



STORY CIRCLE JOURNAL

Vol. 13 No. 2, June, 2009

The newsletter for women with stories to tell...

SCN's Tenth Annual LifeWriting Competition

"About the only value the story of my life may have is to show that one can, even without any particular gifts, overcome obstacles that seem insurmountable if one is willing to face the fact that they must be overcome."



—Eleanor Roosevelt
1884-1962, American First Lady

With these wise words as inspiration, the tenth annual Susan Wittig Albert LifeWriting Competition, named in honor of our founder, will focus on *overcoming obstacles*.

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

For those needing addition guidance to shape their stories, here are some wise words from Lee Ambrose on writing a winning life story:

"In each life there are obstacles to overcome. Sometimes we get caught up in the overwhelming fear that we just can't do it. Sometimes we may feel as though we are not equipped to handle what sits before us. But, once the obstacle has been tackled, we can look back and see that we did face that obstacle, we chose our path and we were able to overcome—sometimes much to our own surprise."

"Write about a time when you were faced with what you knew was just too much for you to overcome—a time when you felt totally ill-equipped to handle what life had thrown your way. Write about the ways in which you approached the situation, the fears you had to deal with, the twists and turns that you had to make to come to a resolution of the situation. Write about how and when you first realized that you did, indeed, have what was necessary to overcome your particular hurdle. Write about how doing so changed your life. Be sure to include what you learned about yourself along the way."

**For all you need to know about entering the contest, go to:
www.storycircle.org/Contests**

If you do not have Internet access, please send a stamped, self-addressed envelope and a note requesting the contest rules to LifeWriting Contest, Story Circle Network, PO Box 500127, Austin TX 78750-0127. The contest closes on July 1, so get started right away!

Stories from the Heart V February 5-7, 2010

"I came home with so much information and inspiration. All of the presenters and their subject matter were fantastic! The conference was the best I've ever attended—you gals thought of everything. It was so well organized and executed—you have a lot to be proud of. And what a great group! I'm so glad to be part of it!"



—Stories from the Heart IV Attendee
February, 2008

Join us in Austin, TX, February 5-7, 2010 for SCN's fifth national lifewriting conference. The conference brings together women from far and near to celebrate our stories and our lives. Through writing, reading, listening, and sharing, we will discover how personal narrative can be a healing art, how we can gather our memories, and how we can tell our stories. Details on pages 20 and 21.

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Letter From SCN's President— Joyce Boatright

If the Winter's icy cold managed to block your creative muse, Spring is here and it's time to thaw those fingers and get busy writing again. By the time you read this, 21 women will still be smiling contentedly from the inspiration and respite they received at the LifeLines Retreat, led last month by memoirist Lisa Dale Norton. Women came from all over Texas and from as far away as Washington Island, WI, to Festival Hill in Round Top, TX, to enjoy the wildflowers, sunshine, and fresh ideas infused in the weekend.

I know many more of you wanted to come, but the economic downturn pinched your pocketbooks and you had to pass up the opportunity this year, which I understand completely. *HOWEVER*, start planning now to join us for the fifth national women's memoir conference next year, February 5-7, at the Wyndham Hotel, Austin, TX. Our founder, Susan Wittig Albert and Linda Hoye are in charge of planning the conference program, so start saving your money now because you can be assured the program will be extraordinary!

In the meantime, join one of the virtual communities. Available are: an Internet writing circle, an online class, and our LifeWriters Yahoo discussion group. Or access our blog <http://storycircle.typepad.com> and be motivated by the postings. Writing can be lonely because no one can do the work except you, but support for your writing practice is only a click away. Reach out; SCN is here for you!

When a woman first joins Story Circle Network, she indicates what interests her. You may be interested in the retreats and conferences, the online circles, the OWL project, or the editorial services, to name a few. Many of you, in addition, have expressed an interest to become involved as volunteers to serve on the committees vital to SCN's success in helping women give voice to their stories.

Whether you ticked off that box on your membership or not, I encourage you to share your talents with others in this incredible organization. You'll find details on these opportunities here: <http://www.storycircle.org/members/volunteers.shtml> If you don't have your member access code (login and password), you can go to www.storycircle.org, click on Members Only, and then click on "lost password." I assure you, we'll get you linked to the site in no time.

And if you *think* you want to get involved, but wonder if the time commitment and tasks might be overwhelming, email us: storycircle@storycircle.org or phone: 512-454-9833 or write to: Story Circle Network, PO Box 500127, Austin TX 78750-0127, and ask about the committee that interests you. We'll send you a description of the committee and answer any additional questions you may have.

When money is tight and a woman feels stirred to make a difference in her community, often the one resource she has is the one resource her community needs most: her time.

Story Circle Network needs your time and talent to accomplish our mission—*"helping women share the stories of their lives and to raising public awareness of the importance of women's personal histories."* In fact, the strength of our organization depends mightily on the time and talent of our members; so if you want to be more involved, please don't be shy.

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

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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.

SCN Launches Online Editorial Service

by Kendra Bonnett

Strong proposals, award-winning novels and inspiring memoirs need more than a good idea and the fortitude to see it through to completion. Story structure, spelling, word choice, grammar are all critical elements, which is why Story Circle Network is pleased to announce its new service for women writers. Story Circle Network-Editorial Service (SCN-ES) is open to all women with words in need of a tune-up, an overhaul, a polish or even just “one more set of eyes.” The SCN-ES editors can help ensure a writer’s thoughts convey the power, emotion and meaning she intends.

Go to: www.storycircleeditorialservice.org. The connection between a writer and an editor is organic. It’s almost primal in the sense that a good editor *feels* the writer’s work. She appreciates the writer’s style, voice, tone and can look at the work holistically. It’s a creative partnership. And when it works, ideas come to life and words sing. It’s almost magical. This is the objective for SCN-ES. “We’re excited to offer our own editorial service,” says SCN founder Susan Wittig Albert. “We felt it was time, given that more and more of our Story Circle members are publishing their work or actively moving in that direction. We want these women (as well as nonmembers) to have access to top-flight editorial assistance. It does make a difference... I know from working with my own trusted editor.”

How SCN-ES Works

While most editorial services are basically the same, SCN-ES takes the relationship between writer and editor very seriously. “We want our writers and editors to bond,” says Matilda Butler, co-coordinator for the program. While most editorial services are either a one-person shop or a contractor that farms work out to someone in its editing pool, SCNES is different. A writer working with SCN-ES can:

- *Find the service she needs*—we offer copyediting, conceptual editing (developmental or content editing), comprehensive editing (combines both copy and conceptual editing), and proofreading,
- *Get to know the editors*—we provide profiles, quotes, preferred genres and insight into each editor’s editorial technique,

- *Select the editors she would most like to work with*—we ask that a writer select three editors in order of preference; we then compare this list with her project due date and the editors’ prior commitments to find the best fit,
- *Request the editor of her choice*—when time is not a factor and a writer is willing to wait for a particular editor, we will honor that request,
- *Learn in the process*—our editors are selected, in part, because they want to help writers hone their craft and improve the mechanics of writing; they are patient teachers. Through interviews and blog posts, our editors will continue to share tips and techniques with writers,
- *Know the cost of the project in advance*—our charges are in keeping with industry standards, and because our rates are based on page count rather than hours it’s easy to calculate the cost, and finally
- *Feel reassured with the results*—we stand behind the work of our editors.

SCN’s LifeLines Retreat— A Handy Little Workshop

by Penny Appleby

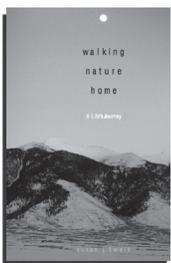
On May 15-17, a group of women gathered at Festival Hill in Round Top, Texas, for Story Circle’s fourth LifeLines writing retreat. It was a wonderful experience of learning and sharing in a lovely environment.

Memoir writer and teacher, Lisa Dale Norton, guided participants through a unique process of writing memoir. Everyone agreed that the process was very helpful—even for the experienced writers who are already writing memoirs.

Norton’s recent book, *Shimmering Images: A Handy Little Guide to Writing Memoir*, was the basis for the workshop; with additional material about a new area she is exploring—the compassionate memoir. To learn more about Lisa Dale Norton visit her website www.lisadalenorton.com.

A Book Signing Event You Won’t Want to Miss!

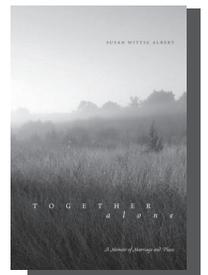
November 2, 2009 • 7-9pm • Be Our Guest
Garrison Chapel at the First United Methodist Church, 1201 Lavaca Street, Austin, Texas



Teacher, gardener, and bestselling author **Susan Wittig Albert** returns with her first nonfiction narrative, *Together, Alone: A Memoir of Marriage and Place*. This beautifully written memoir describes Susan’s experiences of place, marriage, and separateness.

TOGETHER WITH

Ecologist, bestselling author, teacher, and passionate gardener **Susan J. Tweit**. Susan’s latest book, *Walking Nature Home: A Life’s Journey* is her memoir of what nature, Quakerism, and chronic illness taught her about love and life.





Matilda Butler

A Conversation With Matilda & Kendra

by Lisa Shirah-Hiers

Matilda Butler and Kendra Bonnett are the coordinating team behind SCN's new Editorial Service. (You'll be hearing much more about that in our September Journal.) Here, these two fascinating and talented women talk (via email) with Lisa Shirah-Hiers about their work.



Kendra Bonnett

Matilda Butler graduated *magna cum laude* from Boston University. She earned an M.A. in communications from Stanford University and a Ph.D. in social psychology from Northwestern University. Listed in the Who's Who of American Women since 1975, she has taught and conducted research at Stanford, created the nationwide Women's Educational Equity Communications Network, and co-founded Knowledge Access International, a software company specializing in CD-ROM information products. Together with Kendra Bonnett, she co-authored *Rosie's Daughters: The "First Woman To" Generation Tells its Story* which won the 2008 IPPY National Book Award's Bronze Medal. She and Kendra Bonnett now help women tell their life stories in their women's memoir writing classes on line and in person and through a new 5 DVD set, *The [Essential] Women's Memoir Writing Workshop: 21 steps from Planning to Publication*.

An award-winning author with seven books and over 300 magazine articles to her credit, Kendra Bonnett graduated *cum laude* from Arizona State University with degrees in history and anthropology. She completed a Master's in history from the College of William and Mary and further graduate studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara. She was editor of the Women's Educational Equity Communication Network, designed computer curriculum for secondary school students and co-founded *Digit*, one of the first computer magazines for children. She later founded *Profit: Information Technology for Entrepreneurs and Beyond Computing*, a joint magazine publishing venture between IBM and The New York Times and was *Profit's* first Editor in Chief.

