



# Story Circle Journal

Vol. 11 No. 3, September, 2007

The newsletter for women with stories to tell...

*Announcing the Winners of SCN's Eighth Annual Writing Contest*

## *The Susan Wittig Albert Lifewriting Competition*

*The birthings of our lives change us forever. In these four touching stories, our contest winners prove once again that, out of the inevitable pain of birth, can come a new way of being in the world.*

*Thirty-three SCN members entered stories in this year's lifewriting competition on the topic of "Birthings and Beginnings," with two rounds of judging involving a dozen judges.*

*First prize winner*

### *Finding Grace*

**Carol Ramsey**  
Austin TX

Grace was born at 10:45 a.m. on Saturday, March 31, 2007. I was so scared to see her. I was scared to see how small she would be and scared I would break if I held her in my arms. I was only four months pregnant when Grace was born.

Grace was beautiful. She had a perfect face and a cute little nose. She had ten fingers and ten toes. She moved a little, but not with regular breaths or open eyes or hands that could wrap around your finger. I hoped she knew I was holding her. Grace weighed eight ounces and was nine inches long. She was my baby girl.

My husband and I talked to Grace and told her we loved her. I told her I was sorry I didn't take better care of her. Sean asked her to forgive us, which he said she did, but I didn't believe it, not yet.

Grace was with us for one hour and fifty-five minutes. My parents and brother held her and rocked her and talked to her. We took pictures to help us remember her. Then I held her until she passed away.

We had been told that we would lose both of our twins, but later that day, when my body showed no signs of delivering our second girl, Sophia, the doctor said there was a small chance she might survive. I had surgery to repair the problem that caused us to lose Grace, spent another week in the hospital, and then went home on bed rest. Sophia's chances weren't good, we would just have to wait and see.

Being home gave me lots of time. Lots of time to think about what happened. Lots of time to repeat the same six words to myself:

"Why didn't I call my doctor?"

How long would that call have taken? Just five minutes? Maybe less? I could have called the doctor and told him my body felt funny after I peed. It seemed so

*Congratulations to  
the contest winners!*

Carol Ramsey  
Katherine Misegades  
Anonymous (Austin)  
Georgia Hubley

### *In This Issue . . .*

<i>Contest Winners.....</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>President's Letter.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Ten Years of SCN.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Praise for What Wildness.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>More Contest Stories.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Art Journaling.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Kitchen Table Stories... </i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Cookbook Authors... </i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Circles—The Heart of SCN... </i>	<i>12</i>
<i>True Words from Real Women . </i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Take a Bow Judith Helburn... </i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Books for the Journey... </i>	<i>19</i>
<i>How I Found SCN... </i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Land Full of Stories Recap ....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>2008 Conference News ....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Story Circle News Roundup ..</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Workshops, Retreats, etc. ....</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Writing from Life Workshop... </i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Stories from the Heart IV ...</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Conference Registration ....</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Kitchen Table Stories Orders....</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>The Back Page ....</i>	<i>28</i>

*(Continued on page 5)*

## A Letter from SCN's President



September! What a splendid month. Days grow shorter, and nights grow cooler. After the summer heat, it's good to be back out in the garden.

I relish being in this garden that I've tended for twenty years. It is full of memories and friendships. Perhaps my favorite garden plants are the "pass along" plants I've received from my friends. The lilies from my neighbors Bill and Carol who have moved on, the poppies from Jack, the hummingbird-attracting shrimp plants from Angela, the soft green ferns from Molly, the cactus from my son's Houston patio, the chocolate mint rooting in my kitchen window, the gift of a California friend. I

could go on and on—there are many. I equally enjoy thinking of the plants I have passed along myself that now happily flourish in the gardens of my friends.

In many ways, Story Circle Network is like a pass-along garden. For as we share our stories, we share our lives with others near and far, and as we share we enrich our own lives. How wonderful when everyone wins!

This is a special year for Story Circle Network as we celebrate our tenth anniversary. We have a record number of members in 43 states and several other countries. Some of us celebrated at the *LifeLines* retreat in March; others gathered in San Marcos, Texas, to learn and share at *A Land Full of Stories*, our conference on women and place; even more have shared their stories through circles, this *Journal*, the *True Words from Real Women* anthology and the Susan Wittig Albert lifewriting contest (just read those winners for a great sharing experience). We're still looking forward to *Writing from Life* in October and a newly redesigned book review website (more about this in the December *Journal*). Most of all, our fourth great conference, **Stories from the Heart IV** will kick off our second decade in February, 2008.

I'll be sharing more about our activities with you later this month when I write you a very special letter, for if it is September, it is time for the Annual Fund Drive. While we all contribute to the ongoing expenses of Story Circle through our membership dues, these dues do not cover all of our expenses. In order to make Story Circle membership affordable, we must look for other sources of revenue. We begin with our own members.

Some of us are able to share more. If you are in that fortunate position, I hope you will be able to give back to Story Circle through this fund drive. A little or a lot, it will help Story Circle continue to give back to all of us.

What can you do?

- Contribute directly to the Annual Fund Drive. (Does your workplace have matching grants?)
- Raise your basic membership to a higher level.
- Sponsor memberships for women with financial hardships through our Sugar Bowl Fund.
- Share Story Circle with a friend, a sister, a mother or grandmother with a gift membership. (The holiday season is just around the corner.)
- Honor a special woman or her memory with a donation to Story Circle. She will be recognized in the *Story Circle Journal* and on our website.

This year two of our long-time members are making a special anniversary gift to Story Circle. They will match any donations (including membership level increases) up to a maximum of \$10,000! This is great chance for all of us to double our donation and give Story Circle an extra special anniversary gift!

Watch your mailbox, I'll be in touch!

*Patricia Pando*  
President, Story Circle Network

## Story Circle Journal

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

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### Membership Rates

One Year \$35 US  
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Postal Money Order *only*, please

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

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

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

## Reflections on Ten Years of SCN

*Story Circle Network had its beginnings in Austin, Texas, as Susan Wittig Albert and a group of friends began discussing ways to encourage and support women who were hungry to write and share their stories with other women. Pat Flathouse spoke to a dozen of our members who were there in SCN's infancy.*

Those early discussions in 1997 set the stage for the development of Story Circle Network (SCN). Susan Albert, in the May 2000 *Story Circle Journal*, states that she began the SCN with three guiding principles in mind.

First, that women's stories are both valuable and vital—important to our families, to our communities, and to ourselves. Second, that we need encouragement to believe this and keep believing it. And third, that we need support to act on this belief—to write and keep on writing. We need to be connected to other women who believe, as we do, that telling our stories is one of the most important, life-enhancing things we can do for ourselves.

Donna Remmert and Catherine Cogburn were involved with Susan Albert and SCN in Austin in those early days. Donna "...felt that the women involved with SCN expressed an attitude of non-competitive inclusiveness" and were able to choose their activities in the organization according to their various interests and aptitudes. Catherine remembers "the large number of impressive women who were called together for the first board," and has watched the "organization grow to international influence and importance" as SCN continues to meet the needs of countless women who want to write their stories.

Lynn Mills, an SCN member who lives in Indianapolis, Indiana, joined SCN in 1999. She says that, from what she read online and in early issues of the *Journal*, it seemed that there was an abundance of excitement among those in Texas who were "hatching and implementing the ideas that became SCN." Lynn, like numerous other women, joined because she was excited "to find that there were so many other women interested in writing, both for their own personal benefit and also possibly for publication." Lynn shares that she "had previously felt rather alone in my longing for time to write, so I was thrilled to find out that others felt the same way and were doing something to encourage themselves and others to do more," and adds that the "feeling of affirmation and encouragement has been what's kept me involved with SCN."

(Continued on page 4)

## Ten Years of SCN

### SCN has organized:

- 4 writing conferences
- 3 writing retreats
- 8 Writing from Life weekend workshops

### SCN has published:

- 43 issues of its quarterly *Journal*
- 7 annual anthologies
- 2 books to help members write family history and memoir
- 1 anthology of OWL writings
- 1 anthology of nature writing
- 1 book of writing prompts

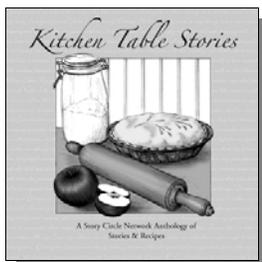
**SCN has helped:**  
over 1600 women to tell their stories

## Still to Come in '07 and '08

**Kitchen Table Stories: An SCN Anthology of Stories and Recipes.** Sample pages on p.10. Order online now for November delivery (or use the form on p.27).

**Writing from Life** weekend workshop. See p.24.

**Stories from the Heart IV: The SCN National Conference,** February 1–3, 2008. Sign up online (or use the form on p.26).



## Ten Years of SCN



(Continued from page 3)

Like Lynn, Lisa Shirah-Hiers tells how she found, through Susan Albert's books and SCN, the courage to write and publish for the first time. Lisa believes that the greatest gift that Susan has shared with members of SCN is her "ability to help women discover their own voice and find the confidence and passion to be their true selves."

The first circle that Susan Albert began was a reading circle in Austin, and that group still meets, more than nine years later. Peggy Moody, who joined that first reading circle, loves to read and discuss women's memoirs. It was through meeting Susan in that first reading circle that she became the computer guru of SCN. She developed the SCN website, engineered the creation of the Internet Chapter, and now, as its Executive Director does countless tasks to help the organization run smoothly, both locally and internationally. Peggy says that she has thoroughly enjoyed her participation with SCN and values her job of helping spread Susan Albert's vision of encouraging women to write their stories. She also treasures friendships made through the years as the Story Circle Network has grown "from a local Austin group to a world-wide organization."

Over the past ten years, more than 1600 women have been involved in the many activities that SCN has to offer—the reading and writing circles, the writing retreats, the conferences and workshops, and the publications, all of which help to nurture women as they learn to write their stories and share them with others. Reading and writing circles, which began to spring up all over Austin, now exist across the country as well as in Canada and in Yemen. SCN offers guidelines for those wanting to start their own circles and also provides a number of Internet circles for women who do not have access to or time for meeting with a circle face-to-face.

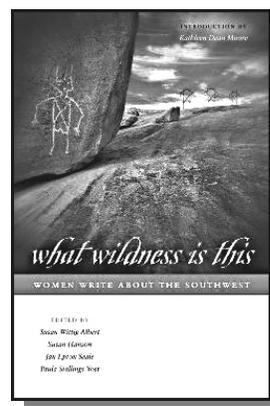
The *Story Circle Journal*, a quarterly publication, contains articles and stories written by SCN members. It is designed to spread the message that it is important for women to tell their stories—important to their psychological and physical health and important to their families and communities as well.

Judith Helburn, one of the original members of SCN, agrees, saying that studies indicate that memoir writing and "the passing on of stories and wisdom to new generations" is of great importance to society as well as to the women who write those stories. Susan Wittig Albert is truly accomplishing her mission of finding a myriad of ways to encourage and support women who write their stories and to help them keep on writing. Many thanks, Susan! ❖



**Pat Flathouse** grew up in Texas. She has been a teacher, counselor, a wife and mother of four sons and a grandmother. She enjoys needlework, stained glass, painting, and writing. Pat serves on the SCN Board and enjoys leading writing workshops.

