



STORY CIRCLE JOURNAL

Vol. 14 No. 2, June, 2010

The newsletter for women with stories to tell...

SCN Salutes and Remembers Liz Carpenter



Women's advocate, writer,
and Story Circle Network member.

September 1, 1920 - March 20, 2010

*"There's only one Liz.
There's never been one like her,
and there'll never be another one."
~Shirley James*

This issue is dedicated to the memory of Liz Carpenter. Read "Remember Liz" on pages 4 and 5, and the "Kitchen Table Stories-Volcano Woman" on page 22.

Susan Wittig Albert Lifewriting Contest 2010

**Contest Entries Accepted
Monday, May 17 through Friday, July 2**

SCN is proud to announce its eleventh annual lifewriting competition named in honor of our founder, Susan Wittig Albert. This year's topic focuses on "Letting Go." Here are some wise words to get you started.

*"And then it hit me—control isn't power; it's fear. Real power is letting go."
~Nancy Aronie*

*"Breathe. Let go. And remind yourself that this very moment is the
only one you know you have for sure."
~Oprah Winfrey*

Write about a time you had to let go to move forward, a time when you recognized that holding on no longer made sense. What made you realize it was time to let go? How hard was it to do? What steps did you take? What did you learn along the way? How did the experience of letting go change you? How did it change your life? (Thank you, Mary Jo Doig, for this topic.)

The contest is open to dues-paying members of SCN and will be coordinated by SCN President Lisa Shirah-Hiers and Executive Director Peggy Moody. For contest entry fee, entry form, and further information, visit

www.storycircle.org/Contests

From the Heart 2010

Time for reflection
time
for connection
for sharing
buried
secrets
and opening
our hearts
to fellow sisters
feelings, fragile...
and sometimes
knowing tears
Sisters in joy
Sisters in pain
Sisters all.
We silently sit
and honor each one
as we listen
and silently
applaud.

Nancilynn Saylor
From the Heart 2010



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Members only—view the color, online
version of the *Journal* at:
[http://www.storycircle.org/members/
pdfs/scjournal.pdf](http://www.storycircle.org/members/pdfs/scjournal.pdf)

Letter From SCN's President—



The Magic of Fifteen Minutes (or, When You Can't Do a Lot, Do a Little)

This April I suffered an illness that laid me flat for almost three weeks—not that I could actually lay flat for that long. Like most women, I've got too much to do: articles to write, students to teach, a husband and daughter who need me and whom I want to spend time with, and many other people counting on me, too. So rather than drop out completely, I fell back on my favorite personal maxim, "When you can't do a lot, do a little." It works for cleaning closets, paying bills, folding laundry, reading a book, researching a thesis or writing your memoir. Every "big" thing we do in life is actually a series of small, discrete actions, what I call the "fifteen-minuteses" of life. Spend them wisely and you make progress. Waste them and you'll just spin your wheels.

There are lots of fifteen-minute blocks of time in a twenty-four-hour day, but we discount them. We think to ourselves, "Well, it isn't really worth getting started since I'll just have to stop when [fill in the blank]." The problem is, life never stops. There will never be a magical day when absolutely everything has been crossed off your to-do list, no one needs you, and you can finally focus on doing what you've "been meaning to do" and write down your stories. "True," you say, "So I will just have to 'make' time." What an odd expression! Time is time. We get twenty-four hours a day and that's it! "Finding time" is equally meaningless. We all know time doesn't just fall in your lap. You have to *go looking*.

What "making" or "finding" time really means is that you have to stop doing one activity to make space for another. Trouble is, telling yourself that you must give something up makes you want it more. No sooner do you make a plan and your inner adolescent (or toddler) is going to tell your smiling, well-reasoned, disciplined self to go jump in a lake! "What! Give up my sleeping-in time, my TV time, my bargain-hunting, friend-texting, cell-gossiping, book-reading, email-checking, twittering time?" The way to gain the inner adolescent's cooperation is to reassure her she can go back to whatever she wants to do...in fifteen minutes.

This is hard for everybody. Even professional writers (who must have chosen their careers because on some level they like to write) approach "having" to write the way my eleven-year old approaches "having" to clean her room. You peer through your mind's door at all the treasures and trash piled willy-nilly and simply can't think where to begin. The way out is to do what we teach in our SCN workshops and circles. Set a timer. Pull up a chair. Take up a pen. Choose one prompt, thought, memory or phrase and see where it takes you. When the timer goes off, stop. I know, I know. By then you won't want to. That's the *real* reason we don't like taking baby steps. It's frustrating to stop when you're getting somewhere. It's also hard to believe that you'll ever get there when you divide a big job into such tiny chunks. But the truth is, the fifteen minuteses can really add up.

If you don't believe me, put it to the test. Make it a game. Pretend you are hunting a common but timid animal, one that's hard to spot in the camouflage of daily life. Look for those odd fifteen-minute blocks when you're waiting in the doctor's office, or stuck in a long line. Challenge yourself to turn off the TV and telephone, leave the last few emails or the last load of towels for tomorrow. See what happens if you just drop out *for fifteen minutes*. You may not really, literally, be able to *make* time to write, but if you look carefully you will *find* the time.

~Lisa Shirah-Hiers

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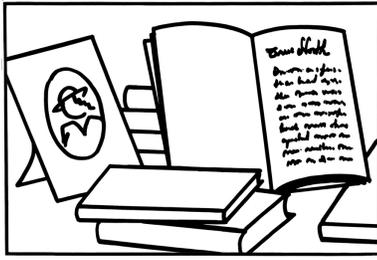
One Year \$35 US
 \$45 Canada and Mexico
 \$50 elsewhere

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

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

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

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



Story Circle Network's Book Reviews

The NEW StoryCircleBookReviews

by Susan Wittig Albert, Coordinating Editor, SCBR

If you've been following our website, you know that we've added a bevy of new features in the past few months. And if you haven't, why not? Better zip on over to www.storycirclebookreviews and see what's been going on while your back is turned!

Advertising Opportunities at SCBR!

This is big news for SCBR, and we hope for all our author members, as well. The SCN board recently approved the posting of advertising on the website. When you visit, you'll see the ads displayed on the right-hand side of the page. This is a rotating display that appears on our home page and on the review pages posted since the beginning of this year. The advertising revenue helps to support SCN's many programs for women.

You're an author? Please consider advertising on our site as you design your promotional plan. We are the largest women's book review site on the Internet. Our readers visit in search of good books by, for, and about women. They come to us because they are aware that the Story Circle Network is a unique and important voice for women readers and writers. Advertising with us allows you to take advantage of SCN's growing reputation in the international community of women writers and the relationships we have built there.

We accept ads that feature books by, for, and about women; writing workshops/classes/events; and other book- or writing-related items. For details and prices, go here: <http://www.storycirclebookreviews.org/frmadvertising.php>

SCBR on Twitter and Facebook

You can keep up with us on Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/storycirclebookreviews>) and Twitter (<http://twitter.com/SCNBookReviews>). We post reviews on these sites.

Who Pays for The Website?

Story Circle Network pays the bills for our website, and volunteer editors and book reviewers provide the content. You can also lend your support by buying books through our links to Amazon and by making a donation.

If you agree that women's voices must be heard and women's books must be supported, please support us!

Changes on Our Editorial Team

Susan Ideus, editor and coordinator of the SCBR review team, has elected to move on to other projects. We've enjoyed working with her very much and value her important contributions to the site. Many thanks, Susan, for all you have done over the past several years!

Judy Miller has taken Susan's place as coordinator of the review team. Judy also posts our SCBR review updates to Story Circle's blog, Telling HerStories, at <http://storycircle.typepad.com/>. You'll find her posts in the category "Book Learning."

Current members of our editorial team: Linda Hoye, Distribution Editor; Judy Miller, Review Team Coordinator; and Laura Hulka and Susan Andrus, Editors. These volunteers contribute many hours each month to the site. Thanks to them for sharing their time, energy, skills, and wisdom!

New Book Distribution Blog

Linda Hoye and Susan Ideus have designed and created a new blog for our reviewers. It displays the books that we've received and invites the 70 members of our review team to "claim" them for review. It's an attractive and easy-to-use tool that helps us keep in touch with our reviewers and helps us keep the books and reviews flowing.

You'd like to review for us? Here's the scoop: <http://www.storycirclebookreviews.org/reviewingforscbr.shtml>

Home Page Makeover

We've made some important changes to the home page. Our monthly Editors' Picks (books that powerfully represent SCN's mission to support women's stories) are now displayed in a "slide show" format. Under that display, you'll see our Review of the Month: a strongly written review that is an excellent example of the kind of reviews we are looking for on our site. We are now also prominently featuring each new review via our Twitter posts, in our "Latest News & Reviews" section.

Story Circle Network's Mission

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



Wordweavers Writing Circle Remember Liz

With Introduction by PJ Pierce

Liz Carpenter was a charter member of Wordweavers, the writing circle I started seven years ago. By that time, she was 82 and had already written millions of words during her years as a Washington D.C. journalist and then as White House press secretary to Lady Bird Johnson. She had four book-length memoirs to her credit as well.

Long accustomed to pounding out her works on a manual Smith Corona typewriter and more recently on her Apple computer keyboard, Liz was finding it harder and harder even to hold a pen in her arthritic hands. So she began economizing on the words she wrote with pen on paper. At our Wordweaver meetings, Liz would read her short timed-writings aloud and from time to time would bring a prepared piece as is the practice in our group.

Liz's favorite writing subjects involved her childhood in Salado and Austin. In conversation about those early days, she usually started this way: "I grew up in a family of words with a mother who recited poetry on a daily basis."

Liz was descended from two Scottish families, the Robertsons and the Sutherlands. Both families settled in colonial Texas in the early 1800s and played important roles in Texas history. Many of her memories centered in and around the old Home Place in Salado, a 22-room mansion built in 1856 by her great grandfather and still owned by the Robertson family. When Wordweavers pulled "fragrance" out of the cigar box full of writing prompts, Liz's response was automatic. "Lavender," she said without hesitation.

"The Robertson Home Place has a great big yard and in the corner is a marvelous old lavender tree," she wrote. "According to family legend, it had been a cutting brought by my ancestors from Tennessee and planted there. I have a descendant of it in my yard here in Austin. Lavender was a fragrance favored by southern women.

"As children, we used go out in the yard, pull off the blossoms and rub them between our fingers. My mother and my grandmother would take branches of lavender and put them between the linens in the closet so they would smell good. When my cousins and I snuggled into the sheets at night, we breathed in the scent. To this day, I feel nurtured when I get a whiff of lavender."

During her last two years, when Liz couldn't leave her house on the cliff in Westlake anymore, Wordweavers began holding our monthly meetings around her dining table. When the sun went down, the Austin skyline gleamed white against the navy blue sky -- a panorama framed by Liz's huge picture window. In her more poetic moments, Liz would refer to the scene with her mother's words about their beloved town: "Athens on the hill." When it finally became impossible for her to create words on paper, Liz was content to sit in her wheelchair at the head of the table, listen as we read, and then offer her insights.

