

STORY CIRCLE JOURNAL

Vol. 13 No. 4, December, 2009

The newsletter for women with stories to tell...



Stories from the Heart V

Uplifting ... warm ... illuminating ... open-hearted ... encouraging ... inspiring ... embracing ... a work of art ... inclusive ... compassionate ... exhilarating

—a few of the words used to describe previous Stories from the Heart conferences

Join us in Austin, Texas, February 5-7, 2010 for SCN's fifth national lifewriting conference.

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

We welcome women who are readers, writers, and storytellers. There will be opportunities to deepen our writing skills, to laugh, to explore difficult or hidden issues, to expand our relationships with other women, and to discover different modes and media—such as art, movement, and poetry—for sharing our stories. See our conference program on p. 4.

Register by December 15 to receive the special early registration rates. Use the form on page 23 of this Journal issue, or sign up online at:

www.storycircle.org/Conference

New at the Conference

If you need another reason to attend the conference, this is it: free one-on-one conversations with strong teachers, published writers, experienced marketers—women who have been there and done that.

Read all about it on page 5.

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*"As women, we teach and pass on our wisdom through story."
 ~ Marion Woodman*

Share Your Stories on the Story Wall, On the Heart to Heart Table & In the Scrapbook

The Story Wall

We'd like to create a Story Wall to introduce ourselves. For those who would like to participate, please bring a short introduction of yourself. Here's one way you can do this: set a timer for 3 minutes and write whatever you feel is important for us to know about you. Then polish it up a bit (type, if possible). Bring it and, if you like, a current photo of yourself. In addition to your written introduction and your photo, you may also want to bring a postable item

that illustrates a part of your story. (This might be something you've created, a different photo, a newspaper clipping, or a symbol.)

Heart to Heart Table

Do you have some brochures, descriptive literature, or cards that you'd like to share with other conference participants? We'll have a table set aside for this use. Bring up to 100 copies of one or two items for the table. (If there are any left, be sure to take them home with you.)

(continued on page 7)



Letter From SCN's President— Widening the Circle

Molly Fumia writes in her book *Safe Passage: Words to Help the Grieving*, “The first time a memory slides over us like a wave of warmth, we have turned the corner on our grief. When a once painful reminder evokes a gentle laugh, when we recognize the joy of the present in an image from the past, we have arrived at an important moment. Those memories are being transformed, unmistakably, into messages of hope.”

This passage reminds me of the healing power that lies in writing and sharing our life stories, and I am again heartened by the mission of Story Circle Network and how glad I am to be a part of this extraordinary organization founded by Susan Wittig Albert for ordinary women.

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

I will never forget my very first experience with SCN. I drove through the pre-dawn hours from Houston to Austin to attend a Writing from Life workshop. I met Patricia Pando that weekend. And Donna Remmert. And Jazz Jaeschke. And Judith Helburn. If you’ve never made a trip to Austin, these are just names on paper to you. However, these women changed my life with their kindness. They helped me find the core of my story, and they listened with their hearts as I began to give voice to the stories that arose from my memory. I cannot put into my words the depth of my gratitude.

Since that weekend so long ago, I have found my heart’s desire, to help other women to write and share their life stories so that they can see the innate value in their personal histories. Through Lone Star College-North Harris here I work, I have facilitated an OWL group of writers who have recently published an anthology entitled “Work of Our Fathers,” which was fully funded by a local grant. The women also made audio recordings of their stories, which are available at <http://fsc.lonestar.edu/ourfathers>. The women involved in this project say they could not imagine how powerful this experience would be. One participant is an immigrant from Ireland, and she is happy to report that her relatives overseas have listened to the podcasts over and over.

Without SCN, this would never have happened; SCN showed me how to facilitate a group. I hope that you will take the challenge to form a circle in your community. The circle widens each time one of us takes time to reach out. And with each circle, we heal the wounds of our past, celebrate the joys of our accomplishments, and discover the delight of story.

~Joyce Boatright

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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Membership Rates

One Year \$35 US
 \$45 Canada and Mexico
 \$50 elsewhere

Foreign Memberships: International
 Postal Money Order *only*, please

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

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

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



Stories from the Heart V Conference News

Conference Hotel

Wyndham Hotel
3401 South IH-35,
Austin TX 78741
512-448-244
fax: 512-443-4208

www.wyndham.com/hotels/AUSWC

To get the conference rate (\$99/night plus tax, double occupancy), call the hotel directly (512-448-2444) and make your reservations no later than January 16, 2010. Room rate includes complimentary airport shuttle service, parking, and high speed wireless internet.

Would you like to advertise for a roommate? See our **Roommates Wanted!** web page:

www.storycircle.org/Conference/roommates.shtml



Pre-Conference Workshop Writing with Heart: Five Easy Steps to Writing with Emotion, Energy and Color

The goal of every writer is to engage her readers and draw them into the story. But that takes more than good narrative. To engage a reader's heart, you must write with heart. You need emotion, sensory detail, energy and more. You need to apply the techniques of good fiction and creative non-fiction writing to your memoir or personal history. But with so many elements to choose from, how do you select? How do you know you've found the best way to tell your story? Our Writing Alchemy process will make this easy and natural. Join us for an afternoon of writing magic that will transform your writing process forever. Bring your idea for a memoir vignette, and you'll leave this workshop with the start of a beautifully crafted story.

Matilda Butler and Kendra Bonnett are Women's Memoirs. Their popular **Women's Memoirs website** (www.womensmemoirs.com) is a resource for writing prompts, recorded author conversations, book reviews, ScrapMoires, marketing and publishing advice and more. As a team, they teach and coach writers, develop memoir-writing workshops and training materials, and even find time to write. Between them, they have written, co-authored or ghostwritten 10 books and hundreds of magazine and journal articles. Their collective memoir, *Rosie's Daughters: The "First Woman To" Generation Tells Its Story*, received a 2008 IPPY national book award.

Their latest book teaches their Writing Alchemy method (Knowledge Access Books, 2010), a technique they will debut nationally in the Stories from the Heart pre-conference workshop. Everyone who signs up to take their pre-conference workshop will receive a free copy of the book. Matilda and Kendra have tested Writing Alchemy on writers of all skill levels and find its impact "nothing short of transformative."

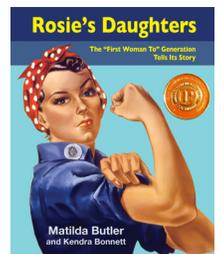
You may **register** for this workshop separately, without registering for the conference. Or you may **register** for the workshop and conference together.



Saturday Luncheon Entertainer Dianne Donovan

Dianne Donovan, our Saturday lunch entertainer, is queen of the classical radio airwaves in central Texas, as daily show host and also producer of "Classical Austin" for **KMFA Radio**. Ms. Donovan is a Montreal-born jazz vocalist. She currently produces a weekly vocal jazz show, "Voices in Jazz" for CKUA Radio in Edmonton. Her first jazz CD, "Yes and No," received critical acclaim and national airplay. Her follow-up release, "A Musing," features mostly original compositions. With Mady Kaye and Beth Ullman, Donovan is also a member of the popular jazz/pop trio, the **Beat Divas**.

[Photo by David Grimes]





Stories from the Heart V Conference News

Program

Friday, February 5

10:00AM–12:00PM: Heart-to-Heart Coaching
 12:00PM: Registration Opens
 1:30–3:30PM: Optional Pre-Conference Workshop
 4:00–5:00PM: Conference Welcome Session
 5:30–7:30PM: Dutch-Treat Dinner
 7:30PM: Keynote Address, Heather Summerhayes Cariou
 (Dessert reception following)

Saturday, February 6

8:30AM: Registration Opens
 9:00–10:30AM: Session 1
 11:00AM–12:30PM: Session 2
 12:30–3:30PM: Lunch, Free Time
 3:30–5:00PM: Session 3
 5:00–8:00PM: Dutch-Treat Dinner
 8:00–10:00PM: Open Mike, Storytelling from the Heart

Sunday, February 7

9:00–10:30AM: Session 4
 11:00AM–12:30PM: Session 5
 12:30–2:00PM: Lunch Speaker, Mary Gorden Spence

Sessions

Pre-Conference Workshop

~Writing with Heart: Five Easy Steps to
 Writing with Emotion, Energy and Color~
 Matilda Butler & Kendra Bonnett
 (not included in full registration, additional \$30–\$40)

Session 1

~Writing Our Cultural Traditions~
 Linda Wisniewski, Doylestown PA
 ~Show, Don't Tell: How to Turn a Ho-Hum Memoir into a Humdinger~
 Dawn Thurston, Villa Park CA
 ~Difficult Memories: Finding Voice and Grace in the "Hard Stuff"~
 Susan Tweit, Salida, CO
 ~Getting the "Picture" on Our Lives~
 Pat Flathouse, Austin, TX; Jane Ross, Austin, TX;
 Aditi Worcester, Austin, TX

Session 2

~Panning for Gold: Using Imagery
 and Metaphor to Enrich Your Memoir~
 Heather Summerhayes Cariou, West New York, NJ
 ~Panel: Getting Published~
 Moderator: Helen Ginger, Austin, TX; Panelists: Kendra
 Bonnett, Milbridge, ME; Matilda Butler, Gilroy, CA; Laurie
 Wagner Buyer, Llano, TX; Susan Tweit, Salida, CO; Linda
 Wisniewski, Doylestown, PA
 ~Details, Details: Getting to the Heart of the Matter~
 Patricia Page, Austin, TX
 ~Story-Poems: A Tool for Writing Our Stories~
 Janet Riehl, St. Louis, MO

Session 3

~Once Upon a Time: Family Stories~
 Joyce Boatright, Conroe, TX
 ~Telling Your Story: From Life Experience to Personal Essay~
 Kathy Sparrow, Rio Hondo, TX
 ~Structures of Memoir: The Narrative and Emotional Arcs~
 Linda Joy Myers, Richmond, CA
 ~Writing Promptly~
 Judy Whelley, Dayton, OH; Becca Taylor, Pinehurst, TX

Session 4

~Panel: Finding Our Voices Online~
 Moderator: Linda Hoye, Auburn, WA Panelists: Nita Lou
 Bryant, Austin, TX; Rhonda Esakov, Georgetown, TX; Kara
 Flathouse, Amarillo, TX; Becky Lane, Wimberley, TX; Judy
 Miller, Zionsville, IN; Becca Taylor, Pinehurst, TX
 ~The Art of the Personal Profile: Telling Another's Story~
 Lisa Shirah-Hiers, Austin, TX
 ~One Way Writing Heals: Changing the Story You Tell~
 Lianne Mercer, Fredericksburg, TX
 ~Research for Memoir and Why It Matters~
 Marlene Samuels, Chicago, IL

Session 5

~What Are You Thinking?!
 Orchestrating the Chorus of Voices in Your Head~
 Jeanne Guy, Austin, TX
 ~Lifewriting Online: Blogging for the Faint of Heart~
 Katherine Misegades, Fort Wayne, IN
 ~Celebrate Your Journey~
 Dawn Espelage, Vinton, VA
 ~Mining First Experiences: Writing Techniques for Reviving Memories~
 Brit Williams, Austin, TX



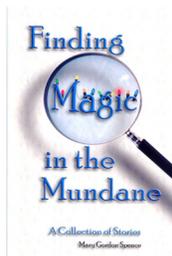
Friday Night Keynote Speaker Heather Summerhayes Cariou

Our Friday-night keynote speaker, **Heather Summerhayes Cariou**, was born and raised in Ontario, trained at the National Ballet School of Canada, and was a founding member of the Ontario Youtheatre and the Center for Actor's Study in Toronto. She enjoyed a professional acting career for twenty years across Canada and off-Broadway. She now lives on the Hudson River in New Jersey with a view of New York City and is working on a novel and co-producing the feature film "Make Believe" with her husband, stage and screen actor Len Cariou, who was recently nominated for an Emmy for his role in *Into the Storm*. She is the acclaimed author of *Sixtyfive Roses*. Visit her website at www.sixtyfiverosesthebook.com



Sunday Luncheon Speaker Mary Gordon Spence

Mary Gordon Spence, our Sunday lunch speaker, has taught kindergarten to college, written Texas history materials, drafted legislation, directed statewide environmental programs and worked for a former president and has been a magazine editor. Her storytelling, ukulele playing, wit and wisdom have been legendary throughout her career. Read more about Mary in our author interview on pages 18-19, and visit her website at www.askmarygordon.com



Story-Telling From the Heart: Open Mike Saturday Night Live

It's Saturday night in Austin TX—what would you like to do after you've enjoyed a fine dinner at one of Austin's many great restaurants? How about we all hang out together and swap stories?

