

STORY CIRCLE JOURNAL

Vol. 14 No. 3, September 2010

The newsletter for women with stories to tell...

Congratulations to the Winners of the 2010 Susan Wittig Albert LifeWriting Competition

by Lisa Shirah-Hiers

SCN is proud to announce the winners of our eleventh annual Susan Wittig Albert LifeWriting Competition! The judges were faced with a major challenge as they sorted through 40 entries on the topic "letting go" (suggested by our True Words editor, Mary Jo Doig). We invited writers to reflect on a time they had to let go to move forward, a time when they recognized that holding on no longer made sense. We asked them to consider what it was that helped them realize it was time to let go, how hard it was to do, what they learned along the way and how the experience changed them and their life.

The first place winner for 2010 is Khadijah Lacina from Shihr, Yemen for her story "Finding Home". Second prize goes to Susan Kasper of Georgetown, TX for "Making Lemonade". Jo Virgil of Austin, TX took third place for "De-Demonizing Maui" with fourth place held by Margaret Stephenson, also of Austin, TX for "I Have to Let Her Grow". The winners received cash prizes and their pieces appear both in this journal and on the website at: <http://www.storycircle.org/Contests/winners.shtml>

The contest would not have been possible without the many hours of reading and reflection by our 16 wonderful volunteer judges. Thanks to all of you and to my Co-chair, Peggy Moody, for her terrific organizational skills and web wonder-working. Thanks also to all the participants for your wonderful stories and the hard work you put in to writing them down. I encourage all of you to keep writing and to consider entering again next year.

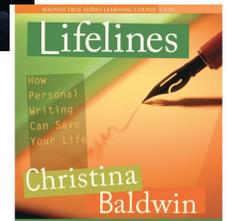
If you did not enter the contest this year, I encourage you to explore this topic of "letting go" in your own writing. It is an especially rich and rewarding one. And do consider entering the contest next summer. Win or lose you'll have a honed piece of writing you can be proud of.

SCN Launches E-Extra! Our Online Journal Supplement

"E-Extra!" joins SCN's Journal, our annual True Words Anthology, and our monthly podcast as a place to feature the writing of our members. To check it out, go to the Members-Only section of our website, click on Writing Resources, and follow the link to "E-Extra." There, you'll find instructions for submitting your writing (up to 500 words). The first issue of "E-Extra!" features pieces from five SCN sisters who discovered one another at the 2010 conference. We can't think of a better way to introduce our new publication!

2011 LifeWriting Retreat

Make plans now to attend SCN's LifeWriting Retreat with Christina Baldwin at Festival Hill in March, 2011. See the story on page 3.



Go To: www.storycircle.org/LifeLines/

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Letter From SCN's President—



This is an extraordinary moment for SCN. With more than 10 years behind us we are at a crossroads: do we maintain, or do we grow?

It's not a simple question. The sheer number of things we currently offer taxes our board of directors and other volunteers. Our national Stories from the Heart Conference, Lifelines Retreat and Writing from Life weekend workshops alone require hundreds of volunteer hours to pull off. Our web presence has expanded, with our monthly national eletters, our Internet Chapter, the largest women's book review site on the web, online classes, our Herstories blog, and our monthly podcast. And now we're on Facebook and Twitter too! These activities demand far more of our irreplaceable Executive Director, Peggy Moody and a cadre of volunteer editors and coordinators than ever before. Even though many similar writing organizations have resorted to eliminating print versions of their magazines to keep costs down, and even though our membership dues no longer cover our administrative and production costs, we continue to publish and mail a quarterly print journal and annual anthology. (A downloadable version is available for those who prefer it.)

A quick comparison makes clear that our dues are far below those of similar organizations that offer far less. Therefore, in July of this year, the Board of Directors voted to raise dues gradually over the span of the next three years while continuing to offer scholarships to those who need them via our "Sugar Bowl" fund.

We are blessed with a hard working Board of Directors which includes several new, enthusiastic members. We are all dedicated to expanding the concentration of SCN members and circles in areas outside Austin so we will have enough volunteers to offer events and workshops in other cities. Our Board—including new Membership and Program Chairs Pat LaPointe and Linda Thune as well as our new Circles Coordinator, Barbara Miller—is committed to fostering women's life writing in communities under-represented at the current time including minorities, non-native English speakers and young girls. We want to ensure that *every* woman and girl who wants to can be served by our organization, find their voice and through it, their personal power.

You can help. Consider increasing your member dues to a higher category, making a donation to our fall fund drive or giving a gift membership to a woman friend or family member. Offer a memorial donation and post the name of a beloved mother, grandmother, daughter or sister on our Memorial Tribute page. Make all your on-line purchases via our Amazon portal or order a book, t-shirt, gym bag, stationary or coffee mug through our Cafepress on-line store. Download our brochure and leave copies in a library or woman-focused business in your community. Forward our free eletters to the women in your life, friend us on Facebook and sign up for our Twitter updates. If you're a blogger, post our button and logo on your website. Take advantage of our free Facilitator's Guide to help you start a circle in your area and encourage your circle members to join. Volunteer at our national conference or submit an application to our Board of Directors.

Whether you are an amateur or professional writer, we'll help you too. Check out our "Resources for Writers" page on the website to find tips on everything from proper grammar to how to write a legal disclaimer. Join our active life-writers group, list your blog on our blogger's page, visit our Market Watch page, or submit a piece to the True Words section of the journal for consideration. Make use of our editorial service or mentoring program. If you're a published author join the listing on our author's page and take advantage of our book review site by posting your book cover (a small ad fee applies) and submitting your book for review. If have a writing-related business post it on our Member Services page for just \$15 a year. If you are a workshop teacher or public speaker, join the free listing on our Speaker's Bureau or submit a proposal to teach an on-line class.

We're passionate about women's stories and we know you are too. Together we can grow into a truly international organization and ensure that future generations of women have a place where their voices will ring out clear and true.

~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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 PO Box 500127,
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 ISSN: 1093-7528

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Membership Rates

One Year \$45 US
 \$55 Canada and Mexico
 \$60 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.

Join Christina Baldwin for SCN's Lifelines Retreat, March, 2011

by Lisa Shirah-Hiers



What if we really talked with each other, and listened to each other, and held each others' stories as sacred information that could transform our lives?

What if we learned to shape the stories of our lives as containers for our experience and an expression of our heart's greatest desires?

What if we wrote what we had learned and took it home with us as a guide to realizing our dreams and hopes? Writing our past in the present can be a life line to a future filled with hope.

Make plans now to come to Texas March 4-6, 2011 for our women-only Lifelines Retreat at Festival Hill in Round Top, Texas. Located 75 miles east of Austin, the International Festival-Institute was founded in 1972 by world-renowned concert pianist James Dick and has developed superb year round education and performance programs. In your off-time you can enjoy their unique 200-acre campus including their extensive gardens, parks and nature preserves.

Our 2011 retreat will be facilitated by SCN member Christina Baldwin, whose book, *Life's Companion: Journal Writing as a Spiritual Practice*, has been the basis of many of our journaling classes. Christina graduated from McAlester College with honors in English and from Columbia Pacific University with a master's degree in Educational Psychology. In addition to *Life's Companion*, she is the author of *Calling the Circle: the First and Future Culture*; *The Seven Whispers: A Spiritual Practice for Times Like These*; and *Storycatcher: Making Sense of our Lives through the Power and Practice of Story*. A coveted speaker and workshop presenter, she is the co-founder (with Ann Linnea) of PeerSpirit, Inc. (<http://peerspirit.com>). Find out more on her website: http://storycatcher.net/christina_baldwin.html

The all-inclusive fee covers triple occupancy room for Friday and Saturday night, 5 meals and drinks/snacks during breaks. * Early bird registration fees are \$400 for SCN members, and \$435 for non-members. After December 31st the price goes up to \$425 for members and \$460 for nonmembers. (Non-member prices include a one-year SCN membership.) Space is limited, so register early! For info or to register visit: <http://www.storycircle.org/LifeLines/>

* Single-occupancy rooms are an additional \$25 per night. Participants can arrange to stay Sunday night as well, at an additional \$62 for triple occupancy or \$85 single.

