



Story Circle Journal

Vol. 12 No. 3, September, 2008

The newsletter for women with stories to tell...

The Susan Wittig Albert Lifewriting Competition

Sharon Blumberg

SCN is proud to announce the results of its Ninth Annual Lifewriting Competition, named in honor of our founder, best-selling mystery writer Susan Wittig Albert. First prize goes to Amber Polo of Camp Verde, AZ, for her story, *Trick or Treat*. Read Amber's story and the three other selected pieces starting on page 3 of this issue. Congratulations to all of our winning authors, those whose entries were selected and those who submitted their work.

This year's topic focused on evolution and growth. Here are the wise words that helped everyone get started.



Story Circle Network Founder,
Susan Wittig Albert

"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, and constellations."

—Anais Nin

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

Thirty-seven entries arrived before the July 7 deadline. Ten Round One judges went to work. They looked for entries that were fresh and original, told a compelling story in a clear and authentic voice, responded to the topic, and were polished and proofread for the competition. The most successful submissions were rich in evocative detail, while avoiding generalizations and abstractions. The writing contributions ranged anywhere from personal essay or slice of memoir, to fiction or poetry.

After July 15, six judges ranked the top twelve entries. By August 1, we had a first place winner along with second, third, and fourth.

I enjoyed the privilege of serving as the Lifewriting Contest Chair for the contest's ninth year. I would like to thank all the hardworking judges, Susan Albert, Peggy Moody, and especially the women who submitted entries for the competition. Without you there could be no competition. Please keep writing and letting your stories and voices be heard. ❖

First Prize
Trick or Treat

by Amber Polo
Camp Verde, AZ



The Homecoming

by Victoria McNabb Wheeler
Stockton, NJ



Strong Winds

by Carol Hyde
Round Rock, TX

My Mother's Hands

by Karen Appleberry
Grapevine, TX

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A Letter from SCN's President



This is a month for hellos and goodbyes. A big hello to Robin Wittig, the new editor of the *Journal*. And, yes, there is a connection. Robin is the daughter of our founder and first editor of the *Journal*, Susan Wittig Albert...the beat goes on. We're delighted to have found such a wonderful successor to Jane Ross, the editor to whom we say goodbye. Jane has edited the *Journal* since December, 2004. Read more about Jane in this issue (page 8), and about Robin in our December issue.

We're also saying goodbye to Paula Yost as editor of the Story Circle Book Review site. When you read Lisa Shirah-Hiers' interview with Paula, you'll understand why Story Circle owes Paula an enormous debt of gratitude for all her many contributions over many years. But we say hello to Linda Wisniewski, who moves to the editor position from

assistant editor.

And we're also fortunate to welcome Susan Ideus to fill Linda's former assistant editor position. Isn't it great to have such a depth of talent on which to draw!

This depth is certainly evident in the four winning stories of this year's Lifewriting Contest (pp 3-7). Each one of them will make you want to read more from these writers. I'm told that this year's submissions were some of the best ever. Thanks to everyone who submitted a story, and start thinking now about entering next year's contest.

In preparation, you might want to check out our newest website, www.storycircleonlineclasses.org. Here you will find a number of classes addressing various aspects of writing. But don't delay; I notice that some of the classes are already waitlisted.

As I write this, I'm looking forward to next week, when I'll be attending the Red River Writing Retreat facilitated by former board members Leilani Rose and Carolyn Blankenship. Maybe some of you will also be there. I must confess that right now what I'm really looking forward to is some cool weather—currently anything under ninety degrees would qualify—to replace the triple-digit weather we've had in Austin for the past week. But more than that, it will be a time to relax and enjoy being with women who find telling their stories an uplifting and soul-nourishing experience. That is time well spent. Even if you can't get to the cool mountains of New Mexico, I hope you can find the time to enjoy the nourishment that writing can bring.



Penny Appleby

Story Circle Network President

Story Circle Network's Mission:

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

Story Circle Journal

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

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We welcome your letters,
 queries, and suggestions.

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

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



Trick or Treat

Amber Polo, Camp Verde AZ



My spine pressed against the straight-backed chair at the round oak kitchen table. Behind a child-sized Halloween witch's hat, I stared at my lover's wife. Marlene's glassy, dark-rimmed eyes stared back. Neither of us remembered a good night's rest.

She'd called my office that afternoon. "We have to talk."

"Yes." My reply was barely audible.

"My house. I'll call when I get my children in bed after Trick or Treat."

Halloween? Where had the two months since Robert's stroke gone? Surprised that I could sit in my swivel chair and perform the simple task of answering a phone, I welcomed action. Anything was better than doing nothing and feeling everything.

The smell of macaroni and cheese reminded me how far outside real life I lived. I pushed aside a red Superman cape, removed a pair of devil horns from beneath me, and waited.

"I'm not old, ugly, or stupid," Marlene began, her square chin high. She'd slipped out of a long black coat and stood straight and poised in black slacks and red sweater. I'd come willingly to her kitchen to listen to words that would hurt. I was not here to deny, justify, or explain.

No ordinary wife and mother, Marlene had begun work on a PhD and last summer took four of their five children to Connecticut and performed in summer stock. No, I never thought she was stupid, old, or ugly. I never wanted her life. Now, I wasn't sure I wanted mine.

She stopped in front of a refrigerator collage of photos, magnets, and scribbled notes, the diary of her active family. "I knew," she said, recognized the look of interest on my face, and smiled. "Last April I was sure. I saw you with him at lunch."

My mind flashed to the hotel restaurant. He always told me it was fine. He lunched with his other department heads, didn't he? I wanted to believe him—believe that no one noticed when we traveled to meetings together or saw those accidental touches. That day Marlene and her mother waved and detoured to our table. She'd smiled through polite introductions and looked as cool as I had learned to appear. So, she'd known since then. And said nothing.

Unable to be less than completely honest, I said, "It was Pittsburgh."

She shook her head. "The night he called and said his car was locked in a parking lot?" She hadn't guessed the affair had begun at the state conference.

I nodded. It sounded so dumb now.

Marlene bent, picked up a tiny princess's tiara, and set it on the stairway up to the bedrooms where her children slept. She turned and tossed me a hurtful line, "Even his Korean mistress was taller than you." Was this supposed to tell me I was not the only one? Not special? Instead, it reminded me that she and Robert never looked like a couple. Next to her tall, solid frame, he bounced like a leprechaun.

In my deepest pain, I wondered if our affair created the stress that caused his stroke. More likely, the years of drinking,

smoking, and intense living had taken a huge toll on his forty-nine-year-old, Type A body.

Marlene sat. She and I were adults and unlikely allies. Robert could not make decisions for himself. It was her time to lay out the rules.

"The hospital staff must not know about the..." Her voice wavered at the word "affair." "So clichéd," she said with a laugh and a dismissive hand gesture. I smiled and something opened between us. Under other circumstances we could have been friends.

That moment passed and she continued, "If a hint of scandal gets back to the social worker, Kara will be sent back to that horrible Korean orphanage." Robert loved his three sons and two adopted daughters. He'd introduced them to me at a party, but I was too nervous to keep their names straight.

She told me the entire university community knew. No one had spoken to me since Robert's hospitalization. I appeared at work every day and maintained the charade that I was fine. Even the worst gossips didn't pry for tidbits of information or ask why I looked like hell. Other times, locked in my apartment, unable to eat or sleep, I journaled—if raving and repeating words on paper could be called journaling.

Marlene narrowed her eyes and tossed her head theatrically. "I wonder if I would have called you—if he'd died," she whispered *sotto voce*.

I believe she would have wanted to be the one.

Marlene decided that the sooner Robert's rehabilitation began, the better his chance of recovery. His family—his children—would be crucial in supporting his therapy.

She told me again the top priority was to protect his children, then tossed out a flip comment about the cost of therapy for five traumatized kids. Unable to meet her eyes, I stared at a glass bowl heaped with candy corn, apples, and Tootsie Roll Pops.

(Continued on page 4)

Mark your calendar
For a great weekend writing event
coming soon.

LifeLines Writing Retreat

With Lisa Dale Norton,
Author of
Shimmering Images:

A Handy Little Guide to Writing Memoir

May 15–17, 2009

Round Top, Texas

Look for more details in the
next issue of the *Journal*.

(Continued from page 3)

Marlene began to pace, automatically straightening the kitchen. The silence felt more awkward than sarcastic words. She picked up a carving knife next to a half-completed Jack-o-lantern and examined it like Lady Macbeth. "I didn't love him. We married in our late twenties and we both wanted a family. He loved me. But I did not love him. We made a good life. I grew to love him—too late." She sighed and tossed the knife into the sink.

I left. I do not remember getting into my car or driving home.

Months later, when he returned to work, I saw the sparkling eyes of the formerly vibrant man and my heart again wanted to reach out. Then I noticed he told only old stories. Later, I learned that Marlene had given Robert rules, too. He could stay in their home until he was well enough to go back to work, he would move out as soon as he could live alone, and then they would divorce.

I saw him alone one more time. I said a final goodbye with sincere sorrow. Gradually, over months, I accepted I'd loved a shallow and selfish man. I remembered him saying, "Be there for me. I'll try to be there for you," and I no longer thought it was a loving commitment.

My devastation at losing this man I loved burned down the walls I had lived behind all my life. At thirty-nine I experienced real feelings, from passion to grief, and at last began to move forward towards life.

Marlene became my secret role model as I created a new life. A suffering wife and caring mother divorced a disabled man and made him leave his home and children months after facing death. I imagined her surrounded by sympathetic family and friends, yet she must have borne enormous guilt as she salvaged her life.

"I'm not good enough for you," Robert told me so often. I hope he said those words often to his wife. ❖

Amber Polo: From a career as a librarian to yoga teacher with a few stops in between, Amber Polo has lived more places than many people visit. Since each move brought a new life, she'll never run out of stories. A recovering English major, Amber has written everything from computer manuals to romances (and prefers romance). Her comic paranormal romance, *Romancing Rebecca*, is available from the Wild Rose Press. For more than you want to know, check out www.amberpolo.com.