## Reviewers' Praise for *What Wildness Is This*



This volume, brought together around the theme of how women experience the Southwest, gathers . . . nearly 100 poems and essays [that] chronicle a variety of encounters with the Southwest, from hiking, camping, and eating to, in a sharp departure, Nancy Mairs' eloquent report on the unforgiving landscape's difficulties for the wheelchair-bound . . . All the pieces share a feeling of awe and a sense of female empowerment.—*Booklist*

From western Oklahoma and Texas through the deserts of New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, and California, the wilderness of the Southwest is explored . . . The Story Circle Network, a national organization that encourages women to write about their lives, solicited personal experiences related to this difficult land . . . A great introductory volume to a land, people, and ecology too often ignored and flown over in our bicoastal literary world, as well as a showcase for a variety of writing techniques embodying a land and a way of life.—*Library Journal*

The editors gathered the works of women writers who have ventured to put the spirit of the Southwest into words. The editors wisely divide the 100 or so essays and poems into eight categories such as "Geographies" and "The Nature of Urban Life." This allows the reader to navigate with greater ease through these vibrant, evocative and often moving pieces . . . *What Wildness Is This* is a fitting tribute to the rugged complexity of the Southwest from the pens of a diverse group of women writers.—*El Paso Times*

*What Wildness Is This: Women Write about the Southwest*, Edited by Susan Wittig Albert, Susan Hanson, Jan Epton Seale, Paula Stallings Yost (University of Texas Press, 2007. ISBN 0292716303).

Copies can be ordered through the SCN website:  
[www.storycircle.org](http://www.storycircle.org)

## *More contest-winning stories . . .*

*(Continued from page 1)*

obvious now that I should have called. Why didn't I call?

Could I have known? This was my first pregnancy and there was a lot going on with my body. On different days, to different degrees, I had fatigue, nausea, heartburn, constipation, arms and legs falling asleep, restless leg syndrome, trouble sleeping at night, drainage in the back of my throat that made my voice hoarse and my left ear sound funny, and a funny taste in my mouth that made me brush my teeth all the time. Should I have known that this was the one symptom that was important?

But I had thought to call and I didn't. Why?

Lying in bed at home after I lost Grace, I tried to find an answer. I'm usually very good at getting things done. I make lists. I cross things off. I can accomplish in a single day what takes other people weeks. I might forget someone's birthday or not really listen to my husband, but I get my list done. I thought the nurses at my doctor's office were very busy and only took serious calls about bleeding, serious pain and labor, but I had thought to call the BabyLine for my insurance company, which had nurses available 24/7 to answer pregnancy questions.

But I wasn't really paying attention or listening to my body. I didn't think anything serious was wrong. I returned curtain rods to Bed, Bath and Beyond that weekend. I crossed that off my list.

In my Sunday School class at church, a few months before losing Grace, we talked about living more like the radical and compassionate Jesus. Our leader asked us to write down what we would do differently to live more like Jesus and I didn't hesitate. I wrote, "Follow my heart more than my mind."

But I didn't follow my heart. I stayed focused on getting practical things done, accomplishing important tasks at work, managing the house and being successful in the world of measurable things. If I had sat down for five minutes and thought, what do I feel? What is my body telling me? What should I be paying attention to? I would have known then; I would have known to call.

I thought about Grace watching over me and I wondered if she knew I could have called and that I could have saved her. I wondered if she blamed me. But then I stopped and I really listened, I listened to my heart. That isn't what Grace was trying to tell me.

I did what I did. I didn't call. Let me go on record with all who might judge me: I didn't call my doctor.

So now I have a choice. I can hold on to that guilt like a precious gem, nurture it and feed it and give it a life of its own. I can share it with Sophia and the rest of my family like a sickness and I can wear it like a badge wherever I go for the rest of my days. But that doesn't honor Grace.

What if I wasn't my perfect self when I lost Grace? What if I hadn't completed my spiritual journey to become more like Jesus? Maybe it would be more of an honor for

Grace's life to try to be this person I want to be and make this journey my precious gem that I nurture, feed and give a life of its own. What if I slow down and I listen to my heart and I do it for Grace?

It has been two months since I lost Grace. Sophia is doing remarkably well, the doctors are amazed and her chances for a healthy birth are much higher than before. I wake up early each morning and meditate and do some light yoga. I recite my morning prayer I wrote that includes the line, "May I listen to my heart before making a list." Then I journal for 15 minutes; one of my prompts is, "When I stop and take the time to listen, what do I hear?"

So, now I am fixed, right? No more mistakes? I can mark this task off my list? No, not so much. This is my morning now forever. The practice of being still, listening and paying attention. I won't ever finish with that. Some days, I don't feel very different and I still make lists. But on most days, my list comes second. I listen first and feel first and then I'm in a better place for all of the rest.

This is my new beginning. This is how I honor Grace. This is how I love Sophia. This is how I found my own grace in losing my baby girl. ❖

About the author: **Carol Ramsey** lives in Austin, Texas with her husband, ten-year-old daughter Austen and their newest addition—eight-week-old, very healthy, very-much-loved Sophia. Carol enjoys her work managing software projects, swimming in Barton Springs, hanging out with her family, and writing early in the morning.

### *The Fern*

**Katherine Misegades**

Fort Wayne IN

*This is his. This is mine. This is ours.* I was sorting—sorting and weeping and re-boxing twenty years of collected stuff. I'd been at that chore for days so my eyes were puffed to slits, and I had to make myself get out of bed each morning. My husband had announced that he'd decided to move away and start a new life. Our three children were devastated, and I was desperately trying to hold together what was left of our world. Family life as we'd known it was over.

"Mama, Mama." I heard the deck door slide shut and footsteps mount the stairs. My ten-year-old daughter, Rachel, popped her head around the railing. Her eyes brimmed with terror. "There's a fire up the mountain. Valerie and I were playing in the woods and we found it. We tried to stomp it out at the edges, but it was too hot."

I phoned the ranger. Within a few minutes, firemen were climbing our lane—a path too steep and narrow for their engines. "Lady, start hosing down your cedar shakes so the house won't catch. We're bringing in the convicts to fight the fire," the ranger called out as he climbed the slope behind the house.

The crew raked and shoveled the rest of that hot summer day. Updrafts sent the flames racing over the mountain top

*(Continued on page 6)*

## More contest-winning stories . . .

(Continued from page 5)

while I watered down my house. By evening, the fire was contained and the weary crew was trucked back to the prison farm. When I finally fell into bed, all that was left of the fire was the smell of charred vegetation drifting through my window screen, and a pulsating glow of embers on the ground that rose behind my house. The ranger had assured me that the danger was past. Everything had burned that would burn. I was amazed that the trees stood as green and untouched as they had been that morning. Only the thick underbrush had burned so that, from a distance, a person couldn't tell there had been a fire. The ranger said it had been a good thing. With the undergrowth gone, another fire wasn't likely to start on our mountain for many years.

That night I dreamed. In my dream, I'd driven my children to the safety of the valley away from the fire. Then I made my way back up the mountain to evacuate other people to safety. As I drove, the houses beside the road were places from my childhood—Grandma's home in Kansas, my childhood home in Indiana, homes of other friends and kinfolk, most of whom had long since died. I stopped at each house and offered a ride, but everyone said they would stay in their places. My anxiety built the further up the mountain I drove. Nobody would come with me to safety.

The kitchen door at the last cabin was ajar. I stepped in and saw an old lady standing with her back to me watching the fire through the window above her sink.

"Do come with me down the mountain to safety. Nobody else will come. I don't know what to do." By then I was in tears.

"You can only offer, but you have to accept what other people decide for themselves. You can only control the course of your own life," she said as she turned to face me. "I will go with you."

I was stunned. She was me—a very old version of me. Then I woke up.

A Smoky Mountain mist rose from the creek and obscured the valley that morning. As I worked at my sorting in my home above the clouds, I shed not a tear. My spirit was quiet and my actions were so methodical that I finished my chore by evening. My dream had been like a birthing experience, and I knew I needed to learn how to live in my new world.

After supper dishes were done and my children were occupied with a game, I went to walk the mountain side. The mist turned into a gentle rain, and the ashes on the ground turned from grey powder to black sludge around my shoes. I

had to look up to see anything that was alive and green, and when I did, the rain soothed my face like a cool compress. I kept climbing, trying not to think about how I could raise from what seemed to be the ashes of my life.

Then I spied a spot of green in the middle of a glen. I hunkered down and curled over to see it, trying not to fall into the black ash muck. The wee tendril of a fern had pushed through the charred leaf bed. Its end was tightly curled into a spiral, but it was opening into a frond. Life was already returning to the forest floor. As I uncurled from my crouch, I knew I'd thrive again soon. ❖

## A Caregiver

Anonymous  
Austin TX

I had gone to Houston the previous week to help. My mother was sick, disoriented and confused. Notes in a shaky version of her handwriting were all over the house, reminders of things to do and warnings about dangers—the stove, the car, unlocked doors. I was horrified to see them. We went to Mom's internist, who explained that her confusion might be due to medication that she was taking for the arthritis flare-up. But he wasn't ready to discontinue it—just a few more days. We hired a home aide, paid bills, bought groceries. On Friday, with the aide there, things seemed orderly, and I went home to my husband and daughters, email, laundry, and a much-needed haircut.

But by Saturday Mom was so disoriented that she asked Joya, her 90-year-old best friend, to take her to the emergency room. Her doctor was annoyed when he was contacted. He didn't practice on Saturdays, and he had no covering physician. Apparently, his patients were required to remain healthy on weekends. The ER doctor sent Mom home to rest. Joya called me, "I can't stay, and it isn't safe for your parents to be alone. You have to come back."

That's when I became a "caregiver" for my parents, and I wasn't happy about it. Frightened, and, I am ashamed to say, a little irritated, I headed again to Houston. My mother had always been in control—until this illness. Now she was wrapped in pain and mushy uncertainty. Dad was frail, deaf, and had dementia. His days were organized around pills, some of them to prevent agitation and violent behavior. What was happening? Would I know what to do? What if I messed up Dad's meds and he got violent? Why hadn't Mom taken better care of herself? She should be feeling better, doing her paperwork, managing Dad. I should be home, or at least wearing cleaner clothes.

"Dandy!" my father cheerfully shouted my childhood nickname, "Long time no see! You haven't been here for weeks! This is delightful!" The previous week was gone from his memory. Mom was sleeping. Joya hugged me and left.

They were so happy to see me, so reassured that I was there! They didn't know that I was just one more frightened

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About the author: **Katherine Misegades** is an SCN member of Internet Circle 12 and a facilitator for Internet Circle 14. She works as a graphic artist and illustrator in Fort Wayne, Indiana. She also designs and publishes hand-knitting patterns.

person in the house. We got through the rest of Saturday. After my parents were in bed, I locked the security gate, put the key under the ashtray, locked the doors and turned on the alarm. (Was the neighborhood really so dangerous?) I remembered when my first child was born—I held her, overjoyed, and overwhelmed by my new responsibilities. This situation felt completely different, bleak and unknown. I comforted myself, “In a couple of days Mom will be herself again,” and tried to sleep.

Sunday morning, I disarmed the alarm and brought in the papers. No disasters yet. Dad hadn’t set off the alarm, turned on the stove, or wandered away. I made coffee in the metal drip pot, measuring the grounds into the basket and pouring boiling water over them. I fed Dad at the kitchen table, while he looked at the papers, and gave him what I hoped were his breakfast pills. He no longer spoke much, but we smiled at one another over our coffee. Then I followed him into their bedroom, to see about Mom. Settling into bed, Dad said something to her in Yiddish (which I don’t understand) and they laughed together, her head leaning toward his. For an instant, sickness and the relentless force of time were forgotten, and I laughed, too.

Moments later, Mom joined me in the kitchen, one hand on her forehead. “My headache is terrible.”

“Eat something. Maybe you’re hungry.”

