



Story Circle Journal

Vol. 12 No 2, June, 2008

The newsletter for women with stories to tell...

The Self-Publishing Issue

*Did you know that 2008 could be the first year that more books are published by authors than by traditional publishers? SCN has already joined the party, using print on demand services to self-publish the 2007 Starting Points writing prompt book. Editor **Jane Ross** introduces the Journal's self-publishing issue, bringing you the information you need to start your own self-publishing journey.*

As a young copyeditor working in London in the 1980s, I belonged to the National Union of Journalists (NUJ). Posted on the notice board by my desk was a postcard I had bought at an NUJ event. It showed a middle-aged woman operating an offset printing press. The caption read: "Freedom of the press belongs to those who control the press." What I loved about that postcard was the sense it gave me that the writer (and even then I aspired to be one) was in control of her own destiny. At the end of the day, if I couldn't find a publisher for my writing, I could print it myself!

Fast forward twenty-five years and the ways that writers can "control the press" have exploded beyond anything we could have imagined. Readily available computer software means that, with a modest amount of training and practice, any author can produce professional-quality book layouts. And the explosion of companies offering self-publishing services on the internet gives authors easy and inexpensive access to the presses to produce good quality printed editions of their books in modest quantities and at reasonable prices. Truly 2008 is the year of the self-published author.

In our first self-publishing issue of the *Journal*, we hear from several SCN members who have taken up the challenge of the new software and online print on demand (POD) services to publish their own personal writings. And we interview a member who used a traditional book printing company to self-publish her book.

Self-publishing offers great possibilities to the memoirist, but it also has many pitfalls for the novice. If you're new to self-publishing, start with our Self-Publisher's Glossary on p. 6. And after you've read the articles, check out the list of resources on p. 4.

The rules of the self-publishing game are changing constantly as POD companies compete, new ones arrive, and others go under, so if you're serious about self-publishing, it's important to try and follow industry news and trends. See our Resources list and Self-Publisher Alert on p. 4 for links to industry websites.

"Controlling the press" offers many benefits for the memoirist and is now within reach of all of us. ❖

Enter SCN's
Susan Wittig Albert
**Lifewriting Competition,
2008**

This year's topic:
Growth and evolution
Details and rules on p. 8

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A Letter from SCN's President



Reading was the hook that got me into Story Circle Network, but I believe it's my awareness of the stories in our lives that has kept me here. Ten years of reading women's memoirs will do that for you. My writing started in an on-going OWL group that has met monthly since I facilitated the class about eight years ago. Both the reading and the writing have significantly raised my consciousness of the stories that are all around us. Recently, in several different activities that occupy my time, personal writing has been the topic.

Conversation Café is something I enjoy on the first Saturday of every month. I was drawn into the group by Leilani Rose (past Vice President of SCN). Anyone can participate in the structured "conversation," which was started to encourage strangers to get together and have a conversation—no intention to persuade, but just to talk and listen, with emphasis on listen. (Go to www.conversationcafe.org to learn more about this national organization.) On the first Saturday in April, the question we discussed was "What is the legacy that you would like to leave?" In the course of the conversation, without any prompting from SCN members who were there, several of the women in the group mentioned that they were either in the process of or planning on writing down some of their history to pass along to their family. One was planning a family reunion where information would be collected and shared. Needless to say that after the session was over, these women were made aware of Story Circle Network!

Sitting in church a few weeks later, I was reading the back of the church bulletin which contained some quotes from *Love: A Guide to Prayer* by Bergan and Schwan: "Journaling is meditative writing. When we place pen on paper, spirit and body cooperate to release our true selves." "To journal is to experience ourselves in a new light as expression is given to the fresh images that emerge from our subconscious. Journaling requires putting aside preconceived ideas and control." The rest of the piece goes on to mention how journaling can be used in a prayerful way.

One other example from yet a totally different environment. I volunteer in an ESL class once a week and recently the small-group assignment required the students (mostly Asian) to write a humorous paragraph on one of these topics: "How to get fat, lose a girlfriend/boyfriend, embarrass your husband/wife, or lose a job." Of course, the teaching lesson here was to provide an opportunity to write in English, read it back and make corrections. However, it was interesting to see how personal some of the writing was and what it reflected about the individuals.

As lifewriters, I'm sure most of you have similar experiences to relate. There are wonderful stories all around us—all we need do is to pay attention. And, if you have some particularly interesting stories, I encourage you to share them on the new internet forum: SCN Lifewriters, which you can read about in this *Journal*. And I encourage you to spread the story of Story Circle to those women you meet with stories to tell. ❖

Penny Appleby
Story Circle Network President.

SCN's Mission: The Story Circle Network (SCN) is dedicated to helping women share the stories of their lives and to raising public awareness of the importance of women's personal histories. We carry out our mission through publications, a website, classes, workshops, writing and reading circles and woman-focused programs. Our activities empower women to tell their stories, discover their identities through their stories and choose to be the authors of their own lives.

Story Circle Journal

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

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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.

Why Choose Print on Demand?

SCN member and self-published author **Betsy Kelleher** reflects on why she chose print on demand to publish her two books.

Even *Writer's Digest* magazine's two-year course on writing book proposals didn't help me snag a traditional publisher's favor! I finally discovered an easier way. I paid a couple thousand dollars to a print on demand publisher, and a few months later I held my beautiful book in my hands!

That simple solution gave reality to an idea conceived 30 years before. After all those years of queries and rejections, re-writing again and again, I finally realized from talking to publisher representatives at writers' conferences that my subject matter was the problem. My book was a personal-experience story of the horse and rider relationship but it also shared my discovery of a spiritual message and parallels between horse training and Christian discipleship. Traditional Christian publishers didn't want horses, and equine publishers didn't want religion. I believed in my message, but my book didn't have enough profit potential for a traditional publisher.

Print on demand (POD) publishers don't send rejection letters. For a fee, almost any book idea can quickly become a reality. You pay the publisher set-up fees (if any) and then you pay a discounted price for each book you order. You also receive royalties for each book sold through various websites and bookstores. You don't have to buy thousands of books and worry about storage or being stuck with books you can't

sell. You won't get rich, but you can get your message or story into print.

"Print on demand" means that each book is printed and bound (in a matter of minutes), as orders are received. It's perfect for family histories, memoirs, manuals and books with limited markets. Most print on demand books sell a few hundred copies (over 500 copies is unusual) and it can take three years for a print on demand book to really start selling (or not).

While researching POD publishing, I discovered Dehanna Bailee's Database website, listing almost 100 companies. Author of fiction and non-fiction books, e-books and articles, Bailee offers this valuable resource on the internet. (See the Resources list on p. 4.)

Costs of print on demand vary. Xlibris has seven programs, priced from \$299 to \$12,999 and iUniverse offers three, from \$599 to \$1299. Infinity has one basic program for \$499 plus add-ons. All publishers have "add-ons," so choose what you need and add that to the basic fee. Proofreading or editing is well worth the cost, even though it adds more time. Some companies offer marketing help for a fee, mostly in materials such as postcards, business cards, or bookmarks.

Learn all you can about the process before you start. Determine your budget, what help you need, and where you want to go with your book. List features that are important to you, then compare what various publishers offer. Remember these websites are geared toward signing new authors. Look for information not included on the site and don't assume anything. Research thoroughly. Take your time and don't feel pressured by a current sale. Ask every question you can think of and don't sign up until you have answers! Consider the number of free books offered, how royalties are figured and what discounts are offered. When you see "up to" 70% discount for authors, ask how many books you have to buy to get that discount! Determine the cost of graphics (if applicable) and of possible changes in the galley proof. Request sample copies from the companies you are considering or visit bookstores to see examples of covers, interior layout and overall quality.

For my first book (published with Pleasant Word Publishers, a division of WinePress Publishing), I chose from four programs, priced from \$799 to \$1999. I wanted the top Blue Ribbon program, until I discovered the additional cost of required editing. I chose the Red Ribbon, which only required proofreading (a lower additional fee). I was impatient with the time spent on several rounds of changes, but I learned a lot during this process with much needed help and advice. I appreciated getting thorough answers to all my questions. This

For those who enjoy "horse stories"

MARES! (Ya Gotta Love 'Em): Fifty Stories to Aid and Inspire Mare Owners

Compiled by Betsy Kelleher
(2008)

Visit Betsy's website:
www.goduseshorses.com

Or call
(618) 977-5638
for more information.



(Continued on page 4)

Why Choose Print on Demand? (continued from page 3)

publisher truly helped me mold a better product, for which I am extremely grateful! I was very pleased with the cover and with the service from this publisher. Their convenient website lets me check my book's sales and order books.

My second book contained stories from many other writers and I wanted to give each one a free copy, so I looked for a publisher that offered lots of free books. Because Xulon Press was highly recommended by a knowledgeable editor and a friendly bookstore manager, I signed with Xulon Press and paid almost \$400 for books to give away. I emptied my savings into Xulon's "Best Seller" program (with all the features I wanted), which happened to be "on sale" at the right time. Editing or proofreading were not required and would have totaled more than I could afford, so I enlisted a fellow writer to edit parts of the book in return for a free copy.

There are problems with print on demand. Photo quality is lower than with offset printing, and I would advise against larger photos (but I was very pleased with the photo quality from Xulon Press). Book reviewers for major publications will not usually review POD books. And Borders, for example, will not schedule book signings for POD authors. Publishers make books *available* to thousands of stores, but those

stores may be hesitant to *stock* POD books. Bookstores favor good discounts and the ability to return books that don't sell, so choose a package accordingly. Pleasant Word offered returnability but later charged for returns rather than subtracting from the royalties. Personal contact encourages bookstores, and consigning a few copies may help.

Publishing a book is a business and one should be realistic about costs involved. Selling my own books, I cleared up to \$7 each when selling in person. Mailing costs, PayPal fees and other costs need to be considered. Last year, I spent \$557 on ink cartridges alone (I print my own marketing materials). I made \$8 from one customer who ordered directly from the publisher and about \$1.21 for each sale to a bookstore. But why pay full retail price to a publisher when Amazon.com sells for less? Personally, I find great satisfaction from my books, but I'm glad they are not my only income! ❖

Betsy Kelleher has written a monthly column for the *Illinois Horse Network* (newspaper) since 1996 and now has two books published about horses, with two different print on demand publishers. Her website is www.goduseshorses.com.

Self-Publisher Alert

Keep an eye on industry websites to keep track of the changing rules of self-publishing.

In April this year, Amazon.com created new rules affecting the POD books that it advertises on its huge and influential retail website. Industry insiders believe that these rules could have the effect of reducing the choices available to self-publishing authors who want their books to be listed on Amazon.com.

Amazon owns print on demand publisher BookSurge. The company's new rules are intended to encourage self-publishing authors to use BookSurge to publish books that they want listed on Amazon. Authors who use POD publishers other than BookSurge are asked to join Amazon's Advantage marketplace and provide a small stock of books. This adds a small additional burden to the process of having their POD book listed on Amazon. BookSurge's production quality has been criticized by some in the industry and knowledgeable POD-industry voices are suggesting that Amazon's new rules may be anti-competitive.

You can read about Amazon's rules at the website of the American Society of Journalists and Authors and the self-publishing industry's response at the website of the Self-Publishers Association of North America: www.asja.org and www.spannet.org.

Amazon's response is at: <http://phx.corporate-ir.net/phoenix.zhtml?c=176060&p=irol-printondemand>

Many other blogs and websites discuss self-publishing issues, so use Google Search to see what people are saying about the industry and about specific POD publishers. Always double check the information that you read in opinion blogs against other sources. ❖

Resources for Self-Publishers

Resources Mentioned in Betsy Kelleher's Article

Database of print on demand publishers: <http://dehanna.com/database.htm>

Writer's Digest magazine website: www.writersdigest.com

POD publishers mentioned: www.winepressbooks.com, www.xulon.com, www.iUniverse.com, www.xlibris.com, www.infinity.com

Resources Mentioned in Sharon Lippincott's Article

Free software needed to read a PDF e-book: Adobe Reader
To download Adobe Reader, visit www.adobe.com/products and click "Get Adobe Reader."

Sharon's own e-book on creating beautiful PDFs: *Make Your Pages Picture Perfect*: www.sharonlippincott.com/downloads/Picture_Perfect_Pages.pdf

SCN Conference digital scrapbook: www.storycircle.org/Conference/SFHscrapbook.pdf (3.7 MB)

Free software that can be used to create e-books: OpenOffice, PDF Creator, CutePDF

Other software that can be used to create e-books: Microsoft Word and Microsoft Publisher (part of Microsoft Office suite), Adobe Acrobat and Adobe Acrobat Pro, Adobe Photoshop

POD publishers mentioned: www.lulu.com, www.createspace.com

Create Your Own Digital E-Book

Using your computer to create lively page layouts for e-books is easier than you think. PDF files offer something for everyone, as **Sharon Lippincott** explains.

Many of the women attending the 2008 *Stories from the Heart* conference brought stories and pictures for posting on a Story Wall. Since it's easy to get busy visiting and forget about the wall, this year's committee decided to compile those stories into an online scrapbook. I happily agreed to adopt this project, which is posted online (see Resources list on p. 4). The contents are heartwarming, and the rich diversity makes it a treasure.