The Homecoming

Victoria McNabb Wheeler, Stockton NJ

She said she would carry a rose so I'd recognize her. Perhaps I should have one too. I am alone at People Express in Newark this chilly November day to meet her flight from Boston. The plane drifts along the tarmac as though it doesn't intend to stop. I stare blankly as bulky stairs are dragged to the plane. The flight attendant pulls the heavy door and it swivels in slow motion toward her. Each blink of my eyes brings this miracle closer. The wait is tiring. Finally the door is open and strangers line the stairs. One is mine. I am here to meet my daughter.

Under my coat I feel trickles of cold sweat. The familiar chill reminds me of the shame my pregnancy brought to my life when I was so young. My thoughts return to my edgy nervousness. I've been anxious for two weeks because I never believed this reunion could happen. I'm on the cusp of a new chapter in my life. The call from the Children's Home Society caught me off guard. I sank to the kitchen floor as I listened to the social worker on the other end of the line. The daughter I gave up at birth for adoption in 1961 wants family health records. The caller gave me the phone number and name of my child, Susan. (Kimberly was my name for her the first five days of her life.) I phoned Susan the next night, on my fortieth birthday. We anxiously agreed to meet. The long secretive silence of twenty-two years had separated us, legally, emotionally and physically. Revised laws opened adoption records, and reunions with birth families are commonplace. I watch them on *Oprah*, while I'm cocooned in my own secret.

At the gate the windows extend from ceiling to floor. The expanse of glass isn't big enough for this event. My impulse is to run and stand at the foot of the stairs and insist "my daughter" be let off first. Instead, I stand at the window, hands extended to the glass, to steady myself. I wonder if she sees me, and if I look anything like what she expects.

"I'm a forty year old with brown hair, tall and slim," I told Susan earlier on the phone. Susan sent me a photo of herself in the mail. She obviously resembles both her birth father and me. It is jarring to see his features in her face. I never told him about my pregnancy because I didn't want to marry him when I was eighteen. We had a wedding planned but I cancelled just twenty four hours before it. He needed financial support through medical school and I wasn't willing to forfeit my future for his.

She bends to leave the plane then steps down the stairwell and I see a vision of myself at twenty-two: tall, brunette and tentative. She reaches for the railing to steady herself, dangles her superfluous rose, and descends the stairs. My nerves electric, my heart syncopated, I forget the script I planned. I wonder if she'll let me hug her and whether she forgives me for giving her up. She enters the gateway. Her lovely eyes sweep over the crowd then she spots me. We walk toward one another like mirror images reaching out to embrace. We cling for several moments, each weeping into the other's shoulder.

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We pull back to hold one another at arms length. We are close enough to look into each other's eyes for the first time and to see that we are biologically mother and daughter.

Twenty-five years later I am still telling our story of that visit, reflecting how dearly I hold the memory. I see it in my mind and replay it over and over. I chose to keep it alive, forever hopeful, and eternally optimistic. It was the first time Susan and I had together as adults.

Susan and I drove home from the airport and sat across from one another at my kitchen table. "Let's compare our feet now," she said after we had noticed the similarity of our hands. We flipped through her high school and college yearbooks and listened to each other's stories about the years separating us. She met her two half sisters, newly teens, as they walked into the house after school. The girls were greatly affected after I told them about Susan, just days before her visit. They reacted dramatically with confusion and tears.

"All I wanted was to find my mother and never let her go," Susan wrote after the visit when she returned to Boston. I relived a monstrous weight of shame when she came into my life. While grappling with the past it came to me that what was lost was found and that she was a gift. It was terrible giving her up as a baby and now miraculously she returned.

After meeting Susan in 1983 I told family and friends about her and why I had disappeared in 1961 during the summer months. I was secluded in a home for unwed mothers. A light flooded into the black hole reserved previously for my dark secret. I was emotionally high on sharing my story. No more secrets and no more invented lies were necessary to cover the truth. "Every birthmother should know her child is safe," I emoted to everyone hearing our story. At first it was so good I believed it would never end.

My family supported me in this remarkable situation and upheld me when it dissolved years later. Bob knew about my secret from our engagement forward, and our daughters eventually accepted their half sister. My mother was awed by the turn of events, which were originally known only to my parents and me.

During my relationship with Susan, I sought solutions to bridge my life with hers, to include her in our schedule, and always to continue plans to meet again. In the past few years her calls became fewer, and my emails answered briefly. Time had run out it seemed, in her interest in my life. Somehow I felt she wanted less contact. Maybe she was seeking an excuse to exit, or perhaps all her questions about me were answered, I don't know.

My husband, two daughters and I predictably weathered her absence as we would any difficult time. I learned to let her go, sadly at first, then gradually with acceptance that Susan was never mine. I have been changed by working through the experience. I forgive myself and the decisions I made as a youth. Rejection by my loved ones never happened.

My inner void about giving up my baby is filled. Susan's story is the missing chapter I sought about questions tormenting me since her adoption. Her presence had lasting value, even if

the relationship did not survive. Our reunion reflects a time for unimagined photos of haunted and difficult beauty. The album is real. It stands on a shelf in my home as a tribute to our time together. The girl I was at seventeen, present but not visible in the photos, is forgiven and healing. I have come home to myself, after a long absence. ❖

Victoria McNabb Wheeler: I graduated with a B.F.A. in 1964 from Ohio State University. A "townie" from Columbus, I rode my bike to class from home. My career in Interiors was shelved by choice in order to marry. We transferred every three years with his job and I wrote letters home to family. Those were my journals while raising our two daughters. Friends told me to write my stories and encouraged me to begin. Story Circle published "Hometown Girl," in the June 2008 *Story Circle Journal*. "Name That Tune" is online with SCN's *True Words from Real Women*, June 2008. I'm thrilled.

Strong Winds

Carol Hyde, Round Rock TX



The hot wind rushed through the open cab of the truck, blowing out all but the thoughts that tumbled through my frantic mind. "Without this surgery your husband will be blind in six months," rumbled over and over again. The wind and truck engine drowned out the sound of my sobs as I headed down I35, home, to an uncertain future.

It was the last summer of my youth. My husband, a diabetic, had just had his first laser surgery for retinopathy. He was blessedly asleep for the drive home, having taken strong medication for the pain of having his eye zapped in an effort to stop his body from completely robbing him of his sight.

Why was this happening? I didn't want a blind husband. I looked over at the man beside me and felt a rush of shame. How could I think about what I wanted when he was the one that was losing his sight? When I met David, I fell in love. When he told me he was diabetic, I squeamishly learned to give him insulin shots and reminded him it was time to eat. During the physical exam for the marriage license I became angry at the doctor when he said, "You do realize that he will not live very long, don't you?"

(Continued on page 6)

Help Women Share Their Stories, Consider a Gift to SCN

Dues cover only one third of SCN's operational budget. Your gift to SCN supports our programs, publications, and projects. No gift to the Story Circle Network is too small (or too large!), and every contribution is tax deductible. Send gifts and contributions to the Story Circle Network, PO Box 500127, Austin, TX 78750-0127.

(Continued from page 5)

My unformulated life plan was to get married, have children and create a happy space for my family. My bookshelves were full of cookbooks, gardening, decorating and healthy living. I wanted a house in the country where I could grow food for my family, play with our children, and surround ourselves with animals and loving people.

The reality of my husband's disease began to blow my world apart.

David soon quit his job. It was too difficult for him to fight against the disease that wanted to rob him of his sight and health. He became depressed, and that never really went away. We needed health insurance and a steady income.

We moved back to Austin where I returned to the job I had left behind. I began to take night classes and plunged into making sure the job was not just somewhere I had to be for eight hours a day. I pushed David to continue his education and focus on something that he could do, with or without sight. I desperately wanted a baby. I was afraid. Afraid David would die and leave me alone. Afraid we would have to depend on handouts to survive. Afraid of where my feelings for David would go. Afraid fear would destroy me.

David could not accept what was happening to him. He refused to follow the instructions to eat right, monitor his blood sugar and control his exercise. When told that he could have a normal life if he only maintained blood sugar control, he knew it was a lie. He struggled to maintain a job, eventually giving up and going on social security disability.

My reaction to the winds of uncertainty led me to take control. I had the babies I so wanted. I turned my job into a career, developing talents I didn't know I had. Although I couldn't have the dream of my youth, I dreamed new dreams and found the means to make them reality. At times I raged against the unfairness of the hand we had been dealt, but I was determined to play with all the cards we had.

We found that David was a good father and so he became the "stay-at-home dad." It was a role we both knew was best for him to play, but neither of us ever really came to terms with the cost. He found it difficult in social situations to explain what he did, so more and more he withdrew from those situations. He dreaded that inevitable question of "What do you do?" I lost my dream of motherhood. I deeply resented that it was David that greeted our children when they came home from school, not me. I could not be as involved in school activities as I wanted. I couldn't always arrange my schedule to be there.

The young girl with dreams of raising kids and chickens changed her definition of motherhood. I did become a scout leader, PTA member, chauffeur to dance, baseball and swim lessons. I also enjoyed the business world, becoming a world traveler, making business decisions involving millions of dollars, although sometimes leaving meetings to take the phone call from the child needing to hear Mommy's voice. I learned to speak, giving presentations before large groups of people. The bookshelf now contained books on parenting, business processes, human behavior and how to prevent kidney disease. The how-to

garden books were replaced with picture books of beautiful gardens from around the world.

As time passed, David slowly lost most of his vision. He began to accumulate the list of complications associated with diabetes. I found the advantage to having a blind husband. He never failed to tell me how nice I looked. He never saw the grey in my hair or the lines that formed on my face. I retained the look of my youth.

In Texas, my home state, there is always wind. Out on the plains of my youth the winds blew strong, leaving desolation behind. Down by the coast, the trees are bent and shaped, hugging the ground, with deep roots in resistance to the wind. The wind can be hot and dry, wringing moisture from all it touches. Sometimes the wind is wet and cold, piercing everything in its path. Then there is the soft gentle breeze that caresses the skin, cooling and rejuvenating. So have been the events that have shaped my life.

I have endured pain that I thought was impossible to survive. I have had to stand by as someone I loved endured physical pain I could not comprehend. I have also mothered two wonderful humans to adulthood. I have achieved success in ways I never dreamed possible. My dreams changed to reflect the reality of my life.