Liz took her last labored breath and finally released her eager grasp of life on March 20, 2010. Her lavender bush had just awakened and was sending out its first faint fragrance. Of the many gifts Liz gave me during our fifteen-year friendship, perhaps what I treasure most are her humor, her wisdom, and her unending enthusiasm for life.

Gwen Gibson

As a friend, Liz Carpenter was delightful, demanding, loyal, giving and a barrel of fun. As a reporter, she was tireless and resourceful, covering Congress, the White House and the Washington social scene—where the gossip is passed with the hors d'oeuvres—like a vacuum cleaner. In the White House, as press secretary and chief-of-staff to Lady Bird Johnson, Liz set new precedents for fairness, openness and humor in public office. When a reporter needed a favor, Liz went the distance. Once, when I was a reporter for the New York Herald Tribune, Liz arranged an exclusive interview for me with the First Lady—by inviting me to interview her in a helicopter as we flew over the Appalachian Mountains. Liz broke the mold in so many ways; there will never be another like her.

Jo Virgil

I have a hard time remembering the very first time I met Liz. In retrospect, I think that's because she was always so personable,

so genuine, that I felt that I had always known her. I had heard of her, of course, so you would think there would be a "Wow" factor at work at our first meeting, but looking back, I can't recall a time when I hadn't yet considered her a friend.

Liz's most treasured gift to me was her attitude toward life, in all of life's tricky forms. She always had a sense of humor, but her humor was embedded with wisdom, compassion, and insight. She had strong opinions and beliefs, but that didn't keep her from engaging in, even encouraging, mutually respectful conversation with those who disagreed with her. She was an incredibly strong woman, but she had smooth edges. She knew how to balance the toughness that her profession demanded with the tenderness that her meaningful relationships required.

Liz spent most of her life in the public eye. We all know how fame can taint a person, distorting reality in bizarre ways. But

Liz lived her public life in such grace. She didn't fall to the temptation of being full of herself, but she was satisfied with who she was. She seemed to forgive her own flaws as readily as she forgave those of others.

Liz's gift to me was showing me what a balanced life looks like.

Martha Iglehart

Liz's dining room had a huge picture window that captured a panoramic view of downtown Austin and all of its famous landmarks--- the capitol building, the UT tower, and Lady Bird Lake. To see that view at dusk was a gift to me from Liz and God. That captivating and mesmerizing vista was the perfect backdrop for spending moments with someone who was a living history book filled with humor. Her humor made me laugh, her wisdom made me think, and her hospitality made me feel special.

Paullette MacDougal

Liz's gift to me... Which one would you like to hear about? Her magnetic personality and infinite capacity for friendship? Her flamboyant style? Her bubbling optimism? Her generosity of spirit? Her love of music?

Knowing she loved to sing (so do I), I went to her home to sing with her. It was the spring before the end, when she was bedridden. I chose CDs from my collection, romantic old standards, the kind Frank Sinatra had made popular. These CDs had only the accompaniment, so Liz and I could be a duet, without the intrusion of a "pro" singer like Frank.

I sat next to her on her bed, and we sang, "My Funny Valentine," "As Time Goes By," and other oldies. In between songs she interviewed me, as was her habit, to interview anyone within earshot.

After we sang, she gave me one of her books, autographed, "To Paullette, Cheers and Harmony..." What a way she had with words! Isn't harmony a great thing to wish someone? My dictionary defines it with words like "concord, peace, friendship, perfect balance of all parts," as well as "agreeable sounds, as in music." Yes, harmony is a perfect gift, and a fine remembrance of a great lady.

Bonnie Watkins

Three years ago our SCN group Wordweavers had a retreat at PJ's Sunday House. Liz wrote on her trademark loose sheets of paper, the journalist's tear sheets ready to be rushed off to press. She told us that she always wanted to write a novel and gifted us with her reel-'em-in opener: "Nineteen brides had walked down that staircase." Then she catalogued the number of steps, divorces, babies and grand babies in the first paragraph! Wouldn't it be another great gift if among her papers someone found more pages of that novel?



Lael Seagert

On Liz's sixty-fifth birthday, September 1, 1985, there was a grand party. Liz asked each of us to wear a 1920s costume and to sing a solo. I remembered Olive Oyl, a cartoon character, girlfriend of Popeye, who sang I Want To Be Loved By You, which I had to order from Warner Brothers. What frightened me the most was forgetting the words, but I practiced, and went out on the generous stage with the Steinway piano and Alma Jean Ward accompanying me. I sang it and remembered all the words! Thank you, Liz, for making us do more than we thought we could.

In 1987, six of us, Alma Jean Ward, Coleen Hardin, Martha Deatherage, Henrietta Jacobsen, Fred Ward, and I went with Liz on a tour of East Texas to promote her new book, Getting Better All The Time. Liz had us billeted in elegant homes along the way, and we sang on first class stages with pianos as well as in gymnasiums with AJ playing an electric keyboard. Liz sang with us, and always had interesting remarks to add. After that, the Getting Better All the Time Singers appeared at the Junior League Christmas affair. Our ranks grew over time. Later, when we sang at the LBJ Library, a newspaper picture of the GBATTS, as Henrietta had named us by then, appeared. A scrapbook reminds us of all the places we sang, including a performance in Dallas at Lady Bird Johnson's seventy-fifth birthday.

Liz's gift to each of us was so amazing, so heartwarming, and so unforgettable. Thank you, Liz, for sharing your remarkable life with us.

By Dita Dauti

Springtime in Central Texas makes me think of everyone I love and care for, close by and afar. This time I am thinking of my dear friend Elizabeth 'Liz' Carpenter, our times together, her supporting advice, her love of music and nature, and her love for spoken and written words.

I am missing her as I am reading the poem "Hummingbird Pauses at the Trumpet Vine" by Mary Oliver, from her book New and Selected Poems: Volume One. I know Liz would love this poem too, especially the following lines:

...and who doesn't want
to live with the brisk
motor of his heart
singing...

Monica Solomon

Haiku for Liz

Living history
Liz at dining room table
Woman connecting

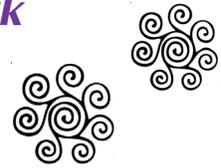
Woman connecting
Liz at dining room table
Living history



Circles: The Heart of Story Circle Network

OWL-A Special Circle

by Lisa Shirah-Hiers



A Story Circle is a group of women who come together to read, write, and celebrate the stories of their lives. A Circle may be made up of as few as two or three people, or as many as twenty. Each meeting of your Circle will probably include a period of writing, a time for voluntary reading, and discussion. Some Circles have chosen to share a meal or refreshments before they settle down to writing and reading. One group has even organized an optional yoga session and a period of meditation.

Listening to the OWLS

By Carolyn McCraw, Houston, TX

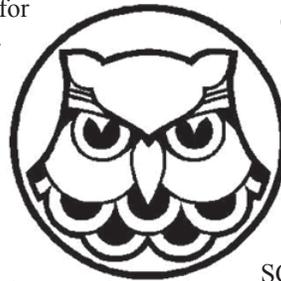
I couldn't have imagined that I would be spending two hours every Wednesday listening to owls. These owls are wise, unique, and fascinating. They are recognized as the Older Women Legacy (OWL) writers of Lone Star College-North Harris. A weekly class is set up to showcase their stories during the fall and spring semesters. These owls hold me in awe of their dynamic story telling. Every Wednesday I listen to wonderful stories that unfolded in this very diverse group of women. What fond memories, delightful events, and sometimes sad recollections are brought forth at our gatherings.

I have quickly adapted to the owl routine. The owl teacher is very dedicated and passionate about memoir writing. She kindly shares her expertise with us and sets the tone for her owls to follow. Under the owl teacher's great leadership and clear direction so many stories are unfurled. These stories leap from the printed pages into our hearts. The reading, writing, and sharing of the stories have been very therapeutic for me. It has felt so good to have a devoted audience that shares my story telling passion.

The owls have so many stories to tell. On any given Wednesday we listen to stories about weddings, best friends, mothers, fathers, first loves, road trips, mashed potatoes, letting go, jobs, marriages, divorces, first homes, high heels, and so much more. In March of this year, the owls were asked to share their favorite stories with the college students, faculty, and staff in an assembly as part of the community's celebration of National Women's Month. What a pleasure it was to stand boldly and read my story about "Weekends with Mom and Big Daddy."

There is no such thing as an uninteresting life. That is a definite fact, because when the owls get together, many life memories are shared through our creative writing. What a great group to hang out with!

Carolyn McCraw is a member of a story circle of OWL writers that meet at the Lone Star College-North Harris campus in Houston, TX. Joyce Boatright is the facilitator of the group and it is open to new members.



Start A Circle of Your Own

By Lisa Shirah-Hiers

If you have been thinking about starting a circle in your area but are worried about the commitment that might entail, consider a short series first. The SCN Guide for Facilitators features 6 sessions worth of prompts. If you met just once per month and used only the prompts in the Guide, you wouldn't have to do much besides finding a location and advertising for members. Many circles start out this way—with a definite beginning, middle and end. Afterward the group may decide they are having so much fun they want to continue. At that point a new facilitator might be chosen, or the group could rotate leadership and organization duties. The Guide is free to SCN members and just \$3.00 for non-members. To order a Guide go to www.storycircle.org and select **What We Do**. Scroll down to and select **Story Circles Around the World** and click on **Organizing a Story Circle**.

Story Circle Network member facilitators may also choose to join our Facilitator's Yahoo group where they can post questions, give and receive advice on organizing and running a circle. And of course, all SCN affiliated circles (those whose facilitators are SCN members) are free to post their circle description and contact info on our Story Circles listing on the SCN website.

You can check the same listing if you are interested in seeing whether a story circle is already meeting in your community.

Facilitators and journalers alike can also make good use of SCN's *Starting Points: Weekly Writing Prompts for Women with Stories to Tell*. This wonderful collection features the best prompts of SCN Founder, Susan Wittig Albert's popular Women's Wise Words weekly email series. It's available directly from the publisher, Lulu, at <http://www.lulu.com/content/774054>. A hard copy is just \$8 plus shipping and handling, or download for just \$5.00!

If you have questions about circles, please contact the Circles Coordinator at circles@storycircle.org.





SCN's Lifewriter's Group Daily Ideas and Inspirations

by Dani Greer

For this issue of the Journal, we asked members of our SCN Lifewriters to tell us why they enjoy their visits to the Yahoo!Group. A consistent theme was discovering new book titles.

Susan Wittig Albert sums it up nicely with this comment:

I love to hear what people are reading. Every week, I pick up more ideas for good books by/for women. I live in books and think I know what's out there, but I'm always amazed at what I've missed. The women on this list have wonderful taste in books and are generous in sharing their finds.