Although the finished scrapbook may look complicated, making it was simpler than it seems. If you can use a word processing program, you can make e-books like this. I used two different methods to convert the stories into PDF files (the ones that open using the free Adobe Reader software).

I scanned several printouts directly into Adobe Acrobat where I saved them as PDF files. Some did not scan as crisply as others, but I was able to get Microsoft Word documents from the authors and convert those directly to PDF files. I created the cover pages in Adobe Photoshop, wrote the Table of Contents and similar pages in OpenOffice, then pulled all the completed PDF files into a single document in Adobe Acro-

bat. You don't need Photoshop. I could have made a perfectly adequate cover in OpenOffice or Microsoft Word.

PDF files are useful for many other purposes. I send PDF versions of stories to friends and relatives so I can use any font or formatting and the story will look the same on any computer and remain unchanged through multiple forwards. Teachers and workshop leaders can share handout files as downloads like the e-book posted on my website (see Resources). You can share collections of family history documents and pictures in PDF albums that you save on CD or DVD disks. You can upload PDF files to online publishing services like Lulu.com or Amazon's CreateSpace.com for surprisingly affordable printing and binding of even a single copy. (You can download a free e-book memoir of my preschool years by searching for my name on Lulu.com.) I print receipts from online orders as PDF files for easy storage and retrieval, and PDF is recommended as one of the most stable formats for long-term archiving of finished files.

Several free alternatives to the pricey Adobe Acrobat program are available. PDFCreator and CutePDF are reliable. Either of these, like Acrobat, are able to create PDF files from any software that lets you print, such as Microsoft Publisher, graphics programs or genealogy programs, and web pages. OpenOffice also includes a robust PDF utility. Over a year ago, I switched from Microsoft Office to this free, full-featured, open-source office suite program and have never regretted the choice.

Converting a document to PDF format amounts to "printing" it to a file rather than paper. Even with Adobe Acrobat Pro, you create your document in another program before "printing" with Adobe PDF as the selected printer. Write your story, edit and format it in your word processing program, and do anything you'd do to prepare a document for printing on paper. PDF Creator and CutePDF work just the same way. In OpenOffice, rather than printing, you select "Export as PDF" from the file menu. The OpenOffice PDF utility does not work with other applications.

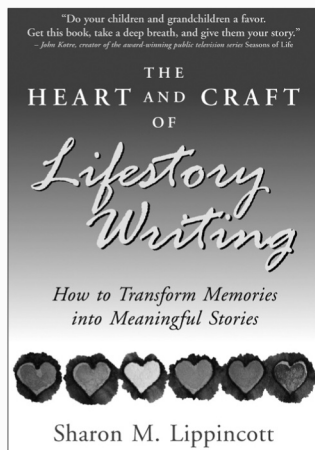
Regardless of the tool you use to create PDF files, be sure to save your working document in the program you used to create it, because you can't edit a PDF file. If you find typos or want to make other changes, you'll have to go back to that original document to make changes, then redo the PDF.

With Adobe Acrobat, you can combine individual PDF files into a composite document, as I did for the scrapbook. Lacking that, you can combine multiple files ahead of time by pasting them into a single document in a word processing program. If you want to add full-page scans of photos, artwork, hand drawn posters or whatever to a composite document, set

(Continued on page 6)

Every life has a story...

Aspiring lifewriters can benefit from the methods, tips and encouragement provided in:



Learn to create meaningful stories and collections that will be treasured for generations from lifestory writing instructor and coach, Sharon Lippincott.

...How will you tell yours?

Visit: www.SharonLippincott.com and
www.HeartAndCraftBlogSpot.com for more information!

Create Your Own Digital E-Book (continued from page 5)

the margins for that page to zero all around, and use the Insert menu to insert a picture from scanner. Set your scanned area to full-page size. Don't let warning messages about printable areas deter you unless you are creating the document for later printing on paper. Check Lulu.com or CreateSpace.com layout guidelines if you are working on a file to upload there.

As you can surely tell, I have lots of fun with PDF files and e-books, and hope you will give them a try too. I welcome any questions you have via email. ❖

Sharon Lippincott leads workshops and presents programs on lifestory writing in Pittsburgh and around the country. She is the author of *The Heart and Craft of Lifestory Writing*, *The Albuquerque Years* (a memoir of her years as a pre-schooler), and numerous published stories and articles. Her blog on lifestory writing has been generating comments from around the world for over two years. You can read it at <http://heartandcraft.blogspot.com>.

Contact Sharon at ritergal@gmail.com.

A Self-Publisher's Glossary

Before you dive into self-publishing, it helps to have a few definitions clear.

Traditional publisher: When we talk about a "traditional publisher" or a "publishing company," we're referring to a company that issues literary works for sale to the public but, most significantly, we mean that this company assumes the business risk of issuing those works. The company pays all the costs of producing saleable versions of those works (whether books or audio CDs or other formats) and expects to recover costs, plus a profit, as the copies sell. Because traditional publishing companies are in business to make a profit, they are highly selective about which books they will agree to publish, and this is the source of many authors' frustration with traditional publishers.

Self-publishing means that it is the author who assumes the business risk of publishing their own literary work. The author pays all the costs associated with getting their work out to the public. The author may hope to recover those costs as the book sells, or she may be content just to get her writing out to an audience, regardless of the cost.

Traditional book printer: Printing companies are not the same thing as publishing companies. Publishing companies typically send books out to be printed by traditional book printing companies (sometimes overseas) where the pages of the book are printed in quantities of hundreds or thousands of copies on offset printing presses and bound using binding machines. The printing process requires the use of printers' plates, which are expensive to create. By printing many copies, the printer spreads the cost of the plates over the whole print run, which gives a moderate price per copy.

Small traditional book printers (especially local companies with a good reputation) can be an appropriate choice for self-publishing authors who know they can sell 1000 or more copies of their book.

Print on demand (POD): This refers to printing and binding single copies of a book (or a very short run) using photocopy technology. Since POD printing machines produce copies directly from an electronic file (no printing plates are needed) and the binding machines used are highly automated,

it is possible to produce a single copy of a book at a time for a very reasonable cost.

For the author, the advantage of POD technology is that it allows her to easily make her book available to customers without having to pay thousands of dollars to print large quantities of books. There is no inventory of books to store, and the POD publisher will often handle book orders, payments, and mailing of books to customers.

Print on demand publisher: There are many companies on the internet offering to print self-published books using POD technology and to handle order fulfillment. Unlike traditional publishers, they do not assume the business risk of producing books. They require that each author cover the costs of creating their print-ready computer file. Correctly speaking, these companies are "publishing services" companies rather than publishers.

Most such companies offer the author a menu of publishing services for a price. Services offered include substantive editing, copy-editing, proofreading, book design and cover design, page layout, and marketing assistance. Since offerings and prices vary enormously, it's vital that the self-publishing author be clear about exactly what services she needs. And she'll need to research the best-rated companies and ask many questions of them so she can compare their services and prices and find the one that's right.

See our Resources list on p. 4 for links to online information and web pages for POD companies.

Print on demand printing: Many of the smaller POD publishers do not have copying machines on their factory floors. In fact they may not have a factory floor at all. They may outsource the printing and distribution.

The largest POD publishers have their own in-house POD copiers, often Xerox DocuTech copiers, and automatic binding equipment.

POD royalties and creator revenues: POD publishers usually credit the author every time a customer orders their book and they refer to these payments as royalties or creator revenues. Some POD publishers allow you to set your own cover price and royalty amounts, others tell you what the cover price and royalty will be. If your goal is to make money from your POD-published book, pay special attention to these figures. ❖

—Jane Ross

Story Circle Book Reviews Can Enhance Your Writing Portfolio

*Story Circle Book Reviews is a great place to start or expand your portfolio of published writings. **Linda C. Wisniewski** explains how to get started and **Duffie Bart** tells how it worked for her.*

You Too Can Be a Star!

Linda C. Wisniewski

If you're thinking about joining the SCN book review team, you'll want to know about the levels we've created. The team has three main groups with benefits that accrue as you progress.

Our Star reviewers have submitted ten or more reviews in the past eighteen months. Each Star has her own web page on the site with her photo, bio, and links to all her reviews. Stars also get to choose a specialty or type of book they prefer to review. Patricia Pando is our Star specializing in Food and Kitchen Matters, so she gets first pick of books on that subject. She has recently reviewed TV chef Paula Deen's wonderful memoir, *It Ain't All about the Cookin'*. Our other Stars are Lee Ambrose, Susan Andrus, Duffie Bart, Doris Benner, Rhonda Esakov, Judith Helburn and Mary Ann Moore.

Next is the Associate group. These women have submitted five to nine reviews in the past twelve months, and are featured on the Associates page with short bios and links to all their reviews. We currently have seven Associate Reviewers.

The most important category is the one we want you to join: Guest Reviewers are women just starting to submit reviews to us. There are already seventeen of them, and we hope you'll join this rung of the ladder. To learn more about the process and how to submit your first review, please visit the Become a Reviewer page on our website. Though we prefer to publish reviews of books published within the last two years and a few classics, we will consider other submissions. If you wish to review a book outside these guidelines, please first contact an editor for approval. Browse through our reviews and review categories to see the kind of books we're interested in reviewing. For an idea of what we'd like to see, please read a few of our online reviews. Please submit all reviews via our easy-to-use online book review submission form available on this guidelines page. (Only automated submissions will be accepted.)

A review on www.StoryCircleBookReviews.org qualifies as published work. You can use it as a "clip" for your writing portfolio, and when an editor asks to see your published writing—voila! Cut and paste it into your query letter.

We editors are thrilled by the quality of the new books we're

receiving almost daily and the quality of the reviews coming in. Our team is making our job a pleasure while providing insightful, delightful reviews of the latest and greatest books by, for, and about women—more than any other book review site on the internet! ❖

Linda Wisniewski is a Contributing Editor to the *Journal* and an editor of the Story Circle Book Reviews. Linda writes for the *Bucks County Herald* and teaches memoir classes for Bucks County Community College, Pa. She is a board member of SCN. Linda's memoir *Off Kilter: A Woman's Journey to Peace with Scoliosis, Her Mother, and Her Polish Heritage* has just been published by Pearlsong Press, www.pearlsong.com/offkilter.htm. See the book reviews on p. 21.

Visit the web's largest selection of reviews of books by, for, and about women, Story Circle Book Reviews, at www.storycirclebookreviews.org

Writing for Fun and, Eventually, for Money

Duffie Bart

I love to read and write. I never considered writing as a possible profession; never thought I was good enough, never thought of myself as a "real" writer. I thought of myself simply as a person who likes to write. I like to write letters, like to jot down the thoughts that flit in and out of my head...on envelopes, scraps of paper, whatever is handy.

I enjoy pondering the thoughts I have while reading. I love new ideas, love to learn. Over time I developed an interest in organizing my thoughts on paper. I like the process of making my writing cohesive.

One day I heard about Story Circle Network and their quarterly *Journal*. Without hesitation, I joined. I read the pieces in those early *Journal* editions and, because they were short, I submitted a short piece of my own. And then another. With every piece of mine in print, Susan Albert (then Editor of the *Journal*) attached a note of congratulations. Her support boosted my confidence, and spurred me on.

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

The Susan Wittig Albert Lifewriting Competition 2008

SCN is proud to announce its ninth annual lifewriting competition, named in honor our founder, best-selling mystery writer Susan Wittig Albert.

Topic: This year's topic focuses on evolution and growth. Here are some wise words to help you get started:

"We do not grow absolutely, chronologically. We grow sometimes in one dimension, and not in another; unevenly. We grow partially. We are relative. We are mature in one realm, childish in another. The past, present, and future mingle and pull us backward, forward, or fix us in the present. We are made up of layers, cells, constellations."—Anais Nin

Evolution and growth happen when we take risks or face up to challenges in order to achieve our dreams. We invite you to write about a point in your life in which you evolved and grew in one dimension or another. What happened? When? Where? Who was involved? How did this growth change you? Was your life transformed for the better? Or not? We invite you to write the story of evolution or growth in your own life.

Awards: One prize of \$75, one prize of \$50, and two prizes of \$25 each. Winning stories will be published in a special section of the September *Story Circle Journal* and will be featured on the SCN's award-winning website. Upon the judges' recommendation, other entries may be published in later issues of the *Journal* and in other SCN print or on-line publications.

Rules:

- You must be a dues-paying member of Story Circle Network to enter. (To join, use our online membership form; you can pay online or mail your check to the address below.)
- There is a \$15 entry fee, which can be paid online or by check (send to the address below).
- One entry per member, please. To be eligible, your entry must be unpublished.
- Winners of previous competitions are not eligible.
- If you have internet access, you must submit your entry to us electronically by using our online form (see below), or by sending it in an email, as a Word attachment or copied into the body of your email. If you do not have access to a computer, mail your entry (typed and single-spaced, on 8.5 x 11 paper). If you do not have access to a typewriter, we will accept entries that are clearly handwritten in dark black ink.
- Each entry must be titled, and no longer than 1200 words (count actual words, or use the MS Word word-count function). Put the actual word count under your name/address. Entries that are longer than 1200 words will be rejected.
- Be sure that your name and address appear on your entry (these will be removed for the judging process). Include a 100-word bio to be published with your entry if you win. Winners' stories must be available for publication; however, if you wish your story to be published anonymously, we will remove your name. Keep a copy of your entry.
- By submitting your story, you are giving Story Circle Network the right to publish it in the *Journal*, in its other print publications, and on its website. However, authors retain copyright.