Twenty-six years after that summer ride there was no wind in my home to drown the sounds of my sobs as I lay pounding the floor and screaming, no, no, no. The long slow battle against the winds of diabetes was over. The man whose life became entwined with mine was gone. He left behind a woman shaped by the winds of life, rooted and able to bend with the currents that ebb and flow, sometimes leaving desolation, other times a gentle caress. ❖

Carol Hyde: Carol Hyde lives in Round Rock, TX and is the mother of Jessica and Joshua, grandmother of Jady. She enjoys being mother, grandmother, and her work as manager in the semiconductor industry. As her last child prepares for college, she is finding her way, not only as an empty nester, but also as a widow.



Sign on to Teach an SCN Online Class

Teaching others is the best way to improve your own skills, and in SCN's expanded online program, you have the opportunity to do just that.

Until October 1, we're accepting proposals for our Winter term, January 19–March 16, 2009. If you're interested in offering a course, check out our "Call for Online Course Proposals," at www.storycircleonlineclasses.org/onlineproposal.php. If you have questions about teaching in the program or want to check out an idea before you submit it as a proposal, please email programdirector@storycircleonlineclasses.org.

My Mother's Hands

Karen Appleberry, Grapevine TX

For an hour after her last breath, I sat holding my mother's hand. I felt its slackness as the life slowly cooled. Ninety-four years of life expressed through these ten thin fingers and fragile bones.

My mother's hands reflected a restless spirit. They were hands that were seldom idle, always engaged in some activity or simply fidgety. To see my mother with still hands was to view a picture of forced repose.

Mama said she was always told she "talked with her hands" and was reprimanded for this as a child.

"Why?" I asked.

"I don't know," she replied, thoughtful. "Maybe it wasn't considered ladylike."

As a child I experienced my mother's hands as strong and directive. She taught me to chop vegetables and write my alphabet by placing her hand over mine and making the motions.

I liked to watch her cook and was amazed by the continuous, coordinated ballet of her hands. I especially loved to watch her knead bread and then gently pat the dough into multiple loaves that would turn into a hot, delicious miracle. She would cut into a hot loaf, spread a slice thickly with butter, and extend it to me, smiling. It was pure alchemy performed by my mother's hands.

Her movements were graceful and precise. No fluttering of hands or limp wrists. She had a love of precision instilled by a German father and a prim New England mother. For all of that, though, she also had a love of "the grand gesture," significantly enhanced by broad, sweeping hand movements. Would there be drama without hands?

I experienced my mother through her hands. Sitting on the edge of the bathtub while she used tweezers to remove gravel embedded in my knees after the latest bicycle miscalculation; crying from the sting of the Mercurochrome she applied afterward (but later proud of my bright pink knees), and then her hands wiping away my tears.

Mama had a habit of clapping her hands together when she was delighted, as she often was. She always greeted me this way in later years—clapping her hands together and saying, "Karen!" and then opening her arms to scoop me up in a hug. She reached for people and for life with her hands.

My mother lived the last four years of her life in a nursing home. It was difficult for her at first, but after two lonely years following my father's death, she thrived on the social activities. Her hands became even more important to her as the rest of her body failed her. She especially loved the Tai Chi class, done from her wheelchair, with its graceful and precise movements.

I spent endless hours at the nursing home sitting with my mother and her hands: watching her cut paper and string in craft classes, or act as music conductor on karaoke nights. I watched as her careful hands faltered trying to complete the motions of eating her meal due to faulty instructions from her Alzheimer's-ridden mind. I unwrapped her straw and cut her meat for her. Later, I placed my hand softly over hers to guide the fork to her mouth.

The morning of the day she died, I washed Mama's hands and massaged cream into them. They were so frail, really only tissue-thin skin over bones gnarled with arthritis. But, our lives are in our hands. I imagined my mother's infant hand clasped in her mother's hand. I remembered my own child hand clasped in hers. Just as I now folded her thin hand in mine and brought it to my cheek to wipe away the tears. ❖

Karen Appleberry: Texas is my home, but I am really a northern-southern, eastern-western hybrid. I lived my early years in the woods and rolling fields of southwestern Ohio. As a teenager, I transplanted myself to the streets of San Francisco. Since then, I have moved frequently until coming to rest in Texas, which snuck up and captured my heart more than twenty years ago.

I am fifty-five years old. I work forty hours a week at a profession that I have loved but have outgrown. Joining the Story Circle Network was a first step on my way to trading the out-lived for the un-lived.

SCN-Affiliated Workshop

A Story Circle Lifewriting Retreat

WHEN: October 3–5, 2008

WHERE: Wildacres Retreat, Little Switzerland, NC

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



Join nationally known author and writing workshop facilitator, Robin Edgar, for a weekend life-writing retreat open to any woman who is interested in life-writing, regardless of skill level or experience.

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

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

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



Take a Bow: Jane Ross!

Lisa Shirah-Hiers, Introduction by Patricia Pando

Simply Great

It is simply great to see a friend move on to new opportunities.

Jane Ross has been a Story Circle Network leader and doer since she joined in 1999 as a facilitator of OWL workshops. She's led six and currently leads a continuing OWL group. She's a member of a writing circle and has served on the SCN board.

Jane also has turned her impressive energy to our SCN publications. She edited the third and fourth *True Words* anthology and became the Assistant Editor of the *Story*

Circle Journal in 2003. When she became editor late in 2004, I knew that we regular contributors needed to be on our toes, for she was looking ahead to changes—many changes in content, size, and level of professionalism. Was I ever right!

Under Jane's leadership the *Journal* expanded, offering more women the opportunities to see their words in print. The larger publication also provided space for additional features. Jane increased the number of regular contributors and gave us a chance to operate at a highly professional level.

That was just a start. During her tenure as editor, Jane spearheaded every phase of the more-than-successful publication of *Kitchen Table Stories*. She also led SCN's constant effort to be responsive to members by designing the first comprehensive member survey.

Jane is the kind of person who jumps right in when she spots an opportunity to develop her skills and enhance her career. I look forward to hearing about her successes in her new endeavors and to continuing to share our Story Circle Network experiences. It's going to be simply great!

Patricia Pando

Lisa Shirah-Hiers

As Jane hands on the *Journal's* editorship to Robin Wittig, she reflects on her years with SCN and the unusual path that led her to us and which is calling her now to new challenges.

Born in Christchurch, New Zealand, to a family of scientists, Jane earned a BS in Mathematics. In the beginning it seemed a poor fit. "I was a couple of years into the degree [when] I realized that math wasn't for me. The way math was taught in New Zealand, it was a pretty solitary subject—you just didn't have discussion sessions...and you worked on your homework alone. I struggled on with my math degree, feeling very dependent but not sure how to change direction and what direction I would take if I could." Then in her senior

year, she ran across a classified ad in a British science magazine advertising a job for an editor to work on science reports for the United Nations. "It was as if a light bulb switched on and I knew that was what I wanted to do."

After graduation, Jane arranged for an internship with Xerox Corporation in the suburbs of London. She spent free hours looking for jobs in publishing. She says she began her first job "at the bottom of the ladder as a copyeditor, marking the manuscripts of dry math monographs with red pen." On reflection, she is sure that having a math degree helped her enter the publishing world, since there "just wasn't a lot of competition from other math graduates for that entry-level editing job."

Her life took another turn when she met her future husband, Felipe Voloch, a Brazilian mathematician. She spent 1986

in Brazil, studying Portuguese and teaching English as a Second Language. For a while she worked at *Time* magazine, then left in 1990 to volunteer in a preschool for disadvantaged children in Rio de Janeiro. Daughter Sofia was born late that year, and Jane and her family moved to Berkeley, then to Austin TX in 1991. She began work as a freelance copyeditor for Publisher's Resource Group, editing high school math textbooks, then enrolled in classes to study page layout, graphics and Web design.

Jane's cosmopolitan life is a reflection of her personality.

She says, "I don't like doing the same thing over and over, and ever since I started working in publishing, I've felt driven to learn all the different processes that go

into creating books and editions of books. The job where I learned the most was as Business Manager for a small publisher in New Zealand, a branch of the London-based Allen and Unwin Publishers (the original publisher of the *Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings*). My boss there was a woman who inspired me enormously. Bridget Williams started out as an editor for Oxford University Press and eventually founded her own scholarly publishing company, working at her kitchen table."

A professional in publishing for "twenty-some years," Jane has seen many changes in the industry. "Trying to start a viable publishing company the way Bridget Williams did would be very difficult right now. But on the other hand, print on demand and online publications have opened up some exciting possibilities for other publishing models that didn't exist when I started work-

Jane's example and leadership had a strong effect on my work as the writer of the "President's Letter" for two years and as the Contributing Editor of "Kitchen Table Stories." Thank you, Jane!

ing in this business.” She believes that staying at the head of the technical curve poses both a challenge and opportunity for SCN...

...to carve out its own unique niche, to fill it in a way that is sustainable, and to find ways to partner with other organizations, businesses, and individuals who can provide complementary services that are beyond the scope of SCN. SCN is also experimenting with the other exciting possibilities offered by the internet. In 2007, I was very pleased to help SCN begin using print on demand to print, sell and deliver the *Starting Points* book of prompts by Susan Albert. And this year, the new online class offerings are amazing in the way the workshop leaders are planning to integrate many of the communications services that the Internet now offers: video classes, online collaborative writing, teleconferencing, and websites.

Now that Jane has stepped down as *Journal* editor and sent her daughter, Sofia, off to college, she is ready to launch into a new phase of her career. After a trip to see her family in New Zealand this fall, she plans to expand her publishing services business. “I now feel ready to spread my wings with publishing projects that are longer-term and more demanding,” she says. “I’d love to work with some of the major publishers on book projects aimed at general readership with a science background, perhaps science biography and books exploring the intersection of philosophy and science, books about our place in the universe.” She also plans to launch two blogs: one centering on SCN’s *Kitchen Table Stories* book and concept, and another about the editing life. It will answer such questions as “What do edi-

tors actually do? How do they make decisions about how to change a piece of writing? What resources do editors use and what resources are out there for writers?” She hopes the blog will be “a forum to explore deeper issues of language and story and how we convey meaning.”

Jane believes that it was SCN, in part, that gave her the courage and skills for these new ventures. “Working for the *Journal* for four years, editing four SCN anthologies, leading OWL workshops, and facilitating a writing circle for five years, I’ve gotten some serious immersion training and developed a real hands-on understanding of what makes an effective story.” Jane credits Susan Albert’s example, vision, and leadership for giving her this “wonderful, wonderful opportunity.” And Jane is delighted to be able to hand the *Journal* over to Susan’s daughter, Robin Wittig. “I couldn’t think of a better person to step into this role,” says Jane.