Carol Ziel shares this:

This website has become another home to me, and an anchor to my day. The encouragement and feedback that I have received about my fledgling writing have given me the courage to really give myself over to the process. The reading circle has challenged me to read subjects/authors that I do not have previous exposure to, and I am learning to read/write more critically. The community of women here are generous and open and inspire me on a daily basis.

Susan Tweit shares this:

I only pop by occasionally because my life is beyond crazy right now, but whenever I do, I'm struck by the warmth of the group, the liveliness of the discussions, the depth of knowledge about writing and life, and the respect for diverse viewpoints and experiences. In my mind, the latter especially is precious. Y'all are a wonderful group.

Pat Bean gets right to the point:

The greatest thing about this group is hearing about the success of other women writers. Such news is like a kick in the butt to this procrastinator.

Claudia's feelings are:

A great supportive and friendly group of talented and accom-

plished women - I do love the book selections interchange, the friendly conversations about writing, blogging, and even gardening, and other assorted topics. Of course, the quotes are enlightening and inspiring from time to time, too. I read more than I participate in interactions here, but it's a site that I look forward to checking in with daily. Thanks for having it.

Kathy Waller likes two things:

Having kindred spirits: people who love reading and writing and who understand the effort and the emotion that go into the creative process .

Having cheerleaders: people willing to share their expertise and enthusiasm and genuinely happy to see others succeed

From Mary M-S:

There's such a great sampling of women here, willing to risk, to speak their thoughts/feelings/experiences, their personal truths. That richness of humanity, especially the woman-kind in a patriarchal world, is uplifting and affirming.

Regina nicely wraps it up with this tasty comment:

The truth is, the list is like a piece of dark chocolate that has rich, deep intense flavors that are tasted in the melting and savoring of each response. Sometimes I savor the flavors and sometimes I eat on the run. Thanks to everyone who shares their stories.

Do we sound like women you might enjoy keeping company with? Then join us by signing up at

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

Great Gifts for Yourself...or Someone Else

Story Circle Network has a new online store!
Choose from a number of products with the Story Circle Network logo, and some with quotations by, for, and about women. Browse the store and buy anything you like. Your purchases help support the Story Circle Network and its programs.

Go to www.cafepress.com/storycircle.
We plan to add new products, so stop by often.

www.cafepress.com/storycircle





Take A Bow! Spotlighting Our Volunteers Lee Ambrose

by Robin A. Edgar

SCN Board member, President and Member Services Coordinator of Internet Chapters, and Manager of Wise Words Weekly Writing Prompts.

“When you realize how important writing is in your life, you will make the time to do it,” says Lee. “A commitment to the perpetuation of a safe and nurturing place for women from all walks of life to write and share their stories allows me to continue to believe in and promote the mission of Story Circle Network.”

Lee Ambrose joined the Story Circle Network in March 2001 and never looked back. Born and raised in New Cumberland, Pennsylvania, a suburb of the state capitol in Harrisburg, she took a job in New Jersey after she got her nursing degree, and eventually moved to Naples, Florida to be closer to the beach.

After working as an RN for 25 years, Lee went back to school and earned a degree in Multi-Disciplinary Studies in 1999 at the Edison College branch in Fort Myers. Although she set her sights on an MFA in Creative Writing, in July 2000 that was derailed when her first grandchild was born three and a half months prematurely. Bringing him home, she became his "Mommy/Nan" and her dream of returning to school flew out the window. “Juggling a full time job and caring for Caleb meant there was not much time for me,” she recalls.

Finding a small ad about SCN in Personal Journaling (no longer in print), Lee joined an e-circle, even though she was not sure that an online organization would be a good fit since she had never done anything online except to email a few select friends. SCN's Internet Chapter afforded the opportunity to network with other women and on her own schedule and still able to be at home with her precious grandbaby.

Nine years later, Lee admits, “It was just what I needed, although I didn't know that at the time. Joining SCN's Internet Chapter is one of the very best things I've ever done for myself!”

It has also been one of the best things to ever happen to SCN! Soon after Lee joined the Internet Chapter as a part of the reading circle and writing e-circle # 7, she transitioned to the role of facilitator for writing e-circle #10 and the reading circle. “You need to be well-read to write well,” she quips.

About a year later, she became the Internet Chapter's Member Services Coordinator and eventually became the President of the Internet Chapter six years ago. “I loved the role of Member Services Coordinator so much that I would only agree to becoming President if I could continue in the Member Services Coordinator position as well,” chuckles Lee. “Both roles are rewarding - but in different ways. I wouldn't trade either of those experiences!”

Lee believes that her experience and expertise as a nurse aided her in the capacity of President of Internet Chapters as well as her other roles within Story Circle Network. “By nature, most

nurses are good communicators, excellent multi-taskers, and genuine people persons,” she says adding that forward thinking and being able to accept people for who and where they are help, too.

The SCN Internet Chapters have grown in many ways under Lee's management over the years. Although the numbers have increased year after year, she says, more importantly, the knowledge that the gift of a safe place to share our stories has deepened and strengthened.

“The Internet Chapter is like a pool of water. Sometimes, someone tosses a small pebble into the still waters of the pool and little ripples go on for days and days. Other times, you can attempt to skip stones across the water for days and every single one of them sinks instead,” she muses, adding that circles are much like that. “A prompt strikes a common chord among our many members and everyone seizes the moment. Another prompt doesn't really strike a chord for anyone and the outcome is a quiet group for a while - or a new and unexpected path for the group.”

Lee's participation in SCN does not stop there. As a member of the Story Circle Board for over six years, Lee encourages new members of the board to seek out their own unique niches within the organization and to delve into it with all their being. “My time with SCN has taught me the importance of sharing our stories with one another and then igniting that fire within others,” she says.

Ever the spark plug herself, she also writes book reviews for the Story Circle Network's Book Review Site and contributes to the SCN blog and participates in the lifewriters yahoo group when time and work allow. It is no wonder that SCN founder, Susan Albert, asked her to be responsible for the Wise Words Weekly Writing Prompts.

“By far, this is the most challenging and enjoyable role I've had within the Story Circle Network,” says Lee, who had her doubts when she was asked to consider the responsibility. “If Susan believes you can do it, you have to believe you can, too!”

In one of the first introductions to the weekly prompts that Lee posted she stated, “Words are my passion.” That phrase has become her springboard to find inspirations for the Wise Words

Weekly Writing Prompts. She says her daily reading often presents a worthwhile quote that she saves (and savors) for just the right moment. Other times, she may hear a phrase in a song or a quote from a movie that works well as a Wise Words entry. She will also search for quotes related to a worthwhile theme and is also mindful of a seasonal change or a special event, like Earth Day or Mother's Day.

"My favorite way to become inspired is to spend some time with Mother Nature. I never cease to be amazed by the numerous ways in which Nature speaks to me and inspires me to write," she says.

After thirty years in the Sunshine state, Lee missed the four seasons and the mountains so she accepted a thirteen-week contract as a travel RN in Kingsport in northeast Tennessee. Almost immediately the Tri-Cities, TN area of Kingsport, Johnson City and Bristol, Tennessee reached out and grabbed her soul. In October 2009, Lee accepted a fulltime position at a local hospital and officially moved to Johnson City, Tennessee.

A wife, mother of three grown daughters and grandmother of seven grandchildren, she still manages to find time for writing activities and projects outside of SCN. As a professional, she writes continuing education programs for nurses and unlicensed nursing staff. She is passionate about her new role as a volunteer for Mountain Region Donor Services where she helps to educate the public about organ donation. She is also currently helping to create ad copy for websites related to the local yarn shop where she spends many of her days off.

When she is not working as a nurse or for SCN, Lee's favorite way to be creative is to work on altered books, mixed media art, and knitting. Additionally, she creates keepsake writing/art projects for her children and grandchildren. Among these, she is especially proud of her compilation of recipes and stories from generations of women in her family. What started out as a response to the recurring question, "Mom, how do you make....?" is now a family keepsake and a labor of love, not only for her daughters but for all the women of her family.

In addition to her other responsibilities, Lee still belongs to writing e-circle #7 as well as the poetry circle #4 and she continues to facilitate writing e-circles #10 and #12.

Lee has written over 60 reviews for Story Circle Book Reviews. Read her work at <http://www.storycirclebookreviews.org/reviewers/ambrose.shtml>

excerpt from

"Riding from the Darkness into the Sunlight"

by Lee Ambrose

When I was finally out of the house and on my own, I moved to that shore. I made the trip in the daylight and for the first time, was able to see the sights that go along with the welcoming smells and sensations I had only experienced in the darkness. I spent all four seasons there and discovered that the beauty and mystic of the sea is, for me, magnified in the quiet winter months. The symphonies of the ocean waves are different with each changing season. The breezes carry a different message to the soul in each season as well. What remains a constant is that I am more at peace with the world and myself when I am near the sea.



A Story Circle Life Writing Retreat with Robin Edgar

WHEN: October 8-10, 2010

WHERE: Wild Acres Retreat, Little Switzerland, NC

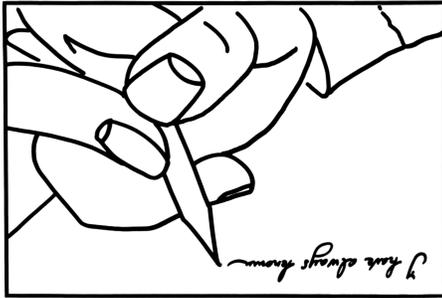
COST: \$230 for SCN members,
\$255 for non-members

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

Registration is limited to 12 participants. Fees for this weekend retreat include a double-occupancy room for two nights and five meals. To register, please contact Robin Edgar at 2robinedgar@gmail.com or visit www.robinedgar.com.





True Words from Real Women

Home

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

Where's Home?

Janine Bray, Bovina Center NY

Until I left after twenty-eight years, Home was the squeak of the oven door when I checked the cookies, and the duck in the Pampers crate in the mudroom. It was sweaty baby toes and cold kisses, flashing colors of young artwork stapled over crumbling plaster, and soggy gloves perched against the chimney. It was our daughter's whisper, "Ma, Pa," at our bedroom door at 3 am when she came home early from a semester in Ireland, instead of touring Europe. And it was leaning against the porch wall, watching a thunderstorm, with their Pa.

I broke up our Home.

I cried when I baked cookies in my new oven and the door didn't squeak and when I moved the crib into my new closet. I felt less-than, after I'd hung their t-shirts (Little League, Garfield, Johnstown Colonials) on my stark basement wall, an attempt to import Home. God, what a bad attempt! Absence. I want to make Home, for Them.

Today, the soup's on; cookies are in the Red Sox cup in the freezer; the candles are lit and our pictures stick on the fridge door. But it's not their Home, yet. It may never be. Where is home?