She sat down, and I set out breakfast, trying to get the food and dishes right. She thanked me, formal, awkward about accepting help. We were talking, then she paused. Her face scrunched up in pain; her eyes squeezed shut. Her forehead compressed into hard wrinkles; she slumped and began falling over, her body shaking and sharply jerking. Kicking back my chair, I ran to grab her. What’s happening? What do I do? Her head is too far over, leaning down toward her chest; her breathing sounds raspy; above her lip the skin looks blue. I am standing behind her, holding her, trying to keep her head up and stop her from falling and not hurt her. “Mom, I’m here; keep breathing; come on, Mom; breathe.” I have to get help. The phone, the phone is miles away on the other side of the doorway. I can’t reach it, and I can’t let go of Mom.

Then I hear Dad, somehow awake despite the sedatives, scuffling slowly down the hall. He looks at us, confused, “Oh, my goodness! What is happening?”

Dad, I remember, Dad who falls and wanders, wears an Emergency Alert pendant. I have set that thing off when I hugged him. I wave, beckoning him closer. He walks carefully. I grab at the pendant, press the button. Someone responds! In a calm voice that doesn’t feel connected to me, I explain. They will send EMS. Mom is limp now, unconscious. I stare at the vein on the side of her neck, insisting that it keep pulsing. I think, “Dad should be holding Mom, whatever happens.” More waving. He understands, and somehow he manages to hold Mom up in her chair.

I run to get dressed. If Mom and I go to the hospital, what will I do with Dad? I can’t imagine taking him. The emergency service is holding the line open, so I can’t phone

anyone. I decide to look for a neighbor to stay with him. First, I’ll see how Mom is doing. At the kitchen doorway, I stop, astonished. Dad is bent over, carefully cradling Mom, singing quietly to her. I remember hiding in my room to avoid hearing them screaming at one another; his drunken rages; her sarcasm toward him. The medics arrive, and move Mom into the ambulance. In the driveway, standing beside the neighbor, Dad weeps.

Within minutes, the ER doctor determined that Mom’s blood sodium level was too low and started an IV to restore balance. Mom revived, but she was hallucinating and terrified. I sat close, trying to calm her, wondering whether this could have been averted by better care on Saturday. Three long days would pass, punctuated by crises, before she was lucid and stable. During that time, in response to Mom’s pleas, the ICU nurses repeatedly gave me her detailed instructions about how to care for Dad.

The seizure—that’s what happened—left permanent damage. Mother would recover, but would never be herself again.

A few months later, I resigned from my demanding, exciting job. My priorities had changed. I’m not a full-time caregiver, but I spend a lot of time at it. I’m often uncomfortable explaining what I do. I understand a little better now how complex we are, how complicated our relationships are. I, who was always measured by accomplishments, no longer weigh them so heavily. Connection and gratitude now matter more. “Take care of yourselves,” I tell my children, “and enjoy every good thing.”



About the author: The author, who is now retired, worked for many years in human services. An avid reader since she was a child, she began memoir writing a few years ago when she joined Story Circle Network. Writing has become one of the joys of her life. She is a volunteer tutor for children with special education needs, attends continuing education classes, and continually tries to exercise more. She is married and has two adult daughters, who keep her up to date.

*(Continued on page 8)*

**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.

## More contest-winning stories . . .

(Continued from page 7)

### *Learning to Fly*

Georgia Hubley  
Henderson NV

A tinge of fear and a shiver runs through me, as I stare at the date circled with a red marker on the calendar pinned to the kitchen bulletin board. Inside the circle are two words emblazoned in red capital letters, MOVING DAY.

My life will change drastically in exactly two weeks, because my husband and I have sold our home we've dwelled in for almost twenty years and we are moving to a condo. It's just the two of us. Our nest is empty.

I retired a month ago, due to a large conglomerate gobbling up my employer of twenty years. I ponder, what am I going to do with my life? My husband has an exciting job and feels fulfilled.

It's not easy sorting through old keepsakes and deciding what we'll keep, discard or donate to a charitable organization. Time is slipping by too quickly, and I feel overwhelmed by what is left to do.

The garage is my husband's domain, but I remember I have a few things stored in the rafters too. I enter the garage, scan the rafters above and spot a black blob tucked away in a huge clear plastic bag. It's been years since that old black beanbag chair was in my son's bedroom. I climb the ladder to the rafters and push the bag down to the garage floor. I remove the plastic bag and sit in the old black beanbag chair, one last time. My chest tightens, I feel a slight tug, and my heart aches a little. I try to choke back the tears to no avail. I hold my head in my hands, and the tears flow, as my mind swirls with memories...

I'd been blessed with one child, a son named Nick, a bundle of creative imagination weighing in at six pounds, seven ounces. My first inkling of this wild imagination was when he was three and a half years old and I discovered he'd become enthralled with the *Wizard of Oz*. The morning after watching his first television broadcast of the show, he ran into the kitchen straddling my new broom, crying profusely. He gulped for air between sobs and whined, "The broom won't fly...the broom won't fly." I could barely contain my laughter, but I did. It took a while to console him, but he accepted my explanation that flying on a broom was only make-believe.

However, his stretch of the imagination ensued. After watching a production of *Peter Pan*, he became obsessed with the elfin-like boy who loved to fly and refused to grow up. "Mommy, I'm not sleepy," Nick said, as I tucked him in that night. "When I close my eyes I can see myself flying across the sky." I kissed his forehead and assured him he'd fall asleep soon.

The next morning I was awakened by a loud thud. Immediately, I raced to Nick's bedroom. He'd leaped from his top bunk bed into the black beanbag chair, splitting the

seam I'd recently repaired; there were spilled beans galore! And there he sat, covered with hundreds of tiny, white foam beans, grinning sheepishly, his cheeks flushed, the thrill of success making his blue eyes brighter than usual, "I learned to fly," he said.

That incident ended his interest in physically learning to fly, but it didn't deter his passion for musical theatre. In fact, it evolved from kindergarten through high school. Then during his first year of college, he was offered a role in a national touring company of *A Chorus Line*. He asked if he could choose performing over finishing college. He had our blessings, "Pursue your dream. Go for it," I said. Proudly, we watched his career flourish.

Our nest was empty much sooner than we'd planned. To ease our anguish, we focused on our jobs during the week and as often as possible, took weekend getaways and watched him perform...

Suddenly, the garage door opens and I am thrust back to reality!

"Hi, Mom. Surprise!" Nick shouts. "I have a couple of days off from the show. Thought you could use my help. I can help you pack. Besides, the theatre is only 85 miles from here."

"Oh, I'm glad you came!" I exclaim. "It is going to be difficult for me to part with this old beanbag chair. Would you like to sit in it one more time?"

I watch his six-foot-two-inch tall, lanky frame plop down into the beanbag chair. We laugh as the patched seam gives way and white foam beans escape, some flying about, others spilling forth onto the garage floor. "Just like old times," Nick says. "Don't worry, I'll clean up this mess and toss the chair in the dumpster."

Relieved, I give him a quick hug and confide I'm engulfed with memories I want to share and I long to write fulltime now that I am retired, but am afraid to give it a try.

He smiles down at me, hugs me back, and replies, "Mom, you always gave me free reign to indulge my imagination and my dreams to reach my goals. Now it's my turn to support you. Go for it!"

That was thirteen years ago, and I learned there was no need to dwell on having an empty nest—it was a new beginning—it was time to spread my wings. My freelance writing career began shortly after the move. I, too, learned to fly. ❖

About the author: **Georgia Hubley** retired after twenty years in financial management to write full-time, thanks to her son's encouragement. She's a night owl and her creative juices flow best during the wee hours. Her short stories and essays about her childhood have appeared in the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Plus* magazine, *Birds and Blooms* magazine, *Story Circle Journal* and various other magazines and newspapers. She resides with her husband in Henderson, Nevada.

*Congratulations to all  
our contest winners!*

*Journaling our stories*

# Journaling in Pictures

*Says Internet Chapter member Renee Cassese, art journaling is a way of recording our stories in a combination of words and art that puts us in touch with deep and creative parts of our soul.*

Some call it art journaling and others call it visual journaling; I simply call it another pathway into my soul. I wanted a way to add some visual creativity to my daily journaling. I started by getting involved in scrap booking, and after making several albums, my muse gave me another push during one of her nightly visitations and I began searching for new ways to record my life stories.

What is art journaling? How does one go about it? What materials do you need? What resources are out there? And why would you want to pursue it in the first place?

In *The Artist's Way*, by Julia Cameron, one exercise is to gather photographs and magazine images and create a collage that represents your dream or goal. This visual imagery is more motivating than the written word and therefore, according to Cameron, more real.

Art journaling is a method of getting down all those feelings, beliefs, thoughts, daydreams and nightmares that we have captured in the blue squiggles of words on white paper, into a more colorful and visual medium. It incorporates a variety of lettering options and artistic processes and media. It documents the daily hubbub of our outer and inner lives in books bursting with color and excitement. Sometimes, what takes pages and pages to say with just words can be easily and creatively described in pictures. And the best part is—you don't have to be artistically talented or able to draw to do it. I know this because my drawings of people, animals, trees and houses look very similar to the ones I drew in first grade.

As with any art or craft, art journaling begins with the gathering of materials. These materials can be simple or varied, but as you become more adept at and enamored of this type of daily journaling your desire to acquire more and more art materials will expand like the petals on the bud of a late summer rose.

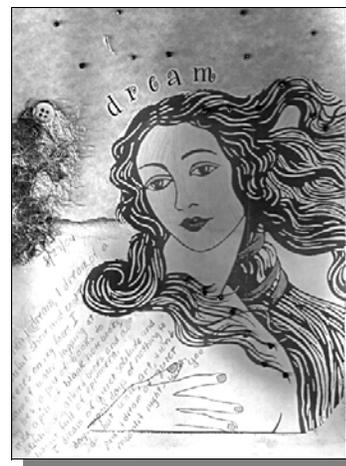
I began with a bound sketchbook of blank white paper and a set of Zig Memory Maker markers. At first my journal pages looked like the rebus stories I used to read to my children. I would write a few lines, using markers just to have some color on the page, and then I would draw some primitive pictures in between the words as illustrations. But soon this became too simple.

I moved ahead to first coloring the whole page before I started writing. For this I used watercolors or decorating chalks that I spread on with cosmetic cotton balls. Soon I discovered that wasn't enough so I started to buy acrylic paints to add more depth to the colored pages. The problem here was that the paint was too wet and caused the thin paper to buckle and warp, so I went out and bought my first book of watercolor paper. Spiral bound is the best for the same reason I love spiral notebooks; you can fold everything over so you only have one page to deal with and don't have to worry about the bindings getting in your way.

My journal pages became richer and more colorful in both content and appearance as the process of art journaling seemed to open doors that I couldn't access through only written words. With this emergence of more and more to say, I needed more and more materials. It was like riding the rapids in a canoe. The trip was exhilarating but I had to grab onto whatever I saw in order to stay afloat.

So as far as materials go you can use bound sketchbooks, watercolor books or make your

*(Continued on page 19)*



## *Art Journaling Supplies*

*Sketchbooks*

*Watercolor books*

*Markers*

*Colored pencils*

*Watercolor and acrylic  
paints*

*Letter stamps*

*Stamp ink*

*Chalks*

*Pastels*

*Pencils*

*Old magazines  
for pictures and text*

*Scissors*

*Glue sticks*

*Ribbon*

*Fabric*

**Renee Cassese** is a Special Education Administrator who has published several personal essays in journals and anthologies and continues to write and create mixed media collage pieces. Currently she is developing a website through which people can commission family memory books and mixed media art pieces. She can be reached at [rneel000@optonline.net](mailto:rneel000@optonline.net).

