



Story Circle Journal

Vol. 12 No. 4, December, 2008

The newsletter for women with stories to tell...

Projects, Programs, Dreams

This year—the second year of Story Circle’s second decade—has seen more than its share of new projects, expanded programs, expansive dreams, and a major literary award. We’re wrapping up this momentous year by reviewing a few of these projects and taking a peek into what’s ahead for 2009.

Polish & Proof with SCN Editorial Services

SCN is about to launch an online service designed to offer assistance to SCN members and non-members who want editorial help to polish and proof their work.

After an extensive search, the selection committee has chosen SCN members Matilda Butler and Kendra Bonnett as the project’s developers and coordinators. They were selected for the strength of their impressive resumes and the creative potential of their project proposal.

In their proposal, Matilda and Kendra write that their vision is to create a Story Circle Network Editorial Services that will be “a premiere resource for women writers looking for editorial assistance,” whether that is simple proofing, more extensive line editing, or even more extensive developmental work. They plan to “pair writers with some of the best editors available to help them bring their stories and manuscripts up to publication standards.”

In the first phase of the project, Matilda and Kendra will recruit a strong team of skilled and experienced editors and develop procedures for the program. They will be working with Peggy Moody to create the project’s website and expect to launch it in the early months of 2009.

Kendra and Matilda have a long history of working together on important writing projects. They became colleagues at the national information clearinghouse, Women’s Educational Equity Communication Network (WEECN), established by Matilda in 1977. Although their extensive careers in writing, publishing, and marketing has taken them in different directions, they maintained their professional and personal friendship across both years and geography.

In 1985, Matilda co-founded Knowledge Access International, a software company specializing in CD-ROM and print products and served as its president until 1997, when she sold it. To continue developing digital products, she established Knowledge Access Publishing; from 1992-1996, she served as a director of the Information Industry Association. Matilda has published more than 50 articles, contributed chapters to several anthologies, co-authored the award-winning *Women and the Mass Media* (1980), and co-edited *Knowledge Utilization Systems* (1983).

After leaving WEECN, Kendra created three magazines, including *Digit*, one of the first children’s computer magazines, and the award-winning *Profit Magazine* for IBM. She also worked as a research interviewer for former Secretary of the Treasury William E. Simon. In 1996 she joined the marketing firm Mark Stevens & Company, becoming its president two years later. She is an award-winning author who has written more than 300 magazine articles and written, edited, or ghostwritten seven books.

Matilda and Kendra began working together again in 2000 on a co-authored book, an important “collective memoir” entitled *Rosie’s Daughters: The “First Woman To” Generation Tells Its Story*. It was published in 2007 and won the 2008 IPPY National Book Award winner in the Women’s Issues category. The pair also co-founded Two Women Business and Publishing to create products and services that help women to both write, publish and market stories and books. They established Two Women Books as an imprint of Knowledge Access Books.

The pair have also teamed up to teach an online class for SCN, entitled “Start Small, Finish Big.” Both are also blogging on *Telling HerStories*.



Matilda Butler



Kendra Bonnett

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2008 Willa Literary Award for Creative Nonfiction



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Letter From SCN's President—Penny Appleby



Here we are, in December—and once again, if you're like me, you're wondering what happened to a few months. I won't repeat all the trite sayings about time passing; you know them all too well. And you know that way too much happens at this time of the year. From September to January, every organization and group schedules more events and activities than it is ever possible to take in—not to mention all the holidays and the shopping, cooking, and decorating associated with them. It makes me weary just to think about it! So I'm hoping that you will use the arrival of this *Journal* to give you an excuse to take it easy for a little while. Sit in that comfortable chair, get that favorite beverage, put your feet up and read about all the interesting events going

on in Story Circle.

Featured this month is our LifeLines facilitator, Lisa Dale Norton. Her memoir, *Hawk Flies Above*, was a favorite selection in our Austin Reading Circle. I'm looking forward to reading her new book *Shimmering Images: A Handy Little Guide to Writing Memoir*, which will be the basis for the LifeLines Retreat in May. I'm also looking forward to the great food at Festival Hill, and hope to see many of you there.

December also means that it's the end of my term as President of the Story Circle Board. What a great privilege this has been for me. As you can read in the *Take A Bow* article by Lisa Shirah-Hiers, my introduction to Story Circle was very serendipitous. In the ten-plus years I've been a member, I've watched Story Circle grow in many ways—membership, geographical representation and particularly in the offerings available. This year I've watched with you the expansion of our on-line classes, the book review site, and our affiliate workshop program. All of these things happened because of the dedication, imagination, and efforts of Story Circle members. But these offerings and our many other services share a common thread—telling our stories. That's the heart of Story Circle and what will keep it going for many years to come.

Waiting in the wings is Joyce Boatright, our new president. Knowing Joyce's enthusiasm for Story Circle, as well as her great talents, I see a very bright future. My thanks to all of you for your continued involvement in and support of this unique organization!

The healing that can grow out of the simple act of telling our stories is often quite remarkable. Even more remarkably, this healing is not just our own healing, it is the healing of all women. That's why, as we tell our stories to ourselves, it is also important to share them with others. This sharing brings a sense of kinship, of sisterhood. We understand that we are not alone in our efforts to become conscious, whole, healthy persons.

~Susan Wittig Albert

Story Circle Network'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.

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.

Editor: Robin Wittig
 journaleditor@storycircle.org

Contributing Editors:
 Mary Jo Doig
 Patricia Pando
 Lisa Shirah-Hiers
 Linda Wisniewski

We welcome your letters,
 queries, and suggestions.

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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.

Projects, Programs, Dreams continued from page 1

SCN Launches *Telling HerStories*

November—National Lifewriting Month—marked the launch of SCN's latest lifewriting project: a group blog (a multipli-authored online journal) featuring eleven SCN bloggers, women who have a passion for telling their own stories and for helping other women tell theirs. *Telling HerStories* is the brainchild of talented, Internet-savvy Becca Taylor, who developed the SCN Podcast Project last year (still going strong with co-host Karen Ballinger). The idea for a blog popped up during a panel discussion of blogging at the national conference in early February. After six months of (as Becca puts it) "noodling, tweaking, wondering, and working," the SCN Board of Directors approved the blog; a team of creative, enthusiastic bloggers was selected and topics proposed; and by November, *Telling HerStories* was ready for launch.

"Life-writing encompasses a huge field of expression," Becca says, "in the form of essays, blogs, poetry, music, art, memoir, biography, diaries and journals, or autobiography." *Telling HerStories* opens up that wide field, suggesting new ways to practice the art and craft of writing about our experience. A new

entry is posted most weekdays, and since the bloggers' experiences and expertise are so varied, there's always something new to think about.

And the bloggers? They represent a wide range of lifewriting interests. Susan Tweit is the author of a dozen books about the natural world and blogs about the community of the land. Susan Ideus, Associate Editor of SCN's book review site, blogs about books and readings. Jane Ross blogs about food, an important element of every lifestory! Lee Ambrose and Janet Riehl are deeply interested in creativity. Susan Albert offers some journaling ideas, while Joyce Boatright and Matilda Butler write about some of the basic elements of lifewriting. Kendra Bonnett and Katherine Misegades explore some of the technical aspects of publication, online and in print. And Becca Taylor, the blog host, looks "inward and forward" in her posts.

This blogging lineup is likely to change over time, but one thing is sure. *Telling HerStories* will always be lively, interesting, engaging, and challenging. You're invited to join in the conversation. Just log on to www.storycircle.typepad.com.

What Wildness is This Wins a Willa!

In September, SCN's anthology, *What Wildness is This: Women Write About the Southwest*, was granted the 2008 Willa Literary Award for Creative Nonfiction. The anthology is a significant collection of writings celebrating women's experiences in the landscapes of the Southwest. Sponsored by SCN and published in 2007 by the University of Texas Press, it illuminates the rich diversity of environments of the Southwest, as well as the extraordinary range of women's voices and women's experiences of the land. The anthology includes a variety of literary forms—memoir, creative non-fiction, essay, poetry—and pieces by nearly a hundred emerging and established writers.

The Willa Literary Award is named for American novelist and Pulitzer winner Willa Cather (1873-1947), best known for her writings about pioneer life on the Great Plains. The award, offered since 2001, is granted by Women Writing the West, a non-profit organization of writers and other professionals writing and supporting the Women's West. A distinguished panel of twenty-one professional librarians participates in the selection process.



What Wildness is This co-editors (left to right), Jan Epton Seale, Susan Hanson, Susan Wittig Albert, Paula Stallings Yost

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How Did You Find SCN?

Share Your Stories

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.



A selection will appear in print in each issue of the Journal. Please follow the guidelines for True Words stories (see the Looking Ahead section on p. 19) as to format, etc. There is no deadline for these stories.



Lisa Dale Norton's "Shimmering Images" of Life and Life Writing

Lisa Dale Norton is the author of *Shimmering Images: A Handy Little Guide to Writing Memoir* (St. Martin's Press, August 2008) and *Hawk Flies Above: Journey to the Heart of the Sandhills* (also St. Martin's Press.) A popular speaker and founder of the Santa Fe

Writing Institute, she teaches Creative Nonfiction and Memoir Writing for the UCLA Extension Writers' Program and private clients across the country. She is a frequent guest on radio and television programs and maintains a blog about writing. She will be SCN's Lifelines Retreat facilitator, May 15-17, 2009, at Festival Hill at Roundtop, TX. Lisa Shirah-Hiers interviewed her via email for the SCJ.

SCJ: When did you first realize you were a writer?

Norton: I couldn't have been more than eight years old. I had a paper to write, and I will never forget the crystalline recognition that came over me when I knew exactly where the story had to go, how it would end, how I would wrap it up. It was obvious in my mind. Even at that age, I had inside me some innate understanding of how a piece of writing worked.

Years later when I was in college at Reed we had Humanities Seminars where we attended weekly lectures then met in small groups with a professor from one of the humanities departments where we talked about the texts for that week, the lecture, and the ideas embedded in the reading. We had regular papers due, and after each paper was submitted each student would meet individually with the Seminar (faculty) leader for a Paper Conference. I had been ill and had fallen behind. Catching up was very difficult. Ken Hanson, a well-esteemed poet, translator and English Department professor, was my Seminar leader that semester. For months it seemed—perhaps it was only weeks!—that I had dodged Hanson on campus, hiding behind trees or making a short cut to avoid having to cross his path, so ashamed was I that I owed him a paper. Finally it was just too much for me, so one night I holed up in the student lounge of the dormitory where I lived, commandeered two tables and set out to compose a paper to hand in to him the next day. I was still sketchy on some of the content of the texts in question, the ideas behind them, and what it was I could say, but I worked my hardest all night long. By dawn I had a paper ready to hand in. I was so relieved to deliver it. Whew! Once again I could walk tall across campus. Days later I met with Hanson for my Paper Conference. I will never forget his first words:

"Where did you learn to write like this?"