Criteria and Judging: The judges look for entries that are fresh and original, tell a compelling story in a clear and authentic voice, are responsive to the topic, and have been polished and proofread for presentation in the competition. The most successful submissions are rich in evocative detail and avoid generalizations and abstractions. Entries will not be returned; evaluations will not be available. The judging team will be made up of Story Circle Facilitators and published authors.

Deadline: Your entry and your entry fee must both be postmarked (if by USPS) or date stamped (if email or PayPal) no later than midnight **July 1, 2008**. It is unfair to writers who observe these rules to ask for an exception.

Notification: Winners will be notified by August 1, 2008.

Three Ways to Enter:

- Preferred method: Use our online form at www.storycircle.org/Contests/
- Email your entry to contest@storycircle.org
- Snail mail your entry to
Life Writing Competition
Story Circle Network
P.O. Box 500127
Austin, TX 78750-0127

(Note: we ask that you mail your entry to us **only** if you do not have email!)

Meet other lifewriters and learn from their stories

Peggy Grose Dishes Out Recipes for the Body and Soul

Peggy Grose decided that self-publishing using a traditional book printing company was the way to go with her first book, *Love and Lemon Pie: Recipes for the Body and the Soul*, a collection of recipes accompanied by her own wisdom garnered from more than 40 years as a mother and communications professional. The Journal interviewed Peggy by email at her Austin home to find out about her self-publishing experience.

SCJ: Where did the idea for *Love and Lemon Pie* come from?

Peggy: I think it came from God, because I'm not that smart. In a section called "A Letter from Home" in the book, I tell about growing up on the farm in Georgia, where we had little money but had food that money could not buy. My mother was a dedicated and talented cook who spared no effort in putting scrumptious meals on the table. What I don't say in the book is that she didn't serve it up with love. Supertime was her time to berate my daddy for something—"I see you're putting up another tobacco barn!" (as if that's not what farmers do)—or me for shaving my legs or bleaching my bangs (as if that's not what teenage girls do).

I was a mature woman with my own children when I finally realized that food on the table was my mother's way of showing love but that we had completely missed the point. What a tragedy. That's why I wrote the book.

SCJ: What was the biggest challenge you faced in writing the book?

Peggy: Imagine 50 years of collected recipes, some on neat little 3" x 5" cards, many on the back of envelopes, scraps of paper and paper napkins, and clippings galore. I had to choose 120 of my favorites. A dozen were given by friends and relatives for the book.

Realizing that young women don't take home-economics anymore, I wanted to be precise in my instructions and not leave anything for novice cooks to guess at. I wanted them to be successful and enjoy the process. I decided to spell out the words "cup," "teaspoon," "tablespoon," etc. rather than abbreviate. I had professional help from my cousin Beth, a professional food writer, making sure my instructions were completely clear, that the ingredients were listed in the order in which they were used and that they were in the same order as the instructions. It was tedious.

I had to cook many of the recipes again in order to check the measurements and directions, including the ones I had made up. My husband ate very well that year.

I worked on the recipes for at least six months, not counting the reviewing, revising, and making corrections. The recipes for the soul came easily, as they were already in my head and heart. I keep files with notes and ideas for writing, so I drew on many of those earlier thoughts.

SCJ: Did you look for a traditional publisher for your book? What went into your decision to self-publish?

Peggy: I knew from journalism class how to write a query letter but didn't know where to start. At the bookstore, I went to the book and gift sections and made a note of the publishers of books most similar to mine. As each rejection letter arrived, I put the manuscript back on the shelf for a year or so.

Then I met a publisher's assistant, who suggested we self-publish. I mentioned it to my brother, Gene, who suggested that I ask his son, Sammy, to publish it. Sammy is a professional magician who also publishes books and magazines about entertaining children with magic. Sammy agreed and did an excellent job of typesetting and coordinating the printing. The whole project, from start to finish, was like birthing an elephant.



Asking equals listening. Telling equals talking. Asking and listening is better than telling and talking. When we do more talking than listening we're "overdrawing from the bank."

The quality of our relationships is directly and totally determined by the quality of our communication. If our words consist of blame, criticism and sarcasm, our relationships will consist of fear, defensiveness, and stagnation. If our words consist of love, appreciation, and encouragement, our relationships will consist of trust, openness and growth.

—Two "recipes for the soul" from *Love and Lemon Pie* by Peggy Grose

(Continued on page 10)

Peggy Grose's Recipes for Life (continued from page 9)

My advice for those seeking to self-publish is to expect to put in a lot of work but that the payoff will be worth it.

SCJ: *If you were to start over, would you go the self-publishing route again?*

Peggy: I have written my memoir and am facing this very question again. I recently attended a presentation at the Writers' League of Texas on self-publishing, where I learned that, for an unknown author, self-publishing seemed the better way to go, for several reasons: you make more money, you have more control, and you get the job done much more quickly. The drawback is that you have to pay from your own pocket, be your own publicist or hire one, and you still have to do the footwork of selling the book.

When I self-published *Love and Lemon Pie*, I didn't have an agent or editor, but friends and Sammy served well as editors. Self-publishing has turned out well for me because I have promoted the book myself and have sold about 3,000 copies through distributors and my own efforts, probably more than if I had had a publisher. All the bookstores and many gift shops in Austin carry my book, but I have to constantly follow up on their supply. Through bookstores, I make only half of what I make at fairs, bazaars and out-on-the-sidewalk kind of places.

SCJ: *What would you do differently (if anything)?*

Peggy: I can't think of anything that I would do differently. It's great fun meeting and talking to people. Because of the nature of the book, people sit at my space and visit, often telling me interesting stories of their lives.

SCJ: *How have you promoted your book? What has worked well and what hasn't?*

Peggy: In order to get the book into most bookstores I had to have a national distributor. By the time they take their cut, the bookstores take theirs, and I pay postage, I don't make much money. Yet, I do it for credibility and would do it again.

In placing books into independent bookstores, I have learned to not leave them on consignment. The managers don't have any money invested in them, so will not promote them. I recently reclaimed five books from a store after four years of sitting in the back on a lower shelf. I had to go personally to collect the check for the three they had sold.

And, sadly, I have quit dealing with church book stores because they consistently lose track of the books and don't reimburse me.

Having a lot of nerve and audacity, I sell books everywhere—at restaurants, Genie Car Wash, fairs, bazaars, festivals, on the airplane, at women's groups and conferences—you name it. I still haven't gotten a write-up in the newspaper, but am working on that. John Kelso [a popular columnist for the *Austin American-Statesman* newspaper] knows about the book and where it's available. A write-up in the Life section would be fabulous. I even sent a copy to Oprah (talk about nerve) but didn't hear back from her.

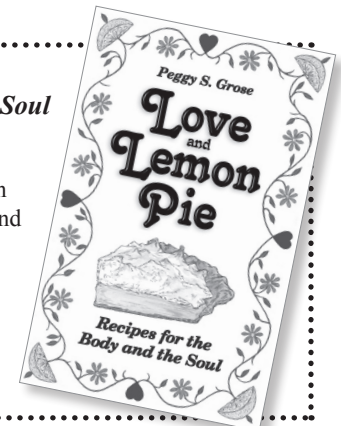
Love and Lemon Pie:

Recipes for the Body and the Soul

This unique cookbook by author Peggy Grose presents two ways in which we can show love—food and the loving words with which we serve it up.

www.loveandlemonpie.com

978-0974421308



I've had my website remodeled, with a blog, which will give a new "recipe for the soul" on a weekly basis. That should bring in some sales.

SCJ: *How did you choose which recipes to use?*

Peggy: I went through my pile of recipes and picked out my favorites—the most interesting ones, and those that I thought other people would like most. I'm not a bland person and don't care for bland food, so the recipes are interesting, I think. I have Tex-Mex recipes, recipes from the Deep South where I grew up, some from Southeast Asia where I lived, and a lot of simple but good, wholesome, and comforting American food.

SCJ: *When did you write the recipes for the soul?*

Peggy: I wrote most of the recipes for the soul in a few days, then added and embellished as the process unfolded. I regularly add to files of ideas for writing and thoughts along the line of "recipes for the soul." God—or wherever these inspirations come from—gives me a new recipe for the soul regularly. Sometimes, overhearing or hearing about people's difficulties in relationships, I have a thought about how to communicate better or simply how to be more loving.

SCJ: *What is the most important thing your book has to offer?*

Peggy: My readers report consistently that, while they love the "recipes for the body," they find the "recipes for the soul" most meaningful. I see many people hurting from dysfunctional relationships, which I believe come largely from poor and destructive communication. People who buy the book and actually read it report good results in their relationships.

The part that is most meaningful to me is meeting and talking with people who come to my booth at fairs and sit, telling their stories. This amazing thing happens every single time I have a book signing. Perhaps the next book, after the memoir, will be a collection of personal stories that I have heard while signing books.

I seldom meet a person that is not interesting. The only people who are boring for me are those who are being phony or insincere.

SCJ: *What did you learn from writing and self-publishing your book?*

Peggy: I learned not to rush something this important. I typically want quick results, so I grew anxious when the project

seemed to drag. I had to wait for Sammy to get his part done according to his schedule, but I was eager to start promoting.

I have learned much about the publishing and marketing business and where not to place books. I have met and made friends with a lot of other authors.

SCJ: *Is there anything else you'd like to add?*

Peggy: I believe that my memoir, *Celebration: A Woman's Story of Courage, Endurance and Transcendence* will be helpful to women of all ages. I'll get the memoir published. Just watch me!

One thing I cherish most is my group of women friends who are supportive and encouraging and who don't feel threatened or diminished by what another woman accomplishes. Thank you, Story Circle Network. ❖

Email interview conducted by Lisa Shirah-Hiers.
Edited by Lisa Shirah-Hiers and Jane Ross

Peggy Grose is the mother of four and grandmother of four. She has a Master's degree in communication and is a licensed therapist, is the owner of her own consulting business, Face to Face Communication, and is employed by a drug rehabilitation program. She has had extensive experience as a writer and public speaker and was once a Dale Carnegie Course instructor. To order *Love and Lemon Pie*, visit her website: www.loveandlemonpie.com.

SCN Book Reviews Can Enhance Your Writing Portfolio
(continued from page 7)

But it was not just seeing my pieces in print that gave me pleasure: it was reading the beautiful pieces of all the other members. I believe that reading is a great teacher...for writers and non-writers alike. And then the wondrous day came when SCN developed a website for book reviews and reviewers. I jumped on board.

One day, a friend who edits a weekly newspaper in Santa Cruz asked what I was writing about. It seems the subject matter of my review fit in with the theme of an upcoming issue. He printed my review and continues to print them, sending me a lovely check for each one. Last week he asked if I would write a column about "something that makes people think." So I sent him a piece called "A Better Life," which appeared in April.

My philosophy in life is: One thing leads to another. There are many small publications and publishing houses that look for material. I write because I love to but I have limited time and energy and, at this late stage in my life (I am in my mid-seventies), I am content in my small world. Even so, good things continue to happen and I believe can happen to anyone who has the optimism and enthusiasm to keep on writing. ❖

True Words from Real Women—A Self-Publishing Story

Desert Eternal

Connie Spittler

Tucson, AZ

It's never easy to hear that the nodule in your left breast is cancerous. Recommendation: lumpectomy. Afterward, recovering at home, painkillers relaxed me enough to ask for yellow pad and pencil. Time in bed might translate into writing opportunity, but my furry mind stumbled over starting new pieces.

Gazing out the window at the strong Arizona light, a thought broke through the haze. A friend had recently given my photographer husband and me the name of an internet site for publishing photography, essays, poetry, etc.—www.blurb.com. I'd already written several desert pieces and I realized Bob's pictures mirrored my words about nature.

In a monsoon lightning flash, I knew a book existed that we'd never considered. As my scars healed, I printed out my Southwestern essays and skimmed Bob's archives, flagging photos. With no deadlines or charges attached, he downloaded blurb formats for words and pictures. There'd be no cost until we ordered the first book from the site bookstore. Once finished, others could order the publication from us or from the website.

It was medical decision time again. Studying cancer return percentages with my doctor, I chose radiation, a seven-week course, five times a week. Some women experience no serious burning from treatment. Others are not so lucky. I thankfully accepted all offered creams and wound bandages.

Struggling with therapy, I worked with Bob designing the book through varying pain and energy thresholds. Some days we managed several hours at his computer; later, sessions were shorter. After printing out the work in progress, I'd head for my pillows, to bed-edit.

Finally, we completed *The Desert Eternal, Words and Images*. Eighty pages by Connie and Robert Spittler. Thirteen essays with 120 color photographs. I shared the preview copy with my radiation technicians. How heartwarming that the first two hard cover books ended up on the coffee tables of supportive team radiologists.