Hey, what a great idea! After all, isn't that what Story Circle is all about? And who has more stories to swap than women—women who have loved and laughed and cried and succeeded and failed and survived and, yes, triumphed! Creative, canny, crafty, clever, courageous women. Women who have lived ordinary, extraordinary, and sometimes downright outrageous lives!

All you have to bring is you, and your story. Maybe it's a piece you've already shared with your Story Circle, or a poem or two that you've just finished, or a short autobiographical fiction piece. Maybe it's a story to be sung, or danced (if you need music, let us know ahead of time). Or perhaps you'd like to



Heart-to-Heart Coaching: Big Questions, Helpful Answers

We're offering something new at our 2010 conference. If you have questions about writing, publishing, and/or marketing your work, or about journaling, blogging, creating videos and audio books, we have answers! Our helpful, enthusiastic SCN consultants will be glad to share them with you in free 15-minute mini-coaching sessions. Heart-to-Heart Coaching is scheduled for Friday morning, February 5, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Here's how the program will work. A webpage on the conference site (<http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/coaching.shtml>) lists the coaches who have volunteered to help you, with a description of their areas of expertise and their special-focus topics. If you are registered for the conference, you'll receive an email in mid-January, inviting you to sign up online. You'll list up to four coaches, in the order of your preference. On a first-come, first-served basis, we'll do our best to schedule you with at least three of the coaches you choose. You'll receive a confirmation of your selections and your schedule.

The best coaching sessions allow the coach and her client to focus on one specific question or on a one-page piece of writing. To get the most out of each one of your sessions, think hard about what you want to learn, frame your questions carefully, and bring them with you. The more specific your questions, the more helpful the answers you'll get from your coach.

If you needed another reason to attend the conference, this is it: free one-on-one conversations with strong teachers, published writers, experienced marketers—women who have been there and done that. We hope you'll join us on Friday morning for our Heart-to-Heart Coaching.

bring a piece of art that you've made—pottery, painting, textile, whatever—and tell us how and why it is part of your story. The sky's the limit and the only thing we have to fear (as some famous man said once) is fear itself. So let's see how many different stories, and how many different ways to tell a story, we can all come up with.

To give each story-teller a chance to participate, we'll divide up into as many as 9 groups—each in a separate meeting room. We ask you to limit your turn at the mike to five minutes. And in order to help our Mistress of Revels, Becca Taylor, do a good job, we'll also ask you to sign up for a turn at the mike when you pick up your registration materials. Please sign up before 6pm on Saturday. And please bring a copy of your piece to post on the **Story Wall**—and plan to email it to us, as well, for sharing with the attendees!

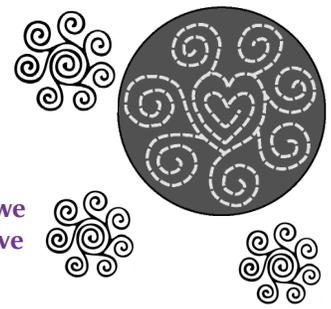
When you come to Austin, Texas, be sure to bring a story from your heart. We're eager to hear it.

Circles: The Heart of Story Circle Network

Start A Circle of Your Own!

by Lisa Shirah-Hiers

The more circles we establish, and the more members of those circles join SCN, the wider we will fling our arms, embracing women all over the world, letting them know that they do have something important to say and helping them to say it, letting them know that their experiences are universal and compelling and interesting and even historically important.



I have long dreamed that we will one day establish story circles for populations we don't currently serve—non-native English speakers and young girls among others. Well, that day has come! I am happy to report that I am facilitating a new bilingual girls' circle at my daughter's school, Parmer Lane Elementary, in the Pflugerville Independent School District, near Austin. The circle is being offered on a trial basis to fourth-grade girls currently enrolled in the grant-funded Afterschool Circles of Education (ACE) program for at-risk youth. With three 45-minute circles in a row every Thursday, it is keeping me busy! And though as a double major in music and Spanish I was once fairly fluent in the language, I am having to review. I have a renewed respect and sense of awe for the thousands of words there are in every language. It is one thing to say, "Have a piece of fruit" and quite another to be able to say "Partake of this luscious crimson strawberry"!

As of this writing we have met twice. At the first meeting I provided each of them with the prettiest notebook and folder I could find which depicted butterflies in every hue. Butterflies would be a good symbol of the awakening I hoped these girls would undergo, and the many different colors would remind us that though we come from different backgrounds, we are essentially the same.

The girls and I are both excited and, predictably, I am learning as much from them as they are from me. (One girl in particular has proven unabashedly helpful as she corrects my Spanish!) The circles conform to the same guidelines as other story circles: non-critical feedback and respect for each other and each other's stories. It has been enlightening to see how freeing this is for these youngsters. At the first meeting the Spanish speakers laboriously copied out the prompts in English even though I had provided a Spanish translation. When I explained that not only were they allowed to write in Spanish but that they were to ANSWER the prompts any way they liked, there were universal exclamations of delight. Then more questions. Were they supposed to answer each question on a new page? Could they really write in Spanish? Could they write in English if they wanted to practice? I told them they could write upside down and backwards if they wanted to, eliciting a chorus of giggles. I promised them we would NOT correct grammar or spelling and that if they wanted to they could just write a list instead of paragraphs. This was supposed to be FUN!

The very first prompt stumped them. I asked them to list five personal characteristics and to indicate which they were

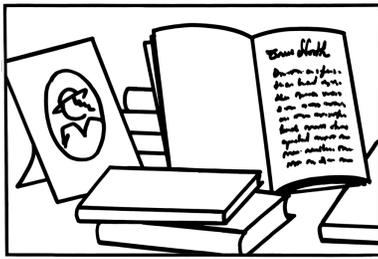
most proud of. After much prodding and some examples, they wrote a few lines. But when it came time to read, they were so shy they covered their mouths so no one could hear. By the second meeting though, we were off and running, and they groaned when it was time to leave. I can see them blossoming right before my eyes. We close with a declaration: "Together we are strong, kind and courageous. Every day we are closer to making our dreams come true." I watch as they read the declaration with more conviction each time and my eyes glisten as I realize my dream—to offer a bilingual girls' circle—is coming true too.

SCN now boasts 47 Story Circles in the US, Canada and Yemen. But many are closed to new members, and we need more. Won't you please consider starting one of your own? There is plenty of help available via our Facilitator's Guide and Facilitators' Yahoo Group, and the Circles Coordinators are standing by to answer your questions and offer advice. The Guide contains everything you need to get started including information on how to find members, duties of the facilitator and six sessions worth of prompts. The Guide is free to SCN members and just \$3.00 for non-members and can be ordered on the SCN website.

If you are worried about a long term commitment, don't! Many circles begin with a definite beginning and end—six weeks perhaps—after which the circle members and the facilitator can consider whether to continue. In some circles a new facilitator is chosen once things get going, or leadership is shared among members. So don't be afraid! Take a risk! It is more rewarding than you can possibly imagine.

If you would like to join a story circle in your area, check our "Story Circles Around the World" listing on the website. You'll find it under the "What We Do" tab. Facilitators and journalers alike can also make good use of SCN's *Starting Points: Weekly Writing Prompts for Women with Stories to Tell*. This wonderful collection features the best prompts of SCN Founder, Susan Wittig Albert's popular Women's Wise Words weekly email series. It's available directly from the publisher, Lulu, at <http://www.lulu.com/content/774054>. A hard copy is just \$8.00 plus shipping and handling, or download for just \$5.00.

If you are a SCN facilitator who would like to have your circle featured in our column, or someone with general questions about circles, please contact the Circles Co-ordinators at circles@storycircle.org.



Story Circle Network's Book Reviews Books for the Journey

by Susan Ideus

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. Visit us at www.storycirclebookreviews.org.

"Just the knowledge that a good book is awaiting one at the end of the day makes that day happier."

—Kathleen Norris

Over at Story Circle Book Reviews, we've had a lot to be excited about.

We try to stay current, not only with books, but with technology as well. The wave of social networking has come to SCBR. For mini-peeks at what's going on with us, you can now follow us on Twitter (<http://twitter.com/SCNBookReviews>). We'll be tweeting about all of our new reviews, and letting the world know what's happening. We already have many new followers, including several publishers, and we'd be delighted if you all signed up to follow us too.

When you come by the website to visit, be prepared to stay awhile. Get comfy and grab a cup of tea. There's a lot to read. Donna Remmert reviewed *Josie's Story* by Sorrel King. Josie's brave mom has written an account of loss due to a horrendous error on the part of a hospital, and relates how she is now an advocate for hospital safety. A sad story but one with a strong purpose.

Another book with medical ties is *Nothing was the Same* by Dr. Kay Redfield Jamison, reviewed by Duffie Bart. Redfield is a psychiatrist who happens to suffer from bipolar disorder. She lost her beloved husband of twenty years to cancer and she chronicles her grief and her depression, as well as trying to distinguish between these two powerful emotions. A compelling love story with a message.

Are there daughters or granddaughters in your life? Judy Miller, one of SCBR's editors, reviewed *Book by Book: Your Complete Guide to Creating Mother-Daughter Book Clubs* by

(continued from page 1)

The Scrapbook

If you'd like a piece you've written included in the second edition of the Stories from the Heart conference scrapbook, send it electronically to Linda at lindawis@comcast.net or by mail to Linda Wisniewski, 6280 Point Pleasant Pike, Doylestown PA 18901. Note that we prefer electronic submissions and that the piece including title and author's name must not exceed one single-spaced page, one side only. The title of the story, the author's name, and city and state should be entered on three separate lines at the top of the page. You may include a picture if you like and if it will fit on the same page as your story. Please submit your story by March 15th.