Though she says she doesn’t live by any particular maxim, Jane does like a quote from Isak Dinesen’s short story, “Babette’s Feast”: “the world [is] not a moral, but a mystic concern.” She says, “By that I understand that when we experience our own life as being profoundly connected to others and to a force greater than ourselves, then questions of right and wrong become matters of doing what keeps us in right relationship to others and to that mystic force. As an editor, I’m thinking of adopting this as my motto: Editing too is not a moral but a mystic concern, the goal of which is to allow writers to connect with readers.”

That’s a goal Jane has certainly fulfilled with SCN, and we are profoundly grateful. ❖



How I Discovered Story Circle

Janet Riehl, St. Louis MO

One way to practice one’s craft is through the activities and opportunities offered by Story Circle Network. Janet Riehl believes that at its best, SCN fosters “connection—within ourselves; with our writing world; and with our writing sisters.” She discovered SCN when she learned about the “Land Full of Stories” conference, for which she became a presenter. She is an active participant in the SCN Lifewriting Yahoo! Group.

After earning a degree in English from Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, Janet served in the Peace Corps in Africa, where she taught English as a Second Language and literature in secondary schools for three years. She has professional experience on four continents directing cross-cultural development projects, conducting workshops, teaching, and training. Her private consulting company in New Mexico counted clients ranging from high-tech business leaders to Native American pueblos.

“I’ve traveled to Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Europe,” she says. “I’ve worked with Native Americans, villagers in

Botswana and Ghana, inner city blacks in Illinois, Latinos in New Mexico. Writing has been the core of it all.” Among her publications is *Sightlines: A Poet’s Diary*. Although the sudden death of her sister in 2004 was the impetus for the book, Janet says, “Its encompassing theme is a meditation on impermanence and chance, the mutability of memory, and the passage of time.”

Janet views writing as a craft that demands the discipline of work. “Our muse comes out when we’re at work,” she says. “Art is good, but craft will see you through.”

Visit Janet’s blog “**Riehl Life: Village Wisdom for the 21st Century**” at <http://www.riehlife.com>.



Kitchen Table Stories

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

Rhonda Esakov comes from a long line of jam and jelly makers. Part I of her story of four generations of women appeared in the June issue.

Rhonda

Hauling yet *another* load of towels and sheets out of the dryer to be folded, Rhonda briefly sniffs them and tries to remember the fresh smell of her mother's air-dried sheets. These dryer sheets that proclaim the fresh, clean, outdoorsy smell just don't quite cut it. Oh well, she thinks, I'd better get this done before the boys come in wanting my attention and something to eat. As she begins folding laundry—*not* a task she enjoys—she notices the dogs whining at the back door, tails wagging furiously, with eager looks in her direction.

"What is it, girls?" she asks the two dogs. She goes to the window with a fresh sheet in her hands. *Oh, no!* The deer are in the orchard again and if she doesn't shoo them away, they will strip away the grape leaves and nibble the fruit on her peach trees. It is bad enough that the cardinals and mockingbirds have pecked holes in the best peaches. She doesn't need the deer contributing to the damage too.

As she opens the door, Rhonda tells the dogs, "Git 'em," and they run out into the yard, through to the orchard, and hot on the heels of the deer they will never catch. They enjoy the chase all the same. To herself, Rhonda thinks that maybe she can get the boys to go pick a bucket of peaches later so she can make some preserves this weekend. Sadly, she is the last in a line of women who liked to cook and can and preserve the fruits of her garden and orchard. Nostalgically, she remembers tales of Great-Grandma Anna's hog plum jam, misses the taste of Grandma Pearl's blackberry jam (Rhonda's favorite to this day), and smiles at the memory of eating more cherries than she saved for her mother Barbara's cherry jelly. "All these women are gone from my life and I have no daughters to pass this tradition of jellies and jams to," she thinks with a tinge of *triste*. "But I can still make my great peach jam and preserves. My father, all the in-laws and other friends and family enjoy receiving the canned gifts each year when the holidays roll around."

And again, no Christmas meal is complete without a dish of Rhonda's fantastic peach preserves to serve with the warm rolls and breads. (Surely you saw that line coming—see "Jam-Making Traditions [Part I]" June, 2008 issue of the *Journal*.) ❖

Rhonda's Peach Jam

- Pick, pit and peel about 5 pounds of peaches (or nectarines) and cut into chunks.
- Place 6 jars (8 ounce) and canning lids in a huge pot filled with water, enough to cover jars when filled by an inch or more. Start the water boiling as this may take a while.
- In about an 8-quart pan, place the cut up fruit and slightly crush.
- Add a cup of water or unsweetened fruit juice and 1/4 cup lemon juice. (I use the juice from my pears since I have *sooo* many and the plentiful lemons from my lemon tree.) Stir in one package of "No Sugar Needed Pectin." (Yes, it's lower calories these days!)
- Bring the mixture to a full boil and stir constantly, mashing as you go. Once you have a rolling boil going, add either 2 cups real sugar or 1 cup Splenda. Bring your fruit mixture back to a boil and boil hard for one minute, stirring constantly. If too foamy, add a teaspoon of butter to the mix; skim foam if needed. Place hot fruit into jars and use your favorite canning method.



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

You have Kitchen Table Stories, too!

We'd love to print them here in the *Journal* (800 words maximum, please, including the recipe). Send via email or as a Word attachment to ppando@gmail.com. In the subject line, please type "Kitchen Table Stories." If you have no computer, type or write your story legibly and mail to: Patricia Pando, 1600 Lake Douglas Road, Bainbridge, GA 39819.

Story Circles: The Heart of SCN

New Circles Launched in Austin, Florida and Washington



Says Circles Coordinator **Lisa Shirah-Hiers**, "From time to time, I enjoy looking over the website list of free range story circles. As Circles Coordinator, it's gratifying to see how far and wide we've spread, to learn about the creative ways in which circles approach writing and sharing together, and to dream of all the new circles we'll one day see in the U.S. and overseas."

As of this writing there are four new circles this year: one in Austin, one in Seattle, and two in Florida. (Imagine a Writing From Life Conference or retreat on the ocean!)

I asked the facilitators of these new circles what the experience has been like for them. Here is what Johnett Scogin of Austin had to say about the circle that she and Rose McCorkle launched last February:

We decided to begin a free-range circle affiliated with SCN after attending a series of writing workshops offered through the Austin Public Library. After several sessions, we made connections with a few other ladies who attended the workshops as well. As the end of the series approached, we all agreed that we wanted to continue to meet and support each other. Because each of us had a real desire for support for ongoing writing projects, as well as time to improve our craft, we determined a format for bi-monthly meetings and began working together as a small group several months ago.

Since our first meetings, several of us have submitted pieces to SCN, as well as other venues. Another of our members, Karen Ballinger, recently began helping with the SCN Podcast. And most recently, we've begun a group blog called "Chickenscratchings." We all feel that participating in the circle has been a positive and beneficial experience. Through constructive and compassionate feedback and mutual support, we have each come to see the writers in ourselves.

Though we are currently not actively recruiting new members, Rose and I would love to communicate with other circle facilitators who may have questions or need support in establishing a circle of their own.

Here is what Pat Hoglund had to say about her circle in Seattle:

This is not the first circle I have hosted. I started one many years ago in Olympia and then when I moved to Seattle I had one here. I had conflicts with space and so I stopped holding meetings for a while but wanted to start again because several of my former members and friends were asking me to have a circle.

My experience initially was very positive. I just printed out and followed the directions on how to start a circle from the Story Circle website. I have continued to repeat the process. My experience is consistently the same. Members find the experience very powerful. I have had some people tell me it was the best decision they ever made. Others have said it was a safe place where they could write and share and explore their own stories. Some said they had never told anyone the things they were sharing.

I have found the circles to be illuminating and healing for all involved. I think one of the most powerful things that happen to women is that they are able to be seen through their stories in a way that has not been available to them. We are truly witnessing their lives in a dramatic way. I love it!

New and prospective facilitators with questions are encouraged to email Rose and Johnett at rosemc50@att.net or johnett42@yahoo.com. Visit the Chickenscratchers Blog at www.chickenscratchers.wordpress.com.

For info on joining Pat Hoglund's circle, contact her via email at hoglundp@aol.com.

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

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 in Canada and Yemen! Check the Free Range Story Circles listing at 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 (just \$3.00 to non-members). To order one, just visit the website and scroll down to "How to Start a Story Circle."

If you are a facilitator with a story to tell about your experience of leading a circle, or if you have questions about free range circles, please email the Circles Coordinator, Lisa Shirah-Hiers at freerangecircles@storycircle.org.



True Words from Real Women

Autumn

A selection of short pieces of lifewriting by our members, edited by **Mary Jo Doig**. The theme of this issue's True Words section is "Autumn." Contribute your own True Words to the Journal. Future topics are listed on p. 23.

My Favorite Season

Duffie Bart
Santa Barbara CA

I turn seventy-five in eleven days and am not upset about it. Autumn has always been my favorite season in nature and it is my favorite season in life.

I became aware of this when recently I was invited by friends to join them on a tour of Greece and the Greek Isles.

"How can you not go?" my teenage daughter asked. "What I wouldn't give," she said wistfully; "I mean, a free trip to Greece. Mom, are you sure about this?"

"I'm sure," I told her without hesitation.

"What has happened to your wanderlust, to your sense of adventure?" she wanted to know.

"I seem to have lost it," I told her, smiling, and then reminded her, "I have often told you my favorite season is autumn."

"Why are you changing the subject?"

"I'm not; you see, I am now in the autumn of my life."

"But that is when everything dies," she moaned.

"Not at all. It is a time of harvesting; for me, it is the richest time."

"Mom, what could possibly be richer than the gift of a trip to Greece, the gift of wandering the glorious Greek Isles with good friends?"

"I do sound ridiculous," I admitted, "but please believe I prefer to stay where I am, living every day without a plan. I've never had the chance to do this—always too busy with spring and summer when everything is blooming all at once—busy, busy, busy. Now I want to slow down and review the blazing colors of my past."