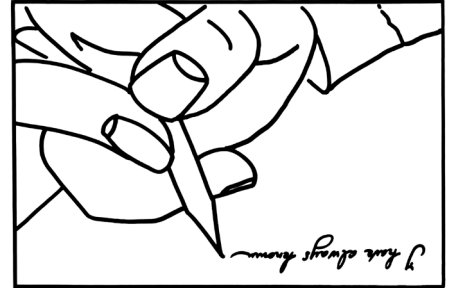
Writing. Cancer. Learning. Healing. From a difficult time emerged a book that framed my philosophy of life, irrevocably intertwined with nature and survival. ❖

To preview Connie's book at www.blurb.com, go to the online bookstore, then search for Spittler.

Advertise Your Book or Your Writing-Related Services in the *Journal*. \$50 for a 1/4 page ad. \$20 for a business-card size ad. Contact journaleditor08@storycircle.org for the exact dimensions and copy deadlines.

True Words from Real Women

True Words from Real Women is a selection of short pieces of life-writing by our members, edited by **Mary Jo Doig**. The theme of this issue's True Words section is "**Hard Choices.**" Why not contribute your own True Words to the Journal? Future topics are listed on p. 17



Tai Goes Home

Barbara Davis

Lewiston ID

www.theserenityroom.blogspot.com

The large black dog sat in the driveway and watched as our daughter Rebekah played in our yard. The dog was a stranger in our neighborhood but seemed docile. She immediately bonded with our daughter and stayed in our yard for several days while we attempted to locate her owner. No one came forward to claim her. We called her Tai.

One afternoon while Rebekah was at school I made the difficult decision to coax Tai into the back seat of the car using a slice of bread. Taking additional slices along, I theorized that if I drove her away from our home she would return to her rightful home. Two miles away I stopped the car, opened the door nearest her, threw two extra slices of bread on the ground, and out she jumped. I sped away leaving her sitting on a clump of green grass, eating.

That evening, at my desk doing paperwork, I heard my daughter yell, "Mom, Tai is back!"

There she was sitting on our front porch, panting and smiling. I knew in my heart that Tai had found her way back "home."

We will never know the circumstances of Tai's early life or why she chose Rebekah as her favorite person. Were they emotionally bound together in another life? Were they soul mates? Or did Tai just sense the sweet spirit of a child? Only the Universe knows.

Tai is still alive and has lived with us for twelve years. ❖

St. Joseph's Medal

Doris Roop-Benner

Richardson TX

When I was in high school, I decided to apply to the Sisters of St. Joseph to become a nun. My family was only so-so supportive but went along with my desire to enter the religious life. They felt I was wasting my life and was destined for something better. I felt it was a calling that I couldn't ignore.

After several years of prayer, testing, and preparation, I was ready. While I was waiting for my acceptance letter to arrive, my Daddy silently handed me a St. Joseph medal inscribed *Doris from Daddy* to put on my rosary that I would attach to my cincture and wear around my waist with my habit.

This gold medal was so precious to me because Daddy didn't really want me to go and he wasn't a demonstrative person (he didn't say he loved me until I was 45 years old), but he showed his love with the giving.

A week later, the letter arrived from the Mother House stating that I was not accepted to enter. I immediately got rid of everything in my trousseau that had anything to do with the convent, except for my Daddy's medal, which I put on a chain and have worn around my neck ever since.

Just touching the gold medal brings back so many thoughts: how strong and confident I felt about becoming a nun; how devastated I was with their decision to reject me; but, now that Daddy's gone, how loved I feel that he made the hard choice of supporting me enough to let me do what was important to me—even if he disagreed. ❖

Hometown Girl

Victoria Wheeler

Stockton NJ

My hometown was named "All America City" in 1960 and reflected values of national pride, a strong work ethic, and choices between college and marriage for its high school graduates. I found myself engaged after high school; six months later I called it off. I turned eighteen just a month before the wedding day and was filled with new strengths: caution and wisdom. I bottled them up for awhile to save face after bridal showers and wedding registry gifts arrived. But the day before the wedding, I froze up and refused to become the bride. I was terrified with that decision but knew it was wise.

I felt embarrassed about the telegrams stating a "postponement" of the ceremony. Shaky and scared I spoke to my fiancé and hoped he might forgive my decision. We'd met just six months before, when I was seventeen. He took the news badly, and extolled my non-virtues to anyone within earshot. However, I was out of the obligation and felt relieved to make a new plan.

I entered college and applied myself toward independence. I pictured life as a teacher, an artist, or journalist. The world opened to me. Twelve weeks into the quarter, I couldn't bend over easily and decided to diet. My periods were always spotty and a doctor's confirmation of my pregnancy had never occurred to me. Now I faced more choices.

Incredulously I saw my youth slip away. Marrying was easily put to rest. I wouldn't. An exit from school for the summer

and a stay at a home for unwed mothers isolated me from everything I loved. My plan was to give up my baby to a waiting couple. I shared my misery only with my parents. Three months later I returned to college more a grown up than a teen.

I learned that life is fragile. Patience, wisdom, and caution became my companions as I faced adulthood. My future evolved in a youthful, lovely dance, with the memory of my time of hard choices never forgotten. ❖

What's a Body to Do?

Carol Newman

Leawood KS

www.angelinyourinkwell.blogspot.com

Looking at faded images in my mother's old photo album for the first time, I saw my family and myself as we are and always will be: barely more than five feet tall, shoulders narrow, hips rounded. A family of pears.

With that one swift visit to the past, I realized certain things were never gonna be. I had always believed that, with vigil over every calorie and fat gram consumed, someday I would appear tall and willowy. To that end, I had spent years sipping clear broth, nibbling rice cakes, and making one diet soda last an entire day.

If I was a pear, I was ripe. Right there before my ancestors and the entire world, I—of the size seven wedding dress, iron- maiden foundation garments, and jicama, kiwi, and lettuce leaf dinners—stood up to my life-long battle of the bulge.

"Baloney!" I said.

I went on the attack—Big Mac style. Once I tasted that secret sauce, I knew I had been released from my crudité confines. I was free.

Eventually I settled into a comfortable routine of eating, neither starving nor larding myself.

I've made the choice. A healthy body is a happy body. And from where I'm sitting—on a bit more body—I'm feeling a lot happier and healthier, carrying on the family history.

And someday, when I pass the album on to my daughter, she can take her place among us pears, the sweetest, most succulent of fruits. ❖

Unexpected Detour

Linda Harris

Hartwell GA

A year ago, I knew who I was: a teacher and a writing workshop leader. I had a cozy little house in San Antonio, a city I loved like an old friend. I enjoyed my life as a single woman and I had great women friends.

When I announced that I was taking a three-month road trip cross-country, I heard words like "brave" and "courageous." Some asked, "Aren't you afraid of being on the road for so long, alone?" But fear never entered my mind; I was euphoric.

On a road trip, the intended destination matters less than the discoveries along the way. I met a man in Hope, Arkansas—the second day of my trip—and falling in love was as natural as driving my Mini Cooper. What was hard were the ripples in the proverbial pond that followed the tossing in of that single stone.

The first ripple was the opinions of other people: "What? You're selling your house and moving to Georgia?" Some added, indignantly, "You can't do that!"

Second were my own former opinions: I'd grown up in Georgia, married at eighteen, and moved a thousand miles away. My home state was like a faded old slide show in my mind, a place I thought I knew all too well, certainly not a place I'd choose now.

Third, my geographical security blanket: I felt something akin to grief at leaving the place I'd called home for four decades.

These ripples were scarier than the fear of being accosted by a band of thieves on an unfamiliar road. Without my familiar props and approval by all who know me, who was I?

I write today on a sun porch in northeast Georgia, overlooking a shimmering lake, sheltered by the tall pines that remind me of my childhood. I meet interesting people every day. A few of them have even asked, "When will you start a writing workshop here?"

Real courage, I'm discovering, is swimming in the rippled pond of the unknown. Though it might be easier to stay on the main road I know so well, unexpected detours can expand my point of view, even my view of who I am. ❖

Heart and Hearth

Helen Lowery

Weatherford TX

Like everyone's memory of 9/11, mine is vivid. The New Mexico sky was clear and crisp. On the Animas River below our house, the aspen turned golden as autumn brought cooler air to High Desert. As I had for over two years now, I was waking up in sacred Navajo land bordered by Chimney Rock in the north, Angel Peak in the east, Mount Taylor in the south, and Ship Rock to the west. I flipped on the television. At first glance, I saw the replay of an airplane going into the World Trade Center. Moments later another plane flew into the second tower. One tower: accident; two towers: terrorist activity. This day, the world changed and my world flipped upside down.

All of my life I quested for home. From as early as I can remember I was a mistaken zygote. Of all the places I had ever lived, it was the siren of the Southwest that called my name. I lived in New Mexico when I was six years old and I returned when I turned 50. I am home in the desert, the dryness, the skin-parching wind. My home is with the hawks and the drums. My soul is bathed by the sights, sounds, and colors of the enchanted state. On this cliff in northern New Mexico, I was finally home but soon to leave again.

(Continued on page 14)

True Words from Real Women (Continued from page 13)

After 9/11, my definition of home became unsettled. The aching for my children and my grandchildren in Texas became a louder voice inside me. I used strong efforts to bribe, coerce, and beg them to move to New Mexico where the air is clear, the nights cool. But there is very little work and homes are too expensive to buy. I had to choose between my homeland and my children. I did not want to miss the baseball games, band concerts, and the new babies ahead, so I had to strike a deal with my soul: that I would return at least once a year and eventually retire in my beloved New Mexico.

I miss it every day, but I have the warm adoration of my babies to whom I represent home. ❖

A Choice Decision

Carol Wessling

Bellevue NE

www.carolwessling.blogspot.com

We all have times in our lives when hard choices have to be made. One of those times for me came in 1980, when my husband went into a deep depression and suddenly turned from an easy-going, loving family man into someone who was constantly angry, jealous, and sleep-deprived.

His downward slide began in the fall and it was after Thanksgiving before I was able to convince him to see a doctor for treatment. He started on a course of medication that did not help him, and it was several months later that he finally found the right anti-depressant for his symptoms.

In the meantime, our marriage suffered considerably.

In fact, it reached a point where I couldn't take it anymore. I packed a bag and got in the car, intent on leaving him and our seven children. I wasn't thinking straight; I had made no provisions for the children and I didn't let anyone know what I was doing. When I think back now, I realize I must have been numb; all of the emotional stress had left me unable to feel anymore. I just knew that I wanted out of the unbearable situation that our marriage had become.

However, once I was 30–45 minutes out of town, I began to realize I couldn't do this. I couldn't leave that easily. I couldn't turn my back on our life together, with almost twenty years of marriage behind us at that point. I pulled off at the next exit and turned around. I headed back home, making the hard choice to stick it out, no matter what happened. I distinctly remember having to make a definite decision, for there was no love in my heart at that point to keep me going. The only thing that made me stay was the decision to stick by my commitment to this man.

I'm so glad I did! After a year of medication and treatment, my husband returned to his former easy-going self. We recently celebrated our forty-seventh anniversary: a tribute to the wisdom of that hard choice. ❖

An Intoxicating Quandary

Sallie Moffitt

Ovilla TX

I could stop, but why?

The ice-cold brew comforts my parched throat like a down-filled quilt on a cold winter night, shielding me from the harsh wind of truth.

So, I take another drink.

I wake to the pounding gavel of justice sentencing me to a lifetime of shame and remorse, pale punishment for my buried secrets resurrected by sobriety.

I could stop,
but why?

Back Door

Janet Riehl

St. Louis MO

www.riehlife.com

When my Pop came out from the Midwest to see my first solo art show in the Bay Area, he gave me some good advice: "If you're going to keep going down this road, you'd better find yourself a back door." Yep, a back door, a backwater—some quiet place where an artist and writer could work while stretching her money.

His words came back to me when my carefully constructed world fell apart a few years later. The wealthy man I'd loved and lived with picked me up from the airport on the way home from my extended Buddhist retreat in Europe. "It's over," he said. "I don't need you anymore. I've found someone else."

I started packing without being sure where the journey was taking me. I'd wanted to go to the country for some time, but there's a lot of country in California. I stashed my major belongings in a friend's basement and stayed in a tiny room while I came back to my senses.

I knew about Lake County because my Buddhist group held their fall retreats there, and I was the Shrine Mama for this large event. I didn't know if I could hold Shrine that year, but as it happened, I was the one who was held.

I kept in touch with a woman who'd cared for our Shrine team and lived in Lake County. My father's words stayed with me. Was Lake County my back door? Or, a place for a spiritual retreat as I divined a direction for my future? My friend graciously agreed to host me for a weekend as I scoped out the situation.

When I came up, everything fell into place. I picked up *Lake Currents* and saw the advertisement for Innisfree Vacation Rentals. Since Yeats' poem Innisfree is one of my favorites, the ad immediately called to me. So it was that I came to speak to Sybil, who became dear Turtlewoman; came to transform Cabin A into the Rocking Triangle Studio; and embarked on the next stage of my life. ❖

In 1912
Shelley Thrasher
 Orange TX

My grandmother wrote,
 “I can’t understand why I yield to you,
 believe that I love you and say so, act so,
 then doubt my own heart,
 wonder at my actions when you are gone.”

She yielded to him.