Member Dues to Increase

by Lisa Shirah-Hiers

After very careful consideration, the Board of Directors voted in July of this year to increase SCN member dues gradually over the next three years. We did not make the decision lightly. Member dues no longer cover our administrative and production costs at a time when postage and other expenses continue to rise. We are determined to continue offering a print edition of our quarterly journal and annual anthology, without resorting to eliminating them in favor of on-line only editions, as other organizations have done. Finally, we want to continue to offer scholarships via our Sugar Bowl fund to those women who cannot afford to pay for their membership.

To make it easier on you, this change will be a gradual one. In September, dues will go up to \$45 in the U.S. (\$55 in Canada and Mexico and \$60 elsewhere.) Dues will be raised another \$10 in September of 2011, with a final increase of \$5 in 2012. There will be a one-time Internet Chapter dues increase to \$20 in September, 2010.

We are also revamping our other membership levels, increasing them slightly, closing the distance between levels, adding three new choices, and changing the names of some categories. The levels will now be: Friend \$75, Donor \$100, Supporter \$125, Contributor \$175, Sustainer \$225, Patron \$300 and Benefactor \$400+.

These changes will bring us up to date and allow us to continue our many current member services and programs while we continue to grow and develop new ways to help you tell your stories.



SCN Sugar Bowl Scholarships

Story Circle Network empowers women to tell their stories, discover their identities through their stories and choose to be the authors of their own lives. We're in our 13th year of helping women find their voices. Sugar Bowl Scholarships help our members in need pay their annual dues and participate in some of our programs.

Why not become a contributor to this worthwhile program? To add your contribution to our Sugar Bowl Scholarship Fund, send a check to: Sugar Bowl, Story Circle Network, PO Box 500127, Austin, TX 78750-0127. You may also donate on the SCN website at www.storycircle.org/frmdonate.shtml.

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, websites, 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.



Finding Home

by Khadijah Lacina, Shihr, Yemen

My fingers have combed
through your rough dirt
planted seeds
we have sipped
your breast's sweet
nectar
you taste of home

Even before my husband and I married, we shared the dream of someday moving to Yemen. For years, this was a dream that had to be set aside, left to slumber as we travelled around the U.S looking for a good home for our children. From city, to city, to inner city we travelled, as my longing to establish roots somewhere grew with every move. Finally, we were able to purchase a three story house which had been taken from its previous owner for nonpayment of taxes. It was in a medium sized town in upstate New York. Its insides were unfinished—in some rooms there were cracks by the windows where the trees outside could peek in and see how our little family of gypsies lived. The yard was small and overgrown, with a huge comfrey plant near the back and some ancient pear trees along one side. It was perfect for us.

My husband fixed up the top floor right away, then proceeded to make the kitchen livable, and the living room actually comfortable. The middle floor was left for a later time—while never being finished or even really partially finished, one of its rooms became the boys' bedroom, and one my workroom, where I concocted herbal potions and made soap to my heart's content.

I spent hours outside in the backyard, digging out the largest garden space I could, as well as a couple of smaller ones around the edges of the house and the back fence. I planted vegetables and herbs, choosing those things that my children could snack on as they played outside, or which could be used as medicines when they were ill. The only exceptions were the morning glories which snaked up the black wrought iron fence in the backyard—I have always loved these joyful little flowers, and every time I looked at them I was reminded of my sister Patty, now gone from this earth, who covered her little house in the northern Wisconsin woods with them every year. I rejoiced when the plants pushed free from the ground, and I saw the children pause in their play to eat a carrot from the garden, or nibble on nasturtium or borage flowers.

We got to know the people in our neighborhood. Once they got used to me wearing my Muslim overgarments, my husband and the boys wearing Saudi thawbs, and the girls in their colored scarves and pretty skirts and dresses, they saw us as people, and, eventually, as neighbors. I sold my soaps at local businesses, was asked to speak at the small, privately owned bookstore on Main Street, and my son joined an archery club and learned to bow hunt. In a word, we became accepted.

When the horror of 9-11 occurred, we stayed in our house—it became a sanctuary as the world outside became just a bit scarier.

Our car was vandalized and people would drive by yelling obscenities at us, just because we were Muslims. We stuck close to home, our lifeboat in rough seas, and tried to ride out the storm. I realized just how thoroughly our neighbors had embraced us when I was outside one morning harvesting calendula flowers, and the big, bearded, Harley Davidson driving sportsman who lived across the street strolled over. He stood looming over me for a minute, then said, "You having any trouble with the people around here?" My husband, who had been standing nearby, said that no, it was nothing we couldn't handle. He replied, "There's a lot of inbreeds in these hills—if anyone gives you trouble, come to me." With that, he shambled off, not knowing that my mouth was hanging open under my veil at this gruff offer of assistance, this offer of community. The tears came when I went back inside.

One day, after we had lived there for about two years, my husband and I were walking together—something we have tried to do at least once a day since the beginning of our marriage. We walk, and connect, or reconnect, or try to figure out why we are on some sort of disconnect, and we always return recharged and recommitted to each other and our family. This was a beautiful spring day, the trees newly dressed in their green tops, waving happily to each other across the valley. When we reached the top of the hill overlooking the high school, Khalil told me that he had figured out a way that we could finally realize our dream of going to Yemen. If we sold the house, we could afford tuition to a language institute, and to live there for at least a year; then we could see if we could stay longer.

If we sold the house...

hands hold tight
the smell of sweet soil
and life fills my senses
then the pull
the tug
I feel your fingers
slip from mine

Once Khalil had made the decision, it was only a matter of time. He worked to finalize things with the buyer, and we began to sort through the accumulated artifacts of nine years together. The idea of throwing away little bits of our lives, or giving them to strangers, made my heart hurt, but he only wanted us to keep a little bit in storage, those things which we just couldn't part with. Being pregnant with our sixth baby made it even harder. What bit of ourselves would this child never know? The quilts made by my mother, my grandmother's afghans, the gifts of my sister and parents, given to make our house a home, the favorite book of five children? I almost couldn't bear the decisions...how do you choose between all that is beloved to you?

Finally came the day of the sale closing. I thought it should be raining, angry, dark—but it was a clear summer day, a betrayal of the pain in my heart. I hated the people who were buying it—they were going to renovate it and rent it out—my soap room, my enclosed porch, my garden to be destroyed—I hated them, and I hated my husband, just a little, for doing this to me, for pulling up the roots I had finally been able to start sending down in this little community. I cried behind my veil, and began to say my goodbyes.

Afterwards, sitting in the car behind the building, my husband held me as I wept for our lost home, for our lost community, for a path swept away that had seemed so right to follow. When finally the tears were spent, my husband held my hand, his artist's fingers entwined in mine. I realized then, that by letting go of this house, I was finally and irrevocably saying to him, "You are my home." I wiped my eyes, sat up a little straighter, and looked ahead, to the new path we were going to forge, to the new future we were going to write—together.

lives enmeshed
shared
path stretches ahead
we have found
our home

About the author:

I grew up in the Kickapoo Valley in Wisconsin, and lived all over the States before ending up here in Yemen. I have a B.A. in English and Theater from the University of Wisconsin. My passions are my eight children and my husband, Islaam, writing, homeschooling, fiber arts and herbs! I teach Arabic and Islaamic studies to women here, and I work to teach them to recognize their importance, and the need for their stories to be heard.