Cindy Hudson. It is all the title claims and more. How I wish I'd had this book around when my daughters were younger! We often read together and discussed books, but how much fun would it have been to include their friends and their friends' moms? This is a fantastic way to keep communication lines open and flourishing. A fine gift for yourself or for the moms in your life.

It was a daughter who told her story in *I Have Something to Tell You* by Regan Hoffman, reviewed by Susan Schoch, which recounts the life of a young woman who is HIV-positive and once so afraid to share that burden with anyone. This is a story of hope as Regan reconnects with her supportive family and goes on to do remarkable things with her life.

These snippets give you only a brief look into these wonderful stories, so I know you'll want to read each review (and each book) for yourself.

Then there are the interviews! We love catching up with favorite authors and visiting with them about their books and their writing. You can learn more about Cindy Hudson, Susan Wittig Albert, Heather Cariou (speaker at the upcoming SCN National Conference), Diana Allen Kouris, and Susan J. Tweit by visiting the Interview section of the Book Review site (<http://www.storycirclebookreviews.org/interviews/>). Fascinating questions and answers that give insight into these immensely talented women.

Did I say we were excited at SCBR? Maybe that was too mild a word. We are animated, impassioned, ebullient, invigorated and exuberant!! Join us—you may find this is contagious!!

Not A SCN Member Yet?

Joining is easy! Go to www.storycircle.org and use your credit card or PayPal account to join immediately. Or, use the mail-in form on page 23 and send a check.

Member Benefits:

- Receive the quarterly *Story Circle Journal*, and contribute your work.
- Join the members-only *SCN LifeWriters Group*.
- Feature and promote your work online and in our national eletters.
- Enter your work in our annual LifeWriting Contest.
- Attend our wonderful events.
- And best of all...join our circle of sisters and share your stories.

www.storycircle.org





Take A Bow! Spotighting Our Volunteers Lisa Shirah-Hiers

by Robin A. Edgar

A member of the SCN since 2000, Lisa Shirah-Hiers has participated in many activities of the organization and has been a member of the Board of Directors since 2004. She will begin her two-year term as the Story Circle Network Board President in January, 2010 just in time for the fifth Stories from the Heart Conference in Austin, TX. Now SCJ takes a closer look at our new leader.

Lisa Shirah-Hiers doesn't do anything half-way. Having earned a Bachelor's in Music Theory/Composition summa cum laude from Lawrence University, she went on to get a Masters in Composition from the University of Texas at Austin. After working as a classical radio announcer on Austin's KMFA, she decided to follow her childhood dream to write and now blends her music expertise and her passion for writing by facilitating writing workshops that often incorporate music. In 2010, Lisa will become SCN's newest Board President.

Lisa joined SCN in 2000. She says that participating in E-circle 10, facilitated by Lee Ambrose, was perfect for her since she was home full time with an infant and couldn't get to face-to-face circles. The circle gave her contact with adults and helped her get back to her childhood dream to write. Not one to stay on the sidelines, she wrote some book reviews that were published on the Storycircle Book Review site. After some of her stories were published in the Story Circle Journal, she entered and took fourth place in the 2002 annual life writing contest. It was while attending the 2004 Stories from the Heart Conference that she decided to apply to the SCN board. "I really got inspired," she says, "when Judith Helburn (then SCN Board President) made an appeal for new board members."

From the start, Lisa's primary interest was to help the membership and circles grow, so she joined the Membership Committee. She said, "When I saw that there were only 15 face-to-face circles—worldwide—I was shocked. That is what SCN is about after all!"

Thinking that part of the reason might be that SCN leaders had been too passive in the way they invited people to start their own circles, she worked with Judith Helburn to develop a more assertive approach. "Judith and I had lunch and discussed a 'Growth Strategy' that included doing more to get new circles started and to support the facilitators we already had," says Lisa. Out of that meeting, they created the Circles Coordinator position. Lisa wrote her own job description, which included contacting every woman who ordered a Facilitator's Guide and answering every New Member Questionnaire. Lisa also began writing the Circles Column in the Journal and standing up after

events to say, "Wasn't this wonderful? Don't you want a circle where you live?" She also followed up SCN events with a letter to participants. "I am proud to say that the number of circles doubled that first year and we are now up to 47!" she says. "Our hope is that circle participation will result in membership growth so that when we have a concentration of members and circles in an area outside of Austin we can offer events there."

Lisa also served as Entertainment Chair and Vendor Chair for the 2006 and 2008 conferences, teaching workshops at both. She has presented workshops at several Writing from Life programs and the Land Full of Stories Conference and is the Entertainment Chair again for 2010.

Never straying too far from her writing goals, Lisa wrote a piece that was accepted for *What Wildness Is This: Women Write about the Southwest* and was reprinted in *Desert Call Magazine*. She also wrote a story for *Kitchen Table Stories*. Since she had been writing profiles for *austinwoman magazine* and *Austin Monthly* for a while, Jane Ross asked Lisa to take over the Take a Bow column. "It was great fun interviewing friends from the board and getting to know them better!" says Lisa. Knowing a good thing when she read it, Jane asked Lisa to do a few author interviews as well. "That has been very educational," says Lisa, "And dishing with other word junkies is always fun!"

Even though she is still passionate about building circles Lisa stepped down from most of the Circles Coordinator tasks last year to make time for new projects. She also decided to let go of Take a Bow when she accepted the nomination for President Elect. "I had always sworn I wouldn't accept a nomination for President until my daughter (who is now 10) was in high school. What can I say? Joyce Boatright, is a very convincing lady as well as a friend. We realized that though we have competent board members with lots of experience from their lives outside SCN, very few have been with SCN or been board members long enough to learn the ropes." Recognizing that she is one of the "oldies" who does know the ropes, Lisa realized that it was time to step up and serve as the new President.

Her main goals as President are to build the SCN board, establish a Volunteer Coordinator position, develop a large vol-

unteer pool, and establish an ad hoc finance committee. She notes how hard the SCN board members work saying “I don’t know how many people realize this, but aside from workshop facilitators, editors and online course instructors, our only paid employee is Peggy Moody, the Executive Director. Every event, every conference, every retreat, every WFL, every BOG we put on is organized by the Board of Directors who work for free. Board members are in charge of or involved with most of our other programs as well: the book review site, the podcast, the journal. Lots of us facilitate circles on or off line. We have full lives outside SCN too. It’s pretty overwhelming!”

As President, you can expect that Lisa will take an assertive approach to encourage SCN members to join the board so they can become the next generation of “oldies.” She is already asking, “Are all our programs really serving enough people to make the work involved worthwhile? If they aren’t bringing in enough money to help us sustain ourselves, or serving people as we intended, we may have to make some changes.”

If you want to see Lisa in action, you can catch her Art of the Profile session at the 2010 conference where she’ll teach participants how to write profiles of family members for family members or for publication. She says, “Even though SCN is about telling our own stories, there is a place for knowing how to tell stories of other lives too. Lots of us have elderly family members who are the keepers of family and cultural history. These stories need to be written down before they’re lost forever and not everyone is prepared to write down their own.”

Lisa also believes that personal profile pieces are a great way to break into publishing, pointing to two free periodicals and the local newspaper in Austin that feature several profile pieces. “I’m sure there are editors in every community who would love good pieces about interesting locals and folks who would enjoy reading pieces about them,” says Lisa.

Even though she started a journal at the age of nine and kept it up through graduate school, Lisa admits she doesn’t journal much any more, and though she participates in two e-circles, including one she facilitates, she admits that she’s bad about getting her posts in on time. “I’ll get too busy for a couple of months and then try to write two or three at once to catch up. I’m just a terrible example.” She’s hoping her new blog <http://myrestlessmuse.blogspot.com/> will put her under the gentle pressure she needs to write and is looking forward to a space to say what she wants, when she wants.

The “theme” for her blog is her dual career as a musician and writer. “I just haven’t ever been happy when I neglected either part of myself. So it’s a tribute to my restless muse who isn’t happy unless she’s doing six things at once,” says Lisa. She currently has 22 things on her to-do list, including a bilingual girls’ story circle starting this week, conference organizing, her conference workshop, two journal pieces, and 16 piano students to teach every week. “All of this goes with the usual family stuff—bills to write, etc.—not to mention trying to make

time for my daughter, my husband, my friends and myself,” she quips.

When she is not working for SCN, Lisa loves to bake, crochet, knit, and do crafts with her daughter. “Creativity is absolutely necessary for my mental health! My career stuff is all creative—writing, teaching, music—but even my hobbies are mostly creative ones too,” she says. “I like making friendship bracelets while watching TV. They only take an hour, so I can finish one in one show. It gives me a sense of accomplishment even if I’m just vegging out.” She also makes time for tai chi, for walks with a girlfriend twice a week, for bowling, movies and games on weekends with her daughter and the opera or dinner with her husband. “I read an obscene amount for someone who claims to be so busy. Bubble baths, chocolate, and a good glass of wine don’t hurt either. That stuff keeps me sane,” she says.

Obviously, there is no way to keep this Energizer Bunny down for too long. Aren’t we lucky to have her as our new SCN Board president?

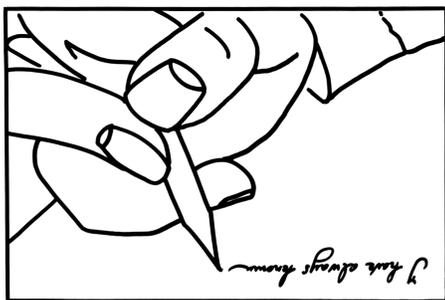


A professional writer for over 30 years, Robin Edgar’s feature articles and profiles have appeared in national and regional magazines such as *Our State*, *Business North Carolina*, *Transitions Abroad*, *Palm Beach Illustrated*, and the online magazine for Paxson Communications Corporation. She has also written features for newspapers such as *The Charlotte Observer*, *The Sun-Sentinel*, and *The South Florida Business Journal*.



Robin teaches writing workshops based on her book, *In My Mother’s Kitchen: An Introduction to the Healing Power of Reminiscence*, in a variety of venues around the country. These include the prestigious John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, North Carolina as well as for caregivers for Hospice, Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s organizations and genealogy and scrapbook enthusiasts. The second edition of *In My Mother’s Kitchen* is available in local libraries, bookstores and Amazon.com.

We are pleased that Robin has joined the Story Circle Journal team as contributing editor for the “Take A Bow” series! You can visit Robin on her website at www.robinedgar.com.



True Words from Real Women

Simplicity

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 "Simplicity." Contribute your own True Words to the Journal. Future topics are listed on page 24.

Simple Is Best

Lorine Andresen, Forest Grove OR

My grandma was the queen of one-liners. She could fit them into any situation, any condition. "Waste not, want not," she'd say, meaning, "clean up your plate."

"Make hay while the sun shines, a stitch in time saves nine, simple is best, be prompt, God is in the details." Many of her own making, she and Gramps lived by these aphorisms.