Fifteen years older, he plucked her
 from her world of girls’ boarding school,
 daily piano practice,
 ice-cream socials, singing in a quartet,
 university education.
 He deposited her on a small farm in Texas
 with onions to plant in her garden,
 cornbread to cook on a wood stove,
 five cows to milk each morning and night,
 a black washpot to make lye soap in.
 She bore him nine children,
 which thickened her 18-inch waist;

bore with her mother-in-law who called “frivolous”
 her thirty outing diapers,
 her subscriptions to *Ladies’ Home Journal* and *Etude*—
 declared, “Pshaw,” about her frequent washings
 of babies and ammonia-smelling diapers in #3 washtubs—

who let her,
 finally,
 take care of the chickens
 and the flowerbeds.

No wonder she doubted her own heart.

Small Choices
Serena Nathan
 Perth WA, Australia

The smallest choices can be the hardest ones. The very small choices that alone mean nothing but, put together with other small choices, can lead to devastatingly huge consequences.

My choices on September 13, 2004, were little ones. They culminated in the death of my youngest son Rory.

I chose to walk the kids to school that day. It was the first lovely spring day we’d had, so a great opportunity to get everyone some early morning fresh air.

I chose to help with the school dance that was to occur that next weekend, so we came home with the intention of making a few calls about catering.

I chose to go inside the pool area. I held the gate open while Rory brought in his trike. He happily rode around the pool on

the bricks while I pulled winter weeds from the flowerbeds surrounding the path. I chose to get him some lunch. Together we left the pool area and drove up to the deli for a sausage roll.

When we got home I felt guilty that I had been gardening for so long and not making those calls about the dance. I chose to put a video, *Spot*, on for Rory and went into the study to make a couple of calls.

All little choices.

After a small while, I decided it was time Rory went to bed for his day sleep. I walked into where the video was playing and he wasn’t there. Ahead of me were the glass back door, the pool gate—open—and my three-year-old son lying face upwards on the bottom of the pool in his navy trousers and green sweater. The gate hadn’t latched properly.

I leapt in, carried him out, screaming. My neighbor heard and called an ambulance. I did CPR until the ambulance came but he was gone. My little blonde darling with his beautiful grin and little chipped front tooth. Gone forever.

Small choices don’t seem hard at the time, but looking back three years later, it’s those very small ones that take my breath away, still. ❖

To Choose Life

Susan Ideus
 Magnolia TX
www.susanideus.wordpress.com

“What do you think I should do?” Possibly the most difficult question ever put to me.

My 84-year-old mother was asking me if she should try eight weeks of toxic chemotherapy for her recurring cancer; it would not cure it but maybe slow it down. Her doctor’s best guess was something like this: if she could even survive the chemo there was a forty percent chance that she might have a better quality of life for possibly four to six months longer.

She sank back into her pillows, tired and discouraged. “Not great odds are they?”

Mother talked to my brothers as well as her sister and brother, asking each their honest opinion. I frankly didn’t feel that she should put her tired weakened body through the agony of chemo. My Uncle Dick told her the same.

Later that evening he came to me, close to tears. “Sus, I told my sister I wanted her to die.”

“No, you didn’t,” I tried to reassure him. “You told her you didn’t want her to suffer any longer.”

Her ultimate choice was to go into the hospice wing of the hospital, not wanting to burden any of us with home care. It seemed to help her to have some control over the situation. Although we had both tried over the past months to repair a lifelong tumultuous relationship, I was surprised when she asked me to stay with her. Never an expressive person, she bore her pain stoically. As she weakened and slipped in and out of consciousness, her family and friends came by for last

(Continued on page 16)

True Words from Real Women (Continued from page 15)

visits. She tried her best to rouse and talk to all of them. When she slipped into a fretful coma, I knew the end was near.

My mind was telling me I didn't want to watch her die, but my heart knew better. Just as she was present at my birth, I was there to see her born into a new life without pain. As I watched her pass from struggle to absolute peace, I knew this was her final gift to me. ❖

Reading Other People's Mail

Sheila McNaughton

St Petersburg FL

www.MyChristmasTreasures.com

John, my husband, asked me to read an email. He stood behind the desk chair tightly gripping the back. "Sit. Read."

A young man named Aaron wanted to meet his father—my husband. Aaron was 32 years old with a two-year-old daughter and a wife pregnant with their second child.

My reaction? Confusion. (Why did I not know about this child?) Joy. (We have a new son.) Relief. (What a burden this must have been.)

John was 17, starting his senior year in high school when his girlfriend became pregnant. Back in 1970, you got married. John was not ready. He walked away, never to see the girl again or his son. The few in his family who knew did not speak of the boy. A secret never discussed.

Aaron's mother married when he was two. Her husband adopted him. Aaron was never told. They had their secrets. At age 25, going through his grandmother's belongings after her death, he came across a photo of John in a tux and his mother in a prom dress. His resemblance to the smiling boy in the photo was unmistakable.

Our two children came with my husband when we married in 1979. They are not stepchildren; they are my children. Now I struggled with John's sin of omission. How could he not have told me about this boy? Each time I asked, he said, "I don't know."

Finally he answered: "When was a good time? When we met? When we married? When we moved to Florida? When we celebrated our tenth anniversary? When?"

I had no answer. The man I loved was not proud; he was hurting and ashamed. It had been an ugly time.

Now I could tell John that Aaron was his son, his past, and I wanted nothing to do with it. Or, I could accept this young man as mine.

Aaron, his wife, Teresa, and children Audrey, Mary, and Simon have brought joy and love to all our lives. ❖

We all have a story of personal growth. Tell us yours! Enter the Susan Wittig Albert Lifewriting Competition. Rules on p. 8. Deadline July 1.

Stopping for a Hawk in Spring

Susan Tweit

Salida CO

communityoftheland.blogspot.com

One April afternoon, my husband and I sped across a rocky summit in Nevada's lonely sagebrush desert, headed for the Pacific Coast. Richard suddenly braked the car and pulled a quick U-turn. He had spotted a hawk lying on the roadside, its wings flapping loosely in the backwash of our passing.

We drove back. There on the gravel shoulder lay a gorgeous adult red-tailed hawk, the wings that normally span four feet tip-to-tip crumpled at awkward angles. As we approached, the bird's head moved.

It was alive! We inched closer. The bird merely lifted its head and stared at us out of fierce golden eyes. Its body was immobile, both wings and back broken by a collision with a passing vehicle. It was beyond help.

Still, we pulled a blanket from the car and wrapped the hawk in it. Richard carried the big bird—so light for such wide wings!—down a steep bank, and set it gently in the thin shade of a sagebrush. We stood in the dry air for a long moment, tears running down our faces, saying goodbye to that red-tailed hawk.

I've picked up roadkill for decades, stopping to move the broken bodies out of harm's way as a sign of respect, to allow the dead of whatever species to decay in peace and thus feed other lives. It's been my ritual of atonement for the harm we humans wreak in our race through life.

Never in all of that time though have I felt so helpless. I don't grieve leaving that red-tailed hawk to die—moving it into the desert to slip away naturally was the kindest thing to do. I do grieve my species' killing haste and callousness, the self-absorbed pace of our lives.

I hope that the hawk passed peacefully into dreams of free flight under the spring sun. In my dreams, the world has room for red-tailed hawks to soar and dive—without ending up on the roadside, wings crumpled, backs broken, and fierce eyes still open. ❖

Her Choice

Pat Daly

Largo FL

My 75-year-old mother had been in Intensive Care for two weeks when she finally was allowed to come out of a drug-induced coma that prevented her from fighting and raging as she detoxed from alcohol dependence. The breathing tube in her throat prevented her from speaking, but her eyes were clear, aware, and calm. She looked at me with a sparkle in her eyes that I hadn't seen for years, due to alcoholism and the demons that are so often born of resentment, hatred, and blame. My eyes smiled back at her and I said, "Hi, Mom."

The hospitalization had weakened her physically. Her doctors wanted to insert a permanent breathing tube in her neck

and send her to a rehabilitation center. When Mom heard this news, the light in her eyes was replaced with a non-verbal message that said, "That ain't gonna happen."

I knew she was not buying the rehab pitch for one second. Later that night, Mom wriggled her body down in bed to a place where her secured wrists were even with her breathing tube, and pulled it out. To everyone's amazement, she breathed just fine on her own and was looking better than ever.

The nurse on duty suggested we talk to her about a living will and ask about her wishes. Mom listened intently as the nurse explained the circumstances of reviving her if her heart stopped. Mom immediately poo-hooed that idea with the comment, "When you're dead, you're dead."

She wasn't interested in coming back again. Her chart was duly noted.

That was Thursday night. As I left her bedside I turned around as I pushed open the Intensive Care exit doors. I could see her watching me from her bed at the end of the corridor. I blew her a kiss and waved good-bye. She was back on the road to recovery, and maybe even sobriety.

The next night, however, her condition worsened and she died. She was not resuscitated. It was her choice, one that was harder for me to accept than for her to make. ❖

Looking Ahead

"True Words" is organized around a theme. While we do accept non-thematic writing, we give precedence to stories written on the theme of a particular issue. **Members only, please.** We're looking for stories rich in evocative detail, showing the struggles, challenges, and resolutions of real people living real lives. We're not looking for generalized, abstract truths about life. We want to read your stories, not your essays! Please make sure that your stories are **350 words** or less. We may edit your submissions for grammar and spelling. Here are the upcoming topics and deadlines:

Autumn—September 2008 (due July 15, 2008)

A Sacred Place—December 2008
(due October 15, 2008)

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

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 Found SCN

Victoria F. Jessop

El Cajon CA

I first discovered the Story Circle Network through *Gammer Gurton's Needle*. Puzzling, perhaps? But I think that Susan Wittig Albert may recognize it. As an avid reader of detective stories, I came across the title of this sixteenth century play by Nicholas Udall in one of Susan's books. We even exchanged e-mails, and I signed up for Susan and Bill Albert's newsletter. In turn, this led to my joining SCN. But I found it daunting. The contributions were almost all Americana: the Thirties, the Forties, the Depression. Would my stories interest those who didn't know or understand my own purely British past?

I had plenty to write about. My father was a storyteller in the old oral tradition. I remember best our sitting around him, fascinated while he talked and played his guitar, my mother joining in too. Sadly, my sister's children and mine barely knew our parents, but stories of these wonderful people are a legacy we can leave our children and grandchildren. Yet we must get those stories on paper. Luckily, we both have excellent memories of much of our family life, living in England through WWII and afterwards.

Although I was too hesitant to write, I did take an e-mail course from Susan Wittig Albert, using true characters, changing and writing a fictional story about them—not at all easy—but this technique forced my mind open and I loved what I was doing. Then, during the very last lesson, our family received a blow that sent all writing out of mind. My youngest daughter was diagnosed with a very rare cancer—a story in itself—a non-Hodgkin's variety. She received radiation and has now been cancer-free for seven years. We live our lives with hope for the future.

Meanwhile, a visit to England in 2003 encouraged me to write an article on my experiences as a child in the terrible 1942 Exeter firebombing. The Exeter paper accepted it and another article I wrote on Exeter, bringing back that yearning to write. Last year, I thought about Story Circle Network once more and rejoined. I hope this time to overcome my writing block. I've led quite a colorful life as well, and wonder if other readers would be interested in what a British-American has to say about life here and in other countries.

I have a book on the great Exeter firebombing in which there is a photo of our actual street, one hundred houses, all turned into rubble. The Exeter paper published that also, together with pictures of my family. I just showed it to my eight-year-old grandson this Christmas, and he was so excited he wanted to take it to Show and Tell.

Now that is fame! ❖

Special True Words Theme: How I Found SCN

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

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

Story circles—the heart of SCN

Truth Be Told: A Prison Writing Circle

Partnering with the non-profit Truth Be Told, SCN sponsors a group of women in prison as they participate in a writing circle. **Natalie Weinstein** describes the challenges and rewards of facilitating writing workshops and circles in prison.

One of SCN's more unusual story circles is found in Lockhart, Texas—at the state prison. Our group is atypical in a couple of ways: we do not meet regularly, and our participants are constantly changing. However, it is similar to its sister circles in that the women who write are creative, talented, and eager.

I am a volunteer who teaches classes at the Lockhart prison through Truth Be Told, an Austin-based service organization that believes in the power of women telling the truth about their lives. Our classes give women the opportunity to tell their life stories, examining the experiences they've had and the choices they've made that brought them to prison.

Truth Be Told also offers "Exploring Creativity" workshops. In fall 2006, I started teaching a workshop that is, in part, dedicated to writing slice-of-life stories for the "True Words from Real Women" section of *Story Circle Journal*. Women who graduate from the Truth Be Told classes can take the workshop and then submit their writing to the True Words editor. Participants receive a very generous one-year membership to SCN. Peggy Moody, the Executive Director of SCN, has been instrumental in coordinating this. Her kindness has been much appreciated.

Truth Be Told and SCN have had a special relationship for years due to the overlapping participation of three women: Carol Waid, Mary Ann Reynolds, and Nathalie Sorrell. Without them, none of this would be happening.