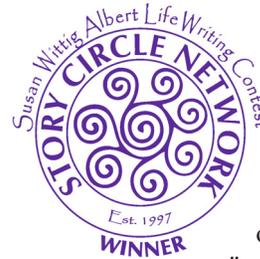
Epilogue

I just wanted to thank you all SO much, for the support and encouragement you all give me. I don't know if I would have found my "voice" as clearly as I have, or placed as much importance on sharing it, if I hadn't found Storycircle and met so many amazing women through it (LIKE YOU!!) Winning the Lifewriting contest meant SO much to me...mostly in intangible ways, but the prize money, being about half of what we make in a usual month, is also a BIG bonus!!! We had a party at home last night, we ate falafel sandwiches and french fries, drank Tang, and danced and sang (we didn't bring our cassette player to Sana'a with us). It was probably off key, but it was fun fun fun. I truly wish you all could have been there with us.

My son and his family came down a few days ago, it is so good to see them...it is the first time seeing my grandson, at a year and a half, he is such a little character—he obviously has a theatre bent in him, much to his parents chagrin. He doesn't speak English, so I have to decipher arabic baby talk, a whole new language!! I am relieved they came when they did, as the cease fire didn't hold, and their village is under seige again. Two of his next door neighbors were killed a couple of months ago, and the snipers are known to target women and children...so needless to say, I am relieved.

I just want to say again, how much I appreciate you all, the connection I feel with you is truly a gift, and I am thankful every day for Storycircle and all the good that has come to me through it.

Peace to you all, Khadijah



Making Lemonade

by Susan Kasper, Georgetown, TX

The ultrasound tech squeezed gel on my breast. How nice; it's warm. I relax as she gently moves the wand over my skin, probing for the "something" that doesn't feel quite right to me. I watch the machine, which seems to be staring at me, pulsing lights undulating across the screen. I have had this experience before, when mammograms have indicated they are "seeing" something suspicious. It's okay, though—I have lumpy breasts.

The ultrasound exam is barely over when the radiologist comes into the room, looming over me. "We need to get a biopsy as soon as possible!" That isn't a part of the script. I am stunned, and can't think of anything to say, so I say nothing. A cold rain pelts down on me as I walk out of the hospital.

Today I let go of the smug certainty that life will always be sunny.

I was so nervous that my heart pounded and my blood pressure soared as the nurse prepared me for the biopsy two days later. She assured me that the Lidocaine will numb me and I shouldn't feel a thing. The radiologist inserts a needle that looks to be the size of a turkey baster into my breast. With a click and a snap, he harvests tissue from this dark invader. I watch as he deposits the bloody strings of tissue into a container with my name on it. The biopsy hurts, both physically and emotionally.

"I'm certain it's malignant," the radiologist says, his brown eyes registering something like sympathy. "I'll call you when I get the pathology report." Numb, I drive home, unsure what to do as I wait by the phone. My brain chants, "Cancer, Cancer, Cancer!"

Today I give up my collection of endless tomorrows.

Wednesday becomes Thursday and then blends into Friday. I sit by the telephone. Everytime it rings, my heart bottoms out somewhere around my knees. My heart knows it's cancer—my brain wants it out—now!

Monday my gynecologist calls and chokes out the words I am expecting. "I'm so sorry; you have cancer." She refers me to a surgeon. I decide to let my family and friends know. I call those closest to me and email the others who might want to know. Amazingly, I am calm and I don't cry. I am eager to engage the enemy; do what must be done. I name my unwelcome visitor "Dammit."

Today I let go of paralyzing fear.

I have decided cancer is about patience, of which I have little. When one hears the sinister term, "It's malignant," after the shock and settling, the first thought is, 'GET THIS THING OUT OF ME!' I want it done yesterday, or before, if possible. Don't confuse me with the details, just get it out!

Then reality sets in. Decisions, decisions. Breast cancer is

about a lot of decisions. How can I process the necessary information, get the expert opinions, and make the important decisions that may literally save my life? The clock is ticking. I move into another time zone—Now, Now, Now. And what happens? The clock slows to an irritating "Tick" . . . "Tick" . . . "Tick" . . . I close my eyes and pray.

Today I let go of fruitless impatience.

Google becomes my best friend. I spend hours each day researching breast cancer. I learn many things. Knowledge begets power. I begin to develop my list of questions for the surgeon, the plastic surgeon, the oncologist. My family is completely supportive. My friends gather 'round, with hugs, comfort, and promises of prayers. I become obsessed about educating my friends about cancer. I tell them everything, except how scared I am. They all think I am "brave" and "positive."

The surgeon orders an MRI, since there are questions about other areas in my breast. The MRI shows "multiple areas of suspicious tissue in the right breast." She has scheduled more biopsies tomorrow. As I clutch the phone to my ear, I am thinking, "Just get 'Dammit' and his devil spawn out of me!" We opt for a mastectomy, rather than hoping for a lumpectomy.

Today I let go of the hope that this is just a "little bump in the road."

My friends are phenomenal! We gather for our bi-weekly poker game and the subject comes around to boobs. We all have two of them, more or less, and I discover that four of my fifteen poker partners have had breast cancer. We all lament that our breasts aren't where they used to be, and one friend announces that she wears a "size 36-long bra!" Another sighs that she likes her breasts okay—she just wishes they were where they started out. I laugh and enjoy the warmth and genuine love I feel from these wonderful women.

Today I give up a part of my secret self-reliant self and embrace the ministrations of others.

At last, after seven weeks, all of the preparations come to an end. I finish all of the medical appointments, the last test, the last "To Do" on my pre-op list. I preregister at the hospital and have the necessary blood tests and EKG done. I answer the same questions I have answered many times before. The medical establishment now has more information about me than my parents, my children, and my husband ever did.

Tonight I pack. I shower and lovingly soap my "old lady" breasts. Tomorrow they will be gone. Tears trickle down my face, mirroring the lazy cascade of droplets on the shower door. I finish my preparations and go to bed. As I lie staring sightlessly into the dark, I begin to count the ways I have been making lemonade out of the lemons. I prepare for the ultimate "letting go"—giving up a part of the body I was born with, letting go of a part of my femininity, a part of my youth. I close my eyes and experience a feeling that a multitude of loving arms encircle me and hold me close. I sigh and go to sleep.

In losing a little, I have gained so much. I have learned patience; I have found courage; I bask in the love and support of

friends and family. And maybe, most of all, I have learned that though our tomorrows may crash and burn, we can become stronger, more realistic, wiser—more focused on what is really important in life, and we can choose to live joyfully, letting go of the "fluff" that once seemed so important, but is really only an illusion.

I close the front door and turn my face to the morning sun, ready to begin this next chapter in my life.

About the author:

After retiring from a long career in nursing, Susan moved from San Antonio to Georgetown Texas, where she enjoys an active, fulfilling life in beautiful Sun City. At sixty-five, she savors the time spent with her son and his family in Austin, and her three grandchildren keep her young at heart. An avid reader, Susan also enjoys traveling, playing cards, and bowling (very badly!) After being widowed at the age of forty-eight, Susan learned the value of journaling, and has been a member of "Story Circle" for three years. She hopes a book lies in her future.



De-Demonizing Maui

by Jo Virgil, Austin, TX

If I ever had any doubt about the power of ritual, it would have been washed away into the Pacific Ocean off the shores of Maui this past April.

My trip to Maui was more than merely a relaxing vacation, although it was certainly that. My daughter Lauren and I went snorkeling over protected coral reefs, we sat in awe of an authentic luau, we ate fine Hawaiian food, soaked up sunshine, watched whales and sunsets, visited, read—all the magical things that an incredible vacation offers.

But after my four days with Lauren, I had another two days to myself, alone—to figure out how to re-paint my memory of Maui. The last time I was there—five years, seven months, and twenty days before—Les and I were celebrating our 33 years of life together as husband and wife. That trip, too, was wonderful, but the shock of his leaving me just five days later left a stain on every memory I had of the island. Going back to de-demonize Maui was the whole purpose of this trip.