SCJ: How did the two of you meet?

KB: Matilda was my first boss. I was just out of graduate school at UC Santa Barbara and wanted a job in San Francisco. ... I had been a temp [at the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research] for a few months and was getting a good reputation for my editing and writing skills when the position of Editor opened with the Women's Educational Equity Communication Network. Along with about 25 others, I interviewed with the associate director. She told Matilda, who was the director, that I was her top choice. Matilda looked at my resume and was hesitant to even interview me. She said, "She doesn't have the right experiences and hasn't written about women's issues." But she agreed to interview me. I knew I was a quick study and persuaded her to give me a try. What a great learning experience! I was responsible for dozens of publications each year.

That was 1979. Thirty years later, we continue to be friends and are now co-authors, colleagues and business partners.

SCJ: Where did the idea for the book come from?

MB: *Rosie's Daughters: The "First Woman To" Generation Tells Its Story* is a collective memoir of women born during WW II and shaped by the '60s, who didn't take "no" for an answer. The idea for the book began to come together in my mind when I

attended the fortieth reunion of my class at National Cathedral School for Girls, a private high school in Washington, D.C. In one joint session, we were seated around tables in the cavernous room where four decades earlier I had studied English Lit, American History, French, and Algebra every afternoon and evening. Representatives of each quinquennial class reunion spoke about their experiences, telling stories that were alternatively humorous and serious because of the momentous times in which we all have lived. I was struck by how the stories of my class differed from those of women who graduated even five years earlier or later.

Once back in my California home, my thoughts returned many times to that session. For the most part, and despite good educations, women who graduated earlier than my class did not seek careers but found fulfillment as wives, mothers, and homemakers. Women who graduated only a few years after my class took their careers and the juggling act of work and family for granted.

My class had a much more complicated and even confused story to tell. When we were in high school, we expected to spend our lives in traditional roles. Some time after that—in fact, at different times for different reasons—unprecedented numbers of us switched tracks and pursued careers. None of us remember thinking, "Well, of course that's what I'll do." Instead, we opened doors and moved in what seemed to be the right direction until

the next doors appeared, then repeated the process. By trial and error, we became proficient in careers that we never imaged when we were in high school. Many of us held jobs in which we were the first woman to ever have that position (hence the phrase “first woman to”). Combining careers and children presented novel challenges, but we were young and energetic.

As a psychologist, my curiosity led me to a formal study of a group I came to call Rosie’s Daughters. I interviewed more than 100 women across the United States and found, in what became a collective memoir of a generation of women on the cusp of change, that my first inkling of a unique group of women was a national phenomenon with stories across this land of common experiences in an uncommon time.

SCJ: What was it like collaborating on Rosie’s Daughters? What did the creative process look like?

KB: As Matilda said, *Rosie’s Daughters* was her idea. She had already done the interviews and had multiple chapters written when she handed me a big pile of papers and said, “Tell me what you think.” The stories told by Rosie’s Daughters really grabbed me, [but] I had lots of questions. Finally, Matilda said, “Will you join me on this book? I think we’re on to something important and we can do more when there are two of us.”

The creative process was definitely messy. We wanted to honor the individual stories, and just using a snippet here and a snippet there didn’t fulfill that need. We wanted to remind readers about the historical context of the last four decades of the 20th century—the adult years of these women’s lives. How could we do that? What about all the quotes Matilda found in the more than 125 memoirs she read that had been written by Rosie’s Daughters—women born between 1940 and 1945?

After months of creative conversations and weeks of research, we came up with an idea we thought would work. We put together a mock-up chapter, which we copied and showed off to friends and family. Nobody liked it, and each person had a different reason. Back to the drawing board. By the third try, we knew we had it right—individual stories at the top of each double-facing page, iconic photos and quotes as sidebars, a 65-year timeline (1941-2005) running across the bottom of pages from the first chapter through the last, and the narrative

occupying the middle of the page. As reviewer author Edith Grotberg said, “[Rosie’s Daughters puts] you...in the middle of this multi-source of information and stimulation. You are part of the action.” That’s just what we wanted.

SCJ: Do you have advice for others seeking a writing partnership?

MB: Kendra and I work well together because each of us has our strengths and we are comfortable with our own strengths and the strengths of the other. We’re open-minded, and I know that if Kendra brings up a point there’s a good reason. We may not always agree but we always work out a solution that is acceptable to both of us.

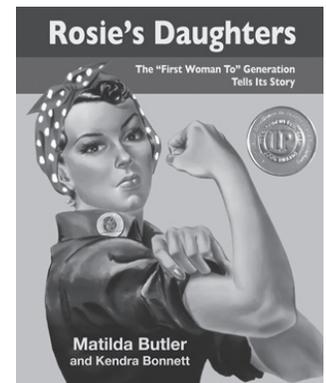
Others seeking a writing partnership need to be clear at the start about how issues will be resolved, who is taking responsibility for which parts of the book or elements of the research, writing, editing process, and how royalties will be divided. A writing relationship is like a business partnership. Everything should be discussed, including how to conclude the relationship if it doesn’t work out.

KB: And 30 years doesn’t hurt. I’m only partly joking. The fact is that good partnerships are few and far between, which is why all of Matilda’s points are critical. You could lose a friendship over a partnership. It requires a level of connection that many marriages never attain, so you have to expect that it might end. Be prepared for that at the outset.

SCJ: What was it like interviewing so many women? What common threads did you find in their stories?

MB: Interviewing more than 100 women for *Rosie’s Daughters* was a life-altering experience. We laughed together; we cried together. Their stories touched my life. In the middle of this process, I found that I dreamed about these women almost nightly. The interviews were long and intense, often lasting three to four hours. Some told me parts of their lives they had never shared with anyone else. I knew I had to find a way to honor those important life stories.

As a researcher, I kept looking for what I thought of as patterns. I never intended to in-



“Gender conservatives who want to dial the clock back say that ‘a woman’s place is in the home.’ That choice is up to each woman, we say. In a free country, no one else has the right to tell me where my ‘place’ is. A second line of resistance is voiced by people who think they are being fair-minded: ‘Women think they can have it all, but no one can have it all.’ That’s certainly true, and we’ll settle for the same amount of ‘all’ that men have always enjoyed—an unchallenged right to work as well as a life partner and a family if desired.”

*~Rosie’s Daughters:
The “First Woman To”
Generation Tells Its Story*

For information on Matilda and Kendra’s memoir classes, books and other products please visit their website: www.WomensMemoirs.com And be sure to watch your September Journal for information about SCN’s new editorial service, which Matilda and Kendra are developing. It’s a story you won’t want to miss.

Conversation continued from page 5

interview so many women; I just kept interviewing thinking that I would eventually find the patterns. Finally, I realized what should have been obvious at the start: every life is unique. To force patterns would trivialize their individual experiences.

Therefore, I organized the chapters by the life stages that almost all women share: education, marriage, children, careers, divorce, and spiritual lives. Then I did a content analysis of the information in the interviews about each of these topics to find the major themes. The chapters flowed from the insights found within the themes.

SCJ: Tell me about your writing workshops.

MB: I'm glad you asked about the writing workshops. I started teaching women's memoir writing in 2006 through local colleges and privately. Not long after that, Kendra began coaching one-on-one. There were women who needed help telling their story and who also wanted help on developing a marketing strategy for their book.

Then in 2008, we began teaching through SCN's wonderful online course program. That took us a step in the direction that we knew we needed to go. Although Kendra teaches on the East coast and I teach in Northern California, there were many women who found us through our website, but who couldn't take our locally offered classes. Fortunately, through SCN, we have the opportunity to work with women no matter where they live.

Now, we've gone one step farther. We have just released a 5-disc DVD set that is based on our all-day classes we teach locally. We call it *The [Essential] Women's Memoir Writing Workshop: 21 Steps from Planning to Publication*. When we decided to develop a DVD of our workshop, we realized we had to create separate lessons and couldn't count on the flow from topic to topic that works in a group setting. The development of the 21 lessons caused us to create more writing exercises as well. The final product includes almost 8 hours of video lessons, 40 writ-

ing exercises, and the electronic version of our 57-page workbook. [We're offering it to SCN members at a discount. In addition, because Alzheimer's is a disease that robs women (and men) of their stories, we are honoring SCN's mission to "help women tell their stories" by donating \$10 for each DVD set sold to the Alzheimer's Association, the leading voluntary health organization in Alzheimer care, support and research.]

SCJ: What do you find most rewarding about working with the women in your classes?

MB: Kendra and I always mention the satisfaction in seeing writers move to a new level in their writing. No matter their proficiency at the point of entry, we love seeing them grow in their writing skills and, of course, in their own satisfaction with stories better told.

SCJ: Why do you think writing our stories is transformative?

KB: Just living life is a full-time proposition. Some years it seems like life is giving us a one-two punch and getting back on our feet is about all we can manage. In those times, we can't imagine we have the energy, resources or strength to write our stories. Besides, who would even care?

Yet telling or writing our stories provides us with the opportunity to lay out the turning points and circumstances, to reflect on our part in the drama, to evaluate the current impact, and, in the best of situations, to dream of the future we want. We never do this without a deliberate effort at life writing, or life talking. During the process, there is time for insights, time to listen to the inner voice that can guide us if only we can ever be quiet enough. Storytelling changes us.

And when we are really lucky, writing our stories can change the lives of our readers... [After reading *Rosie's Daughters*] one woman told us, "I'll never be the same." Reading our book caused

Conversation continued on page 7

...Because Your Story Deserves to be Told

What we may perceive as our ordinary lives can have extraordinary impact on others...this is the power of our legacies.

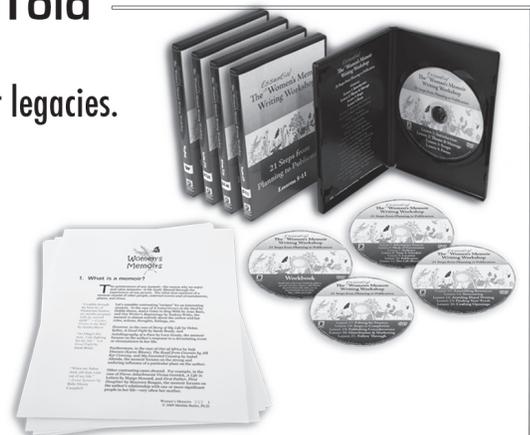
What's keeping you from writing your story?

Matilda Butler and Kendra Bonnett have created the 5-DVD set

The [Essential] Women's Memoir Writing Workshop: 21 Steps from Planning to Publication to help you answer that question and say, "Nothing, Absolutely Nothing."