Every Saturday promptly at 1:00 pm, she'd drive into our yard to pick me up for shopping. We did two kinds of shopping: grocery and window. Main Street of our little town was one block with stores on each side. We'd park in front of the Council Oak Grocery.

She didn't buy many groceries as we were farmers, providing most of our own food. Done with groceries, the fun began. We'd window shop our way past all the stores and back. Sometimes we'd buy something, but mostly it was look and dream, except at Buchannan's Drug. There we shared a strawberry ice cream soda. I loved shopping.

One Saturday, shortly after Thanksgiving 1946, our window-shopping came to an abrupt stop at Gamble's Hardware Store. There, in Christmas display, was a beautiful blue bicycle. A Huffy, loaded with goodies: front basket, chrome handlebars, white rubber grips with streamers, bell and rear carrier. I drooled with desire.

"We need a closer look," Grandma said. Mr. Gamble met us at the door. He'd been watching us.

"Want to try it," he said. Did I? He held it steady while I sat on the seat touching everything, including the \$44.95 price tag. Even at the age of eight I knew this was beyond possibility.

"We'll take it," Grandma said. "You stay here while Mr. Gamble and I discuss this." I could not believe it, this beautiful bike was to be mine.

Each Saturday for the next twenty-two weeks Grandma made a payment of \$2.00 on that bicycle. It stayed in the store window, "SOLD" written on the tag, until my ninth birthday the following June.

The plan was simple, the lesson powerful, and God was truly in the details.

Life's Moments

Mary O. Patino, San Antonio TX

My mother's house is the center of communication. When my sisters and I gather there, we exchange up-to-the moment news or old information: the latest arthritis flare-up, exercise, and our children's activities, like the five-year old cheerleader who performs next weekend at the Arneson River Theater.

Most of our gatherings are impromptu, called by my sister Ana. "Whatcha doing?" "We are ordering tacos. Want to come?" or "The babies are here." If I could fly, I'd be there in ten minutes! Putting Zola, my sheltie, outdoors with fresh water, I swing my camera bag over my shoulder and take off.

Time with family is a kaleidoscope of emotions. Sometimes I return home a little nostalgic or concerned with Mother's health. She is 83 years old. Thankfully, she still nurtures her garden, although not with the same energy as before. I miss not seeing all my sisters or my daughter's family. My daughter lives out of state.

Today, Baby Macaleigh is visiting. Four generations gather: Mother, sisters, nieces, nephews, and great-nieces. I am immersed in the babies, Macaleigh and Kitana and two year-old Natalia. I smile to see my sister Rosemary with Macaleigh, her great-granddaughter. Later, we laugh as she jumps in the child's bouncer to the tune of a horse's gallop.

After awhile, I take Kitana outside to Mother's garden to see the boganvilia and *esperanza*. The orange tree is heavy with green fruit. "Touch it, Kitana." I invite baby to feel the glossy green leaf. "What the heck," I think of Mother's disapproval, pulling off the leaf. We take turns smelling its citrus fragrance. "Ahh..." Redbird joins us. Back indoors, I feed her blueberry yogurt. She loves it! Ana laughs at Kitana's purple mouth, where my hand missed.

I do not need my camera to remember the scenes above or before me as the babies crawl, maneuvering their way on the blanket as one almost travels over the other. I think about my grandsons: "I wish you were here. Maybe for the holidays..." For now, driving home, my soul marvels at the simplicity and gift of these moments.

Memories of a Grandmother She Never Knew

Janice Jakubowicz, Philadelphia PA

The smell of cedar escaped from the closet as I opened the door to begin the seasonal change of clothing. It was finally Spring, and I felt confident enough to stash away the woolens until the first frost. Our teenaged daughter liked to clean out her closet because it meant she had a reason to buy new clothes. She went through growth spurts and some hardly worn things had to go into the giveaway bag.

One day my daughter volunteered to help go through the cedar closet. She thought there might be some retro or vintage clothing she might want. The vintage look, as she defines it, means clothes from the 80s.

As I was hanging the last of the articles, a woman's beige raincoat and long, blue evening dress were revealed. Suddenly, I had a flashback of my mother-in-law. She died years before our daughter was born. When my husband had to close up her home after her death, he couldn't part with these few pieces of clothing that held such happy memories for him.

I took the dress and coat off the rack and showed them to my daughter. She touched them gently, as if she were reaching out to a person standing before her. For the fleeting moment, her grandmother was standing there with us. I choked back my tears. I was grateful to connect my daughter to the memories.

Nothing can replace the unconditional love of a grandmother. Our daughter never had the opportunity to be loved by this woman, so passionate about her family and so unselfish. Her granddaughter was left only with the pictures and stories we shared with her. Now, she has a chance to touch the possessions of a woman who would have loved her very much.

Christmas Memories

Joan Givens, Bellevue WA

C is for a cheerful season, marked by caroling, candy canes, and the Baby's crib. But mostly Christmas is children, the young and young-at-heart, fully immersed in the holiday.

H is for holiday, celebrated by holly wreaths, brass horns, and the hurrying and scurrying of Santa's helpers. It's also the historic story, told now for more than 2000 years.

R is for reminiscing, recalling TV specials, Rudolph, Frosty, and Charlie Brown. It's the season of red, flickering lights, cookie sprinkles, and bright bows.

I is for icicles, ice skates, and black ice. It's inspirational, arousing thoughts of *Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men*.

S is for Swedish meatballs and Swedish pancakes, for "shop-til-you-drop" excursions, for sleigh bells, and stockings hung with care.

T is for fir trees, trimmed with twinkling lights, bright balls, and shimmering tinsel. Surrounded by toy trains, baby dolls, two-wheeler bicycles, and toboggan sleds. But mostly it's traditions, treasured year after year.

M is for music, early mornings, magic, and merriment. Memories are made of this.

A is for angelic faces, tantalizing aromas, and eager anticipation.

S is for the sights and sounds that make falling asleep difficult. Santa's on his way. S is for this familiar story that never grows old.

May CHRISTMAS this year spell out love of family, giving to others, wishes come true, and peace on earth.

Little Things

Doris Anne Roop-Benner, Richardson TX

Little things
can make Me
deliciously happy

My grandchildren's smiles -
a daughter's hug -
holding my husband's arm

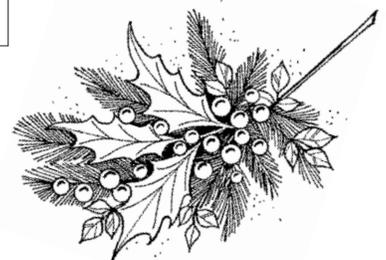
A ferry boat ride at sunset—
the smell of salt water—
the sight of whales tails in the ocean

Rain - anywhere, anytime
chill in the air—
natures' colors—
walking in the forest
animals on a farm

Wearing jeans and sweatshirts—
diving into water fully clothed—
Sleep when the day is done

Laughter real and hearty—
listening and talking to friends

Being forgiving and forgiven,
trusting and trustworthy,
honest with myself and others
true to Me.



Simplify, Simplify.

Beverly Offen, Glenview IL

When I retired, I thought my busy life would slow down and simplify. I didn't plan to follow Thoreau to a cabin by Walden Pond, but I expected afternoons spent reading, time for leisurely dinner preparations, and the opportunity to reshape my mature body. Believing I had limitless time, I added a few new activities to my existing ones.

At first these activities filled only the hours I had previously spent at my job. But while I'd rarely stayed late at work, I soon found myself on my computer, busy into the early evening and then rushing to prepare a last-minute dinner. My husband began to grumble and eye my computer with evil intent.

I thought back on life before my recent marriage and retirement. I had a full-time job and usually went out in the evening. But I'd never felt the time pressure I was now experiencing. What was different?

The difference was that I had lost the structure my job had provided. I didn't have too many activities—I just didn't have control over what I was doing. In order to simplify my life, I had to organize my day, just as my work routine had done.

I took a 5"x8" pad of yellow paper and listed the following seven days. Under each day, I wrote what I would do that day. I included projects to work on, social plans, household duties, people to call, appointments to make and to keep. On Monday I took another smaller sheet of paper, headed it "Tuesday," and wrote down only what I had already scheduled to complete or work on tomorrow. I left the small paper out on my desk and put the large paper away. I went to the kitchen, started dinner, and had a glass of wine with my surprised husband.

The next morning I began completing Tuesday's list of things to do. When I finished, I went for a walk. I didn't think about the rest of the week. Instead I thought about how I was using organization to implement Thoreau's advice to "Simplify, simplify."

The Lessons of the Green Dad

Judy M. Miller, Zionsville, IN

We had the greenest, weed-free yard due to our ducks and the persistence of my father. Thanks to his enthusiasm we experienced a true rural upbringing. Part of this experience came in the form of the ducklings my three brothers received via the Easter Bunny (I received a baby bunny that year, which lived to a ripe old age).

Dad was "green" decades before being green was a concept. As the ducklings grew into big bossy biting ducks, they became voracious insect and pest eaters. They also became the most prolific fertilizing machines in our small community.

My father followed in the wake of our ducks. His bright orange plastic child's bucket served as the weed collector; it was emptied out repeatedly because of the success of the duck fertilizer throughout our vast acreage. I watched him, down on one knee systematically digging out the dandelions, every spring and summer evening when he wasn't traveling for work. He weeded with a wood-handled forked metal dandelion tool.

With his unexposed-to-the-sun hairy legs sticking out of his plaid shorts, his dark business socks still on, and wearing white gym shoes, my father was an amusing sight. I wasn't allowed to help, but I did observe and comment.

"Dad, why do you weed like this?"

"They won't return, honey. You have to get them by the roots, see?" And he showed me the difference between weeding the right and wrong way. "You always do the best job. It pays off down the road."

He never hurried. The weeds diminished as time went on. There were fewer dandelions to reseed the yard.

I learned a lot from watching my father weed; something I carry today, and pass along to my own children. Patience, perseverance and doing something the right way has results.

And, yes, I weed like my father...

My Life BC (Before Computers)

Connie Katusak

I was born BC, not Before Christ but before computers and, according to my grandkids, before everything else important to life: TV, CD and DVD players, interactive smart toys, and cell phones—the dark ages when all the above were the dreams of visionary science fiction writers. Television actually had been presented at the 1939 World Fair but without networks to provide programming, it was for the future. Man had only achieved flight a scant 35 years before and the automobile, not much older, was stymied by the lack of a proper highway system. Jules Verne had already written of rocketing to the moon, but that too was for the future. The nuclear age had not been born but America and Germany were racing to change that.

It was a spare time. The depression followed by WWII meant little money to spend. Reasonably self-sufficient, we grew most of our food and kept chickens for meat and eggs. Telephones were few. A black rotary dial sat on a tiny table, the party line shared by ten families. We rode to church in daddy's car but otherwise walked or rode the bus. Radios were huge static filled vacuum tube monstrosities. Our family did have modern conveniences: a wringer washing machine, an electric Frigidaire, and an Electrolux vacuum cleaner. Mom had an electric sewing machine. Clothes dryers were non-existent – laundry was hung outside on a line to air dry.