My workshop participants have had seventeen stories published in the last four issues of the *Story Circle Journal*. Mary Jo Doig, who edits the True Words section of the *Journal*, has been especially supportive of us. When you read the women's entries in the True Words section, you may guess that the writers are incarcerated. Sometimes they write directly about what brought them to prison or their experiences in prison. But the other entries have run the gamut: living with AIDS, witnessing a summertime blizzard, dealing with anger, surviving a tornado, embracing friendship, trying to help a dying woman, mourning with a stranger in a public garden.

Although Truth Be Told is not a Christian ministry, some inmates write about their religious beliefs and experiences. One of our challenges is balancing our respect for their spiritual convictions with our specific purpose: to give all of our students—regardless of their beliefs—an opportunity to explore the complexity of their lives.

For me, teaching the workshops and serving as the women's editor has been an extremely satisfying experience. I am always delighted by their words and am continually reminded

that talent, inspiration, and the desire to share one's life cross all boundaries.

Earlier this year, SCN decided to give the Lockhart writers the status of a free-range story circle. Once again, these women truly appreciate SCN's support. ❖

Views from Inside

Truth Be Told workshop participant, Rhonda Speer, has had four pieces published in the *Journal*. Natalie Weinstein asked her to respond to a few questions about her participation in SCN.

SCJ: *You've been published in the Journal four times now. What does that mean to you?*

Rhonda: Being published just once brought me great joy. Each time after that has multiplied my joy and self-esteem. But most of all, it pushes me closer to seeing how God can use the written word (as well as the spoken word, signing, Braille, and all forms of communication) to reach people everywhere.

SCJ: *Would you like to see a traditional story circle at Lockhart? Is it possible? What are the obstacles?*

Rhonda: As long as it doesn't require computers or phones—and as long as it gets clearance—it's very possible to have one here. Much could be gained from women coming together to share stories. Truth Be Told teaches us how to deal with the negative of the past and turn it into a positive. The *Story Circle Journal* is a way to focus on the positive and find joy in a sad world. With a story circle, no one would have to feel alone because we could share tragedies, as well as celebrations, together.

SCJ: *What have you gained from being an SCN member?*

Rhonda: I have gained a knowledge that what happens in our lives does matter. And I have gained the sense that I can accomplish my goals as long as two things happen: (1) I follow the Lord's lead, and (2) I stick to my goals.

SCJ: *Any other thoughts or reflections?*

Rhonda: Reflecting on these past months, I've found there is no greater love than laying down your life, either physically (as Christ did) or metaphorically (with pen and paper) for a stranger. Through the power of the written (or spoken) word, a stranger can become your sister. ❖

Truth Be Told Seeks Volunteers

Truth Be Told (TBT) brings communication skills, community building, and creativity to women in prison, giving them tools to recreate their lives. Our hope is to break the patterns of neglect, abuse, and dysfunction that bring women to prison repeatedly and lead families to become accustomed to crime and prison. We offer an alternative: allowing inmates to become contributing members of chosen communities, where it is safe to tell the truth of one's experience, to live creatively using one's gifts and talents, and to pass along these tools to families and friends.

Truth Be Told seeks volunteers in three main areas: Behind Bars (working with women in prison), Beyond Bars (working with graduates of our programs), and Bridge Builders (working on our board or on a team of volunteers to structure TBT to better serve our graduates and make our vision a reality). In addition we are working on a project to foster correspondence between women in prison and women in the community, called the Heart to Heart Correspondence Project, for which we will be inviting volunteer correspondents.

Clearly, to work in the Lockhart Prison, volunteers need to be based in central Texas. To volunteer for the Heart to Heart Correspondence Project, participants may be based anywhere in the USA.

TBT is working on a model curriculum to spread the program throughout the Texas prison system and beyond. Volunteers can help with fundraising and spreading the word.

For more information, contact us at www.truth-be-told.org or (512) 292-6200. ❖

Natalie Weinstein is a journalist who has worked in the news industry as a reporter and editor for 17 years. She is also a Truth Be Told volunteer at the state prison in Lockhart. Natalie lives in Austin, TX with her husband and two young daughters.

SCN Sugar Bowl Aids

Truth-Be-Told Inmates and Others



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 are sponsoring 21 women

in prison with Sugar Bowl scholarships as well as a number of other women who just need a little extra help.

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, P.O. Box 500127, Austin, TX 78750-0127. You may also use PayPal to pay on the SCN website at www.storycircle.org/Donations/sugarbowl.shtml ❖

Lifewriters Yahoo! Group

*Lifewriters' Yahoo! Group Moderator **Dani Greer** reflects on how the online group helped her find a solution to the diarist's age-old dilemma.*

Privacy, or lack of it, isn't just a modern issue. It's always been a dilemma for diarists putting the essence of their lives to paper. What if someone else reads those words? Will our truest thoughts and feelings shock or devastate someone we deeply love? What if we express our hatred and those bitter words haunt another life long after we are gone? Is it worth our own healing, or should it even be a matter of consideration?

These questions and more clearly troubled me in my own lifewriting, and I can see the caution when perusing my few remaining old journals. They seem somehow superficial. The depth that might have been there is noticeably missing, clearly whitewashed away before the most intimate details could be revealed.

How does one get around that kind of fetter? I tossed the predicament out to the 50+ members of the new SCN Lifewriters group we created at Yahoo! several months ago as an email forum for discussing lifewriting issues. It turns out this issue with privacy is as common as sliced bread. In the course of the discussion, I hit upon a thoroughly modern solution that seems to work quite well for me so far. I'm very sure it would take some doing to sneak a peek at my diary now, and that has helped free up some serious honesty in my writing. Thanks to everyone for that round of brainstorming and the solution to my problem.

We've had other fascinating conversations in our daily online discussions, from which lifewriting books we're reading to the rash of recent fake memoir scandals. It's truly a delight to have an ongoing gathering place to discuss lifewriting. If you're in a writing circle, you'll be familiar with the mechanics of a Yahoo! Group. What makes this group different is that we don't discuss our personal stories or writing but the tools and greater topic of lifewriting itself. If you'd like a bit of that conference camaraderie more often, come join us at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/scnlifewriters> and drop in with comments and questions or just for a little lifewriting company. You can also find the solution to my own privacy issues, tucked neatly away in the online archives. A truly clever resolution if I do say so myself! ❖



SCN welcomes
a new organizational-level member:
Harker Heights Public Library
of Harker Heights, TX.



Kitchen Table Stories

Rhonda's Generations of Jam-Making Traditions (Part 1)

Rhonda Esakov comes from a long line of jam and jelly makers, so many that it will take two issues of the Journal for her to share her stories of generations of fruit lovers and their preserves. Watch for Part II in the September issue.

Anna

Anna walks along next to the mules that pull their covered wagon as the canvas flaps in the breeze like sheets hung on a line to dry. She notices a couple of hog plum trees with some healthy looking fruit alongside the dirt road.

"Pearl, Ruby!" she hollers back to two of the girls, "go over there and make yourselves useful and see if you can shake some of the fruit from those trees and gather it in your aprons. Make sure and not get any wormy ones." As an afterthought, she continues, "Mind ya girls, there's always a danger of snakes, so keep your eyes sharp. They like to sun under the branches of that particular tree for some reason."

Tired of working in the cotton fields all day and this walk back to their temporary "house," if you could call four unchinked log walls, a tin roof and dirt floors a house, they look forward to this break in routine. Pearl and Ruby eagerly run to the trees knowing a taste of fresh fruit will be a wonderful treat to their parched throats.

Anna is famous for her jams and jellies; most special is the hog plum jam since although the fruit is free, it isn't often available or easy to find. She hopes she will be able to can up some fruit and jam on that old wood stove before they move on to the next job. Soon they will have enough money saved that they can go north to their land in Missouri and start work on the house, get the fields ready for next spring's planting and finally settle down from this constant life of traveling through New Mexico, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri and back for different seasonal crops. How fine it will be if John can at last get a permanent church ministry and be there to bless the holiday meals in their own home. And those meals will not be the same without a jar of hog plum jam to grace the table and slather on the fresh warm biscuits.

Pearl

As Pearl finishes the wash with the help of her three oldest daughters, she glances across the cornfield to the small fence that separates their home from her mother's. Along the fence, she notices a little bird activity. The girls look exhausted as one turns the handle on the wringer while another feeds clothes through from the other side of the wide tub; the third daughter lugs a heavy basket of clothes for Pearl to hang for drying. The chores are plenty, but a break in routine can't hurt—there will always be more laundry. Pearl remembers fondly her younger days of picking hog plums with her sisters and that wonderful hog plum jam her mom made.

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, 1600 Lake Douglas Road, Bainbridge, GA 39819.

"Bea, Barb, Bev, why don't you girls stop when you are done with those pieces, and I'll finish up here. I think you should run down the pasture to Ma-Maw's fence and check out what them birds are doing. I do believe the blackberries may be ripe and we need to pick 'em afore all the birds git at 'em."

With heavy, and exaggerated, sighs of relief, the girls quickly finish up what they're working with and skitter barefoot across the pasture. Pearl yells, "Watch out for the bees and wasps down there, I don't want ya comin' back all stung up."

Pearl is well known for her cooking and her most special item is blackberry jam. No holiday dinner is ever complete without a jar of her homemade preserves or jam to slather on the hot fresh biscuits sure to be served with the meal, plus it will help feed the family of nine through the winter months.

Barbara

As Barbara is hanging her sheets on the clothesline tree, she glances down at her little tomboy, Rhonda, and shakes her head. Her daughter is rolling her eyes in exasperation over the laundry basket she's holding, clearly put out by having to help her mom hang out clothes when there's a perfectly good dryer in the basement. Hanging the last wet bundle on the lines, Barbara turns the tree to gather in the dry sheets and she pauses to sniff the sheets with their sunny smell, which you can't get from a dryer. Enjoying a moment of nostalgia of doing this

Rhonda Esakov is a volunteer instructor for Texas Parks and Wildlife, an NRA Certified Shooting Instructor/Range Officer and has managed her own tax practice for over 25 years. She is the author of a selection in the *Kitchen Table Stories* anthology. She is writing a memoir on living in the Middle East. A presenter at Stories of the Heart IV, she gave a workshop on Storytelling and has taught Place Writing (Caves) in other workshops. She is a member of e-circle #3.

very same thing with her mother and sisters, she glances back at her two precious cherry trees only to note with alarm that the bird netting has blown free from one tree and there are a dozen blue jays fussing around the trees.

“Sis,” she asks, “why don’t you run over to the cherry trees and climb up and see if you can fix the net? While you’re there, see if the cherries are ready to pick.”

Rhonda, being the tomboy, loves nothing better than to climb trees and can often be found snuggled up in the crook of a tree with a book. This will be much more fun than dragging laundry around! She drops the empty basket without a backward glance and tears off running for the trees yelling, “Hi-YA, git, you stupid birds!” In a blink, she’s up the tree and shooing away the pesky jays, which aren’t afraid to peck her to keep her away from a place they have claimed as their own.

Barbara is a great cook like the women in her family before her, and her pies and jellies can’t be beat. She’s looking forward to a good crop of cherries this year so she can make her fabulous cherry jelly. No Christmas morning is complete without her fresh homemade bread and cherry jelly. There should be enough to make several jars and put away in the basement to keep until the holidays. That is, of course, if the kids and birds don’t eat up all the good cherries first! ❖

To be continued in the next issue of the Journal.

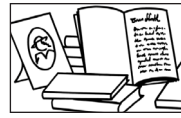
The Rites of Writing: Ways to Foster Your Writing Career

The aspiring freelance writer can benefit from the support of a writing coach, says Contributing Editor Sharon Blumberg.

Why use the services of a writing coach? In many cases, aspiring writers know how to write, but they don’t know how to go about developing a real career as a writer. That is where a coach can help. A writing coach can help you discover what you truly love to write. A coach can also help you stay focused on your writing career. Since a writing coach knows what you need to do to succeed as a writer, a coach can be sure you are taking the right steps to develop a career. In some cases, a writer may wish to write a book, but she just can’t figure out how to put it all together. That is another instance where a coach can help.

There are a number of different kinds of writing coaches available. Try to find a coach with services that meet your needs. You can find a writing coach through a writing organization or through personal recommendation. SCN has a Members’ Services web page listing a few members who offer these kinds of services at www.storycircle.org/memberservices.html.

You need to feel that your coach is helping you become the type of writer you want to become, not the type of writer your coach wants you to be. A good coach will help you discover how to reach your writing potential. ❖



Books for the Journey

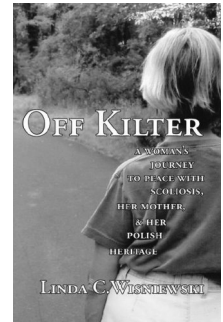
Off Kilter: A Woman’s Journey to Peace with Scoliosis, Her Mother and Her Polish Heritage by Linda Wisniewski (Pearlson Press, 2008. ISBN 1-59719-012-8.)

“More than anything, I want to understand,” writes Linda Wisniewski toward the beginning of her memoir. She does and she shares it.

Growing up in the Polish neighborhood of factory town Amsterdam, NY, little Linda Ciulik knew things weren’t right. Most dads didn’t yell all the time, terrifying and verbally abusing their families. Mothers didn’t cringe and criticize; other mothers thought their daughters could grow up to do wondrous things on their own. Teachers found the good in a child; teachers didn’t always search for the weaknesses and then spread the word. And other girls had straight backs. Everything seemed off-kilter.