Today, it's babysitting when they need me or not. It's making the beds just so, waiting for them to pile in from Boston tonight. It's reweaving the thumbs of favorite mittens, or driving hours to pick up two brothers, broken down on Route 28 north of 20. "You busy, Ma?"

It's hugs anytime.

It's the trip to Graceland or LSU with Granny "by myself." It's pitches, kicks, songs, and dances on the field and stage. It's the screech of a violin or the look of the one-note trumpeteer after that last "phlaaaaaat" of "The Saints...."

It's listening to a story recited from an upside down book, producing raggy mittens and scarves for the snowman, and yogurt cups for sandcastles.

It's birthday celebrations any place.

And it's the bright red heart sticker on the front of my toilet tank after they've left.

Where's Home? In me, I guess.

The Bronx—1940s

Helene Benardo, Bronx NY

Although we moved eight times during my childhood, mostly in-neighborhood, I've always considered one building as the one in which I grew up. From four to twelve, this was my childhood home.

It was from this apartment, on the second floor facing the courtyard, that we would hear my father's whistle each evening as he approached the entrance.

In order to reach my elementary school, we walked past a corner building in which the superintendent and his wife, two of the messiest, sloppiest of people—nastily dubbed Greta Garbo and Clark Gable—tried to interest the neighborhood women in black market nylon stockings, sold from their basement. A little farther on, long before supermarkets, was the family-owned grocery store from which I got my yearly small wooden cheese box in order to plant some spring seeds that never grew, and where most of the boys, my brother among them, had their first jobs delivering orders.

Several blocks ahead, up quite a steep hill, was the library, my second home. I can still picture myself sitting on one of the little stools in the children's section, totally engrossed, while my mother was in the adult area, and my great pride on the day when I, too, graduated to the other side of the floor!

As this was during World War II, many evenings, after we had covered the windows with the blackout curtains, my father would go out with his white helmet, which was his by virtue of his being the neighborhood chief warden. He, and the others assigned, would patrol streets, go on rooftops, etc., as their contribution to what was then called, "the war effort."

I remember the achingly silent street the day FDR died. People drifted in and out of the buildings—an arm patted, a shoulder touched—but not a sound could be heard.

We left this building and moved ten blocks north when my brother returned from the navy, and our small apartment just would not do. To give some idea of those times, I can still hear my parents' voices as they discussed the move, my mother saying: "We can afford it now. I'm working. We can make the jump to 75 dollars a month." And we did.

Letting Go

Teresa Schreiber Werth, Spencerport NY

Home is where you keep your stuff. I think it was George Carlin who said something like that, and it's true. If, like me, you've had the same home for over 40 years, you probably have way too much stuff. Now we start the painful process of deciding which stuff to keep and which to let go. For me, most of the stuff I have kept is heavily invested with memories. So while I can keep the memories even after the stuff is gone, there is a special sadness and loss in the downsizing process.

Our son once told a friend apologetically, "Everything in our house has a story and if you ask my Mom, she'll tell you all of them." Sadly, that's true. I love the stories because they're filled with people and places, events and occasions that enriched our hearts and our home. The carved mahogany chair given to me by my ex-fiancee's mother (she really loved me), the massive burlled oak Morrison roll top table and seven chairs purchased for \$35 a month after our wedding, the maple church pew from my parents' house and the cushion we got for \$10 when a big city church replaced their cushions, great grandma's library table, the tapestry from an Italian woman I took shopping for a special dress to wear to a wedding in Italy, the Kittinger bench made in Buffalo, my home town, the 1865 homespun coverlet gleaned from a dear friend's garage sale decades ago and now a very collectible treasure. On and on it goes. If they could each speak, the stories they would tell!

I've stopped gathering and collecting. When I'm tempted, I look around me and think of all the letting go ahead of me which, like the stuff, is more than enough. Our kids aren't interested in most of it, reminding me that "precious" is a relative concept. And while strangers may want some of it, the stories and memories will fade until they disappear altogether. In the shop or showroom, stuff is meaningless. It's when we connect it with our heart space that it attaches itself to our lives in tender, meaningful ways.

Druid or Beaver?

Ann Conrad Case, Gainesville FL

I stopped to say good-bye to a tree this morning. It's a big live oak that now has an orange tape tied around the trunk. The trunk is pocked at the lower level with holes that I think were made by woodpeckers. I assume that the orange tape means that this is a tree that will be cut down because it is dead or dying.

I have lived in this apartment complex in Gainesville, Florida, for about twenty years. One of the first reasons I continue to live here is the trees—big old live oaks dripping with Spanish moss. In my complex all the apartments are single story and are arranged in quadrangles around small swathes of green. Big trees, oaks, magnolias and dogwoods, grow throughout the complex. As I walk in past the entrance there is a huge oak and as I continue to walk, just beyond the gate house is a pair of old oaks that might almost have grown from the same trunk.

These oaks are places where I pause and give thanks every time I pass.

My walk to the grocery store is twenty minutes by a sidewalk that is lined with oaks. Once I passed a recently felled huge oak. The trunk at the base was almost four feet across. The tree has already been cut into big sections to be moved. To me, that downed tree resembled nothing so much as a dead elephant lying on its side. The grey wrinkled texture of the tree trunk made me think of an elephant's hide. The noble aliveness now stilled, the patient acceptance of death was heart-breaking.

I was telling a friend about my love for trees and said romantically that I thought I had been a Druid in a past life. He said wryly, "Maybe you were a beaver."

Beaver or Druid, my home must include trees and they are some of my most trustworthy companions on the way.

Sweet Desi

Maria Alonzo, San Gabriel CA

Every day I rush home from work and try to put the pressure of my day behind me. By the time I see my little dog Desi at the fence greeting me, tail wagging vigorously, all worries have washed away.

Since the day I chose Desi from the local Humane Society after the death of my beloved dog Toby, I knew he would be good for me. He makes me laugh from the moment he wakes me with licks on my face. He has made my home happy again.

I breathe in a sigh of contentment and peace when I arrive home. My home is my haven but it wasn't always that way.

My childhood home was filled with anger, hatred, and tension. My parents argued so much that I often wanted to disappear. So disappear I did—in my books, my imagination, or by writing in my diary.

I couldn't wait to grow up and leave. My first apartment during college had bare furnishings, but at least I was away from home.

Then my boyfriend and I got a puppy called Gema and moved to a house. We became known as people who would never refuse an animal. People dropped off sick or unwanted cats. We nursed them back to health and found good homes for them. Some we kept.

But there was tension in the house. We were opposites and where once I felt it was good, it became apparent that our relationship wouldn't work. At that opportune time, my job in Los Angeles relocated to San Diego. I found an idyllic house on 4 acres with horses and avocado trees. I enjoyed caring for the horses on weekends and hiking with Gema. Sadly, the landlord decided to remodel the house for himself. I returned to Los Angeles and found a cozy house.

I've learned that no matter how bad my day has been, it's always a joy to come home as long as my pets are waiting for me, happy for my return. I leave all the stresses of the day at the gate.

Creating a Home Container: A Letter From Mother to Son

Deborah Doblado Bowers, Wimberley TX

Mi Hijo, how long has it been since I wrote you a letter? Too long, I know. Thank goodness for cell phones and emails that fill in between occasional face-to-face hugs. I did not have those luxuries with my mother, at your age. I lived halfway around the world and we relied on letters to stay in touch, to feed our relationship. Overseas phone calls and visits were rare. The choices of today are different from the choices of yesteryear. Are we missing out? Writing a letter takes time and thoughtful contemplation. It seems better suited to the topic I am considering today. I am curious as to your thoughts about the subject of home.

When you think about the meaning of home, what picture comes to your mind's eye? What emotions flow through your body? What sounds fill your inner ear? Does home have a taste? Is it sweet, or sour? Does it feel like the bark of a tree, or soft as animal fur? What are your memories of home? Which one of our many homes, stands out to you? Is it more like a jigsaw puzzle with pieces of each? Do you regret there are so many to choose from?

When I think about my childhood home, I see the big, old, white two-story house I loved and sometimes hated. Our family of six managed our daily lives with one bathroom and one tiny floor heater. I remember shivering under the covers most winter nights, with no way to get warm. Why did I hide in the darkness, under the porch with the spiders? What scared me more than a spider?

I can taste the grittiness of mud pies formed by my fat little fingers; and feel the wind on my face as I ran through the avocado grove, across the field of wheat, and down a dirt road, flying alongside tumbleweeds. The freedom to roam outside in nature was a blessing, an escape from a family container that did not always feel safe and secure. What kind of a container did I provide for you, mi Hijo?

New Life

Kathryn Bishop, Cedar Park TX

I'm throwing away old shoes, selling furniture and tools, packing up clothes and files. I'm going to sell our big beautiful dream house. I want to leave this place.

It is time to start my new life somewhere else. My husband died three years ago, and I can't stand to live here any longer without him. I'll go to a place where we never went.

My two young sons and I will move to a different state. We are hoping to find a house that we can settle into. It will be much smaller than the one we're leaving behind. I plan to buy comfortable used furniture. We will unpack our important items, including our collections of photos, music, rocks, feathers, and shells.

In our new house and new city, we will create a warm, loving home. We will meet friends and find community. We will have new dreams. I know we are going to be okay.

Seeking Soul Place

Dana Curtin, Landrum SC

I have been searching for home ever since I left my place with Mom and Dad. That was the home of childhood, the safe haven where I was seen, known, accepted, loved. Out in the world I could not find my Self. I was a little red-headed girl among blondes and brunettes. I was a tomboy among dainty, doll-like girls. I was a nun wannabe who was neither Catholic nor willing to give up the world.

While all was blessings and privilege on the outside, I could not find the home of my soul. Ten years ago, already in my fifth decade, I sat beside green hills in familiar longing, searching for the sweetness of home. I wrote the words below. Perhaps this is the year of coming home?

I have wandered for a lifetime.
Through the busy streets,
past the snowy mountains,
beyond the deserts and the seas.
But I am home now.
Home is where the heart is,
but heart was never touched in
quite the same way before.
There must be friends.
There must be Spirit.
There must be green fields and open space.
There must be rolling waves and majestic sea.

Today I sit beside the road and
know that all is well.
Were I an artist I could paint the
magnificent pastoral tableau before me—
billowy white clouds blowing along
with waves of playful grass,
velvet green hills rolling on and on below
forests of lush green tree topping.
Distant slow-moving silhouettes of cows
grazing lazily on their hillside sanctuary.

The pieces are all still scattered.
The vision is not complete.
But this day I have
come home to myself...
and the world will never
be quite the same again.

The stories were remembered for a reason. Family stories, they were told and retold because they contained essential truths. Life and ourselves were in these stories, whether they were flattering or not, straightforward or opaque, legend or history. They showed us, in one way or another, how to live.

