



Story Circle Journal

Vol. 12 No 1, March, 2008

The newsletter for women with stories to tell...

“You Raise and Claim Your Clear Voice”

Reflections on the Stories from the Heart Conference

With a singer rather than a writer as guide and teacher, the closing lunchtime session of the Stories from the Heart conference embodied a remarkable lesson for conference attendees about the power of voice and circle, as Journal Editor Jane Ross explains.

As women we have many voices—our mother voice, our work voice, our caregiver voice, and dozens more. Running beneath all of these is a voice that is more truly our own, says Conference Program Chair Carolyn Blankenship. “This is a voice that we rarely have an opportunity to express, and SCN and the Stories from the Heart Conference is one of few the places where we women can freely let that voice be heard.”

Conference panelist and presenter Sharon Lippincott felt the remarkable power of claiming her voice in a very literal way at the conference closing session. Sharon had arrived at the conference with mild laryngitis. By Sunday, she was 90% mute, her voice just a whisper. Until, that is, the closing lunchtime presentation when a remarkable singer and teacher called Susan Lincoln led the assembled women in singing several phrases from the mystical sacred music of Hildegard of Bingen, the 12th Century abbess and visionary.

Sharon Lippincott describes what happened next: “How can one chant without a voice? I had no idea, so I simply mouthed the words and went fully through the motions without forcing sound. I put my hands on throat and heart” as Susan Lincoln had all the 100+ women in the circle do to make the connection and “claim our clear voice.”

“[I]mmediately after that,” says Sharon, “I had 90% of my voice back...!” Sharon thought she was hearing Twilight Zone tones!

As Susan Lincoln explains, the words that conference attendees were singing (in Latin, “Tunc tu clamas clara voce”— You raise and claim your clear voice) are a call to the sacred feminine in each of us to awaken. Sung in a circle, these words touch a very deep place in our longing to give voice to our truest selves and to reconnect with that sacred feminine.

Who is this sacred feminine inside each of us? Says Susan Lincoln, “She is compassion, inclusiveness, embracing the whole, emotions, beauty, understanding, sensitivity, creative expression—the qualities most needed in this time. I think Hildegard is saying to us, ‘Speak what you know. Claim what you know. Express it in your own unique voice.’”

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A Letter from SCN's President, Penny Appleby

What a weekend! Women from 19 states and Canada gathered to open their hearts and share their stories. The excitement was there at the beginning of Stories from the Heart conference and just kept building all weekend. Imagine more than 140 women together for a weekend and never a discouraging word was heard! Well, maybe one: many wanted to be in more than one place at a time. Having to choose one session to attend out of four equally terrific sessions was frustrating. Fortunately, everyone had the opportunity to hear the three outstanding conference speakers. SCN's founder Susan Wittig Albert set the tone as the pre-conference presenter. On Friday evening keynote speaker, writer and commentator Nancy Slonim Aronie had us all laughing and weeping.

Closing out the session at Sunday lunch, Susan Lincoln, founder of Hilde Girls (spirit song circles for women), sent us away with the echo of all of our voices still ringing in our ears. Truly, this was a moving closing to such a richly rewarding weekend. Visit our website for an opportunity to see the scrapbook of the conference. Then start saving your pennies and making plans to attend Stories from the Heart V in 2010.

As you know, many celebrations took place in 2007 to celebrate SCN's tenth year. While we were celebrating our achievements of the first ten years, the SCN board was also busy looking forward and asking key questions such as, Where do we go from here? How do we get there? What changes need to be made? The result of this questioning was the development of a Strategic Plan approved by the board in October. This year we will begin to implement the elements of this plan in order to maintain SCN as a viable and meaningful organization for women who want to write and tell their stories as well as for women who want to read about women and their lives.

Speaking of reading, I hope everyone has visited the new Story Circle Book Review website. Take a look at the more than 300 book reviews there—think about becoming a book reviewer yourself, or submitting a review of a book you have read.

Find a comfortable spot, settle in and take the time now to read through this issue of the *Journal*. You'll find out much more about the conference. Our newest board members are featured in the Take a Bow column and, to encourage a visit to the book review site, some book review excerpts. Enjoy!

SCN's new President, Penny Appleby, is a woman who puts her energy where her heart is and fortunately for us, that means giving a great deal of that considerable energy to Story Circle Network. Penny retired from the high-tech industry to Austin TX in 1997, where she soon became a member of the newly formed SCN reading circle. She facilitated and continues to participate in an on-going OWL-Circle group. Joining the Board of SCN in 1999, Penny became Secretary/Treasurer in 2000. She has also been active in several other volunteer-supported organizations, including acting as an Austin Museum of Art docent and reading mentor in a grade school program as well as being active in the American History Club (the oldest women's club in Austin).



SCN President Penny Appleby opens the conference

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.

Driving Forces; L'Oreal Moments

Three remarkable women were the driving forces behind the wonderful Stories from the Heart conference in February: Conference Co-Chairs Peggy Moody and Danelle Sasser and Program Chair Carolyn Blankenship. Their attention to myriad details and quiet yet firm leadership of the conference planning volunteers made this our best conference ever. The Journal interviewed Peggy, Danelle, and Carolyn to get their own look back at the conference.

SCJ: *What is one thing that you took away from a conference session that will stay with you?*

Peggy: I went to one session, plus the lunches and keynote. What I took away from all of them: the importance of taking the time to write your stories—that we deserve to take that time, for ourselves. (A “L’Oreal” moment: ...because I’m worth it!)

Danelle: I struggle with writing, and yet every time I attend an SCN conference or workshop, I discover new ways to dig deep and find something to write about. The session I attended, “Place as Character,” given by Paula Yost, was a wonderful example of that. She showed us different ways to think about “place,” and I was inspired so much by her presentation style and her ideas.

Carolyn: I really enjoyed the session on weaving our stories, where we used the ideas of warp and weft as a structure for our writing; also the session on writing about our cultural traditions. What stays with me is the generosity and talent of our presenters and the way women light up when they share their stories with each other.

SCJ: *As you observed and spoke to the conference attendees, what is the thing you feel they most appreciated or enjoyed about the conference?*

Peggy: The chance to be with like-minded women. And meeting those who had previously been just “e-friends.”

Danelle: Being able to meet the fantastic women who are our members. I think that is what many of the attendees also experienced, especially if this was their first time at a Story Circle event.

SCJ: *What are three pieces of advice that you’d give to the organizers of the next SCN conference?*

Peggy: (1) It’s worth every minute of effort put into the planning. (2) Choose responsible chairs and keep in frequent contact with them. (3) Start asking for volunteers early—via e-letters, etc.—and ask for specific help.

Danelle: (1) Find committed volunteers on the planning committee, who agree to take on these jobs at the beginning of the conference planning. (2) Establish good communication between the co-chairs and all the committee chairs, on a regular basis, so everyone knows what is going on. (3) Try to get volunteers to speak up earlier! We had a lot of volunteers at the last minute, and it would have been nice to have them lined up earlier.

Carolyn: (1) Pay attention to time lines and details, details, details! The timeliness and graciousness of your responses to those who submit proposals and ask questions (and there will be many!) reflects directly on the professionalism and reputation of SCN. (2) Do your



Peggy Moody and Danelle Sasser

[Dear Peggy,]... you better have a smile on your face because that was one FINE conference. I was truly impressed with the way everything was organized and carried out, the choice of the keynote speaker and the quality of presentations. It created such a wonderful sense of community. I feel blessed and grateful to have participated.—J.G.

I have never been in a more supportive and empowering environment, and I was blessed and inspired in countless ways.—T.M.

(Continued on page 4)

Driving Forces; L'Oreal Moments (continued from page 3)



Carolyn Blankenship and Peggy Moody

Allow me to thank you personally for your work and heavy investment in making sure this was PERFECT. I don't think I've ever been to a conference so well planned and executed. Brava!—R.M.

Thank you—thank you—thank you. What a wonderful conference. And the follow-up information is so impressive. You did a fabulous job and I can't think of anything that you could have done better.... I am already looking forward to the next one in 2010.—D.R.

best to make sure your committee members realize the importance of their task—they will be choosing the program that is the whole reason for the conference. A large committee can make for a diverse and interesting program. (3) Patience and graciousness go a long way in making sure things run smoothly and presenters have a good experience—express your thanks and appreciation often throughout the process.

SCJ: *Tell me about something that really touched you at the conference and that let you know the work was all worthwhile.*

Peggy: The countless thank-you's that Danelle and I received from attendees. But most especially the “inner circle” thing that Susan Lincoln had us do at the end of Sunday's lunch, where we were sung to by the big circle of women: one of the most unbelievably moving and validating moments of my life. I felt honored to be part of the conference.

Danelle: Since I spent a lot of time at the registration table and in the common areas, I feel like I saw almost everyone who attended. And every woman I spoke to greeted me warmly and thanked Peggy and me for the work we did. Knowing that so many people really enjoyed the conference made it all worthwhile. I felt so honored to be thanked for helping create this wonderful event. I wish every person who worked on the conference could get the same praise, because it was truly a group effort.

Carolyn: I love hearing women say they are going away inspired to keep writing, or women who discovered some insight into their life, or those who doubted they had a story to tell but found that indeed, they do have something to say.

I felt completely supported by the women who chaired the conference and those who served on all the other committees that interact with the Program Committee. Although I am ready to hand this task over, it has been an incredibly rich and rewarding experience. I am so amazed at the generosity, professionalism, and commitment of both my committee members and the presenters, and their determination to make the conference the absolute best it can be, every time. You gals rock! ❖

I had never been to such an event, and found the whole thing quite amazing, far beyond anything I'd expected. I will certainly plan to return in two years when they have the next one and know that a great adventure is beginning with SCN. I wasn't so sure of my commitment to this organization when I arrived, and felt a bit uncertain at the onset of the conference, but that feeling quickly melted away in the warmth I experienced, and is totally gone now.—S.L.

Thank you to these corporate sponsors of the Stories from the Heart IV conference, and to the many businesses and individuals who donated door prizes, silent auction and goodie bag items, and conference supplies!



Stories from the Heart Conference A Weekend of Abundance

Sandra Simon

My dear friend Monica said it perfectly, “This alone is enough!” and it was still only Friday evening. “Even if I don’t go to anything else at the conference, this has been sufficient!” As the weekend progressed, Monica and I kept repeating her words to each other.

The pre-conference workshop on Mapping Our Stories, led by Susan Albert, was a wonderful experience and lesson in becoming aware of the physical map of our own lives, and bringing geography and place into our writing. We wrote, and then, as we read our stories, we began weaving our connections with one another. When the workshop ended, groups of women clustered together, sharing common experiences. The conference, like our Story Circle Network writing circles, enabled us to achieve that magic.

In her Keynote Speech Friday evening, *We Are All Alchemists; How to Turn Your Sorrow into Gold*, Nancy Slonim Aronie spoke from her heart to ours. We laughed, and wept, sharing the joy of not being alone in the pain and suffering that are, simply, part of all our lives. Hearing her speech would have been sufficient to make this a valuable, wonderful conference! Tired and exhilarated, we then nibbled on delicious dessert pastries and fruits (lots of honeydew, which had figured in one of Nancy’s stories), and talked and talked until late in the night, sharing our stories.