## Kitchen Table Stories



A Story Circle Network Anthology of  
Stories & Recipes

*The 10th Anniversary Special Edition is now for sale!*

*Available for purchase only by pre-paid order until **September 15** at a special price, with copies shipped in November in time for holiday baking and holiday gifts.*

*Be sure to order promptly. We'll print only enough of the Special Edition to cover our pre-orders.*

*Order online at*

[www.storycircle.org/cookbook\\_orderform.php](http://www.storycircle.org/cookbook_orderform.php)

*Or using the order form on p. 27. (Contributors will receive 1 free copy.)*

Sample pages shown slightly  
smaller than actual size of  
8.5 x 8.5 inches

## Making Gravy

Joyce Murray Boatright

I learned to cook when I was nine. My first menu consisted of chicken-fried steak, cream gravy, mashed potatoes, corn and green beans.

Momma was my sorcerer. She grew up on a West Texas farm where she learned to snap beans and husk corn and knead bread and twist off the heads of live chickens. I yearned to lay that kind of claim in the kitchen, and I decided the chicken-fried beige plate special was the best place to start. Momma stood nearby to guide my neophyte efforts. Following Momma's directions, I cut up the potatoes and placed them in a pan of blistering water.

Next, I got out the butcher-tenderized minute steaks—called minute steaks I'm sure because they took only minutes to fry up—and dipped them in a bowl of beaten eggs, dredged and dusted them in salt-and-peppered white flour, then dipped and dusted them a second time so they'd cook crusty and crunchy in the hot, sizzling grease.

The pace quickened because I had to get all my vegetables going. Since I only had two small hands while there were three bubbling pots and a meat-filled frying pan all needing attention simultaneously, Momma, thankfully, stepped in and lent her helping hands. Otherwise, I probably would have ended up scalding myself or starting a grease fire.

The end was near... only thing left to make was the cream gravy. I flipped the chicken-fried steaks onto a platter, set the frying pan over the gas burner and announced I was ready.

Momma turned from the counter where she was busy

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Joyce Boatright loves to cook and hardly ever uses a recipe. She lives and writes in Houston, TX.

84 Kitchen Table Stories

making iced tea. "Add some flour to the pan drippings."

"How much?"

"It depends. How much grease do you have in the pan?"

"I dunno."

"Well, just eyeball it."

"Huh?"

She looked over at the pan. "Put in a handful of flour."

I grabbed a fistful and dumped it in.

"Be careful! Don't get burned. Take your spatula and stir the flour until the lumps are gone and the flour browns."

I obediently followed directions.

"Now add some milk."

"How much?"

"It depends."

"Huh?"

"It depends on how thick you want the gravy. You gotta eyeball it to get it right."

I poured from the milk carton—my hand slipped and milk splashed liberally into the skillet. Oops. "Momma, you make it."

"No," she said with a chuckle, "you're doing fine." She surveyed my work. "But keep stirring so the gravy doesn't burn."

I obliged. The gravy burped and gurgled.

She nodded and re-evaluated the process in progress.

"Turn up the heat, just a smidgeon."

A smidge-what? The pressure of being a sorcerer's apprentice whittled my resolve for culinary mastery. Waving my spatula in one hand and placing the other akimbo, I wailed, "Momma, this is too hard."

- *Over 70 stories and poems from your fellow SCN members (see who's in the book on the list on p.12 of this Journal);*
- *Over 90 scrumptious recipes in a 160-page soft-cover book,*
- *A beautifully illustrated cover by graphic artist Katherine Misegades,*
- *8½x8½-inch square format with spiral binding, perfect for the kitchen*
- *High-quality natural-shade text paper,*
- *A Special Edition printed specially for SCN and sold at a special price for SCN members and e-letter subscribers.*

*Have you ordered your copies yet? Order online (or use the order form on p.27).*

“Careful, you’re slinging grease!”

Eventually the gravy made, but I was full of trepidation about future gravy making episodes—ones when my mother wasn’t around. Despite the fact that mathematics and I operated in different universes, somehow I felt that I was going to master arithmetic faster than I would ever master “eyeballing.” Cornered in the grips of a dilemma, I begged for a formula.

“Momma, instead of me having to eyeball this mess, you just tell me exactly how much of the stuff to put in and I’ll measure it in the future.”

“Can’t do that, honey.”

“Why not?” I might not be able to add and subtract numbers very well—especially under pressure—but I sure could figure out the angles: “What if I pour out all the pan drippings and start with an exact amount? Couldn’t you give me the exact amount of flour to add, and then the exact amount of—”

She laughed. “It doesn’t work that way.”

It’s family recipes that are handed down from mother to daughter throughout womanhood that keep the generations going, and Momma passed to me her own special directions about eyeballing, trying not to overheat when the task seems too hard, and, whenever possible, avoiding the lumps. It’s funny that it has taken me forty-six years to see how much Momma’s and my lives are like making gravy.

Did we learn from our mistakes? It depends. I had my share of self-made dramas, but I finally learned to go easy with the pepper, and Momma was a crusty broad when she had to be but always warm and tender beneath her thick-skinned toughness.

Did we make the right decisions as we journeyed our lives’ paths? It depends. We both had our share of lumps, but we kept cookin’ and the hard edges of disappointment seemed to have smoothed out over time. What can I tell you? We learned to eyeball things and make adjustments.

## *Chicken-Fried Steak*

### **Ingredients**

- 1 cup white flour
- Salt and ground black pepper to taste (but be generous)
- 3 large eggs
- 3 tablespoons milk
- 4 steak cutlets (ask butcher for four generous portions of round steak that have been tenderized)
- ½ cup vegetable oil

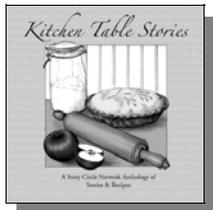
### **Preparation**

In a shallow plate, sift together flour, salt, and pepper. In another shallow pan, combine egg and milk. Dip steaks in egg mixture, coat with flour mixture, and repeat.

In a large frying pan over medium-high heat, add vegetable oil and heat until a drop of water sizzles. Add coated steak pieces and fry 4 to 5 minutes per side or until golden brown and thoroughly cooked. Remove from pan and drain on paper towels. Keep warm until served.

Makes 4 delicious servings!

Listen to a Podcast of authors reading their Kitchen Table Stories on the SCN website.



## KTS Authors

Here's who has a story or poem and recipe in *Kitchen Table Stories*.

Support your fellow circle members by ordering your copy of the book.

Susan Albert  
Shawn Alladio  
Lee Ambrose  
Penny Appleby  
Annabelle Bailey  
Anne Beckner  
Cindy Bellinger  
Sharon Blumberg  
Joyce Boatright  
Teddy Broeker  
Matilda Butler  
Jane Cadieux  
Janet Caplan  
Pat Daly  
Dita Dauti  
Mary Jo Doig  
Liz Dudley  
Robin Edgar  
Mary Elizabeth  
Rhonda Esakov  
Pat Flathouse  
BeeJay Gwennap  
Marian (Bunnie) Haigh  
Janan Hale  
Judith Helburn  
Arlene Howard  
Georgia Hubley  
Rachael Hungerford  
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Regina Moser  
Linda Joy Myers  
Susan Myrick  
Erin Philbin  
Rayn Plainfield  
Donna Remmert  
Nancy Rigg  
Kathleen Rockeman  
Danelle Sasser  
Louise Saxon  
Josephine Sherfy  
Melinda Sherman  
Lisa Shirah-Hiers  
Patricia Stephens  
Becky Szymcik  
Pat Turner  
Lavon Urbonas  
Beth VanDuzer  
Anne Waldron  
Bonnie Watkins  
Judy Whelley  
Peggie Williamson  
Linda Wisniewski  
Paula Stallings Yost

## Story Circles—The Heart of SCN

SCN Circles Coordinator *Lisa Shirah-Hiers* spoke with OWL Coordinator *Anne Beckner*

### What's an OWL circle?

OWL stands for "Older Women's Legacy," which began with a grant to SCN from the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word. It was designed to help women chronicle their memories of life experiences as a gift to their children, grandchildren and friends. Anne Beckner, the SCN board member charged with overseeing the program says, "It is a user-friendly program of five sessions that are easily understood and writing experience is not required by the facilitator or participants. It began in Austin where groups continue to flourish and so far there have been 99 groups in the U.S. and Canada."

A facilitator's manual and workbooks have writing prompts that "stimulate memories and enhance creativity. Sharing experiences of other women leads to bonding which often continues long after the five sessions are over."

Anne says that for herself, the most rewarding aspect of involvement in OWL has been "getting to know the wonderful women I've encountered—the sharing of joys, heartaches, accomplishments and the everyday courage they exhibit has been inspiring."

In 2003, the University of Texas Press published a collection of some of the first writings by OWL members. The book, *With Courage and Common Sense: Memoirs from the Older Women's Legacy Circles*, is available on the SCN website as is the OWL program itself. To learn more or purchase copies visit the OWL website or write to SCN, P.O. Box 500127, Austin, TX, 78750-0127. Send email questions regarding OWL to [owlcircle@storycircle.org](mailto:owlcircle@storycircle.org).

### *You have kitchen table stories, too!*

We'd love to print them here in the *Journal* (800 words maximum, please, including recipe). Send via email or as a Word attachment to [ppando@gmail.com](mailto:ppando@gmail.com). In the subject line, please type "Kitchen Table Stories."

If you have no computer, type or write your story *legibly* and mail to: Patricia Pando, 1600 Lake Douglas Road, Bainbridge, GA 39819.

### *Purchase OWL Workbooks through SCN's Website*

The OWL Program materials are available from the OWL website: [www.storycircle.org/owlcircle](http://www.storycircle.org/owlcircle). Click Info/Purchase.

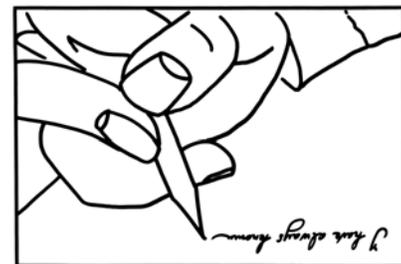


- Individuals pay \$105 (SCN member price) and \$155 (non-member price)
- Organizations (such as churches and libraries) pay \$205.

SCN also offers a coil-bound book called *Your Life, Your Story*, by Pat Flathouse, with additional OWL-style writing exercises.

## True Words from Real Women

The theme of this issue's True Words section, edited by Mary Jo Doig, is "**When the Power Went Out**" 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. 16.



### Were You in the Dark?

**Rhonda Speer**  
Lockhart TX

When the power went out,  
there was only time to shout:  
"Run to the cellar!"  
"Get in, little fella!"

That was the last thing anyone said  
as we realized we should've been dead.

Standing atop the cellar door,  
wishing we could huddle with the kids on the floor,  
we watched as the barn lifted up off the ground.  
Then, it all ended; not a cloud around.

### A Tradition Was Born

**Pat Turner**  
Tyler TX

It was Christmas Eve, 1972, when the power went out and a tradition was born. In a new home four hundred miles from family, I wanted to make the holiday special for my husband and our six-year-old son. Big celebrations with lots of people and food had always been a part of our married life. In fact we enjoyed three or four different celebrations in order to be with family and extended family. Having only been in this new place a month, we did not know anyone and would be celebrating alone. I had planned a festive meal with all the china, silver, and crystal. The tree was bright and colorful with lots of packages. I would light candles, play music, and we even had a fireplace, something we had never had before. I hoped it would be warm and festive enough that we would not feel alone.