After Lauren left, I spent my first day alone mostly sitting on the beach, thinking, meditating, trying very hard to become part of the peace that wrapped the island. I watched newlyweds walk hand-in-hand along the shore. I watched older couples laughing and sharing stories. I watched children squeal as the waves snuck up on them and doused them in sandy salt water. Happiness was all around me, and I wanted to taste that.

I became fascinated with the wet sand and the waves—how people would walk along the beach, leaving deep footprints to mark their path. Then a wave would come in and smear the distinct five-toed prints into mere oval indentations in the sand. Then

another wave would come and erase the ovals entirely. Then another couple would walk along, leaving their footprints, and the cycle repeated over and over. I felt a knowing settle over me—a connection with all the cycles of the planet, of life, of humanity. I understood to the core of my being the necessity of seasons, and birth-and-death, and sunshine-and-darkness, and waves that smooth out the sand. It all made perfect sense, in a way that words won't describe.

I knew what my de-demonizing ritual needed to be. I watched the pattern of the ocean until I was sure how far the strongest waves would come up on shore. Then, as soon as one strong wave crashed up to that point and slid back out to sea, I stood and took exactly 33 steps along the edge of the wet sand, leaving my own deep footprints to represent the 33 years of my marriage. Then I sat back down on the dry sand and waited.

It took three big waves to erase my footprints, to wipe out any evidence of my having walked along the shore. It was a process, a cycle. My 33 footprints became part of the planet, part of nature that changes and cycles and breathes in and out. It wasn't a negative thing—I didn't obliterate my 33 years of marriage or destroy the wonderful memories that I had. What I did was relegate that bit of my history to the inevitable cycle of life. Things had changed—a beach with footprints is no better and no worse than a beach without. In the end, they are the same thing.

At the core of our human spirit, we are wrapped in nature, and in each other, and in the past and the future, and it is ritual that ties all that together and helps us make sense of it all.

My ritual was perfect. I left Maui with a peace that I hadn't felt in five years, seven months, and twenty days. I still miss Les. I still miss the good times we shared and the life we created together. But things changed.

My footprints on Ka'anapali beach are not really gone—they just changed form.

About the author:

Jo Virgil knows the power of story. Story Circle Network, the Central Texas Storytelling Guild, and the Writers' League of Texas are essential aspects of her life, as is writing. Jo works as Community Outreach Specialist in the Texas Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities, where she often gets to hear powerful and moving stories.



Visit the Story Circle Network Blog

**Telling Herstories:
The Broad View**

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



I Have to Let Her Grow

by Margaret Stephenson, Austin TX

I can't control the way my thirteen year old daughter, Kaley, looks through me, conveying the message that I don't understand her, that I am invisible and she's done with me. She drops a musical script she has written on the table and asks me to read it. I swallow tears; the lucid writing explores the intense emotions between a mother and a daughter, the same subject I'm trying to assimilate. She writes things like, "And you will never see how happy I am. I differentiate myself from my mother. I've finally found a place where I am like no other!"

I say, "I love the script, what was your inspiration?"

She shrugs and says, "it just came to me," as she grabs her journal and disappears to the tree fort, where she can hide away from me and her little brother and sister. I want her to grow up, but I also want her to remain who she is right now; she is an important piece of the puzzle, a piece of the family of five I have poured myself into, and a pain rolls through my chest when I resist reaching out to her as she walks away.

After lunch, she sinks into the sofa, slowly covering the screen of her laptop with her body, her eyes darting toward me when I walk by as she's instant messaging her theater friends. Sometimes I catch a glimpse of what she's talking about and see lines of LOLs and short sentences I can't quite make out. I too hide my writing and click on a new tab if someone's eyes seem to spend too long near my computer while I am journaling my way to self-understanding in my fourth decade.

Today she spends time in the middle of the family-action, in the living room and in the kitchen, ignoring her little brother running around the house doing his "exercise" and her preteen sister filling 300 water balloons in the sink. She reads and writes, laughing aloud to herself and occasionally sighing in frustration as I keep my distance but stay in sight while I do my own work, just in case she might invite me into her world. I try to be sensitive to her need to lose herself in the moment and not be interrupted; I know when I begin asking questions and needing her help, she will slink into her room quietly, trying not to be noticed. I miss the 12-year-old that spontaneously included me in her activities. I reach out, hug her, and say, "I love you."

She is distracted from her thoughts and replies, "why do you always do that?"

I say, "don't you ever feel a wave of love rush through you where you just have to hug that person and let them know how you feel?"

She raises her eyebrows, shakes her head, and says, "no-o-o".

I read my worn copy of Louise Bates Ames' book, *Your Ten-to Fourteen-Year-Old*, which explains that young teens have to withdraw so that their fragile personalities, which are in the process of being formed, can be protected. I am adjusting to my evolving role and trying to make sense of my own emotions as I let go of the reigns and discover what she needs from me.

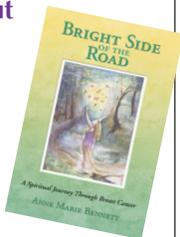
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On this breezy Spring evening, as I take breaks from a book to catch caterpillars in the garden with my son, Kaley opens the front door and says, "Michael asked me to the dance".

I say, "oh, that's so nice," trying not to give away that while I am happy for her, I am also trying to make sense of my circling thoughts, "is she too young, should I be more open, less open, should I allow texting and instant messaging, should I question more?"

She stands tall with a sparkling smile that shoots out of her eyes, but she's reserved, her voice is smooth and confident. She stares out toward the street in thought while I observe her and then she slowly begins to describe the weeklong string of conversations between several of her friends that culminated in the "will you go to the dance with me?" question from Michael. We fall into the comfortable part of our relationship, laughing together, as I ask questions and she explores the details with me. The Elium's, in their book, *Raising a Teenager*, share and I take comfort in the statement, "the young teen hangs suspended over two realities—the familiar security of home and family and the dangerous unknown of the search for self." I remind myself as I flip through self-help books about teenagers late into the night, to respect her when she flies away from me like a baby bird and to welcome her back to the nest when she returns.

I embrace the night as I lie in the bath, peering out the window at the dark sky, listening to the younger kids play in the other room; it's the one place everyone seems to understand I am off-duty. Kaley quietly walks in, finds me in the bath, and immediately undresses and slips in. She's confident that I want her with me; she doesn't even ask. Each day her growing body changes and I'm surprised as I look at her face and can still see the baby she once was. She talks about a dream she had the night before and I stare at her, trying to memorize her face before it changes anymore.

I say suddenly, "when you were born, I was surprised by what you looked like."

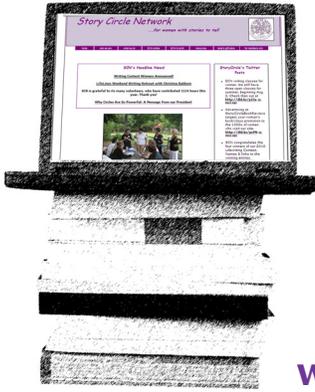
"What did you expect?" she asks.

I say, "I pictured you as a generic, chubby baby, like you might see in a diaper commercial, but you had wise eyes and distinct features and I was mesmerized." She smiles and my heart jumps.

I greedily wish for more, but hope I can appreciate the sweet moments we have together and join her in this journey through the teen years. I am reluctantly letting go of the parent I was, quietly mourning the one that she needed when she was younger, and listening intently as I try to follow her lead while she gets to know herself as a teenager.

About the author:

I am a homeschooling mother living in Austin, TX with my husband and our three children. If I'm not in the process of actually writing, I'm usually thinking about what I am going to write while jotting down ideas between legos and stoplights. I have immersed myself in learning about parenting and education since the moment my first child was born 13 years ago when my passion suddenly switched from counseling others to caring for my own children. Taking classes through Story Circle Network has inspired me to dive into writing about all that I love.