I was flabbergasted. I wasn't sure what he meant. I must have stammered something like: "I just did it."

"Where did you go to high school?" He was tapping a pen lightly in his hand.

"Osceola High School in Nebraska," I said. "The public school?" It came out like a question, so unsure was I of where this was heading. He wanted to know if I'd gone to some special school or program. No. Still not satisfied he pushed on: "What did your parents do?"

I was beginning to panic, to think he thought I'd plagiarized the paper. "My dad's a judge," I said. "He practiced law while I was growing up. My mom, she was the editor of a newspaper for awhile."

What else I said, I do not know. But I do remember his words after that. He peered over his glasses from behind his big desk. His gray beard was clipped close. He wore a tweed suit coat and a turtleneck. The shelves behind him brimmed with volumes of poetry, literary criticism, books in Greek.

"Well," he said, "the style is excellent. Now, about the content...."

And we went on to talk about it, but I was hardly hearing his words, something in me jumping and shouting and boogying across campus already. Kenneth O. Hanson, THE Ken Hanson, the brilliant poet, elegant thinker, a man twice my age—and more, probably!—had told me my style was excellent. A paper that I'd crafted in the dark hours of the previous night was well-written! There was some kind of baseline victory in that moment for me, and I believe it was perhaps then that it jelled, and I knew that I had something in me that was bigger than anything I could have planned or learned. It was, simply, a gift.

SCJ: How did your family and friends react? Were there mentors who helped you along the way?

Norton: My parents were always proud of me, even if they rarely said it, and I know they simply expected me to achieve, to do well, to work hard, and to be successful. My friends have always been supportive. My friends are my tribe. Without them I would be lost. Yes, there have been mentors. Leila Falk at Reed College was my advisor in the Music Department, where I earned

a B.A. Leila taught me the power and weight of each word. She would go over my papers with me, word by word, and ask thoughtful questions about each choice I had made. She helped me see that thinking had to be seamless, that each word in a piece of writing mattered and depended on a larger understanding of what it was you were trying to say. No one had ever challenged me in this way before. I owe much of the success of my Reed education to Leila Falk and her ability to perceive what I needed and her willingness to give it to me. She was (and is) brilliant and patient.

[Another mentor was] John Bennett at the University of Iowa where I, as always, pursued an against-the-grain path. My interest simply did not lie in mass communications, or reporting, for that matter. I wanted to write long stories, stories that revolved around real-world stuff, stories that allowed me to be present in the text. I didn't know what this kind of writing was called, but John saw my interests and my strengths and guided me toward what we now call narrative nonfiction. John allowed me to find my own path, guided me once I'd latched onto it, and taught me how to buck the system.

SCJ: *What is the hardest part of memoir writing to teach? What do you most hope your students will learn?*

Norton: First, the deep understanding that memoir is not autobiography and cannot be structured as such, and second, the need for a strong, individual voice in the narrator. I hope students will leave my classes clear about the craft being shared and confident that they can achieve their writing dreams. Same thing with any words I have penned about the art and craft of writing in my new book: *Shimmering Images: A Handy Little Guide to Writing Memoir*.

SCJ: *What made you decide to write *Shimmering Images*? Where did the idea for the title come from?*

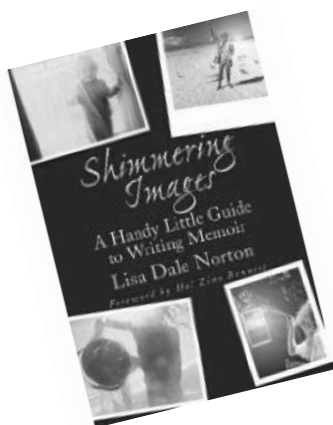
Norton: I wrote *Shimmering Images* because I had taught the material around which I built the book so many times and seen its effect on people that it just seemed like the next step. Every-

where I taught, memoir students asked for a book. When students in my on-line UCLA classes told me they were printing out and saving my lectures, I knew it was time to act. The title came from the technique itself, which I've been teaching for decades. Shimmering Images are iconic memories that we have never forgotten. They are like little snapshots in your mind: the look on the face of a person the last time you saw him; the view from the front porch of a summer cottage as your dad walked toward the woods; a memory of riding bikes with your best childhood friend's dogs scampering at the wheels. There are millions of these moments frozen in memory. Those memory-pictures are fundamental in what I teach. They are the material out of which one constructs a memoir.

SCJ: *In your book you discuss the important difference between factual truth and artistic truth. Which is most important in memoir writing and why?*

Norton: I was always fascinated during my years at the Journalism School in Iowa with this notion of truth that they were trying to teach us to pursue as reporters. I just didn't buy it. I knew that truth of events is nothing more than one person's interpretation. History is nothing more than interpretation. Knowing this made the whole notion of truth slippery territory for me. Later, as I worked on my own memoir and taught more and more writing classes, I felt in my bones that there is no factual truth that is particularly pertinent to the work of memoir. Of course, we need real facts in a piece of narrative nonfiction writing, but a larger truth predicated on facts alone is not the point. Memoir writing is about making a truth for oneself. It's all about lining up the events in such a way, into such a "narrative," that the resulting story rings true in an emotional way. That is what story is all about. To sideswipe this core goal of memoir in the pursuit of factual "truth" is to misunderstand literature and the goal of the genre. I feel passionately about this. It's obvious to me that arguments about truth and fact in memoir are a waste of time. The point is the story. The emotional truth is where the power resides in story.

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LifeLines: A Story Circle Life Writing Retreat

May 15-17, 2009

Festival Hill, Round Top TX

**The Compassionate Memoir: Using Shimmering Images
and the Power of Story to Change Your Life**

A Weekend Memoir Workshop with Lisa Dale Norton

Plan now to attend, and register no later than April 15!

All the details are on our website: www.storycircle.org/LifeLines

SCJ: Do you think “claiming one’s voice” is particularly problematic for women? Why or why not?

Norton: Yes. Although many men doubt themselves, too, they doubt less their right to be heard. It’s cultural. At root, women are taught to receive, listen, be empathetic. Men are trained to direct traffic, and they are accorded that right via just about every value and institution in our society. This is a patriarchal society. Bottom-line. Many women are taught that what they have to say is not important. This can be direct and overt, or very subtle, but the end result is the same: a doubting of self and the worthiness of one’s perception. One of the biggest hurdles in my work is to get women to really see, claim, and own their right to be heard. I don’t see this changing, either, until education changes and the institutions follow suit—government, corporations, advertising, religion, and a host of others.

I can make inroads, though, in my own way. I believe that writing memoir is a powerful tool for according personal power and for changing the world, and I can keep hammering away at this. If one woman stands up and speaks, if she writes her memoir, she models the opportunity for another to do the same, and on and on it goes. Those stories that are shared have the power to shape not only the author’s life—to give her access to a new future by opening doors that had previously remained closed in her mind about perceptions of self—but they also have the power to do the same for those who read them. If I can do that for just one woman, who then passes it on, I’ve done my work in this world.

SCJ: What are some of the challenges you have faced personally or professionally? How did you overcome them?

Norton: My parents divorced when I was about 13. I was raped by a stranger on the street at 20. My marriage ended, my life screeched to a halt, and I had to start all over again. I have lost loved ones who were central to my heart and to my sense of stability in the world. I have faced innumerable challenges on the path to building a literary career. You know, life. I don’t know how one overcomes. I just go on. Perhaps it has something to do with the blood that flows in my veins. My maternal great-grandmother sustained a farm on the plains of North Dakota alone after the death of her husband. She kept that farm afloat, and after the Depression and the Dust Bowl she sold it for a profit. My paternal great-grandfather, against all odds and during similar times, won passage to Washington, D.C., as a congressman from Nebraska. Would some of that heritage be responsible for my perseverance? Who’s to say? Besides, I don’t think we ever “overcome” these kinds of traumas and difficulties. At best we simply integrate them into our philosophy and our art, and as we grow older and sadder and wiser, we grow more compassionate.

SCJ: What are you looking forward to about the Lifelines’ Retreat? Can you give readers a preview of your curriculum?

Norton: I approach each new teaching/speaking opportunity with the excitement of a performance—a new opportunity to share what I am passionate about, one more place to connect with writers, one more chance to inspire and create clarity around the craft of writing, one more opening to help one more person “get” the bigness of what memoir writing is all about, to provide the doorway for personal transformation. I look forward to all of that. The title of the Retreat is “The Compassionate Memoir: Using Shimmering Images and the Power of Story to Change Your Life,” so we’ll focus mainly on Shimmering Images as a building block for story structure and on how the narrative arc in a memoir needs to work. But we’ll go a step further, too, into understanding how a compassionate narrator in memoir can make all the difference in whether that story grabs readers or not. I am convinced that the compassionately written memoir is the next wave in this popular genre, that it has the potential to change how we behave in the world.

SCJ: What are some dreams you have for the future? What things do you hope to experience or accomplish in your lifetime?

Norton: To love. To forgive. To engage in a primary relationship that allows me to work out all that stuff we humans carry around, stuff that can only be addressed in relationship with another human. That,

to me, seems to be the real work of life. To travel Europe more and more and more. I’ve actually accomplished a lot of my career goals. I landed an agent. I published that first book I so desired (*Hawk Flies Above*) with a major New York publishing house (St. Martin’s Press). I went on a book tour. That was all a dream come true. I’d yearned for it for so long, worked for it for so long. To have it happen was one of the biggest moments in my life. Later I managed to get another book published (*Shimmering Images*) and that has made me feel quite settled inside myself. I wanted another book. It is important to me to work diligently on my next project. I would like to see it published. I know that road is rocky. We’ll see what the world brings. It is also important to me that I serve, that I help people write their stories and find new ways of being in the world through that process. I know that the creation of memoir is a transformative act. I love midwiving that process. It gives me fundamental joy to aid a writer on the path. But really, in my heart, the things I most want to experience or accomplish, reside in the realm of personal growth, love, companionship, and home. That’s really all that matters. In the end, the only thing you can take with you is love. All the other stuff is just, well, stuff.

“To write compelling memoir, you must first believe you have the right to speak, the right to tell your story, to be heard. You have to believe the story you are telling is important, key to your understanding of life and key to others’. For some, this is the highest wall to climb in writing stories about your lives, because too often you have been told that what you think, feel, and have experienced doesn’t matter.”

~Lisa Dale Norton, *Shimmering Images*





Online Learning Story Circle Network's Course Offerings: Winter 2009

SCN's educational program is a key element of its unique mission: to help women share the stories of their lives. For more than a decade, SCN members have participated in conferences, workshops, classes, and writing and reading circles. For the past six years, online learning has been part of our educational program, with classes in editing, memoir writing, and memoir-to-fiction. Now, we're expanding our program. We've just launched a new website (www.storycircleonlineclasses.org) and are offering new classes in the Winter term, taught by our all-woman faculty of skilled, experienced, published instructors.