We're offering this DVD-based course through SCN at a special **DISCOUNT** for you--just \$99, 25% off the regular price. In addition, we're giving \$10 of your order to the Alzheimer's Association, chosen because this disease is robbing too many women (and men) of their stories, their legacies.

For much more information: www.tinyurl.com/scn-dvd



Your DVD course inspired me to start writing the story of my life. -Marilyn D.
I love this DVD because the presenter is experienced and beginner friendly. -Crystal K.
Your Women's Memoir Workshop is very motivating and exceeded my expectations. -Joan E.
Your clearly defined planning and execution steps will guide me in the coming months. -Jackie F.

Conversation continued from page 6

her to look at her life, the good and especially the bad, which she had stuffed down deep. She said it wasn't easy but she was transformed by the process.

SCJ: What do you think is the greatest legacy of Rosies and Rosie's daughters?

KB: I like answering this question because I'm not part of the Rosie's Daughters generation. I'm a Baby Boomer. And the truth is we get so much of the credit for the change, for the expansion of opportunities and willingness to do it all. The fact is, just like all successive generations of women, we too are the benefactors of what the "First Woman To" Generation (the FW2s we call them) has done. They broke down the doors and smashed the glass ceilings. Of course, we're close enough on their heels that the oldest Boomers had to navigate the splinters and broken glass left behind. We just didn't get as many bruised shoulders.

Rosies gave their daughters a legacy of what was possible. They proved that women could do it all. All those Rosie the Riveters didn't brag about their accomplishments. They just did what was necessary, and when the war was over they went home. But there was a powerful message in their accomplishments, and when their daughters needed to find the strength to take charge of their lives, they could draw on their mothers' experiences.

Successive generations—the granddaughters and beyond of Rosie the Riveter—have to keep vigilant. They must not lose this most precious legacy that has been given to them—We Can Do It! It's one of the most valuable gifts each of us will ever receive.

We learn best to listen to our own voices if we are listening at the same time to other women-whose stories, for all our differences, turn out, if we listen well, to be our stories also.

—Barbara Deming

Online Learning Helping Women Write Their Lives: One Story at a Time

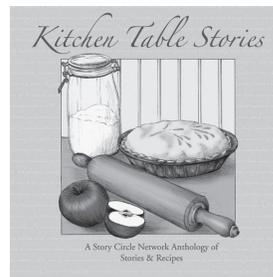
Visit the Online Learning website at www.storycircleonlineclasses.org for the latest class schedule. Our next session runs July 15—September 8, 2009.



The Story Circle Network has offered classes, workshops, conferences, writing and reading circles, and online programs—all designed for women—since 1997.

Our central program focus is writing about our lives—about women's lives. We teach general writing skills, organization, and critical editing, as well as technical skills in book design and development, online marketing, blogging, and other Internet-related activities.

All the Kitchen Table Stories You Love, All Together In One Place



Kitchen Table Stories is a 160-page soft-cover cookbook and story collection from Story Circle Network, including over 70 recipes together with their funny, heartwarming, and touching stories behind those recipes.

Get yours today at
www.storycircle.org/cookbook
Just \$18 per copy plus shipping and handling.

A Story Circle Network LifeWriting Retreat with Robin Edgar

October 2-4, 2009

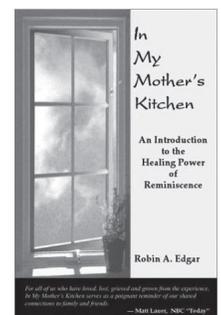
Wild Acres Retreat, Little Switzerland, NC

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

Guests stay in lodges with rooms that have a private bathroom and accommodate up to two guests. There are no televisions or telephones in the rooms. Go to their website at wildacres.org for more information.

Registration is limited to 12 participants. Fees for this weekend retreat of \$225 for SCN members, \$250 for non-members, include a double-occupancy room for two nights and five meals.

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





Take A Bow! Spotighting Our Volunteers New Board Members

by Lisa Shirah-Hiers

The board welcomes five new directors this year. We thought you'd like to know more about them.

A theme common to all our board members is the desire to give back. With diverse and significant talents, a deep love for SCN, and a commitment to our mission, we are sure these creative and energetic women who've just joined our team will do just that. We look forward to seeing what happens next!

Jeanne Guy

Jeanne Guy first joined SCN in 2003 as a representative of Seton Cove when that organization cooperated with SCN to bring Christina Baldwin to Austin. After a brief interlude in California (where she remarried) she returned to Austin in 2007 and renewed her membership. She brings valuable skills as a workshop facilitator and experience as a board member for several other organizations, including the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce and the Zachary Scott Theatre. She has also served as Chair and Secretary of the Pflugerville Chamber of Commerce, chair of several church committees, and chair of the Deutschen Pfest Annual Community Festival.

Jeanne says, "SCN has become increasingly important in my life, aiding my writing, affording a platform to facilitate workshops, providing camaraderie of like-minded women, making me read memoirs as part of the Austin Reading Circle, and offering support of my dream..." That dream is a first book, a work of creative non-fiction based on personal events. As a board member, she "...would enjoy exploring the growth potential of SCN, with ideas to enhance, expand and broaden member services...to investigate and bring training opportunities to the board and Executive Director to grow SCN to the next level." She says SCN is important to her because it "[gives] women and our stories a sense of place in this world, a platform where we can come together, write, share our stories and know our own worth."

Linda Hoye

Linda Hoye reports that she joined SCN in August of 2008 because she "...wanted an opportunity to learn more and connect with other women who were interested in writing their stories." She participates in e-Circle 11 and the reading circle and enjoys listening to SCN's podcast and reading the new SCN Blog. She sees the greatest benefit of SCN as "...the opportunity for women to build their writing skills, to gain confidence in their ability to write." Having a piece published in the December journal and chosen as "Story of the Month" encouraged her to continue to write. She hopes to do the same for other women.

Linda's training and 15 years experience in Information Technology will come in handy, keeping SCN on the forefront of the "information age" and ensuring we are conversant with all the latest technologies. She says, "I joined the board because in the

brief time that I have been a member of SCN I have grown so much as a writer and been encouraged to continue to pursue my dreams. I believe in SCN and want to contribute to the group in any way that I can. I hope...to help members (especially remote members) feel even more connected to the SCN family and to... encourage other women to write their stories."

Martha Meacham

A member of SCN for the last 3 years, Martha says, "SCN has helped me return to the writing and journaling I left behind to pursue an academic career. I realize now that writing is my therapy. I feel SCN has been a community to help me further my interest to write. There are so many opportunities to find and share your voice and such a willing audience to listen." With a 200-page novel that "emerged" while she was working on her dissertation, Martha says SCN has helped her to be "... more authentic in my fictional voice." She has served as VP and Board Member of Literacy Austin and has experience "...using technology tools to teach... and tell stories."

As an educator, Martha says, "I will apply my professional experience to help with conferences, workshops and educational projects." She would also like to help SCN embrace technologies that will benefit members. She says, "I am thrilled to be able to give back to an organization like SCN that means so much to me. Though a relatively new member of SCN, I recognized right away that women with stories to tell are a dynamic and fascinating group! ... What a gift it is to be on the board when there is so much excitement in the air!"

Johnett Scogin

Johnette Scogin says that, "I was first attracted to SCN because it is a group concerned with two things I love and wish to support: writing and a community of women." Shortly after joining SCN a year ago, she and her partner started a story circle in South Austin. The group is going strong with a steady membership. She hopes that in the next few years SCN will "diversify its membership and widen its appeal to younger women." An experienced writer and educator, she is a member of the Austin Poetry Society and brings 25 years experience teaching at all levels—kindergarten to college. Fluent in American Sign Language, she works with deaf and hearing impaired students. She says, "They are often the most struggling writers and therefore

the least willing to take risks. While I realize there are differences in teaching [young people] and adults... I know that learning to write and sharing writing are often areas of great anxiety."

Johnette hopes that SCN will "...[continue] to offer low- cost, high-quality venues for women to improve their craft, to [search] for new ways for women to tell their life stories including those who would do so in other languages." As a board member, she adds, "I hope to be able to give back to the community of women who have made such a difference to me... I have learned so much from other women writers, and have learned that I, too, have much to give."

Judy Whelley

Judy Whelley was introduced to SCN when Susan Albert came to Dayton to promote one of her China Bayles books and to give a talk at the Cox Arboretum. As a member, Judy has enjoyed participating in online reading and writing circles, co-editing the 2008 *True Words Anthology* (with Becca Taylor), helping to edit the *Kitchen Table Stories* and serving as an interviewer for SCN's podcast. She says, "I treasure my reading and writing sisterhood; I have a creative tribe now. I have found inspiration, encouragement, information about writing and publishing, and an opportunity to grow as a writer."

A retired teacher, Judy holds a Doctorate in Special Education. She was a founding member of Choices in Community Living, a network of group homes and assisted living facilities for persons with developmental delays. As co-founder of a charter school, she was responsible for professional development, grant writing and public relations, and now brings these valuable skills to the SCN. She has served on the Board and as President of the Monco Corporation which offers sheltered employment for persons with developmental disabilities. She has held several offices for Camp Emmanuel, a summer program for children with hearing impairments/deafness, and was board member of Rhythm in Shoes, a dance company. She says "SCN is growing by leaps and bounds. It is my desire to add my talent and creativity, to 'put my shoulder to the wheel', and to be part of the 'brain trust' that continues to grow the organization. When asked why she joined the board she says, "I simply wanted to give something back in gratitude for all the benefits I have received through SCN and to, in some small way, perpetuate the organization for other women with stories to tell."

Your *SCN* Anthology Is In Your Mailbox!

This year's anthology was edited by Amber Lea Starfire, publisher and editor of *The Writer's Eye Magazine* and freelance editor, writer, and photographer. Amber earned her M.A. from Stanford University. She has taught at Foothill Community College in Los Altos California, and has developed coursework and training programs for a variety of business clients. She is currently teaching in SCN's online program.

It has been a real honor and pleasure to contribute as Editor to this special edition of *Story Circle Network Anthology*, beginning with the privilege of reading all of the heartfelt stories and poems that were submitted. I dove headfirst into narratives and poetry filled with life's experiences and emotions - tenderness, humor, nostalgia, loss, love, joy, and awe—writing that brought me into the hearts and lives of the courageous women who, in the very act of writing, have exposed pieces of themselves to the world.

The next part of the job, and always my least favorite, was the difficult task of selecting pieces to include and pieces to exclude. I asked myself, "Which stories have the most emotional impact? Which ones make me laugh, cry or smile? And when I have three similar stories, all strong, which one do I include and, therefore, which two do I exclude?" I would love to say that there's an exact science to the selection process, but in the end, the decisions are often subjective.