The workshops that I attended gave me new tools and tech-

niques for writing and thinking about my stories, and reaching down into myself to understand and experience the stories in new ways. I also learned about using digital technology to present stories in a different way, bringing in music and images to convey time, place, and meaning. And, I learned a lot of realities about publishing—including information about new, different avenues for publishing stories.

With new and old friends, I laughed and cheered as Sue Bilich and Paultette MacDougal entertained us after lunch on Saturday—possibly the first musical performance ever that was complete with writing prompts. The weekend was more than filled with joys—writing, listening, sharing, eating, a little shopping, connecting with friends. It was far more than sufficient! ❖

Conference Tech-Notes

Pat Flathouse

One important new aspect of this conference was the opportunity to learn more about how technology plays an important part in our writing. I participated in the Blog Panel, held in the media room, and learned quite a bit from the other panelists because I could see what was happening up on the screen as each panelist talked about her blog. The media room was a very important addition to our conference because it provided a wonderful visual tool to illustrate what is available in the way of technology to enhance our writing.

I think the 2008 Story Circle Conference was the best one of the four I have attended. But I say that every time! They just get better and better. ❖

Conference Co-Chairs Peggy Moody and Danelle Sasser and Program Chair Carolyn Blankenship.

Peggy Moody is SCN’s Executive Director. She is a native Texan (from San Antonio), and resident of Austin for the past 22 years. After working at IBM as a programmer and project manager for over 20 years, she left the company in 2001 to become a full-time self-employed webmaster and SCN’s Executive Director. She is married with three children with whom she drives many car-pool miles each week and attends lots of sporting events on weekends (kids’ swim meets, football, basketball, and baseball games). Her own passions are books (mostly women’s memoirs, but also mysteries and other novels), yoga, knitting, dancing, bread-baking, and gardening. She loves the mountains and dreams of living in the Colorado Rockies some day. She is not a writer but is a lover of stories and will one day write her own.

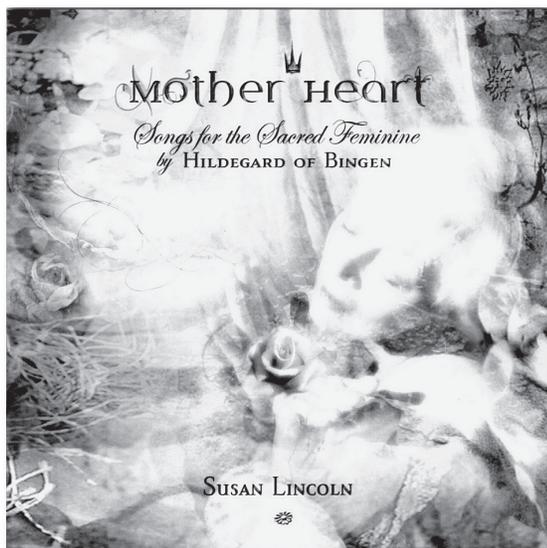
Danelle Sasser joined SCN in 2000, when she saw a notice in the newspaper about a writing group for women and signed up. Danelle has been on the SCN Board since 2003 and was co-chair with Peggy Moody of the 2006 SCN conference. Danelle graduated from the University of New Mexico with a business degree and a minor in music, worked in the computer department of the Public Service Company of New Mexico, and then worked for a computer software company in New Jersey. Since moving to Austin in 1993, she has been a very busy full-time Mom of twin teen boys, active on school PTA boards and booster clubs, helping with Eagle Scout projects, and involved in her congregation. In her spare time she reads, especially mysteries, surfs the web, sews, plays the flute in several chamber ensembles, and kayaks.

Carolyn Blankenship is a lifetime resident of Austin TX where she raised two daughters and worked at a variety of interesting occupations, both paid and volunteer, including children’s education, secretary, volunteer development, facilitator training, and desk-top publishing. Carolyn has developed and facilitated a variety of programs in personal and spiritual growth over the past 30 years, and currently teaches classes at Seton Cove, leads a yearly writing retreat in New Mexico, and facilitates Story Circle’s semi-annual Writing from Life Workshops. Carolyn enjoys her grandchildren, gardening, sculpting, photography, journaling, and as much travel as time and money allow. She now lives with her husband in Lockhart TX.

You Raise and Claim Your Clear Voice (continued from page 1)

In the feedback from conference attendees, over and over it is clear that the conference helped participants not only to claim their clear voice as writers and women but reminded them why claiming our voices is important work. It uplifts us; it lets us reconnect with each other as fellow travelers on the writing journey and life journey. And the process of doing this in a nurturing circle of women reminds us why our stories matter in the world at large and gives us the strength to continue to write and to seek places and means to send our story out into the world.

Many dedicated women helped make the Stories from the Heart Conference possible and enabled 140 women from around the US (and one from Canada) to claim their clear voice. Read a tribute to the three women at the head of this effort on page 3 of this issue. ❖



Mother Heart
Songs for the Sacred Feminine
by Hildegard of Bingen

Artist Susan Lincoln

The sacred music of Hildegard of Bingen, carried on the wings of Susan Lincoln's angelic voice, will take you on an emotional journey relaxing and inspiring you as it moves through your body awakening the divine spirit within.

Available through www.susanlincoln.com
(Listen to a sample on iTunes.)

Thank You

to all who have helped make the conference a success

Presenters, Panelists, Speakers and Singers

Susan Wittig Albert, Nancy Slonim Aronie, Cindy Bellinger, Sue Bilich, Carolyn Blankenship, Joyce Boatright, Patricia Daly, Rhonda Esakov, Pat Flathouse, Jan Golden, Peggy Grose, Greta Gutman, Jeanne Guy, Barbara Heming, Pat LaPointe, Helen Leatherwood, Susan Lincoln, Sharon Lippincott, Theresa May, Paullette MacDougal, Martha Meacham, Barbara Miller, Regina Moser, Patricia Pando, PJ Pierce, Donna Remmert, Janet Riehl, Jane Ross, Lisa Shirah-Hiers, Sandi Stromberg, Becca Taylor, Bonnie Watkins, Linda Wisniewski, Paula Stallings Yost

Conference Committee Chairs

Conference Co-Chairs: Danelle Sasser and Peggy Moody
Program Chair: Carolyn Blankenship
Advertising, P.R., Publications: Joyce Boatright
Goodie Bags, Door Prizes, Auction: Judith Helburn
Entertainment: Sue Bilich, Helen Lowery
Evaluations, Scrapbook, Story Wall: Linda Wisniewski
Hospitality: Danelle Sasser
Registration (on-site): Penny Appleby
Signage and Name Tags: Pat Flathouse
Site: Judy Abrahamson, Hazel Baylor
Subsidy: Patricia Pando
Vendors: Lisa Shirah-Hiers
Volunteer Coordinator: Penny Appleby

Other Planning Volunteers

Susan Wittig Albert, Anne Beckner, Linda Joy Myers, Donna Remmert, Rebecca Roberts, Leilani Rose, Jane Ross, Susan Schoch, Sandi Simon, Jo Virgil, Olga Wise, Paula Yost

General Volunteers

Peggy Grose, Abby November, Audrey Cournia, Carol Purroy, Rose McCorkle, Sheila McNaughton, Jan Golden, Janice Kvale, Pat LaPointe, Jeanne Henry, Sonja Borstner, Jane Parsons, Johnnet Scogin, Charlotte Scott, Esther and Richard Tangen (Travis County RSVP)

Conference Photographers

Tim Newman, Jane Steig Parsons (bios on page 22.)

"[I will remember] the beauty, sincerity courage and openness of the women present."

"Susan Lincoln's music will revive me often."

"I was impressed by the attention to detail. I think I've found a home in SCN."

The Stories from the Heart Conference Revisited



Keynote speaker Nancy Slonim Aronie



Susan and Bill Albert with Paulette MacDougal



An intense writing session

Who was there?

145 women came from U.S.
19 states and 1 from Canada.

How far did they travel?

Our furthest traveler came from Vancouver, B.C., Canada (1860 miles).
60 of our participants (42%) had to travel two hours or more to get to the conference.
40 women came from out of state.



Sunday luncheon song-circle leader, singer Susan Lincoln

Who helped create the conference?

33 women were speakers, presenters, panelists, or singers.
26 women helped plan the conference, and another 16 volunteers helped run it.



In the vendor room

Who gave from the heart?

21 SCN members and 22 businesses and service organizations made generous cash donations or donated items for door prizes and goodie bags, 8 subsidies were granted to cover all or part of the participant's conference costs

Thank you to conference photographers Tim Newman and Jane Steig Parsons for permission to reprint photos.

Conference Presenters a Talented Writing Crowd

Wow! Among the 30 presenters and panelists at the Stories from the Heart conference, at least fifteen have had a book published. Here is a list of conference presenters who are book authors or editors and their book titles. Starred titles are reviewed on the SCN Book Review website. And of course all our presenters and panelists have many short pieces published in many different publications.

Susan Wittig Albert

China Bayles' Book of Days
*What Wildness Is This**
 (Ed., with Susan Hanson, Jan Epton Seale, Paula Stallings Yost)
With Courage and Common Sense (Ed., with Dayna Finet)
Starting Points, Weekly Writing Prompts
*Spanish Dagger**
 (and other China Bayles Herbal Mysteries)
*The Tale of Hawthorn House**
 (and other Cottage Tales of Beatrix Potter)
Death on the Lizard
 (and other Victorian Mysteries, co-authored with Bill Albert, writing as Robin Paige)
*Writing from Life, Telling Your Soul's Story**
Work of Her Own

Nancy Slonim Aronie

*Writing from the Heart**
 (Read the book review on p.9)

Cindy Bellinger

Journaling for Women
Someone Stole My Outhouse: And Other Tales of Home-Improvement

Joyce Boatright

*Telling Your Story: A Basic Guide to Memoir Writing**
 (Read the book review on p.9)

Rhonda Esakov

Tax Guide for Small Business

Pat Flathouse

*Your Life, Your Story: A Book to Help You Capture Your Memories**
 (with Catherine Cogburn and Susan Wittig Albert)
A Priceless Legacy: Writing the Stories of Your Family History

Peggy Grose

Love and Lemon Pie: Recipes for the Body and the Soul

Sharon Lippincott

*The Heart and Craft of Lifestory Writing**
 (Read the book review on p.10)

Patricia Pando

Stirring up Memories All the Times
Claiming Their Land: Women Homesteaders in Texas

PJ Pierce

*Let Me Tell You What I've Learned: Texas Wisewomen Speak**

Donna Van Straten Remmert

Littlest Big Kid
Jitterbug Girl

Janet Riehl

Sightlines: A Poet's Diary

Jane Ross

Kitchen Table Stories (Ed.)*

Linda Wisniewski

Off Kilter: A Woman's Journey to Peace with Scoliosis, Her Mother and Her Polish Heritage

Paula Yost

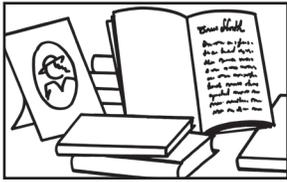
*What Wildness Is This**
 (Ed., with Susan Wittig Albert, Susan Hanson, Jan Epton Seale)

Look for reviews of the starred titles on the SCN Book Review Website, www.storycirclebookreviews.org. More books by SCN authors are at www.storycircle.org/authors.shtml. To benefit SCN with your book purchase, follow the link from the authors page or from the book review website to Amazon and a portion of the purchase price will come back to SCN.

