, and, in the release of a hundred inhibitions, with my tongue. I have come here to taste this skin.

Where am I? What wildness is this? This is a different chaos; here there are no edges. Skin against skin, I can find no boundaries. Whose pulsing center is this? What is inside? Who is outside? Who am I now?

My body, awakened and eager, opens to this passion, receives this primal knowledge. Held fast, I let go.

—Linda Elizabeth Peterson,  
"Into the Escalante"

A voice rises from the land, though it is nothing you can hear. The day I feel ready for change, a branch breaks off before my eyes. The day I need laughter, a raven hops from treetop to treetop, taunting me on my way down the mountain. Think something, and it will happen. Need something, and it will appear. Always, the timing is perfect. Just what you need, if you have the eye to catch it. That is the enchantment, the magic. The air breathes it over everyone, whether they like it or not.

This land requires you to withstand—externally and internally—rockslides, searing heat, blizzards, and drenching rains. If you don't turn away, but turn toward the sun, the land finds a way in. It seeps under your skin, coursing through your veins like footsteps following old mountain trails. Before you know it, the land settles on your face. And you know you're home.

—Cindy Bellinger, "This Land on My Face"

On my first day here, I encountered several blue-winged teal, the male distinguished by the stripe of white between his bill and eyes. Gliding back and forth across the pond, the birds seemed oblivious not only to the turtle sunning on the muddy bank but also to the Wied's crested flycatcher, snatching insects as it tumbled through the air.

This morning, though, there are no ducks. I find a colony of cormorants instead.

"Five cormorants are swimming in the pond today," I note in the journal I hold balanced on my lap, "five cormorants like a haiku skimming the surface, grinning apostrophes on water."

While I am not looking, they all get out, flex their wings, and then run back into the water like children, splashing each other as they go. If it weren't anthropocentric to do so, I'd say these creatures were in love with the lives they lead.

Taking a closer look, I see that my count is wrong. "There are ten, not five," I write at the bottom of the page. "Cormorants on holiday, I guess" . . .

Perched on my stool, and out of their line of sight, I make a small confession in my book. "I feel a bit like a voyeur," I write as a final note, "sneaking up on a group of bathers skinny-dipping in the pond."

—Susan Hanson, "The Act of Attention"

As we rode the river into the quiet of the canyons...I remembered what it is to be at home in a place, to belong in a way that touches your very cells. The river's lessons were written in the dazzle of stars overhead, the hiss of water, the warmth of silky black schist, the trilling of canyon wrens, the curving shapes of red-rock canyon walls, and the metallic taste of my unceasing dread. They reminded me of the connection between place and the human heart, of the necessity of belonging to the whole landscape, to the parts we love and the parts we fear. They reminded me that home is not an abstract concept, but a real and often problematic place.

—Susan J. Tweit, "Riding the River Home"

On this June evening, three years after the trees were felled [and the earth scraped up to make this pond], I lie on the dock studying the surrounding pines mirror-imaged on the quiet water of a full pond. The bulrushes and cattails line the water's edge. Just before the stars come out, bats dart above me, having emerged from their daytime sleep in an undisclosed location somewhere in the woods. From time to time a bat swoops to the water's surface to retrieve a gnat or mosquito, and concentric circles radiate outward, barely discernable in the fading light. Suddenly one frog launches into his loud serenade and a thousand more frogs and their tiny offspring join in. Crickets add to the chorus. The pond's daytime inhabitants—the dragonflies and water gliders—have gone to bed. I imagine the big turtles have called it a day as well.

And I ponder: how did these creatures and plants know about our pond? As the brown hole filled with rain and spring water, how was it that they appeared? Maybe it's like the baseball diamond in the cornfield: "If you build it, they will come." I suspect that the birds have dropped cattail and bulrush seeds—or maybe the seeds have come in from other nearby ponds when they overflowed during a Central Texas deluge. But the dragonflies, the turtles, the frogs? How did they know to come? The only creatures Jack and I have intentionally put in the pond are the hundreds of bass and perch we brought in big water-filled plastic bags from Larry's Fish Farm in nearby Giddings. The fish seem to have adapted well to the ecosystem that has developed naturally over these three years. In fact, both perch and bass are producing fry that swim along with the tadpoles and baby turtles.

It's dark enough now for me to distinguish the Big Dipper—and yes, the Little Dipper, too—from the place where I lie here on the dock. If the moon isn't too bright tonight, the Milky Way will be visible after the western horizon has disappeared into blackness. A family of deer appears on the dam to munch on the new grass sprouts and to quench their thirst after the long, hot day spent resting in the woods. They make their way past the head-high loblolly seedlings that have sprouted on the dam and around the

water's edge. And I smile. For in spite of the destruction we humans caused a few years ago, these hopeful pines have found their way back from the seeds of their parents and grandparents.

Nature is patient. Perhaps she has forgiven us.

—PJ Pierce, "The Pond"

Caving is like wandering into uncharted realms in our lives and trying not to make a misstep. I've had someone tell me, "See that formation above your head? It's at least a thousand years old and the rarest in this state. Be careful you don't bump it." I nearly had a heart attack. Similarly, I've seen friends at the altar told, "This person will be your partner for the rest of your life. Be thoughtful." Caving and life, love or work or faith, our embraces come with costs. One misstep is all it takes.

Sometimes, we can only hope our gracelessness will be forgiven. In a cave deep in Mexico I lost a lens cap. In a cave in Belize, a flashlight. Perhaps someone who comes after me will pick them up. I hope so. I hope they take away the jarring plastic from such wild places, plastic as incongruous as a laptop in a leaf-strewn jungle. Perhaps someone will come along and pick up all the things we have left—a headache here, a lost friend there, a missed opportunity. Perhaps they will find places for them in their own lives, cradling them like prayers . . .

Can we really move softly and carefully through such passages in our lives without tripping? Can we leave "nothing but footprints" without causing damage? The caves have taught me that we can't. But perhaps the beauty and the grace is in our willingness to try. Called to explore difficult places, we will hear our bedroom curtains rustling like bat wings. Umbras of moon shadows and paths will be singing for us then. Home and hill and horizon will be singing for us then, and sacrifices must come. We leave behind what we must. We chart our topography and step outside lightly to see the white full moon waiting, so low and large on the horizon that it could roll into our waiting arms, settling like a stone.

—Joy Kennedy, "What We Leave Behind"

I rejoice in the voices of the women in *What Wildness Is This*, almost a hundred, raising our voices in celebration or warning, the words echoing off the canyon walls and the border fences, whistling through ocotillo wands. This body of work expresses what so many people most deeply feel and most clearly believe: gratitude for the gift of this place; astonishment at what each moment presents—peach jelly on the table, rain on the wind, fear in a standing wave, ghosts in the soil; an abiding love for this serene and mysterious patch of earth; and the terrible understanding that we cannot wreck this place without destroying also ourselves.

—Kathleen Dean Moore,

Introduction to *What Wildness Is This*



## Books for the Journey

***Islands in the Salish Sea: A Community Atlas*, edited by Sheila Harrington and Judy Stevenson (TouchWood Editions, 2005. ISBN 189489832X).**

**Reviewed by Mary Ann Moore, Nanaimo, BC, Canada**

(Review excerpted from the SCN Book Review website. Read Mary Ann's full-length review of *Islands in the Salish Sea* by going to our website: [www.storycircle.org/BookReviews/](http://www.storycircle.org/BookReviews/))

As geographer Briony Penn points out in her inspired and compassionate foreword to *Islands in the Salish Sea*, "The urge to map comes from the same base as the urge to sing, dance or write... If someone has taken the time and effort to record it, then it has value. People become aware of and sensitized to these values, and they can then become advocates for them."

From a childlike state of curiosity and imagination, over 3000 people on seventeen of the islands in British Columbia's Strait of Georgia became involved in a five-year project of community mapping that, as Penn describes it, became "a reflection of all the love and positive power in a community." It does my heart good just to know of such a project.

The name "Salish Sea" is a term used in recognition of the Salish-speaking people who live in and around the Strait of Georgia down to Puget Sound in the state of Washington. As oil, fish, and marine mammals know no boundaries, Canadian/American biologist Bert Webber began to use the name "Salish Sea" in the 1970s.

Judi Stevenson and Sheila Harrington, who both live on Salt Spring Island in British Columbia, were the overall coordinators of the Islands in the Salish Sea Community Mapping Project under the sponsorship of the Land Trust Alliance of British Columbia with support from the West Coast Islands Conservancy. The first workshop the coordinators presented on Salt Spring Island in January 2000 enticed other island representatives into the project. By early spring almost every island had a local coordinator and a host organization.

One of the goals of the mapping project was to share "personal and collective vision and experiences that gave birth to the maps, and thus contribute to community mapping and sustainability in other parts of Canada and beyond."

This book, with its impassioned results of artistic mapping and community building, is sure to inspire you to protect and sustain your own home place. ❖

Reviewer **Mary Ann Moore** is the founder of Flying Mermaids Writing Circles & Retreats. She lives in Nanaimo, British Columbia. She invites women to tell their stories in

## True Words from Real Women

### *Awakened*

Cathey Capers  
Austin TX

Awakened.  
That sound when a gust  
snaps the full white sail to attention.  
You feel the motion and power  
rise beneath you  
and send you sailing across big blue waters.  
Each wave supportive now  
buoying your dreams.  
Each breeze sends your hair flying behind you  
and clarity shines on your face like the sun.  
It's a wild ride  
yet you feel safer and more sure  
in this freedom  
than you've ever been on the shore.  
You step up to the bow  
to drink it all in  
and what greets you  
is your own pounding heart  
breaking harder than the surf at the shore—  
wide open, spilling into the sea.  
You wonder  
as you did when a child,  
where does that great wind begin?  
and you sense, somehow, you are bound to go there.

Awakened.  
By the power of this dream.  
The white sheet unfurls at your feet.  
Miles and miles from the nearest ocean  
you swear you smell it.  
As you step into your day  
greeted by your pounding heart, you wonder,  
where do these dreams come from?  
And you know now you are bound to land there. ❖

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writing circles she facilitates and through self-guiding materials called Mapping Your Spiritual Journey. Mary Ann's personal essays, poetry and fiction have appeared in various publications and anthologies in Canada and the U.S. Her poems have been published on CD: *When My Heart Is Open*.

Visit Mary Ann's website at [www.maryannmoore.ca](http://www.maryannmoore.ca).

**You can benefit SCN** by purchasing this book through the book review website. Just click on the picture of the book's cover to go to Amazon.com and place your order.