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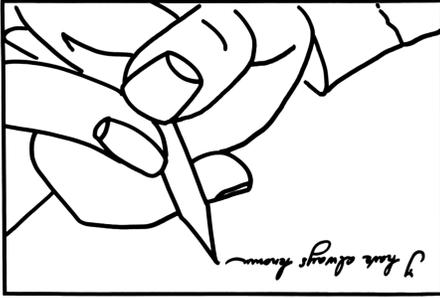
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(October 18-November 8, 2010)



True Words from Real Women

Autumn Dreams

A selection of short pieces of lifewriting by our members, edited by Mary Jo Doig. The theme of this issue's True Words section is "Autumn Dreams." Contribute your own True Words to the Journal. Future topics are listed on page 24.

Autumn Dreams

Arlene Howard, Rancho Mirage CA

"I will go if we can stop by Niagara Falls," Mom replied. "It is my dream to go there." I chuckled. I had asked Mom if she would like to drive from Maryland to Utah with me. I would be spending the year at Utah State. Never mind that Niagara Falls was a 360-mile detour. Dreams are dreams. I had always wanted to go there, too.

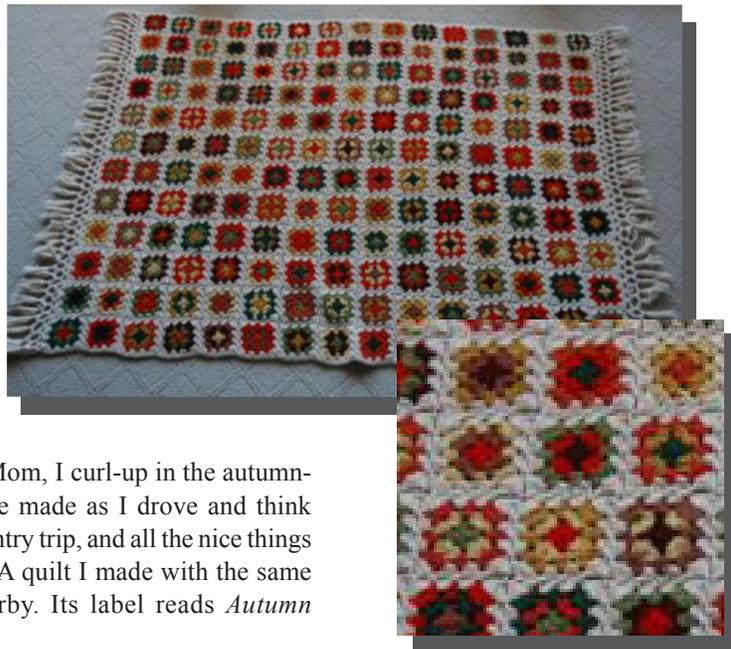
On the morning of September 18, 1976, we packed our things in my 1967 Volkswagen bug. With Mom crocheting and me at the wheel, we waved goodbye to my husband Alan and my Saint Bernard and headed toward Pennsylvania. In Erie, the trees were showing their fall colors: deep orange and shimmering yellow. The next morning as we entered Buffalo, I saw flashing red lights. "Your headlight is broken. Get it fixed."

No citation. "Whew!"

As soon as we got to Niagara Falls, we bought tickets for the Maid of the Mist boat ride. Water splashed all over our black oilskin jackets as our boat passed by American Falls and Bridal Veil Falls. Ahead rainbows danced on the rushing water. We heard the roar of billions of gallons of foamy ice-green water spilling over the 2,500 foot wide Horseshoe Falls. Dripping wet from the dense spray but smiling like a Cheshire cat Mom shouted, "I am finally here."

The next day we had dinner with Alan in Cleveland, then said goodbye again. When we reached Madison, Wisconsin, Mom asked, "Can we find a five and dime? I need more yarn." After a night of rest, there was more driving and more crocheting. Postcard to Alan: *Saw the Mississippi, Mt. Rushmore and snow on the golden aspen in Yellowstone. Arrived in Logan. Logged 2800 miles.*

Now when I need to talk to Mom, I curl-up in the autumn-colored granny square afghan she made as I drove and think about Niagara Falls, our cross-country trip, and all the nice things she did for me and our daughter. A quilt I made with the same colors as the afghan hangs nearby. Its label reads *Autumn Dreams*.



Florida Fall

Ann Conrad Case, Gainesville FL

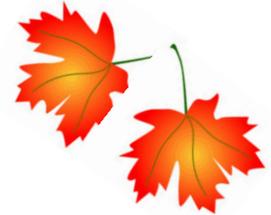
the first yellow leaf
floats down from the plum tree

a blue jay lands
among the cardinals
calls harsh "school days"
after the liquid notes of summer

the light lays out along the lawn
thin and sideways slanting

the breeze stirs cooler
in the early morning

there is a turn of seasons
in the tropics
you must stay and learn
its ways, watch and be
patient



Woodsmoke

Khadijah Lacina,
Shihr, Yemen

scent of woodsmoke
taunts
tantalizes
tugs my heart
by the hand
to Autumns past
crisp bite
of a Mackintosh
straight from the tree
hills draped in a
joyful riot of color
cool nights
loudspeaker squawks
saxophone sings
a silvery song
slow dancing
crepe paper lined gym
i long again
for the warm strength
the security
the safety
of my father's arm

September Birthday Losses

Christina Wells, Washington DC

Before their dad's surprise seventy-fifth birthday, Julie's sister Nina stands in her spotless kitchen and asks if we are still trying to have a baby. We do not tell her that I am in the act of having a miscarriage. Julie and I seem to have created a silent bond that you do not mention losing a pregnancy right before a family reunion.

Julie has wanted to make sure we deliver her part of Robert's birthday present. All the sisters are responsible for bringing one of the gifts that will have everyone's name on it, and Julie will announce that everyone has bought Robert a ticket to Las Vegas. This is, she thinks, the best part and even when she was driving the day before, yelling at me, I knew this to be the reason why she would not turn around. The part with the presents would be the time in the weekend when she would feel better about being the one to have no Little League pictures in her father's front hallway, the one where he had come bustling in with the daughters from the second marriage, fresh from getting candy after Mass. This will be the part where Julie can smile and say, "You deserve it, Dad. You deserve to be happy."

I tell Nina I was briefly pregnant after the very first insemination attempt, but neither Julie nor I mention that I was gulping ginger tea as late as yesterday. Now I sit on a barstool in the suburban Ohio kitchen, watching Megan drool carrot baby food down her dimpled chin, while Nina says cheerfully, "You can try again—you've got lots of time. Here, do you want to hold her?"

She thrusts the baby into my arms, and two little blue eyes look up at me as if to say, "I know." At least she does not do what babies tend to do with me when they are hungry, root around as if I can feed them, looking confused when there is no milk.

Conestoga Wagon Days

Charlotte Smith, San Antonio TX

My soul mate of 30 years, Papa Bear, went out one day and bought a Conestoga wagon with a team of mules.

From then on, the man who sold them to us, "Old Scotty," would come to our ranch on Sundays to teach us wagon-driving and to join us for a steak dinner. He was the last of the "muleskinners." The folks who drove teams of mules were known as muleskinners, I was told, because long hours of handling the reins would inevitably skin their hands.

Old Scotty taught the Baby Bears—our son and daughter—how to put the harnesses on the mules and how to hitch them to the wagons. We went on trail rides every weekend. Autumn was a favorite time for us because the leaves would fall around us as we followed the trails.

We were usually the only wagon on a trail. Sometimes, one or two other wagons would join us. One of those other wagons had rubber car tires. But our wagon wheels were the traditional iron ones. Our wagon had no shock system like you have in a car, so our teeth would rattle intensely—practically get shaken out of our mouths—as we rode.

I would even wear a bonnet and an 1800s-style, long, gingham dress over my jeans. I felt like I was really playing the role, even though the Baby Bears would laugh at me and say I looked foolish.