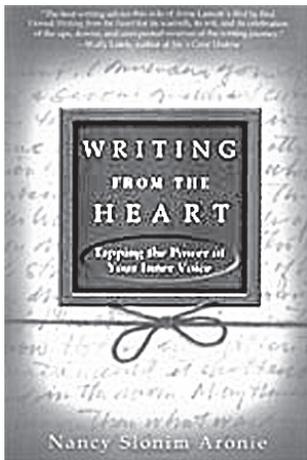


The Book Review Website team: Robin Wittig, Susan Wittig Albert, Linda Wisniewski, Paula Stallings Yost

Books for the Journey



The Stories from the Heart Conference introduced not only a wonderful group of presenters, who brought the craft of memoir writing to life, but also some wonderful books on lifewriting by those presenters. We bring you a small sampling of those books in these excerpts from the SCN book review website, www.storycirclebookreviews.org.



Writing from the Heart: Tapping the Power of Your Inner Voice, by Nancy Slonim Aronie (Hyperion, 1998. ISBN 0786882875). Reviewed by Donna Van Straten Remmert

Nancy Aronie shares her life experiences and invites her readers to reflect upon theirs. Having used this book as a resource in my Story Circle Network writing circle, I know that it inspires, moti-

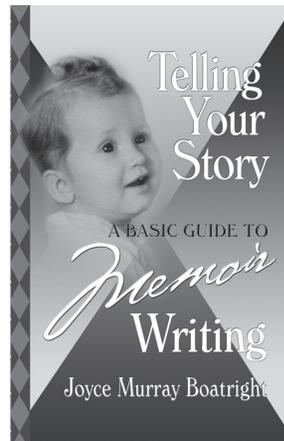
vates, and entertains in ways that can seem nothing short of transformational.

The easiest way to demonstrate the whimsical humor in *Writing from the Heart* is to glance at the chapter titles. My favorites are “Yesterday’s Soup,” “To Thine Own Self, Write the Bloody Truth,” “Are you There, Gut? It’s Me, Margaret,” and “Just for the Smell of It.” These chapters and all the others smack at truth and the human condition in safe, humorous ways that invite introspection and encourage shifts in one’s perspective.

Though humor is ever present in her book, Aronie challenges her readers to go deep into themselves to discover their profound truths as well. The book is an excellent guide for learning how to communicate your authentic self in writing. I especially like the way the author presents the writing exercises, sharing her life story to encourage readers to take the risk of sharing theirs.

Writing from the Heart is an outstanding resource for writing memoir, but it is not restricted to that type of writing. Instead, it is a guide for any genre requiring knowledge of oneself and an authentic voice. I loved reading and working with this book.

Aronie is a commentator for NPR’s “All Things Considered” who founded the Chilmark Writing Workshop on Martha’s Vineyard, where she lives. She also has distinguished herself as a notable author and workshop leader. For her complete calendar and to read more about this fantastic woman who has also been a stage actress and stand-up comic, go to her website: www.chilmarkwritingworkshop.com. ❖



Telling Your Story: A Basic Guide to Memoir Writing by Joyce Murray Boatright (Stone Press Publishing, Houston, 2006. ISBN 0977022900). Reviewed by Patricia Nordyke Pando

Where do I begin? How do I begin? Those questions often fly through my mind when I confront a blank page or an empty computer screen. I am not alone.

Joyce Murray Boatright knows the feeling. In *Telling Your Story*, she shares a professional writer’s secret: “Even today, forty-plus years since my first published byline, the hardest part of writing is to begin.”

This SCN member and Circle leader offers a great deal of help not only in getting started but in suggesting what to do after you get started and even what to do with your work after you finish. And she manages to do it in just a little over fifty pages.

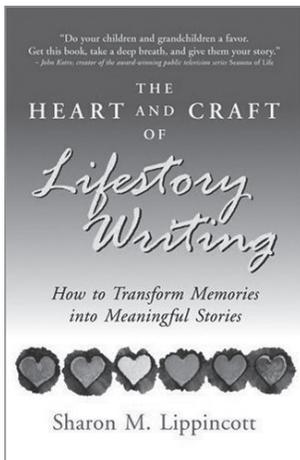
Boatright draws on her experience not only as a professional writer and a teacher of writing but also as a memoirist. She recounts how she began a family memoir as a Christmas gift for her parents who had “arrived at that point in their lives where they had everything they wanted.” In that first effort in 1991, she recounted familiar family stories. Through the years the project grew as other family members, mother, brother, son and more, contributed their stories. An inspiration for all of us!

Boatright offers fun suggestions on how to keep on going and how to break through blocks. She offers great advice about how to craft a memory, a recollection, into a real story with a beginning, middle and end.

When you are finished? Boatright has suggestions for personal uses, such as “make a family album or a cookbook,” and clear advice on how to go about preparing your manuscript for a wider audience.

This book will have wide appeal. It is full of good suggestions I can use as I co-lead an SCN OWL (Older Women’s Legacy) Circle. ❖

Books for the Journey (continued from page 9)



***The Heart and Craft of Lifestory Writing*, by Sharon M. Lippincott (Lighthouse Point Press, 2007. ISBN 9780979299803). Reviewed by Patricia Nordyke Pando**

“Start writing,” the author urges the reluctant writer at any skill level. Sharon Lippincott is a master project person, a worker bee, not a flitting butterfly. Sticking-with-it is a problem all writers experience at one time or another. The so-

lution? “When you have a purpose...you’ll discover awesome staying power.”

Since “Sharon’s Stories” comprise the first appendix, I feel comfortable using the author’s first name. Indeed, after completing the book, I felt we are great and close friends. Sharon defines what she deems “lifestory writing” on the very first page, indeed the first line of the book. It is “the process of transforming your own essence into works on paper for other people to know—daring to expose not only your actions and experiences, but your thoughts, your choices, your perceptions, and your feelings.” As a part of the main text, she recounts her own experiences in discovering this creative process.

Don’t worry about what goes down on the page as you “start writing.” “The underlying theme of this book is that anything you write is okay,” says Sharon. This is a book for storytellers of all levels of skill and degrees of experience.

The four appendices will be useful to all. The “stuck” writer may head for the second appendix, which is a series of memory triggers. I’ve worked with word processors for well over twenty years, yet until I browsed “Layout and Other Geeky Stuff” in Appendix 3, I’ve never known how to insert a caption with a picture. Finally, Appendix 4 offers two bibliographies. The first is of books cited in the text. The second comprises as complete and current a list of books on lifewriting and memoir as I have ever encountered. This is a perfect read to tell your own story in your own way. ❖

When you order these and other books through our book review website, a portion of the sale comes back to benefit SCN. Thank you for supporting these authors and our organization.

“Memory to Memoir” is Paula Yost’s acclaimed online lifewriting class, now in its fourth year.

More information on p. 25

Sign up on our website.

Story Circle Book Reviews Needs You!

Paula Stallings Yost

These are exciting times at www.StoryCircleBookReviews.org. Since our website expansion and redesign in mid-October 2007, we have published more than seventy reviews and have received and distributed more than one hundred books from publishers, publicists and authors, a definite record for our review site since it was established more than eight years ago.

Our editorial team—Susan Albert, Linda Wisniewski, Robin Wittig, and I—are thrilled with the growth and progress we’ve seen over these past few months and are predicting the excitement to continue. Of course, our success (past, present and future) is dependent upon a strong team of reviewers. Our current group is providing some of the best, most comprehensive reviews of books “by, for and about women” available on the Internet. What we need are a few more good women to join the team and accomplish even more.

Among the changes we’ve made recently is the establishment of a Review Team page with new breakdowns. We now include a list of the names and books reviewed by our Guest Reviewers—those who have submitted one to four reviews in the past twelve months. Our Associates list includes the names, biographies, and books reviewed by team members who have written five to nine reviews in the past year. Finally, each Star Reviewer is provided with her own page on the website that includes her photograph, biography, and list of books reviewed. Each month, a Review of the Month is selected by the editorial team and featured prominently on our home page, along with a photo and bio of the winning reviewer.

Certainly, one of our most important goals is to encourage and promote the efforts of each of our reviewers and to help them expand their writing portfolios. An added attraction is the opportunity to receive free, recently published books for your reading/reviewing pleasure. As more and more publishers become aware of our site, we expect to receive more and more great books. We also are happy to receive reviews of other books our reviewers have read and enjoyed on their own.

If you think you might be interested in working with us, please check out our Become a Reviewer page at www.story-circlebookreviews.org/becomeareviewer.shtml and then send us a sample review. Keep in mind please that we are seeking reviews of books published within the past two years and that are by, for and about women. We’ll look forward to hearing from you. ❖

For 60 years, Recording for the Blind & Dyslexic (RFB&D), a national nonprofit, volunteer organization based in Princeton, NJ, has been the leading producer of accessible educational materials for students with disabilities such as visual impairment or dyslexia that make reading standard print difficult or impossible. Volunteers at RFB&D studios in 20 states nationwide are helping to produce books in accessible digital format on CD. Visit the organization online at www.rfbid.org

Reading in the Dark

Published author Zara Houshmand had already found her writing voice but needed help throwing off her fear of speaking in public. A unique volunteer position reading books for the disabled helped her find her voice.

I volunteer at Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic (RFB&D) in Austin for a couple of hours each week. It's a noble cause, a great organization cheerfully run by a very professional staff, and the other volunteers are fascinating people from all walks of life. But that's not why I do it.

I can't imagine not being able to read—living without the companionship of books, the friendship of a favorite author, the passionate fling that kills sleep and postpones all mundane affairs until the very last page.

I'll confess: as a child, I was pathologically shy, a terrified mumbler. Now I face audiences in bookstores with enthusiasm and giddy pleasure. It's taken many small steps to travel that distance, and I still welcome ways to stretch without too much pain. I volunteered for RFB&D selfishly, to improve my reading skills.

The recording booth is an intimate space, claustrophobic until the walls dissolve into an interior world of words. There's no performance pressure. If I make a mistake, I back up and do it again. I set myself goals, work on technicalities. Today I'll remember to breathe from the diaphragm, avoiding that noisy inhalation before each sentence. The text continues, page after forgiving page, as I venture small experiments with

obscure muscles, forgetting myself for paragraphs at a time, then remembering... until, an hour or so into the session, I realize it's happening effortlessly, a small trick mastered.

Expression is a minefield. At first I cringe at what I hear—an amateur actor, a corny lilt gilding each sentence. Sometimes other voices crowd my head like nosy ghosts—here comes my grandmother with her Sunday-school quaver. I've learned a remedy. Pull back and let the grammar do the work, delivering the words without judgment beyond the pauses and inflections that naturally sculpt a clause, a question, a rhetorical shift. And sooner or later, on a good day, the words dissolve into their images and intentions. When the sound of my own voice fades, when I'm absorbed in the sense of the words, expression comes naturally. The lesson, as always: it's not about me.