*Meet other lifewriters and learn from their stories*

## *A Land Full of Stories*

*June will bring the SCN/Southwestern Writers' Collection conference, "A Land Full of Stories," celebrating the launch of the new anthology, What Wildness Is This, published by the University of Texas Press in association with SCN. Susan Wittig Albert and her conference co-chair, Paula Stallings Yost, (two of the four editors of What Wildness Is This) spoke to the Journal about their fascination with place in writing and why they are excited about the upcoming conference.*

**SCJ** *How did the idea for the book and conference come about?*

**Susan** In many of our story circles, the subject of place—home places, wilderness places, urban places, ancestral places, historical places—comes up over and over again. Several of us were reading women writers whose focus is the Southwest: Barbara Kingsolver, Terry Tempest Williams, Linda Hogan. We thought it would be interesting to couple their writings about place with the work of emerging writers in a book about the Southwest. The University of Texas Press was interested in the project, and so it was born. The conference seemed like the right kind of venue to celebrate the book's publication and bring together people who are deeply interested in the idea of place.

**SCJ** *Tell us what you think members will find most exciting about the Land Full of Stories conference.*

**Susan** I think members will be interested in the writing workshops, both the field writing that's scheduled for Thursday, before the conference starts on Friday, and the small-group interactive writing workshops that will be held on Saturday. I'm looking forward to having a chance to explore different ways to experience and write about place—how we belong to a place, what happens when we are displaced, how our identities are tied to and shaped by place.

**SCJ** *What are some of your earliest experiences of the natural world? When did you first become aware of the importance of nature (and place) in your life?*

**Paula** Before we can speak or understand the words of others, our five senses alert us to the world around us. Through sight, smell, sound, taste and touch, we begin to explore our environment. My earliest memory is as an infant being playfully tossed in the air on a warm and sunny day. Sixty years later, that moment is still branded in my mind complete with a clear recollection of the blueness of the sky, the light breeze stroking my body and the sweet smell of the outdoors. Those special moments in special places, in the sun or rain or even an occasional Texas ice storm, have continued throughout my life and are a joy to recall. Like the people I've encountered over the years and the lessons I've learned, those moments have contributed to the whole of who I am.

**SCJ** *I know you have some particularly strong ideas, Susan, on the importance of place in peoples lives—our connection (or lack of connection) to the places where we live. Is there anything you or Paula would like to say about that?*

**Susan** It's often been said that we live in a placeless culture, where much of the uniqueness of places is being homogenized. We are casually mobile in our daily lives, without thinking of the place we've been or the place we're going. We eat at fast-food restaurants, shop in big-box stores, drive on interstate highways—and all are the same, whether you're in Miami or

*a woman can't survive  
by her own breath  
alone  
she must know  
the voices of mountains  
—Joy Harjo, "Fire"*



Susan Wittig Albert  
Paula Stallings Yost



*(Continued on page 8)*

## Susan Albert and Paula Yost

(Continued from page 7)

Seattle. We may deliberately avoid becoming attached to the place we live because we know we're on the move. And many of us change our dwelling-places frequently. I moved dozens of times until I finally settled. When we don't have a "here" to which we feel attached, we go "there" and "there" and "there" in a constant state of restless confusion, with an insistent desire to find a "somewhere" that feels right. But in spite of our rootlessness, it is possible to become attached to place once again, to feel ourselves related to a particular land, neighborhood, city, people—to become conscious inhabitants of a place. That's one of the things we want to address in the conference—how we can fully and mindfully inhabit the place we call home.

**Paula** For some time, I've recognized that our physical environment plays a vital role in our lives. Perhaps because of my work on "*What Wildness Is This*," I've come to think of place as a key character within our stories. A character with its own distinct personality and with some degree of influence on human characters.

**SCJ** *Unlike other SCN events, the conference will be open to both men and women. Why did the conference planners decide to make it coed?*

**Paula** You're right. This conference will look a bit different from previous Story Circle get-togethers. Our co-sponsor for this event is the Alkek Library's Southwestern Writers Collection at Texas State University. In addition to providing space for the conference, the library is creating an exhibit for the summer months that will spotlight the publication of *What Wildness Is This* and its contributors as well as historical data about Story Circle Network. Naturally, we want to encourage *all* students, faculty and Alkek Library supporters to attend the conference to celebrate the

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**Susan Wittig Albert**, the founder of Story Circle Network, is the bestselling author of both fiction and non-fiction, including *Writing from Life: Telling the Soul's Story*. Susan is currently working on a memoir of place called *Landscapes of Solitude: Journeys into the Interior*. Visit Susan's website at [www.mysterypartners.com](http://www.mysterypartners.com).

**Paula Stallings Yost** founded LifeSketches/Heirloom Memoirs Publishing, a biography service based in the piney woods of East Texas. She helps others preserve their family or personal histories by writing the real stories of real people from all walks of life. LifeSketches produces everything from simple oral histories to limited edition books of distinction, including a visual record of treasured photographs and other memorabilia. A popular speaker, Yost offers comprehensive lifewriting workshops in person and online. Visit Paula Yost's website at [www.alifesketch.com](http://www.alifesketch.com).

publication of SCN's new anthology and to share or learn more about a subject of interest to men and women alike—place writing.

**Susan** "A Land Full of Stories" is a unique conference, and I hope that SCN members will take advantage of this unusual opportunity to join with like-minded others in a deep, rich exploration of writing about place. At this conference, we hope to forge a continuing community of writers and readers who will make the conference topic—finding our own stories in the stories of a place—an essential and lasting part of our lives.

**SCJ** *A Land Full of Stories is a writing conference, yet the suggested topics on the website reveal an interest in understanding place through other arts as well (music, painting, etc.). Why is that?*

**Susan** Place doesn't just come down to natural history, which is why I'm always a little unhappy with the term "nature writing." When we write about place, we need to consider all the important aspects of human culture. How can you think of New York without thinking of Broadway, or San Francisco without Chinatown? Can you imagine the Grand Canyon without hearing the echoes of "The Grand Canyon Suite" in your head? Can you travel through the Smokies without wanting to know something about those pioneer homesteads—the food women prepared, the clothing and quilts they made, the songs they sang, the stories they told? Every natural place is now a human place, too, and to fully understand and participate in that place, we need to share in its cultures, its arts, its stories.

**SCJ** *Do you think there is a difference in the way men and women approach nature writing?*

**Susan** Historically, men's attitude toward the natural world has been one of conquest, of putting nature to the service of man. It's a habit of mind that's often revealed, openly or in subtle ways, in their writings about nature. This has begun to change in the last few decades, with Aldo Leopold's understanding of the community of nature and Barry Lopez's quiet observations of the natural world. But still, men writers often seem to stand *outside* nature, looking at it, measuring and evaluating it as though it were an artifact. The best women writers seem to me to write from *inside* nature, as participants in the natural world, not observers. The relationship goes both ways, as it does in Cindy Bellinger's essay (in our book) called "This Land on My Face." And they often see place as an essential, shaping part of their stories, as Nancy Mairs does in her essay, "Writing West." Nancy sees the world from a wheelchair, and her experience of traveling through the deserts and canyons of the Southwest helps us to understand more about the challenge of just getting there and back again. This is honest writing, real stories. Women writers about place often seem more open and transparent to me.

(Continued on page 17)

*Kitchen table stories**Pretty Please—With Syrup on Top*

*Some things are just not to be joked about as Patricia Pando found out one April Fools Day. She shares her story of love and tears amid the pancake batter.*

April Fool! I always loved the first day of April—and I never minded being fooled, although it looks like I'd have learned to expect the salt in the oatmeal since it happened every year. My dad was quite a jokester, and he was consistent.

Mrs. Colley, our next-door neighbor, knew when she confronted an empty front porch in response to a doorbell that two little girls were hiding behind the spirea trying hard to suppress their giggles.

"Oh!" she'd exclaim, "I was so hoping it was the Nordyke girls. Here I've just pulled chocolate chip cookies out of the oven and there is no one to eat them."

"April Fool!" We jumped out from behind the bushes and ran on to the porch.

"Oh, my dears! You had me completely fooled." We were as predictable as our dad.

When my oldest son was six or so, I decided it was time to share the springtime fun with him. Chris and I spent the afternoon of March 31 safety-pinning together all of his father's socks heel to toe. When we heard Bob stepping out of the shower we popped under the covers to watch the fun as sock after sock serpented from the drawer.

"April Fool!" We jumped out of the down comforter.

"I couldn't figure it out!" He shook his head.

Why wasn't I surprised when I poured blue milk onto a giggling boy's cereal? Such fun. We spent the morning thinking of other tricks.

Chris pulled the doorbell-and-hide stunt on our (fully-warned) next-door neighbors. Some traditions should not be allowed to fade.

At lunchtime two-year-old Patrick looked mildly confused when a tasty bowl of dog food appeared on his high chair tray. We gave him his usual peanut butter and jelly on white bread before he gobbled down more than a mouthful.

We decided not to play a trick on Baby Katy, she wouldn't be a year old for another week, but Chris thought of one that she could play. We put her dress on backwards when we headed out for the A&P. We got lots of smiles, especially from the man in the vegetable department.

"What shall we have for supper?" I asked Chris knowing what the answer would be since it was always the same.

"Pancakes! Pancakes!"

"For supper? Pancakes are for breakfast."

"Pancakes! Pancakes for supper! Pretty please—with sugar on it."

"How about syrup?" We headed for the aisle.

On the way home Chris lamented from the backseat that he'd been playing tricks on people all day long, but not one single person had played a trick on him. It just wasn't right. I commented that the day wasn't over.

Pancakes were a production at our house. The syrup had to be maple and had to be warm, the butter just this side of gooey. I cooked up one plate at a time. First little bitty quarter-sized ones for Baby Katy, and then nice silver-dollar sized ones for Patrick.

"I can't wait!" Bob called from the table. So I made some great big Daddy-sized ones and sent Chris to the table carefully balancing the plate.

"I think I'll make mine next and finish up the batter," I said as I emptied the bowl onto the griddle.

"But what about me?" Chris asked.

"Oh, Baby! I'm sorry. I've used up all the batter! Tell you what I'll do; I'll make you some scrambled eggs!"

He wailed.

"It's not fair!" He wailed louder, the tears streaming down his face.

"April Fool!" I cried.

"April Fool!" Bob and Patrick chorused. We all laughed. Even Baby Katy.

I reached in the refrigerator and pulled out a bowl of batter.

"Look! There's plenty left. I'll make yours as big as Daddy's."

*(Continued on page 10)*

*Any-Day Pancakes*

- 1 cup flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1 scant cup milk
- 1 teaspoon melted butter

Mix together the flour and baking powder. Add the egg and then gradually add enough milk to make a smooth batter. Stir in the melted butter. Cook in a hot griddle or frying pan, flip pancakes when they bubble, to brown the other side.

Serve with maple syrup and lots more butter.

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**Patricia Pando** joined Story Circle Network and the Internet Chapter in 2000. She is a member of an OWL Circle in Bainbridge, Georgia.

(Continued from page 9)

Chris continued to wail.

"Get another plate, he can have one of mine." Bob called over the din. Chris continued to wail.

Soon he was sitting behind a stack of not four but five pancakes, and I didn't say a word about the flood of syrup he poured over them.

"It was a joke," I explained. "An April Fool trick like the socks and Katy's dress.

"It wasn't funny." Chris speared a chunk of pancake.

"I thought the blue milk was funny."