"But what will you do?"

"Not much, I suppose. I will enjoy living by my own timetable, the same as the autumn leaves."

I waited for more arguments. Instead I heard: "You sound happy, Mom. If your life has been as colorful as the autumn leaves, I guess that's pretty good. I hope I feel the same way one day. In the meantime," she announced with certitude, "I am saving my pennies for a trip to Greece."

She ran to me for a hug, which I gladly gave. ❖

Autumn Friendship

Shelley Thrasher
Orange TX

Edge of the gray Gulf,
we sit in low, plastic-webbed chairs—
aluminum-rod supports sink
as the sea gnaws at the beach.

Your face—still beautiful yet
lined like the ridged sand behind us.
"The daily struggle,
preserve ourselves from conformity"—
our words fight against the wind.

The sea's strong current
rushes diagonally
toward the beach.
Last week the undertow
ingested two children. ❖

On This Great Day

R. L. Milton
Lockhart TX

I planted and watched it grow.
But during the winter, it did not show.

I waited till spring to see what would happen.
Again it decided to hide its face and not be seen.

Then the summer rolled around.
And I just wanted to play and clown.

Nothing of what it was doing.
Still no signs of anything brewing.

Finally, I peeked out beyond the sky.
What did my eyes see?
On this great day in autumn,
I found a new me. ❖





Growing an Idea

Shawn Essed
Taneytown MD

In seventh grade my foreign language appreciation teacher planted in my head the idea of traveling to Spain. The idea sprouted into a plan to attend an extra year of high school in Europe, but my dad said no. Instead I traveled an hour away to the University of Maryland.

Still the idea grew, so I applied to take my junior year abroad. But the scholarship I won wasn't for the destination I'd hoped. In late September I took my first transatlantic flight to England. I didn't even make it to Spain on my Eurorail trip over winter break because I wanted more than a just few days there.

After graduation a friend and I planned an adventure to Barcelona. "Let's just buy plane tickets and see what happens!"

She backed out at the last moment, so in late September I packed up my convertible and drove to New Mexico to kill time while I waited for an agency to set me up with an *au pair* job in Spain.

Well, the Land of Enchantment was difficult to leave. When I could put it off no longer, I sold my car for airfare and late September found me once again on a transatlantic flight. By this time the journey felt more like an obligation than a dream come true. I didn't want to be an early autumn transplant again, yet there I was, my childhood idea in full bloom.

Mornings in Palma de Mallorca, I'd sit out on the terrace overlooking the city to the Mediterranean. Olive and almond trees grew in the field below. Palms swayed in the wind. The purity of the blue sky matched that of the glistening sea. Paradise was beautiful, but felt remote. In my heart I wanted to grow roots, not travel any longer.

Then a month later I met my future husband. It was obvious why I had come to Spain.

Now, twelve years later, the idea to travel to Spain still bears fruit, as this autumn my husband and I await the birth of our third child. ❖

Autumn 1975

Janan Hale
Tyler TX

Autumn is invigorating—flooding the mind with thoughts of projects long undone, filling the bloodstream with new enthusiasm and energy.

Autumn is ambiguous—regardless how the Fahrenheit scale may start the day; there is no assurance it will end as such.

Autumn is a deluge of leaves upon the lawn; a protective covering against the severity of winter.

Autumn is flamboyant—resplendently variegated in colors and shades only God's greatness could imagine.

Autumn is relief—bringing a chill to our bones, warmed to the marrow by summer's intensity. ❖

Beginnings and Endings

Janet Caplan
Sooke BC Canada

For me, September—Labor Day in particular—signifies the arrival of autumn. That has always meant a series of beginnings and endings: summer vacation comes to an end as school starts up once again. Work seems to move into high gear as people return from various holiday destinations, ready to take on new projects. The weather cools and we need to add an extra layer of clothing in order to keep warm. Of course, the most noticeable sign of autumn's return is the changing color of the leaves, losing their green lustre and gradually moving into their gold and then red variations before finally withering and falling off their branches.

That was autumn as I knew it throughout most of my life; the last two years have shown me a different picture though, one that I imagine will be the version I experience from now on. Children are grown and doing what they do: no more "summer's over blues" and "return to school anguish." The working world no longer beckons—I, too, do what I do. Autumn is not the bell-wether season it was; it is a continuation, part of the flow-through of the seasons as they present themselves here on our Canadian west coast. The autumn months look much the same as others throughout the year: undoubtedly, there is less sun than in spring and summer and perhaps less rain than in winter. Though the odd deciduous tree has found its way here and the occasional red maple or golden oak leaf may blow across one's path, the scene remains simply green, green, green year-round. Cedar, arbutus, Douglas fir, pine, and spruce fill out our evergreen landscape.

I occupy a different time and space now and my autumn seasons, along with all that they implied, have changed along with me. Without those beginnings and endings, autumn seems to just creep up on me; it simply happens in a relaxed kind of way, like my life. ❖



Autumn in Prison

Jannette Buck
Lockhart TX

As I sit here in prison,
I watch the seasons change.

It grows cooler outside.
The leaves change colors.

It is so pretty.
It feels good outside.

I welcome the cool weather into my heart.
It is just right. ❖

More True Words

School Daze

Erin Declan Philbin
Pittsburgh PA



It's September 1976. After eight years in St. Patrick's Elementary School, I'm headed to the big, bad public high school. I'm beyond scared. My dad, well aware of my inclination to get lost on the way back from the bathroom, decides to give me a "trial run" before school starts.

I sit in the front seat of his car, sweat dripping down the back of my legs. My brand-new combination lock is heavy in my hands. The magical series of numbers run through my mind like a mantra, a prayer, "Please let the locker open. Please let the locker open."

Dad keeps up a happy patter, pointing out various routes I may walk to school. I furiously pick out my own landmarks as street names slip from my brain.

Dad walks me through the front doors, past the football team and marching band, practicing for the first big game. I'm ushered into the darkened hallways of West Scranton High. The school has three floors of four long hallways built around a small courtyard.

Warnings from my older sisters ring in my ears. "Don't try to cut through the courtyard; those doors will be locked."

"In the spring, wise guys drop M-80's out the windows just for laughs. They also like to steal all the doorknobs."

My dad interrupts my reverie. "The important thing to remember is that there are *up* staircases and *down* staircases to help with the flow of traffic. They are clearly marked, so it should be no trouble."

I find my assigned locker and practice slipping my lock on and off the gray door. I jot down the locker number, certain that I'll never be able to find it again when school starts in a week.

Dad throws his arm around my shoulder as we leave the school. "You'll do just fine, little girl," he assures me as we head back into the bright sunshine. I did do fine, but still have "walking up the down staircase" and "no doorknobs" on my list of nightmares. ❖



It's All The Vogue

Erin Declan Philbin
Pittsburgh PA

Since my pre-teen years, my favorite part of fall has been the September issue of *Vogue* magazine. My sister, Patty, lets me borrow hers and I am smitten. *Largest Fashion Issue Ever!* it proclaims in big shiny letters. It's jam-packed with all I'll ever need to know about fashion, make-up, and the latest in what's Hot, Hot, Hot! It's all I need to be wildly popular. The fact that I wear a wool school uniform and navy-blue knee socks every day does not deter me.

Through high school and college I love the September *Vogue*. I hunt the drugstores and newsstands from the beginning of August, afraid they will sell out and leave me behind. I am certain it will only be a matter of time before I, too, am one of the beautiful people. I just need some fashion sense. Before I leave for grad school, I scour the city looking for my *Vogue*. Do I think they won't sell it in Pittsburgh?

My life after grad school is busy, if not glamorous. I occasionally buy *Vogue*, rub the perfume samples on my wrists, and search for a fashion trend I could actually wear even if I could never afford it.

Last year, while I am in the hospital for a week with a ruptured appendix, my husband surprises me with a copy of *Vogue*. I'm delighted; it's been years since I've bought one. It still has the glossy pictures, glamorous ads, and perfume samples. I find myself distracted.

"Why do these girls look so unhappy?" "Does anyone actually dress like that?" I realize with a start that I'm a middle-aged woman with nothing in common with these super-thin, super models. Even more surprising—I don't care. I settle in bed with a mystery novel—older, wider, and maybe even wiser. ❖

It's Fall

Doris Anne Roop-Benner
Richardson TX

The aspens are
quaking

My senses are
waking

To the beauty around me
It's Fall!

Timeless Tear

Carolyn Donnell
San Jose CA

I sat upon green grassy hill
my back against a spreading oak.
Dappled sunlight filtered through,
turning leaves to gleaming gold.

Rustles in the brush did cause
my peaceful reverie to end.
Across, on the adjacent knoll,
I saw a noble stag step forth.

The Lord of forest dark and deep
paused to ponder all his realm.
Antlered head, imperial,
turned and contemplated me.

Mesmerized by sable eyes,
I saw reflected first, myself.
Next came hunters with their guns,
defaming tree and rock and rill.

I shed one tear, and as I stared
into that dark and regal orb,
I swear to you, as I am here,
I saw a tear form there as well.

For one timeless moment pure,
we were one in heart and mind.
He saw my life and I knew his.
At long last, I understood.

A hunter shot that stag today.
A contest for his buddies dear.
The antlered head, a prize to place
upon his wall for all to see.

I went to see him hanging there,
to give my last endeared respects.
For one brief moment I did wish
to see the hunter's head instead.

The Reunion

Marsha Brandsdorfer
Mountain View CA

I had been trying to visit Greece for seven years. When I told my friend Dimitra that I would be visiting her last autumn, she did not believe me. So many times I had promised but it seemed that I was continuously having problems with jobs and looking for new work and postponing my trip.

This time, however, I decided I had waited long enough. Autumn would be a good time to visit Greece. This off-seasonal visit would mean that the attractions I intended to visit with a tour group would be less crowded, and the weather would not be so hot.

Dimitra's only son Nicholas would be just a month shy of his first birthday. I looked forward to meeting Nicholas as much as I looked forward to seeing Dimitra again.

Dimitra and I became friends when she lived in California, not far from me, for a few years while attending school in San Jose.

On my bus tour in Greece, I was the only one who used a regular camera and not a digital. However, photos would never capture all the remarkable wonderful history I saw. I enjoyed seeing Olympia, the founding city of the Olympics; Delphi where the people traveled to pray to the Gods; and Kalamaka, where I saw monasteries perched high up in the mountains.