Papa Bear had always wanted the Baby Bears to be half-country and half-city. I do believe that by teaching them the ways of muleskinners, he achieved that goal.

Dreams of a Special Autumn

Victoria F. Jessop, El Cajon CA
jessopfam@cox.net, SCN w-ecircle 6



1956—more than fifty years ago! I was twenty and on my first holiday abroad. So long ago now, my memories are dreamlike, but I remember the excitement of Paris in Autumn, the chestnut trees with brown leaves, sunny in the day and cool in the evening. Landing at Orly Airport, we took the bus to Les Invalides, and had our first taste of "foreign-ness," when it was blocked by a parked car on a narrow street. We listened with interest and awe to the loud volley of French as the driver spoke to some men nearby, who then bodily lifted the Citroën to the sidewalk so he could drive through.

We stayed at Reuil-Malmaison, a small but lovely town some kilometers from Paris. Its church holds the tomb of the Empress Josephine, who spent her last years at the beautiful villa Malmaison, and where we saw a model dressed in Napoleon's clothes. We decided he certainly was short—the size of the bed confirmed that.

How we explored Paris! Each morning after breakfast, we would go to the station at Reuil, always stopping on the way to buy our simple lunch, and then, taking the train to Gare San Lazarre, we'd ride the Metro to some planned spot in Paris and take the day to walk back to Gare San Lazarre by evening. All those years in school, I had dreamed of seeing the pictures on my French bookcovers—Opéra, Nôtre Dame, and, of course, the Eiffel Tower—now I saw them with my own eyes.

But in my dreams, while I still see the sights of Monmartre, the cobbled stones, the Sacré Coeur, I still can smell the scents of Gitanes and Gaulois, coffee from every bistro, and the less pleasant, but ever pervasive, sewers. How wonderful it was to take the elevator on the Eiffel Tower and look at Paris from *la deuxième étage* where you could see the Arc de Triomphe, the Champs Elysées, but I also dream of those wonderful French pastries, and particularly *tartine de mirabeaux*.

A Dream of Autumn

Nancilynn Saylor, Austin TX

mimi10417@sbcglobal.net, SCN w-ecircles 4 and 6

With the advent of autumn a change is in the air
 days begin to shorten
 The Monarchs migration to Mexico is on its final approach
 The silent hum of
 Of a thousand gossamer wings
 Fluttering furiously
 Spilling their eggs upon
 The milkweed beds
 We prepared in spring/meant for this autumn arrival
 The Monarchs know this
 As surely as we know they will come.
 For they only eat the milkweed...
 Eggs hatch, quickly becoming Caterpillars
 Voraciously feeding on the bed- now- buffet
 consuming it they begin to furiously spin
 crystal chrysalis chambers
 Only to quickly emerge as butterflies again-
 To feed then fly
 the route
 Encoded in butterfly DNA
 as they have never seen Mexico;
 landing perhaps,
 In the crooks of trees
 In Michoacán-
 The same trees
 as
 Their winged ancestors before them
 rested.

The Fall Season of My Life

Helene Benardo, Bronx NY

hlmb2h@yahoo.com, SCN w-ecircles 5 and 9

It's tempting to go the route of new books, new binders, new pencils, etc. However, at almost 75 years of age, I'm leaving those aspects of Autumn Dreams to my four grandchildren.

For me, Autumn Dreams refer to the season of my life. It's the time of retirement from my career, indulging in hobbies long loved and talents newly discovered and, of course, enjoying the aforementioned grandchildren.

It's also a bittersweet time. I'm lucky that my husband of 49 years and I are in reasonably good health, but what of those friends and relatives from all the seasons of our lives? Too many are gone and too many are ill. The downside of our luck is watching the loss and decline of so many.

I try to maintain an equilibrium that will let me balance both sides of the equation. It's not easy and, being of a somewhat melancholic disposition, requires constant vigilance on my part.

These so-called "golden years" (read "old age") are not a walk in the park. There are tremendous pluses and many minuses. Living "in the moment" is a goal to work towards and to strive for.

But somehow life was so much easier when Autumn Dreams meant new books, new binders, and new pencils!



The Breath of Promise

Lorraine Williams Markham, Ontario Canada

lorwill@sympatico.ca

Autumn is the season that holds the breath of promise to persons of all ages. When we're young, it heralds the anticipation of starting school. When older, it offers a surprising relief to the laziness of summer with a return to the security of routine.

Many North Americans experience nature as her paintbrush transforms trees into flaming displays of dazzling colours.

One autumn decades ago marked another wondrous beginning for me. Our wedding was planned for September. My fiancé and I chose a relatively small reception after the church service, for about sixty of our relatives and friends. I was feeling tentative about the whole thing, because my future bridegroom and myself came from different religious backgrounds. His family was not overly enthused about that. I wondered if this would affect his enjoyment of his own wedding!

At the reception, my in-laws requested not a sit-down dinner but rather a cocktail party with no cocktails. My in-laws had also requested no alcohol be served—a totally new wedding

reception experience for my Irish-Canadian dad who had his nationality's love of rum! The toasts were kept to a minimum.

The muted speech making started. Finally it was my new husband's turn to deliver the last word. He gave the usual recognition of thanks to both sets of parents for having brought us up lovingly and being supportive of us all our lives. Then he turned to me. I wondered if he was going to be defensive about his choice of bride, or would he make a generalized speech, sincere but inoffensive. Instead, after looking at me with love in his eyes, he turned to the guests and said these words of conviction:

"Tomorrow happens to be my twenty-sixth birthday. And I want to tell all of you, Lorraine, my bride, is the most beautiful birthday present I have ever received in my entire life."

His words on that autumn day gave permanent substance to the dreams we'd talked about for our life together. No wonder I love September.

Who Do I Dream That I Am?

Deborah Doblado Bowers, Wimberly TX



Autumn Adoption

Susan LaBrose, Schulenburg TX
labrose@cvctx.com

A search for self in the autumn of my life, who am I?
I am a bigger story now, and the little story
I am the whole and the part, nested within All

I am the window ledge, deep and wide, three stories high
Breathing in moist morning air, with a bird's eye view
Touching treetops, seeing all I can see

I am the red peeling bark of the madrone
Shedding old skin, peeling back the layers
I am the hollowed out redwood, with its blackened web filled womb

I am the golden thread of light, shining through a triangular lens
Beyond womb and web, through movement and body prayer
From here to there

I am a warrior, a family of soldiers
Learning how to move as one, speaking a shared voice
With quiet strength of a new found warrior guide

I am the round eyes of night eagle
The broad red shoulders of little eagle
A receiver and messenger, filled with questions of wonder

I am a sacred stream and a wise old tree
A vast wave in the ocean, a wet footprint in the sand
I am the gentleness of my partner

I am you; I am me, merging as One
Moving up and down the Spiral
In search of Goodness, Beauty and Truth

Joe and Sybil had not lived together long, but had been married for some time. Soon after their marriage, World War II called him away.

With his return, as with all reunions after lengthy separations, there were obstacles to overcome. Once again they were reminded of Joe's mother's disapproval of Sybil. In addition, Joe's postwar employment was short lived due to an auto accident which occurred in a 'borrowed' company car.

Steady employment returned when Sybil, believing in Joe's abilities and their combined motivation to be successful, bravely approached her in-laws and asked them for financial help so that Joe could start his own company. The elders agreed to a loan, and the company was formed.

As the business grew and financial stability improved, Sybil and Joe began planning for a family of their own. Unfortunately, Sybil discovered that she was unable to conceive.

Although disappointed, their strong desire to have a child led them to consider the possibilities of adoption. Learning that adoption through an agency could take quite some time, Sybil turned to her physician for advice and he told her that she and Joe might be able to adopt a child privately. He knew a couple, the woman being a patient of his, who wanted to put their soon-to-be-born child up for adoption. Since the two couples seemed to have much in common, he suggested that the biological parents might agree to a black market adoption.