Matilda Butler

Start Small Finish Big: From Memoir Vignette to Publication, Part One/Part Two.

Matilda Butler and Kendra Bonnett

Part One of this two-part course is designed to help you write your memoir by "starting small." Through instructional videos, creative exercises, and writing assignments that use your own family photos, treasured mementos and even recipes as triggers to memory, you'll find your unique voice, and develop your personal style of expression. Then we'll help you "Finish Big." Although actual publication of one or more of your stories will come at the end of Part Two of this class, you'll start getting ready now. We'll show you how to use the Internet to begin creating your readership and create a base of family, friends, and fans who'll be interested in buying your memoir when it comes out. Writing for your family rather than for publication? These same Internet skills will let you share your life stories on a continuing basis with those close to you. (If you've taken Part One of this course, you're eligible to enroll in Part Two.)



Kendra Bonnett & Angus

Journaling by the Moonlight: A Woman's Path to Self-Discovery.

Tina Games



The moon can bring great comfort to women during challenging periods in their lives, particularly during times when they've felt a loss of personal identity. Working with the phases of the moon as a source of transformation, women who are facing major life transitions or who may be challenged by the loss of personal identity are gently guided on a path of self-discovery. With a variety of creative methods, including journaling and visual collage techniques, this workshop encourages personal reflection with many opportunities to answer the question, "I'm a woman—but who am I really?" At the close of the eight-week circle, each woman will have discovered her "full moon"—a spiritual place where she can make a connection with her authentic self.

Begin Blogging.

Katherine Misegades

Blogs are websites that allow you to add and manage content without needing to know how to write code. Among their many uses, blogs can be used for journaling, and can be kept private by using a password. A blog can be set up and customized within an hour or two. This course offers technical information to help you set up a blog and get comfortable with managing it. In this class, you will learn how to set up and customize a new blog (Wordpress, Blogger, Type Pad); add and manage posts; add and manage links; add and manage pages; manage comments; add and manage other resources such as images and audio files; and troubleshoot blogging issues by searching for help from the blog host. Blogging can be fun—join us and learn how!



Finding Joy in the Details: Using the "Small" Stories to Tell the Large Stories of Your Life.

Erin D. Philbin



We all have wonderful stories that are unique and important, but we may feel overwhelmed when we try to write. We want to tell the "big" stories but are uncertain about where to begin. Working from easy, comfortable prompts, you will create six stories that you can pull together into your larger story. The teacher will provide help with grammar and organization, but emphasis will be placed on encouraging the creation of your stories. For beginning memoirists.

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Take a Bow! Spotlighting Our Volunteers

Penny Appleby

In January, 2009, Penny Appleby, President of SCN, will step down to make way for President-Elect Joyce Boatright. We thought it high time we acknowledge all Penny has done for our organization and let our readers know more about this fascinating and energetic lady. *By Lisa Shirah-Hiers*

Like many other members of SCN, Penny Appleby came to the organization not through writing but through a reading circle. She had retired to Austin from a long career at IBM and was looking for a new job. "I'd gone to this person for advice on writing a resume, and in the process of talking about that I must have talked about liking to read. She said, "You need to go to this book group that meets with Susan Wittig Albert." I said "THE Susan Wittig Albert?" because I had already been reading the China Bayles books for a long time."

She was given a little piece of paper with an address, dates, and a list of books and arrived "not knowing a soul." Lucky for Penny, Peggy Moody had recently joined too. "Peggy was working for IBM and I had just retired from IBM," Penny says. "So we had a connection there. And that's where I learned of SCN—through the reading circle. But I kept saying 'I'm not a writer.' I said that for years. And in the sense that a lot of people are, I am not. I don't journal and I don't write a lot. But what SCN has made me aware of is not so much about the writing but about all the stories that are in people. I think it hit me the first time when I saw Judith Helburn do an OWL session, listening to those women around me tell their stories. And then I went to some Writing from Life workshops. You'd hear the people tell their stories. And it was just mind-boggling to me. I guess what I learned is that everybody has something to say. Everybody has a story to tell."

Not everyone is brave enough to walk into a meeting not knowing a soul, but Penny is one who is always trying new things. Her conversation is peppered with the phrase "It was fun!" and that *joie de vivre* is all through her life experiences.

Penny was born in Phenix City, AL and raised in Columbus, GA. After earning a Bachelors degree in Business from Florida State, she spent a year in Cape Canaveral and taught with a friend for another year in Macon, GA. When her friend married and left, Penny returned to Florida to work as a secretary. "I went to Cape Canaveral to find a husband because that was the early days of the space program. So I was supposed to find a husband—an engineer. It was really fun. It was early days. We saw the first astronauts go. But after three years I thought 'This is ridiculous. I'm not just going to spend my life looking for a husband.'"

Penny decided she'd like to teach again, but at the graduate level. Her father invited her to live at home and enter graduate

school at nearby Auburn where she earned an MBA. Looking for work, she found that recruiters were more interested in her typing and dictation skills than they were in her management training. It was the combination of her secretarial and teaching experience that finally landed her a position at IBM where she worked for nearly 31 years, mostly in jobs associated with marketing. She moved frequently, working in Atlanta, Jacksonville, Austin, Newport Beach, Stratford, Glen Rock, New York and (lucky for us) returned to Austin in 1997 after retiring in 1996.

Retirement proved challenging at first for someone who had worked all her life. "I had not been homesick since freshman year, when I was horribly homesick for about six weeks. I was never homesick again no matter where I lived. But after I'd got myself kind of settled here I was a little uneasy and didn't know why. Then it hit me. I had retired, turned sixty, and moved to a new place—all within a short period of time. That's when I went about creating a life beyond retirement."

Now Penny says she probably has less discretionary time than she did when she was working. She joined the SCN Board in 1997, serving as Secretary-Treasurer before assuming the

Presidency in January this year. She is a long time member of the Austin Reading Circle, an OWL-Circle facilitator, an ESL instructor and choir member at her church, a member and past president of the American History Club, (a century-old Austin women's club), and a docent at the Austin Museum of Art. She participates in a bridge club, a continuing education group at UT, a Conversation Café, a Wednesday morning breakfast club, and a Centering Prayer group. She also volunteered for five or six years in a mentoring program at a local elementary school, but finally took a sabbatical because as she says, "I decided I need one morning a week for myself!"

Though she is stepping down as President, Penny plans to continue serving on the Board for at least one more year and helping to organize the Lifelines Retreat and the 2010 conference. It's a busy life, but Penny wouldn't have it any other way. She says her work in ESL and her experience of living all over the country have convinced her that "people are basically good. I think we are more alike—and this is across all religions, cultures. It's unfortunate that we spend more time focusing on our differences than the things that bring us together."

There's no doubt that this energetic woman will find plenty to do and will continue to offer her energy and high spirits wherever she goes.



"People are basically good. I think we are more alike—and this is across all religions, cultures. It's unfortunate that we spend more time focusing on our differences than the things that bring us together."

Projects, Programs, Dreams continued from page 3

SCN's New Mentorship Program

As part of its expanded online class program, SCN is in the process of developing a new program of writing mentorships. A mentor is an attentive, responsive reader who provides constructive feedback that encourages you to develop your own critical perspectives on your writing," Albert says. "She is an experienced guide who can show you how your writing might be improved and what kind of new directions you might consider." The mentorship program is designed for self-directed writers who are working (or would like to work) on a specific project. They will be matched with mentors—published writers with whom they might establish a productive working relationship.

When the program is officially launched shortly after the first of the year, there will be five or six mentors available. "We will expand our roster as time goes on and demand grows," Albert says.

Watch for an announcement of the program's official launch at www.storycircleonlineclasses.org.

SCN's Online Class Program

Another major project in 2008 was the expansion of the online writing program that SCN has offered for several years. "It was an ambitious effort for us," Program Coordinator Susan Albert says. "We began by advertising for teachers, then screening and selecting proposals. Peggy Moody and I worked together to set up new procedures for instructor contracts and student enrollments, trying to anticipate problems and think ahead to the future when the program might grow to be quite large. We launched the new website (www.storycircleonlineclasses.org) in early August. We were happily surprised at the results: early enrollments, full classes, and an almost problem-free first term."

The first group of five eight-week classes attracted over thirty students. The classes included a course in journaling; an introductory memoir course; a class on personal mapping for more advanced writers; a writing-to-heel class; and a two-part class designed to help writers develop and publish their memoirs. Teachers sent their class materials and assignments to students via email; students replied with their written work, which the instructor critiqued and returned. In some classes, students used Yahoo! Group class sites to share writing and ideas.

At the end of the term, students were asked to evaluate their classes, offer suggestions for improvements in the program, and comment on their experience. One wrote: "To begin with, I had no idea what to expect, as it was my first online writing course. As the weeks went by, I felt that I had developed a relationship with my teacher who worked hard to raise my standards. I hope that she will teach again next term as I plan to join her class again. Perhaps that says it all!"

For the Winter term (January-March, 2009), the offerings have been expanded from five classes to nine: six writing-intensive courses and three writing/media-intensive courses, including a blogging class. The term begins January 19. For details, go to www.storycircleonlineclasses.org, and read more on pages 7 and 21 of this issue of Story Circle Journal.

Story Circle Book Reviews: A Passion for Women's Writings

The Story Circle Book Review website (www.storycirclebookreviews.org) was redesigned and relaunched in October, 2007. With over 600 reviews of books by over 500 authors, SCBR is now the largest women's book review site on the Internet. This year, the site was expanded to include interviews with authors, podcast interviews, a Review of the Month, and Editors' Picks. In October, the editors began publishing a monthly eletter that features current reviews, new books, and an author interview. Traffic to the site has grown at a brisk pace, with the number of visitors doubling from October 2007 to October 2008.

The review team is growing, as well, now numbering nearly fifty. Reviewers are passionate about women's writing. Reviewer Lee Ambrose says, "I enjoy reviewing books for the SCN Book Review Site almost as much as I enjoy reading the reviews posted by my sister reviewers. Reading and writing are such an important part of my life that I cannot imagine a day without actively reading or writing—or both!"

Editors Linda Wisniewski and Susan Albert manage the site and work with publishers and authors to obtain new books for review; Editorial Assistant Robin Wittig orders the books and posts reviews to Amazon. Assistant Editor Susan Ideus receives and distributes books to reviewers. Ideus says that she gets to "see (and feel and smell and fondle...oh my!) all of the wonderful books made available to our review team." She adds, "For an avid reader and book lover like me, this is sweet torture. Many a day, I find myself wanting to keep each book for myself to read, to savor, to review." But she doesn't. Instead, she offers the books to the review team, which snatches them up immediately. The reviews are edited, then posted to the site by webmistress Peggy Moody.

"We plan to just keep growing," Editor Linda Wisniewski says. "We're always looking for new reviewers, new books, and new ideas to make the site even more appealing. We love offering women's books!"



Susan Wittig Albert



Linda Wisniewski



Susan Ideus



Robin Wittig





Kitchen Table Stories

Ring in the New

You have kitchen table stories, too!