"It was. But you should never joke about pancakes."

He was right. I never pulled that trick again.

Over forty now, Chris still doesn't think it was funny. The last time I asked him about it he said, "You should never joke about pancakes." ❖

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*You Have Kitchen Table Stories Too!*  
*Our 10th Anniversary*  
*Cookbook–Anthology Needs Them!*  
*Submission deadline: March 15*

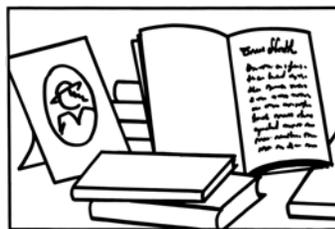
Over the winter holidays, I'll bet you revisited some favorite family recipes. And I bet you talked with family about foods that have special significance for all of you and the stories you associate with them. Tell the world about these family foods and related stories in our upcoming cookbook–anthology, celebrating ten years of Story Circle Network.

We will be accepting submissions from all our members. We are looking for as wide a range as possible of recipes together with a related story, similar to the Kitchen Table Stories in each issue of the *Journal*. There is a word limit of 800 words for the story. (No word limit for the recipe.) We also welcome poetry (up to 40 lines) on a food-related topic. We will accept up to three stories and/or poems per author for consideration.

Send your stories and recipes to [cookbook07@storycircle.org](mailto:cookbook07@storycircle.org) by the March 15 deadline and help make our new tenth anniversary anthology a delicious ragout of flavors and tales.

Please be sure to include your name, city, phone, address, and email address so that we may contact you if we have questions about your submission. If you would like to submit your story as a hard copy, please send your writing to: Cookbook Submissions, Story Circle Network, PO Box 500127, Austin TX 78750-0127.

And if you've ever expressed interest in helping edit or produce an SCN publication, expect a call from *Journal* Editor Jane Ross (or you can contact her at the submission email address). We need lots of helping hands to make this exciting project a success. We'll be publishing in a book format that will work for bedtime reading and as a cookbook. Copies will be for sale to the public. The Publications Committee still has to finalize the details as to whether authors will receive a free copy or heavy discounts off the retail price. Watch for more details in upcoming e-letters.



## Books for the Journey

***Firstlight*, by Sue Monk Kidd (Guideposts Books, 2006. ISBN 0824947061).**

**Reviewed by Duffie Bart, Santa Barbara, Calif.**

(Review excerpted from the SCN Book Review website. Read Duffie's full-length review of *Firstlight* by going to our website: [www.storycircle.org/BookReviews/](http://www.storycircle.org/BookReviews/))

*Firstlight* by Sue Monk Kidd is a book I return to over and over. It contains a number of essays she wrote when in her thirties for the spiritual magazine, *Guideposts*. In her late twenties, the author seriously began to examine the reality of her inner life and the meaning and purpose of her life, and became serious about being a writer. When *Guideposts* asked that she assemble her essays into a book, Mrs. Kidd had her doubts that her writing from that period in her life would still have merit. But these are beautiful essays, each one. They are not outdated, nor do they reveal an immaturity that might well have existed when she wrote them.

Kidd is not a preacher; she is a born storyteller and a born writer. She believes that telling stories and spirituality are inextricably bound together, that delving into the mysterious interior realm of her soul is the very source of her creativity. She explains that all this began for her when reading Thomas Merton's autobiographical book, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, that this book had "a life-altering effect on me when I read it at the age of twenty-nine," and that it was this book that led her to become a writer.

She believes that "creativity is essentially a spiritual experience, a conversation between my soul and me." She tells us of her "raw longing for the Divine," her "irrepressible hunger for that deepest thing in myself." She dedicates herself to the articulation of her spiritual quest.

She suggests that we try to find the moment when our hearts first opened, when an experience became the "firstlight" that touched us in a way to perhaps change us forever, to start us on our own path of communion with something greater than ourselves, a path of revelation that connected us to our creativity.

"I believe in stories," she writes. "The world has enough dogma. It's stories we need more of, stories that reverence the still, small voice that sings our life. As Anthony de Mello observed, 'The shortest distance between a human being and Truth is a story.'" ❖



Reviewer **Duffie Bart** is a screenwriter turned prose writer who writes for newspapers and magazines. She is a fan of Eckhart Tolle and devotes her life to his message of how best to become aware and live life most fully.

# True Words from Real Women

The theme of this issue's True Words section, edited by Mary Jo Doig, is "Awakening." 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. 14.



Awake  
Chrisalynn Bradford  
Lockhart TX

As I walk through the door, I am asked, "How you do today? What I do for you?"

"A full set and a pedicure, please," I reply.

Women are gossiping in Vietnamese, telephones are ringing. I can feel and hear the buffering as my nails are sculpted. They're beautiful, perfect. My sister looks on, admiring. She can't seem to keep up her nails.

My hands and feet are stripped of wax. I feel so relaxed, soft, refreshed—like a queen. On the ride home we sing really loud, off key, along with the radio, being silly.

At the house, the smell of fried chicken greets us at the door. My niece has pulled off her diaper and is running around naked as my sister-in-law tries to catch her. My brother watches in amusement.

I pick up my sister's slobbering, goo-goo-ga-ga-ing baby and hold him. My other niece and nephew are each pulling on a pant leg. They want some attention too. My mom walks into the living room.

I wake up. No babies. No siblings. No family at all. Only a cellie a few inches away. I am lying on a very thin, gray mattress on a concrete slab. A long, white t-shirt covers my body. The walls are white and bare.

I am 23. I no longer want to wake up like this, in this place. But I have no choice for the time being. So I roll back over and try to go back to my dreams—the only place I can be with my loved ones. ❖

Treasure in the Day to Day  
Beth Carrignant  
Millbury MA

On Saturday mornings my husband and I get up early and go out for breakfast together. We try and find a different place to have breakfast each week. We have been to quite a few different ones, and discovering our new place of the week is absolutely part of the fun, like a mini adventure. Some weeks, we have chosen a location ahead of time. At other times, we simply pick a direction to drive in and see what we might find.

Never one to enjoy the cold, I find that I am excited as I

climb into the cold car to begin our weekly trip. We have experienced some wonderful breakfasts and great service in our travels. Our favorite places are inevitably those with a varied menu and, of course, great coffee. Some of our stops have been small, traditional diners; others were full service restaurants, or combination bakery and breakfast places. Many are quite tiny, and most are charming. People come and go, and we like to watch the regulars with their daily newspaper, the families with small children, or other couples who also come in for breakfast. We plan to purchase a travel diary or journal and begin documenting our weekly stops with details about each Saturday morning experience.

During this short interlude in our normally busy week, we can stop, linger, and reconnect. We don't discuss anything especially earth shattering, mostly the details of our day to day lives. But, to me, this time is more precious than gold. I love sitting across the table from my husband as we talk and laugh. The time spent in the car together and in each little breakfast place is time when I do not have to share him with anyone. The rest of the world will have to wait, because this time is ours alone.

I have discovered many such treasures, hiding right under my nose, little gifts of happiness to be found, if I simply allow myself to awaken to the joy that can be found in the day to day. ❖

*Most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.* Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865)

A Long Slumber  
Mary Sullivan, r.c.  
Ronkonkoma NY

I was 60 years of age when first awakened.

No, it was not the kiss of a fairytale prince that roused me out of my six-decade slumber. It was not romance, or beauty, or love. It was a plaintive cry that I did not recognize as a plea for recognition. Repelled, I turned away trying to ignore what I heard, saw, smelled. I could not.

It started with my arrival in Manila, the capital of the Philippines. We drove into our *barangay*, our neighborhood. Soldiers with drawn rifles halted our car and demanded proof of our identity. Only when they were satisfied were we allowed to enter the development of Loyola Heights and proceed to our retreat house.

I looked out of the car and saw massive iron gates being

## More True Words . . .

(Continued from page 11)

swung inwards to allow our car to enter. Thick cement walls topped with barbed wire and broken glass surrounded our compound. I was appalled. Translated into life in the United States this image reeked of exclusivity and wealth. I found out later it signified the same in the Philippines.

It was where I was to live during my year in this country.

Whenever I stepped out of this compound I entered another world—the world of three- and four-year-old girls and boys whose role was to beg. They were policed by a pimp who organized them, protected them, and pocketed their money. I walked down to the local businesses. The ice cream store, the hair salon, the local print shop were always protected by armed guards for fear of robberies. Families who lived in cardboard shacks were flat up against mansions with manicured lawns.

“Be careful, Mary,” my Cenacle Sisters warned me. “It’s election time and there are kidnappings of westerners to pay for the political campaigns.”

It was too late for the warning. My thick walls of pride breached, my armor of arrogance—pierced and penetrated—collapsed, shattering my heart. I was no longer asleep. I had been kidnapped by a God Who demanded that I face the reality that I was the poor one. ❖

### Opening My Heart

**Mary Lesia Parent**  
Lockhart TX

At the age of 39—busted for drugs and facing time in prison—I woke up.

Was this how my life was supposed to be?

My brother had raped me at a young age. I told my mom and others, only never to be heard.

Was this how my life was supposed to be?

I lived through two long relationships back-to-back with verbal abuse and sexual demands.

Was this how my life was supposed to be?

I tried to hide the pain with drugs, but I only numbed myself. It was a temporary fix. I was scared and felt alone, thinking: *How can I change my life?*

With a faith in God, encouraging women for support, and a workshop called Purity with Purpose, I began to open my heart and to purge my heart and mind. I learned how to forgive myself and others. That’s when I woke up to my life. I gained control of my mind and body. I gained the self-awareness that purging and purity can bring meaning and a new beginning.

A second workshop, called Truth Be Told, gave me the tools and the boldness to tell the truth. All of us have made mistakes and can learn from them. Today, I can tell you about my childhood and its effect on me.

I have also found a purpose in life—to tell others about new beginnings.

This is how my life is supposed to be. ❖

### Scarlet Ribbon

**Rachael Hungerford**  
Williamsport PA

A scarlet ribbon of rage  
runs right through  
the women in my family  
Great grandmother  
Grandmother  
Mother  
Me  
Daughter  
Granddaughter

You can’t miss it!  
Bright and sparkling  
Slippery and strong!  
It flashes smartly from our eyes.  
Sits proudly in the set of our jaws  
licks across our stiff, hunched shoulders.  
It knots us all together  
in resentment, depression  
strokes and broken hearts  
It’s sure of its power  
Its energy  
Its strength.  
“See!” it whispers,  
“I’m going to rule  
To win!”  
“No matter what!”  
“We’ll see!” I answer. ❖

### We Got the Music

**Erin Declan Philbin**  
Pittsburgh PA

“Brendan, time for dinner,” I call into the next room. I see the back of his head nodding, but he doesn’t answer. After calling him a second time, my younger son nudges him. As Brendan ambles over, I see the reason for the delay in response. He is wearing tiny ear buds. He pulls an MP3 player from his pocket. I stare in shock at him. When exactly did this happen? I swear he was having an arm fart contest with his little brother this morning. I guess my 11-year-old is growing up. He can’t be ready—because I’m not ready.