Finally, there were the tasks of editing and formatting the collective pieces into this 28-page anthology. James Thurber said of an editor, that "he should say to himself, 'How can I help this writer to say it better in his own style?' and avoid, 'How can I show him how I would write it, if it were my piece?'" "It has been my joyful mission to do just that, and I hope that I have been successful in helping each author clarify, refine, and strengthen her own writing. Through this process, I have once again been awakened to the power and beauty of the stories, poems, and songs that we share with one another. As you, the readers and writers of this anthology, partake of the verbal feast in these pages, I hope that you are equally awakened and inspired. Bon appétit!

Amber Starfire



Co-Editor, StoryCircleBookReviews.org

We're looking for a volunteer co-editor for our book review website. Tasks include editing 4-5 reviews per week, requesting 5-6 review copies per week from publishers (we'll show you how to do that), and helping select Review of the Month and Editors' Picks for the monthly eletter. Requirements: editorial ability, Internet/email access. Time required: 2-3 hours per week. Interested? Write to storycircle@storycircle.org





Kitchen Table Stories

Love Cookies

by Gwen McMath

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.

Normally, when I think of baking memories, I remember baking in the kitchen with Mom. I have many wonderful memories of baking with my mother, but nothing can compare to Love Cookies, because, you see, they had the most love in them.

When I was a young girl growing up in Grand Prairie, Texas, I was what you might call a "high-maintenance" child. Since it was in the late 1950s, the labels of "emotionally disturbed" or "prone to anxiety attacks" were not used in connection with children, but I could have easily fit into those categories. It was with these problems that I arrived in the first grade. I had so much self-inflicted perfectionism that every time I could not do something perfectly on the first try, I would get nauseated, throw up, and have to go home. I missed about half of the first grade and ended up with stomach ulcers.

The ulcers made me even more of an odd duck, since there was no cure for them at that time; people thought you had to cure them nutritionally. So every day in second grade I had to march to the lunchroom and drink milk. I also took medication which my mother called my "nerve" pills. I think you now can get the picture of what I meant by "high-maintenance."

It was during this time of my life that some new neighbors moved in across the street. They were a friendly family and had two girls about the age of my sister and me. We all became fast friends. I think it was providential that they moved there when they did and that "Miss Golda" had the opportunity to observe me day to day. Knowing her spiritual convictions, I'm sure she spent quality time praying for my many needs. The family didn't live across the street from us for very long before they had to move away, but luckily for me, we all remained friends. Whenever they moved we still got together and spent days and nights at each other's houses. Because of my many anxieties, it was hard for me to spend the night with other people.

Without saying a word, though, "Miss Golda" always made me feel at home. Because of my ulcers, my diet was very bland; I had trouble finding food I really liked. This was where the Love Cookies came in. Miss Golda always baked these cookies for me every time I came to visit. Those cookies, along with her

gentleness, gracious hospitality, and loving care, eased my anxieties and calmed my many fears so I could enjoy myself.

Miss Golda and her two daughters are still friends of mine. We get together a couple of times a year to visit. The fears and anxieties that I had as a child have long disappeared, but I have never forgotten the lesson of the Love Cookies. For twenty years I taught elementary school, specializing in children with emotional problems. I treasure the secret of the Love Cookies. I am now sharing that secret with you.

Over my lifetime, I have varied the recipe to accommodate every holiday. I have made iced Christmas cookies, Easter cookies, Valentine's Day cookies, and Thanksgiving cookies.

Love Cookies

2 1/2 cups sugar
2 sticks butter
1 teaspoon vanilla
3 eggs
4 cups flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon soda



Mix together well. Chill dough. Cut out shapes or use a drinking glass to make round cookies. Bake at 350 degrees. Sprinkle with cinnamon, ginger, or sugar if desired. They can also be iced.

Oh, yes, I almost forgot. These cookies won't come out right if they're not baked with love. Do you know a child or adult who needs some tender loving care? Bake and take these cookies out into the world and spread a little sunshine. There could be someone on your block who needs some Love Cookies.

A Story Circle Network member since 2003, Gwen McMath has been a Stories from the Heart presenter. She teaches writing at Del Mar College in Corpus Christi, Texas where she lives with her family.

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.

Have you ever wondered what a story circle is, exactly? If you have never been able to participate in a reading or writing circle, or attend SCN events such as the Writing from Life weekend, Lifelines Retreat, or a national Stories from the Heart Conference, you may not realize what makes SCN's story circles so unique.

Our mission statement says, "The Story Circle Network is dedicated to helping women share the stories of their lives and to raising public awareness of the importance of women's personal histories." For this reason, SCN story circles are women-only. Limiting participation to women allows circles to go deeper into issues that might be uncomfortable in a co-ed setting. Experienced workshop facilitators know that the dynamics of a women-only versus a co-ed group are very different. In a co-ed gathering, women often act and speak differently than they do with just women. In the embrace of a circle of writing "sisters," women come out of their shells and feel their kinship through shared life experiences.

SCN circles are usually small—just three to eight women. A small group allows everyone plenty of time to share her writing and to give and receive encouragement.

In a typical SCN face-to-face circle, facilitators hand out the writing topic at the meeting. Participants have five or ten minutes to write. There is no time to worry over word choice or grammar, no time for the internal editor to berate and bellyache. What comes out is spontaneous and free and often very, very beautiful. Over and over again I've heard women experiencing a story circle for the first time say that they never realized what they had inside them, that they really can write.

Story circle feedback is strictly positive and encouraging. Participants are asked not to comment on grammar and not to offer an edit. Instead, comments center on things such as "the line I liked best" or "how the piece made me feel." Often listeners comment on "what the piece made me think about" or "how

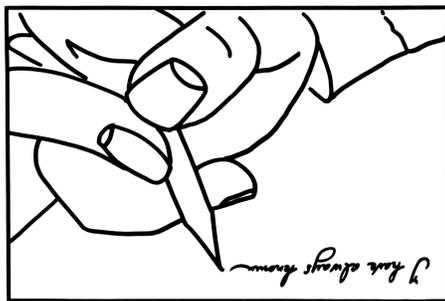
I connected the writer's experience with my own." This kind of feedback allows the writer to see that her experience is unique but at the same time universal, and that she does, indeed, have something important and interesting to say.

If this sounds like something you want in your life, consider joining or starting a circle of your own. You can check the SCN website to see if there is already a circle meeting near you. Go to www.storycircle.org and click on "What We Do" to find the list of circles around the world.

If there is no circle near you, we encourage you to consider forming one of your own. Note that only the facilitator of a story circle need be a member of Story Circle Network—so you can invite friends, put up an ad or poster, send an email invitation. We have outlined everything you need to get started in our Facilitator's Guide. The Guide is free to SCN members, downloadable from the Information tab on the Members-Only website, and just \$3.00 for non-members and can be ordered via the website. Story Circle Network member facilitators may also choose to join our Facilitator's Yahoo group where they can post questions and give and receive advice on organizing and running a circle. And of course, all SCN affiliated circles (those whose facilitators are SCN members) are invited to post their circle description and contact information on our "Story Circles Around the World" page on the SCN website.

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 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 plus shipping and handling, or download for just \$5.00!

If you are a facilitator and would like your circle to be featured in a future issue of the Circles Column, or if you have questions about circles, contact the Circles Coordinator at circles@storycircle.org.



True Words from Real Women

Pets

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

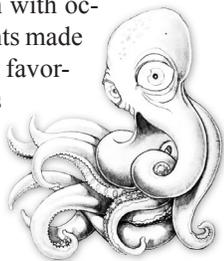
Red Sea Octopus
Rhonda Esakov
 Georgetown TX

In the mid '60s I began my fascination with pets and fish, and of course the sea areas around Jeddah were a perfect breeding ground for me to find unusual pets to bring home. Hermit crabs and starfish were among the first to make it to the tub of seawater I had in my yard.

But my most glorious find was a small octopus. Somehow, I had coaxed a small octopus, no more than 2 feet long, out of its hidey-hole on the edge of the reef. It was so cute (to an 8-year-old little girl) that I just had to take it home. I picked it up and placed it on the small inflatable raft I always seemed to have with me as I explored the tide pools. It clung to the rubber raft willingly and I swam it in to shore to show my latest great find to my parents.

We reached the shore and everyone waded in a couple feet to see this beautiful creature I had brought in. My mom didn't seem to think it was all that great and she wanted me to let it go. I cried and begged and tried to peel it off the raft to show her an even closer view so she could see what a precious pet I had found. Then, with a startling *pop*, the raft popped, I lost my grip, and the octopus slithered one way as I fell back the other way into the water.

How was I to know it had a sharp pointy beak in its mouth? At the first sign of trouble, it stuck out its beak, attacked my raft and swam away. I guess I'm lucky that when it was wrapped around my arm the only thing I had to show for it were the little love hickeys it left where it's suckers had clung. That is one pet I never got to take home, but it started my fascination with octopi and my parents bought and grandparents made little doll octopi for me to have instead. My favorite doll was lost in a London airport (that's another story) but I still have two that I have kept for nearly 40 years.



Jiggs

Lorine Andresen
 Forest Grove OR

My 5th birthday present from Grandpa and Grandma was a rat terrier puppy. He looked like a black, brown, and white jigsaw puzzle. I named him Jiggs.

He went everywhere with my older brother and me, as evidenced in childhood pictures. There he is sitting in our laps dressed in baby clothes, in the bicycle basket, in the coaster wagon, squeezed in between us on the back of our pony or in the car. He loved to ride.

My brother once rigged an old, wicker baby buggy so our cattle dog Teddy and Albert, the goat, could pull it as a team. Jiggs and I were passengers. One day something frightened Albert and they took off down the road, through the ditch, and across the yard. It was a great ride until the team chose to go on opposite sides of a tree.

I flew out of the buggy, while Jiggs hit the tree head on. He lay limp and silent. Mom rushed to my aid, scolding my brother with every step. Once certain I was okay, she picked Jiggs up, legs dangling like wet noodles, carried him to the house, and laid him in his bed. We all cried as Mom bandaged my cuts and picked gravel from my knees. By the time she was through, Jiggs was awake and walking about. He was a tough cookie.

He earned his keep on the farm too, nabbing rats at every opportunity. He'd grab them in the back, shaking them hard, so they couldn't bite his face. Once they were dead, he'd drop them at Dad's feet. Jiggs knew who buttered his bread.

He sat by the road every afternoon, waiting for us to come home from school. He never missed a day.

Jiggs was my grade school playmate and my teenage confidant. When I married, he stayed with Mom and Dad. On visits home, he'd greet me as if I'd never left.

Jiggs was tough, clever, and loyal. More than a pet, he was a gift of love and my best friend.

Old Cat

Shelley Thrasher
 Orange TX

Our Siamese hunches at the gray waterer like a tattered ermine muff, gazes into the shallow liquid as if reading her own fortune.