After my tour, Dimitra visited me at my hotel in Athens. It was surreal to be standing there finally next to each other. We hugged and went to dinner. The next day I took a cab to her home and met her son. Nicholas hobbled when I held his arms as he tried desperately to walk. He gave me hugs and played on the floor with his toys.

Due to the poor economy in the United States, I was laid off from my job just a few months after my trip. I was thankful that I had not delayed my trip and had visited Greece when I had the chance. Autumn for me is a time for change, adventure, and risk. ❖



Grandpa and I get dressed in our warm clothes—he in his bib overalls and me in my jeans. We both pull on thick jackets as we prepare to hunt for a deer that will help feed the family over the winter.

We make it to our blind, and Grandpa settles us down for a long stay in hopes that a deer will appear. We must be quiet as we wait. Three hours pass. It seems like an eternity to an eight-year-old girl.

"There he is," I whisper to Grandpa, who then slowly cocks the shotgun.

Minnesota Autumn

Carolyn Donnell
San Jose CA

Shimmering trunks of gray-white birches reflect and sway, standing in dark back-water washes left by abandoned beaver dams. Mosquitoes flee Jack Frost's approach. He leaves behind glints of auburn-orange and yellow-gold. Luminous leaves, storing up the last of summer's sun. Soon enough winter will arrive to sculpt all but the evergreens with its icy breath. But for now, enjoy Autumn. My favorite time to be up north.



Bring Out the Sweater

Doreen L. Myers
Valrico FL

What if my life was divided into seasons? Where would I be now? Considering I plan on living to be a hundred years old like my Great Uncle Willie, I would say I am precisely at the beginning edge of autumn. I was born on November 10, 1958, so it is this year I say goodbye to the season of summer, literally and figuratively.

Turning fifty years old pushes me forward into the next beautiful season of my life. I have smelled the early fragrant blooms of my

youth, I've learned and been tested, founded friendships and found love. My Spring fell into my Summer, those years blowing by as quickly as a warm evening breeze. Busy times spent as wife and mother, caregiver and lover, and the days just melted away. We moved across the country three times, Dad died, and Mom moved south. Now the children are grown, making their way through their very own spring. I hope they take time and live in the moment, really feel the days—not just pass the time.

My autumn will be filled with rewarding experiences, rich in detail and vividly stunning colors. The leaves on the trees will drip with candy apple reds, sunny lemon yellows and oranges so warm and bright they can almost be tasted. The green leaves will give in gracefully to their aging veins and accept the idea of their evolution toward eventual grandeur. I too will accept the skin that shows the road map of my life. Those wrinkle lines will not define me, they beautify me. The lines around my face are testament to the many smiles that placed them there.

Our oldest daughter Allison is getting married in May 2009 and soon we will gain our first son. So now, just as she begins her new life and a new season, I will as well. Now is our time. My husband David and I will marvel at our accomplishments and plan for our future endeavors, however large or small.

Winter will have to wait. ❖

Shhh! I See Him!

Rhonda Speer, Lockhart TX

Bang!

I see the beautiful, six-point buck drop. I run from the blind to slit his throat and throw a rope around his back feet so we can drag him out of the woods and into the back of the pickup.

Once we arrive home, Grandpa tells Granny that I was the brave one who cut the deer's throat, tied his feet, helped drag him out of the woods, and helped load him onto the truck. Grandpa then lets me ride with them to take the deer to the butcher shop.

I am beaming with pride. ❖



More True Words

Memories of Seasons Gone By

Victoria Jessop
El Cajon CA

For me, autumn evokes memories of seasons gone by. First, when I am six, living in a small Devonshire village, while Exeter is put to rights after the air raids. Summer flies by, making way for harvest and the onset of autumn. The orchards are full of apples—Devon is cider country. Haystacks are built; stooks of corn stand together in fields of yellow stubble. In the still light evening, I am lifted onto the biggest horse in the world, a still, patient Clydesdale. Nearly touching the sky, frightened and exhilarated, I survey the great distance below.

Years go by; autumn comes and goes. My nineteenth birthday has just passed. In a suburb north of London, I stand at the garden gate in late August. Looking skywards, I watch the flocks of migrating birds—the first sign of autumn’s approach. The foliage turns yellow and golden brown in the warm weather; the mellow days draw in as nights get misty in the woods nearby. Autumn in England is like a beautiful woman dressed in a stately gown of gold: muted and melancholy. The days get colder and storms come, tossing the trees around, throwing down the now rusty, dead leaves. I scuff them as I walk, hearing the crunch of the dry, broken piles swirling round my feet, forlornly waiting to be swept up.

Now, in my twenty-seventh year, I am in America. Fall comes around; nights get darker sooner in the States. It is further south than England. I am in awe of the flaunting red maples mixed with the brown and gold of the other leaves. We drive through the Pennsylvania countryside, amazed at the richness of the scenery, the thick woods in their autumn glory, as we head for Gettysburg with my visiting parents. There, in the waning light, we make a tour of the famous battlegrounds, passing the impressive carved Gettysburg Address, the Peach Orchard, the Wheatfield, Cemetery Ridge, and feel the redolent sadness. Long dead soldiers, the Grey and the Blue still in their Battalions, lying side by side in their burying grounds. ❖



Autumn Leavings

Janice Strohmeier
Houston TX

The sun casts elongated autumn arms over its domain. Ribbon-thin shadows of football players rush their calf-skin treasures into the end zone. Sweetness filters into the chilling air as the blooms of summer dust themselves off for sleep. Overhead in an icy-crisp October sky, geese honk their delight at heading south. And I, as though beckoned by a distant lover, prepare to leave.

In the wee hours of a late-October morning, my mother gave early birth to an impetuous daughter who bullied her way out of the birth canal and bellowed her entrance at first breath. She would abide by no schedule; the world awaited her imprint and she planted her flag with fierce certainty. October greeted me with ice on the riverbanks and blizzards in the forecast. I had arrived.

The rhythm of autumn leavings long hovered within; an unsure composer trying to find her notes. By the mid-teen years, the unstrung melody cried out for harmony and I responded like a musician starved of a conductor. My young soul anticipated autumn’s yearly cue. When the October clouds billowed on the horizon, and when the sun played with its shadow-paintbrush, I packed my duffle bag and bought a bus ticket bound for adventure. I breathed in the ancestral call to discover worlds unknown and knew that like my ancestors, I would return to my home when the buds filled their green cradles.

Decades later, the bus no longer waits for me; I no longer seek passage. I peer into the exquisite tapestry of my past from the porch of another wedding anniversary. I recognize the arrogance of youth that would not let me bear mediocrity, would not tie me to the conventions of predictability. The symphony has quieted, the notes come softly now. I nestle into my present as I rest my head back and close my eyes in contentment. I lay my hand lightly on the arm of my husband who waited patiently for the autumn leavings to flutter in his direction and gather at his door. ❖

Harvest of Mothering

Sharon Pierot, Snohomish WA



I’ve been preparing for this harvest since the spring of my womanhood. Dreaming the shadows of possibility and change; poring over potential outcomes and results. Now, this body has edged over into the autumn years of its life-cycle mimicking the seasons in quick succession of heat, cold, languish, and buzzing energy. Each is a reminder of change, transition, and transformation.

The full-time, full-attention, mothering years are almost over. Years (thirty-two of them at this writing) tending wounded knees and sore personalities; cross generational, cultural and

technical slang, nursing my own broken heart at the abrupt leavings of teenagers eager to be free of these arms that only wanted to hold and keep safe. This last mid-life child is stretching towards his own light and life, needing less of the mothering I have to offer.

I feel a ripening and bursting within—a great anticipation, as if any day now, out of every pore popping with raucous vibrant rainbow colors and juiciness, will be a harvest of all the hidden passions, ideas, thoughts, and feelings I keep hidden during this mothering season. ❖

Squirrel Heaven

Doris Anne Roop-Benner
Richardson TX



Over the years, we've had all kinds of critters in our attic: raccoons, squirrels, rats, birds. Most of them come and spend a little time and then move on. Last fall a new breed of squirrels—the X Generation, I call them—moved in. They decided they liked our place so they set up house and then had babies—lots of them.

They slept all day and ran around the attic all night. We called the pest control people and tried all the methods they suggested to drive them out: mothballs, rat poison, fox urine—nothing worked. In addition to losing sleep, we couldn't stand being in the house because of the smell. So we decided maybe they needed some extraordinary treatment.

We got a special trap and put pecans in it because we figured these were more discerning squirrels and maybe they didn't like just plain peanuts. We left the lights on in the attic all day and night because we heard squirrels didn't like too much light. Next we put a boom box up there and played loud rock music.

The squirrel family thought they'd died and gone to squirrel heaven. They ate the pecans without tripping the trap door and we swear we could hear them dancing to the music.

So, we quit treating them nice and within a few weeks they finally moved out. Hopefully they'll spread the word that the Benner B&B is only a one star establishment. ❖



Fall Foliage Tour

Joan Givens
Bellevue NE

Perhaps it's peculiar to the teaching profession, but each fall as we returned to shiny faces, dusty chalkboards, new textbooks, and teacher meetings, what we dreamt about was a tour to the northeast to view the fall foliage. And, upon retirement, that trip was near the top of our to-do agenda. Rog and I scheduled a Ram Tour the very September after we retired.

Our tour began in Boston. A step-on guide whisked us around Bean Town, with stops at the USS Constitution, Boston from atop the John Hancock Building, the site of the Boston Tea Party, and lunch at Quincy Market. Then we went on to Lexington and Concord and the story of the first battle of the Revolutionary War.

Climbing back on our bus, we headed north into New Hampshire, then on to Maine and Portland Head Lighthouse. The harbor in Providence, RI, was spectacular. And all along our path, we witnessed the brilliant reds, oranges, yellows, and rusts of the maple and oak trees surrounding us.

Why such attraction to this particular scenery at this time of year? Freedom is the obvious answer. Freedom from the routine of nearly 35 years of teaching. Freedom to discover firsthand what we had only read about to this point. Freedom to begin this new stage of life called retirement.