In a flash, I am 11 years old in my parents’ house. It’s Saturday morning, cleaning day. Both Mom and Dad are at work, but I’m a girl on a mission. I run through the house, dusting, scrubbing, and vacuuming. Laundry loads are sorted, washed, dried, folded, and put away. My pace quickens. Sheets are changed. My parent’s bedroom is tidied. I mop down the stairs and—done!

With a grin, I make myself a glass of lemonade and settle into the rocking chair in the front room. I turn on my parent’s stereo. The dial is set where I left it last Saturday.

It's 2:00 p.m. Mom comes home, smiles at me, and gives me some space. This is the deal I have made: if I have the house clean by 2:00, I can listen to Casey Kasem's *American Top 40*. Mom doesn't understand why I would want to do this; no one else in the family even asks to use the stereo. For the next two hours, I'm transfixed, listening to the songs count down to number one, devouring music trivia, tearing up over long-distance dedications. I'm in heaven.

I look up and see my son with his off-brand, hand-me-down MP3 player in his hand. "Hey buddy," I say as I throw my arm around his shoulder. Our eyes are almost level.

"What are you listening to?" ❖

### When I Woke Up

**Suzanna Pearl**

Dallas TX

We were at Anna and Bob's house for dinner, with other long-time friends. The husbands—Bob, Seth, and my Andrew—were all junior faculty in the biology department. The wives—Anna, Sara, and I—all became jugglers once we had children. Anna, a Spanish teacher, with three-year-old twins, was also finding a house for Bob's parents. Sara, who had two little boys, had an adjunct faculty position in Women's Studies and headed the pre-school co-op. I had two small daughters and was developing health education programs for elderly people. I also handled everything for our family, freeing my husband to do his work.

Dina and Bardy, who had always been part of our gatherings, were missing. Since their separation, Dina didn't go to parties—and Anna, Sara, and I wouldn't invite Bardy, who had left her and their three children so that he could express himself more fully.

We ate Anna's excellent paella, with bread, cheese, and salad, and drank dark red Spanish wine. After some food and wine, the husbands began discussing Bardy's new life. Bardy took yoga and arrived early to sit up front and admire the young woman who led the class. He went to Parents Without Partners events, and had a tiring sex life. My husband was uncharacteristically quiet. Then they talked about Murray, who was openly having an affair with a young grad student. Slowly and clearly, Andrew spoke, "Well, times are freer now. Whatever feels good—why not have it?" These words, from my conservative, morally rigid husband!

The world felt slippery. I didn't know Andrew. My stomach clenched, and I woke up. Did my eyes widen, my eyebrows raise? Did Sara and Anna exchange glances? In an instant, I understood five years of fights and confusion. Andrew was rarely at home. When he was home, he was distant and angry. I had swallowed his explanations of pressures at work, evening meetings, weekend planning sessions. I was stunned. Another year would pass before I believed what I understood that night and confronted Andrew—but, finally, I had awakened to my life. ❖

### Silent Awakening

**Sharon Valverde**

Lockhart TX

I was buried in the hills and fields,  
and as my flesh and bones dissolved into earth  
the sun was relentless.

Rains flooded fire and fed my roots.

I strained towards the light and opened wide....

I woke up dreaming I had lived.

Every breath an awakening.

I sought God everywhere and found her  
essence inside myself

in breathing saints' air

in a child's smile

in the *dejà vu* of ancient music.

I cried for the trees and wolves that knew my name,  
and for the tragedy of human suffering. I stood in  
terrible awe as the soul of my sky exploded violent  
and surreal.

The silence of innocence shattered was deafening.

Inside my child's mind I vowed to become queen,  
witch,

priestess,

and goddess.

Resolution set,

I stepped into the fire of Divine Will for tempering and  
purification rites more painful than I could  
imagine.

Ever striving to become like glass blown to mirror's  
reflection,

to allow Divine Source to shine through,

to be able to look inside finally without fear and see  
my true self. ❖

### Mom Stories: Quit Smoking

**Marcy Meffert**

Leon Valley TX

It was late November, 1962. I was lighting a cigarette, brushing ashes off my blouse, and coughing as usual.

"When I grow up, I will never smoke or drink because alcohol and tobacco are the devil's tools," my oldest son vowed, watching me.

"Where did you learn that," I rasped, last night's cocktail-party smoke-a-thon still with me.

"In kindergarten—my teacher said," he replied.

"All people don't believe that," I explained. "Some people believe smoking and drinking are sinful and we have to respect that but we are Catholics. We don't practice birth control so we smoke, drink, and play bingo instead."

Fast forward a couple of years.

The previous late night had been a three-packer party. As I groped through the medicine chest looking for a

## More True Words . . .

(Continued from page 13)

lozenge, I realized that no pill could stop the hacking, the burn holes in my clothing, the stains on my teeth. I would have to cut down, as I tried so many times before.

I would smoke only cigarettes that I enjoyed and not those lit out of habit: when I put on makeup, talked on the phone, and so on. I discovered I smoked only two meaningful cigarettes from the daily average pack-and-a-half: at the day's beginning and end. Smoking so few cigarettes made as much sense as taking the pill if you have sex only twice a month. I didn't need to smoke.

That year, I attended all holiday parties wearing white gloves. No need to smoke when your hands are covered. I told nobody about my quitting; I wanted to fail privately.

Only my husband noticed; he said he'd hated to kiss me when I had smoker's breath. For diversion, I considered going on the pill. I don't play bingo.

Along with better breath, after a few months I had more breath. I blew up balloons at my child's birthday party. I swam across a pool without wheezing.

Best of all, I no longer lived with the decision made by an insecure 13 year old (me) trying to puff into the in-group.

And I stopped coughing.

And I became pregnant again. ❖

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*Sign up today for the March LifeLines  
Retreat with Susan Wittig Albert.  
There are just a few spots still open  
for this weekend writing workshop.*

## It's Not Too Late

Ceri Lynn Workman

Lockhart TX

I am finally awake—as I sit here in my prison cell at age 22. I grew up around drugs. My grandmother sold drugs and ended up in prison. My mom has done drugs since she was 14. I started at age 12.

So really from the beginning, I never had a chance. At 13, I was smoking crack and prostituting with my mom. When I was 14, I was in a foster home and met a guy named Mike. He was 18. I ended up pregnant.

He was a straight-up square. So when I was with him, I wasn't into drugs. By age 15, I had my precious baby boy.

Mike and I were having lots of problems. We would argue and fight. I ended up going to live with my aunt and grandma, who had just gotten out of prison.

I was fighting for custody of my baby. I had almost won until one day my mom begged me to take her to the 'hood to get some crack. Finally, I gave in. I heard it sizzle and had to have some.

I had a job as a waitress, but I gave it up. I was 17 and on the streets again, doing anything and everything to get my next hit. I only lasted 10 months out there. In that time, I ended up with a guy. His name was James, but everyone called him Gangsta.

I got in trouble for criminal trespassing and went to jail. Grandma bonded me out. I caught up with James, but then we both ended up behind bars. He's there for aggravated robbery and capital murder. I'm *only* here for aggravated robbery.

As I sit in my prison cell, I know this is not the life I want. I lost my son and I lost my freedom.

I know I haven't been the mother I should have been. But I believe that I have finally woken up to reality. I long so much to be a mother to my son. It's not too late. ❖

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## 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:

*Yard Sales*—June 2007 (due April 15)

*When the Power Went Out*—September 2007 (due July 15)

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

## Stretching My Mind

**Anne Gorman**

Austin TX

Teetering on the thin blue yoga mat, my body contorted like a kid playing Twister, the words of the yoga instructor caught my attention. New to the practice of yoga, I struggled with the pose. My reluctant body and my reluctant mind wobbled as I observed the effortless stance of others around me from the corner of my eye. I dared not turn my head, lest I fall over.

In a calm, well-cadenced voice, the instructor encouraged her students to stay with the pose as best they could. "Don't worry if you can't assume the pose the exact way I do," she assured her class, "all of our bodies are built differently." As she observed various levels of ability and struggles, she coached us to "hang in there, make noises if you have to—there is no one way to do this."

At that moment I was struck by the realization of how her guidance in the yoga class was really a metaphor for life. At that point, I realized that I didn't need to concern myself with how my tight hamstrings kept me from assuming a perfect Downward-Dog position. No matter how nimble my classmates appeared I finally felt comfortable with my own limits.

As the class finished we brought our hands together as if in prayer with the thumbs touching the heart. We bowed as we leaned forward saying, "Namaste." Loosely translated from Sanskrit, the phrase means, "I salute and honor you."

I wonder if I was learning to honor myself. That hour at the YMCA awakened an inner window that I mistakenly thought was already open. ❖

## Awakenings 101

**Annabelle Bailey**

Southbury CT

I was a 17-year-old country girl used to a strong parental government and a fairly isolated life. There weren't any girls my age living within walking distance of my home so I had a lot of alone time. It was my final year of high school and I was eager to go away to college.

Nothing in the SUNY Albany catalog could possibly have prepared me for my first look in my dorm room. It had been designed for two but was to be shared by three. When I showed up with my mother and my luggage, I quickly realized that my roomies had already settled in. I got the saggy top bunk, one twentieth of a closet, and the beaten up desk. This was my introduction to one of the worst and best years of my life.

It turned out that my roomies were almost polar opposites. Cynthia ("Call me Sin.") was a wild child. She saw nothing incongruous about knitting a sweater for her

California beloved while having an affair with her freshman art professor. ("Prop the door open, Annabelle, I won't be making curfew.") She could be harsh, but she taught me a lot. ("You look like a clown. *This* is how you put on make-up.")

Marieke, on the other hand, was loving and almost puritanical in her teaching. She grew up on a dairy farm about an hour north of campus and spent almost all weekends helping out the family there. She dressed in a conservative manner—matronly for a 20 year old. Her messages to me were always clear and precise. As she arranged the latest long-stemmed roses from her true love, she'd speak of love, devotion, and responsibility.

Marieke dropped out of school to help on the farm and Sin moved to California. We have had no contact for over 40 years. I didn't become a clone of either one of them, rather chose bits and pieces of both. In the absence of strong parental rule, I realized that I had already firm beliefs of my own and a wide streak of independence. My deepest regards to two beloved mentors and SUNY Albany. ❖

## I Awoke to Summer

**Rhonda Speer**

Lockhart TX

On the July 4, 1985, I awoke to a beautiful Rocky Mountain summer morning.

I was planning to meet my friends in downtown Denver, before the big parade. I lived only a few blocks away, so I walked there in my shorts, halter-top, and flip-flops. It was 80 degrees when I left my apartment.

I stopped at the first vendor and got a rum-and-Coke on the rocks. I looked up at a bank sign to see how much time I had before my friends would show up. It wasn't the time I paid attention to though; it was the temperature. Had it really dropped six degrees in the time I had walked those few short blocks?

I was getting cold.