She jumps onto our brown futon, faces its back and yowls. We call her name—"Bali, Bali." She finally turns around, settles into a ball.

She yowls during the night. Awakened, we call her name. Finally, she quietens, perhaps huddling before the gray waterer, contemplating her future.

Trixie: An Unexpected Gift**Barbara Lindquist Miller**

Austin TX

All I saw was grey fur. The German shepherd straddled my prone, snow-suited, four-year-old-self as I lay on the ground. Sheer terror gripped me as I walked home from kindergarten on a very cold Minneapolis winter afternoon. Those dangling mittens hanging from a ribbon through my jacket sleeves caught her attention and the rest is history.

The fear instilled that day owned me for years. Walking to and from school became a desperate game of finding the blocks where there were no dogs.

One fall evening, during junior high, I came bursting through the back door at home with more than a dozen friends in my wake. The Lindquist house was party central after football games. We were ready to celebrate a win.

Dad no doubt heard us coming and met us in the kitchen. "Wait there! I brought home a surprise for Jan."

Soon he appeared with a large cardboard box that he set in the middle of the floor. We all struggled to see the contents. Dad picked up a small, black bundle and everybody immediately fell in love. My first thought was, "Oh, no! How could he bring a dog into this house? He knows they scare me to death."

There was little sleep that night as I struggled with my fears. The first light of morning brought my younger sister, Jan, and her new dog, Trixie, to my bedside.

"You *have* to hold her!"

As I backed away my lap was filled with a soft, furry creature that was far more afraid than I was. The cocker spaniel puppy was shaking and crying softly. My heart overpowered my head almost immediately. I found myself holding that little creature while whispering softly in her ear.

Trixie soon became a real member of the family. She was rambunctious, fun loving, and endearing. Her ultimate destiny was nearly met several times as she ran after every car that passed the house. She was there to meet me every time I came down the hill from school. The gift was for Jan but I celebrated the loss of an old fear.

Heroes Come In All Sizes**Linda Austin**

St. Louis MO

On a hot July morning the windows of our station wagon were rolled all the way down while we idled in a line of cars and waited for the Yellowstone Park gates to open. We had a Starcraft camper in tow. My sister and I lolled half-asleep in the backseat, Mom and Dad relaxed in the front. The air was still, with a hint of exhaust.

A loud buzzing popped into my brain. Heart stopped in dreaded fear of bugs, I frantically searched for the source of my terror. There it was: a giant furry bumblebee casually hovered inside the car as though trying to decipher the strange box he had gotten into. My sister, roused by squeaks from my paralyzed throat, stiffened against the car door. Fear shot through her eyes as she found the bee. Screaming began in earnest.

Dad and Mom swiveled around in irritation. "What the heck is wrong with you kids," Dad growled.

"Bee!" we yelled, lurching against the doors, against each other, anything to get away from that buzzing around our heads. Somehow we could not even think to open a door to escape!

Backing onto my sister, I caught a stirring in the pile of newspaper strips on the floor. Our hamster had been awakened from his slumber. Inexplicably, the bee landed on the floor of Charlie's cage. Charlie waddled over to the strange thing, peered at it with eyes half shut, then pounced upon it with a bite.

That was the end of the bumblebee.



Mouths hanging silent, my sister and I watched our pet head back to his nest and disappear into its shredding. I imagined Charlie shaking his head and dusting off his paws before falling back to sleep.

I'd like to say that my sister and I learned a lesson that day, of how silly we were to be so afraid of tiny things, but I would be wrong. What we did learn was how valuable our little hamster was, and we loved him more than ever. Charlie—our hero!

Simon the Boneless Kitty**Rose McCorkle**

Austin TX

He took me by surprise when he crawled into my lap at a party, a three-month old rescued grey tabby. But wait a minute: I was a dog person! I had three dogs at home, in fact. It didn't seem to matter for he obviously had chosen me, but did I want to choose him? Did I want to bring kitty chaos into my doggie den? It seemed that the little fellow was ready to leave with me and I couldn't resist, so that's how my new pet, christened Simon, made his way into my home.

He was a friendly cat and, with two small children at home, there was no lack of entertainment for him.

Three-year-old Kaylee would squeal, "Look! Simon likes to hang around my neck!" and hold his feet around her shoulders as if he were a mink stole. Two-year-old Bryce carried the poor

cat upside down, but Simon didn't seem to mind. His body contorted into any position a toddler could wrangle.

Simon never scratched or meowed in pain. He endured every indignity without complaint. He was able to bend into any position: hanging upside-down, over an arm, around a neck. That's how he came to be called "Simon the Boneless Kitty" by family and friends.

No one had ever seen a cat like him. Nor had I, and I probably never will. Our beloved Simon the Boneless Kitty was taken away by a rare feline disorder two years ago. But he lives on in the hearts of the children who shriek with delight when looking at his pictures, laughing, and telling stories of his antics—and in mine as I look into the faces of those children.

More True Words**The Python Under my Grapefruit Tree**

Jamuna Advani
San Ramon CA

It was the summer of 1942 at Jiribam district in the Manipur state of North Eastern India when one of the villagers came to inform my father that some men had killed and brought a big snake. My father went out to see; then he called us to come out, so my mother, grandmother, and I joined the crowd. There lay a creature as if in a deep slumber.

I, seven years old and scared, stood behind my father looking at it, unable to believe my eyes. I was told that it was a python. It had smooth skin with a brown blotchy pattern.

Seven or eight people were standing in a circle. One of the villagers was complaining that he'd lost his goat. He was going to the sugarcane field that crossed the stream bordering the field and backyards of the government quarters. When he saw this big snake he called his friend for help. They decided to contact the police department. Police came to the spot and shot it.

Herpetologists refer two types of python found in India: rock python, found in all parts of India, and regal python, usually found in North Eastern India and Nicobar islands. Pythons are believed to live in cool, shaded areas near rivulets, coming out only at night to hunt for their prey.

I remember it was long, maybe about seven feet. I am not sure which type of python it was. After it was shot, three men from the rivulet pulled out the majestic snake, and laid it under the shade of my grapefruit tree.

As a child the image of the gigantic python remained with me as a scary one. As I grew older, I felt sorry for this beautiful snake with dark brown blotches and smooth skin, a creature that God had created with His meticulous hand. It met a terrible tragedy by losing its life because it was hungry and swallowed somebody's goat. But I was glad it could rest under the shade of my favorite grapefruit and hoped the tree gave peace to its soul.

It's a Secret but I Lichen You

Judy Watkins
Myrtle Creek OR

Okay cat, let's talk about the possibility of you coming to live at our house. It is winter and you can't go on living behind the cafeteria. We will give you a warm home, plenty of food and love, and in exchange we would expect some love and companionship from you. Does that sound like an acceptable arrangement?

Are there some things you neglected to tell me? Your behavior that isn't what I expected. When we have visitors you hide under our bed and don't come out until they are gone. What about the love you promised? You never allow anybody to pet or hold you. You are content on your dad's lap as long as he doesn't try to touch you. You seem to be happiest lying on the arm of his chair or on the table next to it. You want to be close, to be part of the family but not too close.

When dad works in the yard you follow his every footstep. Sometimes you look as though you are wondering if he will

A Sugar Sweet Lesson

Carol Wessling
Bellevue NE

"This is a story about a dog...." How many times have you heard those words? But it's also a story about a human being—me—and the lesson I learned from our dog, Sugar. Sugar came to us as a puppy during a rough time in our marriage. To keep lines of communication open, since the house was full of children, my husband and I went for long walks to talk things out. On one of those walks, we came upon a new litter of puppies. The owner was giving them away and, smitten, we took one home with us.

We called her Sugar and she lived with us for 17 years. However, her last two-to-three years were not healthy ones and, as I look back on that time, I believe Sugar was trying to teach me an important lesson: when to let go.

The first signs of Sugar's coming health problems started when she was about 14 years old. She had some arthritis and would, on occasion, get up rather slowly and walk somewhat gingerly. We kept her as active as possible.

The next thing to go was her hearing; we noticed that she couldn't hear approaching cars, so we had to watch her very carefully.

Then she developed a cataract in one eye; it became difficult for her to see. Yet I continued in denial, refusing to see the inevitable coming at us.

Time dragged on for her, and she became incontinent. We moved her into our garage and, of course, that transition was hard for her to understand. She had always had the run of the house, slept with our children, and was another member of our family. She deteriorated right before our eyes.

Finally one morning, I went to the garage and she was lying there—dead. I had heard her making strange, guttural noises during the night, so I wasn't too surprised, but the guilt I felt was huge. I sensed that place in myself that wanted to hang on to love at all costs.

Her cost was immense.

ever sit still so that you can have your nap.

I'm the one who offered you a home and how do you repay me? In the night when I wake up I often find you lying on my stomach sleeping soundly. You never come near me when I am awake but I am your sleeping companion of choice.

You have lived here for 15 years and I don't expect that you are going to change your ways now. We have loved your unpredictable personality but we often wish you didn't wake up at 4 AM every day wanting your breakfast and to go outdoors. The more we try to ignore you, the louder you purr as you sit right next to our ears. If we continue to pretend we don't hear you, then you meow and cry. What a pain in the neck you are!

Yet, cat, for better or worse—we are a family. You don't run away, so you must be happy with the arrangement too. You have been a good friend, a good companion.

Chloe
Kathy Waller
 Austin TX

Chloe was a tuxedo cat. She had a white Charlie Chaplin mustache, a white nose, a splash of white between gold eyes, and a wicked sense of humor. We lost her last month. She was nearly nineteen years old.

Adopted at six months, Chloe immediately made herself at home, climbing the Christmas tree and stealing pantyhose. She grew into a Velcro cat, always beside me. When I began working long hours, her coat thinned. After I retired, it became thick and glossy again. I'm ashamed I didn't realize how lonely she was.

When I married and moved into an apartment, Chloe protested. She tucked herself into her pristine litter box for the first twenty-four hours, scowling. She was the only cat I've ever known who could purse her lips

Then she and David fell in love.

Several months ago, she began to change. Some days she ate food laced with glucosamine; some days she left it in the dish. She slept for hours—on the sofa, in her basket, in a paper grocery sack. She ceded her position as Head of Townhome Security to a younger friend.

I knew she slept all day to be fresh for David. At night, she sat beside him on the sofa and yelled: "Pet me."

"Stop."

"Pet me again."

David carried her upstairs and provided baby food so she wouldn't walk on him before morning. I would wake to hear the *tsk-tsk-tsk* of midnight snack. Sometimes she tickled him awake so he could hold the plate.

"She's doing fine," he would say.

Finally we had to discuss her future. Sharing the decision wasn't easy.

When Chloe died, we were at home together. While I held her, David went out and bought a blue baby blanket. The next day at the crematorium, we stood together, stroking her for the last time.