—Elizabeth Ehrlich

Neni's House

Jamuna Devi Advani, San Ramon CA

There is a house where a piece of my heart hangs still
on the wall where no one can see, at 7/18 South Petal Nagar,
New Delhi.

Those days when winter arrived at Shilling
the beautiful hill town slept in hibernation.
As hub bubs of life stood still we headed for Delhi,
Neni, my mother in law, always welcomed us lovingly
and with her warm hearted glow of a smile
we always felt a part of her life.
During weekends Neni's married daughters living in the same
city
came by along with their husbands and children
and stayed overnight, it was like a family sleepover.
The children played hide and seek game
running out toward the gate
when hawkers sounded their bells
to sell their savory snacks.
The mothers sat together on the big broad bed
or sometimes in the warm soothing winter sun
at the front yard, chatting, gossiping, occasionally arguing
when one complained, "You didn't do this," another responded
louder,
then followed by a higher pitch from a third one—
as though the house was having a war of words.
Meanwhile we prepared food to feed the hungry crowd
Neni, an excellent cook, guided us to make the special dishes
for her special guests:
Her sons-in-law.
Our children, now grown and married, never forget those days
at Patel Nagar.
The sweet memories always come back as a part of their
conversations,
and a smile from my heart leaps up in my face—
a piece of my heart is still hiding there,
somewhere in that house.

And the Truth Shall Set You Free

Sandra K. Heggen, Kempner TX

I'm Homesick.

Truth is my only real Home.

It's not that I do not know this place,
It's that this place does not know me.

This is a beautiful place,
Full of wonder and glory,
Full of strife and strain,
But it does not know me.

I know this place,
Its blue skies and golden sunsets,
Its gray clouds and rainbows,
But it does not know me.

I know this place,
Its people of many hues,
Its killing and its anger,
But it does not know me.

I know this place,
I know its loves and its hates,
Its tears and its laughter,
But it does not know me.

I know this place,
Its falsity and its truth,
But it is not Truth,
And it does not know me.

I know this place,
In suffering I bide here,
In this suffering is the cure.
In time it will know me,
And I will know the Truth,
And I will find Home.

Treehouse

Janet Caplan, Vancouver, Canada

Home sits on a hilltop overlooking a salt water bay. I sit at my
kitchen table finishing my morning coffee, reading my book. The
book isn't that good and it's not holding my attention. Every
now and then I find myself gazing out of the large window at the
water below and the trees that surround me: western red-cedar,
Douglas fir, alder, and maple. I live in a treehouse, I think. The
trees shelter me from my neighbors' houses: they're visible for only
a short time during the brief winter months. Each home is an oasis.

This early spring morning is overcast. Grey clouds are moving
in quickly between the hills on the opposite side of the bay. The
winds pick up and my trees begin to sway. Birds circle overhead
as they head for cover from the wind and impending rains. The
water below is choppy now and I see, through my binoculars,

fishing boats rocking at their moorings. Two small boats switch
course and head back to shore. Suddenly the rain pours forth,
pounding the window before me. That's okay, I think, twenty
minutes from now it'll all be over and the sun will shine. I'll get
out with the dogs for a morning walk and go on about my day.

And that's exactly right. A half hour later I gather the two pups
and put on my spring jacket. As I turn to close the door behind
me, I take in the breathtaking view that is mine. Windows span
the entire length of the house. I can't miss a thing. At my home's
elevation, I enjoy a bird's eye view of the sea, the sky, and the
forests of my corner of Vancouver Island. This is truly my home.
What great fortune.

Dream House vs. Dream Home

Pat LaPointe, Prospect Heights IL

I am blessed to have, at this time in my life, the house about which I have always dreamed. It's a family house: large kitchen, many bedrooms, and modern conveniences. It has been a place for my children and grandchildren to enjoy and feel loved.

But this had always been the dream house, something more for others than myself. As I journey from midlife toward my "golden" years with fewer days where the sounds of children fill the house, I find I have a new dream, a home of my dreams, my home.

In this home there would be a large room, walls lined with overflowing bookshelves, a fireplace, and a chair that wraps around me while I read. The windows would open wide to carry some of nature inside.

There would be a medium sized room, a yoga parlor of sorts. The walls would be covered in lilac and white. There would be incense burning continuously and music to bring peace to both my body and soul.

And there would be a smaller room for writing. Just a desk upon which my laptop would rest along with a functional chair for when the time comes to get serious about writing. There would be a cozy chair in which to sit and invite my creative muses. It would be most important that this room have a door, something to close off the outer world and symbolize the sacredness of my work and to contain my passion.

The smallest rooms, and the ones in which I would spend the least time would be the kitchen and bedroom. Their sole purpose would be to nourish and rest my body and prepare me to be fully present in the other rooms to receive nourishment for my soul and spirit.

This home may never exist in reality, but will always remain my fondest dream.

True Home

B. Lynn Goodwin, Danville, CA

My mother next to me at the San Francisco Airport was muttering, "Home is where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in." She taught Frost's *The Death of the Hired Man*, to her American Lit students, and tonight this particular line had new significance.

We were picking up my sister, whose grades had not met her college's academic standards. After two semesters she was returning home, and we were taking her in.

My mother and sister were so alike and so diametrically opposed. Home felt like disappointment that night.

Sometimes old disappointments still lurk in the corners of my condo. They form a shadowy pattern that reminds me of the house I grew up in. Though I did not know it the night my sister returned from college, I have discovered that disappointment comes from a lack of gratitude, a skewed attitude, or both. Attitude is everything, and the right one, in combination with gratitude, can make any place feel like home.

My condo is where I live, but home is a state of mind. When I open my front door these days, Mikko McPuppers, the world's best senior shih tzu and my only housemate, is waiting for me.

My Person is home, I imagine him thinking as he dances in

circles around me. Then he rushes to the carpet, and lies on his side, tail thumping and forepaws waving.

"I love my welcoming committee," I tell him. I drop my packages to rub his back with one hand and his belly with the other. He is in Doggie Blissland. I want to be there too.

We have a symbiotic relationship: he walks me and I feed him. While we walk, I allow gratitude lists and prayers to replace my darker thoughts. I welcome the shift this practice bring.

When Mikko's unconditional love surrounds me, I slide into gratefulness. Disappointment is far away. I am at home and at peace.

I will write on the pages of history what I want them to say. I will be myself. I will speak my own name.

—Maya Angelou

A Dream

Tracy Wood, Ardmore PA

I was back in our house last night, in a dream.

I thought I was done with that.

You asked, "What shade should we use in the front?"

We will make things fresh with paint.

Yes, we, the three of us, need this house now.

I can see the steps from down the block,
and the rail which we will paint white.

What would my mom and dad think of this
new shade we pull on their dream?

Their dream house where the kids played in the shade
of the tree whose fruit would be plucked by birds in
June. And Dad would watch and scream at those
birds through the glass, from his chair, with his tea.

From a glass, he drank tea with a bowl of fruit he left out
for me, fruits of blue and green and red. Which squish
when you bite and turn your tongue dark in June.

And Mom on the porch in her suit for the sun
with a snack, and a book and her smile.

I thought I was all done with this,
but who can stop a dream?

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Matching Sheets

Abby November, Austin TX

My childhood home was occupied by eight people. We shared one working bathroom, three bedrooms, and an unfinished basement. Dad's parents lived with us. I adored my granddad, Zayde, and was his favorite. Bubs, as we called Dad's mother, was a ball buster, bossy, and argumentative. It was supposed to be temporary, "...only until the Depression ends." I remember smells of rising yeast bread baking in the gas oven, along with the eight brown-skin, kosher salt-coated baking potatoes, bubbling greasy chicken soup, and lots of laughter and shouting.

In 1962, when my Bubs—my grandmother—died, my parents were left alone with us four kids. I commuted daily to Hunter College by subway. Mom often said, "We may not be rich but we have food, a roof over your heads, and library cards. If you have books, you will never be lonely."

Home meant newspapers spread on the newly washed floors on Friday afternoon as the women prepared for the Sabbath. My older sister, Esta and I shared a bed, often fighting over blankets and clothing. But we had each other when mom and dad were focused and unavailable trying to meet our daily needs.

As a shallow teen, things impressed me, and I sometimes wished out loud that I was an only child, so my room would have matching bedding and a modern bathroom. I was insensitive to the difficulty of my parents' life, how hard Mom worked, taught school, took care of four kids—five if you count Dad—and avoided an intrusive mother in law. Luckily, Zayde always had time for the kids; he would regale us with stories of jumping over the tenements of the lower east side of NY, chasing trolley cars, and other wild deeds.

Now, as I look at my large, but quiet home with three bathrooms and matching sheets, I would trade those things for an hour with my family around the cracked kitchenette table, slurping chicken soup and dipping garlic-laden rye toast into its hot steaming broth.

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What I Know Now

Katharine Stone Ayers, Makawao HI

What is it about being 70?
For me, it's not about aches and pains
Because that's gone on for most of my life.

When I ask myself that question, I recognize that the number 70 has a lot of associations, ideas and concepts but very little relevance to how I actually feel.

What I know now, in this moment, is:
I sense sparkling and brilliant light
coursing through my body and field and I am filled with a joy,
a gratitude, a satisfaction, a feeling that all of life
is animated with brilliancy and a dynamic aliveness.

What I know now is: that life seems more full, joyous and celebratory than when I was 20.
I feel more connected to a golden flow in my core
and an abundant flow in the Universe
that is in and surrounds All things.

What I know now is: Even though part of me thinks I'm in charge,
in reality, a Reality much bigger than I charts my life
in a way that I could not have imagined.
I have come to know and trust that this unfoldment is taking me home.

And what is this home?
A profound and peaceful place like deep blue ocean water.
An empty place that is filled with the creative expression of the Universe.

A river that brings me unerringly into the moment.
A sanctuary that beckons us All.

The Home I Carry With Me

Susan Myrick, Glencoe IL

My grandparents' home resides within me like no other home I've occupied. Their home became mine when my mother left my father and we moved in with them. She was twenty-one and I was sixteen months. The few years spent in my grandparents' home, before my mother remarried and we moved away, were the most nourishing of my childhood.

Nostalgia carries me back to that time and place—to black Fords, Southern fry cooking, a closet full of women's hats, dresser drawers stocked with bobby pins, hot summer nights on the front porch, my long roped swing, wicker laundry baskets and clothespins, and a washer in the basement that was a multi-tubbed, wringer-type contraption, operated by hand. Nostalgia is more accurately a journey back to the place where I felt loved the way every child should feel loved. My grandparents' house and its old fashioned contents remain beautiful to me, soothing and comforting, because of the generous spirit of their owners. I need to visit it, still. In my imagination, I linger there to reabsorb the strength I once developed within its walls.