(continued on page 13)

Clothespin

Linda Sievers, Arcata CA

It tapped against my shoe as it fell out of the box. Worn and chipped, with clip legs, its rounded head and torso resembled Grandma's small, sturdy shape. The old hardwood clothespin must be a hundred years old, I thought, as vivid childhood memories surfaced.

Flip, flap, the cotton sheets slapped in the October wind as Grandma, white ringlets blowing into her eyes, gathered the rambunctious fabric close to her body. I peered up at her from under my straw hat, trying to not get tangled in the sheets as she placed clothespins into my four year old hands. My apron, sewn by Grandma long before I was a thought, was made from an old canvas seed bag with faded words that ran across the width of the front pockets. Apron strings that circled my chest, crisscrossed my shoulders, and wound their way under my arms, were knotted at my back. Stray pins I failed to secure inside my pockets fell to the ground.

"Watch out now," Grandma cautioned. "I don't want to grind clothespins in my lawn mower and have splinters fly up and hit me in the eye."

"I'll be careful, Grandma." I frantically searched for errant pins in the grass. I didn't want anything to hurt my grandma.

Short-cutting his way across our lawn, the Fuller Brush man said. "I see you have your helper with you today, Mrs. Banks."

"Yes, Mr. Abrams. She's a good helper."

Later, when Grandma snapped a freshly-dried sheet over the bed, I watched it magically billow above my head. With coarse brown hands she smoothed and tucked the sheet under the mattress.

"HMMMMMMMM," she purred, eyes gleaming under her spectacles. "Ready for warm homemade bread and jam?"

My parents, uncle and aunt, seven grandchildren, and Grandpa all lived in the house grandma inherited from her father in 1900, where generations of laundry hung outside to dry.

I squeezed the old clothespin, modest and efficient like grandma. How unpretentious was her devotion to all of us, how endearing the memories.

My Life BC *continued*

Buoyed by the inventions developed during the war, the Age of Technology was born and later replaced by the Information Age. Today our senses are overwhelmed by gadgets as we race to keep up with the latest devices hawked by an advertising media gone crazy. Mine was a simpler time. Would I give up my computer and cell phone or replace jet planes with horse and wagon? Not on your life. But sometimes when nostalgia kicks in, I do wish for "time travel" so I could take my grandkids back for a visit to that less complicated simpler age.

Simply Unforgettable

Joyce Murray Boatright

"My grandma is 80 years old, drives a black Lincoln Town car, packs a 357 Magnum, and has a Texas prison named after her."

This was the description my nephew made of his grandmother when he was a student in upstate New York at Bard College. Do you think, despite the facts of the matter, that he painted her larger than life?

He did not.

Lane Murray was the second child born to a High Plains farmer and third grade teacher in West Texas. My grandmother cashed out her teacher retirement in order to pay for my mother's last year at Texas Tech University. It was 1942, and my grandmother knew my mother needed to be able to get along in life on more than her astonishing good looks.

She was right.

After my mother had a college degree, she worked her way through a master's degree and a doctorate on her teacher's pay. Because she had the educational credentials, she was able to secure a faculty position in the education department at Texas A&M University. Because she had the educational credentials and experience of working in a male dominated culture, she was able to secure a position as the founding superintendent of the Windham School System, within the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. Because she valued education, she put together a team of educators that built the first adult performance program in the United States. Recidivism declined in Texas because men and women received educational and vocational skills that gave them marketable skills and a chance at a future that did not include a return to prison.

People noticed.

She was named to the Texas Women's Hall of Fame a year prior to Barbara Bush's induction. She was inducted the same year as Susan Komen's sister. Both women were on crusades. And they shared the same fierce determination, so it wasn't that my mother was a woman apart from other women.

She was not.

My mother was one among other modern pioneers that led us into a post-feminist world. She battled discrimination without drawing attention to herself. She did her homework and had her facts to defend her position, and she won the day more times than she lost. And when it was my turn, all I had to do was follow in her footsteps.

It sounds so simple in the telling.

My Amazing Quonset Hut Experience

Mitzi Boyd, Fort Worth TX

Often, in the autumn of life, one stands back far enough to get life in focus. In the United States, where consumerism fuels our materialistic economy, the notion that simplicity is a good thing is often suspect. Norah Jones' song *Come Away With Me* has the lines, *And I want to wake up with the rain falling on a tin roof, while I'm safe there in your arms.*

These lyrics transport me back to seven months in 1975, living in a WW2 vintage corrugated and slightly rusted-at-the-seams quonset hut. We rented this hut, perched just above a rocky beach on the eastern shore of Orcas Island off Washington State, while we contemplated building a permanent residence. My previously landlocked Texas family was simply stunned at the always-changing currents, colors, moods, smells, and—amazing to us—tide levels just outside our door. The hut was quite primitive with curved, unpainted dark masonite walls, linoleum floors, and back-to-basic amenities. Rainy days were spent reading library books and putting puzzles together. On blustery nights there was nothing quite like snuggling under quilts to the crackles and pops of a wood fire. The tinny hypnotic sounds of rain on the tin roof translated into bliss after Texas summers of relentless heat.

At dawn I would sit quietly watching a family of deer munch their breakfast near our front door. After they lumbered off, I would sip freshly brewed coffee while watching the morning mist dance on the ever-changing water, as the sun rose behind the distant mountains. In the chilly salt air, I would watch for an eagle or a pod of Orca (killer) whales as they traveled together not far off the shoreline, always heard with their rhythmic breathing before being seen.

These memories often flood back, reminding me of life's simple pleasures. Earl Nightingale said it best: *Everything that's really worthwhile in life comes to us free—our minds, our souls, our bodies, our hopes, our dreams, our intelligence, our love of family and friends and country. All of these priceless possessions are free.*

Pets—a Lesson in Simplicity

Laurel Hunt, Asheville, NC

"Putting away their things is one of the hardest parts," my friend said, as we discussed the pain of pet loss. As dog lovers, both of us knew all too well the heartbreak of saying goodbye to a beloved pet.

After many months of slow decline, I had put my elderly springer spaniel, Emily, to sleep. Now, in every room of the house, there was something of Emily's: her bed in the master bedroom, another bed in the hallway, and yet another one in the den. I left the beds where they were, her scent still clinging to them, the imprint of her body on the pillow. I tucked her collar away in a drawer and hung her leash on the peg rack.

My Decades of Simplicity

Janan Hale, Tyler TX

Life at birth was complete dependence on others and having them be equal to the task. Being nurtured and adored without realizing the gift of it. Simplicity was with trust.

Life at age ten meant barefoot summers, sandlot baseball, avoiding grass burrs, visiting a cousin in the city, swimming with friends at the one pool in town. Simplicity was with a smile.

Life at twenty meant completing assignments, managing relationships, learning to live with another person in a college dorm, dreaming about a wedding in the near future. Simplicity was with thoughts and questions.

Life at thirty meant home ownership, carpools, conferences with teachers, frequent trips to the pediatrician with one of our four children, being a stay-at-home mom, having very little power. Simplicity was happiness and some despair.

Life at forty meant confusion about the future, dealing with the possibility of failures, the constancy of each day's demands, teenagers, steady friends as well as family. Simplicity was not present, instead there was facing reality head-on.

Life at fifty meant internal changes of both mind and body, embracing a new outlook of "live and let live," looking within instead of casting my focus on others. Children became adults and were finding their own paths. Simplicity was with a slower pace.

Life at sixty was relaxation, still looking forward but also enjoying the look back, results were not so bad, there was a power to call my own. It had always been there, I just failed to claim it. Simplicity was completing the tasks with satisfaction.

Life at seventy brings new challenges with health, with responsibilities for older family members but there is also pride in simple accomplishments and some surprise that so many years have passed. Simplicity is comfortable and welcomed.

The kitchen held most of her worldly possessions: her bowls, a bag of dog food, and assorted medications. As I washed Emily's food dish and put it away, I thought about her predecessor, Dixie, who had eaten out of it. In turn, along with Emily's beds, it would be handed down to my new puppy, Alex. I sorted through Emily's leftover medicines. What could be re-used, I set aside for the animal shelter.

Finally, I folded her red fleece coat and put it away.

As I put away her few possessions, I thought of how humans go through life acquiring material things. Dogs ask for nothing but love and kindness. And that is all they leave behind.

The Round-Headed Boy and the Magic Sheet

Amber Polo

Once upon a time (that's fairy tale talk for over 50 years ago) there was a round-headed boy (no, not Charlie Brown). This RHB lived with his beautiful older sister above a toy store. One Christmas their parents, busy preparing toys, hung a magic sheet across the door of one room and warned their children to never, never look behind the sheet. For, if they did, Santa would give the tree and all their presents to less fortunate boys and girls.

As Christmas came closer and closer, their excitement grew. Finally, three days before Christmas, the two children stared at the magic sheet, imagining a tinsely tree and glorious presents.

"I want to look!" said the RHB.

"No!" replied his very good, beautiful sister

"I can't wait." He reached one pudgy hand toward the sheet.

"Noooooooooo!" she cried.

He jumped, grabbed a fistful of cloth, and pulled hard on the magic sheet. The sheet cascaded down. She squeezed her eyes shut. His bugged out. She screamed.

Their mother ran up the stairs.

"I didn't look," cried the little girl, tears streaming down her face. "It was him," she sniffed. "I told him not to do it."

The RHB planted his legs as his mother towered over him. "I wanted to look."

"I didn't want to look. He made me do it," his sister moaned. "I didn't see the tree or any presents. Not one."

"You let him do it," her mother scolded.

"Right!" the RHB said. "It's all her fault."

His sister lurched towards him and their mother scooped him up. "Leave him alone. You're bigger."

The girl crossed her arms, imagining a Christmas morning with no presents, no tree, and not one Christmas cookie. The RHB grinned a round-faced grin. He'd seen he had more presents than his sister.

* * *

This is one of a series of simple stories I wrote for my brother at a time when he needed a happy reinventing of family history. He called the stories the second best Christmas present he ever received (his first two-wheeler stayed in first place). I am so happy I shared this with him before his unexpected death. I'd like to think this is an example of how we can each use our writing skills in special ways.

All in Fun

Betty Lafferty

I try to remember
What was done,
All in the name
Of having fun.

There were marbles, hop-scotch
And jumping rope too,
Kick-the-can,
So much to do.

Sand boxes full
Of castles so tall,
We were just children,
But we had it all.

There were paintbrushes,
Chalk and crayons galore,
So much fun,
Who could want for more?

Cherry trees to climb
While the pears would fall,
We were just children,
But we had it all.

Tricycles to ride
And roller-skates too,
Sled rides and ice skates,
So much to do.

Swings and sliding boards,
Cart wheels and games,
The reading of books
That left you never the same.

The playing of dress-up
And a high heel shoe,
A world of make-believe,
So much to do.

We each had a doll
When we were small,
Having fun as children,
We had it all.

Sewing Savagery

Elaine Thomas, LaGrange TX

Simplicity my foot!

That was the company's name but I will testify that at least one of its patterns was anything but simple.