We'd love to print them here in the Journal (800 words maximum, please, including the recipe). Send via email or as a Word attachment to ppando@gmail.com. In the subject line, please type "Kitchen Table Stories." If you have no computer, type or write your story legibly and mail to: Patricia Pando, 1423 West Alabama, Houston, TX 77006.

By Patricia Pando

On New Year's Day I will take the wreath down from the front door, and smooth and fold the last stray pieces of tissue paper. New Year's Eve and New Year's Day are cleaning-up days, change-of-pace days. We'll think about the old year, remember good old times and a few hard ones, then start promising ourselves to sign up for the aerobics class, read good books, and floss our teeth twice a day. We'll vow to get those pictures from summer vacation into an album, and answer all the folks who sent Christmas letters.

Sometime during that New Year's Day, I'll pull out my neglected sewing box and honor an old family tradition. An aunt of mine insisted that all the girls and women in the house hem a new dishtowel. This was to ensure a prosperous future.

It's hard to find an unhemmed dishtowel today. I think this tradition must reach back to when most of the kitchen linens in the house had once been feed sacks. A houseful of girls and women could just about hem a year's supply of tea towels on a cold pre-television afternoon, when they'd cleaned up after the black-eyed peas and greens. Last week when I was Christmas shopping, I spotted some printed fabric remnants that looked just like feed sack prints. In honor of my Aunt Alda, I bought a couple of yards. Once home, I headed for the dishtowel drawer and pulled out all that were sadly frayed. One was a 1995 calendar, another one, tattered beyond saving, celebrated the marriage of Charles and Diana. Out they'll go on New Year's night as I replace them with my freshly hemmed treasures.

I'll probably be watching football while I sew, and use one of my new towels to clean up after our last holiday meal. Diets and resolutions will begin on the morning of January 2.

When I was growing up in the Texas Panhandle, New Year's Day meant black-eyed peas cooked with ham hocks and small whole okra pods, served with my grandmother's cornbread (or as near as my mother could come, but that's a story for another day). There were pork chops and cole slaw, too. I can't remember what we had for dessert; we were probably still working on the fruit cakes which, because they had been soaked in bourbon since Thanksgiving, were getting rather heady.

For years, my mother made the black-eyes from dried peas that she had soaked over night. One story we heard was that the peas should be covered with running water exactly at midnight, so that good luck would soak right in. I don't know where the okra idea came from. Surely out on the farm where my dad grew up, okra was long gone by New Year's Day.

Pork is another traditional New Year's food around the world, but especially in the South. We cooked our black-eyes with ham hock and ate pork chops, but for other Southerners, it's pork jowl in the black-eyes and ham on the table. Many families will add some rice and spice and serve up Hoppin' John. Almost everyone will have greens. Greens are naturally associated with money, and many families share collards or turnip greens rather than my family's traditional cole slaw. This maybe a good year to put some extra greens on the table!

Most of us will be having the lucky fare as we welcome 2009, sometimes in the traditional menu, but sometimes with a new (and slightly healthier) twist. This black-eyed pea concoction shows up often. I make this spicy version, calling it Panhandle Caviar. Hold the jalapeños if you have a tender mouth or tummy.

I've tweaked the recipe for years. When we lived in Georgia I added some toasted pecans, and had "Georgia Caviar." It occurs to me that Iowans and Nebraskans might add corn to make it their own; in New England cooks might add some dried cranberries. Californians—what?—maybe figs? And New Mexicans, of course, pinon nuts. Make it your own, and let me know what you come up with.

Panhandle Caviar

- 2 16-ounce cans black-eyed peas
- 4 scallions, green parts only, minced
- 1 or 2 seeded and minced jalapeño peppers
- ¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro (or Italian parsley)
- ¼ cup drained and chopped pimentos
- ¼ cup fresh lime juice
- ¼ cup apple cider vinegar
- ½ cup olive oil
- Salt and black pepper to taste

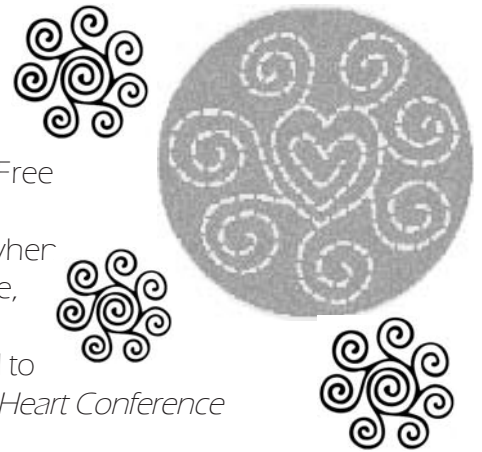


Drain the black-eyed peas and rinse well under running water. Combine the peas, scallions, jalapenos, cilantro, and pimentos and toss to mix. Whisk the oil, lime, and vinegar and pour over the black-eyed peas. Season with salt and pepper. Put the mixture into a large glass jar or plastic container and marinate for three to five days. Serve with tortilla chips, with extra chopped jalapeños and Tabasco sauce on the side.



Circles: The Heart of Story Circle Network

Start One of Your Own!



Lisa Shirah-Hiers From time to time it is interesting to look at the list of Free Range Story Circles on the website. I love to see how our larger circle is expanding into new communities, and imagine how women will feel when they discover a safe place to write and share their stories. And, of course, there is always the dream that when we get enough circles and SCN members in some other city, we will finally have the worker bees we need to offer a *Writing from Life* weekend, a *LifeLines Retreat*, or a *Stories from the Heart Conference* outside of Austin!

This month I thought it would be interesting to see what some of our new circles' facilitators have to say about the process of starting and leading a circle in their town.

Meghan Miller Brawley listed her circle in Harker Heights, TX on our website in August this year. She says "So far, we've had a very good experience. We started with a three-hour workshop with Pat Flathouse and had 11 attendees. Our circle meets regularly once a month and we have six regular attendees. Even though we're a very diverse group, ranging from a college student to a grandmother, we've gotten to be good friends through sharing our stories. We're small enough so that facilitating is a very loose responsibility. I use the facilitator's guide, but sometimes we adapt the topics to fit our needs, and I mostly just end up being the timekeeper and the one to move discussion on to the next writing topic. It's more of a round-table group."

"For examples of what we're writing, you can check out our online page. We use wiki software, which is a way for many people to edit the same webpage, so we can all contribute and 'publish' the stories we want to share. It's been a great way to reach people who can't make every meeting and a way to share in between meetings."

To get there go to: http://www.ci.harkerheights.tx.us/hhplwiki/index.php?title=Saturday_Story_Shareers

Val Perry launched her circle in Valrico, FL last January. They call themselves "Life Writers Bloom!" Val says, "Like so many of the other story circles, our group began because we took a lifestory writing course at our local library and when it ended, we decided we wanted to keep meeting and develop our writing. Several of our members have submitted work to SCN and it has been accepted for publication. We have also had work published in our local newspaper, the *Tampa Tribune*. Our circle is one of several writing groups supported by the Friends of the Library at Bloomingdale. Our group consists of nine women ages 35 to 75 years old. We are a mix of writers, poets, artists, genealogists, and scrapbookers who are interested in exploring different ways we can present the stories of our lives. Three of us teach life story writing at the library several times a year."

"I think it helped us that we had all taken the class and were familiar with working in a writing group and giving posi-

tive feedback. This preparation allowed us to dip straight into Susan Albert's book of prompts, [*Starting Points*] and begin writing without expending a lot of energy on organization and guidelines. The fun part for us—sharing our stories—started almost immediately. At the end of an afternoon together, members comment that they feel uplifted!"

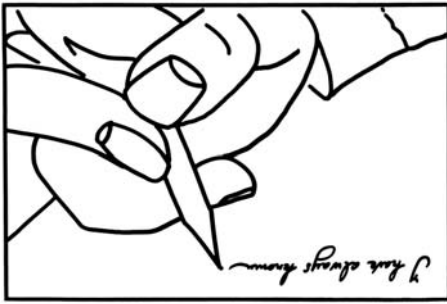
Val Perry has invited anyone who wants to learn more about her circle to email her at LifeWritersBloom@msn.com.

Whether you're a facilitator like Val or just like to journal on your own, *Starting Points: Weekly Writing Prompts for Women with Stories to Tell* is a wonderful collection of the best of Susan Wittig Albert's popular Women's Wise Words series. It's available directly from the publisher, Lulu, at <http://www.lulu.com/content/774054>. A hard copy is just \$8 plus shipping and handling, or you can purchase a download for just \$5.00!

If you are interested in joining a story circle in your community, check the website, www.storycircle.org, and scroll down to the Free Range Story Circles listing under the heading "How to Start a Story Circle." If there is no circle currently in your area, we invite you to start one! We have lots of help available including our very thorough Facilitator's Guide. The Guide contains everything you need: how to find members, how to facilitate a group, and prompts for six meetings. The Guide is free to SCN members and can be ordered via the "How to Start a Story Circle" section of the website. Story Circle Network member facilitators may also choose to join our Facilitator's Yahoo group, where they can post questions, give, and receive advice on organizing and running a circle.

If you have questions about circles, please contact the Circles Coordinator at freerangecircles@storycircle.org.





True Words from Real Women

A Sacred Place

A selection of short pieces of lifewriting by our members, edited by **Mary Jo Doig**. The theme of this issue's True Words section is "A Sacred Place." Contribute your own True Words to the Journal. Future topics are listed on page 18.

Goddess Breathing

Tabitha Kot

Mississauga ON Canada

Sitting innocently in my car,
Weaving my way through rush hour traffic,
Distracted and gnawing on a tart piece of Macintosh apple.

She silently, invisibly, slinks through the
Sliver-crack
Of my open window.

Gliding across the breadth of my shoulders,
Licking Her way up the back of my neck,
She slides seductively across my jawline,
Rises up to my ear and
Whispers, hotly,

Your Life
is your Sacred Space.

And She is gone.

I blink once,
Slowly,
Deliberately.

My eyes open to a
Whole
New
World.

She is in everything I see.
She is in everything I hear.
She is in all that I touch,
All that I taste,
All that I smell,
All that I know.

I see the jewel of the Goddess sparkling
In everything I behold.
The world becomes precious to me
In a Heartbeat
With Her
In it.

I am Home.



Last Visit

Linda Hoye

Auburn WA



She had invited me watch her die. Not purposefully, as I'm sure Aunt Edie didn't know that the day would be her last, but something in her voice compelled me to come. So I came, and our time together that afternoon reminded me what belonging and family felt like. I had forgotten.

Later that evening, we were at the home of her friend, Dorothy, catching up on old friends and family when suddenly I saw Dorothy's eyes widen as she looked across the table. "Edith?" she exclaimed.

I turned toward Aunt Edie and saw her lips moving the way a baby will do when blowing bubbles. For a moment I thought she was making a joke, and then I realized that something was terribly wrong. Her stare was blank and her body still, but for the burbling of her lips as air was expressed.