My friends weren't there yet. I ordered another drink—hold the rocks. The sign now read 60 degrees. Nah, it couldn't be.

I suddenly heard the north wind bellowing and felt its effects as the temperature dropped from second to second. I lived in the mountains. But snow in the summer?

I ran back home as best I could. The snow was six inches deep by the time I reached my apartment. But I figured I'd dress for the weather and head back to the parade.

Within 20 minutes I was ready to go outside again. As I reached the door, I saw that all traffic had stopped. The snow was three feet deep.

So much for going to Dairy Queen for a blizzard after the parade. ❖

*More True Words . . .***To Salve the Wound****Bonnie Watkins**  
Austin TX

Pushing out from under the anesthesia of sleep,  
 Struggling to surface through to morning,  
 Like a diver clawing upward  
 To push aside the blue lid of water.  
 Slowly the room defines itself,  
 The gaudy light fixture,  
 The freshly painted white walls,  
 The favorite art, our good companions.

I roll over to curve within the arc of your body,  
 A puzzle matching piece to piece.  
 Then memory settles in  
 And I recall the void: gone. You are gone. ❖

**Esophagastroduodenoscopy****Sharon Blumberg**  
Munster IN

There are times in life when one pauses to think about one's own mortality, and what is yet to be accomplished in one's lifetime. That particular moment for me was last summer. I was experiencing discomfort in my stomach off and on for several months. When I inquired, my pulmonary doctor put me on a medicine that gave me instant relief. The results of the upper gastro-intestinal X-ray that he ordered for me revealed that I had esophagitis. So he referred me to a gastro specialist.

Upon this visit, the gastro doctor recommended that I undergo an upper endoscopy, in order to rule out any other serious conditions that could be developing. The formal name for this procedure was an esophagastroduodenoscopy, which sounded like an intriguing creature from a beloved Dr. Seuss book.

I pondered over undergoing this procedure for about two months. My husband had this procedure done about eight years ago. He said that he woke up after being told to swallow, and it was all over. Meanwhile a number of unsettling thoughts worried me as I thought about what this upcoming test would be like. It was scheduled for December 29, 2006.

On the morning of my 7:00 a.m. appointment, I was escorted to my room by a kind, elderly gentleman who served as a hospital volunteer. There, the nurse told me to change into a gown and then started my IV drip. At 7:30, I was transported into the room where the procedure was to be performed. I lay on my gurney for about 45 minutes, listening to the rhythms of my heart beating away on the monitor. From that sound, awoke in me the realization of what still awaited me. I knew I needed to experience more

precious time with relationships and accomplish more with my work.

The doctor and medical team finally arrived to perform the brief procedure, which I barely felt and then the long-awaited procedure was finally over. The doctor informed me that everything looked fine. At this little milestone, I whispered some thoughts softly to the universe.

"We indeed have work to do." ❖

**Awakening 1 and 2****Sharon Pancamo**  
Lockhart TX

Part 1:

Young, just married, baby, and a new life.  
 I was 22 years old and found out I had contracted HIV.  
 Scared, nowhere to hide, I had to run, run fast.

I became a woman with HIV/AIDS when all I'd ever heard about was men having it.

I can remember never wanting to fall asleep because I was afraid I would not wake up. Then came the drugs—cocaine to stay awake, heroin to fall asleep.

I can't remember sleeping back then, but then memory sometimes serves me poorly. That's actually all I did. Taking yet another HIV regimen that may or may not promise more waking hours of pain—who would want to stay awake for that?

Part 2:

Many years of drugs. At age 42, I finally awoke to the devastation of HIV/AIDS and my use of drugs to hide the pain of being an outcast. I awoke to what this has done to my life: the loss of my relationship with my son and daughter, the loss of my mother and sister. The pain of the losses has finally forced me to wake up and fully view the past.

I am 44 now and I am still awake. ❖

**Journey****Illia Thompson**  
Carmel Valley CA

awakening hearts  
 hold each other  
 beyond dreamtime

after spring rains  
 an iris blooms  
 between two golden poppies

frog music  
 open air concert  
 moonlight at play

full burning fire  
 flames cool amid ashes  
 final offering ❖

*Sharing our stories*

## Feedback Guidelines for Facilitators

*SCN Past President Judith Helburn is a Certified Sage-ing® Leader. Drawing on her work with the Sage-ing Guild, she has created these guidelines for giving feedback to circle members' writing.*

Feedback other than encouragement and praise is appropriate only in critiquing circles or if a member of a story circle requests it.

Giving and receiving feedback about our writing can become an indispensable part of our own learning. In addition, the feedback process provides guidance towards our becoming more skilled writers.

The goal is that feedback be given and received with objectivity and compassion. When a circle member presents a written piece [either orally or in writing], the circle member gives herself feedback first, followed by others. Feedback should be objective, specific and brief. "*This is how I would do it....*" Or, "*It might have more clarity if....*"

### *Guidelines for the giver of feedback*

1. Have the intention to be of benefit. This is not the time to dump your own negativity on someone else.
2. Be a clean mirror. Be descriptive, not interpretive. Be specific. Do not get sidetracked. Do not be judgmental.
3. When giving feedback, say what you liked first. "*The piece was well thought out....*" "*Your description of... made me feel....*" And, then, speak about what might be improved. "*What were you trying to convey? It is not clear....*" "*Have you tried writing this in the first tense...?*" Be honest, but speak in a way that will be heard. Recognize that you don't have to be "right." The more we speak gently and with compassion, the more likely we are to be heard.
4. Finish with a positive comment. Say your piece and let it go.

### *Guidelines for the recipient of feedback*

1. When receiving feedback, protect yourself. Take a deep breath. Listen with openness, wanting to learn from what you hear. Be aware of projections—your own and others. If something doesn't fit, it is okay. If you hear something from several people, pay attention!
2. Do not assume you already know what the other person means. If you need to, ask for clarification.
3. Be aware of your own reactions when listening to feedback to yourself and others. Notice what arises in your mind as you listen. We may fear giving and receiving feedback. We are afraid of hurting feelings and being hurt. Sometimes that fear generates extra-energetic criticism.
4. Do not explain. Your job is to hear how the other person experiences you. Resist the impulse to justify, defend or explain.
5. Regard all feedback as a gift. The idea is to appreciate the opportunity to learn and develop. Don't forget to thank the other for her time and thought.
6. Take time to sort out what you have heard. It is your choice and only your choice whether or not to act on the feedback.

—Adapted by Judith Helburn from material written by Karen Kissel Wegela, Shaya Isenberg, and Bahira Sugarman.

Visit the Sage-ing Guild's website at  
[www.sage-ingguild.org](http://www.sage-ingguild.org)

## *Susan Albert and Paula Yost*

*(Continued from page 8)*

**SCJ** *Do you believe nature writers have a crucial place in today's world?*

**Susan** Oh, absolutely! All around us, we see the terrible consequences of ignoring the natural world, of believing that mankind's ingenuity and technologies can solve any challenge that nature throws at us, from hurricanes and tidal waves to earthquakes and the melting of the ice caps. Global warming is not a myth or a story, it's a real event, and it is going to shape all human life in ways we can't now imagine—regardless of what our politicians tell us, or how

they try to spin the story. Every day, we lose some part of the world as we know it now. Writers must document that loss, using all the tools at their command. And people who write about nature are part of the advance guard that has to remind the rest of humanity that human-caused climate change must be confronted, understood, and reversed. Nature writers must urge, encourage, strengthen, and hearten everyone else to do all we can to keep our ecosphere in balance. This is a global imperative, and nature writers bear a huge responsibility to tell the rest of the world what has happened, what is happening now, and what will happen in the future.

The earth can't speak for itself. Nature writers must speak for the earth! ❖

—Email interview conducted and edited  
by Lisa Shirah-Hiers

*Publishing our stories*

## *The Journal—A Banquet by and for Members*

*Editor Jane Ross likes to think of the Story Circle Journal as a three-course banquet offered each season to our members and by our members. Wondering what you could bring to the table? Here are some suggestions.*

The *Story Circle Journal* has a three-fold mission. We're here to provide members with useful information that will help you on your writing and publishing journeys. We bring you information about your organization and the activities and events that it offers. And we provide a forum for members to see your own lifewriting and articles in print and to enter the publication process in a supportive environment. Because of the costs of printing and mailing, the *Journal* is currently limited to 28 pages, four times a year, and we try to make the best use of that space while fulfilling all three parts of our mission. We love to get contributions from members and have created a number of ways that you can contribute.

### *Appetizer: Informative Articles*

Informative articles are the green salad appetizer of the *Journal's* three-course banquet. The salad may not be as more-ish as the desserts, but it's a very important part of what feeds us as writers. And if you can get your salad greens, lovingly grown and fresh picked, at an organic farmers market as I'm fortunate to be able to do, they can be just as delicious as the sweets, in their own earthy way.

Though you might not have thought about it this way, our personal story includes the story of finding our writing voice and discovering what it takes to share our story with the world. The writing journey is as much a hero's/heroine's journey as other aspects of our lives and along the way we learn all kinds of lessons—some practical, some philosophical, some lessons about who we are.

Did you read Linda Wisniewski's article in the June '06 *Journal* in which she talked about a visit to a quilt show and how it spurred her to write for a national quilting magazine? And in the September '06 *Journal*, Linda followed up with an article about query letters, in which she shared the query letter that she had sent to the quilting magazine. Linda's two articles use aspects of her writing journey to reflect on how

we find the inspiration to take that bold step of writing for the national press. And her articles inform others about the process and what it takes to be successful. Also in the September '06 *Journal*, Sharon Blumberg shared her own experiences using journaling for professional growth.

Many of you have found your writing and publishing efforts to be growing experiences, both personally and as writers. Many of those experiences are ones from which your fellow SCN members can learn. So I strongly encourage you to share them in an article for the *Journal*. (Please send me a query email first—see the sidebar below at left.)

### *Main Course: Information about SCN*

Information about our organization is the meat and potatoes of the *Journal*. If members don't know about the activities, events, and services we offer, our wonderful programs wouldn't make. So in every issue of the *Journal* we devote considerable space to upcoming workshops, conferences, retreats, contests, anthologies, circles, etc. Our conferences are an especially important component of our offerings because they help cover the cost of keeping our office running and paying our incomparable Executive Director, Peggy Moody. That's why you'll see much conference information and related articles in our *Journal*. These conferences (and our other workshops and retreats) are deep sustenance for the writer's soul. So, if you can, plan on joining us for at least one event this year.

### *Dessert: Personal Lifewriting*

Personal lifewriting is the delectable dessert of the *Journal*. The True Words pages of each *Journal* include upwards of a dozen short pieces of lifewriting on a theme. This is the mainstay of the space we devote to your personal stories. True Words Editor Mary Jo Doig does an outstanding job of working with authors as they submit their writing, always with the aim of sharing the space available in a way that's fair to new and repeat contributors. In our member survey, 93% of those who had submitted True Words stories reported that you were very satisfied with the editor's responsiveness to your submission. If you're feeling nervous about sending your first True Words story, know that you couldn't meet a more sensitive and receptive editor than Mary Jo! Another *Journal* venue for your lifewriting is the entertaining Kitchen Table Stories column edited by SCN President Patricia Pando.