Homespace

Amy L. Greenspan, Austin TX

Sylvia's space
 a house she's lived in fifty years
 decaying now
 but not as fast as her mind
 fading paint
 memories
 missing shingles
 names
 growing mold
 bewilderment
 lost tiles
 years

Shabbiness

rich in the familiar
 pulls pride from nooks
 dementia doesn't reach
 I made that
 bookcase
 painting
 sculpture
 vase

A failing space
 a home
 keeps Sylvia alive

Easter Journey

Tess Baader Gump, Chicago IL

I shall tie my hair in ribbons
 and sew myself a shift,
 Prepare the scented waters
 and set my heart adrift.

Encased by lacy lavender
 anointed by cologne,
 I'll embark upon a journey
 where the mourning doves have flown.

Purple plastic streamers
 attached to pink balloons
 may float above my shoulders
 on champagne afternoons.

If I didn't know the river,
 pewter gray from shore to shore,
 My vessel might float freely
 without motor, sail, or oar.

Shall I keep to charted waters
 sailing straight to home,
 Or steer a course to Paradise
 where the mourning doves have flown?

Shangri-la

Karen Waddell, Lake Jackson TX

We've visited my folks out of state, all three of us tired from the 9-hour drive.
 Kids bust from the car empty-handed, agenda laden,
 heading for the leaded glass front door with black-duct-taped cracks.
 Will it last another Southeast Texas winter?
 I jostle an empty drink cup, fanny pack, phone, keys, passenger seat junk,
 head inside, visually checking for the porch step,
 scolding myself yet again for dragging my feet on researching a step-less porch entry.

Green and sandy colors greet me from the open ceiling atrium.
 What's this for? a friend once pondered.
 Wasted space, a grizzly contractor deemed.
 Poorly cared for plants thrive without care.
 The crooked, Mexican fountain, dried up, kindly waits for water.
 Petulant green weeds sprout between earth-toned stones.
 Torn roof-top sunscreen sorely missed.
 Windows never washed.
 Nature kisses my soul.

Kids check into their rooms, full of deep colors—turquoise, blues, purples,
 painting that rejuvenated my psyche during Spring and Summer Breaks—
 overhauling my colorless daily dirge with muscles aches, onion peeling metaphors,
 and new memories of Harry Potter, Walk Two Moons, and The Beatles.

"Oh I finally get to sleep in my own bed," a voice rejoices.
 I echo the sentiment, though wincing at my overused, pancake-like pillow.
 The corner bead float tape still peeling from the ceiling, rebirth is probable now,
 the foundation repair recently completed.
 I tense my muscles yet seek imaginative juices,
 envisioning what colors might rejuvenate this master bedroom this summer
 and bring peace to the master, more accurately, Mom.
 I plop on my bed, muscles finally unfreezing from driving.
 Kids bounce in and unwind beside me, rolling and stretching.
 We jabber about nothing, and wrap ourselves up in the familiar.

Location of My Heart

Marlene Samuels, Chicago IL

My new house welcomes me home with a prevailing calm. It has a soothing intimacy—a tremendous departure from the chaos that reigned in our first house. That one, a massive Victorian brownstone my husband and I moved into when we were first married, never attained my ideal of "home." It didn't matter that we lived in that house for twenty years or that it was the place we raised our two sons, a house on which we spent most of our resources restoring. Despite its charm, the house evaded intimacy and warmth. It defied becoming home almost as if inhabited by an aloofness and formality of the Victorian character.

I struggled to recreate my concept of a home—a nurturing, safe haven much like the one my parents had created for me during my childhood. I cultivated an herb and vegetable garden, a flower garden, fruit trees. I filled the house with the warmth and intense aromas of my cooking, had family dinners, holiday parties, and always lots and lots of children.

During cold winter evenings our fireplaces blazed, emitting scents of the hickory and cherry woods we burned freely. In warmer weather, we sipped wine outside on a slate patio under intense shade of old fruit bearing trees. But when I greeted guests at the front door, I felt like a stranger in this structure, waiting to be asked, "Do you know who lives here?"

cont on page 17

East Texas Clay

Dorothy Clover, Beaumont TX

Hilly roads, dusty trails,
Tall majestic trees on either side....
There's a distinct smell in the piney woods that lets you know
We're home, sweet home....
This land is like no other...
The signature red clay is as far as
The eye can see.
So, is it true that there's
Nothing to do in the clay, but play?

Some of the best fishing in the world
Nothing to do in the clay, but play.
Wives lose husbands to deer, not girls...
Nothing to do in the clay, but play.

Jump off a log, and go swimming in the creek
Nothing to do in the clay, but play.
Kids are doing it now, even as we speak...
Nothing to do in the clay, but play.

Not unusual to have 10 children or more
Nothing to do in the clay, but play.
The reality shows would be rocked to the core
Nothing to do in the clay, but play.

All the women from here are fine and thick
Nothing to do in the clay, but play.
They literally have to beat the men off with a stick!
Nothing to do in the clay, but play.

Now, what can I say about these country men?
Nothing to do in the clay, but play.

There's so much to say that I don't know where to begin...
Nothing to do in the clay, but play.
They're good-looking, hard working, lumber toting, trucking
driving,
Cattle prodding, child-raising, fish catching, deer hunting...
Well, you know the rest... our men are the best
And they say, yes they say, but we brag, in a way...
Nothing to do in the clay, but play!

Location of My Heart (cont from page 16)

A few weeks ago, I drove past our first house. I slowed down a bit, looking at it from the car window with total detachment, rather than with longing. And for the first time, the adages, "a house is not a home" and "home is where the heart is," resonated with me. In my new house, I'm very much at home whether dinner is of my own creation or brought to the front door by a delivery man. It's informal and comforting, the place where I relax, catch my breath, and reflect. The moments of quietness are comforting instead of menacing. Home is where I've returned to my lost self.

Reclaiming the Prairie

Polly Grose, Wayzata MN

After my mid-life remarriage to an Englishman and transfer from my home in Minneapolis to London, I quickly embraced British life and culture. Thanks to a challenging Public Affairs job and frequent opportunities to enjoy David's friends and family, I felt right at home.

That is until I grappled with their questions about my origins. Clearly, the Midwest—an unknown territory—was suspect. British people never understood United States geography west of Chicago.

"No," I would reply, "it's not Milwaukee, It's Minneapolis; no, not Indianapolis." Determined to earn respect, I described Minneapolis as a vital, cultural city northwest of Chicago. Glazed eyes turned away, conversations shifted, and I gave up and identified myself as a Londoner. Yes, London was my home, I proclaimed. But often my voice caught in my throat—was this true? I dug deeper into British ways and felt fulfilled until David died.

Suddenly I was a British widow. After 20 years I was a lonely American living in London as a widow. For a while I enjoyed the loving attention I received from David's grieving children and close friends. Much as I tried, however, as I went out each day to return to our flat, our home—now my home—I was sad. The cozy rooms filled with David's art work and scrapbooks, were silent and confining. His presence, his love, had been my home.

Within months, now retired and working as a writer, I realized I was free to travel to my own family in the states. I took off to visit my children on the west coast and then found a small condo on the shores of Lake Minnetonka in the Minneapolis suburbs. I could see the blue lake stretching south to the horizon, and to the west were the rolling plains of wheat and corn about to be harvested. I plunged into active volunteer work at the Guthrie Theater, and in an instant I was home. I returned to London to pack, sell our flat, and bid bittersweet farewells. Then I could fly home to reclaim the Prairie.



Visit the Story Circle Network Blog
**Telling Herstories:
The Broad View**

<http://storycircle.typepad.com/>



Susan Albert (left) and Peggy Moody (right)

Susan and Peggy: The Heart of SCN

by Mary Jo Doig

I've traveled very little in my life and when I decided to drive, instead of fly, to Austin for February's Stories from the Heart Conference, I planned a three-week, ten state, 4,000 mile road trip with the conference at its heart. When I pulled up to the Austin, TX Wyndham Hotel's front entrance on February 4th, two cars were already parked there. I looked over at the two women unloading and stacking boxes on a luggage carrier and saw they were Susan Albert, SCNs founder, and

Peggy Moody, SCNs Executive Director. It had been six years since I'd last seen them and I was delighted they were the first women I encountered.

The conference happened—oh my, did it happen!--overflowing with creativity, wisdom, energy, and the generous spirits of amazing women from all over the country. Four days later, when I reluctantly drove out of Austin, I was both suffused and spilling over with the gifts of all that collective woman power. During the next several days, as I traveled roads home between Austin and Virginia, I took some meaningful side-trips and also reveled in my abundant solitary, reflective car time. The image of Susan and Peggy working together in front of the Wyndham returned several times in my quiet musings, an image that stirred levels of symbolism as I pondered how much their teamwork had brought to our organization. I began to wonder how, when, and where Susan and Peggy—women whom I've always thought of as SCNs heart and soul—had met.

I'd developed a list of several follow-ups I wanted to do post-conference and now added one more: "Talk with Susan and Peggy and write an article about how they met." Later, when I wrote to ask if they'd be interested in taking on yet another little project, both were enthusiastic. I was delighted and thought for my column this month, you might be as interested as I. Here's what we talked about:

Mary Jo: Susan, Story Circle Network began with you. Tell us when and how the seed for SCN was germinated.

Susan: SCN's first board had had its first organizational meetings when I met Peggy, at a reading circle meeting in January or February 1998. The board was beginning to think about developing a website, and Peggy seemed like a natural for the task. What was wonderful for me was the way she brought her creative ideas and experiences to the work. I had no experience at all of using the Internet as a means of communication. Peggy showed me how that could be done. It was wonderful teamwork from the start!

I also want to mention that SCN was fortunate because, as an organization, it didn't have a substantial investment in pre-Internet technology/office/organizational procedures. We came into being in 1997 and Peggy came on board the next year, bringing her computer/Internet skills. The minute she stepped into her role as our IT coordinator/manager, she began to shape the organization's abilities to reach out, using the new technologies. We (the board and I) were all "old-style thinkers," but we adapted quickly to her newer ways of thinking, organizing, and connecting. And because the organization was so young, we didn't have to go back and change anything, as we would have done if we had been 10 or 15 years old. We just stepped into the new world of the Internet from the beginning, and grew along with the possibilities, as Peggy showed them to us.

Mary Jo: Peggy, SCN online—which allows our members to connect with writing peers all over the world—began with you. When and where did you and Susan meet, and how did that meeting come to be? Was SCN already in existence when you connected professionally or have you been a team from the start?

Peggy: My sisters, mother, and I frequently loan books to each other; once my sister loaned me one of Susan Albert's China Bayles' books. I saw Susan's website mentioned in the book, went to look at it, and read somewhere on it that she was starting a reading group here in Austin in early 1998. My youngest child was in daycare part-time and the reading group's meeting time just happened to be at a time that he was in daycare, so I went. That group was the first story circle group in Austin—and we are still meeting, more than 12 years later.