While I called for an ambulance, Dorothy hurried to the bathroom, returning with a wet facecloth which she instructed me to put on Aunt Edie's forehead. The cure-all for everything when I was a child had been a cool cloth on the forehead. I knew that this was not going to help Aunt Edie, yet I did as she instructed.

As we waited, I paced and prayed, horrified by the situation and by my reaction to it. I didn't know CPR, I didn't even know if CPR would help, but I felt that I could, that I should, be doing something. My aunt continued to express air in the same burbling manner. I sensed that she was already gone and that this was just her body going through the process.

When the paramedics arrived they moved her to the floor and connected a machine. "No heartbeat detected—check patient," I heard over and over again, the mechanical voice confirming my suspicions.

While I would not soon get over the horror of that day, and I wondered at the reason for my being present, it was a sacred gift to have been there in those final moments of her life. From this experience sprang a rebirth of a sense of purpose and strength within me. This was my aunt's final gift.



The Sidewalks of Chicago

Karen Ballinger
Austin TX

When I was little, I looked forward to days off from school because they meant shopping with Mom. Mom called her boss with “just a little white lie” to take the day off. We stood across the street waiting for the yellow school bus to take us to the train station. Mom held me back as the train approached, its big green square mouth whistling. I pressed my face against the glass watching the suburbs fly by, the landscape getting more industrial as we approached the city. The windows went dark as we entered the underground labyrinth of train tracks outside Union Station. Cold air blew back my hair as commuters crushed through the sliding glass doors and swarmed onto the sidewalks of Chicago.

Mom and I traditionally ate breakfast at Lou Mitchell’s, savoring the free homemade powdered sugar donut holes and small yellow box of Milk Duds. The bus carried us through the green latticework bridge to the Merchandise Mart, the mammoth imposing building with a three-story escalator in the lobby.

Mom worked at the Mart a long time ago and knew the tricks of getting samples from wholesalers. She steered us through dark empty hallways, the bright displays lighting our faces like Christmas lights. Stopping at a shop doorway, Mom asked gently, “Excuse me, do you have any samples available?”

Shuffling to the back of the store, we rifled through clothes with miniscule cuts in the seams, trying them on next to bottles of cleaner in the supply cabinet. We shopped until our last dollar, having just enough money for the train ride home.

In 2002, I ran the Chicago Marathon, burying my grief about the first of Mom’s two debilitating strokes. As I ran through downtown, I recognized the huge glass lobby and giant escalator on the ground floor of the Merchandise Mart, empty and imposing, just as I had remembered it. I started bawling, jogging by a sea of faces, realizing that the Mart will always hold a sacred place in my heart, a place where Mom and I shared a lot of happy memories.



Notes of Inspiration

Sallie Moffitt
Ovilla TX

Far from the city, deep in the woods, I sit in the shade of a sweet gum tree. Nobody knows where I am except the ruby-red cardinal chirping a staccato song.

I listen to the wind singing through the needles of the pine trees, whistling a familiar tune. Squirrels scamper on the bark of a hickory tree in a crescendo to the top. A cottontail rabbit thumps across a carpet of leaves. In a distant field, a chorus of wolves howls the refrain to nature’s song.

The rhythm of nature’s melody wakes my muse, inspiring it to hum along. With a pen in my hand, my paper below, now my writing begins to flow.

Nirvana

Doris Anne Roop-Benner, Richardson TX

My sacred place has always been a cemetery—any cemetery. I find them to be beautiful, serene, and close to God. I have written more poetry while sitting in graveyards than anywhere else. This haiku is my favorite:

Walking by the graves
Feeling their spirits rising
Must be Nirvana!



Smoke Signals

Dorothy Ross, Davis CA

We can’t see the flames
But there is no escaping the smoke
That shrouds the mountain.

Along the ridge, fat gray plumes rise
Like smoke signals from an ancient tribe.
What is their message?

Are they telling us and the other animals
To leave this area where fires surround us?
Is it an ancient warning system?

Ghostly shadows of purple pines
Hug the mountain base, barely visible
Through the haze.

Though we fret about the forest being consumed,
We find the wood-burning odors strangely seductive.
Like sleeping beside a campfire.

The air smells wonderful in the cabin,
But the surfaces are soon covered
With a layer of fine soot.

When the smoke finally clears,
We inspect the charred hillside
Looking for survivors.

There is no sign of animal life.
No birds chirping, no chipmunks scrambling.
Where have the deer gone?

The sepulchral sepia-tone
Is relieved only by black specters of spindly pines,
Their branches reduced to mere stubs.

At the feet of these forlorn spires,
A thick carpet of ashes cloaks the rocks
And disguises our favorite trails.

How long will it be before the green returns?
How many seasons of snow and rain and sunshine
Must pass until the flowers bloom again?

When will we heed the smoke signals
And take better care of the forest?
How do we begin?

More True Words

The Mountain Calls

Ardine Martinelli, Mt. Rainier WA



My heart is closing,
 busyness takes over the day,
 the week the month.
 My body yearns for peace,
 quiet renewal.

The mountain calls.

Leaving the busyness behind,
 hiking boots in hand,
 I return home
 to the rich landscape of the mountain.

Entering the trailhead my breath deepens.
 My body moves with each breath
 freeing the tightly held constraints.
 The rhythm of breath step silence takes hold.
 Head chatter stops and
 I become one with the trail.

Aware only of the wind
 caressing my body,
 the sun washing over me,
 cleansing my soul.
 Birds singing their melody,
 touching my heart.

My eyes open.
 I see the expansive world we live in.
 Snow covered peaks,
 multitudes of greens covering the land.
 Wildflowers—vivid magenta, bright blues, reds,
 yellows, purples, dot the velvet green.

The sound of water cascades down a rock front,
 rippling through a stream.
 I stop I listen.

Is there anything more beautiful than the sound of water?
 Flowing ever-changing, pulsing with life.

The Mountain Calls,

My ears hear the squeak of the pica,
 the high whistle of the marmot,
 clear loud
 announcing their presence to the world.

The hike continues,
 a body rhythm develops with the earth.
 I no longer walk on the earth,
 I walk with the earth.

My heart and soul open with each step,
 troubles, worries, doubts, fears—wash away.

At trail's end, a deep turquoise alpine lake shimmers in the sun.
 Nestled in trees, wind gently creates ripples circling outward.
 So easy to lose oneself
 in the beauty the serenity, of this lake.

Silence the only sound.
 Trees reflect on the surface,
 the turquoise shifts colors,
 shades of deep blue, pockets of blue/green.

God, reflected in all that my eyes behold.
 My heart and soul expand, absorbing the vastness,
 becoming vast.
 the sense of separateness is gone.
 I return to my world renewed whole.

When the mountain calls,
 I listen.

*A Place to Belong*

Connie Gray, Austin TX

Here is an e-mail inviting me to a workshop: *Stories to Tell*. Sure, I had thought about writing my life story, talked about it with my children, friends, and therapists. Here is the venue to make that thought a reality. I put it off. I think about it.

The thought nags at me while my inner child pulls on my heart, "You said you would tell our story when you were safe and happy. You are safe and happy."

I listen to my three year old self and go online to sign up. Damn, I realize my registration is a few days late. I register anyway.

Today I check the mail and there, standing tall, is a large manila envelope. *Story Circle Network*. The information sheets are non-threatening, benign, and factual. Then I begin to read the stories in the *Anthology*.

The pages start with stories of those with "normal" lives: the first taste of pizza, pony-tails swinging in innocent childhood, and acquiring a dog. The frustration, the feeling different, and the sadness set in. Here is one more place that I don't belong. I spent my entire childhood not fitting in and don't need one more place to remind me that I am different.

A few tears later I reopen the magazine and continue reading. Wait! Here is a woman's story about losing her children, like my mom lost us to a dysfunctional system run by people with power and no common sense. Another woman shares my experiences of being told that her emotions are wrong: "You want something to cry about? I'll give you something to cry about," rings loudly in my ears and tortures my soul. Here is a woman's story about finding solace at a friend's house during her turbulent childhood—my neighbors knew me well.

Perhaps I've found a place I do belong, a place to tell my story, a place to be heard. My three year old self relaxes and trusts me to tell her story. I think the workshop will be a place where I do belong.



A Sacred Place

Peggy Fisher, Camden NJ

I approached my fortieth birthday in a tunnel of darkness. But wasn't I a survivor who had traveled diverse roads as a young nurse, an army officer, a teacher, and now a guidance counselor? Hadn't I walked through these challenges with footsteps of purpose?

As I counseled my young students, multiple masks hid my pain. The weight of these masks left me drained; however, I pushed myself home to cook dinner and assist my three children with their homework. The living room couch and a cocktail supported my energy. I fell in bed exhausted, but my replay of negative tapes kept me grieving.

I had revealed my marital separation only to Katie, the school nurse, but not the extent of my pain or the details. Katie didn't know that each day as I waited for the train to go home I wondered, *How long can I move away from the platform and puff on this cigarette when a quiet voice in my ear says, "Jump?"*

One day, Katy said, "There's a yoga class starting in Center City next week." Somehow I knew this would energize my travel-stained path. I had dismissed the idea of a shrink sometime ago. Katy's suggestion became a reality when I began my journey to the sacred spaces within us by the daily lessons of hatha yoga. A few months later window-shopping around the city led me to a sign which read: *Transcendental Meditation Classes*. Soon I integrated this path with yoga and the darkness surrounding my soul continued to recede.

The exploration of these roads for over thirty years grounds my belief that there is universal force of light available to all of us. In the morning when I stretch my body with yoga, and a bird swoops down and crosses my window, I feel connected and humbled.

But my most sacred spaces are spent in daily meditations examining my imperfect soul:

Sitting in my chair
beginning meditation,
reflective events of the day
pierce my mantra.

Altered states of consciousness,
sometimes tears-
give me respite.
Restoring my equilibrium once more.

In Memory of Kelli

Patsy Morgan, Atlanta GA



I have lost one of my children to Death. Drowning. At eighteen months old. And now I walk this beach alone because this shore is my lifelong friend, hears every word I say, receives and disperses my grief. To me, the sea whispers, shouts, "Live, live." Its cresting waves announce that its Source is unending, that there will always be waves, ebb, flow. It speaks of continuous renewal.

With the blazing sun lighting my sweat-soaked body and lighting the white sands beneath my bare feet, I tread to find my child's soul. She's gone, but I see her, hear her, feel her. She is no place and she is everywhere.

Her tiny toes walked this sand. Her tiny voice whispered, "See bird fly! Fly, Mommy!" And as she toddled, waves lapped her new-found exploring feet: "Stay, Mommy. We stay."

Almost twenty yards away from me a heron now stands sentinel on one long spiny leg—the other leg tucked underneath his grey feathers. He is meditating on me, on this entire salty scene, unmoving, unflustered, wholly engaged, one-pointed attention. He does not thwart, he does not beckon. I absorb his presence. Just for this instant, I will be heron. And for the next, and the next with no space in between.