Just as I was about to prepare dinner the power went out. Upon investigation, my husband determined a transformer had blown out. The neighbors pointed out the blackened pole. Needless to say the power would be out for a long time. Darkness and December cold were descending fast. The candles and fireplace now seemed more a necessity and less festive. Christmas cookies and eggnog would not make a very satisfying meal.

What were we going to do? My resourceful husband

remembered our camping supplies: a Coleman stove and lantern somewhere in the garage. Luckily there was also fuel. I scrounged around finding cans of vegetable soup, pea soup, and tomatoes, which I combined into tasty chowder and heated on the Coleman stove. I spread a blanket on the floor in front of the fireplace. We devoured hot cups of soup with cheese and crackers for an impromptu fireside picnic. My husband read the Christmas story by candlelight and we sang carols basking in warmth and love.

The power returned as I was tucking my son into bed. He asked if we could do it again next year. We have had a fireside picnic with the same menu every Christmas since. ❖

### Our Kitchen Clubhouse

**Shawn Essed**  
Taneytown MD

When Mom returned from Iran she moved my sister and me out of Dad's house and into a run-down apartment complex just off the highway. I was seven, Raneer was six, and Mom was still married to her second husband, though he'd stayed behind in Tehran with our baby sister. Mom drank a lot of Bloody Marys and constantly reassured us, "This is a place of transition."

Our apartment was dark and shabby. The rooms I remember best are the living room, where I watched the 1:00 p.m. movie as often as possible, and the kitchen where we camped when the power went out.

We lived off food stamps, Dad's child support, and Mom's earnings as a part-time teacher's assistant. But ends didn't always meet. Often she asked Dad or a friend to help and sometimes she had to decide what we could do without.

Everyday Mom walked us to and from school. One February afternoon we came home to an icy apartment. Mom cursed a little, then said, "Don't worry, I've been expecting this. Only the electric is off; we still have gas."

She snuggled Raneer and me in the narrow, dingy space between the wall and cabinets with blankets and toys. Then she hung a heavy blanket across the doorway, turned on the oven, and opened the oven door.

"Mommy!" I cried, "That's how the lady died in the movie."

"No, baby, the gas is only dangerous if the pilot light goes out."

(Continued on page 14)

## More True Words . . .

(Continued from page 13)

Ranee and I were freezing and scared. But soon the little kitchen warmed up to a cozy clubhouse. We played dolls and one of Mom's friends brought over dinner. We played with the flashlight when the sun went down. Finally, we had a fort in this strange new life.

Still, I kept an eye on that oven.

From then on I longed to recapture that afternoon holed up against the cold in the dim kitchen. But whenever I asked, "Mommy, can you hang up a blanket again, so we can play in the kitchen like that one day?" she said, "No," without explanation. ❖

### Power Outage: A Different Perspective

**Becky Szymcik**  
Westboro MA

For most, power outages are either nuisance or hardship, depending on circumstance: a strong summer storm resulting in a few hours of discomfort, winter weather keeping power and heat off overnight, power outages after devastating tornadoes and hurricanes with long-term power outage. As a disaster worker with Red Cross and now with FEMA, the phrase, "When the power went out," means something different to me.

In 1990, during my first snowstorm as a worker, the power was out statewide. The National Guard had to pick me up to get me to the office. They dropped me off at the edge of the parking lot where I trudged through three feet of snow. For seventeen years I would work every storm. I often got sent to the most devastated areas of the country to help out: Hurricane Andrew, the Midwest Floods, Northridge earthquake, plus various hurricanes and tropical storms. I was always fortunate enough to be assigned in an area that had power, water, and hotel space. I was lucky, but often felt guilty that those who were displaced were staying in shelters with only back-up generator power or staying in their damaged homes with no power, water, or food.

In 2002, I was in Louisiana for Hurricane Isidore. Hurricane Lili hit a few days later and we evacuated to Baton Rouge for safety. Then the storm hit Baton Rouge and our hotel was without power. It was hot, humid—I was without air conditioning and hated that I couldn't handle it! For the first time, I actually experienced a small portion of what disaster victims suffer and it stuck with me. After responding to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, I have even more determination to make it through hardship assignments without complaint.

I vow not to complain about it when it happens to me—the nuisance factor *is* manageable after all. I no longer wish to ride out the storm bundled up in a blanket and drinking cocoa, instead of having to respond to the disaster. When the power goes out, I think about why I do what I do, and I go to work with more resolve to make an actual difference. ❖

### Perpetuate

**Takiyah Robinson**  
Lockhart TX

Unyielding maliciousness.  
Generations pass.  
With the intent to fabricate  
a dream once lost.  
Endlessly wandering in submission.  
Fighting the desires within  
for the eye of maternity.  
In a state of oblivion,  
light illuminated from the bowels within.  
Connecting with the realization  
that the power of the eye ceased eons ago.

### Left in the Dark

**Sherri A. Stanczak**  
St. Charles MO

St. Louis was hit with a couple of bad storms in 2006. The first one came along at the end of July, the hottest part of summer. Thousands of people lost power for several days. Some were even without power for over a week.

There were many couples who had romantic evenings while the power was out. They ate dinner by candlelight and, since the TV wasn't on, sat and talked to each other without any distractions.

One evening, our neighborhood had a power-outage barbecue. Many of us had lived here for years but had never met each other. We all brought food and made some good friendships that evening.

When our power went out again in the winter, it happened during an extremely cold spell. Being without electric in the winter is a little tougher than the summer. Not only was it cold, but we also had to worry about our pipes freezing. My husband and I cuddled up in one big sleeping bag to keep warm. We also built a fire, which we hadn't done in years.

Doing without made us more appreciative. Darkness was a reminder to me of my illness. I have multiple sclerosis and sometimes I lose partial vision. When I was younger, I lost my vision completely and the doctors thought I would never see again. After a lot of prayers, my vision returned but since then I have lost partial vision many times. There hasn't been a day that passes that I don't give thanks for my eyesight.

Being left in the dark reminded me of how precious the light is. Suffering the extreme heat or cold made me appreciate the protective roof we have over our heads. The people who died during those storms made me appreciate life. And, ironically, the power outage that caused so much inconvenience for most of us actually created some extra jobs for those who had been unemployed.

The power outages we have had in the past year made me more aware of the luxuries we have in our lives. ❖

## Powerless

**Diana Ross**  
Lockhart TX

My power went out when I caught this last drug charge. It wasn't because I couldn't get high anymore. It was because I feared losing the man I loved if I went to prison.

When I was arrested, I suddenly seemed powerless over everything: my drug addiction, my man, my pregnancy, my court appearances, and my lawyer—who didn't know squat.

Now I'm powerless over parole, wondering when I'll be able to go home and finally be a mother to my son. I delivered him in prison, and he was taken from my arms.

I don't know how I lost control over everything, and sometimes I wonder if I've ever had control over anything at all. ❖

## Where Was the Ark?

**Judy Watkins**  
Hillsboro OR

It was mid-September and we were touring Costa del Sol, the Riviera of Spain. The tour literature promised the sun shined 364½ days each year and we expected a day of leisure to enjoy the sandy (nude) beaches, browse through trendy boutiques, sample the fancy restaurants, and simply relax.

The morning after our arrival we awoke to very loud thunder and lightening, and all the electricity was out. We could see the hotels all around were also without light as we struggled in the dark to find our clothes and get dressed. Food was on the top of my mind and I wondered how we were going to get something to eat. There was no need for worry, though, as our hotel served us a cold buffet for breakfast and lunch, minus coffee or tea.

Throughout the day the storm continued and the streets looked like rivers of black mud running over the curbs and flooding the hotel's parking lot. There was nothing to do but watch the storm, for the day remained too dark to try writing even though I was sitting in front of the patio door.

We watched as two hotel maids made a mad dash into the street in the effort to move their motor scooter to higher ground. The water was well past their ankles and they were soaked to the skin before they made it to the street. The scooter was in water over its wheels and wouldn't start. It was too heavy to push in the pouring rain but they finally moved it. People from surrounding buildings watched from their decks and cheered loudly when the feat was over. Nobody offered to help though.

It was late afternoon before the rain stopped but the stores were closed the remainder of the day. We walked and watched as the mud and debris were mucked from the businesses around town and settled for another cold meal served at our hotel.

Well, we *were* told that there was a half-day each year that wasn't perfect, but why was it saved for us? ❖

## The Russians Are Coming!

**Sharon Lippincott**  
Monroeville PA

I had not started dinner when the lights went out on November 9, 1965. Surrounding apartments were dark, so I lit a candle and groped my way to the roof. All Boston lay dark. How terrifying! Downstairs, I heard disturbing reports on my transistor radio: *Outages all over the east coast—Vermont... Connecticut... Manhattan... gridlock... airports... hospitals... elevators... traffic signals... subways.*

Panic gripped my heart at the obvious answer: *The Russians are coming!* Growing up in Los Alamos shaped my thinking. I was convinced this massive blackout was contrived to divert attention from an invasion of submarines that would soon flood our shores with troops. I thought of the tiny new life hovering in my womb and wondered what the world would be like for my unborn child. I didn't want to think of the war that would ensue as we fended off this attack.

I called my husband, hoping to catch him at school, but there was no answer. I blew out the candle and settled in to wait, radio by my side. Within an hour he strode in. He'd ridden from Cambridge with a friend and they managed to avoid the worst traffic.

The radio told of students directing traffic at darkened intersections. Compassion ruled the day as neighbors checked on neighbors, and everyone gave whatever aid they could. Preliminary reports pointed reassuringly to a mere system meltdown, not sabotage.

I took my candle to the kitchen and fixed a simple dinner, deeply grateful for my gas stove. We spent a poignant evening playing cards on our bed, with a single candle for light.

Life seemed especially precious the next morning, when the sun rose on a free nation, with power restored and life back to normal. My terror seemed silly. Did I really think the Russians would invade with submarines? Even at Pearl Harbor they used airplanes. I vowed to keep my head in future disasters. I'd need to be strong. I'd have a child to protect! ❖

## Damn it, Amy. Damn it!

**Amy Torrence Sexton**  
Lockhart TX

You want to push me away and that pisses me off.

I need to be here. I can't just go away. Without me, you are missing something that is healthy for you to feel.

Yes, you need to work on the way you react when I surface, but I need to surface.

Don't close the door on me. Don't try to ignore me. Learn to control me.

If you let me come out, fewer people will take advantage of you. Come on, Amy, don't be a doormat any longer.

*(Continued on page 16)*

## More True Words . . .

(Continued from page 15)

I want to help you! Let's deal with all the reasons I exist. You've been walked on, walked out on, and abused.

I need you, just like you need me.

I am just a small part of you. But without me, you cannot be whole. ❖

### Storm at Core Sound

Margaret Norton  
St. Peters MO

It was a warm sunny day in September and I planned to spend it playing in Core Sound, which was only 50 feet from my back door. Around lunchtime, the waves started to get bigger and the sky began to grow dark.

I heard my mother calling me to come inside. As I ran for the door, I could feel the rain slapping my back. Inside I changed into something dry then hurried back to the porch to see what was happening outside.

We lived on a small island in eastern North Carolina with no TV or telephone. Communication with the outside world was limited and, unlike today, there was no advance warning of tropical storms.