When I signed up for a freshman sewing class, the high school teacher announced our first project would be pajamas or a nightgown. Mother, a trained seamstress, agreed to pick up a pattern and fabric when she went to town. Meanwhile, my city classmates strolled into class, emptying tiny bags containing cool fabrics and cute, uncomplicated patterns.

I was dismayed when Mother showed me her purchases. This pattern for pajamas had more pieces than a jet plane, thereby requiring miles of the green flowered flannelette fabric she had chosen.

"I was hoping for something simpler," I blurted out.

"But this will be a good learning experience for you. That's the whole point of taking sewing. Build your skills," she said, attempting to bolster my confidence.

"Ummm," I muttered, recognizing that the supplies were paid for, so enough said.

The project surpassed even my worst nightmares. After pinning pieces on the bias for an hour, I cut out fabric until my hand blistered. The complications included side darts, facings, buttonholes, a collar, set-in sleeves, and a waistband.

I had no experience with an electric sewing machine, just the limited sewing skills I'd picked up using Granny's antique hand-cranked Singer tabletop model. Perhaps that's why my stitches bunched, my tension was too tight or too loose, my seams puckered, and when I incorrectly loaded the bobbin, it jammed half shut in rolls of taut knots.

A few classes later, the teacher's attitude turned frosty and she grimaced when she looked my way.

Meanwhile, my chic classmates finished

their simple nighties and displayed the pressed garments, testaments to their considerable skills. Waiting for me to catch up, they filed their nails and chatted, occasionally glancing my way.

The teacher eventually took pity on me, gave me a passing grade, and told me to finish the project at home. Would it surprise you to learn that those partially completed pajamas never again saw the light of day?

Caught By the Rhythm of Life

Janet Davis, Austin TX

I wasn't prepared to get that kind of a phone call that morning... or ever.

I was working from my San Antonio Riverwalk hotel room on a short business trip. Four weeks prior, our 23 year old, first-week-as-a-law-student son, Bob, had been diagnosed with a brain tumor. Thankfully, the tumor had been discovered on a routine exam, not through a crisis. After initial testing, this particular week found us waiting for appointments with Houston specialists and moving through our daily lives while trying to absorb our new reality. I had looked forward to this time away, hoping that a different setting would temper the pain and fear of home.

Bob called just before noon, distraught. My easy-going son had hit a wall. He said he could not even decide whether or not to go to class that afternoon. He was overwhelmed, paralyzed. Though he had been able to maintain his prep and class-work, a significant accomplishment for a One-L, everything else in life had become undoable: laundry, meals, errands. There was no space for the simple rhythm of life.

I encouraged him to take the next hour to offload his thoughts onto paper and see what course of action floated to the top; he would call back then. The process brought clarity: he needed a break.

As we spoke, I began to recognize the importance of the ordinary rhythm of life. Those simple tasks of groceries and laundry had kept me moving forward during this time of rampant uncertainty. As I listened to his pain and disorientation, I began to imagine how the absence of such rhythm had perhaps multiplied the anguish of this moment. A path of healing began to take shape.

We called it "mom's rhythm therapy." As we waited together, in the midst of the anxiety and chaos of the unknown, our focus became sleeping and eating, cooking and cleaning, resting and exercising. We both learned the healing power of simplicity. In our current state of free fall, we were both blessedly caught by the rhythm of life.

The Topic Was Simplicity

Tiffany Benton

I remember standing on stage at the Sacramento State Fair wearing an outfit I had sewn. I'd received a 4-H blue ribbon and was one of a handful of young girls modeling our creations.

I joined a 4-H club when I was 10. My preference was to raise lambs but mom wasn't big on animals and I wasn't big on crossing her. I chose sewing. My first project was an apron. Mom had a portable Singer sewing machine that she let me use. I sat for hours with my foot on the peddle practicing. Some days went well; others were a nightmare, like when I sewed my fingernail.

The Gift

Arlene V. R. Howard, Rancho Mirage CA

I knew what it meant to me the first moment I read the next *True Words* topic. But what did others think Simplicity meant?

Why not ask, I thought.

My husband's response, "Simplicity is complex."

"Simplicity means lack of chaos, absence of clutter, whether material or virtual clutter," my best friend told me.

"Peace," a college friend said. "I am trying to make life less complicated, simpler, so I can have peace."

My daughter, a second-year resident at a busy hospital, howled. "Hah! I sure don't have any simplicity in my life."

A gal I met on a boat on the English canals replied, "Patterns. You know, the kind you sew with." I smiled. In the wilds of Britain, more than 5000 miles from home, I met someone who had the same idea as I did of what simplicity means.

I began to sew when I was eight. My Mom had a treadle Singer sewing machine that she used to make special occasion dresses for me. I remember a white waffle picot sun dress with a bolero for one Easter, a lace-trimmed red velvet corduroy dress for one Christmas. With Mom's guidance, I laid out the 35 cent Simplicity doll clothes patterns on scraps from my clothes. When I was in high school, Dad put a motor on the treadle machine so I could sew faster. Simplicity patterns for my American Character Sweet Sue doll were set aside for patterns to make sailor dresses, poodle skirts, and prom dresses. As an adult, Simplicity patterns gave way to Stretch and Sew patterns for my daughter's clothes. In my late 40s, clothes patterns were replaced by quilt patterns. However, come Halloween, I still rely on Simplicity patterns for costumes.

Learning to sew with Simplicity patterns was a gift that has given me a lifetime of pleasure. I now spend at least two hours each day quilting. As I put the pieces of fabric together, the rhythm of the needle moving up and down, back and forth, in and out, makes me calm, gives me peace.

Thank you, Mom. Thank you, Simplicity.

(continued on page 17)

Romancing My Animus

Carol Ziel, St. Louis MO

All my life I have searched for myself—my true, whole, and holy self. For many years it was as if I was many selves. My internal world was like a honeycomb, each cell responsible for a feeling, a way of being, a response.

Over time that world has become integrated. It's more like a stream: flowing, collecting and absorbing everything it moves over and under, yet still remaining itself.

I am 61 years old, and coming to the end of the biggest part of that journey. I have accepted my abusive history to the best of my ability and come to peace with it.

I understand I have been changed forever and can never again be that person who existed for such a short time before the hurts began. However, I can be the self that I am now.

Maybe the ideal man that dwells within me, the many faceted animus that I dream of, is that sense of strength that still eludes me. Frequently he is within grasp. Sometimes he can even get close and personal. This animus is stubborn, vibrantly beautiful and powerful.

I am so accustomed to feeling fractured and fragile that the idea of that kind of strength and beauty dwelling within is frightening. Who would I be if I could stretch the boundaries and borders of self to fully contain my animus? What still needs to be done so that I can invite him in? Will he seek me out? Can I "will" myself to be found? I am driven to pursue him until he becomes an integral part of my Being. And, maybe there is still time—in this lifetime.

Now I'm in a stage of life that could be described "ripa." Yogis call this the "pause" between the breaths. I've been here before and begged the Universe to let me stay forever. My internal journey has been long, hard. To rest is good. Experience tells me that just when I'm relishing this place, an inner bell tolls, and the journey begins again. Maybe this time my animus and I will become one.

Simplicity: Three Words

Polly Grose, Wayzata MN

On his death bed David took my hand and said three words, "We're friends again." A simple affirmation of friendship at an ultimate moment, a moment when the shadows circling his head cleared for a second to free these words.

The three words, clearly spoken through a veil of morphine holding at bay an excruciating bone cancer pain, drew me into his arms for a last embrace.

Friends again, tensions resolved, fears at rest, sorrows put aside, I said quietly "Of course, always." Another three words—my voice shaking but smiling to meet his weak but discernible twinkle—his brow furrowed, amidst relentless pain but I had seen a brave smile to last forever.

Touching his forehead, I remembered fragments of the past 20 years; my move to London to remarry and begin a new life with David, a handsome Brit, a lifelong Londoner with American business connections. Mutual friends introduced us and soon we began an intense courtship as I reorganized my job and juggled family ties to change the course of my life. We shared his tiny bachelor flat just off the Chelsea Green, relishing our intimacy. Joy and camaraderie colored our lives for many years until David suffered heart trouble and then cancer struck. Those years of illness, chemotherapy and radiation, remissions and yet increasing frailty, sifted drops of unease, anxiety, and tangled misunderstandings onto our shoulders. We ignored the means to resolve these troubling problems.

I managed to cast aside any guilty feelings at leaving him behind as I scheduled short trips to the USA to catch up on my children and grandchildren, to plunge happily into their active lives. I left behind the sinking misery of my aging husband whose sudden temper and sullen acceptance I failed to understand.

Now as I leaned across his bed, I thought of the past three months as frequent relapses led to emergency hospitalization. We spent so many hours tending to these acute concerns—not a moment to reflect on our promises of abiding love—until his simple words: "We're friends again."

The Topic Was Simplicity *continued*

joyed 4-H sewing and even chose the pattern and material for my new outfit. It was ghastly: a gold wide-wale corduroy skirt, forest green blouse with flowers and a huge bow at the neck, and a bolero jacket. I cringe and giggle now, thinking about it.

The Simplicity pattern was complicated. Mom and I argued. I was restless. She was always after me to sit and sew. Finally I finished and received a blue ribbon at the Fair. My leader encouraged me to enter at State. Next thing I knew, I was backstage with these other girls. I was embarrassed not only to wear

my outfit, but to model it. Luckily there were no boys at the fashion show. Mom proudly watched from the audience.

I continued sewing, preferring Simplicity patterns. But, there's no simplicity in being a teenager even if the pattern calls for it!



A Conversation With Mary Gordon Spence

by Lisa Shirah-Hiers

Mary Gordon Spence has lived an interesting and diverse life full of surprising twists and turns and what she calls “magic moments.” A gifted speaker, humorist, commentator and author of *Finding Magic in the Mundane*, Mary Gordon (she goes by a double first name) will be our Sunday luncheon keynote speaker at the Stories from the Heart Conference on February 7, 2010. Lisa Shirah-Hiers interviewed her via email for the SCJ.

SCJ: Your website says you grew up “in a small Central TX town where family storytelling and sing-alongs were everyday rituals.” Tell us about your childhood and how it influenced the person you are today.

MG: My daddy grew up with little parental supervision in Eagle Pass, along the Mexican border, in an environment glorified in Wild West movies. My mother had a storybook growing up in a highly educated, refined Tennessee family who moved to McAllen, where my granddaddy practiced law and worked to end political corruption. The blending of these two families provided a rich, diverse environment for my brother, sister and me.

Daddy was 6’5” tall; Mother was 5’4”; and my sister got around in a wheelchair. So for easy access in my household, we had wash rags nailed to the ceiling and showerheads two feet from the ground. Those spatial features weren’t the only things that separated my family from the others in Brownwood, Texas. We had loaded guns in the den and fine china in the dining room, deer blinds in the backyard and a piano and history books in the living room. What my parents had in common was devotion to our family and a belief system that even the most disenfranchised deserved a place at the table. Conversations were always lively in our family—we discussed politics and current events and had a more global perspective than our friends. We celebrated every holiday and were as comfortable frog gigging (frog hunting) with Daddy as we were in community theatre productions with Mother.