Near my naked feet, clear shallow pools of leftover high tide like mini salty crystal lakes hold scattered shells and seaweeds seemingly created for children—for Kelli to observe and to easily pluck these offerings for all who seek gifts. Where is Kelli?

Lying in a transparent pool, a five-petaled white sand dollar—with seaflower on its surface—when it breaks, reveals five little white birds as if in flight. Winged flight, soul-flight permeates this place. Seagulls fly the shore and pierce the sky with their screams. They trust only their own sailing selves. Does Kelli now sail these winds?

Also within the tide pool, a sun-bleached catfish skeleton picked clean by crabs and decay; its ornate spine like a Baroque crucifix—even here, Resurrection is not forgotten.

A Thin Place

Pat Turner

Tyler TX

Sitting down to write a story on a sacred place in what I refer to as my thin place, I wonder what makes a place sacred. I don't think it's the comfy worn green recliner I settle into nor is it the collection of family photos or the memory collage of the son I lost. It's not even the wooden rocker in which I rocked him and which still bears scars inflicted by a little boy playing with a knitting needle. It's not the fabric-covered screen displaying years of mementoes. It's not the familiar self-help books or meditation guides that line the shelves. It's not the worktable holding baskets of colorful paints and big fat brushes. It's surely not my latest efforts at watercolor tacked to the cork wall.

It's not any of these things and yet it's all of these things together setting this place apart. I recall reading somewhere that sacred means "set apart." All the conversations I've had here with my God, all the tears shed, all the uncontained joy, have permeated the walls and enfold me each time I enter this room and begin my daily ritual of communication with self and with God. The ritual and the things combine to make this a very thin space where the distance between the physical and the spiritual narrows to nothing. No wonder I don't want to leave.

More True Words

Blissful Slumber

Betsy Boyd, Maryville TN

The most sacred place on earth is in my home. It has been several places in my home, actually. During the past ten years it has moved around from time to time. At first, it was the ottoman in front of my oversized living room chair. Then it moved to the space underneath my desk where my feet go when I'm writing my morning pages. But at the moment, the most sacred place in the world is on the other side of my bed, up near the pillows. That is my cat's current favorite place to nap.

My cat has a lot to do. She keeps me company in the bathroom as I prepare for my day, lapping serenely at the dripping faucet while I blow dry my hair and apply my Maybelline One-Coat mascara. At the end of my day, she cheerfully welcomes me at the door and ushers me into the sanctuary of home. She brings me sacrificial moles from my yard to seal the deal between us.

For a solid year after my engagement ended, she kept me company in my big recliner as I put in hours of healing grief, fluctuating from uncontrollable, spastic sobbing to blankly staring into a derailed future. In our friskier moments, she plays Marco to my Polo and A-Rod to my Roger Clemens. We banter back and forth, Sonny and Cher-style, during trips to the vet. She never fails to ask for what she wants from me with that cat's voice that makes it clear her every wish *will* be satisfied by me. We're both really content with our arrangement.

It's exhausting stuff, being a cat. Her method is to indulge in extended periods of restorative sleep punctuated by brief intervals of full-out, wildly-authentic expressions of cat-ness. Lately, when I happen to pass through my bedroom and spot her on the bed in her quiet, blissful repose, her mouth affixed in that permanent, angelic smile all sleeping cats have, I am tempted to invade her peaceful meditations and scoop her up in my arms, holding her close in the hope that some of her grace will seep into me. But I resist and continue my task with a smile in my heart. Important work is being done there. And I know enough to keep a respectful distance from a sacred place when I see one.

When things got messy and out of control, I'd grab my library books and head to my secret place. My five younger siblings tried their best, but they never found me. Mom sort of knew where I was. Dad was always at work. My books were my only private possessions. The "kids," as I always referred to the bunch, knew better than to deface a library book. Dad would take his belt off if he had to pay money to the library.

Four houses down was a set of concrete steps that led to the baseball field of Inwood Park. Surrounding the field were cozy spots among thick woods. Daylight filtered through the towering trees, enough for me to read the stories in which I became a character. The oldest of six children in a low-income family was not the most exciting life. I survived by spending time alone high up in the Alps with an old grandfather, eating goat cheese and bread. Other days, I'd live in a log cabin out on a vast plain

To Dance My Dreams

Linda Sievers, Arcata CA

I was home between professional dance engagements on the day that I inserted the key into the brass lock of the oak door and entered the red brick building where my mother had brought me for my first dance lesson in 1950, just eighteen years before. I looked up two flights of familiar stairs leading to the dance, voice, and piano studios and began to climb, then paused. The bell over the door, that had announced entry of thousands of mothers who had brought children to their lessons for over five decades, was gone.

I walked up the first flight. Each step echoed memories of children laughing, vocal and piano scales ascending, mothers chattering together in the waiting room. I peeked into the dressing room and saw no traces of the ritual attire of ballet slippers, hair ribbons, or leotards left behind, only the musty smell of emptiness.

I began the second flight to the accompaniment of creaking stairs. Reflections of my hand enclosed in my mother's, and my teacher's encouragement stirred in my soul. I recalled lyrics ringing from the voice studio on my right and melodies resonating from the piano studio down the hall, as images of children in tap shoes came clacking up the stairs. Hired by my dance teacher as a young teen to demonstrate movement for children and to answer the phone, I lingered on the top floor and heard myself. "Good afternoon, college of music and dance. May I help you?"

Slowly I opened the door to the dance studio where I had grown from childhood through adolescence. I saw no mirrors, no ballet barres or grand piano, no photos of student dancers; only a pile of debris in the center of the room where I had learned to dance my dreams.

This old building, so dear to my heart, filled with warm impressions of my tender beginnings, would soon be leveled to make way for a parking lot.

I turned and hurried down the stairs into the sultry heat of August, tears searing my eyes.



and listen to my "Pa" play a fiddle at night and sleep in a loft.

The nuns at St. George School said the most sacred place was the sanctuary of our church, but they were wrong. My hidden place in the park was where I talked to God. That's where I cried. Where I prayed. A little writer's nook where I created stories like the ones in the library books. I was somebody else in that place, somebody who felt good about herself. No one made fun of me for wearing my cousin's hand-me-down clothes or teased me because my father was drunk so much.

When I felt strong enough, I'd return to the little wooden house up on the street, and Mom and I would just look at each other. Then I'd help finish hanging clean diapers on the line that stretched across the dining room.

I still wonder how Mom got by without her own secret place.

Inwood Place

Betty Anne Schmidt, Springfield TN

Awake the Dreamer

Barbara Smythe, La Verne CA

Delusional Dreamers, awake!
Rise up from your quiescent existence.
Throw back your covers of chronic consumption,
Abandon your plush pillows of power.

Awake! You are not an only child,
Entitled to suck Mother Earth dry,
While your brothers and sisters
Starve for simple sustenance.

Imagine a future where your insatiable appetite
Is replaced with social justice and spiritual fulfillment,
Where you want less, buy less, use less.
A future where there is enough for every living being.

Dream a new dream—a dream about caring
More about people, than about money and things.
Awake from your suspended consciousness
To a state of 'blessed unrest,' until your dream is reality
And Mother Earth is a sacred place again.



Home is Sacred

Tricia Stephens, Carrollton TX

Home is my sacred place where I am happy being surrounded by all that is comfortable and known. In the kitchen with my family's favorite foods are worn tools anchoring me to people and times past. Picking up my favorite cookbook I remember mom giving it to me 37 years ago. Drinking from a juice glass I remember me as a young child watching Grandma Frances transform it from a jelly jar. Cooking with my sons I wonder what memories they will recall when they are grown.

Home is a refuge from the busyness of life where I relax wearing my favorite jeans that have worn spots not because of fashion, but from many seasons spent together. Here I draw and write stories with my kids, and sit with my husband enjoying our time after the day's work.

I like taking daily vacations at home. A favorite spot is my back porch where I can sit quietly until someone finds me. Staring into the yard I notice the green of the grass, see the texture of the flowers, and hear birds as I become calm and fully in my body. Claiming this wonderful feeling of peace in chaos, I take it back inside.

Over the years my sacred place has become portable. Carrying a bag of knitting, I enjoy the feel of the yarn against my fingers and the clicking of the needles while waiting at appointments. The repetitive motion quiets my mind and seeing knitting grow from the needles is fun. Even more fun is watching my sons try on the slippers, gloves, and scarves I make them.

My home has birthed many sacred places, some constant and some changing from year to year. The trick for me is not to pick any particular one, but to enter whichever one presents itself and embrace it. This isn't easy, for when I'm stressed I want to bolt, but when I surrender I'm quickly surrounded by all that is comfortable and known, happy and safe again.



Sacred Season, Sacred Snow

Susan Ideus

Magnolia TX

In southern New Mexico there is a beautiful camp, set in tall mountains among towering pines and grand peaks. The heart of the camp is an old log chapel, dating from the 1930s. Inside, there are few amenities aside from functional wooden pews. But, oh my, does that chapel have soul! From early in the morning until late at night, campers worship and pray and make very joyful noises unto their Lord. Candles often burn in the windows, imparting a glow to the old burnished wooden walls, and enhancing the mellow scent of pine. It also serves as a sanctuary of extreme quiet, meditation, soul-searching, and prayer.

One winter, when my husband and I were living and working at the camp, the locals lamented the lack of snow—bad news for near-by ski areas and our winter camp attendance. Christmas Eve dawned clear and not very cold. A community service was planned for that evening in the chapel. Just at dark, the lovely luminarias, or *farolitos*, were lit along the walkways, to welcome guests and light the way for Baby Jesus.

Our music was presented by local talent, and the carols could surely be heard across several mountains. The last to perform was a teenage boy just learning to play the trombone. He apologized that he hadn't yet learned a holy song, but he entertained us with a lively rendition of *Let It Snow, Let It Snow, Let It Snow*.

Midnight was drawing near. *Silent Night* was sung softly as we lit candles to carry out into the darkness. The pastor opened the door...and it was snowing! From the accumulation, it was obvious that the snow had been silently falling for some time. The entire camp was wrapped in a mantle of pristine white and the quiet was deep and profound. The luminarias still glowed through the snow. We really were standing in a sacred place at this sacred time of year. It was an unexpected blessing and a record snowfall enjoyed by all. Our young trombonist, when teased about his song, just replied that God always heard prayers, even those coming from a trombone.



How hard it is to escape from places. However carefully one goes they hold you - you leave little bits of yourself fluttering on the fences - like rags and shreds of your very life.

~Katherine Mansfield

More True Words

The Breath of Life

Grace Fiandaca, Altamonte Springs FL

I searched for the sacred in your eyes
 But you, not knowing yourself,
 How sacred you are
 Closed your blue eyes forever
 With a single bullet,
 Killing more than you.