They did.

Feelings of eagerness and apprehension regarding the outcome of this human gamble filled the waiting period. As agreements were made Joe and Sybil began to realize that their dream would become a reality: this would not be a 'chosen' baby, but would be a 'wanted' one, though unacceptable to Joe's mother.

Soon November arrived; all was ready.

I was born, an autumn dream: the beginning for one family; an ending for another. I was born to parents who never saw me and adopted by parents who saw the strawberry-blonde, blue eyed girl as the perfect fit for their 'perfect family.'

Their autumn dream lasted several years.

All Saints Day

Ann Conrad Case, Gainesville FL

gently raining leaves,
the tears of autumn,
in sun's warmth, stolen
from the days to come

life stirs, spring-like, in second birth
with the release from hot or cold

the season is its own joy
golden are the days
anticipation, preparation

winds walk and stir. red leaves, dancing,
fall and skip, like children out of school
there is a freedom of the season
that gives 'way all the bounty of the harvest
and stands naked, stripped to only life

all the green and glory of the summer
gone, fallen, taken from the fields.



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Bluestem in Autumn

Lynn Weiss, Lake Dallas TX

Great Spirit,
As your breath touches the Bluestem
Turned straw in the summer,
Gently creating circles, ellipses, and vibrations of movement
That quiver from base to tip,
More restrained at the plant's feet,
Broader reaching silhouetted against the sky,

I realize that my life, too, lives through its seasons.
Bluestem and I are in an ending phase,
Preparing for rebirth next year.
Dreamed in the autumn blush of lavender and blue,
The plant and I display our sheen of beauty,
Burnished by months of living.

Though fall foretells this ending
So tomorrow can come yet again,
Blessed by the soul that is ours,
With its remnants of wisdom within,
Our spirits carry forth the vitality of life
Lived fully through our seasons of time.



The Promise of Change

Carol Wessling, Bellevue NE
wess66@cox.net

Oh yes, I dream of autumn,
Colorful, cool, and invigorating,
Even the shorter days will be welcome to summer-weary folk.

It's 90 degrees outside now,
And the 'feels like' temp is worse,
As high humidity envelopes us in a sauna-like feel.

The rain just will not stop,
And flooding has been rampant,
Here in the normally pleasant but now sweltering Midwest.

We long for cooler temps,
And the crisp, colorful leaves of fall.
A time to finally be able to enjoy being outside in nature.

A time to relish fresh air,
The sight of leaves changing color overnight,
The feeling of coolness on our summer-hot skin.

Oh yes, I dream of autumn,
While wiping off my brow.
And I give thanks for seasons, as I welcome the promise of change.

Preppy Aspirations

Shawn Essed, Taneytown MD
SCN w-ecircle 3

Sitting on my bedroom floor I methodically went through the Ames, Kmart, and JC Penny catalogs circling the new clothes I wanted for school. Oh, I was so excited to start junior high in September! We couldn't afford Polo or Izod like my friends talked about, but the knockoffs weren't as expensive. I coordinated "polo" shirts with button downs, sweaters, jeans and cords. Leaning down closer I made sure the shirt I liked didn't have a weird off brand emblem on the pocket.

Sauntering into the kitchen, "Okay Mom, I worked it out. If I get five new outfits for school, it will be less than \$150." Flipping through the catalogs I showed her my plan.

One feature at a time Mom's face shut down.

"Well, I can definitely wear my Docksiders from last year." I pursed my lips. "I don't need all of this stuff. Maybe just half."

Mom said she'd talk to Dad. That meant he'd talk to my stepmother and she'd take us to the second hand store on Eastern Avenue in Baltimore. I took my catalogs back up to my room and sat with them on my lap. I felt stupid for making Mom feel bad like that.

Dreading facing my best friend to talk about her shopping trip, I wondered if I could still get away with, "Um, I forgot," when the kids at school said, "I like your sweater. Where'd you get it?" What difference did it make to them anyway? Mom said she was sure lots of kids hid Ames and Kmart tags. My sisters and I did enjoy finding second hand bargains. It made us feel like we were getting away with something. But, ugh, the ridicule if I ever let that slip! Maybe if I went through the catalogs again and just chose a few key items to mix with the second hand stuff...



Time Changes

Roxahne Adams, Converse TX

No work. No errands. No neighbors. No phones (well, except cell phones for emergencies only.)

It's time to relax before we get back to the hustle-bustle life. It's Labor Day weekend—a sign of change in so many ways. Summer ends. Summer clothes go on sale. School starts. School supplies and fall clothes fill the stores. Darkness comes earlier. Even the clocks change soon.

I see the bus drivers learning their routes. And I know it's time for marching band to start too. I am 14½ years old. So fall also means that it is almost time for my 15th birthday.

I love the fall and the changes that blow in and blow out like the autumn wind.

After the Wedding

Susan Ideus, Las Cruces NM
susanideus@gmail.com, SCN w-ecircle 3

In honor of our 42nd wedding anniversary—August 30, 1968

The wedding was over, the reception had been fun, we'd escaped the well-wishers who pursued our car with its "Just Married" sign, and we were alone!

It was almost midnight and we were also...starved! We realized that neither of us had eaten since the rehearsal dinner the night before. We were in the midst of a huge rain storm complete with window-rattling thunder, and didn't *really* want to go out anyway. Always resourceful, Harold found a room service menu, claiming 24-hour service. He called, and observing our limited newlywed budget, he ordered a burger and fries with two plates. Soon it arrived, with a fully-garbed waiter rolling in a tray with our burger "under glass." Harold mumbled some sort of embarrassed thanks, gave him a too-large tip, and closed the door behind him. We collapsed in giggles. But, we did enjoy that burger—and the rest of the night.

Early the next morning, we took our things out to the car. To our dismay, all of our clothes, left hanging in the car, enough for our whole Colorado honeymoon, were missing. We hadn't taken them in because of the rain. Disheartened, we walked back to the room, deciding we might have to give up the trip, as we surely couldn't replace almost our entire wardrobe. Just then, the phone rang. It was our friend, Patt. Surprised to hear from anyone this particular morning, Harold managed a mostly civil greeting. A huge grin spread across his face, and as he hung up, he said, "We're going to Colorado by way of Patt's place." It seems we had not eluded our well-wishing friends after all. They'd followed us to the hotel, and remembering the broken wing-window in Harold's old Ford, they had "stolen" the clothes. Patt was calling to see why we hadn't picked them up. Our "friends" did leave us a note, under the windshield wipers, explaining where they were, but it had washed away in the storm!

An hour later, we were on the road to Colorado, and our own special "Autumn Dreams."

I could not live without Autumn.
 How can dying things be so beautiful?
 The colors draining from summer
 Leaves yielding shamelessly to autumn hues
 As if they had been soaking up warm honey and melted butter.
 Leaves the color of chocolate kisses and mulled wine.
 Green leeching into the ethos
 Feeding my soul for the winter's journey.

Autumn Dreams

Suzanne Mitchell
smitchell1979@alumni.unc.edu, SCN w-ecircle #3

Back in the day, autumn brought the smell of new saddle shoes and colored notebooks waiting for their gleaming lined pages to be filled. Brilliant displays of red and gold leaves became crispy brown bits that crunched underfoot. Friends returned from summer vacations either tanned and fit, or pasty white if they, like you, had heard the sound of the surf only from deep within the pages of the latest beach read. There were new teachers, classes and roommates; decisions about drop/add and pass/fail; tests to take and papers to write; and holiday breaks to look forward to. You had to make room in your closet for a season full of hand-knitted sweaters with Grandma's sweet scent still lingering on them.