We would love to be able to include more and longer pieces of lifewriting in the *Journal*. Alas, with the space limitations that we have, I can only include long pieces rarely

*(Continued on page 19)*

### *Your query email to the Journal Editor*

It doesn't need to be formal or fancy but it does need to include:

- A lead paragraph stating what your article will be about and why it will be of interest to SCN members.
- A second short paragraph giving a little more detail.
- A third paragraph giving your background. What experiences have you had that make you qualified to write on this topic?
- Your name and contact info.

*Story Circles—the heart of SCN*

## *Keeping the Circles Rolling*

*Circles Coordinator Lisa Shirah-Hiers has some great advice to help keep those story circles humming along.*

A recurring theme in messages from both the Internet and Free Range Facilitator Yahoo email groups is what to do when participation in your writing circle starts to drop off. Facilitators—don't panic! Circle members—take heart! Often the cause is not connected with the facilitator but simply reflects the circumstances of members' lives or of the circles themselves. The way to find the solution is to identify the problem. Here are a few factors to consider and tricks that facilitators can use to get everyone back on the same page (literally and figuratively!)

 Internet circles sometimes suffer from overwriting, perfectionism, and procrastination precisely because members have a whole month to respond. Stop that self-critiquing in its tracks with this simple exercise: Ask participants to respond in a quick five minutes during their usual email time to an easy, light-hearted prompt. (The three funniest things that ever happened to me. Or, if I were on vacation right now, what three things would I do today?) Ask them to write directly into the email (instead of lurking off with a notebook) and have them “reply all” as soon as they're finished typing. See if that breaks the ice.

 If people stop coming to your face-to-face circle, it may be time to evaluate the particulars of your meeting: Is the time and place convenient? If not, you might try meeting over a meal. That's a simple way to combine something we want to fit into our lives (writing) with something we can't avoid (the need to eat!). Is the place conducive to quiet writing and sharing? If not, ask members to write a list of possible meeting locations. You might meet in each other's

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A new free-range writing circle is forming in Cedar Park, Tex., north of Austin. If you live in the neighborhood and would like to join, contact Brenda Carr at (512) 259-6645 or email [bcarrdukes@hotmail.com](mailto:bcarrdukes@hotmail.com).

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and on a case-by-case basis. But hold onto your longer pieces—SCN offers many other submission opportunities. There is the annual anthology that comes out each spring. There's the Susan Wittig Albert Lifewriting Contest in July. This year, we'll have our 10th anniversary cookbook-antology (deadline March 15). And we have occasional web publishing opportunities such as the new “How I Found SCN” web page.

What would *you* like to bring to the table? ❖

homes or find a church that will let you meet for free. If childcare is the issue, consider sharing the cost of a sitter.

 Have the topics gotten too “weighty” and intimidating? Or are there are some particularly gifted writers in the group whose wonderful writing leaves others feeling shy about their own endeavors? An easy way to lighten things up and get back on track is to use lists as topics. We all write lists all the time: shopping lists, to-do lists, wish lists. Ask your circle to write for *three minutes only* a list of reasons why they want to write. Then for another three minutes, a list of things that get in the way. For the final three minutes, a list of ways they can put writing back into their lives. Hold sharing until the end. Listening to each other's ideas will give everyone some good strategies for making writing a priority.

Other “list”-type topics are: the ten greatest blessings in my life; the five things I most wish for; the top ten things I want to do before I die; my five favorite books and one line each on why I like them; the six most important qualities of a good friend or soul mate. Or ask for a list of the top five things they want to write about, providing you and your whole group with prompts for the next year! Lists are un-intimidating, and put experienced and beginning writers on equal footing. (It's hard to make a list sound poetic!)

 See whether it's time to open your group up to some fresh new folks. Ask those who haven't been participating recently whether they are still interested or need to take a hiatus. Remind them that they don't have to share their writing, but if they want to be in a circle they should at least come and respond to other members' writings. Even if they choose to stay in the group, it might be time to advertise for new members.

### *Finally, a reminder to all circle members.*

We women need to stop doing everything for everyone else and take some part of our time and energy to “feed the well.” If we have joined a circle it's because we wanted to write, we wanted companionship, we wanted to feed our souls. There are 744 hours in a month. Surely all of us deserve one or two of them for ourselves, to reconnect with and reflect on our own hopes and dreams for the future, our past, and the joys and wonders that are often hidden in plain sight in our day-to-day. ❖

Circles Coordinator **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 to the *Journal*.



# Story Circle News Roundup

## Board Planning Session

The SCN board met for a planning session on January 20–21 for a day and a half of intensive discussion. Invited facilitator Kim Gustafson, from the H.R. department of Computer Sciences Corporation, helped us to focus our thoughts and energies on the challenges and opportunities that SCN faces in its second decade and to come up with a timeline for creating a vision and plan for SCN's future.

During the Sunday morning session, board members separated into four groups to consider questions related to: our diverse membership, the board's committee structure, the resources we have and can call upon for the future, and strategic planning for the future. From the draft outline produced by these groups, four ad hoc committees were formed that will look more closely at these areas over the coming weeks and report back to the board in March.

In addition, Kim helped the board decide how best to handle the new challenge of operating with a board that is spread around the country. We discussed technology options and settled on using teleconferencing for future board meetings, beginning immediately.

—Report by Jane Ross

## Board Meeting Report

The SCN Board met in the Colorado Room of the Lower Colorado River Authority near downtown Austin, Tex., on January 22, 2007. President Patricia Pando chaired the meeting which was attended by ten returning board members, six of our eight new board members and the Executive Director. For the first time, two members of the board attended via teleconference. Members reported their contribution of 705.5 hours to SCN activities since the last meeting in October. The board:

1. Welcomed the new board members. (See new board-member bios at right.)
2. Reviewed and approved the minutes of the October 2006 meeting and the treasurer's report.
3. Reviewed and approved the budget for 2007.
4. Received ad hoc committee assignments resulting from our January planning session; reports are due to the Executive Committee by March 5.
5. Reviewed plans for the March 2007 LifeLines retreat, June 2007 nature-writing conference, Fall 2007 SCN cookbook/anthology, and February 2008 Stories from the Heart IV conference.
6. Added an additional board meeting to the schedule on June 11.

The next Board meeting will be held on March 19.

—Report by Penny Appleby

## Internet Chapter News

The first quarter of 2007 has been a busy one for members of the Internet Chapter. Writing circle members have said goodbye to some of their circle sisters and hello to new ones while continuing to share their own life stories.

Reading circle members have enjoyed the published works of other women while exploring the common threads between those women's lives and their own lives. And yes, they too have said goodbye to some and hello to others. Balancing the challenges of the busyness of life and the desire to write is an ever present challenge. Blessedly, the women of the Internet Chapter seem to find a way to do so!

Internet Chapter membership currently stands at 221, and continues to rise slowly and steadily. There are 15 writing circles and two reading circles.

—Report by Lee Ambrose

(Continued from page 3)

## Requests from the Member Survey

As part of our survey, we asked members to tell us what other programs and activities you would like to see SCN offer. Sixty-one women answered this question and the board will be working hard over this year to begin to fulfill these requests. The most common suggestions were:

- Regional conferences and workshops;
- More information about how to get published and how to self-publish;
- Local chapters and/or circles;
- More online classes;
- More information and help with running writing circles and workshops;
- Opportunities to have writing critiqued.

A number of survey respondents asked: why are all the events in Austin?

Story Circle Network was founded in Austin, Tex., in 1997 by Susan Wittig Albert. Initially the organization was involved primarily in the publishing of a quarterly journal and annual anthology of members' writings and in offering OWL writing workshops to senior women in the Austin area.

With the advent of the Internet and the creation of an Internet chapter, our membership outside Austin increased rapidly from 2000. This year for the first time, we have several board members and a board president who reside outside the state of Texas! The board will offer programs in other cities and states just as soon as there are enough women in those locales to do the footwork. It is, indeed, one of our dearest dreams to have events outside Austin and Texas. Help us make this dream a reality! Write and let us know you'd like to assist with setting up a program or event in your area. Email [cb@io.com](mailto:cb@io.com).

*Take a bow! Spotighting our volunteers*

## *Welcome to Our New Board Members*

*The SCN Board welcomed eight new members in January including four from outside of the Austin area. Lisa Shirah-Hiers profiles each of these energetic women, detailing their experiences within and outside of SCN, their passion for the organization, and their dreams for its future.*

**Judy Abrahamson** has been an Austin SCN member for six or seven years. The main attraction for her was “writing as a vehicle for personal insight and growth.” Attending a Writing from Life (WFL) workshop, she discovered it “was such a positive experience, that I knew I had found a treasure.” She carries the distinction of having attended all three of our conferences and our retreat in Round Top with Maureen Murdock (two years ago). She served five years as board member, past president and program chair of the Academy of Rehabilitative Audiology. She says she is most interested in helping with conference planning and organization. She credits SCN with her “personal growth and connection with intelligent, insightful, inspirational women” and wishes that more women could experience this.

Another Austinite, **Hazel Baylor**, has been a member since 2004 when she attended a fundraiser with friend and fellow board member, Leilani Rose. “I was impressed with the enthusiasm of the women in attendance and realized that I would like to know more. When I started reading the wonderful stories on the website and attended a couple of functions, I was hooked.” Initially she was relatively inactive because, she says, “I kept saying I really didn’t want to write.” That changed when she was enabled during a WFL to “make an important life decision.” Now she is a regular writing circle participant and has attended two conferences and the LifeLines Writing Retreat at Round Top. Hazel served on the board of a family service agency in El Paso and has extensive experience working with the Board of the Department of Human Services. She has facilitated retreat and planning sessions for several boards, including SCN’s. A social worker “interested in helping others to have meaningful lives,” she loves the outdoors, reading, and visiting with friends and family. Her wish for SCN is that we expand to include minorities and develop programs to reach out to teenagers.



One of our new “at-large” board members, **Joyce Boatright** resides in Houston, TX. It was her own first WFL workshop experience in Austin that, she says, “connected me to [this] wonderful community of women.” She also attended the Round Top Lifeline’s retreat, has written several stories for the True Words pages, presented at the national conference

and at a WFL in Austin, contributed to the Katrina stories online, joined the speakers’ bureau, and facilitates a free-range story circle in Houston. She recently published a book, *Telling Your Story: A Basic Guide to Memoir Writing*. She holds a doctorate in adult education (her dissertation topic was “Strategies for Marketing Professional Development Seminars”) and has extensive public relations experience including directorship of an educational organization’s in-house agency, served on state and national committees for governmental relations, and co-chaired regional and national news campaigns. She teaches at a community college where she was recognized in 2006 with the Faculty Excellence award. Future projects include a podcast, “In Her Own Voice,” for her women memoir course participants, and development of e-letters. She says, “Discovering SCN has uncovered a deep desire to connect with other women and help them share their life stories.” Her primary goals for SCN’s future are “membership growth and vehicles for expression” including the organization of a SCN Writing from Life event in Houston.