I've yet to meet anyone on the receiving end of RFB&D services. That lack of feedback seemed strange at first, but there's a wisdom in anonymity. In the recording booth, I'm buffered not just from outside noise but also from the tug of the personal, the tangle of a real-life story on the far side of the microphone. Like all true practice, the reading is blessed in the ordinary, the regular repetition of small steps. Somewhere a library steadily grows, but in the inner space where voice reverberates, where worlds unfold in the mind, the practice feels as random and intimate as a message in a bottle. ❖

*Zara Houshmand is the co-author, with Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian, of the memoir *A Mirror Garden* (A.A. Knopf, 2007)*

Online Classes for Women with Stories to Tell

Susan Wittig Albert and Patricia Pando

If you have a story to tell and want some help in shaping your ideas, writing, and publishing, SCN can help you! Last October, the SCN board approved the development of a broad program of courses and the creation of a new website dedicated to the SCN's online classes.

We've begun working on the program and will soon have several classes to offer. Coming in June, to a computer near you: a four-week edition of Paula Yost's highly-acclaimed course, *Memory to Memoir*. Paula takes only twelve students. Registration will be online and the course will be taught via email. Students need not be members of SCN. Details here: www.storycircle.org/Workshops/MemoryMemoir.shtml and on page 25 of this *Journal*.

SCN's expanded program of classes will be offered during three terms: April–June, September–November, and January–March, and will include classes for beginning, mid-level, and advanced students. As the program develops, we expect to offer courses in journaling, place writing, nature writing, family history writing, self-publishing, editing and proofreading, blogging, writing-as-therapy, and poetry, all with a strong and clearly-defined focus on lifewriting. We hope to be able to

take advantage of new technologies such as podcasting and teleconferencing. We'd also like to be able to offer courses related to our bi-annual *Stories from the Heart* conference and other SCN activities. Once we have developed a regular faculty and are able to offer an expanded number of courses, we plan to create a lifewriting curriculum with a core course, various concentrations, and a certificate for students who complete some number or combination of courses.

If you are interested in teaching a course or becoming a regular faculty member in this program, please email Susan Wittig Albert (china@tstar.net) or Patricia Pando (ppando@gmail.com) and tell us about your interest and your experience. And please watch for our "Call for Online Course Proposals," which will come in June (for September–November courses), September (for January–March courses), and January (for April–June courses).

And don't forget: Paula Yost's class, *Memory to Memoir*, beginning in June! ❖

Story Circles—The Heart of SCN

Support, Not Critiques, the Hallmark of Writing Circles

Lisa Shirah-Hiers

Frequently I am asked, “Why is the feedback in my circle so ‘touchy-feely?’” The answer is that story circles are not critique groups! Part of SCN’s mission is “...to empower women to tell their stories, discover their identities through their stories, and choose to be the authors of their own lives.” The key word in the statement is “empower.” We are not an organization of professional writers. We are an organization of women in all shapes and sizes, at all different skill levels, who want to tell their stories. Too many of us have been intimidated by professional critique groups, former teachers, and others in our lives who convinced us either that we had nothing to say or that we didn’t say it the right way. In a story circle, the atmosphere is ideally safe and inspiring—not intimidating and, well, critical!

I know whereof I speak! When I began a fantasy novel many years ago, I joined a writer’s critique group because I thought that is what “serious” writers were supposed to do. I spent two years re-writing Chapters 1 and 2 because they were never quite “good” enough for my fellows. When I tried to start Chapter 3, I would think about what my critique group might say and I’d just freeze.

When you are a beginning writer, or just a writer at the beginning of a big piece, you need encouragement—not a line-edit or critique. After you’ve found your voice and written the “crappy little first draft,” that is the time to hone your skill. Then a professional critique becomes crucial to preparing to publish.

If you are ready to move beyond friendly encouragement, check out our online intensive writing workshops. You will get a true critique from our experienced instructors. But if you are starting out, find—or found—a true story circle. In that warm embrace, you will discover your unique voice, and your confidence. ❖

Would you like to join a story circle in your area?

To date we have reading and writing circles in California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin and even Canada and Ma’bar, Yemen! Check the “Free-Range Circles” list in the “How to Start a Story Circle” section of the website www.storycircle.org If there is no circle in your area, we hope you will consider starting one! The *Facilitator’s Guide* has everything you need including information on finding members, guidelines for facilitators and six weeks of writing prompts. And it’s free to our members.

For further information, contact Circles Coordinator Lisa Shirah-Hiers at freerangecircles@storycircle.org. ❖

How I Found SCN

Tiffany Benton

Honolulu HI

When I was fifty I sought the visionary counsel of an astrologer. She showed amazing insight into numerous aspects of my life and I felt as though I was talking with an old friend. At some point she asked me if I liked to write. “Yes, I’ve been a journaler since the ’70s,” I replied.

“Well, you need to write,” she said. Our conversation continued. She stopped four or five times to remind me, “You need to write.”

I kept replying, “I journal.” Finally, I asked her why she kept saying this. She said I should write down my life stories, that my family would love to hear them, and that this writing process would be healthy for me. At that moment, I realized that I was always telling my stories to friends and family and at work, and it might be fun to write them down.

As I was speaking to the astrologer, my sister was calling me to let me know that my mother had fallen, fractured her hip, and was in the hospital. My father was so confused my siblings had to stay with him. The next few years were filled with the crisis of my parents’ decline in health. I continued to write. Words poured onto the page. Writing my stories consumed my mind and provided a much needed break from the pain and worry about my parents. During this time I often stayed with my youngest sister and her family. I got to know them and my other siblings and their families after years of estrangement. That was the joy amidst the pain.

Within three years both of my parents had passed on, and my memoir, *A Tree with a View*, was a draft. A good friend suggested I attend the Maui Writer’s Conference. Terrified and unsure about what I was doing at a convention of writers, I registered. That first year (I attended three years in a row), I learned about book proposals in addition to other valuable writing skills. I decided to try to get my manuscript published. First on the list was a book proposal that included a summary of similar books on the market.

I began looking for book reviews. Perusing the Internet, I came across a site called OWL for women writers. I have an owl tattoo on my left shoulder. Further research of the OWL Network led me right to the Story Circle Network and all of the wonderful services available. I became a member. I continue to work on my book and enjoy sharing writings with my SCN e-circle sisters. ❖

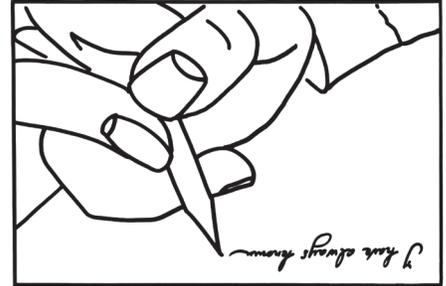
Special True Words Theme: How I Found SCN

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 on p. 18) as to format, etc. There is no deadline for these stories. ❖

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 "**A Garden Story**." Why not contribute your own True Words to the Journal? Future topics are listed on p. 18.



June Nancy Davies Portland OR

Over the years the month of June has come to hold many significant events in my life. I was married in June. I gave birth to my first child in June. We have celebrated numerous graduations from a variety of institutions in the month of June. My son committed suicide in June. My mother's name is June.

And June is the month when my garden is always at its best: not yet abandoned or at least neglected, like it is by late summer; my attention not yet given up and strayed to other things. The summer that Brett died, I tore everything out of my garden: weeds, flowers, rocks, sticks, everything. All I wanted was dry, barren dirt where nothing would be allowed to grow, where nothing would ever grow again. I felt bare inside and I wanted this garden to reflect that. I wanted the surface to be so hard that nothing could penetrate it. That's how I wanted my brain to feel. I was vigilant in the task, as if this would keep the pain away. Or at least distract it for awhile. And in a way it did. It was a focus until I could figure out what to do next. I couldn't get past the feeling that if I could only understand exactly why Brett had decided to take his life, then I could fix it. And if I could fix it, then he could come back. I knew that this wasn't going to happen, but it still occupied a lot of my thoughts.

It took a couple of passes at June coming and going before it wasn't a month to dread anymore. It will never be what it was, but I can greet it with a bit of peace now. I can plant bright blue flowers, the color of his eyes. I can let wild flowers grow with reckless abandon, which was the way he lived his life. And I can catch his spirit in the summer breeze on my face. ❖

Finding Hope Anne Gorman Houston TX

When someone loses something, my mom swears by St. Anthony and his mother. She has co-workers with missing keys, desperate for a miracle, calling her at home. "Donna, who's that person you pray to when you've lost something?" they implore.

"Call on St. Anthony and his mother," she tells them. As the story goes, the keys are found in short order.

But would that work with intangibles too, like lost enthusiasm, lost affection, or lost hope? I'm not so sure. My approach has more to do with unearthing, aeration, and feeding the soil—or do I mean soul?

Just a few years ago I felt at my wits' end, regretting past choices, second-guessing the present, and fearful of the future. That spring I began to dig along a narrow strip of soil between my driveway and the fence with a small hand trowel. Hacking away at the concrete bits embedded among the dirt, I cleared the space for the addition of a new layer of rich topsoil before I planted the variegated jasmine vines. Against all odds, the vines survived. With regular feeding and watering they took root. Slowly they grew, releasing new tendrils that reached for the light. I threaded the new growth along the wire trellis I constructed along the fence.

Now, each spring is heralded by the vines' fragrant white blossoms. Their survival is not a matter of chance. Nor was it a matter of luck.

Like the vines, I survived. Careful tending of my garden allowed me to see my life differently, which gave me hope for today. ❖

Seed of Death Jennifer Norman Lockhart TX

The seed of death was planted
There was no way to stop its growth
AIDS spread like a weed

No breath
A bud of health forms
Transformation occurs
Overwhelming life springs forth from within

The harvest reaps rewards
I'm alive
I'm breathing
I'm whole

(Continued on page 14)

True Words from Real Women (Continued from page 13)

Garden of Life

Jamie Finley
Bacliff TX

I am a seed planted in uncertain soil, unaware of the nutrients feeding me. I am thirsty for life, for a chance to burst through the dirt and breathe. I need to grow, wanting to reach great heights, getting closer each day, each minute, yet still unaware.

Penetrating the soil's crust, I break free and see such beauty bathing in sunlight.

My whole life, I've taken so much for granted, just going through the motions. Suddenly, as if the blinds have been opened, I bask in the light, in the splendor of the wind brushing my face lovingly. The expanse of the clouds blankets the sky. The smell of the roses assails my nostrils.

The tree comes back to life, losing all its leaves to autumn only to renew itself, more beautiful than ever, come spring.

A second chance. I am alive. ❖

My Friend Jim

Marsha Brandsdorfer
Mountain View CA

On December 20, 2007, my friend jumped off the Golden Gate Bridge. He was suffering from mild dementia and depression and was very afraid for a future that might include Alzheimer's, which killed his older brother. Jim was 69 years old, well read and smart, and he didn't want to lose his mind.

Jim and I used to go to movies, baseball games, and dinners in San Francisco. We had long conversations about everything: baseball, politics, jobs, and family. He grew up in Virginia and when I went to his memorial, I met some of his nieces and nephews who were on a visit to start taking care of some matters and to cremate Jim.