SCJ: You changed your major several times in college. What were some of the majors you considered before you settled? What did you finally choose?

MG: It’s beginning to make sense to me, now that I think about it. I didn’t realize at the time that changing majors would set the stage for the many paths I’ve explored since that time. I majored in music—my first love—but felt limited by the time I had to spend in the practice room. I then majored in sociology and philosophy until my daddy said I had to get a teaching certificate.

SCJ: You earned your MA from La Universidad de las Americas in Puebla, Puebla, Mexico. What was that experience like? How did you wind up in a Mexican University?

MG: I’ve always said that *mi corazón es Mexicana*, (my heart is Mexican), so when the person to whom I was married finished his Ph.D. and was offered a teaching position at la Universidad de las Americas, I was raring to go! The MA program in Intercultural Education with an emphasis on Teaching English as a Second Language was right up my alley—a melding of my intellectual curiosity and my teaching abilities. I also taught English in Mexico so there are lots of second-language-learners speaking Texan.

SCJ: Your website says you’ve “taught kindergarten to college, written Texas history materials, drafted legislation, directed state-wide environmental programs and worked for a former president and [as] a magazine editor.” Now you give speeches, emcee, work with schools as a TEA-Certified Team Builder, write newsletter stories, coach writers and presenters, blog, write for the Austin American Statesman and broadcast commentary on KUT! What do you find most rewarding about your varied career?

MG: I’ve always been open to new possibilities and one thing seems to lead to another—it only makes sense after you look back on it all! I’m curious, I’m flexible, and I love new challenges. I accept necessary losses. Except for my roles as mother and grandmother, my favorite one is that of engaging, educating and entertaining adults through speaking and writing. (Speaking is my favorite.) I love that instant connection with people. Maybe the common thread among all the things I’ve done is my love for bringing a fresh perspective to tired, worn out subjects.

SCJ: A frequent comment from your keynote audiences is that you have a wicked sense of humor. Where did it come from? How has it helped you in your life and work?

MG: I have a keen, quick sense of humor, and it keeps me entertained. It’s a gift and a talent that everyone in my family shared. And being able to use it to explore less traditional ways to look at things is such a joy. The most boring presentation I ever heard was *about* humor; I never talk about it. I simply have it, and do it. There are studies that show that laughter prepares the brain for learning. That’s my story, and I’m sticking to it.

SCJ: What did you learn from writing *Finding Magic in the Mundane*?

MG: I learned that I had enough staying power to get everything done. In order to keep from getting bored, I added premiums at the end of each story—kind of like the ones you get from becoming a member of public radio or television. Mine were zany facts and stories that amused me.

SCJ: What are some of your favorite “magic moments”?

MG: I find magic almost every time I leave my house. (I have to stay home a lot to keep from going into overload.) Baptizing my daddy in the Sabinal River; finding a Band-Aid in my purse when someone needs one; pulling out jumper cables to help someone with a dead battery; running into an old friend on the Zocalo (main square) in Mexico City—my days are full of magic moments.

SCJ: What have you learned about publishing that you can pass on to those seeking to publish for the first time?

MG: I chose to self publish my collection of stories because I didn’t want anyone to tell me what to do or how to change them. It was a great experience for me. I do recommend that people hire a great proofreader. I claim that the typos in my book are part of the magic. The truth is that I was horrified when I saw them.

SCJ: How do you nurture the writer in yourself? Do you have a writing practice or any special rituals? If so what are they?

MG: I write irregularly—usually when I can’t help it. I struggle with defining myself as a writer. If I wrote everything that rumbled around in my head—the zany things I observe and experience or my commentary on things—I wouldn’t be able to do anything else. I might be rich and famous if I had better writing practices.

SCJ: Tell me a little bit about your blog marygordonspence.blogspot.com. Does it have a theme? Where do you find inspiration for your posts?

MG: I blog irregularly. (Hum, see a theme here?) It would be too boring for me to become a regular blogger. Plus, I’m not at all certain that other people care about what I think.

SCJ: What were some major turning points in your life journey?

MG: Discarding things that no longer work for me and embracing new ones—these are major turning points that occur regularly. Some of them are subtle; others are cataclysmic. When I found out that I didn’t have to buy one roll of film and get another one for free every time I went into Eckert stores, it simplified my life immensely.

SCJ: What things do you think are most necessary to live an authentic and satisfying life?

MG: Wonder about things; challenge things; embrace things; celebrate things. I am wedded to living a life that’s authentic for me—it’s not always the easy path, believe me!

SCJ: Are there any new projects on your horizon?

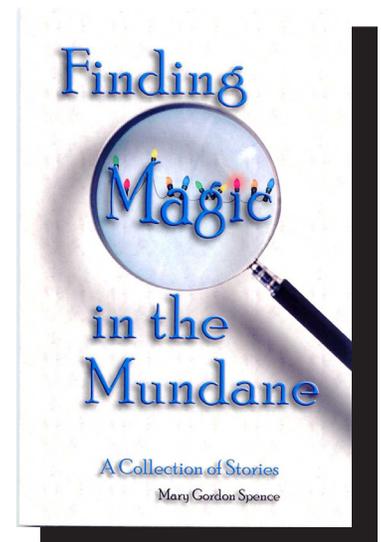
MG: I’ve got several book projects in the works; and I’m planning to get a new screen door.

SCJ: What are you most looking forward to at the SCN conference this year? Any hints about what you might talk about?

MG: I am so looking forward to the SCN conference—it will be my first one! Adoring so many women who are involved with SCN puts the icing on the cake for me. I’m sure I’ll tell some stories about life its ownself, and I think it will be one big love fest—at least I hope so.

SCJ: Is there anything else you’d like to say?

MG: I think resourcefulness is a major key for thriving. Knowing we have options keeps us sane! There are always other options—always.



Excerpts from “Finding Magic in the Mundane”

“I just keep finding more and more magic...it appears when you’re standing on a street corner in Mexico City and run into old friends; when you find an unopened envelope containing a \$500 check or \$20 in the pocket of your winter coat; and when you’re thinking about somebody you miss and they call you.”

“Take good care of your irises. I’m always looking to do more good deeds for poor, neglected plants, and I still carry a shovel in the back of my car.”

Praise for “Finding Magic in the Mundane”

“A liberal dose of Mary Gordon Spence is good for our health...and our funny bone.”
~ Ann Richards

“Mary Gordon Spence shows us in bold, sassy style that the tradition of the wry, observant American humorist is still very much alive!”

~ Isaiah Sheffer



Kitchen Table Stories

Ruth's Water Chestnut Meat Patties

by Jean Hough

You have kitchen table stories, too, and we'd love to print them (800 words maximum, please, including recipe). Send by e-mail or as a Word attachment to ppando@gmail.com. In the subject line please type **Kitchen Table Stories**. If you can't send by e-mail, please type or write your story legibly and mail to Patricia Pando, 1423 West Alabama, Houston, TX 77006.

Where do family favorites come from? From lots of experimentation, adding this, subtracting that. Jean Hough's mother, Ruth, adapted a teenager's magazine recipe into a treat that's still a favorite fifty years later.

My mother, Ruth, was a culinary artist who could experiment with and fashion any recipe to tempt our family's taste buds and treat our fussy tummies with flavorful nourishment. I clipped the original recipe (below) from a magazine in the 1950s when, as a teenager, I was Mother's apprentice and eager to try my own culinary wings.

Teenager's Torn-Out Recipe

1/2 cup milk
 2 cups cubed bread
 1 pound ground beef
 1/2 teaspoon onion powder
 1 teaspoon garlic salt
 1 tablespoon soy sauce
 1/2 teaspoon Tabasco
 1/2 teaspoon Accent
 1 5-ounce can water chestnuts, sliced thin

Soak the bread in the milk, squeeze out as much milk as possible forming a soft, wet dough. Combine with beef, seasonings, and chestnuts and mix thoroughly. Shape into balls or patties. Roll in sifted cornflake crumbs. Fry.

Mother, Daddy, and I liked the natural flavors of foods and could not tolerate most seasonings. Therefore, we omitted the onion powder, garlic salt and Tabasco. The foodies of today may prefer the spicy original recipe, so I've included those spices here.

Also, Mother never bought generic ground beef. She selected a slice of top round steak or top sirloin, then asked the butcher to remove the circumference of fat and feed the remaining portion through the fine meat grinder twice. (This eliminated most of the small pieces of gristle which were icky to this picky eater.)

We learned that a half can of water chestnuts was sufficient for our tastes. Mother saved the remaining water chestnuts for the next batch by immersing them in a tightly-capped

water-filled container and placing it in the freezer. As a precaution, Mother always rinsed the water chestnuts before slicing them.

Fast forward several decades to when Mother began experimenting with the recipe to counteract the deterioration of meat in our area. Instead of being dependably flavorful, juicy and nicely textured, beef often had an unpleasant taste, was dry and very gristly. Accent had either disappeared from market shelves by this time or was so controversial that we eliminated the flavor-enhancer from our cooking. Mother often substituted a shot of sherry in this and other recipes. A tablespoon of dark Karo syrup added both flavor and texture to the mixture. Her favorite choices for cubed bread were sour dough French bread or crumbled-up corn muffins. To add flavor and additional moistness, she used mayonnaise or sour cream. Like most culinary artists, she seldom measured such ingredients, judging instead by instinct or how the mixture felt to her intuitive hands.

Mother usually prepared the ingredients in the morning, and then let the flavors mingle all day in the refrigerated bowl. About an hour before dinnertime, she prepared the skillet, a plate of cornflake crumbs, and a cookie sheet lined with aluminum foil. She gently formed one-inch thick patties, dipped them in the cornflake crumbs, lightly browned them in the hot skillet, and then transferred each to the cookie sheet where they baked for about 45 minutes in a preheated 350 degree oven.

The recipe produced much more than the three of us could eat at one meal. The leftovers were wrapped in portion-sized packages of aluminum foil, placed in a zippered freezer bag identifying the contents and date, and placed in the freezer. We thus had several ready-to-heat-and-eat yummy meals of one of our favorite entrees.

It's time to sift through the narrative and present Mother's recipe for Water Chestnut Meat Patties.

(continued on page 21)

The Value of Lace

Ann Case, Gainesville FL

This past June, at the age of sixty-nine, I became a sister of a religious community of the Episcopal Church, the Order of the Community of the Paraclete. The vows of the community are fidelity, obedience, and simplicity. For me, the vow of simplicity was one of the attractions of the order.

I have been a schoolteacher's wife, and then made a living myself as a librarian. Is it a desire for simplicity or just being too broke? The amount of income does help you choose to live a simple lifestyle! I've always wanted to live simply but struggled with it's not really being a choice since I could not do otherwise.

Having taken on the intentional vow of simplicity I now look even more closely at how I spend money.

Part of the habit of the Paracletians is a white, hooded alb. I needed to buy one for myself. In the catalog they are plain or with a band of lace at the sleeve and the hem. The ones with lace are, of course, more expensive. I really wanted the lace but I wrestled with that. After all, lace is not strictly necessary. Finally I sprung for the lace and, in buying that alb, spent more money on clothes than I had in two years!