But with this freedom came a touch of melancholy. We were leaving behind the known, heading into a future of uncertainty. Would we adjust well to a life with more freedom? We would no longer be slave to the clock or the calendar and how would we handle that? Could we find productive things to do now that our work would no longer give us a sense of purpose? Would we enjoy spending all our days together when our past had demanded so much separation?

And I sensed all this in those brilliant colors as well. Now they were glorious, but soon they'd begin to fade and eventually fall to the earth. A metaphor for what was ahead of me, now that I'm entering the autumn of my life. ❖

The Coup de Grâce

Sandra K. Heggen
Kempner TX

Fall in Texas isn't like fall in Ohio. Sometimes we don't even have fall in Texas; we go immediately from summer to not-quite-summer and back to summer. But when I was a kid, fall in northwest Ohio was one of the rare seasons when the skies were cloudless and the air was crisp instead of humid. Some years fall was short but what it lacked in length it made up in concentration.

Our house was an old farmhouse overtaken by the dilatory growth of the village. Graceful maple trees nearly surrounded it and, frankly, they didn't deign to compete with other trees for the intense red color of fall. They were secure in knowing that their yellow and golden leaves were their flaming glory. The elms might be bigger and the cottonwood might be bulkier, but nothing outshone the maples in leaf color.

The colors of the leaves weren't their only appeal. The payoff came when the quiescent trees shed enough to allow raking. With the low autumn sun comfortably warming my shoulders, I could smell their subtle perfume. It was warm and pungently herbaceous, redolent with the history of intense summer sun, and softly mysterious summer nights. My vigorous rake raised powdery motes that swirled in soft violence and dusted my lips.

And then came the *coup de grâce*. Before me stood a huge pile of gold, mined from the soil by way of deep roots and gentle rains. I gazed upon them, knew their desire for one final moment of glory, and then I turned, took a deep breath, spread my wings and, with total abandonment, sprang backward into the arms of gold. Golden dust flew all around me and as I looked heavenward I saw the tiniest fragments soaring and sparkling in the last rays of the sun. The crackling of sacrificed leaves roared in my ears as I plummeted down, to finally rest on the crumbs of autumn while the few spared leaves softly wafted down to caressingly bury my face and body. Their soft kiss would have to last me until next year. ❖





SCN Honors: *Paula Yost*

Paula Yost recently retired from her post as editor of Story Circle's book review website, www.storycirclebookreviews.org. During her long stint as editor, Paula developed a team of dedicated reviewers, built strong relationships with publishers and publicists, and assembled the most substantial collection of reviews of women's books, by women reviewers, on the Internet. In 2007, she helped to redesign and relaunch the site, reorganizing it and giving it a whole new look. Thanks to Paula's dedication and commitment, StoryCircleBookReviews is widely recognized by publishers, authors, and readers as a major Internet publication, and the editors receive review copies and requests for reviews daily.

Born in Tyler and raised in East Texas and Louisiana, Paula Yost studied journalism at UT Austin and Dallas and worked in international sales and public relations and as an editor for *The News Telegram* (Sulphur Springs, TX) before founding her business, Lifesketches/Heirloom Memoirs Publishing. She has served on the SCN board and the board of the Association of Personal Historians (APH), an international trade organization for people in the business of helping others preserve their memoirs or life stories in print, audio or video media. Lisa Shirah-Hiers interviewed Paula via email for the *Journal*.

SCJ: *When did you become a member of SCN? How did you find out about it?*

Paula: When I was planning the APH conference in Dallas in 2000, I heard about Susan Albert and her work as well as SCN. I invited her to appear as a keynote speaker at our conference, which she did. Soon thereafter, I joined SCN.

SCJ: *What kinds of activities have you participated in as a SCN member?*

Paula: I joined the board in 2001 and served as Editor of the Story Circle Book Reviews from 2001–2006. I helped with re-vamping the online site in 2007 and have served as co-editor with Susan Albert until I recently retired from the position. I have taught sessions at SCN conferences and Writing from Life weekends and have also taught four or five online memoir-writing classes. I've served as a judge in writing contests and as editor and contributor of *What Wildness Is This: Women Write About the Southwest* (March, 2007, UT Press.) In June 2007, at Texas State University in San Marcos, I co-chaired the "Land Full of Stories Conference" that celebrated the launch of *What Wildness Is This*.

SCJ: *Tell me more about your experiences with the book review site. What have you found most rewarding? Most challenging? What has it taught you?*

Paula: The most rewarding thing has been watching the site grow from its small beginnings to a first-rate online book review site, probably the best site out there for women writers and readers. It's been challenging at times to persuade publishers to provide review copies (no longer a problem) and sometimes it has been difficult to get reviews written in a reasonable time.

Working with Susan over the last year has taught me a lot about the publishing world and how to reach publishers and publicists. Overall, I have realized what can be accomplished with a few good ideas and a little teamwork.

SCJ: *What advice would you give authors who wish to market their books? How can the new SCN website help them? What should they know about other book review sites?*

Paula: By all means, query the site's editors about reviewing your book and don't forget to mention you're a SCN member. If possible, arrange to sell copies through Amazon, as we also post reviews there. Today's authors have to work hard to market their books, whether self-published or otherwise. Book reviews are a great way to reach beyond bookstore audiences or other local venues.

SCJ: *Aside from your work with the What Wildness Is This, are there other experiences you've had as an editor that you'd like to share with us? Which experiences have been most interesting? Most rewarding?*

Paula: I'm now editing another anthology, *My Words Are Gonna Linger: The Art of Personal History*, to be published by Personal History Press for APH in January, 2009. It is a delightful collection of memoir vignettes representing a wide variety of cultures, eras and viewpoints. I found it fascinating work to take a literary tour of nineteenth-century Japan, attend an arranged wedding in India in 1925, visit war zones, witness peace demonstrations, dog-sled across the Alaskan tundra, hear a dying mother's last words to her young children, empathize with immigrants escaping political and economic oppression, learn a few secrets behind one of the most noted research facilities in the world, and so much more. Perhaps the most rewarding part

of this kind of work is helping each individual piece bloom brighter through selective weeding and fertilizing (editing) and then seeing the collective garden in all its natural beauty.

SCJ: *Tell me about your experiences as an online instructor. What courses have you taught? What have you learned from the experience? From your students? What do you hope they have learned from you?*

Paula: I had no idea how very much I would enjoy teaching these lifewriting sessions, nor did I realize how much I would learn from the students. They never fail to amaze me with their insight, courage, and sensitivity. The one thing I hope they learn above anything else is confidence in knowing no one can tell their story better than they can.

SCJ: *What are some other accomplishments you are most proud of in your life?*

Paula: I love having reached the point where I have more choices and no one in particular to answer to on a daily basis. That's worth a lot in my book, especially after all those years as a hardworking single mom.

SCJ: *Have there been special mentors in your life who helped you reach your dreams? Who were they? How did they help you?*

Paula: Too many mentors to name, but I do believe they're always there if you only pay attention. If not in person, then in the

books you read or the research you might do or even in global current events. Golda Meir, for instance, became a mentor for me when I heard her confession about being less than a good mother but a helluva good prime minister. It came at a time when I really needed to hear that I didn't have to be all things to all people at all moments. Of course, it almost goes without saying that Susan Albert has been a wonderful writing mentor for me since the day I met her more than eight years ago. She's an incredibly generous woman who happily shares her time and talents with so many aspiring writers.

SCJ: *How do you nurture the writer in yourself? Do you have a writing practice or any special rituals? Describe it/them?*

Paula: As I tell my students, my special ritual consists mainly of putting my butt in the chair and keeping it there until words have appeared on my pages for the day.

SCJ: *Do you journal? If so, what has your personal writing taught you about yourself and your life?*

Paula: Not as often as I should. The best lesson I've learned when going back to read older journals is the power of objectivity in writing.

SCJ: *If you could go back in time and talk to your younger self, what advice would you give her?*

Paula: The one thing life has really taught me: Believe in yourself!

SCN Launches Expanded Online Program

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

Online Learning

Online learning is the next best thing to being there! Most of our classes are built around weekly units. The teacher emails or posts a lesson or reading assignment, as well as a writing assignment. You will complete the assignment and email it to your teacher, who returns editing and rewriting suggestions to you via email, fax, or mail. Some teachers also use an online forum, which allows students to share and discuss their work in a helpful, supportive environment. Some teachers supplement their assignments with scheduled teleconferences or other individualized interaction. Most classes do not require a specific

online meeting time, so you will be able to study and write at your own pace.

Enrollment is open to all women. Spaces are limited, so please enroll as soon as possible. If the class you want is already filled, try another—or check back in November, when we will post Winter classes (January–March, 2009). You'll find enrollment information, details, and many resources on the website: www.storycircleonlineclasses.org.

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Lifewriter's Yahoo! Group

The Higher Purpose of Lifewriting

Lifewriters' Yahoo! Group Moderator **Dani Greer** shares some members' thoughts about why we write and how our stories record the precious little moments beyond all the "Big Stuff" that becomes our history.

Recently Len, one of our Yahoo! Group members, posed this tantalizing question to the other members:

I have read that it's important to assign a higher purpose to one's writing. I feel challenged to do that so that when these weak moments hit, I have a bigger purpose than just getting down my story. Do you guys have that "higher purpose" assigned to your writing?

I confess, the question made me think hard. I have a tendency to vent in my journal and much of what I have to say doesn't rise to lofty heights. But other members had different views. Here is one of the more poignant:

When I was in my twenties I was pushed to the very edge. In a deep depression, I came to the crossroads that demanded I make the decision to live or die. I didn't want to die but wasn't sure about the living thing, and I found myself grabbing at books written by people who found themselves in positions similar to mine. Book after book, I ate their words. I clung to them like life preservers. I made it, and I know a large part of why I made it was because of the people who had the courage to put their words on paper for me (and others like me) to see. I'm not sure where I would have ended up if I didn't have their stories to hold on to.

Still, through it all, I never thought of my own story in the same way. I thought their stories were legit and mine were journal ramblings. When I found SCN I started to see that my story is as legitimate as any other story, so I began to put it out there.

The higher purpose I have for my writing is very clear: I want to add to the legacy of writers who helped save my life. People's stories helped save my life. If my story can add a little comfort to a tortured life, or if it can be the one thing someone clings to in her darkness, so be it. If my words can lend a bit of joy to someone's day I've done my job. I want to give to others what others have given to me. Make sense?