When her father died in 2004, **Helen Lowery** discovered that neither of her parents had written down family stories. “[M]y children, grandchildren, and myself were left to look at pictures of people and guess who they are. I wanted to leave my children stories...to help remember and to help better know their family.” She found SCN as she searched through Susan Albert’s classes. Joining in 2005 at the Round Top LifeLines Retreat, she now participates in Internet Reading and Writing circles. Through SCN she says, “I have been given the support of many women to write. This has helped me focus on writing as a priority rather than a pastime. ... Reading at least a book [a] month and being involved in the online discussions has helped increase my knowledge of other women, how they think and write about their own lives and this enhances my memory of stories past as well as my vocabulary and metaphors. The online community has become my respite and my reflection on my day and my life. I keep a file of these writings for writing triggers later.” She has served on numerous boards: National and Community Service, Battered Women’s Services, Independent Living, City Planning, Human Potential Movement and the Unity. She is a certified grant writer and experienced fund raiser. “I think the mission of increasing the voice of women in the written word is very important to the generations coming up in a computer age, and I want to be a part of this explosion.”

*(Continued on page 22)*

## Welcome to Our New Board Members

(Continued from page 21)



**Linda Joy Myers** joined SCN in 2000 “...because of its focus and welcoming attitude toward women’s stories, and the way it invites women to write the domestic and ‘small’ stories that most writing organizations don’t find important to publish and share. I also appreciated Susan’s psychology background, and the fact that a feminist spirituality was welcome.” She presented at all three conferences and wrote an article for and was interviewed in the *Journal*. Another “at-large” board member, she resides in California. She served on the California Writer’s Club board—first as Vice President, then as President from 2004–2006, and was Vice-President of the Women’s National Book Association, San Francisco branch for two years. She has experience blogging, creating websites and workshops, and supporting other writers. The first chapter of her memoir *Don’t Call Me Mother*, won first prize in the 2004 Jack London Writing Conference contest. “The most essential thing Story Circle has to offer [is] the focus on women’s lives—the idea that women have something unique to offer—check out the new book on the Female Brain—and that women’s stories are a way to save the world! ...I hope that is not too over the top, but it feels... that the weaving that women do in the world, through connections and through stories are indeed very valuable skills, treasures, and gifts.”

**Sandra Simon** came to SCN through Judith Helburn’s Austin OWL circle. Says Sandra, “Judith described the writing circle as a safe environment, somewhat structured, accommodating, welcoming, and fun. I was planning to join with my mother, to help write her stories. When my mother decided not to participate, Judith said, ‘Well, you come anyway!’” Because of SCN Sandra says, “I have begun writing my real stories, not the resume! I am learning assists and techniques to help me write, and I feel connected to the other women in my writing circles. Our backgrounds and experiences might be different, but the stories cut through the differences and reveal our similarities and connectedness.” She has published in the SCN journal and anthology; has served on the board of the Women’s Health Alliance of Long Island; and has worked with Jewish Women International in Austin on the annual Prejudice Awareness Seminar. “I’m a first-generation American; my mind is filled with family stories from a small town in Poland as well as from the places where I have lived.” She left a career as a biochemist to stay home with her children, then worked in public health education, eventually returning to grad school for an MSW. She subsequently worked for the Department of Human

Services in program evaluation, policy analysis, and planning. Referring to SCN’s tenth anniversary she says, “I think that, as we continue to grow and offer new types of writing programs, we need to ensure that we maintain the atmosphere that SCN has now—welcoming, non-judgmental, and empowering.”



**Jo Virgil** “...was first introduced to SCN by Susan Albert, through her job as Community Relations Manager at Barnes & Noble while SCN was involved in the Barnes & Noble project, Noble Generation. In her writing circle, “Wordweavers,” (led by P.J. Pierce), she has “... learned the power of personal story [and] about the strength women friends can offer. I’ve gained confidence in my writing.” She has served on the board of the Writers’ League of Texas and the Central Texas Storytelling Guild and the advisory board of Scribe, a new writers’ retreat. She assists non-profit boards in fundraising and has “...extensive experience in event planning and publicity, as well as in the book industry.” She hopes SCN will continue “...encouraging women to realize that their stories are valuable—first, to themselves, and second, to those who care about them or who can benefit from their experiences.”



Joining around 1999, **Linda Wisniewski**, “...was attracted to the online presence and the welcoming community of women writers.” She has participated in the Internet Circle, a free-range circle, two national conferences, two retreats, the contest, online courses, and writing for the *Journal*. Benefits she’s received from SCN include “[s]upport in my writing career and for my personal writing. I’ve learned practical skills to improve my work, tips to pass along to my students, accessed markets through the newsletter, made wonderful long-distance friendships...and fell in love with Austin!” Another long-distance board member, she resides in Doylestown, PA. She has served on the UU church’s board of directors and on the board of the Medical Library Association, Philadelphia Chapter. An experienced researcher, (she once owned an info research company), she currently works as part-time substitute librarian and as a reporter for a weekly newspaper, teaches memoir writing for adults, and facilitates a women’s spiritual writing group at her church. She speaks publicly on the benefits of writing for older people. Her goals for SCN include, “More diversity, i.e., women of color. More circles outside of Texas.”

*SCN-sponsored events*

# *Workshops, Retreats, Conferences*

*LifeLines Writing Retreat  
With Susan Wittig Albert  
At Festival Hill in Round Top, Texas,  
March 16-18, 2007*

**There are still a few places  
available at the Lifelines Writing retreat.  
Sign-up today!**

**What is LifeLines?**

LifeLines is a weekend writing retreat for women. For a detailed description of the program, visit the website at:

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

**How much does it cost?**

\$375 for SCN members; \$395 for non-members. The fee includes two nights in a double occupancy room and five meals. For a single occupancy room, the rate is \$25 per night higher (\$425 for members; \$445 for non-members).

**How can I pay?**

You can pay online (electronic funds transfer or credit card) or by mailing a check to the SCN PO Box number: Story Circle Network, P.O. Box 500127, Austin, TX 78750-0127.

**Register online at:**

[www.storycircle.org/LifeLines/frmregister.shtml](http://www.storycircle.org/LifeLines/frmregister.shtml)

**What is included in my registration fees?**

Your registration includes:

1. Five workshop sessions (Friday evening; Saturday morning, afternoon, and evening; Sunday morning)
2. Meals: Friday dinner; Saturday breakfast, lunch, and dinner; Sunday breakfast
3. Snacks/drinks during breaks
4. Two nights stay in double-occupancy accommodations (two twin beds in each room). Check-in time is 4 p.m. on Friday; check-out time is noon on Sunday.

**What is the refund policy?**

Cancellations are subject to a cancellation fee of \$50. After February 15, we will refund your money only if we are able to fill your place from our waiting list.

**Questions about LifeLines?** Contact us via email: [storycircle@storycircle.org](mailto:storycircle@storycircle.org) or phone: (512) 454-9833

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

If you have been thinking you might like to facilitate a session at one of Story Circle's events, now's the time! We have several opportunities for women with great ideas for interactive writing: the spring and fall Writing from Life Workshops (April 21–22 and October 27–28), and our fourth Stories from the Heart National Conference next February 1–3, 2008.

Workshop sessions are an hour and fifteen 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, and presenters for Stories from the Heart are given a reduction in their conference fee. The Program Committee selects facilitators after reviewing all proposals.

Proposals for Writing from Life should be sent to Carolyn Blankenship at [cb@io.com](mailto:cb@io.com). 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;
4. Whether you are interested in the April or October workshop.

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.

A call for proposals for the National Conference will appear in the next issue of the *Journal*, as well as online. We just know our membership is teeming with all kinds of talent and bright ideas—let us hear from you!

*More workshop, retreat, and conference  
information on the next page.*

*Writing from Life:  
The Writes of Spring  
April 21–22, 2007*

Ah, Central Texas in the spring...Bluebonnets, barbecue...and lifewriting! What could be better? Join facilitators Carolyn Blankenship, Catherine Cogburn, Rebecca Roberts, Leilani Rose, Ann Walters, and Paula Yost for a weekend workshop that will give you the opportunity to explore and share your personal story, discover creative new approaches to lifewriting, and celebrate springtime! Come discover yourself and share what you find—tell us your story as it reveals itself to you.

**When:** Saturday & Sunday, April 21–22, 2007

**Where:** LCRA Board Room, 3700 Lake Austin Blvd., Austin, TX

**Cost:** \$100 for SCN members; \$125 for non-members (A box lunch on Saturday is included in the fee.)

**To Register:** Register online at [www.storycircle.org/frmenroll.shtml](http://www.storycircle.org/frmenroll.shtml) or call the SCN office.

There will be the option to join the group for a Dutch-treat dinner across the street on Saturday evening, with a Conversation Café following. Out-of-towners can check our website for a list of nearby hotels/motels at:

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

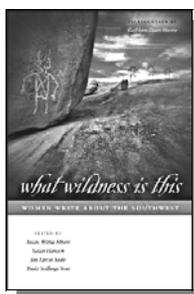
*SCHOLARSHIP for FOOD!*

We are offering a full scholarship to this event for someone good at organizing, who will be asked to bring snacks, set up the coffee and snack table, call in lunch orders, and pick the lunches up. This person will miss part of the session just before lunch and will need to arrive half an hour early to set up.

*Be Our Guest  
Free afternoon program*

**When:** Sunday, March 25, 2007, 2–4 p.m.

**Where:** LCRA Colorado Room, 3700 Lake Austin Blvd, Austin TX, [www.storycircle.org/graphics/LCRA\\_map.html](http://www.storycircle.org/graphics/LCRA_map.html)



**Program:** Readings/discussion of *What Wilderness Is This*, SCN's new anthology. Susan Wittig Albert will moderate the program, which will feature several contributors to the anthology reading from their work and talking about the importance of place-writing. There will also be a book sale/book signing to benefit the SCN. More information can be found on the Be Our Guest web page:

[www.storycircle.org/beourguest.shtml](http://www.storycircle.org/beourguest.shtml)

*Red River Writing Retreat*

a Story Circle Writing Workshop  
with Carolyn Blankenship & Leilani Rose

August 12–14, 2007

Red River, New Mexico

Escape the August heat and humidity and kick back in the cool mountains of New Mexico! Join us for a women's writing retreat at the Ponderosa Lodge in beautiful Red River, New Mexico. We will explore the theme, "*Come to Your Senses*," and delve into writing that focuses on using touch, taste, sight, sound, and smell to take our writing to a deeper level.

Check out the information at our website, [www.cbdeco.com/rr07](http://www.cbdeco.com/rr07), then click on the Registration link for a printable form. Because we want an intimate retreat with ample time for writing and sharing, we are only able to accept 20 participants.