The waves got bigger and the wind blew harder. Soon the water was beating against our house. As I looked out the window, I saw a tremendous wall of water coming toward me. Across Core Sound was the Outer Banks and beyond that the Atlantic Ocean. A storm had come ashore close to the Cape Lookout Lighthouse and the Atlantic was being flushed into Core Sound. As I looked out again, I saw cows, ponies, small boats, trees, and other debris swirling past my house.

Though it has been fifty years since that day, I still remember the fear I felt. I was only seven years old, and I just knew that I was going to die. Then it happened. The

power went out.

I started to cry. My father immediately picked me up. He wiped my tears away while telling me everything would be okay. He reminded me he was there, as well as God, and they would take care of us. The storm continued to rage as darkness fell, but I was no longer afraid.

Until his death in 1989, my father was the solid rock in my family. He taught us to believe in God and how to survive the difficult storms of life. The light that went out the day he died can never be replaced, but his love remains alive within my heart. ❖

### Power Within

Rhonda Esakov  
Georgetown TX

I found myself deep in the clutches of a gang of budding criminals, thugs, and drug dealers when I was in my late teens. Clannish to a fault, one of their members was obsessive in his love for me and the clan was going to test me to see if I was worthy of becoming one of their own.

Sure, it was exciting at first, being on the side, watching and taking part in the not-so-far-outside-the-law activities like road racing and underage drinking. But I soon found myself in a situation I could no longer control and my unease was transparent on my then-innocent face. Now I would have to pay for my inattention to a life spinning out of control and prove to the guys that I was worthy to hang with them.

I talked tough and now would have to back up my own false bravado with deeds. They were taking me to one of their illegal activity dumpsites and going to leave me alone in a dark, deep abandoned warehouse area carved out of caves. Deep underground, in a place where the power had been cut and no natural light entered, I was to be left alone to test my bravery. No big deal, right? They would drive me in, drop me off, and come back later to pick me up.

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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:

*Lost Voices*—December 2007 (due October 15)  
*A Garden Story*—March 2008 (due January 15, 2008)

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.

Little did I know that in deep bowels of earth and stone, with no power, no light, and nobody to help me, I would face some fears and learn some truths about myself that would help shape me into a self-reliant person with an appreciation of my own inner powers. When they drove off and the last little flicker of light and power went out, I faced a dark place in my soul and learned to trust the light within to help me. ❖

## The Light of Friendship

Sharon “Hope” Pancamo

Lockhart TX

The house lay in a nice, quiet neighborhood. Water began to fall from the sky in white sheets. A small, weak voice called out, “Sharon, are you there?” Almost at the same time, a clap of thunder sounded and lightning blazed through the night sky. I was surrounded by complete darkness.

My heart raced as I tried to search in the dark for candles to light my way through the house. Mrs. Paul, an older woman whom I loved and cared for, was in one of the bedrooms. She rested in bed most days and nights.

I carried the lit candle, finding my way to her. Her frail voice strengthened as I came into view. I hugged her and lit more candles. She read to me as I sat and held her hand from a chair alongside her bed.

I found light inside a darkened house through the stories that Mrs. Paul read when the power went out. ❖

## First Get the Candles Out

Arlene Howard

Rancho Mirage CA

When I was growing up, the after-dinner ritual was listening to the radio and eating dessert. *The Lone Ranger* and *The Cisco Kid* were favorites as bread pudding and baked apples filled our tummies. When I got married, I continued the desserts-in-the-evening tradition.

“What is your favorite dessert?” I asked my husband of three weeks.

“Gingerbread,” he replied.

The next day I bought a box of gingerbread mix and prepared it. My mom had not made gingerbread and I was proud of myself, as young brides are wont to be. Fifteen minutes later the power went out, the electric oven went cold, and it was an hour before the electricity returned. What a sorry looking gingerbread—more like ginger soup!

About a year later my husband said, “How about some gingerbread?” I bought another box of gingerbread mix and made it. Would you believe the power went out and stayed out over night? No gingerbread for this husband.

Twenty years and four moves later we were living in

Maryland. One day while I was shopping, I saw a box of gingerbread mix. As soon as I put the cake in the oven, the power went out. Stayed out for three days this time.

We laugh about the gingerbreads we didn’t eat and fondly remember the ones we consumed on trips. In Dijon, France, gingerbread is one of their specialties. In England, we gobbled up warm gingerbread that was swimming in lemon sauce. Apparently there was no power problem when making gingerbread in Europe.

*I would like to try to making gingerbread again,* I recently thought and went to the store.

“You don’t have gingerbread mix?” I called five other stores. *Nada.* Is it possible that others have had the same problem I did and gave up buying the mix, so the stores no longer stock it?

Now I am on a quest. The question is: if I find a box of gingerbread mix, do I dare make it? If I do, I will get the candles out before I put it in the oven. ❖

## The Most Powerful Moment of My Life

Mary Sullivan, rc

Ronkonkoma NY

Where was I when the power went out? I was in the elevator in the retreat house in which I now live. It jerked abruptly, stopped, and went totally black. I was alone and frightened, able to see nothing.

Where was I when the power went out? I was on the cable tram that mounts Grouse Mountain in Vancouver, British Columbia. I am afraid of heights. We stopped and swung back and forth in the breeze. I sat down on the floor and buried my head so I could not see the vastness that lay below me.

Where was I when the power went out? I was in Rome, Italy caught in a bombardment of sound and chaos. The city totally lost its electricity but retained its strong Italian spirit of protest. The residents railed and vented their fury.

Impotent—that was my overriding feeling. I did not know how to do anything nor was anyone there to help.

Where was I when the power went out? I looked at her in her bed. She was dying and I could do nothing. I did not know the words to say; I did not know the actions to take to ease her passage. I stood there and watched the power go out. Her spirit fled leaving behind a shell of flesh no longer powered by the energy of life.

And I! What and Who is the source of my power? Do I let it come from without me, relying on someone else? Sometimes I stand and acknowledge I have let my own power leave me.

Where will I be and whom will I be when that significant last moment of my life comes? Will my power be wrenched from me or will there be a willing surrender?

I don’t know the words or the actions of that moment. I just know it will come someday and as the power goes out of me it will be the most powerful moment of my life! ❖

Take a bow! Spotighting our volunteers

## Judith Helburn: SCN's Own Sage

Past president of Story Circle Network, Judith Helburn will be leaving the board at the end of 2007 after 10 years of active participation in Story Circle Network since its beginnings. Lisa Shirah-Hiers pays tribute to Judith and wishes her well with all her future projects and plans.



Judith Helburn, has never had trouble keeping busy. She's been a librarian, owned a library consulting business and a beaded jewelry business, been a full-time mommy (she has a son and daughter) and traveled nearly every part of the world. She cooks, has been recycling for 39 years, is an avid music lover and says she has "taken up knitting again after a 40 year hiatus." She is now the proud grandmother of "four unique grandchildren" and calls herself a "professional volunteer."

"I am interested in and curious about everything...and limiting myself enough so that I have been able to grow deeply in a few areas has always been a challenge." That curiosity has drawn her into a wealth of experiences that most of us can only dream about. "I've been to most places in the world...as far north as Alaska and Hudson Bay, as far south as the Antarctic. I've been to the Far East several times and to Africa four times as well as parts of the U.S., Latin America, Australia, New Zealand and Europe. Since a lot of our travel has been eco/adventure travel, I've learned that more and more folks are conscious of caring for the environment and sacred places. I realize how fortunate I have been having access to free education in America."

In 1997 Judith was teaching a course on Sage-ing at the Austin Jung Society when she was invited to join the newly-forming Story Circle Network. Two years later she became the facilitator of her circle when the other two facilitators dropped out. "Writing in a group is an important way for me to write personal stories. Before SCN, I only wrote professional stuff. Now, I have about 75 pages of stories." She advises new facilitators not to forget about "mundane" topics, which, she finds, often yield surprising results. "Try 'sidewalks', 'shoes', 'the kitchen table'."



**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*.

The courage and willingness to step in and fill a void is a recurrent theme in Judith's life. She taught her first WFL on the fly when one of the facilitators backed out *the morning of!* "Since I have had much experience leading groups, I offered to jump in. I've led about five since then. I also enjoy leading sessions at our conferences, my own writing circles, my book reviews—and connecting with many outstanding women whom I otherwise would not have known."

When SCN's founder and first president, Susan Wittig Albert, asked Judith to take her place, Judith didn't hesitate. "I had avoided presidency of numerous organizations in my life but when Susan asked me to be the first prez after her tenure, we agreed that I had the combination needed to lead SCN. Regardless of how successful I was, I learned patience, tenacity, lots a problem-solving, diplomacy. And, I went directly from that presidency to that of the Sage-ing Guild." It wasn't always easy. "The beginning of my presidency was difficult. I was very cautious about changing anything that Susan had done—too cautious...Ultimately I found my voice. It was something that must be done and I am both well organized and have some vision—qualities needed for a leader. If one is dedicated to an organization, sometimes one steps in and does what has to be done to keep the energy flowing."

When SCN needed book reviewers for the website, Judith stepped in again. It was a win-win for Judith and for SCN. "I've been writing book reviews for myself since I was a teen. I learn best kinetically—using my hands—so writing for SCN's review site was just an extension. One day, I was talking to Dana Smith...editor of the *Austin Senior Advocate*. She mentioned that she would like to include book reviews. I offered to send her some. After checking around, I found that I could charge a small fee.... She published a few but I was not happy with the arrangement. I had written a few articles for the *Senior Voice* in Dallas about both SCN and Sage-ing. I offered to supply the editor with reviews and have been doing so for about a year.... After they are in the paper, I submit them to our site." An avid reader, (she holds a degree in library science) Judith can't name just *one* book as a favorite any more than she can name *one* of the many places she's visited. "The most interesting book I have read is the one I am reading at present. Life is a flow, and I keep changing."

These days, in addition to facilitating circles and

(Continued on page 19)

(Continued from page 18)

workshops, and writing book reviews for SCN, Judith is also the Chair of the Coordinating Circle of the Sage-ing Guild, a national organization of Sage-ing Leaders. "Our vision is to change the paradigm from Aging to Sage-ing." The two non-profits have in common the desire for "life review" which Judith says "...is an important component of the Sage-ing curriculum." "I am passionate about helping those in the second half of life live with joy, grace, responsibility and laughter. And of course, those that teach, learn. Learning to

be still and listen, not only to people, but to nature and our universe has also been a challenge. I find it easier now that I am in the second half of life.... [S]ince I was a child, I was conscious of the environment, of the awesomeness of Nature, that social justice is to be strived for. Now, I know that we are here to be the best we can be."

Being her best, giving her best, chasing new horizons, reinventing herself, stepping into new roles and facing new challenges with courage and tenacity, Judith has taught all of us to do the same. We are lucky to have her! ❖

## Art Journaling—Renee Cassese

(Continued from page 9)

own blank books to work in. Generally the media you decide to use on your pages will dictate the type of paper you will need. I now work in two books at once: a sketchbook for colored pencils and markers and simple collage; and a watercolor book for watercolors, acrylic paints and heavier collage materials. Words and phrases that describe my thoughts and topics for the pages may be written with paint, markers, colored pencils, rubber stamps, or text cut from magazines or old books. Sometimes the words come first and spark ideas for pictures in collage or drawings that elaborate on the topic. Other times the collage comes first and evokes journaling that describes how I felt while making the art project.

Seena B. Frost, author of *Soul Collage*, tells us that "psychology, science and religion are rediscovering the transformative power of images." Images can create an outer, concrete vision of our inner, abstract thoughts and dreams. I have to say that my journals have become just that as the words transformed into colorful images on the pages of my notebooks.