I loved Chloe. She was my friend for a third of my life. I miss her vitality and humor and grace and companionship.

But in death, Chloe taught me to share my love and grief. I'm grateful to her for that gift.

My Cat
Cameo Victor
 Elkhart IN

There's a cat
 in my lap
 demanding attention
 draping soft downy purrs
 across this page—stalking
 the pencil jealously
 impatiently
 twitching
 her tail—counterpoint
 to the rhythm of my rhyme.
 She lifts bright coaxing eyes
 green glittering inside a triangle
 puss exploding with tickly antennae.
 Her delicate paws sans claws
 insistently pat at my chin
 till I snatch her up
 warm

heavy

vibrating

stretched

soothing

across

my

heart.

Cameo

A Clutter of Cats
Victoria F. Jessop
 El Cajon CA

When, my husband, the children, and I lived in Japan, the Tiki-Cat came to share our hearts and home. A Japanese Bobtail, white with orange patches and golden eyes, she found me. She lived to keep watch over us, following us all wherever the family went. And when baby Alison was born, Tiki slept under her crib. She was our first cat.

My husband's last duty station was San Diego. We were given a sweet blue point Siamese kitten, Sei-Li. Sei-Li had two batches of kittens, one before she was spayed and one batch a year later! We kept a seal point, Tigra-Bast—the kids named her! Sadly, she died young of feline leukemia. Sei-Li, though, lived many years. Of her second batch, we kept a black kitten we called Misty.

Later, my husband bought me a beautiful seal point Siamese with brilliant blue eyes, Chai-Yai (meaning beautiful), who was my constant companion for the next fourteen years. When she died, I didn't think that I would ever have another cat like Chai, my dear companion, who slept in the curl of my arm.

During this time, a little fluffy blue cat called Sasha came into our lives, gentle but bulimic! After Chai came Jamelah ("Beautiful" in Arabic), another pretty tabby we loved for fifteen years, later joined by Lao-Tai, (Thai Native), a male seal point. During their time together, a friendly, stray, red tabby kitten jumped over the fence. He jumped on my lap, and touched my face gently. Honey Bun—because of the whorls on his sides—Jamelah and Lao-Tai became a fairly peaceful threesome.

Many years later, after Jamelah died, we chose a couple of cats from the Cat Shelter, a white kitten with green eyes, and another, white with red tabby patches, Bejin and Bonita (Japanese and Spanish for Beautiful.) Bejin is a princess and a great lap-sitter, and Bonita has a wistful look. They both bedevil our now venerable Honey, and show him no respect.

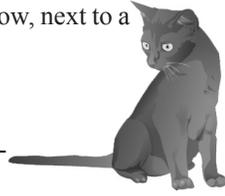
But they have all been happy cats, and we love to share our lives with them.



More True Words

First Date
Stephanie Barko
 Austin TX

A brown mackerel tabby is crouched low, next to a female
 in the back of a latched steel crate.
 He is terrified.
 I peer into the crate and his panic-stricken golden green eyes meet mine.
 “This sucks, doesn’t it?”
 I say, sympathizing with his distress at the appallingly loud environment.
 He stares at me and blinks.
 “It’s a terrible place for a cat”.
 He blinks again.
 We share a long gaze, and then I ask the feline
 “Shall we go into the breakout room and check out each other’s scents?”
 Silently, he blinks.
 “Are you sure?”
 A final blink.



In the reverberating bluster unique to a chain pet store on a Saturday, Choko and I meet. Foster parents line the back of the store next to cages of orphans stacked six feet high.

Foster Dad opens the breakout room and the three of us walk in and sit down on the built-in bench. Paralleling my body, Choko rests on his belly—he is not a lap cat. He lays alongside me, emphasizing his mystery, his independence, his cat-ness.

I stroke him, not requiring much but his presence. Choko stays put as Foster Dad exits the room and the fur person and I are left alone to develop our telepathy.

Shyly and quietly we transmit our signals like an awkward couple upon first encounter, grateful to be temporarily sequestered from the din beyond our enclosure. Time passes.

Foster Dad reenters the room and lays down a gauntlet.

“This is the first day I’ve offered this cat for adoption since he joined my foster group as a kitten five years ago. He has emotional issues, a delicate nervous system. He’s not a beginner cat.” Foster Dad picks Choko up and re-deposits him into his crate. I exit the store to search for a new cat elsewhere.

The next day I arise with Choko on my mind. Like the morning after a subtle first date, his beingness lingers. Is he the one? I visit a shelter full of cats that afternoon, already knowing I am wed to Choko, no matter who is blinking at me.

A Hog in the House
Gerri Hilger
 Hutchinson KS

“Please, Mom, she is house broken and won’t be any trouble. You can’t imagine how cute she is sitting on the couch watching TV with us.”

Kristine, our oldest daughter, was definitely correct. After raising hundreds of feeder pigs on the farm, no part of my imagination included one relaxing in the family room.

Unfortunately, the animal that exited our mini-van with all of Kristine’s other college stuff was neither miniature nor cute. She weighed over a hundred pounds, looked like some biological mistake, but worst of all, she smelled like a pig. Therefore, the vehicle reeked of hog manure.

Adding to this disaster, Kristine’s siblings planned to double date that evening to the prom in this van. Their excited welcome home for their sister quickly became anger and frustration as they got the first whiff of their transportation. Then the family dog got a scent of the porker and went berserk, his growling and barking setting off every dog in the neighborhood. Breaking her leash, the panicked pig ran for the nearby woods. The horses in the adjoining pasture joined the chaos neighing, running the fence, and threatening to bound over.

Kristine finally secured the pig, taking her into the house, much to the dismay of the entire family. However, this was the only way to quiet the neighborhood, which sounded invaded by the Bremen Town musicians. A trip to the car wash and a miracle deodorizer readied the van for the prom.

Though docile, a pig wandering throughout the house was bizarre. One day while hanging clothes in the girls’ upstairs closet, I screamed when the pig—resting below—grunted at me. The frightened animal crapped on the floor. I wanted her evicted. Somehow though, the accident became my fault for frightening her. But, of course!

However, a couple of days later when I found her snuggly sleeping on our bed, she was *gone*. Patience is one thing, but there is only room for one Geraldine in my bed. Really, how could Kristine expect me to accept a pig with my name?

Reading eCircle Facilitator Retires, New Facilitators Named by Lee Ambrose

The Internet Chapter Reading eCircle recently said goodbye to facilitator Helen Lowery. During Helen’s time as facilitator, the circle has grown in numbers and in depth of character. Reading and discussing books by, for, and about women has a way of bringing women from all walks of life to the same well, where sharing is a cool drink for the soul. Helen was instrumental in creating a safe environment for members to come to the well and quench their thirst. With thanks and appreciation for all that she has done for SCN, we wish her well. And at the same time, we welcome two new co-facilitators: Rachel Orozco and Renee Cassese, whose work will begin immediately. We know that the eCircle will continue to thrive under their guidance.

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Lessons From Smudge

Karen Buley
Missoula MT

I was a thrilled eight-year-old when Smudge—an old, black-and-white cocker spaniel—came to live with us. He had belonged to my cousin Eleanor’s uncle, Grattan. Eleanor became his owner after Grattan passed away; we became Smudge’s owners shortly before Eleanor’s wedding.

Smudge acclimated from living in one-person homes to living with our family of seven. Though he became a pal to me and my siblings, I don’t remember how long he was with us. I do remember, though, how devastated I was when, returning home from school one afternoon, Mom told me that Smudge had run away.

I remember walking up and down our block, calling his name. I remember hoping he’d find his way home. And I remember crying, picturing him splayed, bloody, and dead in the middle of an unnamed street.

Mostly what I remember, though, is how angry I was when, years later, Mom told me the truth about Smudge.

“He was sick,” she said, “so we had him put to sleep. Don’t you remember him messing and throwing up?”

I didn’t. I do remember that he smelled—perhaps that was part of his illness. But that memory didn’t dull the anger I felt when I learned that Smudge hadn’t run away.

“I thought it’d be too hard to understand,” Mom explained.

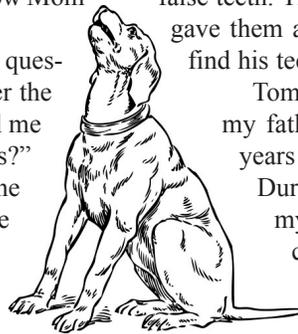
It wouldn’t have been. The tragic death I’d pictured was hard. The truth would have been easier to handle. I know Mom meant well, but I’ll never forget the betrayal I felt.

That memory has shaped my answers to the hard questions my children have since posed to me. I remember the inner turmoil I felt when my seven-year-old said, “Tell me the truth—just tell me the truth! Is there a Santa Claus?”

I didn’t want to answer truthfully. I remembered the sadness I felt when, at age eleven, I learned the true answer to that question. But I also remembered my vow to always be honest with my kids.

So I told him the truth—and he seemed to feel like I did.

Sad.



Sis

Editha Bartley
Rociada NM

Sis was 16 and that is old in dog years. My doctor father noted the body systems fail as one ages and we always hope the failures will be painless, fast, and fatal. Sis, our old Australian shepherd had been failing for a year. We all hoped her heart would just give out, but she kept going because she had jobs to do.

She was the tiny pup I had to tolerate until another owner could be located. Although she was the pick of the litter and a gift, I, who don’t do puppies anymore, agreed to keep her for the day until Mark (her owner) would take her home.

Eight hours with a bundle of black-and-white puppy energy causes instant insanity, and by 5 pm that day she was Little Sister (Sis) and a big part of our lives. Her cow dog intelligence saved us thousands of steps.

In the heat of a cow chase she’d sometimes forget she was supposed to be a heeler; instead she’d become a header, much

Tom
Brenda A. Carr
Jonestown TX

“Come and see the pups,” Rita said. Our parents were out for the evening; we hurried there and back. We chose Tom because he looked the strongest. Tom was a cross between a Pekingese and a Yorkshire terrier but he was very strong. His teeth stuck out a bit at the top making him look a little like an English bulldog, and his front legs were so arranged that they reminded one of cattle in the pastoral scenes of England in the 19th century paintings.

“What is it?” my father said.

First Tom changed the rules—and nobody changed the rules in our house! No longer did dogs sleep in the kitchen by the Aga cooker but Tom managed to find himself a warm place on the parental bed in all of about six weeks. He did this by kicking at the bottom of the heavy kitchen doors with their old iron latches; nobody got any sleep at all. Tom could keep the noise up for hours and then sleep all day.

Tom loved warmth first, his female friends second, and giving the poor cats a very difficult life. He visited friends regularly, taking short cuts through our land and the neighboring farms. Telephone calls would come in from neighboring villages by people offering to drop him off. He would return exhausted and spend the rest of day snoring on the hearth.