His relatives went up to Coit Tower, which is a monument on a hilltop in celebration of the city's finest fireman. There they opened the box of Jim's ashes, which whirled into the air with the wind. Upon their descent, Jim's ashes would land on the grass. I wondered if flowers could possibly grow from the remains of Jim. Would they blossom as roses or daffodils? Would each flower have a story in it, as Jim did? Would they be appreciated? Would they stand out from the rest of the flowers on the hill, or would they blend in?

I would like to think that Jim would be reincarnated into flowers. He loved nature and I'm sure he would want to end up being a part of it. ❖

Into the Garden—Sunday, May 15, 2005

Cathey Capers
Austin TX

Last evening,
I stood beside a beautiful black woman
dressed in an African-inspired robe.
With joy and pride she showed us
the new sanctuary of St. Peter's,
talked about her choir—
I could hear the robust alleluia
she would summon.

Moments later, I would lie—
not wanting to enlarge the distance between us—
claim membership to a congregation
I walked away from some time ago—
sadly.

This morning, the Sabbath—
celebrating the return of a cool blue sky—
stepping into the garden.
As I harvest the fruits of that good earth
remembering how it was built, literally,
from trash
my thoughts turn to redemption,
and Eden.
Mercy comes upon me
like a gentle rain
dissolving the shame of my earlier deceit.

Look how the winter greens,
long past their season,
still offer up just what the body needs
and too much;
force us to ask,
with whom can we share?
When I stoop to pull
the roots
of stems that have given themselves up completely
it's a genuflection I recall,
and I am, in this blessed moment,
on this late spring Sunday
united with a simple truth—

Here is my sanctuary
in this garden of miracles.

I rest the fork
to take up the pencil

thankful for such a forgiving revelation.

Seeds of Time

Marianne Cassells

Charlotte NC

I suspect my mother's interest in gardening truly began during World War II with the planting of Victory gardens. German U-boats lurked beneath the waves around Britain, disrupting the flow of food supplies. Ever pragmatic, the British planted cabbages and potatoes to defeat the Hun.

From the moment she turned the first spadeful of earth-worm-laden soil each spring, my mother taught me crop rotation (this year lettuce, last year potatoes), pest control (marigolds amongst the rest), how to thin, how much to water, when to harvest. Beneficial insects moved fast, slow ones spelled trouble.

At the front gate grew a rowan tree, fragrant white blossoms followed by heavy clusters of red berries in autumn. We watched for the surprises of spring: dainty lily of the valley nodding beneath the privet hedge, the first snowdrop, the purple note of a crocus. Her plants were treasured. When we moved, she sat in the back of the moving van clutching a rhododendron.

Nasturtiums were my favorite. Red-orange and yellow blossoms trumpeted from wizened seeds, the undersides of their pungent leaves a nursery for butterfly cocoons, offspring of hairy black and yellow caterpillars.

In every house in which I have lived, I've planted a garden. Aster, anemones, bee balm, cosmos, coneflower, daisies, dahlias, lilies, lantana, stock, scabiosa, verbena, veronica. Herbs for their poetry as much as their usefulness. Tarragon, pennyroyal, feverfew, lemon balm, sage, rosemary, thyme. The garden gives me a sense of permanence, of future. It requires preparation, planning; gives disappointment and delight.

The first time my mother died she was not quiet about it. Her dementia worsening, she yelled, scratched, and fought. After she went to the nursing home there was little I could carry back to the U.S. I brought her little garden fork, paint peeling from its handle, tines lightly coated with rust. Five years later she would succumb, quietly this time, to pneumonia.

Nasturtiums still spring from wrinkled seeds. With the fork I turn the soil in the herb bed and am again connected—to my mother and to the great heartbeat of Mother Earth. ❖

The Rose

Shari Noland

Lockhart TX

I am 14. I have grown from a seed to a rose that is starting to bloom.

I am wearing a tight, black Tommy Hilfiger dress with slide-in shoes. I look like a young child trying to act grown.

My friends are there, looking like and dressing like me. We drink, smoke, curse, and act as if life has no meaning. We hear that we are wasting our lives and will never amount to anything.

I am a rose in a garden. Other flowers are blooming around me. But I am stunting my growth. I remain the same. Fortunately, I still have my roots, which ground me.

As I grow older, however, my behavior worsens and I become more rebellious. I go through life the hard way because of the choices I am making.

I hear two voices: one for good, one for evil. I smell death but taste life.

The seasons change. It's below zero. I am very cold. I feel lost, confused, and very disappointed in myself. I am scared, not knowing how my life may turn out.

I am 24 now. The winter has been long, but spring has finally come. I can once again grow.

I am wearing a baggy, dark-blue shirt and pants with tan boots. I still look young, but I have matured. I am surrounded by other women, who are dressed exactly the same. I am now searching for meaning. I am determined not to waste my life. I want to amount to something.

So here I am—a beautiful rose that stands out. Weeds crowd me, but I am trying to stop their growth. ❖

You Could Have Warned Me

Becky Lane

Wimberly TX

When I first decided to try my hand at growing a few vegetables, we were living in the suburbs north of Dallas. Due to urban sprawl, our neighborhood was being overrun with rabbits, which were feasting on all the pretty flowers I had planted. Just to be on the safe side, I decided to plant my lettuces in big whiskey barrel planters to keep them away from marauding bunnies. One day, as I was watering the barrels, I noticed a pile of grassy stuff in the middle of one. I assumed it had blown in when my husband was mowing nearby. Then I noticed that the grass pile seemed to be moving, each time the water from my hose got near it.

Wondering what kind of ghastly creature could be lurking under there scared the bejeebers out of me and sent me hollering for John. While I kept my distance, he used a broom handle to lift up the grassy mat, then he burst out laughing and said, "You're not gonna believe this!"

What was hidden under the grass? A nest of baby bunnies. Some brazen hussy of a rabbit, not content with having the run of my entire yard, had managed to climb up into my barrel, build a nest, and lay her babies right smack dab in the middle of my lettuce patch! Damn, they were cute though. ❖

(Continued on page 16)

True Words from Real Women (Continued from page 15)

Where Heirloom Roses Flourish

Bobbi A. Chukran

Leander TX

For over eleven years I wrestled
with the hard rubble of the
Texas Hill Country terrain
to build a garden
on a solid limestone ledge.

A former ranch carpeted with
rocks, juniper, and cacti,
the scrubby land was only suitable for growing
things such as cattle or goats.

It was a leap of faith
to plant roses there in that hard place
that often sizzled in the hot Texas sun
(110 in the shade)
in that blinding hot rocky garden,
but amazingly enough
they flourished
and grew
and blossomed.
And on the hottest days,
their intoxicating fragrance was
the strongest and wafted
on the hot breeze.

After eleven years we sold the house
and at the last minute, all of a sudden,
while packing up a houseful of things,
I realized that I couldn't take
the garden with me,
that I'd have to leave it for someone else
to care for and nurture.
And it almost broke my heart.
Then I realized that the roses
would go on blooming
without me
even if I left them
even if I packed up all my
worldly goods and moved
across town or across the world.
They would bloom.

I fall asleep at night and dream of a
warm, green paradise on earth.
A hard place where the mockingbird sings
and where sweet-smelling heirloom roses
flourish.

Lucky in the Garden

Valerie Lima

Fayetteville AR

Wow—long-handled pruning shears! Excited, I unwrapped them. Now I could reach those overgrown vines and tree branches. In the still-warm days after Christmas, I had my opportunity. Armed with the shears extended their full length, I surveyed the garden: overgrown honeysuckle vines, wild grapevines festooned from tree to tree, and cedar-tree branches outspread. In the far garden stood Lucky, a gnome figurine. Years ago he was washed away when the creek overflowed. We had to search to unearth him in a far back corner amidst leaves and debris also washed by the creek. That's when he got his name: Lucky.

I then built a six-inch stone wall. Lucky perched in the raised area, his back against an old hawthorn tree. He stood jauntily in his red hat and green tunic, holding a brown sack I filled with variegated blue glass purchased near Hot Springs, Arkansas. Lucky provided a bright spot in the winter garden.

Inventory taken, I started at one side of the yard, working my way around. I could reach further now. I could clip those overflowing honeysuckle and wild grapevines, prune those wild rose bushes towering over my head and the neighbor's trees encroaching into the sunlight needed for my plum tree, trim the butterfly bushes and crepe myrtles aiming for the sky. As I stood with my back to Lucky, I reached high to snip those wild grape vines that looked like garlands draped from wild rose bush to surrounding trees.

Snip! Crunch! Snap! I then heard a soft whoosh behind me. I whirled around to see the hawthorn, now freed from the vines anchoring it, slowly falling, then settling on the ground. Was I lucky the tree crashed down to the side of me and not on top of me! Apparently it contained rotten spots, but it was still large and heavy.

And then I saw Lucky still standing as the tree trunk just missed him also. Both of us were lucky that day, even though I now faced the large task of cutting up the tree. ❖

Poo, Poo, Poo

Abby November

Austin TX

"You're so pretty, so green!" Mom told her plants, adding "poo, poo, poo" to avoid the evil eye. She called them her "kids." Her current kids were the waxy-leaved type, on the windowsill of her Brooklyn apartment. The kids were saved from the trash pile by Mom.

Irene, the Italian lady next door who was moving in with her daughter into a "fancy, schmancy" ranch home on the Island, dumped the dying, shriveled plants out in the trash.

"Ida, you are a sucker for every lost plant," Irene said as Mom saved the plants. The kids responded to her tender loving care. They thrived in the warmth of her soft brown eyes, dimmed by age but bright with the inner glow of her soul.

Why, even the Christmas cactus bloomed—a miracle for a Jewish home—and on Chanukah! The soil smelled like a mixture of olive oil, parmesan, and greasy fried potato latkes (pancakes). They were happy.

Mom needed bypass surgery. She was frightened to be out of control for so many days. And who would tend the kids? Dad loved her, but as an artiste he forgot mundane activities like cooking, cleaning, and paying bills.

Complications occurred, delaying Mom's return. Her babies were withering. The weeks of neglect were difficult to overcome even after she came home. As the kids' withering continued so did Mom's. She no longer sang to them. She neglected her own needs.

Late one evening Dad called. "I'm taking your mother to the emergency room. She won't eat or drink. Here, talk to her!"

He held the phone by her ear as I said, "Have some nice hot tea and honey." Barely audible, I heard her repeat, "Nice hot tea."

Those were the last words I heard her say. She lapsed into a coma and died several days later.

This time the kids had no savior. We left them on the sidewalk near the trash pails, all traces of love and smells absent from the soil. No one to say, "Poo, poo, poo." ❖

A Sixth Grade Garden Flower

Sandra Simon

Austin TX

*We're the garden flowers,
flowers of the king,
watching,
swaying in the breeze....*

A flower! I had dreamed about the sixth grade musical since first grade. But I had dreamed of a lead role, not a stupid garden flower. When Beverly's name was announced for the Queen, my cheeks burned, my stomach hurt, and I felt somehow ashamed.