This was Linda’s Ciulik’s life as a child. It is not Linda Wisniewski’s life today. Her back may still curve [from scoliosis], but when she stands in front of the mirror she looks straight into the eyes of the woman who gazes back at her. What’s more, Wisniewski knows how to talk straight and write straight.

—From the review by Patricia Nurdyke Pando on the SCN book review website



Wisniewski honors all the members of the family into which she was born, in spite of its often-dysfunctional dynamics. She honors the past, her Polish heritage. She writes about her Catholic education, the insensitivity of the nuns, her failed marriages, and so much more. She writes of her life spent pleasing “teachers, employers, parents, boyfriends, husbands, twisting myself into someone I can’t be. I hurt when I do this, because it’s not natural.” She relates her journey moving away from this futile way of being. The path she chose was to become herself, accept her emotional and physical handicaps, stretch herself, and take bigger and bigger risks despite her shyness.

Ultimately, the author comes to a place of inner peace: “The good memories return, like a tide that has been out for decades. Freed from some long-forgotten dam, they return to me, washing me in their healing waters.”

—From the review by Duffie Bart on the SCN book review website

Read the online author interview with Linda Wisniewski, at Story Circle Book Reviews: www.storycirclebookreviews.org. Linda talks about writing and publishing her book in the May SCN Podcast, on the web at: <http://scn.libsyn.com>.

Spotlighting our volunteers

Take a Bow Lisa Shirah-Hiers

In a change of roles this issue, we invited Lisa Shirah-Hiers to be the subject of our *Take a Bow* column. **Sharon Blumberg** interviewed Lisa to find out more about the Journal's most active contributor, a woman who wears many hats within SCN.

Lisa was born in Kentucky in 1965 and grew up in Madison, Wisc., with her mother Elizabeth and sister Rebecca. In 1988, she graduated *summa cum laude* with a Bachelor of Music from Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisc. In 1990, Lisa married and moved to Austin, Tex. She graduated in 1992 with a Masters in Composition from the University of Texas at Austin.

Following graduate school, Lisa worked part-time as an announcer on KMFA, the classical music station in Austin, and she taught piano lessons for the Traveling Music Teacher Network. Lisa later took a break from music and worked as an office manager prior to starting her family. It was during her time at home with a young baby daughter that Lisa discovered SCN. Says Lisa, "I was glad to see [my daughter's] milestones but desperately bored and lonely.... I joined the Story Circle Network and the Internet Chapter and started writing in e-circle 10. It was a great thing for me. I didn't have to drag my baby to a face-to-face circle, and I could write any time of the day or night. It satisfied an old craving to write and gave me something like a social life."

It was through SCN that Lisa first began to publish. In 2002, Lisa won an honorable mention in the San Gabriel Writers' League Writingsmarter Contest and fourth place in the SCN annual Susan Wittig Albert Lifewriting Competition. Being involved in SCN gave Lisa the courage to move forward with her writing career.

Lisa's friend Melanie Alberts, a former board member of SCN, encouraged Lisa to send some of her writing to the *Hill Country Sun*, a magazine for which Melanie was writing. After Lisa's work was published in the *Hill Country Sun* and *austinwoman* magazine, Susan Wittig Albert asked Lisa if she would write about Susan's then new mystery series based on the life of Beatrix Potter. Lisa was thrilled when *Austin Monthly* accepted the piece.

When her daughter began kindergarten, Lisa resumed teaching piano lessons and continued her writing. She was thrilled when Jane Ross invited her to do the "Take a Bow" column of the *Story Circle Journal* on a regular basis. Lisa has also contributed pieces to SCN anthologies, *What Wildness Is This* and *Kitchen Table Stories*.

Sharon Blumberg is a middle school Spanish teacher. An SCN member since 1999, Sharon is working actively to grow her freelance writing career. She has recently joined the *Journal* staff as a Contributing Editor and is on the SCN Board.

Lisa became more involved with SCN in 2004 at the annual conference, and later that year she joined the SCN board. When Lisa discovered that there were only a handful of story circles around the country, she focused on developing more. She worked with past presidents Judith Helburn and Patricia Pando to develop the Circles Coordinator position. In addition, with the help of Executive Director Peggy Moody and Judith, Lisa established a facilitators' Yahoo! group through which members post questions and suggestions to each other. Lisa takes pride in the fact that as a result of these efforts, SCN has doubled the number of circles around the country and the world. In addition to her circles work, Lisa has served on the Membership Committee, Strategic Planning Committee, and Conference Vendor Committee.

As a Contributing Editor to the *Journal* Lisa writes the Circles Column, "Take a Bow," and author interview features. Lisa took pride in interviewing some interesting and famous women, including Susan Wittig Albert, Nancy Aronie, (SCN 2008 conference keynote speaker), and Kathleen Dean Moore, (the 2007 Land Full of Stories conference keynote speaker). She has found these interviews to be very rewarding. Lisa also writes two memoir pieces a month for her Internet Circles.

Lisa started writing young. When she was just six years old, she wrote a novel that filled a whole spiral notebook as well as many short stories and poems. She has been journaling since nine. Lisa advises beginning writers to "write freely and write a lot. Don't let the critic get you."

Lisa says, "I get bored unless I have lots of activities from which to choose. I guess that's because I have a moody muse. I read quite a lot—mostly children's fantasy novels (the genre in which I've been working)." Lisa also enjoys baking, jazzercise, T'ai Chi, knitting, crochet, coloring (which she calls her "dirty little secret"), and playing the piano and composing when she has time. She has just finished writing the novel she started when her daughter was little. With her many varied activities and commitments, it seems boredom is one problem that Lisa doesn't have!

Lisa has struggled with bipolar disorder for most of her life, although she is now on medication to control it. What got her through it was a maxim: "When you can't do a lot, do a little." Occasionally after a major project, Lisa feels low energy and motivation. Lisa says, "I learned the hard way that if you do nothing, you'll just erode your self-esteem. You've got to do something, however small." The irony is that Lisa's accomplishments are enormous! ❖

Sam Shirah and the Freedom Walk: A Daughter Reconnects with Her Father's Story

SCN's **Lisa Shirah-Hiers** had only a second-hand understanding of the role her father, who died when she was fourteen, had played in the 1960s civil rights movement. Then, this spring Lisa was invited to represent her father at a conference to honor the 1963 Freedom Walkers, a group of idealistic young men who suffered imprisonment for their belief in equal rights and freedom of expression. It was in standing in front of an unlikely conference audience that Lisa reconnected with her memory of her father with new understanding and empathy.



Lisa Shirah-Hiers with author Mary Stanton and Lisa's sister Rebecca, March '08.

In April of 1963, in the middle of the civil rights movement, a postman named Bill Moore, a confirmed atheist, decided to carry a plea for racial tolerance on foot from Chattanooga, Tennessee, to Jackson, Mississippi, where he planned to deliver it to Governor Ross Barnett. As he walked, handing out copies of his letter, he pushed a small cart on which he'd mounted a poster of Jesus with the caption, "Wanted—agitator, carpenter by trade, revolutionary, consorter with criminals and prostitutes."

A few days into the walk, Bill Moore passed through an isolated rural community where he was confronted by a white conservative Baptist grocer named Floyd Simpson. Simpson seemed more offended by the poster than he was by Moore's anti-segregationist message and grilled him about his religious beliefs. A few hours and miles later, Simpson shot Bill Moore dead.

Within a week, a group of young civil rights activists determined to finish Bill Moore's walk. That group included my father Sam Shirah as well as four other members of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and five members of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Dad was just twenty years old and deeply involved in the movement. As the group crossed the Alabama border, all of them were arrested and spent a month in Kilby State Prison subsisting on rations of cornbread laced with sand and glass.

Although the Freedom Walk was well publicized at the time, it wasn't until 2003 that a book was published about these events. Mary Stanton's *Freedom Walk: Mississippi or Bust* (University Press of Mississippi, Jackson) includes an

extensive biography not only of Bill Moore but of my father as well. It is a precious record of his life.

Forty-five years after the Freedom Walk, in January this year, the President of American Atheists Ellen Johnson invited me and my sister to represent my father at the American Atheists' conference where there would be a tribute to Bill Moore and all the Freedom Walkers. My sister and I arrived in Minneapolis full of excitement. On Good Friday, we stood on the podium with three of the walkers: Bob Zellner (Dad's best friend), Zev Aeolony and Winston Lockett. We exchanged a warm hug and I stood at the lectern to give my speech, aware that an atheists' conference was a strange place for my deeply religious father to be honored.

I couldn't tell the audience what it was like to be part of that great movement for justice and equal rights. I was conceived only after those events during Freedom Summer of 1964 when my mother came to Mississippi to help my dad and other SNCC members register black voters.

Around the time that Dad was organizing labor unions, I was about two. Mom told me my favorite song was "Solidarity Forever." But I had the words a little mixed up. Mom had been trying to get me to eat my vegetables, so I walked around singing "Saladarity forever, green salad makes you strong."

My parents divorced after only a few years, so for most of my life I had very little contact with my father until one wonderful summer in 1979 when my sister and I visited our grandparents, the Rev. and Mrs. Sam Shirah in Dothan, Ala. Dad came down from Woodstock, N.Y., with his second wife, Benita, and for three lovely weeks we all got to know each other. For the first time since we were babies, my sister and I got to hear him sing and play the guitar. I told him about my dreams of a music career and played the piano for him. Grandmother said he wept when he heard me, but with my back to the room and my eyes on the keys, I didn't see it. I feel blessed to have had those three weeks to know him. It was the last summer of his life. He was taken from us the very next January when I was only fourteen.

From that moment on, my dad was to me an elusive character in history. I was hungry for everything my grandparents sent me: clippings, obituaries, and family stories. When they told me about the Freedom Walk, I took to scouring libraries for books about SNCC, searching through the indexes for any

(Continued on page 27)

SCN-sponsored events

Workshops, Retreats, Conferences

Discovering Ourselves through the Power and Practice of Story: A Writing from Life Workshop

When: June 14–15, 2008
9:00am–5:00pm (optional to 8:30pm), Saturday
9:00am–Noon, Sunday

Where: Meeting Room A 504 of Building A
LCRA Dalchau Service Center
3505 Montopolis Drive, Austin, TX

Cost: \$125 for non-members, \$100 for Story Circle members
(A box lunch on Saturday is included in the fee.)

DEADLINE FOR SIGN-UP: June 6

Join us for a weekend of writing, sharing, and discovering how powerful the practice of telling our stories can be. The stories we tell about ourselves make our lives bigger or smaller, more expansive or more limited, depending on our definition and interpretation of the events of our lives—not what literally happens, but what we make of it. As Christina Baldwin notes, we make the world fit into the story we are already carrying. We are the storytellers, the ones who put life into words. Come join our ranks and experience the mix of wisdom, wit and wonder that emerges when women gather to share their stories. The workshop is open to any woman who is interested in lifewriting regardless of skill level or experience.

More information on the web at: www.storycircle.org/Workshops/

Mark your calendar and plan to join us in Austin TX October 25–26 for another Writing from Life weekend workshop. Details will be posted on the SCN website later this summer. Watch for a reminder in upcoming e-letters.

Teachers Wanted for SCN's Online Workshop Program

The organizers of SCN's online classes are looking for teachers who want to share their passion for lifewriting.

In fall, 2008, SCN will begin offering classes in its expanded online workshop program. Why not be among the first to join the faculty.

Want some ideas for a class you might want to offer? Try these on for size:

- Redesign your Stories from the Heart or Land Full of Stories conference presentation as an online course, with 6–8 student writing assignments that you email to your students. You critique their work and return with suggestions.
- Propose a workshop on journaling, memoir-writing, or life-based fiction, with assignments, tips, and mentoring.
- Suggest a class on writing a family history. Each student chooses five or six family members, conducts interviews or writes from memory. Or your students write about places in their family's past or family traditions. Lots of possibilities.
- Recipe collections are fun! Organize a class that shows students how to gather, edit, assemble, and tell stories about their families' favorite recipes. In a second-level course, help them learn how to publish their books.
- Do you blog? Do you know quite a lot about blogging? Share that knowledge (and inspiration) with people who are just getting started.
- Do you teach lifewriting as a means of healing and a way to reframe experience? Share your knowledge and experience with students online.
- Offer an intensive workshop on self-publishing, guiding students through the creation of an e-book or POD book.
- Do your talents include proofreading and editing texts? Lots of people would like to brush up their editorial skills. You can help.
- Are you a published author who would like to offer coaching or one-to-one tutoring? Tell us about yourself and what you'd like to do.

(Continued on p. 25)

Workshop Guidelines

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

REFUND/CANCELLATION POLICY: We will refund your registration fee (less a \$25 cancellation charge) if you request it by the 15th calendar day before the workshop begins. After that date, we will refund your fee only if we are able to fill your space from our waiting list. We reserve the right to

cancel the workshop; if so, we will refund your full registration fee.