Then a friend said she liked seeing a hand come out of a sleeve with lace on it as I served the communion cup at the church altar. It reminded her that a woman was serving her.

I once heard poverty defined as "a lack of choices."

Simplicity is not poverty. I have the responsibility of deciding where my money, time, and energy will go and one of simplicity's choices is "what makes the heart sing."

No house.

No car.

But lace at my sleeves.



Ruth's Water Chestnut Meat Patties

1/2 cup milk
 2 cups cubed bread (suggest sour dough or crumbled corn muffins)
 1 pound top steak or top sirloin, fat removed and fed through a small meat grinder, twice
 1 tablespoon soy sauce
 sherry or other wine to taste
 dark Karo syrup to taste
 mayonnaise or sour cream as needed for added moisture & flavor
 1/2 of a 5 oz. can water chestnuts, rinsed in water and sliced thin

Soak the bread in the milk, squeeze out as much as possible forming a soft wet dough. Combine the beef and other ingredients mixing thoroughly with a fork. Set the bowl in the refrig-

Picking Up the Pieces of my Life

Barbara Drewry, Wichita KS

Picking up the pieces of my life
 one by one
 not holding on
 to any
 very long
 sorting through
 clearing out
 trying to remember
 what this woman's all about

Picking up the pieces of my life
 caring, finally, less than too much
 but still more than enough
 after all these years
 after all these tears

Picking up
 I'm picking up speed now
 dropping off greed now
 I don't really need
 this thing
 that much

Picking up the pieces of my life
 turning them over
 letting them go
 not ceasing to care
 just learning to share
 with a world that is hungry
 like me

Picking up the pieces of my life
 choosing to dare
 to become who I am
 and to let that be
 less than too much
 and still more than enough
 after all these years
 after all these tears

Picking up
 I'm picking up a feeling
 of the dawn
 now
 moving on
 I'm moving on now
 holding a treasure
 and letting it go
 as I must
 not throwing away
 there is no away
 but just learning
 just yearning to trust
 caring less than too much
 and still more than enough
 after all these years
 after all these fears

Picking up the pieces of my life
 gently
 now
 looking forward
 now

letting go of my need
 to hold on
 to what is already gone
 and having the heart
 to keep
 what cannot really go

Caring less than too much
 and still more than enough
 after all

erator until about one hour before mealtime to allow the flavors to blend. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Shape into thick patties. Roll in cornflake crumbs. Brown on both sides in a skillet. Transfer the patties to a foil-lined cookie sheet and bake in the oven for about 45 minutes.

If there are patties left over, foil wrap in individual-sized servings, place in a labeled freezer bag and freeze to be reheated when a quickie meal is needed.

Jean Hough joined Story Circle Network in the spring of 2009 and is enjoying both its reading and its writing activities. She had a career as a medical transcriptionist and says her work helped her learn about both writing and editing. Today, she is retired and lives in Carlsbad, CA.

SCN's Lifewriter's Group Real Words Wednesday



by Dani Greer

It's been a fascinating and busy two months at the Story Circle Network Lifewriters Yahoo!Group.

In September, we read and discussed *Walking Nature Home* by SCN member Susan Tweit. We had the added gift of the author herself, who joined us for a week-long question and answer session about her memoir. We especially appreciated her generosity, for Susan's husband, Richard, was diagnosed with a brain tumor and was scheduled to undergo surgery. Susan demonstrated the act of "live memoir" in sharing her journey with us on her blog *Walking Nature Home* (<http://susantweit.typepad.com/walkingnaturehome>), and continues her vibrant example of living in the moment while embracing the gifts that life brings to us. In her poetic and graceful way, she thanked us all for "the support, love, prayers, and well-wishes—what poet David Lee calls "whispers in the wind."

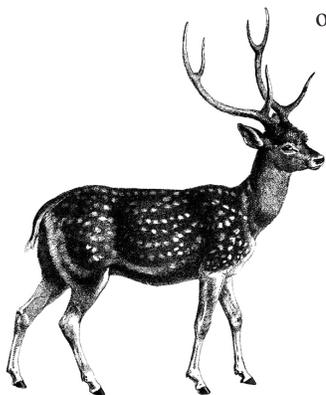
In one of our livelier exchanges, we discussed the Ken Burns' National Parks PBS Special. Many of you may have registered the noticeable lack of women participants in the program, with only three or four women naturalists, a few women relatives of great men, and no women historians. We talked at length about how the great American wilderness, as well as history in general, still belongs to men, underscoring how important it is for us to tell our own and our foremothers' stories. The spell-checker gives me a red underscore for the word "foremothers" here. It wants to correct me. Susan Ideus, searching for a book title, had a similar experience:

"Now you all will love this. I went to Amazon.com and typed in "founding mothers," and while the book did come up as a choice, there in big letters were the words, "Did you mean Founding Fathers?"

No, we didn't. Though we had a grim chuckle over it, it really wasn't very funny. We think **mothers** are worth some recognition. Don't you? It's no small thing to be a strong, intelligent, caring, and sharing woman. We know this. That's who you'll meet in our group.

Join us at:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SCNLifewriters>.



How I Discovered SCN

by Mary Sullivan, Medford, NY

SCN is important to me because women and writing are so important to me. Even though I'm not writing, I still want to belong and don't want to lose touch. I love my groups (poetry group 4, writing group 7—which I belonged to for many years—and group 8—which I facilitated for several years and then turned over to Sandy Naylor—but right now I don't have the energy to read the postings or to respond. Most of my energy each day is used to accomplish my daily living activities.

I started a writing group here on Long Island several years ago and also taught a lot of writing courses. The OWL (SCNs Older Women's Legacy) is one I taught several times while at the Cenacle. My current writing group is now down to seven women. There are two six-session groups of seven women: the winter group and the spring group. We bring our own writing and critique each other's work. There are no suggested themes for our writing.

I've not yet been able to write about my experiences in an assisted nursing facility.

Mary's story was published in the *Journal* a few years ago. We're republishing it so that she can see herself in the *Journal* again.

Ever since I can remember, words nourished me. Once I began to write I felt like someone who discovers that it is more fun to cook than eat. The world of imagination, testing out new words, growing in self-expression filled me with boundless energy.

In 1996 and 1997 I lived in the Philippines—a wonderful, yet difficult experience. I was the only Western Sister living with Eastern Sisters. Our cultures were vastly different. I was much more straightforward in expressing myself than they and found I desperately needed someone to bounce off my feelings, questions, and judgments. There was no one.

I had sporadically kept diaries, relishing each with pages pristine in their nakedness. After a few days I was too busy, too tired, or just plain forgetful, so I never kept it up. What to do? The all-pervasive poverty so viscerally affected me that I had to find a way to process. Feeling alone and powerless, I turned to writing poetry, which helped allay my fears and assuage my discomfort. It became my prayer, my diary, my listener, my energy source, and my therapist.

I began what I call spiritual essays. My Sullivan family roots, my Cenacle Congregation's mission, my ministry of retreats and spiritual direction, my bewilderment about how to be with poverty and how to live in another culture coalesced into one yearning for God. My spiritual essays became the way to express all of this.

When I returned to the United States I wanted to continue writing, but had no outlet. I found a periodical, *Personal Essay*, sold only intermittently at newsstands. Inside, I cut out an intriguing ad for Story Circle Network and held onto it for years. In the beginning of 2002 I filled out the ad and sent in the check.

It took me eight months to fully realize all the SCN opportunities. I could belong to an e-circle of other women writers and soon became a member of e-circle 7. I learned how to copy

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Registration Form

Send this form with your check to:
 Conference Registration, Story Circle Network
 PO Box 500127, Austin TX 78750.
 To register online and use your credit card, go to
www.storycircle.org/Conference/frmregister.php

Name _____
 Street Address _____
 City, State, Zip _____
 Email _____
 Phone _____ Current Member of Story Circle? yes no

Registration Type		Early Registration (Through 12/15/09) Member/Non-Member	Regular Registration (12/16/09-1/31/10) Member/Non-Member	Registration at Door (cash/check only) Member/Non-Member	Amount Due
Full Registration (Friday night Keynote/Saturday/Sunday)		\$200 / \$250	\$225 / \$275	\$250 / \$300	\$
Partial Registration (Please check all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> Friday (Keynote/dessert/ reception)	\$30	\$35	\$40	\$
	<input type="checkbox"/> Saturday only (includes lunch)	\$95 / \$115	\$115 / \$135	\$135 / \$155	\$
	<input type="checkbox"/> Saturday lunch only	\$30	\$40	**	\$
	<input type="checkbox"/> Sunday only (includes lunch)	\$75 / \$100	\$100 / \$125	\$125 / \$150	\$
	<input type="checkbox"/> Sunday lunch only	\$30	\$40	**	\$
Friday Pre-Conference Workshop (Not included in full registration; option; extra charge)		\$30	\$35	\$40	\$
Saturday/Sunday lunch preference:		<input type="checkbox"/> Chicken	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian	Total Due	\$

* Non-Members who choose to join prior to the end of the conference on Sunday, February 7, 2010 will have a portion of their registration fee applied to their dues.

** You MUST register for lunches by Jan. 31! Registrations for these events will NOT be accepted at the door.

* Scholarship applicants may extend Early Registration to January 1, 2010 by which time they will have been notified.

Refund Policy: Cancellations are accepted until January 1, 2010, and are subject to a cancellation fee of \$50 for a full conference registration or \$25 for a one-day registration. There is no refund for Friday's lecture/reception.

How I Discovered SCN *continued*

and paste, how to send an attachment when submitting a journal story, how to keep up with voluminous correspondence spawned by so many women writers who became friends and ultimately my sisters.

I gave away several gift subscriptions but never enticed anyone to become a permanent part of SCN. I look with envy at the conferences, retreats, and courses given in Texas knowing I will never attend them. I wish somehow, since we come from so many states, there could be a way for these to reach us on a personal

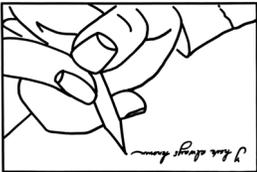
basis. I do not regret one minute of being with this organization. I only regret not answering the ad sooner and not joining a writing circle sooner.

If you remember Mary, or if you would simply like to share a word of encouragement with her, we know she would love to hear from you. Here is her address:

Mary Sullivan, c/o The Medford Hamlet, 1529 North Ocean Avenue, Medford, NY 11753

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True Words Looking Ahead

We're looking for stories rich in evocative detail, showing the struggles, challenges, and resolutions of real people living real lives. We're not looking for generalized, abstract truths about life. We want to read your stories, not your essays! Please make sure that your stories are **350 words** or less. We may edit your submissions for grammar and spelling. Members only please. Here are the upcoming topics and deadlines:

March 2010 (due Jan. 15)—*Dancing With Life*

June 2010 (due April 15)—*Home*

September 2010 (due July 15)—*Autumn Dreams*

December 2010 (due Oct. 15)—*In the Bleak Midwinter*

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.

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