I stormed off the school bus, crying, and threw down the mimeographed pages describing the flowers' two songs and costume. *Why* was I a flower? I should have been a star! I wasn't too tall—Beverly was my exact height. I was a pretty good student, especially in spelling. I was quiet and obedient, as was expected of girls. True, I fought once with Sybil, but that was fifth grade—long ago—and I had apologized.

"Be happy to be a flower," my parents said. "You don't have to memorize lines."

That wasn't what I wanted to hear. I wanted them to understand my disappointment, maybe call my teacher and insist that I have a larger role. That, I knew, was fantasy. I was shy, nearsighted, and gawky; my parents, new to this country, were absorbed in business and trying to make their way—important matters, not foolishness.

Grandma made my costume, which was basically a tutu. At the fabric store, we bought the pattern and beautiful shiny, slippery blue fabric. As she pinned and sewed, I realized the costume was too large.

"*Why?* I won't grow in two weeks!"

"It must be modest," she insisted. "Not too tight on top, and loose in the crotch."

I appeared in my baggy, loose-crotch costume, with an undershirt (not a training bra), looking badly wilted. At least nobody laughed out loud. Wishing I could disappear from the stage, I planted myself as far back as possible in the flower-garden chorus line.

From way back there, embarrassed and disappointed, I saw my little sisters, parents, and grandparents beaming at me. The role and costume no longer mattered so much. I felt warm and loved, and I finally could blossom into a satisfactory tall, blue flower. I grinned back, swaying and singing, happy. ❖

Life of a Seed

Candy Lively

Lockhart TX

Planting

I was born in 1960 in Rusk, Texas. I was adopted when I was fourteen months old.

Sprouting

When I was six, I got to pick out my brother. He was still little, maybe two weeks old. I dressed him and got him ready to go while my parents filled out the adoption papers.

Growing quickly

A week before my fifteenth birthday, I had the first of my five boys. His daddy was my high school sweetheart. We got married when I was 20. He died in a car wreck when I was 23. Three years later, I met a friend of my brother. We got married.

Withering

It was a very bad marriage. He hit me in the head with his fist. He put a pillow over my face, trying to kill me. One day, we were driving down a dirt road. It was raining. He drove the truck into a tree. Another time, he pushed me out of a moving car and tried to run me over. These were the fifteen most horrible years of my life.

Fallow ground

I am in prison for writing hot checks. I let him intimidate me into doing it. But coming to prison very well may have saved my life. It got me away from him.

Replanting

I am a single woman and am enjoying life. I am happy, loving, and caring. ❖

(Continued on page 18)

True Words from Real Women (Continued from page 17)

Morning Color

Sonja Borstner
The Woodlands TX

The morning glory blossom begins her journey the day before, in tightly twirled buds that tuck themselves beneath broad, heart-shaped green leaves. Mostly white. Thin as pencils.

In the muted light of dawn, the purple buds blend into emerald leaves making you doubt the purple touching your eyes.

As the summer sun brightens the garden, the morning glory arches and opens, a slow motion of color change. Constellation blue. Empress blue. Sky blue.

I look deep into the center after the buxom bumblebee exits. Wheels of sapphire, spokes of magenta. The calyx tunnels into lemon yellow, into eternal light you think you can see forever.

In the heat of late morning, the glory begins to droop. Her flags fade to magenta then crumple into lavender, lilac, and finally collapse into a soft murmuring pink.

A day of opening and closing... leaving behind new buds in the cluster for another day.

I pray for a similar day: a day of constantly changing color, of opening and closing, of becoming social then savoring solitude, of leaving behind the buds of love and gratitude for another day. ❖

Once in a Lifetime

Becky Lane
Wimberly TX

I've been seeing previews for a new kids' movie that is due out soon. It's about a boy who finds a secret book in the mysterious old house that his family moves into. He is warned not to open the book, for 'though it will enable him to see the wondrous, magical world that surrounds us all, but which is invisible to most humans, it will also foist on him an enormous burden of responsibility. Pretty far-fetched, huh?

Well, yesterday I went for an early walk, while everything was shrouded in heavy fog. At first I saw just a few cottony webs tucked in the branches of some low, evergreen shrubs. Then I noticed that there were some extremely delicate ones floating on the tips of a few tall grass stalks. Finally I realized that it wasn't just a few. There were hundreds, if not thousands—a veritable sea of delicate, waving flags and when an occasional beam of light managed to penetrate the fog, they became tiny, glistening necklaces, spun of silk and diamonds.

This morning I went walking a bit later than usual, and unlike yesterday, it is a gorgeous, sunny day, with nary a cloud in the sky. Try as I might, I could not spot a single one of those webs. Were they all dismantled overnight? Were they so

fragile that the wind wrenched them away from their flagpoles and sent them drifting like tiny parachutes? Or was I, for some unknown reason, granted a once in a lifetime glimpse into a secret, magical world that surrounds us but which most humans are never allowed to see? ❖

In the Garden

Rhonda Speer
Lockhart TX

He was walking in the garden the first time we met. Looking this way and that, he stepped before a yellow and peach rose. As the tears fell from his eyes, he clipped one. There were more.

Then he spoke in a whisper to someone only he could see, "Mama, this 'n here's your favorite, or at least used to be."

"Sir," I said, "who are you are speaking to?"

"My wife. She's just left us to go on home to glory. But I thought while she's in my heart, I could tell her 'I'm sorry,'" he said. "How can it be that here in this garden 56 years ago we met, and 55 years ago were married right here by these roses? It seems as only yesterday. I guess my children and grandchildren will tire of me soon too, as I look forward to being with Mama."

We finished walking through the garden in silence, and we both shed silent tears, his for his wife. And mine? I was sorry to leave her memories behind in the garden. ❖

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:

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

Autumn—September 2008 (due July 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.



Kitchen Table Stories

Pound Pooches and Found Felines

Patricia Pando and her husband have always had a hard time resisting the urge to adopt just one more animal. They thought they'd licked the habit, until a certain orange kitty turned up under the azaleas.

For a year, maybe more, this orange (I call it ginger) cat has been hanging around our house. It (we haven't settled the he/she issue) strolled the front porch, peeked in the kitchen window, and meowed pitifully from under the azaleas.

We keep trying not to adopt animals. Several years ago after the last cat collided with a car, we'd declared a pet ban. Enough. We were finished. Period.

Then our daughter called. Katy wrote the pet-of-the-week column and took a picture as part of her job as a reporter for the local paper. Young and tenderhearted, she and her roommate had already acquired two dogs and two cats.

"Mom, I'm going to have to take another dog."

"No, you are not. You have more than you can handle now."

"I have to. This wonderful Lab has been pet of the week three times and no one will adopt her. Eleanor, she's the pound lady, has kept her two extra weeks and if she doesn't get adopted by tomorrow. . ."

"What's wrong with her?"

"She's old."

In five minutes we were in our red pickup headed for the pound. Katy stood outside with a blonde Lab on a leash. The dog shot me a glance. I held it. We bonded. For life.

The vet said she was old but healthy.

"She'll be a good fireplace dog," she said.

We named her Eleanor for the woman who saved her life. As she became a part of our lives, I began to think of her as a grand lady like Eleanor Roosevelt in her later years. So we added on to her name.

It seemed natural then, that when a young male pound dog entered our life we named him Franklin Delano. After we'd had him about a year, I heard about a distressed young Australian shepherd. We took her in.

What to name her? I suggested Eleanor II, but Bob nixed it. It would be disrespectful. So, Miss Lucy Mercer shared bed and board with Frankie D. (If you don't know who Miss Lucy was, look her up. Suffice it to say that she was the first Franklin D.'s "very good friend.")

Miss Lucy and Frankie have both gone on. Again, we decided, no more pets! But if we should ever have one, which, of course, we were, we'd certainly follow the presidential naming pattern.

Then one day we were on an errand at the Tallahassee Animal Shelter. We were not there to adopt a pet, but I heard a cooing sound. A "kitchy, kitchy, kitchy" sound. Bob had his nose against the cage of a tiny, blue-gray Manx youngster.

I'd opened the front door to leave, when he stopped. "We can't leave her behind."

As we headed for the vet to get her checked out, we discussed her name.

"I just don't know. Martha and Abigail sound so formal, and she is such a doll."

We both knew it. Dolley Madison.

Around Thanksgiving, maybe it was the holiday spirit, I began to mellow about that ginger cat. I sneaked a little dry cat food out under the azaleas. I didn't tell Bob or Dolley. The next morning it was gone. Then I sneaked a little more. Bob caught me.

I didn't stop. Bob gave in; next thing you know, he'd joined the campaign.

"Here, Ginger, Ginger, Ginger. Want a little snack?" Once you name an animal there's no going back.

She/he is still scared. She/he'll come to eat, even stick its head in the door, but there's no touching yet, which is why we haven't resolved the she/he issue. And what will we do when we do?

We know we'll call the cat Ginger, but the formal, the real name? Now if it's a boy cat, the answer is right there—he'll be Thomas Jefferson after our red-headed third president. But a girl cat? We could go with Ginger as a nickname and have Elizabeth Virginia Truman, or stick with the red-headed approach and have Thelma Nixon. Do you think there's ever been a cat named after our thirty-fourth First Lady?

By the time you are reading this, the mystery may be solved. I'm following the gentling of Ginger on my blog, and you can, too. Visit <http://trillap.blogspot.com>.

You can tell I love my animal companions. Why I even cook for them! ❖

Dolley's Fish Nibbles

Ingredients

- 1 6-ounce can water-packed tuna
- 1 hard-boiled egg, chopped or grated
- 1/4 cup cornmeal
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour (or substitute whole-wheat)

Preparation

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

In a medium bowl combine the undrained tuna and egg. Stir in the cornmeal and flour and form into a ball.

Roll out dough with a rolling pin or pat the dough flat (about 1/4 inch) on a floured board. Cut into 1/4 inch squares—remember kitties have tiny mouths. Bake on a greased cookie sheet for about 15 minutes. Cool before serving. Store in the refrigerator.

Take a Bow! Spotighting Our Volunteers

Meet Our New Board Members

The SCN Board recently welcomed three new Board members from outside the Austin area. Contributing Editor Lisa Shirah-Hiers profiles each of these enthusiastic new members to tell us about their experience inside and outside SCN, their passion for the organization, and their dreams for its future.



Becca Taylor was first attracted to SCN because she says, “I wanted a supportive and creative writing environment. I’ve been a member since 2005.” She has participated in the March 2007 LifeLines retreat, the 2007 Land Full of Stories conference and is a member and facilitator of an e-circle. She is also the driving force behind the SCN pod-

cast. She says SCN has helped her to develop “a new sisterhood of friends, as well as a renewed desire to write.”

Becca has been serving on a non-profit board for 10 years with the Society for Technical Communication (STC). Lately she served as President of the Houston chapter, which has a membership of over 300 professional writers and communicators. She has acted as webmaster, newsletter editor, and Director of Communications for STC as well.

She says, “SCN has become an important part of my writing life and I’d like to offer my expertise to help the organization stay healthy and grow.” She lists her relevant skills in communications, PR and marketing, strategic planning, and best practices. “I have a strong background in procedural writing, which would help the board to document SCN processes. I have an M.B.A. in Marketing and several years of experience in marketing, which can be used to help promote SCN. I’ve been in professional writing positions for 10 years, so I can help improve our communications strategy, including how we present ourselves on the web and in newsletters.”