The house is bright with unnatural light
 The air dense with TV noise
 Bereft of night or wind.
 I slip out unnoticed
 Into the darkness

To the path I made of smooth pebbles
 Which snakes beside the garden
 I planted for you.

Purple periwinkles, yellow dahlias, orange zinnias
 A gift offered in your memory

From the young beauty
 Who cradled our son's tender heart,
 But by then their love was
 Collateral damage,

Another sacrifice on your funeral pyre.
 You killed more than you
 With your single bullet.

My angry words spill out in to the night:

"Protect your children
 Whom you left fatherless and broken,
 Do for them now
 What you did not do in life!"
 All the words I never said to you,
 Thunder forth from my lips.
 The night reverberates
 With my anguished cries.

Until at last, spent of words,
 I sit curled in silence on my pebble path
 My fingers digging damp dirt to hold
 In my palm it forms a cool balm.

Unfurling my fist to breathe in the scent of earth,
 The familiar musk opens wide
 My wounded longing.

Only then do I hear the night speak
 Offering my face to the wind
 It grazes my cheek like fingertips,
 Touches my lips and caresses my hair.
 Watching in awe, the sky shows me
 The clouds skim swift and sure
 Like kayaks on the river,
 Pushed along by an unseen current,
 While the moon dodges in and out
 Teasing me with its light.

Someone calls to me from the front door.
 I stand, brush off my shorts,
 And go inside.
 But the night, the wind, the earth,
 Follow me in from the garden
 Where I have been swaddled and rocked
 By the breath of life,
 By love,
 Undeterred by death.

Dedicated to Bobby Harriss (November 19, 1956 to April 23, 2007)
 May you abide in peace.

Free to Play

Roseanne Lasater, Spokane Valley WA

The barber strop hung from a nail on the kitchen wall, right beside the door. It stood out, black leather on white paint, a reminder of what would happen. It happened whether we were good or not. Sometimes when he missed the mark, and red welts showed, we stayed home on those days.

When he came home from work, we'd hide. And when he left us high and dry, it was no surprise. While our mother cried, we huddled around her, two at her sides, one at her feet. She cried so we cried. I saw it in my mind. It was my first family portrait. And suddenly we were homeless.

My mother packed us into the '47 Ford and drove us from Brooklyn to her brother's farm in Athens, Georgia. It was summertime. The streams run warm in Georgia in the summertime.

For the first time in my life, I was free to play. All I ever did in Georgia that summer was play. From sun up to sun down, barefoot, in our underwear, we had the free run of the farm. We slept in tepees. We lived outside, gathered wild eggs for breakfast, rode bareback, and swam in the irrigation canals.

Nobody entertained us, but we were entertained. None of the grown ups yelled at us, but we yelled and hollered all the day through. Nobody hit us, that was the main thing, and for the first time in my life, I wasn't afraid. It was a revelation.

I wanted that summer to go on forever. There was only the water flowing slowly by in the canal, the snort of a horse, the leaping of children in the yard, the sunshine, the sweat, and the easy roll of one day into the next. I'd never had a summer like that before.

But seasons come and go and that summer sure enough ended, as all summers do. One day, my mother got a letter, and she cried again, and then we went home. The barber strop was still there, hanging from a nail on the kitchen wall.

Quietude

Sharyn Pierot, Snohomish WA



Quietude. I don't know where I heard or read this word. I love it! It's what I want. How I want to walk. It feels reverent, sacred, spacious, natural. To walk lightly and reverently, embraced by the quietude of space, within and without. This is a characteristic I would like to make my own; not just in a specific moment at work where I consciously put on the mantle of quiet and open, but as a characteristic of who I am. To envelope myself in quietude and let it live through me. I'm thinking of an old growth forest. The essence of quietude: autumn decay, leaves falling, invisible rodents, busyness of decomposition, the monastic quiet of it all. That's what I want to be, this mystery.

There is a longing inside to be still. To be in the dusk of this quiet; not be moved out of the arms of this space. To walk through my days as in an abbey. At peace with everything that appears in front of me. Leaning toward life with a whispered, "yes," and looking it straight in the eye, loving me while I do.

A White Light Shone

Abby November
Austin TX



My two sisters, brother, and I were raised in a Brooklyn Jewish home. Our red brick home and shared porch was in a lower middle-class neighborhood. The family elders believed in gender delineation.

Girls could become teachers, caregivers, and servants to the male siblings. My parents believed that only men could have a *Bar Mitzvah* (coming of age) ceremony. Boys only could read the holy words in our *Torah* (bible.) In fact girls didn't go to after-school Hebrew and religious classes.

It was awesome, hearing the male congregation every Shabbath and holiday chanting prayers that my father's great-grandfathers had chanted. At our synagogue, women sat upstairs where we wouldn't distract the males by our voices and "wanton" looks. How could anyone be distracted by my voice—except a coyote howling at the moon? And where would one find a coyote in Brooklyn?

In my 50th year, I learned to read the holy books. In a *Bar* and *Bat Mitzvah* class for seniors in Austin, Texas, I slowly read and then chanted. I felt my knees and hands tremble with fear and excitement. Slowly, haltingly, then joyously I read those ancient words.

I felt a warm white light surround me. I felt my long gone mother's warmth and my grandfather's smile. I was alone and yet part of a greater light as I recited those words linking me forever to Sinai.



True Words Looking Ahead

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. Members only please. Here are the upcoming topics and deadlines:

Winds of Change—March 2009 (due January 15, 2009)

Pets—June 2009 (due April 15, 2009)

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

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

How I Discovered Story Circle

Dani Greer, Flagler CO

When Dani Greer and her husband moved to a small town on the High Plains, she decided to take the opportunity to write and explore the possibility of a career shift from the fine arts. "I'd read a book about growing up as a military brat, and decided to explore some of the memories and feelings associated with that."

At the same time that she joined Story Circle Network, Dani also joined a Yahoo! Group of women writers where she enjoyed an online camaraderie that fed her writer's soul.

"Late last year, when Susan and I tossed around the idea of a similar connection for SCN members, I knew this would be the draw to my greater involvement with SCN and life writing," says Dani. "Group energy is so powerful and motivating, and a good balance to writing, which is very isolated."

The Yahoo! SCN LifeWriters Group is open to members of Story Circle Network. If you're not a member, then join the organization first (dues are only \$35 per year) and then go to the SCN LifeWriters Yahoo! Group and follow the directions. Within a short time, Peggy Moody, SCN executive director, will confirm membership and approve entry into the Yahoo! Group.

The group is new but very active. And the benefits are great.

As Dani says, "In just a few months of group activity, I've learned so much about this genre of writing and how fascinating it is, not to mention its ever-increasing popularity. Everyone has a story to tell, and I don't think I realized how precious those stories are until chatting with other members online."

One of the discussions in the group has been around blogging. Why have a blog? How do you get a blog? When you get one, what do you do with it, especially if you see yourself as technologically challenged?

Dani has responded to the discussion in the most helpful way. She has set up a blog dedicated to helping wannabe bloggers enter into the fray for an online presence. Visit her (see address below) for her easy-to-understand start-up hints.

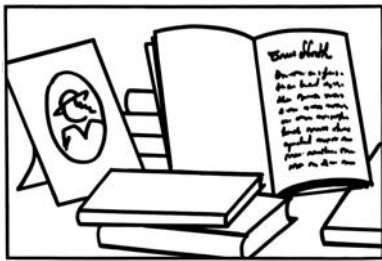
"I think a blog is one of the fastest, easiest, and certainly least expensive ways to have an online presence," she says. "If you're marketing anything, especially a book, a blog is essential. It's also a fabulous way to demonstrate your writing ability, so it's not a waste of time as many writers believe. It's just another form of writing that happens to have a higher online profile than a website. It's an essential tool and really easy-peasy when using Blogger." (Blogger is online blogging software.)

Dani thinks the other benefits of SCN are boundless. "I like the monthly eletters, the weekly writing prompts sent by Lee Ambrose in the Internet Chapter, the podcasts, the new Yahoo! Group, the *Journal*, and the SCN Book Review site. Not necessarily in that order, but they all contribute to an ongoing presence from day to day."

She adds: "I also like the fact that the group is very organized and well-run."

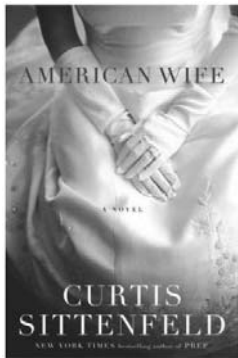
Visit Dani at <http://blogbooktours.blogspot.com> and at <http://bloodredpencil.blogspot.com>.





Story Circle Network's Book Reviews *Books for the Journey*

Story Circle Network hosts the most substantial women's book review site on the web. Read hundreds of reviews of books by, for, and about women. New reviews are added almost daily. www.storycirclebookreviews.org.



***American Wife: A Novel*, by Curtis Sittenfeld (Random House, 2008. ISBN 978-1-400-06475-5).
Reviewed by Patricia Pando**

It's 2007 and the United States President has problems. This joking, bluffing son of an ultra-loyal wealthy family is in big trouble. His quiet, former school-librarian wife stands loyally and quietly by his side. Sound familiar? But it is Charlie and Alice

Blackwell we're reading about.

Good thing the title points out this is a novel or one might easily mistake this Wisconsin beef-baron family for a real oil-business family from Texas. In her acknowledgements, author Curtis Sittenfeld gives a vigorous nod to Ann Gerhart's *The Life and Choices of Laura Bush*, a straightforward biography. She begins this book with a statement that an American first lady, "her husband, his parents and certain prominent members of his administration are recognizable." Are they ever! Sometimes I felt like I was peeking behind the lace curtains or spending the night at their house with too-thin walls.

The story is told in the voice of Alice, a small town girl growing up in unexceptional circumstances. One terrible night at the start of her senior year in high school, she was the driver in a car accident that took the life of the boy she cared for since her grandmother mistook him for a girl the summer before third grade. Alice's family and most of her friends support her, but she never puts the tragedy completely behind her. It haunts her through the final pages of the book.

As life goes on, Alice graduates from university and becomes a public school librarian, content with her life and loving her students. Then one night at a party a stroke of lightning named Charlie Blackwell strikes and everything changes.

Six weeks later they are engaged and visiting the extended and raucous Blackwell family at the family compound. They are all there: the three brothers and their wives, the patriarch (a former governor) and the overpowering matriarch Priscilla, known to the sons as Maj (short for Majesty) and Grandmaj by the kiddies. Six weeks after that the happy couple ties the knot.

I won't tell the rest of the story. You already know lots of it. But there is much more about Alice as a daughter, a granddaughter, a friend and a mother as well as a wife. Sittenfeld has an outstanding ear and gives more than a mere peek behind the

curtains. Through Alice's narrative the scope broadens beyond the wife of the title. There is much here about all of the roles in life—for Alice and for many women. The author also has an eye for place. She captures the feeling of small town America in the sixties, the university town bustle of Madison, and the touch of luxury that comes with life in an expensive suburb of Milwaukee. The Wisconsin settings come alive; those in Washington sound a less true note.