**COST: \$185** (Includes workshop and refreshments; does not include lodging, meals, or transportation)

**DEADLINE FOR REGISTRATION: July 10, 2007**

Questions? Contact Carolyn at [cb@io.com](mailto:cb@io.com) or Leilani at [lrose11@austin.rr.com](mailto:lrose11@austin.rr.com). We hope you will "come to your senses" and join us!

*The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us, the less taste we shall have for destruction.— Rachel Carson*

*Stories from the Heart IV  
The SCN National Conference  
February 1–3, 2008*

It's not too soon to put this on your calendar: our next National Conference, *Stories from the Heart IV*, February 1–3, 2008, at the Wyndham Hotel in Austin, Tex.

Our keynote speaker will be Nancy Aronie, author of *Writing from the Heart: Tapping the Power of Your Inner Voice*. We are in the early planning stages, and if you have special talents to offer, please let us know. We need help with finding conference sponsors, creating goodie bags, hospitality during the conference, and other tasks. If you are interested, let us know at [conference@storycircle.org](mailto:conference@storycircle.org). Look for more about the conference in the next issue of the *Journal*.



# A Land Full of Stories

*A Conference & Celebration of Writing about Place and Personal History*

*Conference dates: June 7–9, 2007*

*Alkek Library, Southwestern Writers Collection*

*Texas State University, San Marcos, Texas*

Mark your calendars and start making plans now to join us in San Marcos, Texas, for this Story Circle Network conference

SCN, in cooperation with the Alkek Library's Southwestern Writers Collection at Texas State University, is planning a weekend writing conference to mark the publication of *What Wildness is This: Women Write About the Southwest*—Story Circle Network's new anthology of writings by women celebrating their experiences in the landscapes of the Southwest. The conference will bring together people from around the country to tell their stories of the land through personal essays, autobiographical fiction, poetry, drama, dance, music, art and more. A wide variety of 90-minute workshops and panel discussions focused on writing about place will be offered on Friday and Saturday.

## *Keynote Speaker*

The evening's keynote address will be delivered by Kathleen Dean Moore, Professor of Philosophy and founding director of the Spring Creek Project for Ideas, Nature, and the Written Word at Oregon State University. Moore is the author of three books of essays: *The Pine Island Paradox*; *Holdfast: At Home in the Natural World*; and *Riverwalking: Reflections on Moving Water*.

## *Pre-Conference Writing Sessions*

Field-writing activities in Austin and San Marcos, including bat-watching, wildflower sightings, glass-bottom boat tours, spelunking and more.

## *Conference Hotel*

**Quality Inn, San Marcos 512-353-7770**

We have reserved a block of rooms at the Quality Inn in San Marcos for conference attendees. Lodging is not included in your registration fee. You will need to make your own reservations by calling the hotel directly at 512-353-7770. Don't forget to request the special, reduced SCN rates of \$69.95 (single room) and \$79.95 (double room) available for the nights of June 7, 8 and 9. Rates include free high-speed Internet access and a hot breakfast each morning! Book early. Reservations at this discounted rate available only until May 24, 2007.

**Website:** [www.storycircle.org/WhatWildness/landstories](http://www.storycircle.org/WhatWildness/landstories)



Kathleen Dean Moore

### **Conference Scholarships Available**

Former SCN board member Jazz Jaeschke (facilitator of the Internet Chapter Poetry Circle) has generously offered three \$75 scholarships to help pay for SCN members to attend this conference.

For more information, visit the Registration page of the conference website.

*To sign up for our  
conference  
e-letter, to catch up  
on the news,  
or to register,  
visit our website.*



Copy 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/WhatWildness/landstories](http://www.storycircle.org/WhatWildness/landstories) and click  
the link to Registration.

# Registration Form

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

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

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Story Circle Member?  Yes  No

Are you currently enrolled as a college student?  Yes  No  
(Students pay a discounted fee of \$ 15 for workshops, and full price for the Fri. reception and Sat. lunch.)

Registration Type		Early registration* (before 04/15/07)	Regular Registration (04/16/07– 05/31/07)	Registration at the Door (cash/ check only!)	Amount Due
<b>Full Registration</b> (Full conference includes Friday afternoon/Saturday workshops, Friday night welcome/reception/keynote, Saturday breaks and lunch. Does not include pre-conference field-writing activities, housing, transportation from hotel to university.)		\$180 Students \$112	\$195 Students \$112	\$210 Students \$112	
<b>Partial registration</b>	Saturday only, with lunch	\$125	\$140	**	
	Saturday only, no lunch	\$100	\$110	\$125	
	Saturday lunch only	\$30	\$40	**	
	Individual sessions <b>Friday</b> Session 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Session 2 <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Saturday</b> Session 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Session 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Session 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Session 4 <input type="checkbox"/>	\$25 Students \$15	\$30 Students \$15	\$35 Students \$15	
<b>Field-writing Sessions</b> Thursday, June 7	Morning Session 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Afternoon Session 2 <input type="checkbox"/>	\$25	\$30	\$35	
				<b>Total Enclosed</b>	

What is \*NOT\* included in my FULL registration fees?

- Optional Thursday Pre-Conference Field Writing Sessions
- Lodging is \*NOT\* included in the registration fee. You need to make your own lodging arrangements. Want a roommate? See Roommates Wanted page for more information.

\*\*You MUST register for lunch by May 31! Registration for this event will NOT be accepted at the door.

You can pay online (electronic funds transfer or credit card) or by check sent to the address at the top of this page.

Refund Policy: Cancellations are accepted until May 15, 2007, and are subject to a cancellation fee of \$40 for a full conference registration.

Questions? Contact us via email at [LandStories@storycircle.org](mailto:LandStories@storycircle.org) or phone: (512) 454-9833



# Celebrating Women's Writing

## STORY CIRCLE NETWORK—10TH ANNIVERSARY

### *Snow Brought Me to the Story Circle Network*

**Marti Weisbrich**  
Round Rock TX

January 2005 found me living in Leavenworth, Washington. We had experienced twenty-nine consecutive days of gloomy, sunless skies, snow, and ice, and I was going stir crazy. Having read everything that I could get my hands on in the house, I visited the local library.

In desperation, since I had practically read every book in the small library, I glanced at the mystery section. I had never read this genre because mysteries did not appeal to me. I reached for a book on the top shelf, under the letter A, and found *Chile Death*, a China Bayles herbal mystery by Susan Wittig Albert. The information on the flyleaf looked interesting so I checked the book out of the library. Reading it, I became enthralled with the mystery concept and the characters and especially liked the herbal information and the recipes, as I love to both garden and cook. The writing was honest and humorous, and I found that I wanted to know all about the author.

Researching Susan on the web led me to finding that she had created a very special non-profit organization, an organization that had created a sisterhood among women who long to tell their stories, the Story Circle Network. I joined the Story Circle Network national organization in March 2005. In January 2006 I joined the Internet Chapter, becoming a member of the Reading Circle 1, Writing Circle 8 and, since October 26, 2006, Reading Circle 2. Since February 2007, I am currently a member of both reading circles.

Finding Susan's web log, *Lifescapes*, was like finding a touchstone, for she wrote with such enthusiasm of her landscape, the Texas Hill Country. In 2002, my husband Rich and I launched an odyssey to explore this great country of ours. Since moving from California we have lived in the balmy tropics of Maui and in the snowy wonderland of central Washington. Reading and sharing Susan's blog about the Hill Country with my husband Rich ignited a deep curiosity about this part of Texas and we decided to see the Texas Hill Country for ourselves. We took a trip in April 2005 and moved to Round Rock, Texas in July 2005.

From a chance book discovery in a small Washington library, an entire world has opened up for me, not only outwardly via our move to Texas but inwardly as well. My inward journey began the moment that I became a member of the Story Circle Network and met such an incredible group of wise, witty, and warm women. By the way, these words also describe the author, whom I have been so privileged to meet on several occasions, the woman who put all of this into motion, Susan Wittig Albert. ❖



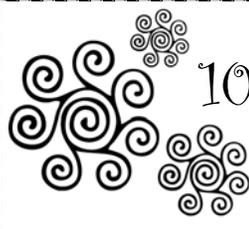
**Marti Weisbrich** is a first generation American who grew up in central California of Spanish parents. Marti married young and raised a family, and travel was not a priority in those early adult years. In 2002, Marti and her husband sold their California business and

home to travel and live in various places around the country. They now call Round Rock, Texas, their home.

### *10th Anniversary True Words Theme: How I Found SCN*

We all have a story about how we found Story Circle Network. Maybe finding SCN didn't cause you to move across country—we'd still 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* during 2007. Please follow the guidelines for all True Words stories (see the Looking Ahead section on p. 14) as to format, etc. There is no deadline for these stories.



10th Anniversary  
**Events**  
and Deadlines

## ***Mark Your Calendar***

**March 15:** Deadline for submissions to the SCN cookbook–anthology (see p. 10)

**March 16–18:** LifeLines Writing Retreat with Susan Wittig Albert, in Round Top, Tex. (see right)

**March 25:** Be Our Guest, Austin, Tex. Celebrating the publication of *What Wildness Is This: Women Write about the Southwest*. **Free** (see p. 24)

**April 15:** Early registration deadline for the Land Full of Stories Conference (see p. 25–6)

**April 21–22** Writing from Life writing workshop, Austin, Tex. (see p. 24)

**June 8–9:** The Land Full of Stories Conference, San Marcos, Tex. (see p. 25–6)

**July 15:** Susan Wittig Albert Lifewriting Contest entry deadline. Topic to be announced in the SCN National e-letter. Full details in the June *Journal*.

**August 12–14:** Writing from Life writing workshop, Red River, NM. (see p. 24)

**October 5–7:** LifeLines Lifewriting Retreat with Robin Edgar, Wildacres, NC. See June *Journal*.

**October 27–28:** Writing from Life writing workshop, Austin, Tex. (see call for workshop proposals p. 23)

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

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

## *LifeLines Lifewriting Retreat*

### *A Created Version of the Past*

*A Weekend Memoir Workshop*

*With Susan Wittig Albert*

*March 16–18, 2007*

Susan Wittig Albert will facilitate the LifeLines Retreat, at Festival Hill, Round Top, Texas. The workshop, which is limited to 60 women, is based on the online class Susan taught for SCN for several years and focuses on the use of fictional techniques in memoir. Participants will be asked to read a published memoir by a well-known writer (to be assigned later) and to bring a brief written narrative of an event from their own lives, which they will expand and rework during the weekend sessions.

Susan will demonstrate ways to develop characters, create scenes and construct plots, use various points of view to tell the story, craft lively dialogue, manage time, and create settings. The sessions will be organized around group discussion, individual writings, and small-group sharing. Participants will take home several pieces of writing, as well as handouts and exercises that will allow them to continue their work.

***Sign up now*** for this wonderful weekend of writing and sharing. Registration is certain to fill up—Susan’s workshops always do. For registration details, see p. 23 or go to the LifeLines Web page:

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

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

**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.