Sharon Blumberg has been a member since 1999 when she discovered SCN in *Personal Journaling* magazine. “When I saw an announcement about SCN, I could not wait to join and become involved.” She has been a frequent contributor to SCN’s publications ever since. Her first *Story Circle Journal* article appeared on the back page of the No-

vember 2000 issue in the “Mini-Stories: Our Readers Share” section. She’s been a regular contributor to “True Words,” and her article on “Journaling for Professional Growth” appeared

in the September 2006 issue. She says of the *Journal*, “Not only do I enjoy seeing my own articles in print in the *Journal*, but I truly enjoy reading all of the different kinds of writing, from cover to cover...I enjoy reading about all of the different programs and workshops that are always being offered...I have also watched my own confidence level grow and flourish due to being a member of this organization.” Sharon is also a contributor to *Kitchen Table Stories*.

Sharon served for ten years on the board of the local chapter of Women’s American ORT (Organization for Rehabilitation through Training), a Jewish women’s organization that funds schools for disadvantaged students from all over the world, and she spent two years as President. She is looking forward to working on the SCN board because, as she says, “I have developed so much as a person by taking part in many of SCN’s activities. I would [like] to help more women writers, whether experienced or aspiring, experience this same joy.”

She has a strong background and interest in fundraising, membership activities and growth, and developing more publishing opportunities for SCN members. “There seems to be something for everyone who wishes to take part in this organization. This is an element that is very special about SCN.”



Robin Edgar joined SCN in 2003 when she was attracted by the philosophy of the importance of encouraging people to tell their stories. An at-large board member, she started a story circle in Charlotte, NC, and teaches lifewriting retreats that are affiliated with SCN. She has judged two writing contests, written several book reviews, and contrib-

uted several articles to the *Journal* and the cookbook.

Robin is a national workshop presenter and SCN has been especially important in helping her recharge her batteries. “It can be very draining, physically, mentally, and spiritually, to travel all over the U.S. teaching reminiscence writing workshops, as I am always giving of myself to help others. My story circle revitalizes me and gives me a chance to write for myself.” Now she dreams that in the future SCN will be able to make the conference available outside Austin.

(Continued on p. 21)

Story Circle News Roundup

Board Meeting Report

The Story Circle Board met on February 4, 2008, with thirteen board members present in Austin and four attending via teleconference. New board members Sharon Blumberg, Robin Edgar, and Becca Taylor were welcomed. This was the first meeting with the new officers, Penny Appleby, President, Joyce Boatright, President Elect, Hazel Baylor, Vice President and Helen Lowry, Secretary/Treasurer. Board members reported 1568 hours of volunteer time since the last meeting in October.

The Board:

Approved the minutes of the previous meeting;

Delayed approving the Treasurer's Report and new Budget until the next meeting;

Heard a preliminary report of the Conference—very good results; detailed report will be available at next meeting;

Honored Carolyn Blankenship who is leaving Board after many years of service;

Members were asked to review standing committees and let the President know one on which they wish to serve;

Agreed that organizational and financial items are top priority for implementing the new Strategic Plan. Committees were formed and reports will be made at the next meeting;

Discussed creation of a Story Circle Network blog. Becca Taylor will present a proposal at the April meeting.

The next meeting will be held on April 14 at the home of Penny Appleby.

—Penny Appleby, Board President

(Continued from page 20)

Robin has experience in publishing; public relations and marketing; lifewriting for bereavement; and grant writing. She served as the 2006–07 President of Mammoth Oaks Home Owners Association, is currently a member of the City of Charlotte Community Relations Committee, and was recently asked to facilitate Love and Forgiveness conversations through a partnership with the Fetzer Institute and PBS. She says, "I believe in SCN's mission and want to help keep it a viable organization to carry on that mission." Her personal goals for SCN are to "continue to reach more women, find more avenues for those women to tell their stories, and keep SCN fiscally viable." ❖

SCN's Board in 2008

Executive Committee

Penny Appleby, M.B.A., President
Joyce Boatright, President Elect
Hazel Baylor, Vice President
Helen Lowry, Secretary/Treasurer

Other Board Members

Judy Abrahamson
Lee Ambrose, Internet Chapter President
Anne Beckner, Director OWL-Circle Project
Sharon Blumberg
Robin Edgar
Peggy Moody, Executive Director
Linda Joy Myers
Patricia Pando, Ph.D.
Danelle Sasser
Lisa Shirah-Hiers, Circles Coordinator
Becca Taylor
Linda Wisniewski

Internet Chapter Officers:

Lee Ambrose, President; Member Services
Peggy Moody, Secretary/Treasurer

Internet Chapter Report

The Internet Chapter continues to grow in number and participation levels. Many of the Internet Chapter members were able to attend the Stories from the Heart Conference held in February and from all accounts, it was a great experience for the women who usually only know one another through cyber-connections.

The 2008 reading e-circle book list appears on the website and as is usually the case, the reading circle has chosen some great titles and authors for their reading and discussion pleasure, beginning with *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life* by Barbara Kingsolver.

The reading circle and writing circles are always ready to welcome new members so if you have been considering one or both of them, don't miss out on the woman-to-woman connection that the Internet Chapter nurtures constantly.

—Lee Ambrose, Internet Chapter President and
Member Service Coordinator

An SCN Roundtable Discussion—Online! Susan Wittig Albert and Dani Greer

Story Circle has launched yet another online member service—a roundtable discussion with other SCN members, carried on right in your email in-box!

SCN LifeWriters is the name of our brand-new group, which is accepting members now. It's an Internet forum where we can get together every day, find out more about each other, learn more about lifewriting, and keep up with all the latest SCN news—all delivered through a Yahoo! Group.

If you've ever been a member of an Internet email forum, you know what fun they can be, and what a learning experience. This group is designed to help us exchange ideas, opinions, and information about lifewriting. (If you're interested in sharing your story, you'll want to join an e-circle instead.) We hope it will be like some of the exciting sessions we attended at the recent conference: a place to toss around all kinds of ideas for new ways to create our life stories, to write, and even to publish and market them.

How do you join? That's easy! You can read about the group here: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/scnlifewriters>.

If you decide to join, click on the button "Join this group." You will be prompted to join Yahoo! Groups and register for a Yahoo ID that will allow you access to the group's files, calendar, and polls. If you choose not to do that, you can still join our list and participate in the email discussions. Once you're approved, you're set to participate. It's that simple.

What are you waiting for? Come on over to SCN LifeWriters and join the party! ❖

True Words Already Truly Amazing Becca Taylor and Judy Whelley, Editors

The submission deadline for the 2008 True Words anthology was February 15, and what a ride it has already been! We have over 100 submissions from all around the country, from free-range circles and e-circles alike. This year you'll be treated to poetry, prose, and even photographs from women telling it like it is. We have been amazed reading through early submissions at the range and depth of your writing.

If you submitted your piece and have not heard from us, please send it again as soon as possible (anthology08@storycircle.org). We'll be communicating with all authors about their pieces in March, and you should have your very own copy in your hot little hands by mid-April. When you read through your anthology, you might laugh, you might cry, but we can guarantee you won't come away untouched.

Money Matters with Carolyn Blankenship Olga Wise

Yet again, SCN's conference inspired participants to think about writing from surprising new perspectives. Carolyn Blankenship's session on Money Matters gave us another angle to inform our memoir writing. What do (or did) our families tell us about money? Do the attitudes we have today stem from those early years? How are our attitudes of today different from those of our parents? Was there always enough? Did you struggle? Do you enjoy money? Do you avoid thinking about money? Money talks, what does it say to us? Dana Gioia's poem on money (www.danagioia.net/poems/money.htm) was used as one of our writing prompts—and with great success.

What have we taught our children about money? Does money make us comfortable, anxious, sad, happy, or do we have mixed feelings? Isn't this a good time for you to try your own writing on money and discover what it means to you? ❖

Conference Photographers

Tim Newman, Austin, Tex., is the husband of Jackie Newman, who has been active in SCN for many years. Tim has been retired since 2000. Photography and building computers from components are his hobbies. And says Tim, "I also enjoy writing stories."



Jane Steig Parsons, Austin, Tex., is the owner of Prints Charming Photography. She has had more than 20 one-woman shows of her photography in Austin and has numerous publication credits. Jane is a published poet and is working on her memoir.

"You can communicate things that you feel and see.

You are a voice

You don't have to ask anyone's permission."

—Faith Ringold

Announcement

The Story Circle Journal Welcomes New Layout Artist. Applications Reopen for Editor in Chief, Deadline March 30.

Beginning with this issue, the *Story Circle Journal* welcomes SCN member, graphic designer Katherine Misegades to the position of Layout Artist, handling the layout of the *Journal*. Katherine brings many years experience of book and web design, page layout, and illustration skills to this job. Katherine's illustration and cover design featured on *Kitchen Table Stories* and she also designed the cover and text lay out of *Starting Points* in 2007. The SCN Publications Committee is delighted to have Katherine as part of our staff.

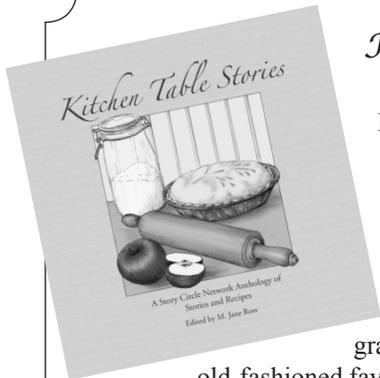
With Katherine on board, the editorship of the *Journal* is now a simpler job for the Editor in Chief. Current Editor Jane Ross still intends to retire from the position in 2008 after more than four years working on the *Journal*. She plans to remain available during the 2008 to help train the new editor in the position.

The Publications Committee of SCN is reopening the call for applicants to replace Jane in this paid position. The *Journal* is published quarterly. The Editor is responsible for all aspects of the *Journal* content, from deciding what content to include, to coordinating with the Contributing Editors on content, to seeking additional articles, copyediting, proofreading, and coordinating the printing and mailing. The right person for the job will have strong editing experience, be dedicated to the SCN mission of helping women tell their stories, be good at working with a wide range of contributors to the *Journal*, be detail oriented, and impeccable about meeting deadlines.

To apply, send an email to: journaleditor08@storycircle.org telling us about your background and experience that is relevant to this job. ❖

May Means Mother's Day

Okay, we're still in March. But May is not far off. Why not treat a mother in your life to a heart-warming and inspiring book from SCN or a brand new memoir from an SCN author.

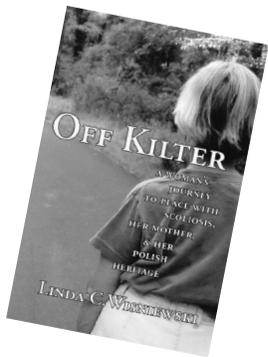


Kitchen Table Stories
 Edited by M. Jane Ross

The cookbook that will bring a tear to the eye as you read about childhood days in the kitchen with mother or grandmother and try out the old-fashioned favorite recipes and contemporary treats in this delightful cookbook—anthology.