Art journaling is fun and creative and gives me a reason to shop at all the craft stores in the neighborhood and touch and explore the luscious variety of materials out there. But most important, it is a powerful new way to record the stories that make us who we are. Try it; you'll like it. And I'd love to see some of the pages you create. ❖

### Art Journaling Resources

[www.starchildworks.com/blog/art-journaling](http://www.starchildworks.com/blog/art-journaling)  
[www.teraleigh.com/journals](http://www.teraleigh.com/journals)  
[www.kporterfield.com/journal/illuminations](http://www.kporterfield.com/journal/illuminations)  
[www.self-help-arts-journal.com](http://www.self-help-arts-journal.com)

### Art Journaling Books

*Visual Chronicles* by Linda Woods  
*The Decorated Page* by Gwen Diehn  
*The Decorated Journal* by Gwen Diehn  
*Making and Keeping Creative Journals*  
 by Suzanne J. E. Tourtillott  
*A Life in Hand* by Hannah Hinchman  
*Kaleidoscope* by Suzanne Simanaitis



## Books for the Journey

***Floor Sample*, by Julia Cameron (Penguin, 2006. ISBN 1585424943). Reviewed by Judith Helburn, Austin TX**

One would think that the author who gave us *The Artist's Way* would have her life together. She certainly helped me expand my creativity. It seems, however, that her writing and her creativity are her glue.

She writes candidly and openly of a difficult life from times as a child when she witnessed her own parents fall apart psychologically, through her own teen and young adult alcoholism into a whirlwind marriage with Martin Scorsese and being consumed by a wild Hollywood scene. What brought her to a mostly sane life was her child, her sobriety, her creativity and her writing.

Cameron's writing, even as a teen-ager has been finely honed and intelligent, in fact so fine that she was writing for *The Washington Post*, *Rolling Stone* and *Playboy* in her early twenties—while she was what she calls a "cup of soup" alcoholic. "Simply add alcohol to my system and I was an instant alcoholic."

She writes courageously of her difficulties throughout her life and how walking in nature, asking for help and writing her three page quota have always helped her through. Her three pages a day have led to twenty-two books, plays, poetry and even a feature film. Her philosophy became, "I am just supposed to be writing. Quality was up to God. I was in charge only of quantity." And, in her sobriety, it worked. She found that teaching and helping others unblock their creativity gave her great satisfaction and she did it well. In many instances, she sacrificed her own writing time and her own sense of integrity. Then, she would pull back and return to a position of balance.

Julia Cameron bares her soul and leads us through her personal labyrinth to a life of vision, a life that is often uncomfortable, and a life that is uniquely Cameron. One can only hope that, as she continues her creative journey, she sends what comes from her soul and her pen to us so that we, too, may be enriched. ❖



## How I Found SCN

Pattie C. S. Burke  
Austin TX

“You ought to join a Story Circle e-group,” a friend from Arizona told me, in reply to my grumbling about how hungry I was for the stimulation of bonding and sharing with other women writers since my move to Austin, Texas. “I’m in an e-circle,” she said, “and I love it.”

“No way would I love it,” I told her. “I’m a hopeless touchy-feely creature with no desire to hug a computer.”

Maybe my hesitation was a result of my unusual, even spiritual, initiation into the writer’s life in 1995, the year of my 65th birthday. I had already retired from teaching several years earlier and had decided to give up my commercial interior design business, which—to my discomfort—was becoming more business than design. The large canvases that I had loved painting were also physically less comfortable to work with. I longed to pour all of my creativity into writing—to paint with the words that had been hanging around in my heart for way too many years.

At that time there was a YWCA (do those “Ws” still exist?) in downtown Phoenix. I decided to learn something about the craft of writing as a jump start into this new endeavor, so I registered for a Saturday workshop. Fortunately, our instructor never mentioned the craft part. She brought us right into the depths where the real stuff was dwelling.

After the workshop, four of us decided to meet regularly to share and critique our stories and poetry, always bringing the spirit of our first meeting with us. We became sisters, sharing our lives as we wrote. When one of us, Becky, had a recurrence of terminal cancer, she asked us to meet at her house and read to her. She wasn’t always coherent, but the four of us had a communication bond that transcended coherence.

I thought that I could never have that kind of bond again; therefore, I didn’t seek it. In Austin, as a last desperate resort, I took my friend’s advice and joined a SCN electronic circle, resigning myself to cold computer hugs. What an epiphany I had! Warmth, love, compassion, and understanding flowed through the computers of my sisters of e-circle 7 in abundance! I can’t express my gratitude sufficiently; they

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

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

A selection will appear in print in each issue of the *Journal* during 2007. Please follow the guidelines for all True Words stories (see the Looking Ahead section on p. 16) as to format, etc. There is no deadline for these stories.

have shown me that when we write our hearts out with our group we are blessed with that illusive bond. I feel acceptance for anything and everything that I write. Maybe that’s why I’m so comfortable revealing whatever comes forth, embracing my vulnerability in order to become a “real” writer.

Now, dear sisters, when I press the Send button, it will be with the warmest of computer hugs! ❖

## *A Land Full of Stories: A Conference and Celebration of Writing about Place and Personal History*

Sandi Simon reports

Story Circle Network and the Alkek Library’s Southwestern Writers Collection at Texas State University sponsored a weekend writing conference in June to celebrate the publication of *What Wildness Is This: Women Write About the Southwest*, SCN’s new anthology of writings by women about their experiences in the landscapes of the Southwest. Eighty women from twelve states gathered to write our stories of the land—the land around us and our interior landscapes—taking as our inspiration and starting point not only the poetry and nature-writing of other women but also music, art, drama and nature and place itself.

The conference began with two excellent writing workshops, led by Susan Hanson and Susan Albert. Saturday was filled with more wonderful, boundary-stretching writing sessions, and, during lunch, we were treated to hearing nine authors read their stories from *What Wildness Is This*. One attendee commented, “Twas a weekend of richness in every way.” Another said, “I had a fabulous time and met so many enlightening women.” As we wrote, shared stories, and learned new approaches to memoir writing about place and experience, we began to form connections and community.

Friday evening, a reception was held to mark the opening of an exhibit in Alkek Library related to the anthology. It was thrilling to see the exhibit cases filled with manuscripts and books by “our” authors, many of them members of SCN.

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, presented the keynote address, “The World Depends on This.” Moore spoke about an “ecological ethic of care,” caring and commitment to right acting involving our relationships not only with other people but also with the land. Her words were passionate and stirring.

Pre-conference workshops in Austin and San Marcos offered participants a variety of field-writing experiences, including an urban pond, a wilderness center, a meditative Haiku trail walk, a hike through restored wetlands, and a visit to a Texas historic town.

As one attendee wrote, “Thank you to Susan, Paula, and all the organizers and presenters for a very inspiring two days of writing and sharing.” ❖

*Conference News Update*

# Stories from the Heart IV

*The Story Circle Network National Conference*

February 1–3, 2008, Austin, Texas —Register online or on p. 26

## *Share Your Talents at the 2008 Conference*

Would you like to share your wares or your services with other SCN members at our Stories from the Heart Conference in February, 2008? Well, you can, in four ways:

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

**Provide goodies** for the conference goody bags and the silent auction. Contact Judith Helburn at [thehelburns@sbcglobal.net](mailto:thehelburns@sbcglobal.net).

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

**Be a volunteer.** You don’t have to live in Austin to help during the conference.

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

## *Become a Worker Bee for the Conference*

Over the past several years SCN has organized three great national conferences for its members. Many members (including many Austin Chapter volunteers) worked diligently behind the scenes to make sure everything went as planned.

SCN is already well on the way with planning for Stories from the Heart IV, to be held in February 2008. Behind the scenes, members are already very busy helping put everything together and we need a few more “worker bees” to do various jobs. We need:

- Hospitality volunteers,
- Lots of registration table volunteers,
- Other volunteers (just ask).

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

## *Call for Vendors Works of Heart Marketplace*

**Vendors: Plan ahead to obtain your Tax ID early so you can get your vendor application to SCN by December 1.**

Stories from the Heart IV is looking for vendors (including small publishers) who would like to sell *their own* books, paper products, print-related services, writing-related items, and hand-crafted items of interest to women. We will have a limited number of tables available in a reserved “shopping area.” Vendor sales will be Saturday only. Fees are \$50 for a 6’x30” full table and \$25 for a 3’x30” half table.

- Vendors must be members of SCN. (To join, see our online membership form or use the form in this issue of the *Journal*.)
- Vendors *must* obtain a Texas Sales and Use Tax Permit and include their Tax Permit ID number on the vendor application form. It is illegal to sell *anything* in Texas (including self-published books) without a permit. Under no circumstances will a vendor application be accepted without a Texas Sales and Use Tax permit number. It takes 4–6 weeks to get a permit number so plan accordingly. You can apply online at the Texas Comptroller’s website: [www.window.state.tx.us/taxpermit/](http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxpermit/) or contact the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts at 1-800-252-5555.
- Vendors will be responsible for collecting and submitting applicable taxes to the State of Texas.
- Deadline for vendor applications (including tax ID number and booth fees) is **December 1**. (We will hold each applicant’s check until the vendor selection decisions have been made; we will then mail checks back to those not selected.) Apply early! Postmarks will be considered when assigning table location to accepted artists. We will notify successful applicants by December 15, 2007.

The vendor application form, vendor guidelines, and further information can be found on the conference website:

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

# Story Circle News Roundup

## Board Meeting Report

The Story Circle Board of Directors met on June 11 with twelve members present in Austin and four members present via teleconference. President Patricia Pando chaired the meeting.

Significant items discussed included:

- Linda Wisniewski, present at the meeting, reported that the Land Full of Stories Conference was well received and the keynote speaker, Kathleen Dean Moore, was excellent. See more about this conference on page 20.
- Plans for the SCN National Conference, Stories from the Heart IV, scheduled for February, 2008, continue to move along on schedule. See the call for volunteers, vendors, and sponsors on p. 21.
- Sale of Susan Wittig Albert's books through the website have been very successful; to date we have sold over 700 books.
- The ad hoc Categories of Participation committee recommended dissolving the Austin Chapter. There were 11 Yes votes at the meeting and an opportunity to vote was sent to members not present. The results will be reported at the October meeting.
- The cookbook/anthology will be published in the fall. See a sample spread from the cookbook on p. 10, order form on p. 27, and the book cover on p. 28.

The next Board Meeting is scheduled for October 8 at the Isis Institute of Women's Studies in Austin.

—Report by Penny Appleby

## Internet Chapter Report

The writing and reading e-circles continue to enjoy solid membership participation and have recently welcomed several new members.

On August 1st, Helen Lowery assumed the role of reading e-circle facilitator. After being an active participant in the reading circle, Helen is poised to lead the group into more interesting and lively discussions of wonderful books written by fascinating women. We welcome Helen into her new role as facilitator. And, we thank Lisa Check for her many years of gentle leadership in that same reading circle.

Susan Ideus has become a facilitator for one of the Internet Chapter writing circles. Welcome to Susan in her new role as well!

—Internet Chapter President, Lee Ambrose

Thanks to the SCN members from 5 states plus Switzerland who entered the August Haiku contest! Results to be announced.

## SCN Strategic Planning

SCN President Patricia Pando

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

In response to these concerns, four ad hoc committees were formed. All of the committees presented full reports. The Executive Committee and Executive Director are now using the conclusions of the retreats and the committee reports to create the first draft of a strategic plan. This is a challenging task for us, since we must sometimes choose between two recommendations, both good, but that would take us in opposite directions. At the same time, it is rewarding activity because the commitment to the Story Circle Network mission is clear in all of the recommendations. It certainly helps that we have a deadline!