*Blessings,
Tabitha*

There were a few gulps and no doubt some misty eyes. Later in the conversation, Susan Albert offered this:

What a wonderful question! It's something we don't think about unless we're challenged.

Like others, my first purpose is to learn who I am, who I have been, who I might be. It's the same purpose I have in meditation: to become conscious, to be self-aware (which I hope is not the same thing as self-centered or self-engrossed). I am al-

ways astonished at the way I have changed and am changing now—I wouldn't know that if I hadn't recorded the self I was twenty years ago, or ten, so I can see her against who I am now, and who I will be in ten more years and twenty, perhaps even thirty, if I'm lucky.

And as others have said so well, I write because perhaps someone else wants or needs to hear a story like mine, and may perhaps be empowered by some part of my story.

But I'm also writing because I am absolutely convinced that there needs to be a record of our experiences, as women, so that the women who come after us will know how it really was, how we lived it, how it felt, how our women's stories are different from men's stories (even while they share many of the same elements). I truly believe that women's stories—every-day wisdom, tales of ordinary events, recipes, child-care stories, growing-up-girls stories, tales of old women—carry the cultural story in a way that men's do not: we carry the mother-line, the mother-song, a precious kind of knowledge. Just think of how many of those mother stories have been lost, while men (bless them!) have been telling and writing about wars and governments and explorations and conquerings—all those glorious father stories.

So I'm writing to add my little bit of story to other women's stories, so that after we're gone, our children's children won't have to wonder what else was happening, besides all the "Big Stuff" that was going on in the world.

Wow. Thank you, Len. Your question and everyone's answers have really lit up my day!

Susan

Sharing pain, helping others, getting to know ourselves, and finding a collective voice for womankind—these are only a few of the many reasons we write about our lives. I will continue to vent in my journal, and the discussions lead me to believe that even that may be a higher purpose, if not exactly conscious on my part. The journal is, after all, an outlet that keeps me from verbalizing feelings that might be hurtful to someone else.

Still, the conversation has me thinking of ways I can enhance my journal so that reading it in the future might prove more interesting and informative. Thanks to my pals in the group for helping me raise my consciousness.

If you think this sort of exchange between lifewriting friends might help your journaling efforts, why not join our Yahoo! Group? We're online at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/scnlifewriters>. You'll find it a warm and gentle place to share your experiences with lifewriting, without sharing the actual stories themselves. ❖



Story Circle Network's Book Reviews

Books for the Journey

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



August Book Review of the Month

Second Journey: The Road Back to Yourself

by Joan Anderson

Hyperion, 2008.
ISBN 978-1-4013-0339-6.

Reviewed by Lee Ambrose

"Most of us, halfway to a hundred, confront a need for greater self-awareness." With this insight as the opening sentence, Joan Anderson takes her readers with her as she comes to realize that she had been ignoring her own needs for far too long. But how could this be? How could the woman who has given so many women the gift of awakening to self not be heeding her own words?

Anderson's book, *A Year by the Sea*, is the story of her awakening. It has become a national bestseller that encourages women to find themselves. But as the book and the others that followed grew in popularity, Anderson became so busy that she has robbed herself of herself. Her popularity as an author isn't the only thief. Book tours, public speaking, weekend workshops all steal time and energy. But added to that is the work of being wife, mother, grandmother, and caregiver to an aging parent. These forces have taken their toll on Anderson. And even when faced with her own health issues, Anderson waved them off. Her schedule didn't allow for time for such things as ill-health.

Enter female friends: "The Salty Sisters" to the rescue! Six women who met at one of Anderson's weekend retreats have become friends, nurturing and strengthening one another. Listening to these women, Anderson realizes that she faces too many demands. It is time to step back and re-evaluate. "If I am truly honest, I have to acknowledge that the demands I am so convinced are coming from the outer world are, in fact, coming from that perpetually unfinished part of me—the pulls and tugs originating from my own ambiguity."

In *Second Journey*, Anderson takes her readers along as she travels to ancestral Iona where she spends time alone in nature, searching for the parts of herself that she has been ignoring in the time since she wrote her first book. She comes to the profound conclusion: "For if I have learned anything, it is that the journey will always be unfinished."

Reading a book by Joan Anderson is like sitting with a good friend, sharing a cup of coffee during a heartfelt conversation. With wit, humor and amazing honesty, she is not only able to reveal the pitfalls of a woman's life but also to offer the insight and hope that are necessary to meet those challenges.

Lee Ambrose

Lee is passionate about words. She enjoys reviewing books for the SCN Book Review Site almost as much as she enjoys reading the reviews posted by her sister reviewers. Reading and writing are such an important part of her life that she cannot imagine a day without actively reading or writing—or both!



Susan Ideus Named New Assistant Editor

Susan Ideus has taken the position of Assistant Editor of the SCN Book Review Site, filling the vacancy left when Linda Wisniewski was promoted to Editor.



Susan, an SCN Internet member since January 2006, lives in Magnolia, TX with her husband of 40 years, Harold, and their Cairn "terror," Duffy. She and Harold have two lovely daughters, Rebecca and

Johanna, both living in nearby Texas locations, so visiting is a wonderful treat. Her hobbies are reading, needlework, and of course, her real passion, writing. She is doing some memoir work at the urging of her daughters. Her current dream is to retire and write whenever and wherever she might be, since traveling RV-style is also part of that dream. She's still not sure where her writing will lead, but she is sure that SCN will continue to play a major role in her writing life.

Join Our Review Team

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

(Continued from page 19)

Classes and Faculty: Fall, 2008

Classes begin on Sept. 15 (with one exception) and end in mid-November. Classes may fill; be sure to register early and check the website at www.storycircleonlineclasses.org for space availability.



What to Keep: An Introduction to Memoir Writing,
taught by Robin Reger, journalist, editor, writing teacher.

No one else's life has been exactly like yours. But your experiences are also universal: everyone has felt the disappointment of a goal not realized, the joy of a new friendship, the love for a special someone, the delight in something new. In this course we'll examine how to choose from our life experiences to write stories that resonate with our readers. We'll consider our purpose for writing and focus on how to achieve that purpose. We'll practice editing and tightening for effect. And we'll have fun and end by writing better!

Journaling by the Moonlight: A Woman's Path to Self-Discovery,
taught by Tina Games, writing coach, journaling teacher.

In this class, we will embark on a journey of self-discovery through journaling, leading toward a life of creative fulfillment. The moon can bring great comfort to women during challenging periods in their lives, particularly during times when they've felt a loss of personal identity. Working with the phases of the moon as a source of transformation, women who are facing major life transitions or who may be challenged by the loss of personal identity are gently guided on a path of self-discovery.



Writing a Healing Memoir,
taught by Linda Joy Myers, Ph.D., therapist and author of
Don't Call Me Mother and Becoming Whole: Writing Your Healing Story.

Writing a memoir is a powerful process of self-identity, healing, and integration. In this course, we will learn how to write a memoir that helps to heal, as well as create a meaningful story. We will work with the roles in the family that challenge the memoir writer; explore the "I" narrator and the "I" character; learn about emotional themes; discuss "what is truth"; write scenes that show more than tell in several turning point stories; and understand how to cope with both inner and outer critics.

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

taught by Matilda Butler and Kendra Bonnett, co-authors of the award-winning
Rosie's Daughters: The "First-Woman-to" Generation Tells Its Story.

Class begins Oct. 1. Part One of this two-part course will help you write your memoir by "starting small." Our class will cut that "book monster" down to size. Through a series of instructional videos, creative exercises, and writing assignments that use your own family photos, treasured mementos and even recipes as triggers to memory, you'll find your unique voice and develop your personal style of expression. Then we'll help you "finish big" by showing you how to use the Internet to begin creating your own readership. (You can take Part One without enrolling in Part Two.)



Personal Maps and Place as Story,

taught by Susan Wittig Albert, best-selling novelist, and author of
Writing From Life: Telling Your Soul's Story.

Class begins Sept. 15. A personal map is a representation of our personal understanding and awareness of the places we inhabit, based on our daily practices, life experiences, and cultural values. In this class, we will draw maps and write, in order to focus both on physical realities and our own inner geographies—the way we feel about the places we inhabit.



If you're interested in teaching an online class, go here for details:
<http://www.storycircleonlineclasses.org/onlineproposal.php>



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:

- A Sacred Place—December 2008 (due October 15)
- Winds of Change—March 2009 (due January 15, 2009)

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

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

Story Circle Network Podcast



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

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

(831) 480-3977

<http://scn.libsyn.com>



Join the Story Circle Network!

Make your check to Story Circle Network
 PO Box 500127
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Annual Membership:

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

9/08



This membership is a gift.

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

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“Women’s Lives, Women’s Legacies”

A Writing from Life Workshop for
Women with Stories to Tell

Led by Carolyn Blankenship and others
October 25-26, Austin, Texas

There is no greater gift we can give ourselves than the understanding and healing that comes with writing our lives. Just as an employment resume provides a snapshot of one’s work history and skills, life-writing can offer a picture of your soul, a portrait of who you really are.

~Kathi Snead

Join us for an insightful and joyful weekend of writing and sharing the stories of our lives. Adrienne Rich declares, “What women need is the opportunity and the validation to name and describe the truths of our lives.” This workshop is one of those rare and wonderful opportunities. Be a part of our circle of storycatchers as we write about the women we were, the women we are, and the women we will become.

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

Go to www.storycircle.org/Workshops
for all the details and to enroll online!
Deadline to enroll is Oct. 12.

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

Mark Your Calendar SCN Events & Deadlines

September 15: Beginning of the fall term of SCN’s online classes.

October 1: Deadline for submitting online class proposals for January 19–March 16.

October 12: SCN Board Meeting

October 15: Deadline for December *Story Circle Journal* submissions. True Words theme: “A Sacred Place.”

October 17: Registration deadline for the October Writing From Life Workshop.

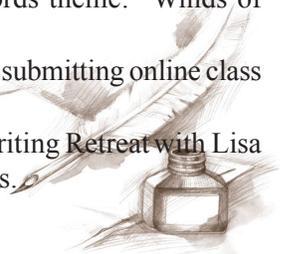
October 25–26: Writing From Life Workshop, Austin

November: Check the website for January 19–March 16 online classes.

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

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

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



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