My father, along with most men over 60 in Britain, had false teeth. These were ill fitting and, in his last years, he often gave them a rest on the hearth. One day he returned only to find his teeth reduced to a few plastic shards.

Tom played a huge part in our family life and became my father’s chief and firm companion. He lived for 14 years and outlived my father by about a year and a half.

During the last two years I think the little mutt helped my father with his suffering—for he had pancreatic cancer then—more than his wife or any of his six children.

to her master’s dismay. Sis worked horses as well, totally against the rules of this ranch, and Chestnut kicked her twice. He knocked her out once, right in the gate, but that didn’t stop her.

Sis always had a job to do. Calving will be different this spring. Sis was one of the official “clean up the new baby” dogs. She loved it when the new calf ended up by the old wood stove, chilled, and so bewildered with this new world. She knew her job well and the babies loved her attention.

She also understood that her last job was to die with dignity and she carried this out perfectly, as she did everything else in her dog life—but with help. The doctor’s fatal shot was so gentle that Sis died with grace. Her old heart, so full of love, just stopped beating.

Dr. Kervorkian is right. It really is a dog’s life—and death.

More True Words

Puppy Love Carolyn Feingold Bellevue NE



According to my son-in-law, Cameron, their dog Bailey seemed depressed and needed a canine friend. Several trips to the Humane Society later, much growling, bared teeth, and raised hackles on Bailey's part, the family decided Bailey would remain an only dog.

One day as we searched the pet shop for fish food, we stumbled against a box containing four squirming beagle puppies. My granddaughter Abby sank to the floor. Good sense deserted me; I lifted a puppy into her lap. My daughter Katie decided a harmless puppy would be everyone's ideal companion. I offered a puppy loan.

Riding home, snuggling the puppy, I decided to fence my yard and keep the puppy myself. Abby's pleas to hold her puppy, along with thoughts of early rising, afternoon returns home, and dog walking in all weather squelched that fantasy. The puppy was Abby's.

The puppy's arrival home was uneventful. Bailey sniffed him, bared her teeth, and retreated to guard her food bowl. Puppy explored his new surroundings and peed on the kitchen floor.

Cameron's Scottish ancestry inspired Haggis' name. That haggis is considered edible would prove ironic.

Our response to Haggis blurred the drawbacks—the resident dog's territoriality, potty training the puppy, disturbed sleep, and damaged possessions composed a recipe for regret. Giggles and squeals of a little girl receiving puppy kisses outweighed everything else.

On Haggis' third day, he became assertive. At a supposedly safe distance from Bailey, he pointed his nose skyward and bayed a resounding, "Owooo." Bailey growled twice then lunged toward the baying puppy, opening her mouth to enclose much of the smaller dog's head. Haggis and Abby screamed. Cameron disengaged Bailey's mouth from Haggis' head, staunched the blood, and rushed Haggis to the vet. Haggis lived to bay another day, but not at Abby's house.

Five years later, Abby occasionally says she doesn't like Bailey and wishes Haggis lived with her family. To ease her immediate grief, her parents bought her a stuffed dog she named Haggis. He still sleeps on her pillow.

Bailey remains the family's only dog. We avoid all pet stores that sell puppies.



Stormie and the Heineken Doris Anne Roop-Benner Richardson TX

We've always had slugs in our garden—lots of slugs—especially around the hosta plants. We would put bug spray, bug powder—you name it—on these plants to keep the slugs from eating the leaves. Nothing worked and these critters could eat an entire plant in just a few days.

A friend of mine said she had the same problem and found that the way to get rid of them was to put beer in margarine cups and place them under the leaves. The slugs would crawl in the cups—apparently they liked beer—and would drown.

First I had to go buy some margarine in cups and dump out the margarine. Then I filled the cups with Heineken beer, which I rarely drink, but when I do I like the good stuff. I put them out

on Sunday night and could hardly wait till the next day to check and see how many slugs I'd caught. I found no slugs, but the beer was completely gone. I figured it had dried up. I filled them again and the next day same scenario: no slugs, no beer. This went on for five days.

Then came the weekend. Friday night I put out the beer. Early Saturday morning I went out to turn on the pool pump. When I came out from behind the pool equipment fence, there was my dog Stormie slurping up the beer. She looked up at me with her sweet but slightly glazed puppy eyes and seemed to say, "Thanks Mom! Isn't it a great life?"



The Silver Anniversary Abby November Austin TX

Our 25th wedding anniversary morning began warm, threatening to turn Inferno, as I placed the mushy card on his paper. When my sleep-ruffled hubby appeared, he looked surprised. "It's our anniversary?"

"Rich, not just any anniversary, but our 25th, our silver anniversary."

"Sorry, I forgot. I'll make it up with dinner and a movie." A fast save, he had hoped.

"No way! I can't believe you would forget—this of all anniversaries. *Forgetaboutit!*" I stormed off, slamming doors.

I kept expecting romance and roses where none were. Instead, he showered me with quiet and stability to balance my

seesaw whims. Yet, the need for soft and unconditional love and for hugs was very strong that morning.

So I took a new love, who is always there—bad or good hair days, fat or thin jean days—unconditionally. I adopted Kasha, a hyperactive golden ball of fluff, so loving that her little foibles were so easy to overlook: the eaten papers, shoes, and underwear. I am smitten by her moist brown nose, pink tongue, and wagging pendulum of her tail. The 12-year-old dog is still happy to see us even though she has lost an eye and limps.

And when she was wracked by cancer at 13, Kasha allowed me to hold her as the vet eased her through the door of this world into the next, where she now frolicks with squirrels and rabbits, waiting for me to join her.

Giving Back Bevo
Brit Williams
 Austin TX

People proudly boast their beloved animals on sweatshirts and mugs. And I can think of no other animal more widely exhibited than my University's pet: Bevo.

I am the worst Bevo-devotee of all time. It's been my easiest accomplishment. I say accomplishment because if you don't bleed orange or have Bevo tattooed on your forehead by the time you graduate from the University of Texas, people think something is wrong with you. You haven't taken ownership. In fact, you aren't a real Longhorn at all.

Of course, Bevo and I weren't properly introduced until I came to UT for my junior year in college. I wasn't born into a family of orange-blooded Texas Exes and I missed the indoctrination of freshman orientation, so I adopted him later than most.

At first it was exciting, I even boasted Bevo's sticker on my notebook and car bumper. I touted ownership of my new pet for weeks, though I kept him confined to the backyard and forgot to refill his water bowl. Feeding Bevo—body and ego—became too costly. I even had thoughts of putting him down.

I was a fraud, forgoing the burnt-orange blood transfusion. So I gave him back to the people who bled orange just like him. He is a sweet Horn, too hard for me to handle. Maybe I'm more of a dog person.

Bevo is now in the care of people who give him what he needs. They shout victoriously when the tower lights up orange after a win. They look at him and shout, "*We* beat OU!" He's nurtured and fed by a family who faithfully follows his scoreboards, reads his newsletters, and pours money into his name. Bevo's masters boast him on their clothing, pop his gang sign, and pay lots of money to spend every fall weekend watching his mascot dance around in front of the pigskin.

Bevo's Longhorn spirit may elude me, but my respect for this deified animal remains. So on occasion I'll allow my pinky and index fingers up to raise up toward the sky.

Black Furry Freckles
Linda Sievers
 Arcata CA

I saw you sneak into our yard. You were starving. I wouldn't let you into the house. We had had another cat steal its way into our hearts. We had to have him put down.

We kept you outside all winter, then one day I found you in the house. You ran, limping, and hid from me as my husband said, "Let's see if the vet can help."

The vet said you had ear mites and a bad cut on your paw, but you were healthy.

You frightened easily. We couldn't move too quickly because you'd scatter, and when our grandson visited, you stayed outside in the rain for five days watching us from the neighbor's field.

In the evenings you'd walk with us among the rhododendrons. We laughed as you pranced ahead, your black bull's-eye tail swishing against your white backside. While my husband watered the rhodies you followed him, licking water off the leaves.

I've never had a kitty with black furry freckles on his ears. And I've never seen a cat stand on hind tip-toes by the bird bath and dip his paw to test for water before daintily flicking his tongue to taste the cool liquid.

I remember, Sidney, you didn't like it when Gray Kitty joined our family, did you? You had been sick for sometime. As we started to walk with him, I saw you watching us. Remember? I went back and picked you up and carried you on our walk. Later, when I tucked you in your cat bed, I'm so glad I bent down and whispered, "I love you, Sidney. Sleep well."

Next morning, before dawn, I opened the door to let Gray Kitty in. You ran outside. We never saw you again.

Months later Gray Kitty found a cat skeleton under the Pink Diamond rhodie where you liked to nap. My husband said some black furry freckles were still visible.

I've never been able to look at that skeleton, but I know this: you taught me how to love, to be a more understanding person.

I love you, Sidney. Sleep well.

Apology to a Cat Over Sunday Breakfast
Johnett Scogin

Austin TX

Pardon me
 For I forgot
 That you
 Are the most important
 Thing in the Universe
 That stroking your fur
 Attending to your needs
 Will have a greater impact
 On my ultimate happiness
 Than doing the dishes
 Or finishing my breakfast
 While it is still hot
 So, as I bury my fingers
 In the softness
 Of your belly
 Kneading and rubbing you
 As you need and rub against me
 It is partially to say
 Thank you
 For the reminder
 And grounding me
 Immediately
 In reality once more
 Instead of the ego-driven
 Fantasy world
 I daily inhabit
 With others of my kind
 A dull-witted lot
 With our less-evolved
 Sense of the
 Present



*When you open your heart,
you open your mind.*
~Beth Mende Conny



Heather Summerhayes Cariou



Mary Gordon Spence

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The SCN National Conference

Stories from the Heart V

February 5-7, 2010

Wyndham Hotel, Austin, Texas

Plan now to join us for a unique and exciting event: the *fifth* national women's memoir conference of the Story Circle Network!

Stories from the Heart V will bring women from around the country to celebrate our stories and our lives. Through writing, reading, listening, and sharing, we will discover how personal narrative is a healing art, how we can gather our memories, how we can tell our stories. We welcome readers, writers, storytellers, and any woman with a past, present, and future. There will be opportunities to explore difficult or hidden issues, expand our relationships with other women, and discover different modes and media—such as art, dance, and drama—for sharing our stories. Come, learn, share, celebrate with us as we honor our stories!