I was excited to find a group of women who loved to read and discuss books—and books that weren't just the current best-sellers but were "important" books—women's memoirs. I felt connected in a way I hadn't before, when I was taking care of a baby, a toddler, and a middle-schooler.

I got to know Susan and she asked me to join Story Circle Network's Board of Directors. The organization was looking for someone to manage their web site, and since that was the work I was doing for IBM, I was asked to do this for SCN. I worked very closely with Susan to develop the website, including the creation of the Internet Chapter and its website. I must say that

working closely with Susan is absolutely wonderful—the best work environment I've ever been involved in!

Mary Jo: Susan, we know that after you left your career as a university administrator, you became a successful author of three—soon to be four, when your first Darling Dahlia book is released this July—book series as your primary career. Peggy, we don't know as much about you beyond the fact that you are a highly skilled IT professional who brought SCN online and available to women all over the world. Tell us what your profession was when you and Susan met. And, now that you have been SCNs Executive Director for several years, do you hold another professional career outside of your SCN work?

Peggy: I became Executive Director in January, 2003—more than seven years ago. At the time I was working for IBM, where I worked for 22 years before I quit at the end of 2004 to do web work full time. I also manage a number of other websites for several other people and non-profit organizations.

One other thing I want to tell you: when I got involved with SCN and joined the board and was working on the website, my job at IBM was becoming more stressful and less fulfilling and I was ready for a change. I found I wanted to make a difference and do more meaningful work. I told Susan then that I wished I could do the kind of work I was doing for SCN—more meaningful and valuable work—full time. It wasn't too many years later that that became a reality. I will always be thankful and grateful for everything Susan has done for me. She has changed my life in profound ways. She has been my boss, mentor, confidant, and counselor, but I am most proud to call her friend.

Susan: I feel exactly the same way about Peggy! She has changed my life entirely, too: inside/out, upside/down. I could never do all the things I do without her help and encouragement and constant support and friendship. She tells me when I need to pay attention to something and always asks the questions I should be asking for myself.

Mary Jo: When you first came together, what was your vision?

Susan: For me, the vision was simply to find the most effective ways to help women tell the stories they were carrying around inside them. I felt (and still do) that the best way to do that was through an active "circle" of supportive, caring women. I also hoped that we would be able to offer conferences, classes, and so on—but at the time, teaching on the Internet, or offering an extensive book review website . . . well, those couldn't even be imagined!

Mary Jo: Did you ever imagine that SCN would attain the breadth and depth it has today, after evolving for these past several years?

Susan: No, I didn't. But that's because my own vision was just mine. The strength of SCN has been the strength of all the women who have contributed over the 13 years of our existence: each woman with her own ideas, dreams, stories, hopes. We (Peggy and I, board members, SCN members) just kept trying to find ways to incorporate as many of those ideas, dreams, stories, and hopes as possible into the organization. So it's a huge amalgam:

and thank Goddess for Peggy, who keeps us all pointed in the same direction and in touch with one another!

Mary Jo: We've read many stories about how individual women discovered SCN. It would be interesting to know how the original founding members come together to birth SCN? How many were there and are they still with SCN today?

Peggy: I don't know how many initial members there were, or who (besides Susan) were the original members. I do know that these women joined in 1997 and are still members today: Susan Wittig Albert, Marsha Fowler, Judie Hansen, Bobbie Mahoney, Mary Faith Pankin, and Donna Remmert. These women joined in 1998 and are still members: Carolyn Blankenship, Mary Jane Marks, Peggy Moody, and Anne Waldron.

Mary Jo: What are your greatest SCN joys and what are your greatest challenges?

Susan: Greatest joy: seeing and hearing so many women speaking freely and creatively about their life experiences, their challenges, their gains and losses—and thinking how difficult that seemed to be in the beginning, for each of us and for all of us together. One of the things I love best: scrolling through SCN's blog roll, and seeing all the wonderful lifestory blogs that our members have created, each one so individual, yet all of them together saying the same thing: this is MY voice, MY story. Pay attention!

Greatest challenge: finding time to do as much as I want to do! And that's where Peggy comes in, because she helps me make time by finding/creating new ways to do more creatively, think more expansively.

Mary Jo: When you look ahead to the coming decade, where would you like to see SCNs journey lead?

Susan: I'd like to see the online class program grow (and it will, under Amber Starfire's leadership!). I'd like to see the book review website become even more influential and be recognized more widely for the wonderful resource it is for women writers, readers, and publishers. I'd like to see chapters holding workshops in other cities. (That's been a continuing challenge for the board.) And I love seeing the board's leadership grow and develop and flex their collective muscle and imagination!

Peggy: I'd like to see more members—young and old—all over the world, more reading and writing circles, and more ways for women to share their stories.

Mary Jo: Is there anything else you'd like our readers to know?

Susan: Remember that Helen Reddy song, "I am woman, hear me roar"? We do roar, each in our own way: some of us softly, others loudly; some of us wave our arms and stamp our feet, others of us smile and hold out a hand. We have voices, we are heard. We have stories and we tell and share them, proudly.

Mary Jo: Yes, we have, and yes, we do, and—Susan and Peggy—that has, for so many of us, made a profound difference in our lives. Here are two small words encircled with vast gratitude and affection: thank you! Thank you both for your years of devotion to our Story Circle Network.



A Conversation With Carolyn Scarborough

by Lisa Shirah-Hiers

Carolyn Scarborough is the author of *Backyard Pearls: Cultivating Wisdom and Joy in Everyday Life*. She is also an Inner Wisdom Writing Coach, helping people get in touch with the message they're here to share with the world, then supporting them to write it in books, blogs or articles. She lives in Austin, Texas with her husband, two teenage daughters and their big-haired labradoodle. Lisa Shirah-Hiers interviewed her via email for the Story Circle Journal.

SCJ: Your book began as a series of newspaper columns you wrote when you were staying home with your two girls. What made you decide to collect them into a book?

CS: I hadn't really thought about it, but the newspaper readers kept asking if I would put my essays in a book. The more I pondered this, the more I liked the idea. Now, I'm thrilled that I did. The book is something that I can pass down to my daughters, it adds to my professional credibility... and it's a lot less messy than newsprint!

SCJ: In the first chapter (*Identity Pearls*), you describe your choice to leave a busy and glamorous career as a travel magazine writer to stay home with your kids--and the funny fact that you felt uncomfortable answering questions about your "new" career. As you put it, "...I settled on the least objectionable label and said I was a stay-at-home mother. Granted, this one too was misleading—did it mean I was a mother at home, but once out the door it was nothing but spiked heels and salsa parties for me?" Say a bit more about why you think this is a tricky question for women (and men) in this position.

CS: I think it's our all too human nature to label people outwardly, rather than tuning into the magnificence of who they really are. We do it so much that we think it's the truth about someone. So, somehow, being at home with kids meant I was different than I was as a high profile magazine writer and editor. The superficialities are indeed different, but my most essential qualities are the same, and that gets overlooked.

SCJ: In the book you define "backyard pearls" as "...moments of beauty, insight or joy [that] are always available. It simply takes paying attention to what's right around us and inside us." Can you elaborate?

CS: When I'm with my daughter at the same time I'm thinking about taxes and washing the dishes, I can still hear some of what she's saying and look efficient. But I'm not going to scoop up any pearls in the dish suds. I'm not present enough. I'm moving through life, but not living it.

If, instead, I put down the dish rag and clear my thoughts, I may notice the slightly tangy scent of her hair, or the awkward, sweet teenage question. My heart starts expanding. Gratitude comes in. And sometimes, I even get to bliss. But finding those pearls all starts with awareness and being really present in the moment. There's always a different way to see things.

This even works in the middle of a seemingly negative moment. I can be tapping my fingers in frustration behind three slow customers in the grocery checkout line – one counting a dollar's worth of change in pennies – and put myself in hell. But the pearl in this case is in first noticing my thoughts and accepting (rather than resisting) the situation, since I can't change it anyway! Once I do that, taking some deep breaths and moving out of my racing mind, I may notice a fragility in the woman counting pennies and feel some compassion. Or notice how I have a belief – perhaps that people shouldn't take more than their "fair" share of time – that is causing me stress and that I need to release. There's always a gift.

It's like when we're writing. Pearls are abundant there as well. When I'm writing and I'm disconnected from my body and my mind is wrestling those thousand-pound mental alligators (such as, "Who cares what I have to say?" or "This isn't good enough"), then the results come out in the writing. But when I pause, tune into my body and breath, compassionately and non-judgmentally notice my thoughts and release them, then I drop into this well of original thought. The pearls come, because that's where they're hidden...

SCJ: Why did you decide to include writing prompts at the end of each essay?

CS: Since I am really a coach at heart, I wanted to encourage people to ponder how the subject of each chapter affects their own lives. Some of that exploration starts when they're reading the stories. I feel so honored when people confess to me that they think I'm spying on them, because how else could I understand their exact experience?! That's what we try to do as writers – capture the universal within the personal.

SCJ: What are three or four "pearls" from the book that are your favorites?

CS: One of my favorites is "Living in the Pause," where I come upon the realization that often what's worthwhile doesn't appear while we're doing the tasks on our to-do list, but in the pauses between the tasks. Another favorite is "'Tis better to Receive than to Give," which turns traditional wisdom on its head and helped me better understand my mother. And I'm always moved when I re-read "Open Hearted Living," about my father's death and the gifts we can experience after the loss of someone we love.

SCJ: *Do you think writing our stories is transformative?*

CS: The whole process is transformative. First, there's capturing the story. Often I'm in the middle of my day, perhaps feeling out of sorts (which is often because I'm mentally in the past or future, not the present), when suddenly a moment comes and I get an "aha." My perspective changes, I spot a flash of beauty, whatever. That moment alone transforms me, even if I don't write about it.

But when I take it further and decide to write about it, the insights keep coming. I may spend the next week just looking for patterns or anecdotes related to the topic. For instance, in one of my stories I had an aha about interrupting people. Once I had that, I started looking for patterns. When am I interrupted? Why do people interrupt? What happens when we resist that urge? I learned so much through that exploration, and more shifts happened.

The actual writing of the story takes it even further, inviting a deeper wisdom to come forth. As I follow the threads, more is revealed.

And ironically, when I read my own stories, perhaps a month or year later, I get more from them. I think that's because when we write from that deep place, we're tapping into the divine. In our daily life, we don't have that level of connection all the time. I'm very human and sometimes forget the wisdom in my own words!

Overall, the whole process is transformative and has taught me to slow down, because that's where the pearls lie. When we're speeded up, we rush right past the bliss. We react mindlessly to life. We get a lot accomplished, but don't necessarily feel much joy. When we slow down, all this beauty just opens up.