This draft will go to the board as a whole for comments and then will be presented at the October board meeting.

## Announcement

*Applications Open for  
Story Circle Journal Editor  
Deadline October 15*

Story Circle Journal Editor Jane Ross will be retiring from the position in January 2008 after more than four years working on the *Journal*. She plans to remain available during the first half of 2008 to help ease the new editor into the position, if required. The Publications Committee of SCN is now seeking applicants to replace Jane in this paid position.

The *Journal* is published quarterly. The Editor is responsible for all aspects of the *Journal*, from deciding on the content, to seeking articles, laying out the *Journal* using Microsoft Publisher (provided by SCN), proofreading, and overseeing the printing and mailing. The right person for the job will have strong editing experience, some layout experience, be dedicated to the SCN mission of helping women tell their stories, be good at working with a wide range of contributors to the *Journal*, be detail oriented, and impeccable about meeting deadlines.

As part of the SCN Strategic Planning process, the new editor may have an opportunity to make changes to the *Journal* format, in consultation with the SCN Board.

To apply, send an email to: [journaleditor@storycircle.org](mailto:journaleditor@storycircle.org) telling us about your background and experience that is relevant to this job.

SCN-sponsored events

## Workshops, Retreats, Conferences

### The Power of Words Conference

Liberation through the Spoken, Written & Sung Word

September 28th – October 1st, 2007  
Goddard College, Plainfield, Vermont

Featuring David Abram, Allison Hedge Coke, Nehassaiu deGannes and over 35 presenters and performers on writing, storytelling, drama, social change, ecology, healing, mythology and music. Explore how to make a living, make community and make change through our words.



123 Pitkin Road, Plainfield, VT 05667 - [www.goddard.edu](http://www.goddard.edu)  
TLAconference@goddard.edu 802-454-8311x204



### Call for Workshop Proposals Seize the Opportunity!

If you have been thinking you might like to facilitate a session at one of SCN's events, now's the time! Spring workshops are right around the corner (dates to be announced).

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. The Program Committee selects facilitators after reviewing all proposals.

### LifeLines

An SCN-sponsored Lifewriting Retreat  
with Robin Edgar,  
author of *In My Mother's Kitchen*  
October 5 – 7, 2007  
Little Switzerland, NC

Join nationally-known author and writing-workshop facilitator, Robin Edgar, for a weekend lifewriting retreat open to any woman who is interested in lifewriting, regardless of skill level or experience. Held at WildAcres Retreat in Little Switzerland, North Carolina (see [www.wildacres.org](http://www.wildacres.org)). The rustic setting offers comfortable lodges with rooms that accommodate up to two guests and have a private bathroom. Registration is limited to 12 participants.

**COST:** \$250 for SCN members, \$275 for non-members. (Includes a double-occupancy room for two nights and five meals; does not include transportation.)

**DEADLINE FOR REGISTRATION:** September 30

To register, contact Robin Edgar at [robinedgar@earthlink.net](mailto:robinedgar@earthlink.net).

Proposals for Writing from Life should be submitted via our online form at:

[www.storycircle.org/frmwflpresenter.shtml](http://www.storycircle.org/frmwflpresenter.shtml)  
(See the link on the SCN website.)

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

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

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

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

SCN's signature weekend writing workshop



# Writing from Life

*Nurturing the Self and the Soul: Confronting the Tyranny of Relentless Busyness*  
October 27-28, Austin, Tex.

**Facilitated by Carolyn Blankenship, Ann Walters, Leilani Rose, Cathey Capers, and Catherine Cogburn.**

Our standard greeting to each other has become "I am so busy." We say this as if exhaustion and stress were marks of character. If people and tasks are always clamoring for our attention, we must be important and needed. We seem to value speed, consumption and productivity above rest, relationships and creativity. Women, who are great multi-taskers, are particularly susceptible to the cultural pressures to do more, buy more, be more. Take a weekend for yourself, to write, relax, and rejuvenate with other women who are writing—and re-writing—their stories and their lives.

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

**Registration Information:** Enrollment is limited. Please register early using our **online enrollment form**.

**Registration/Payment Deadline:** Friday, October 19. We **must** receive your registration and payment by this date!

**Fee:** \$125 for non-members; \$100 for dues-paying SCN members.

**Location:** Lower Colorado River Authority Colorado Room, Austin, TX (Map on the SCN website.)

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

**Sessions:**

**1. Take Off Your Shoes: Carolyn Blankenship.**

We will recognize and acknowledge that where we stand is sacred ground. In this session we'll use our writing to discover how "taking off our shoes" can nurture our souls.

**2. Covered Journals: Carolyn Blankenship.**

On Saturday we will have the opportunity to create our own journals from composition books, using beautiful papers and ribbon.

**3. The Exquisite Risk: Cathey Capers.**

Quieting body, mind, and heart we will experience, reflect and write to unmask our "inner complexity" and consider how we may begin to experience more spaciousness and peace by becoming more aware of the mind.

**4. Deep River: Honoring Life's Rhythms: Lisa Shirah-Hiers.**

In this workshop we'll explore rhythm and discover which people, places, events, and experiences frustrate or support our own unique inner rhythms.

**5. How Mountains Move: Ann Walters.**

We will access the ancient wisdom of Mother Nature through the shamanic practice of Rock Reading. Bring your own medium sized, unpolished, stone or rock to class and let a new writing adventure begin!



**This membership is a gift.**

My name and address:

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

My phone and e-mail:

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

## Join the Story Circle Network!

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

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

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

9/07



# Stories from the Heart IV

*The Story Circle Network National Conference*

February 1–3, 2008  
Wyndham Hotel, Austin, Texas

*When you open your heart,  
you open your mind.*  
—Beth Mende Conny

Mark your calendars and start making plans now to join us in Austin for the *fourth* National Conference of the Story Circle Network!

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

We welcome readers, writers, storytellers, and any woman with a past, present, and future. There will be opportunities to explore difficult or hidden issues, expand our relationships with other women, and discover different modes and media—such as art, dance, and drama—for sharing our stories.



## *Our Keynote Speaker*

Our Friday-night keynote speaker, Nancy Slonim Aronie, has been a commentator for National Public Radio's "All Things Considered." She was a Visiting Writer at Trinity College in Hartford, CT, wrote a monthly column in *McCall's* magazine and was the recipient of the Eye of the Beholder Artist in Residence award at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. She gives writing workshops and lectures at Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health, Omega Institute, Rowe Conference Center, Wain-Wright House and The Open Center in New York City. She teaches at Harvard University.



Nancy Aronie

## *Our Hotel*

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

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

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

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

*Register online or using the form on the next page*

***Our Conference  
Website is  
Open Now!***

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

We're looking forward to seeing *you* at **Stories from the Heart IV.**



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/  
 Conference/frmregister.php](http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/frmregister.php)

## Registration Form

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

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

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

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

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

- \*Non-Members who choose to join prior to the end of the conference on Sunday, February 3, 2008, will have a portion of their registration fee applied to their dues.

- Cancellations are accepted until Jan. 1, 2008, and are subject to a cancellation fee of \$50 for a full conference registration or \$25 for a one-day registration. No refund for Friday's lecture/reception.

### *Sisters Helping Sisters*

If you are a member of SCN and have an annual family income of \$50,000 or less, you may apply for a conference scholarship. These will be awarded in amounts ranging from \$75 to the full conference cost, depending on need and the availability of funds. Additionally, we may be able to assist with travel/lodging (but we can't confirm the availability of travel/lodging money until January, 2008). To apply, go [www.storycircle.org/Conference/frmregister.php](http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/frmregister.php) or write to us, telling us how much aid you need (for registration, childcare, travel/lodging). Tell us about yourself and your reasons for applying

for a scholarship. One of the objectives of Stories from the Heart IV is to return to our communities and share our discoveries with others. In approximately 200 words, explain how you will help the SCN achieve this objective.

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

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

Order **now** during our one month pre-order period. Don't miss out!



# Kitchen Table Stories



*Springerle Cookies, Rhubarb Pie, Wacky Cake, Hockey Pucks, Jackfruit Thoran, Chicken and Dumplings...these are just a few of the luscious, intriguing, heart-warming and enticing entries in this book. And that's just the recipes!*

*Read your fellow SCN members wonderful stories behind their own special favorite and most memorable foods!*

The SCN Special Edition will be available by pre-paid order only. Contributors to the book will receive one free copy.

**Just \$15 each plus shipping & handling.**

Shipping and handling is **\$3** for the first copy. Add **\$1** shipping and handling for each additional copy in your order. Copies will be shipped in November.

### *Two ways to order:*

Order online at the web address in the box below. You'll have the option of paying by check or PayPal.

Or use the order form below and mail us your check.

**Please be sure that your check or PayPal payment reaches us by  
September 15**

**as we will be printing just enough copies to fulfill the pre-paid orders received by this date.**

Receive a discount off the sale price when you order 5 or more copies to be sent to the same address:

10% discount when you order 5 or more copies,  
15% discount when you order 10 or more copies.

For discounts on 20+ copies, email SCN at: [cookbook07@storycircle.org](mailto:cookbook07@storycircle.org)

NOTE: If you are ordering outside the US, query by email to [webmistress@storycircle.org](mailto:webmistress@storycircle.org) and we will tell you the amount of the postage for your order. You will be billed for exact postage plus \$3 handling for a shipment of up to 5 books. Payment for international orders must be made through PayPal or via an international postal money order.

Order online at: [www.storycircle.org/cookbook\\_orderform.php](http://www.storycircle.org/cookbook_orderform.php) (or use this order form)

Check here if you have a story or poem in the book or if you were an editor on this book. (Contributors will receive one free copy in addition to those purchased. There is no shipping and handling charge for your free copy.)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_  
State/Province: \_\_\_\_\_  
Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_  
Country: \_\_\_\_\_

<i>I would like to purchase</i>	
_____ <b>Kitchen Table Stories</b> books @ \$15	_____
Less discount for 5 or more copies	- _____
<b>Total cost of books</b>	_____
Shipping and handling for 1 copy @ \$3 for the first copy	_____ <b>\$3.00</b>
Shipping and handling for additional copies @ \$1 per copy after the first	_____
<b>Subtotal</b>	_____
Texas residents add 8.25% sales tax to subtotal	_____
<b>Total Amount Due</b>	_____

Please make out your check to **Story Circle Network**. Mail your order to: SCN, PO Box 500127, Austin TX, 78750, USA

# Kitchen Table Stories



A Story Circle Network Anthology of  
Stories & Recipes

*"Find yourself a comfortable reading chair, while you sit and savor the stories of the diverse group of women writers and cooks whose words are collected in **Kitchen Table Stories**. And when you're done reading, take this book and head for the kitchen, to try out the enticing and varied recipes paired with our stories."*

—From the Foreword  
to *Kitchen Table Stories*

*Order now to receive your  
copies of **Kitchen Table Stories**  
in November!*

*Order details on p.27  
See sample pages on pp.10–11  
and a list of authors on p.12*

## 10th Anniversary Events and Deadlines

### **Mark Your Calendar**

**September 15:** Deadline for orders for the *Kitchen Table Stories* cookbook and anthology

**October 5–7:** LifeLines Lifewriting Retreat with Robin Edgar, Wildacres, N.C. (see p. 23)

**October 27–28:** Writing from Life writing workshop, Austin, Tex. (see p. 24)

**February 1–3, 2008:** Stories from the Heart IV, SCN's national conference, Austin, Tex. (see p. 25)

Our online calendar is at:

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

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

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