SCN POSTAL ADDRESS: Story Circle Network, P.O. Box 500127, Austin, TX 78750-0127, 512-454-9833, storycircle@storycircle.org

NOTE: For affiliated workshops such as the Red River Retreat, please contact the workshop organizers directly with your payment and for answers to your questions.

Sign on to Teach in SCN's Online Workshop Program

We are now accepting proposals for the term beginning September 15 and ending November 21. If you're interested in offering a course, check out our "Call for Online Course Proposals," at www.storycircle.org/onlineproposal.shtml. If you have questions about teaching in the program or want to check out an idea before you submit it as a proposal, please email programdirector@storycircle.org.

Affiliate Your Writing Workshop with SCN and Reach More Participants

SCN invites writing teachers and writing-related workshop facilitators among our members to affiliate their programs with SCN.

Besides the SCN-sponsored workshops such as Writing from Life, SCN offers several "affiliated" workshops, events run by SCN members that have a special relationship with SCN. The aim is to help our members reach more participants for their programs while at the same time getting the Story Circle Network name out to those who attend our members' events.

While we grow our affiliation program, one-year affiliation is, for now, free for programs that are approved for affiliation by the SCN Board.

For our members who run SCN-affiliated programs, SCN will:

- list the particulars of your program on SCN's Writers' Workshops page, here: www.storycircle.org/Writers.shtml using the text you give us (include a link to more detailed info on your own website);
- mention briefly the workshop in three monthly e-letters (this will be a summary of the info posted on the Writers' Workshops page);
- give you one quarter-page ad in one issue of the *Journal* (you will work with the *Journal* Editor on this).

In return, you will be asked to include the words "Affiliated with Story Circle Network," with the SCN logo on your website and e-letters (where the particular program is displayed), and in your print advertising, to distribute SCN brochures to participants, and to answer questions about SCN.

As the affiliation program expands, the one-year affiliation may be something that we charge for, but for now, there is no charge.

How Do I Affiliate My Program with SCN? Simply send an email to storycircle@storycircle.org with the words "SCN Affiliated Program" in the subject line. Tell us about your program, including a PDF of ads or handouts if available. Affiliation requests are reviewed by the SCN Board.

SCN-Affiliated Workshop

Red River Writing Retreat

A Women's Writing Workshop
with Carolyn Blankenship and Leilani Rose
August 10–12, 2008
Red River, New Mexico

Escape the August heat and humidity and kick back in the cool mountains of New Mexico! Join us for a women's writing retreat at the Ponderosa Lodge in beautiful Red River, New Mexico. This year we will explore the theme, "Coming Home to Ourselves."

Because we want an intimate retreat with ample time for writing and sharing, we are only able to accept 18 participants, and we only have four spaces left. You can email Leilani at lr0se11@austin.rr.com or Carolyn at cb@io.com for information or to pre-register. For more information about Red River lodging, food, music festival, etc., check out our website at <http://www.cbdeco.com/rr08>.

DATES/TIMES:

1:30 pm, Sunday, August 10, to 1:00 pm, Tuesday, August 12, 2008

COST: \$195 for Story Circle members, \$225 for non-members

(Includes workshop and refreshments;
does not include lodging, meals, or transportation.)

We regret that we are unable to accept credit cards,
but we do have an installment plan.

DEADLINE FOR REGISTRATION: July 10, 2008

SCN-Affiliated Workshop

A Story Circle Lifewriting Retreat

with Robin Edgar

WHEN: October 3–5, 2008

WHERE: Wildacres Retreat, Little Switzerland, NC

COST: \$225 for SCN members, \$250 for non-members

Join nationally known author and writing workshop facilitator, Robin Edgar, for a weekend life-writing retreat open to any woman who is interested in lifewriting, regardless of skill level or experience. Held at Wildacres atop Pompey's Knob mountain in Little Switzerland, North Carolina, it is a true retreat, undisturbed by through traffic or noises of the city. The 1,600 acres are adjacent to the Blue Ridge Parkway and thousands of acres of the Pisgah National Forest. The buildings are modern yet rustic and provide a very comfortable setting.

Guests stay in lodges with rooms that have a private bathroom and accommodate up to two guests. There are no televisions or telephones in the rooms. See www.wildacres.org.

Registration is limited to 12 participants. Fees for this weekend retreat include a double-occupancy room for two nights and five meals.

**To register, please contact Robin Edgar
at robinedgar@earthlink.net or visit www.robinedgar.com**

Story Circle News Roundup

Board Meeting Report

The SCN Board met at Penny Appleby's home in Austin on Sunday, April 13. President Penny Appleby chaired the meeting with four other members and the Executive Director present and six via teleconference. The Board:

- Reviewed and approved the minutes of the February meeting and the treasurer's report,
- Welcomed Linda Joy Myers as the new Chair of the Membership Committee,
- Reviewed the final budget of the Stories from the Heart Conference IV, which was very successful,
- Heard a report from Anne Beckner on ways to keep the OWL program viable,
- Heard two reports on Strategic Planning update (see Planning Update below).

The next Board meeting will be July 13.

—Report by Penny Appleby, Board President

Planning Update

Penny Appleby

Joyce Boatright wrote a thorough description of the planning process SCN went through planning the next ten years of SCN, which appeared in the June, 2007, *Story Circle Journal*. Patricia Pando synthesized the results of that process into a Strategic Planning Document, which the Board approved in October, 2007. Now we are in the process of implementing the elements of that Planning Document. At the February Board meeting two items—Organization and Finance—were selected to have specific plans identified and reported to the Board on April 13. Here are the highlights of those reports.

Key to all the other items in the plan is an evaluation of the current organization of SCN and what, if any, changes need to be made. The two major items to be investigated include the writing of a Vision Statement and the corresponding Goals and Objectives.

The Finance action plan includes three major categories: Revenue Review and Expenditure Review, Budget, and Fundraising/increase income. Specific tasks were assigned to Board members to have completed by specific dates. One task is to revisit how income and expenses are reported. The growth of SCN has made this a priority and because this information would be useful in determining future programs.

Story Circle Network funds itself primarily through its membership and various programs throughout the year. One key task assigned includes a thorough study of past workshops and programs to determine if we should be doing more

of certain types, or if some need to be eliminated. Other tasks include researching the types of grants available to SCN and the possibility of a fund raising campaign outside the membership.

Follow the progress of the implementation of these and other plans in future issues of the *Journal*. ❖

Internet Circle Tips

Lee Ambrose

Sometimes, new members ask the questions that so many of our Internet Chapter members wonder about but never voice. Beginning with this issue of the *Journal*, look for helpful little tidbits from some of our Internet Chapter e-circle facilitators. In some cases, these will be generated from direct questions by some of our members. Other times, they will be items our facilitators believe to be important pieces of information for new and long-standing members.

In this issue, Jazz Jaeschke, our poetry circle facilitator, explains why it is important to always post to the circle address rather than “off list” (a term we use to denote sending email to individual email addresses rather than the circle's Yahoo! groups email address.)

Says Jazz, “To facilitate our togetherness in circle, poems and responses go to the circle distribution list rather than to individuals. To ensure everyone can read what's sent, regardless of their computer setup, we mostly avoid attachments and fancy fonts.”

Jazz feels circle members benefit from hearing one another's reactions to the various poems offered. And “Sharing personal comments with the full circle strengthens our community within the circle.”

So, Internet Circle members, keep sending everything to your circle address. ❖

Members in Print and in the News

More member news online on the Members In Print page of our website.

Nightshade, the latest in Susan Albert's popular China Bayles herbal mystery series, was published on April 1. The book is an Alternate Selection of the Mystery Guild. Susan's memoir, *Landscapes of the Heart: A Memoir of Marriage and Place*, has been accepted by the University of Texas Press for publication in fall, 2009.

The April 19 *Charlotte Observer* featured Robin Edgar, author of *In My Mother's Kitchen: An Introduction to the Healing Power of Reminiscence*. Robin will be leading her annual writing retreat at Wildacres this fall. See p. 24 for details.

Sam Shirah and the Freedom Walk (Continued from page 23)

word of him and the Freedom Walk. Most of the time there was nothing—at best a footnote or two—but every word was precious to me. I ran my finger over my father’s name wishing we’d had more time.

Then a few years ago I received a copy of Mary Stanton’s book. At last I had my father’s story and a little of my mother’s too. It was painful to read and powerful too. I grieved all over again, swelled with pride when I discovered that he’d sung at Carnegie Hall with Bob Dylan and the Freedom Singers, when I heard of his charisma that was so strong he’d once converted a Ku Klux Klan-planted spy with Nazi leanings into the movement! I wished I could have heard him then.

“I’m proud of Sam Shirah,” I told the assembled conference-goers, “proud of the little pieces of him that live—I hope—in me. I have his brown eyes, his love of music, and his deep desire to do good in the world.

“I’m proud of my mother too. I can’t help saying, as we honor these brave men—those standing here and those like my father and Bill Moore who cannot—that we must remember too the women in their lives. Women like my mother who were left to the diapers, the bread-winning and the work of home so husbands, lovers, and sons could work for civil rights with no or too little pay. It took strength and courage to be kin to someone in the movement, because it made you and everyone you loved a target as well. As I remember all the sacrifices my parents and grandparents made, I am filled with a sense of awe and of obligation to be as courageous as I can be when the need arises.”

I had worried about standing up in front of a gathering of atheists and using the word “blessing.” My father and grandfather came to the civil rights movement because of their religious conviction that we are all children of God—brothers and sisters—and consequently equally entitled to freedom and

justice. It was the power of that faith that led them and many others to risk their lives in the struggle for equal rights. My dad was a preacher’s kid and a Sunday school teacher who’d announced his intention to go into the ministry just two weeks before he died.

But, I continued, “If anyone thinks it strange that Sam Shirah be honored here, in this time and place, by those who do not share his beliefs, let me remind them: what the Civil Rights Movement achieved was not only equal rights under the law but a union—for a time—of atheists, Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, blacks, whites, gays, straights, men, women, Yankees, and southerners; who focused not on their differences but on their common humanity and their dedication to do what is right and good. As I thought about all of this, I remembered a quotation often attributed to Voltaire: ‘I may disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.’”

To me that is what my father stood for as much as anything else. And I believe that it is still in unity and tolerance and mutual understanding where the hope for a better future lies.

Representing my father at an Atheists’ conference was a surreal experience, but my sister and I were warmly welcomed by everyone. We had long talks with author Mary Stanton, three of the surviving Freedom Walkers, and former SNCC Chair, Chuck McDew. It was deeply satisfying to meet people who spent so much time with my father when he was young and humbling to think of all they had risked for racial equality. I will never forget this experience, these special people, and the chance to touch my father across the divide of so many years. ❖

For more information about Bill Moore’s Freedom Walk and Mary Stanton’s book, *Freedom Walk: Mississippi or Bust*, go to: www.alabamatheist.org/all/article.



This membership is a gift

My name and address:

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Join the Story Circle Network!

Annual Membership:

- _____ USA: \$35.00
- _____ Canada & Mexico: \$45.00 (International MO)
- _____ International: \$50.00 (International MO)
- _____ Internet Chapter: \$18/yr (in addition to your national dues)
- _____ Sample copy of the *Story Circle Journal*: \$5.00

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

6/08

Name _____

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

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

Mark Your Calendar

SCN Events and Deadlines

See pages 24–25 for workshop details

June 6: Registration deadline for the June Writing from Life workshop.

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

July 1: Deadline to enter the Susan Wittig Albert Life-writing Contest. See p. 8.

July 10: Registration deadline for Red River Writing Retreat.

August 10–12: Red River Writing Retreat (SCN-affiliated workshop). Red River, NM.

September 15: Beginning of the fall term of SCN's on-line classes. See the call for proposals on p. 25.

October 3–5: Story Circle Lifewriting Retreat with Robin Edgar (SCN-affiliated workshop), Little Switzerland, NC.

October 17: Registration deadline for the October Writing from Life workshop. Check the SCN website later this summer for more information.

October 25–26: Writing from Life weekend writing workshop, Austin TX.

Our online calendar is at:

www.storycircle.org/calendar.html

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

Save a Tree

Get Your Journal over the Internet

Tired of waiting for the *Journal* to be delivered by the post office? SCN is now offering you a way to receive your *Story Circle Journal* via email, on the day it's mailed. The email will contain a link so that you can easily download the electronic version to your computer.

The electronic version is a PDF (Portable Document Format), which you'll need Adobe Reader to view. Most computers come with this software already installed, but free versions are available for nearly every operating system—no matter how old—at www.adobe.com/products.

When you get your email containing a link to the PDF, you'll have several choices: You can save the *Journal* file on your computer to read or print at your leisure, or you can read it on the screen. With the on-screen version you can zoom in and make the text bigger and easier to read.

Saving the PDF to your computer usually takes only seconds. The time it takes to print depends on the speed of your printer.

Of course, there are three advantages to Story Circle Network in sending your *Journal* via the internet—our organization saves the cost of paper, printing and postage, which means that money can be used for other projects. And *you* can feel good about helping the environment by saving paper and energy.

To sign up for electronic delivery of the *Journal*, send an e-mail to storycircle@storycircle.org. Include the words "SCN Journal via PDF" in the subject line.

Story Circle Network Inc.

PO Box 500127

Austin TX 78750-0127