Our Keynote Speakers

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 Youththeatre 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. Visit her website at <http://www.sixtyfiverosesthebook.com/>

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. Visit her website at <http://www.askmarygordon.com/>

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See the hotel website for more information: 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 at <http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/roommates.new.shtml>

Our Website: www.storycircle.org/Conference

Call for Presenters

Deadline: July 31, 2009

The conference program will feature 20 presentations organized into four concurrent tracks, with five 90-minute presentations in each track. Each presenter will receive a \$40 discount from the full conference fee. The ideas sketched out below are just suggestions—be creative! Make sure your presentation includes at least two opportunities for participants to actually write and share their writing. Our conference is built around interactive presentations rather than lectures. The program tracks are tentative and subject to change.

Proposal Guidelines

We are especially seeking proposals with strong audience interaction/participation, rather than lecture-style presentations that primarily deliver information. Please provide detailed information about the methods you plan to use to accomplish this. When you write your synopsis, remember that it will be used to promote both your presentation and the conference. So take advantage of this opportunity to “sell” your workshop and build excitement about the conference with descriptive, definitive words that go directly to the heart of the matter, explaining your goals for the workshop and the benefits participants can expect. A catchy, definitive presentation title is important. Create something short and sweet that will appeal to conference attendees and whet their appetite.

See a sample proposal that meets the above guidelines at <http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/sample.html>

Story Circle reserves the right to polish and/or make minor changes to presentation titles and synopses to improve marketability.

NOTE: individual presenters may not create a panel presentation. You may co-present with another person(s); multiple presenters must be named and have bios included within the original application.

Presenters do not have to be members of Story Circle, but must register for (at minimum) one day’s attendance at the conference. Your registration and payment (at either the member or non-member rate) must be received by October 15, 2009. Presenters will receive a discount: full registration will be discounted by \$40, Saturday only by \$25, Sunday only by \$15. Panelists will receive a \$15 discount from the full conference fee.

NOTE: “double” discount people (those who are both presenters & panelists) should take the higher discount, not both.

Submitting a Proposal

Please fill out the form on our website at:
<http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/frmpresenter.php>
or email your proposal to
confprogram@storycircle.org

The deadline for all proposals is July 31, 2009

Tentative Program Tracks

Track A. Circles of Creativity

We invite writing circle facilitators (SCN story circles, Internet Chapter circles, OWL-Circles) to use some of their favorite prompts to lead a writing circle.

Track B. Nuts & Bolts

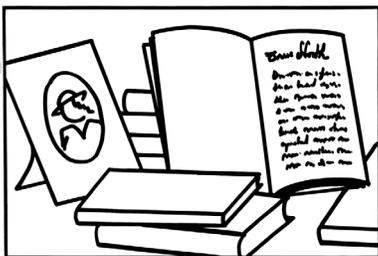
Some possibilities include self publishing; genre options for personal writing (autobiography, memoir, fiction); writing a family history; relating the history of a community, business or organization; fictionalizing your story; organizing a memoir; telling another person’s story (your mother’s, grandmother’s); harvesting our journals.

Track C. Putting Our Hearts on Paper

Some possibilities include techniques for accessing our inner wisdom; writing an ethical will; writing spiritual autobiography; writing as a tool for building relationships, healing emotional wounds, and/or giving a gift to loved ones; journal writing as a tool for increasing self-awareness, accessing deeper levels of experience, and/or learning to trust, appreciate, and celebrate our own process.

Track D. Myriad Methods of Storytelling: Focus on Time & Place

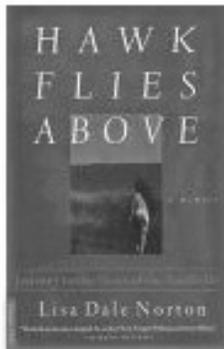
Some possibilities include telling stories through media such as sculpture, dance, art, poetry, oral storytelling, and scrapbooking; telling stories that reflect multicultural experiences; telling stories that include several points of view; enhancing stories through the use of genealogical research; and specific techniques for re-viving memories.



Story Circle Network's Book Reviews Books for the Journey

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

Review of the Month



Hawk Flies Above
by Lisa Dale Norton

Beacon Press, 2007.
ISBN 978-0-8070-7273-8.

Reviewed by Edith O'Nuallain

In her book *Hawk Flies Above* author Lisa Dale Norton combines memoir and nature writing to evoke stories and images from her childhood. She recalls long, lazy summer days spent with her family at their cabin beside Lake Ericson

in the midst of the Nebraskan Sandhills.

But the magic ended the day her mother left home, leaving behind a family broken, shocked, and vulnerable. Lisa's sense of separateness and loss haunted her for years as she moved from place to place. It was in one of these half-way towns which functioned for her as temporary destinations throughout this restless period that she finally met her nemesis, coming face to face with death, on the day she was attacked and raped. Somehow, years after this horrifying ordeal, she found herself back in the family cabin in the heart of the landscape she loved. During the long spring, summer and fall sojourn here she began finally to piece together her memories and her life. In the end, it was this land that she cherished, and the multitude of her memories bound up within it, that led to her healing. Quite simply, the deep, life-long love she harboured for her childhood retreat, the landscape of her soul, ultimately gave her a reason for going on. She writes, "you can have my innocence; you can have my trust; but you cannot have the things I love." (pg. 184)

While this book is itself the memoir of a troubled young woman, it is also a primer of sorts in writing memoirs. Scattered throughout the tales of her childhood, the author regularly pauses to reflect upon the meanings of her memories. Thus she considers treasured memories as ways of "reconnecting with something lost, something sacred." In telling her story, she discovers that "Story nurtures. I tell a story and I feel more whole." (pg. 35) She also notes that in telling our stories we not only remember and thereby honor our memories, but we then have the opportunity to let these memories go, allowing them to become the means of transforming our present and future lives, so that they become "part of the path that leads to the genesis of a new magical world, one built from the luminescent pieces of the life I lead now."

(pg. 38) This appears to be an earlier version of what would later become Norton's concept of "Shimmering Images" the title of her later book about writing memoirs.

Like many of us, Norton found it difficult to actually begin writing. But eventually the day arrived when she sat down to begin her story. "I cannot recall what those first words were, so many times rewritten since then, but that I had begun, finally, the story I had said I would write, even though I did not know what I was trying to say, or how to say it, and the relief was immense. Once over the edge and into the work, I could not stop." (pg. 140) As she continued to write she realised that her identity was inextricably intertwined with her memories of the Nebraskan prairie sandhills. "This place is lined with my stories...any tale I can tell is woven with knowledge I carry from a childhood spent exploring sandy prairie." (pg. 158) Ultimately, this memoir recounts a tale in which Norton is transformed.

One of the most striking features of the book's structure is that each chapter is punctuated by an evocative and lyrical piece entitled "Notebook" which focuses on a plant or bird indigenous to the Ericson Sandhills, and meaningful to her personally. In the end she was not only healed by the land but she also learned a valuable lesson about how to live a life. In the end, she discovers that compassion and love for ourselves, for others and for the land we inhabit overcome separateness and link us together in an intricate web of connections.

Book Review Editor Wisniewski Retires

Co-editor Linda Wisniewski is retiring from StoryCircleBookReviews to pursue her own writing work. Linda has served for nearly two years and is a ten-year member of SCN and the Internet Chapter. In addition to her work on the BookReview site, she has facilitated an e-circle, written reviews, and was one of the editors of the Kitchen Table Stories anthology. She is a member of the SCN board and a regional representative of the International Women's Writing Guild.



Linda is the author of *Off Kilter: A Woman's Journey to Peace with Scoliosis, Her Mother, and Her Polish Heritage* (Pearlson Press, 2008), and numerous newspaper articles and columns. You can keep up with her latest activities on her website: www.lindawis.com. We're very grateful to Linda for sharing so much of herself with Story Circle! (And if you're interested in becoming a BookReview editor, check out the box on p. 9)

How I Discovered Story Circle Network Fulfillment in Sharing my Stories

by Marsha Brandsdorfer, Mountain View CA

I was a subscriber of the *Writer's Digest* magazine and saw an ad about the Story Circle Network in the publication, so I sent away for a sample journal and also reviewed the SCN website. I was initially curious about this writers organization, a writing group just for women, emphasizing women's memoir writing. The mission: to encourage women to tell their stories and write about their lives.

I related immediately as my memoir, *The Accidental Secretary*, was about to go to press. The main theme of my book was about working for attorneys for over two decades. I wrote my book to share my experiences and to allow other women who have gone through difficulties in their working relationships to know that they are not alone in some of their ordeals.

One interesting problem I encountered while working was the way I was treated for being single. For example, when I asked one attorney for a raise after working for him for over a year, he told me that I did not need any more money. His excuse was that I was going to get married and have someone else take care of me. It was irrelevant to him to reward me for the good work I did for him. When firms were cutting back, I was the first to go. Since I didn't have any children to support, employers felt I didn't need any money. Try telling that to my landlord.

Susan Ideus reviewed my book. Her positive review can be found on Story Circle's website at:
www.storycirclebookreviews.org/reviews/secretary.shtml

As a member, I receive the quarterly *Story Circle Journal*. In the *True Words from Real Women* section, a theme is given to write about for each issue, and contributions from members are considered for publication. When one of my friends committed suicide in December, I wrote a short article about him. My story, "My Friend Jim," was published in the March issue of the *Journal*.

It is fulfilling to have another outlet for my writing and to share my stories with other women writers and readers.

How Did You Discover SCN?

Please share *your* story of how *you* found Story Circle Network, and how it has changed your life. If you can send your writing via email or as a Word attachment, the editors will love you. 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.



This membership is a gift.

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Annual Membership:

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

3/09

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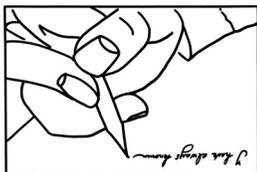
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True Words Looking Ahead

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:

***The Blessings of a Burden*—September 2009 (due July 15)**
***Simplicity*—December 2009 (due October 15)**

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

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

Story Circle Network, Inc.
PO Box 500127
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Mark Your Calendar SCN Events & Deadlines

June 14: *Be Our Guest!* With SCN & Central TX Story Telling Guild members. Find details on the website calendar.

July 1: Submission deadline for *The Susan Wittig Albert LifeWriting Competition*.

July 12: SCN Board Meeting.

July 15: Deadline for *September Story Circle Journal* submissions. True Words theme: "The Blessings of a Burden." We're also accepting submissions for Kitchen Table Stories, How I Discovered Story Circle Network, and Circles: The Heart of Story Circle Network.

July 15: Online Classes begin. Visit www.storycircleonlineclasses.org

July 31: Deadline for *Stories from the Heart V Program Proposals*.

October 2-4: *LifeWriting Retreat With Robin Edgar*. See page 7 for details. Limited spaces available...register now!

Nov 2: *Be Our Guest!* See the details on page 3.



Stories from the Heart V
February 5-7, 2010
Details on pages 20-21

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