“SCN has created a unique way of blending family lore with food and giving us something for everyone. This would be an ideal gift for family and friends. Or maybe you could start your own story/recipe collection. It's a great conversation piece.”
 —Doris Anne Roop-Benner,

Paperback, spiral binding, 164 pages. \$18
 Order online at: www.storycircle.org/cookbook and receive our \$3 pre-pub discount when you order this month.



Off Kilter
 A Woman's Journey to Peace with Scoliosis, Her Mother, & Her Polish Heritage
 by Linda C. Wisniewski

Pearlson Press
 Paperback, 164 pgs, \$18.95
 ISBN: 978-1-59719-012-1

From the SCN website home page, click the link to Amazon to order your copy and benefit SCN.

“Off Kilter is one woman's testimony to the effects of childhood abuse, which left her 'off kilter' in more than one way. Her spine was not straight but her heart and mind were always on a sight-line to what is right, what is good, and what is redeeming in the human heart. Linda writes with candor and honesty about her healing journey to forgiveness and wholeness... Everyone should read this lovely book!”
 —Linda Joy Myers, author of *Becoming Whole: Writing Your Healing Story & Don't Call Me Mother*

SCN-sponsored events

Workshops, Retreats, Conferences

As women, we teach and pass on
our wisdom through story.
—Marion Woodman,
Coming Home to Myself

Storycatchers come whenever we
are in crisis to remind us of who we
are. We require story in order to
link our lives with each other. Story
couples our experiences, mind to
mind and heart to heart. Story is the
electromagnetic conductor that brings
us close enough together to make the
leap of association and identification,
to see that another person is a
variation of ourselves.
—Christina Baldwin,
Storycatcher

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 1

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/

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.

Want to get the word out about a writing workshop that you offer in your region?

SCN offers several way for you to get the word out:

- Advertise in the *Story Circle Journal* Workshop pages. \$50 for a 1/4 page advertisement.
- List your writing-related business on the SCN Member Services web page. (\$15 per year). Visit: www.storycircle.org/memberservices.shtml
- You may also contact us about a sponsorship or affiliation arrangement with SCN by emailing storycircle@storycircle.org. (Please include the words: "Sponsorship/affiliation request" in the subject line of your email.

Want to find a member-run writing workshop in your region?

- Visit our Member Services web page: www.storycircle.org/memberservices.shtml
- We have members in Ohio, Arizona, New Mexico, Oregon and other parts of the country who offer writing workshops. Check them out.

Memory to Memoir

Online Writing Workshop with Paula Stallings Yost

SCN announces the fourth session of Paula Stallings Yost's highly successful online writing class, *Memory to Memoir*.

Who: Everybody has a story! All writers, whether new to the craft or more experienced, are welcome and will benefit from this class.

Where: Your Place! This is an online class. An introduction will be emailed to you upon receipt of your enrollment fee. The lesson plan, as well as further instructions, will be emailed to you on the first day of class.

When: June 2 – 30, 2008

Cost: \$200 for dues-paying members of Story Circle; \$225 for non-members.

Website: www.storycircle.org/Workshops/MemoryMemoir.shtml

Paula describes the class schedule: "The online classes are very informal in consideration of students' varied schedules. Beginning June 2, I will send a lesson plan with writing tips

and an assignment each week to each student. The student will have a week in which to accomplish that assignment before the next lesson comes along. There is no formal class 'session.' You may choose to read and absorb the assignment at your convenience (even two o'clock in the morning if you wish) and then submit a story you write specifically connected to that week's lesson or even a story in your 'previously written' stash.

Once I receive your assignment, I will edit it and provide a constructive critique usually within 48 hours. Based on this schedule, the last lesson will be sent on June 23, so you should be finished with the class by June 30. Students will be given the opportunity to share their work with each other or not, as they choose. Otherwise, all your correspondence will be ONLY with me in the interest of preserving your privacy."

Paula Stallings Yost is an experienced journalist/memoirist and founder of LifeSketches/Heirloom Memoirs Publishing—a company dedicated to the preservation of personal and family histories in book form. In her online class, each student will compose four short stories that will be edited by the instructor and returned with helpful suggestions for improvement or expansion. Students also will learn methods for transitioning and organizing the stories into a creative nonfiction narrative. Writing guidelines, story ideas, and a bibliography of suggested reading materials will be provided.

Paula's course ... was the best I've had in twenty years of writing classes, conferences, workshops, etc. And last year, I graduated from McMaster University's Writing Certificate Program with As in every class, but I have learned much more from this course.

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 are over half full. You can email Leilani at lrose11@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 the site for last year's retreat (soon to be updated!) at <http://www.cbdeco.com/rr07>.

DATES/TIMES: 2:00 pm, Sunday, August 10, to noon, 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



How SCN Can Help You Tell Your Story

If you want to dig deeper, look farther, write more often and more expressively, or discover other ways to tell and share your experiences, we're here to help. But SCN is like anything else—the more you put into it, the more you get out of it. Here are some ways you can get more out of what we offer to our members. And of course, if you haven't already joined, become a member today!

1. **Journal every day.** You'll find articles to inspire you in each issue of our *Story Circle Journal*. If you're a member of the Internet Chapter, you'll also receive weekly writing prompts by email—perfect for keeping your journal on track. Or use SCN's *Starting Points*, a book of writing prompts from Susan Wittig Albert.
2. **Join a Story Circle** in your community. Can't find one? Then start one! Our *Facilitator's Guide* will show you how easy it is to do this. For a copy, email storycircle@storycircle.org.
3. **Join the Internet Chapter** and connect with a Story Circle online. See www.storycircle.org/ecircles.shtml.
4. **Contribute your story to our Story Circle Journal.** And read the *Journal* from cover to cover—it's full of great ideas for writing your life story.
5. **Take an online writing workshop.** Look online and on pages 24-25 for news of upcoming writing workshops.
6. **Read, read, read!** Women's memoirs are "hot" in today's publishing world, and we try to keep abreast of the best. Here's a list of the books our reading circles have read over the past several years: www.storycirclebookreviews.org. We've also reviewed a great many other books about women's lives—visit our book review site.
7. **Write reviews** of women's memoirs and related books and submit them our Book Review website. Read our Reviewers' Guidelines: www.storycirclebookreviews.org/becomeareviewer.shtml. If you have published a book, consider submitting it for review.
8. **Join our online Internet Chapter Reading Circle**, or our Austin TX Reading Circle, or start a Reading Circle of your own. You can choose books from the SCN reading list and print out our online reading guides.
9. **Attend our events.** We offer Writing from Life weekends in Austin twice a year, a LifeLines writing retreat and a national conference every two years. Want to attend events but can't join us in Austin? Start a Story Circle in your own community and create your own calendar of women's events! Here's how to get started: www.storycircle.org/ChapterGuidelines.html.
10. **Check out our Older Women's Legacy Circle (OWL) project** (for seniors 60+). Lots of info at: www.owlcircle.com.
11. If you offer writing-related classes, workshops, or programs, you are eligible to **post information about yourself and your work on our Speakers Bureau pages**. Posting on our site does not obligate you to any payment to Story Circle. You will have your own individual URL and will be able to put it on your brochures, handouts, and business cards. For an example, go to the Speakers Bureau (www.storycircle.org/SpeakersBureau), then choose a name from our list of speakers.
12. If you're ready to tell your story to a wider audience, **check out our Market Watch** on our website where we list current publishing opportunities, contests, and writers conferences.
13. **Contribute to our annual anthology** or one of our other occasional collections. Look for the call for submissions in our eletters and in the *Story Circle Journal*.
14. **Share your writing achievements with us.** To see what other lifewriters have been doing, take a look at our "Members in Print and in the News" page: www.storycircle.org/MembersInPrint.shtml.
15. **Give a gift membership** to a friend or favorite relative. You'll find a form in this issue. Let them know that you value their stories and hope that they'll write them down!
16. **Stay informed.** We're continually offering new programs and services. To stay up-to-date on what we're doing, subscribe to our monthly National e-letter: www.storycircle.org/eletters.shtml.

Story Circle Journal Staff

Sharon Blumberg joins the Contributing Editors of the *Story Circle Journal* this issue and helped prepare the book review pages. Sharon has also joined the SCN board. You can read Sharon's biography on our Take a Bow page (p. 20).



Mary Jo Doig lives in Raphine, Virginia, and has been a member of SCN since 2001, when she joined SCN's writing e-circle #2. She has facilitated e-circle #7 since 2003, and been True Words editor for the *Story Circle Journal* since 2004. A full-time human services professional, she also enjoys freelance opportunities. Reading, writing, editing, cooking, quilting, and knitting are her loves—that is, right after her three great, grown children: Chip, Polly, and Susan.



Lisa Shirah-Hiers contributed the Circles column and the Take a Bow column to this issue of the *Journal* and regularly contributes our author interview as well. Lisa is a freelance writer and piano teacher living in Austin, Texas. She has published articles, essays and reviews in the *Texas Episcopalian*, the *Hill Country Sun*, *AustinWoman*, *Austin Monthly* and online. Lisa is a Board member of SCN and a frequent presenter at SCN's Writing from Life workshops.

Linda Wisniewski is a regular contributor to the *Story Circle Journal*. As scrapbook coordinator for the Stories from the Heart conference, she provided quotes and feedback from conference participants in this issue. Linda writes for the *Bucks County Herald* and teaches memoir classes for Bucks County Community College. 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 Pearlson Press, www.pearlson.com/offkilter.htm.



Patricia Pando edits the Kitchen Table Stories column of the *Story Circle Journal*. Patricia, a President Emerita of SCN, lives and writes in Bainbridge, Georgia, and Tallahassee, Florida. Patricia remains a member of the SCN board.

Jane Ross is the Editor in Chief of *Story Circle Journal*, since December 2004. Jane is a freelance editor based in Austin, Texas. She has worked in publishing since she graduated from college in her native New Zealand in the 1980s. Jane was a member of the SCN board from 2005–7.



Katherine Misegades has joined the *Story Circle Journal* staff this issue as the layout artist. She is a graphic designer from Fort Wayne, Indiana, and a member of SCN. She facilitates Internet Chapter 14. She also publishes knitting patterns.



This membership is a gift

My name and address:

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- _____ International: \$50.00 (International MO)
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Mark Your Calendar

SCN Events and Deadlines

May 23: Registration deadline for Memory to Memoir online writing class. See p. 25.

June 1: Registration deadline for the June Writing from Life workshop. See p. 24.

June 2: Memory to Memoir online writing class begins.

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

July 1: Deadline to enter the Susan Wittig Albert Lifewriting Contest.

July 10: Registration deadline for Red River Writing Retreat. See p. 25.

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

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.

Susan Wittig Albert Lifewriting Contest 2008

Deadline July 1

SCN is proud to announce its ninth annual lifewriting competition, named in honor of Story Circle Network founder and best-selling author, Susan Wittig Albert. 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?

This year the contest will be coordinated by SCN Board member Sharon Blumberg, with a submission deadline of July 1. Look for more details in the June *Journal* and in our monthly e-letters.

Story Circle Network Inc.
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