SCJ: *What led you to your new path as an Inner Wisdom Writing Coach? What do you do for people?*

CS: I have always been fascinated by the psychological and spiritual aspects of how people tick. As a journalist, no matter what I'm interviewing someone about – from how to make a soufflé to where to skydive -- I have a knack for pulling out the deeper meaning in an experience. It's somehow wired in me.

So, when I heard about the profession of life coaching, I knew that it was perfect for me. I attended and graduated from Coach U, then added those skills to my professional career as a

writer, journalist and author. Now people call me the "book whisperer," because my depth and questioning helps people reach deep into themselves, see what's there, and express it in writing.

Some clients come to me because they have a passion to write something, and either can't start or can't finish or need direction. I inspire them to write in a way that energizes them, to tune into their bodies as they write to access more depth, and to play with time so it's an asset instead of an enemy. It's a method that makes the process light and fun, from writing to marketing and publishing.

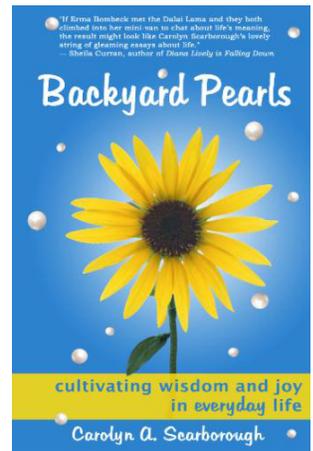
SCJ: *What are some dreams you have for the future? What things do you hope to experience or accomplish in your lifetime?*

CS: My life is such a ripe plum now, how will things get better? I experience so much daily that fills me up, that I don't have dreams other than to squeeze the bliss out of each moment. Right now I'm sitting on my front porch, where I do much of my writing, and I'm noticing that the sound of the wind in one tree has a different music than the wind in the tree next to it. The interplay is creating a symphony. The clouds are floating by, my dog is asleep at my feet, my heart is wide open. What more is there?

I went to hear Byron Katie speak a few months ago in Houston and someone asked her about her dream. She replied something along the lines of "To sit on a street corner and watch the world go by." I think when your mind gets so clear that there's some spaciousness rather than constant worry, judgment and endless recycling of tapes, than it matters little what you're doing. You're at peace and happy wherever you are.

SCJ: *What is ahead for you now? What will you do now that your book is out in the world?*

CS: I truly love coaching people who want to express through writing, so what's ahead is enjoying my growing coaching business, snuggling with my husband and daughters, writing more pearls for a future book... and perhaps, as Byron Katie says, sitting on a street corner and happily watching the world go by...



"Imagine if when we looked at ourselves in the mirror, the image reversed? Instead of imperfections, what if the only thing grinning back at us, Cheshire cat-style, was our brilliance? What if we looked in the mirror and saw the moon and the stars and the bright snap of sunflower within us?" (p. 30)

"As we hold them, lacing together arms and even strands of hair, we feel a quiet glow expanding out from our belly—the belly that first connected them to us with two feet of cord. That's when we realize this fragile thread that we weave through their lives doesn't just hold them together—it holds us together too." (p. 51)

"It takes only the slightest slip, the merest whisper, for us to find some way to judge ourselves. The scary thing is that most of the time we don't even notice it." (p. 94)

To find out more about Carolyn, read her blog or order her book, visit www.backyardpearls.com



Kitchen Table Stories Volcano Woman

by Patricia Nordyke Pando

Trilla Pando established Kitchen Table Stories as a heart-warming *Journal* column that allows us to peek in on kitchen tables around the globe. Every quarter I've looked forward to reading a new story, a wonderful snippet of true history, a story from the very heart of our families and our homes. Thank you, Trilla, for your dedication in bringing these stories to us. This issue's story, written by Trilla and featuring Liz Carpenter, is a fitting finale for this much loved series. —Robin Wittig, Editor, *Story Circle Journal*.

It was a room full of women, and not a one made a sound that February Friday in 2004. We come together to celebrate our selves and our stories, but now we sat silenced, waiting to meet a part of the histories of our collective lives. There was a noise in the hall. Someone stepped to the front of the room to ensure that the path was clear. A friend made a brief but unnecessary introduction—we all knew whom we'd come to see.

I'd grabbed a seat near the front; no way was I going to miss a word she said. I knew that when SCN announced Liz Carpenter as the keynote speaker at the second Stories from the Heart Conference at the Red Lion Hotel in Austin, Texas. The place was sold out. For all her place in history, and it was a big one, Liz was Texas's own, Austin's own, and especially that evening, she was Story Circle's own and that's what she was about to join us to talk about, to share with us the importance of telling our stories.

She had arrived with some spectacle a little earlier; I'd watched from a safe vantage across the lobby. Clearly, she had difficulty getting around. Well, why not? She was a mere eighty-three years old at the time. I spotted a ramp, and thought that she'd probably be using a wheelchair. Her friend must be going to push her in. Then a purr filled the room; all eyes turned to the door. Here came Liz. No one pushed Liz around, she was self-propelled.

They may call those things "scooters," but what Liz did was more on the order of "full speed ahead." Across the room and up the ramp. I learned later, I wasn't the only one who feared that she'd fly right off other side. She didn't. She came to a precise stop and proceeded to enthrall her audience for the next hour.

She told us about her life: moving among the powerful of the nation and staying home to take care of the children who needed her. She told us a little about public speaking. She also told us about the importance in her life of her writing circle—her Story Circle—how it was not merely the telling and sharing of her own story but hearing the stories of her sister members that kept her going.

"My mind is like a volcano spewing up ideas."*

That was not my only encounter with the Liz's volcanic personality. A few years later I was in Austin with my husband Bob. He was doing research for his dissertation in Twentieth-Century American History. He made an appointment to interview Liz. She was generous and set aside a morning for him to visit her at home. I begged to come along. We picked the coldest, iciest,

snowiest, slipperiest day Austin has known in ages. Bob called and suggested "maybe another day."

"Come now," Liz responded. We did. Liz welcomed us in her bedroom, probably the best spot in the world for regarding the capital city of Texas. She was propped up like a queen and fully groomed. She delighted us with insightful, and often, funny stories and accounts of her colorful life. She clearly reveled in the attention, particularly the male attention. As the morning wore on she suggested perhaps I should go to the kitchen and help her caregiver make lunch, which, yes, she insisted we share with her.

In the kitchen the caregiver and I lamented that she hadn't known we were coming. We could have brought lunch. Now we resigned ourselves to a "from the freezer meal." It wasn't bad. Some breaded fish fillets sprinkled with Tabasco, mixed vegetables, and for desert—canned fruit and the chocolates we brought. I set the table while she cooked. Then we called Bob and Liz in. He wheeled her in to the head of the table where she regaled the three of us with such marvelous stories we scarcely noticed what was on our plates.

We lost Liz this March, but I'll never lose the memory, not only of a gallant public servant and compassionate mother, aunt and friend, but of a fiery, funny, feisty woman who knew how to laugh with the world.

I've adapted a favorite family recipe to honor the wit and spicy spirits of Texan Liz Carpenter.

Volcano Fish (in honor of Liz Carpenter)

1 pound fish filets or steaks	2 pinches turmeric powder
1 tsp red chili powder	1/2 tsp salt
1/2 tsp black pepper powder	Vegetable oil for frying

Mix all the spices with a little water and rub the paste over the fish. Set aside for an hour. Heat the oil in a frying pan or wok and shallow-fry the fish until it is golden brown. Remove and drain the excess oil on paper towels. Repeat till all fish are fried. Serve on a bed of lettuce with lemon wedges. (This rub is also excellent used with shrimp or chicken.)

A long-time member of Story Circle Network and of the Internet Chapter, former SCN president Patricia Pando (usually known as Trilla) lives and writes in Houston.

*I remember Liz's exact words because I went straight to my room and recorded them in my journal.



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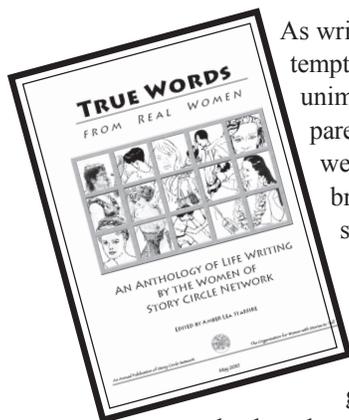
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Your *SCN Anthology* Is In Your Mailbox!



As writers of life stories, we might be tempted to think that our own lives are unimportant or ordinary when compared with those of other writers, but we each have experiences that can bring gifts of perspective, grace, solace, forgiveness, and joy to others. That is why I believe that sharing our life stories—the joyful and humorous, as well as those of loss and pain—is a gift we give one another. Our

words, though sometimes fragile representatives of our memories and adventures, have the power to touch hearts and open minds.

In the 2010 True Words Anthology, you'll find stories about life as children see it, the awkwardness of coming of age, and of finding our true selves. We remember our family traditions and express the joys of being mothers, of nurturing other lives into being. We laugh together at the antics of our pets, and we talk about what the act of writing really means to us. We share memories about hard times—abuse and loss, surviving illness and the cruelty of others. And yet, we continue to express gratitude for all the wonderful things, small and large, that life has given us.

Each Anthology is a treasure chest of our collective experiences and viewpoints. The job of selecting which pieces to include is always both difficult and rewarding. This year, we received so many wonderful stories and poems—154 submissions compared to around 80 last year—it was impossible to include all the pieces that wanted to be read. So, I am pleased to announce that we will

be publishing an online Supplement to the 2010 Anthology that will contain all the pieces that were not included in the Anthology itself. (The supplement will be available for download in early June.)

In the meantime, I suggest that you grab a cup of tea, find a comfortable chair, and savor the lovely jewels within the 2010 True Words Anthology.

~Amber Lea Starfire,
Editor *True Words Anthology*

Amber Lea Starfire, publisher and editor of *Writing Through Life* and the *Writer's Eye Magazine*, edited this year's anthology. Amber, a freelance editor, writer, and photographer earned her M.A. from Stanford University, has taught at Community Colleges and businesses for twenty years, and is currently teaching in SCN's online program. You can email Amber at amber@amberstarfire.com

New Leadership for SCN Online Classes

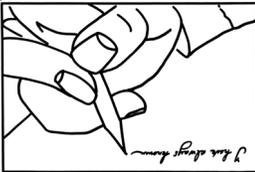


Amber Starfire is expanding her role with Story Circle Network! She is taking over the role of coordinating the Online Class program. This is a very important SCN project, and we're so pleased that Amber will be able to give it the attention it needs for the program to grow and help even more women. For more information go to:

www.storycircleonlineclasses.org

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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** and your poems are **30 lines** or less. We may edit your submissions for grammar and spelling. Members only please. Here are the upcoming topics and deadlines:

September 2010 (due July 15)—*Autumn Dreams*
December 2010 (due Oct. 15)—*In the Bleak Midwinter*
March 2011 (due Jan. 15)—*It Started as an Ordinary Day*

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

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

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