This is a story of a particular marriage, but also a story of many marriages, of accommodation and compromise, giving and taking, and, in the end, sticking to it and to each other for better and for worse.

Be warned: There are some explicit scenes.

Meet Patricia Pando



Having been born in Texas, I'm happy that I've just returned. It will make it easier to take care of my Story Circle responsibilities, and to visit a precious grandson. I have been an SCN member for many years, as well as a contributing editor to the Story Circle Journal and a member of the board. In 2005, I became president for a two-year

term. I also am a member of the Internet Chapter, where I have belonged to both reading and writing circles. Currently, I co-lead an OWL-Circle group near my home. Of all of my SCN activities, I particularly relish writing book reviews. Doing so has made me both a more careful reader, as I seek to capture the essence of a book, and a more adventuresome one, as I enjoy the fun of sharing a new experience. In the past, I taught college economics in Texas and Georgia. Now I enjoy writing, reading, and gardening at home in Bainbridge, Georgia, where I write a column on food and history for the local newspaper.

Patricia Pando specializes in reviewing books about Food, Cooking and Kitchen Matters.

Join Our Review Team

We're looking for strong reviews of books by, for and about women. If you'd like to join our review team, check out our guidelines by following the link on the Book Review Home Page, www.storycirclebookreviews.org.



Online Learning

Continued from page 7

What to Keep: An Introduction to Memoir Writing.

Robin Reger

You're special; absolutely unique. No one else's life has been exactly like yours. But your experiences are universal: everyone has felt the disappointment of a goal not realized, the joy of a new friendship, the love for a special someone, the delight in something new. These universal experiences, these memories, can create a connection between us, a bond between writer and reader. In this course we'll explore how to choose from our life experiences to write stories that resonate with our readers. We'll practice the techniques of our craft in a safe and supportive environment, improving our skills and gaining knowledge. And we'll have a good time.



Journaling a Path Through the Chakras: A Unique Approach to Journaling for Self-Discovery and Personal Growth.

Amber Starfire



In this course, we approach self-discovery and personal growth by journaling a path through the seven chakras. Through the act of journaling we wend our way through the metaphorical chakras of our lives, beginning with the root chakra (related to instinct, security, survival, and human potential) and ending with the crown chakra (related to consciousness and connection with the divine), exploring the various ways we experience our lives. Feedback in this class is designed to encourage and deepen understanding and insight. Students will receive a free copy of the teacher's Starfire Creativity Journal software. (Note: While this course is structured according to the classic Hindu chakras as a guideline, it does not require or endorse any particular religious belief.)

Writing Wild! Using Nature and Place as Inspiration.

Susan Tweit

This is an individually-tailored workshop with an award-winning writer and naturalist, exploring ways to write from and about nature and place, focusing on writing exercises, techniques, and markets. You will identify a landscape or place that inspires you and name a dozen key species that define that place. You will "listen" to the land and record what it has to say, then write a personal essay, story, or poem depicting your relationship and what makes the land speak to you. In addition, you will learn how to research markets for your work.



Memory to Memoir, Part One.

Paula Stallings Yost



Overwhelmed by the idea of producing a life story? Wonder where to begin? Stop fretting and just do it. The delights and benefits of reminiscence will be revealed as you write your personal or family history, one great story at a time. In this class, we will learn effective life-writing techniques while we relax and have fun with a variety of writing and memory-jogger exercises. You will compose four short stories that will be edited by the instructor and returned with helpful suggestions for improvement or expansion. You will learn tips for transitioning and organizing the stories into a creative nonfiction narrative. Writing guidelines, story ideas, and a bibliography of suggested reading materials will be provided as well.

Save The Date!



Stories from the Heart V February 5-7, 2010



Keynote speakers:

Heather Summerhayes Cariou, author of *Sixtyfive Roses*

Mary Gordon Spence, author of *Finding Magic in the Mundane*.

Join us in Austin, TX, February 5-7, 2010 for SCN's fifth national lifewriting conference! The conference brings together women from far and near to celebrate our stories and our lives. Through writing, reading, listening, and sharing, we will discover how personal narrative can be a healing art, how we can gather our memories, and how we can tell our stories.





Gain Experience & Make a Difference *Become a SCN Board Member*

By Joyce Boatright with Lisa Shirah-Hiers

Did you know that Story Circle Network is almost entirely run by volunteers? Our Board members are devoted, hard-working women who love the fun and fellowship of actively working together to keep Story Circle running strong. We are at a critical juncture in our history as we enter our second decade and need lots of willing hands and hearts to maintain the services we already provide and to grow into the future with on-line courses, a blog, podcasts, a for-fee editing service and hopefully a retreat or conference or Writing from Life that is offered outside Austin!

Service on the Board of Directors is a great way to gain new skills and learn new things while giving back to Story Circle Network all that you have received from our wonderful, women-focused organization.

The Story Circle Network's Board of Directors is currently seeking bright, enthusiastic new directors. If you are a Story Circle Network member who would like information about serving on our board, including what is required of our board members, keep reading.

Membership on the board of a non-profit organization is an important responsibility, for the health and vitality of the organization depends heavily on the energy and enthusiasm of its board of directors. As a mostly-volunteer non-profit organization (that is, we have only one staff member: our Executive Director), the Story Circle relies on its directors not only for guidance and good ideas, but for help in implementation of those ideas. We are committed to recruiting board members who are willing to devote their creative energies, their enthusiasm, and their time to helping the Network grow.

As a member of the Story Circle Network board, you will be asked to pledge to help us in the following ways:

1. Make a commitment to support and further the continued development of the Story Circle's mission and purpose.
2. Agree to serve the term to which you are appointed. (A full term is 3 years. However, some directors may be appointed to fill an uncompleted term.)
3. Assist other directors in meeting the responsibilities of a non-profit board by
 - a. developing and monitoring the Network's programs and services
 - b. ensuring effective organizational planning
 - c. ensuring adequate resources
 - d. managing resources effectively
 - e. enhancing the Network's public image, both locally and nationally
 - f. assessing the board's own performance
 - g. assisting in the recruitment of Network members and volunteers

4. Attend at least three of the four board meetings per year, preparing for the meetings by reviewing all pre-board meeting materials. (You may attend meetings via telephone, and you should notify the executive director in advance when you expect to be absent.)
5. Serve on at least one workgroup (i.e. Program, Membership, etc.) or committee, attending meetings in addition to scheduled board meetings and carrying out promptly any activities you volunteer to undertake.
6. Participate in the board development workshop (if scheduled).
7. Attend a minimum of one national Network activity each year (i.e. a workshop, class, or lecture), as a board representative.
8. Keep a tally of the hours you volunteer to the Network, including board and workgroup meetings, plus your other work time, and submit it regularly. (You will not be asked to identify yourself. Our purpose here is to tally the total hours volunteered by the board, not the hours of individuals.)

Regularly reassess your commitment to the Network. If you find it difficult to fulfill your responsibilities to the board, please discuss your feelings and concerns with an executive officer. ❖

SCN Sugar Bowl Scholarships



A number of women have asked us to help them find sponsors for their SCN memberships. To meet this need, the SCN board of directors set up a scholarship fund in 2002, called the Sugar Bowl. This year, we sponsored 21 women Sugar Bowl scholarships.

Why not become a contributor to this worthwhile program? To add your contribution to our Sugar Bowl Scholarship Fund, send a check to: Sugar Bowl, Story Circle Network, PO Box 500127, Austin, TX 78750-0127. You may also use PayPal to pay on the SCN website at www.storycircle.org/Donations/sugarbowl.shtml

Summary of Board Meeting October 12, 2008

Highlights from the October Board Meeting:

- SCN will begin accepting direct credit card payments in the next few months.
- We're in the process of redesigning our website.
- We are developing an editorial service to provide both basic and developmental editing. We will create a website to make these services available to both SCN members and the general public via the Internet.
- A new slate of officers was approved: Joyce Boatright, President; Helen Lowery, President Elect; Lisa Shirah-Hiers, vice President; Becca Taylor, Secretary-Treasurer.
- Our national conference, Stories from the Heart V, is planned for the first weekend of February, 2010.

Story Circle Network Podcast



Tune in every month to hear our stories and learn more about the art of lifewriting.

Listen on your computer, portable audio player, or by phone!

(831) 480-3977

<http://scn.libsyn.com>

“Storytelling is healing. As we reveal ourselves in story, we become aware of the continuing core of our lives under the fragmented surface of our experience. We become aware of the multifaceted, multichaptered ‘ I ’ who is the storyteller. We can trace out the paradoxical and even contradictory versions of ourselves that we create for different occasions, different audiences.... Most important, as we become aware of ourselves as storytellers, we realized that what we understand and imagine about ourselves is a story. And when we know all this, we can use our stories to heal and make ourselves whole.”

~Susan Wittig Albert~ *Writing From Life*



This membership is a gift.

Join the Story Circle Network!

Annual Membership:

- _____ USA: \$35
- _____ Canada & Mexico: \$45 (International MO)
- _____ International \$50 (International MO)
- _____ Internet Chapter: \$18/yr (in addition to your national dues)
- _____ Sample copy of the *Story Circle Journal*: \$5

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

9/08

My name and address:

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ - _____

Phone _____

My phone and e-mail:

Email _____ Amount enclosed _____

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

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



A Story Circle Network Affiliated
Women's Workshop
*Sing to Feel,
Write to Heal*

Presented by Lisa Shawley, Music Therapist and
Lisa Shirah-Hiers, Music Teacher and Writing Facilitator

Thursdays, February 5 - March 26, 1:00-2:00
At The Senior Activity Center,
2874 Shoal Crest Ave.
(off 29th and Lamar Blvd., Austin, TX)

You will explore and express your hidden talents in a safe and fun-filled circle of women. Through the powerful combination of music and life writing, facilitators Lisa Shawley and Lisa Shirah-Hiers will help you discover and share your creativity as you uncover your inner wisdom, your unique life's rhythms and the healing power of your life's stories.

For more information & to register contact:

Lisa Shawley
at flymetothemoon@juno.com
512-382-1687

Or

Lisa Shirah-Hiers
at lshirah@hotmail.com
512-832-0207



Please put "Sing to Feel" in the subject line.

Mark Your Calendar *SCN Events & Deadlines*

January 15, 2009: Deadline for March *Story Circle Journal* submissions. True Words theme: "Winds of Change."

February 1, 2009: Deadline for submitting online class proposals for April 13–June 8.

March is National Women's History Month

April 15, 2009: Deadline for June *Story Circle Journal* submissions. True Words theme: "Pets"

April 15, 2009: Last day to register for LifeLines Writing Retreat.

May 15-17, 2009: LifeLines Writing Retreat with Lisa Dale Norton, Round Top, Texas.

SAVE THE DATE
Stories from the Heart V
February 5-7, 2010

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

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