These beginnings, though, were always somewhat bittersweet, as the days grew shorter and the nights grew colder. You could see your breath and inhale the scent of snow. Your future featured frozen gutters, clanking radiator pipes, and hours of wrestling with snow tires and shovels. You loaded the trunk of your car with emergency cat litter, blankets and flashlights, just in case. You bought pads for the dogs' paws, and a cord of wood from the guy in the panel truck. And you tried hard, as you did every year, to remember whether you were supposed to turn into, or away from, the inevitable skid on the black ice.

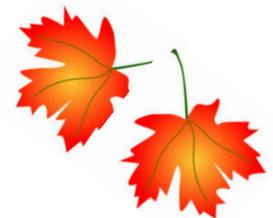
But then you moved to Texas.

The white-faced golden retriever has lost the September spring in her step and plops down in the street like a mule. Your stained sneakers sink into the melting asphalt and you head back to find the ruby slippers that will transport you home. You wear the requisite post-Labor Day blacks and browns, and swear to shoot yourself if your boss requires pantyhose.

You turn your internal calendar on its head. Now it's May that is bittersweet; the fountain's gurgles and the last remnants of fresh air disappear into the whirr of the air-conditioning that will run nonstop for six months. You give Grandma's sweaters to Goodwill. And you start dreaming of autumn in January.

Autumn Dreams

Carol Ziel, St. Louis MO
 SCN w-e circle 6



I could not live without Autumn
 With its memory of summer's hot breath
 And winter's deep slumber.
 Like a pied piper it dances seeds into the cooling earth.
 Like a mother it soothes them to sleep.
 It pulls me from the heated season of my own summer
 Lays me to rest with nature's best.
 I gather the seeds of my future.
 Wait for winter.
 And wait for my own sleep.

This Peace Of Time

June Baker Jefferson, Fayetteville AR

I stand in our yard, take deep slow breaths and feel the tension flowing away. The action puts me in remembrance of the rejuvenation I feel as each season changes in these beautiful Arkansas Ozarks.

Whether I am settled into our sitting places or just walking out the door with places to go, a fragrance, sound, or motion in my peripheral vision will bring me to a halt. It seems as if my breath automatically holds. At that moment, my body goes into voluntary paralysis, afraid if I move, this peace of time will end too soon.

I do eventually breathe, of course, and in the process smell the last scents of mint and four-o'clocks, abelia and autumn clematis. They are mixed with the inevitable odor of fall: the rich humus of old forest blending with new layers of leaves, the musky deer and raccoon, summer-dried ponds biding their time until the rains of fall.

As I move toward my car, I recall our family's black Studebaker and occasional Sunday drives through the Ouachita mountains and countryside during my childhood. Once Daddy motioned from the car steering wheel at some roadside groves of fiery red leaves and dark purple berries. I was surprised that he moved his driving hands in an unsafe manner. Even more remarkable was that he pointed, which we had been taught was rude. So I looked out the window and listened closely. He simply said, 'Sumac,' in the voice I treasure to this day—fervent and somewhat hoarse—as memories of his camping, hiking and horseback riding days replayed.

"Your daddy was friends with my daddy long before we started courting. They hiked all over these hills," Mama said.

Just two little things—a plant and an explanation about why it was noticed—and off we'd be on another trip of reminiscences complementing the one we were taking over the same roads my ancestors had explored. My family opened the door to Nature's wonders for me while developing my storyteller's heart.

Some time this autumn, my husband and I will find ourselves driving on our hilly backroads with the car windows down, watching the leaves change almost right before our eyes. We'll see a bank of red and purple and both say, thankfully, 'Sumac.'



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Immortal Dreaming

Barbara Youngblood Carr, Austin TX
bcarr2@austin.rr.com

When the first blue norther gusts into the valley each fall and crosses the Illinois River, pastures, forests, mountains and Molly Field Cemetery, it paints everything on the earth with first frost. Trees close pores, slip deep inside themselves and, with small wild things wintering there to escape the elements, seek warmth inside bark tunnels and dormant sap.

Stone markers sink further into even colder graves. Brisk winter winds whisper through every tree, curl around all remaining dead leaves, sketch a different poem onto each one before the once brightly-colored fall messenger floats down to cover the resting places of our ancestors.

When the wind calms down, silent snowflakes sometimes fall softly, cover loved ones' dust with their special blankets.

Fall leaves, bones and memories dream all things, whisper all secrets, cry everyman's tears. After drying off sorrow's traces with tomorrow's sunshine, they will chant every word ever written back into the air and sky, paint butterflies and rainbows with their soft colors, join the Great Spirit and become immortal.



My Mom and Me

Tina Clemons, Fort Worth TX

I am walking in the countryside, taking in the beauty of autumn. I am wearing my mom's old, knitted sweater.

It's just my mom and me.

Actually, my mom is in heaven. But the crisp breeze and the sweater stir up memories. I can somehow feel her holding me.

The squirrels are playing hide-and-seek as they gather nuts. I look around. The trees are losing leaves, but they are still beautiful. I see yellow, brown, and light green leaves everywhere. I start running and jump right into a pile of them.

It's just my mom and me.

I feel so much peace and calm. I will always remember this day. The wind is singing. I remember my mom singing gospel songs. That woman had the voice of an angel.

The journey back home begins—for just my mom and me.

It was a lovely October afternoon in New Mexico's Jemez Mountains. Harold and I had driven up to see the fall colors, especially spectacular this year. The shimmering gold of the white-trunked aspens with the backdrop of the red rocks and evergreens in this area was breath-taking.

Harold knew something was bothering me, and in the quiet time of driving, we talked. I had been so unsettled since my Dad's death some weeks before. I'd been with him when he died, and he'd seemed peaceful; but still, there was something bothering me. My mom had been so angry with him, vexed that he *dare to die* and leave her. I felt like he'd heard her tirades even though she'd been so sure he was "out of it." I hated thinking he'd died feeling a burden of guilt.

Daddy loved coming here and the day was filled with memories of him—his favorite café in Jemez Springs where he'd order Blue Corn Green Chile Enchiladas so hot and spicy they made him cry, yet laugh with delight at the treat; walking around Bandelier National Monument and exploring the Indian ruins;

The Golden Cathedral

Susan Ideus, Las Cruces NM
susanideus@gmail.com, SCN w-ecircle 3

fishing at Fenton Lake; and, picnicking at Jemez Falls. I was swathed in these warm remembrances, and my anxiety began to fade.

Harold pulled into a trailhead parking area, held out his hand and said, "Let's walk."

Before long, we found ourselves in a dense aspen grove. Leaves crinkled beneath our feet. Overhead, sunlight filtered through the gold-laden branches giving a shimmer to the crisp autumn air. We walked into a clearing that resembled nothing so much as an outdoor cathedral, filling my soul with a reverent stillness and awe.

"Oh Harold, Daddy would have loved it here. Whenever he came to see the aspens, he'd tell me it always made him feel like God was in His heaven and all was right with the world."

There was my answer. Sitting on a log, I sensed Daddy's presence beside me. I swear I felt the brush of his hand on my shoulder and the breeze whispered, "All's right, Sissy."

And indeed, now it was.



SCN's LifeWriters Group

Daily Ideas and Inspirations

by Dani Greer

The SCN LifeWriters Group on Yahoo.com boasts 130 members who post an average 200 messages a week. This group is very active, and you can join the conversation. Go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/scnlifewriters/>

SCN's LifeWriters Group, is an online community where SCN members get together to talk about lifewriting and our lives. It's like a party, with many conversations going on at once, in many different "rooms" (& on the patio & in the kitchen) and on many topics.

To help focus the conversation, days of the week are designated for special topics (but we never stick to just these).

Monday: Brazen Hussies Day (we brag!)

Tuesday: Journaling

Wednesday: True Words (favorite quotes)

Thursday: Food & the Environment (yes, these are related!)

Friday/Saturday/Sunday: What we're reading

The Yahoo group is one of SCN's official publications, and is open to members only. The goal of the group is to share bits of

lifestory, but not formal stories—the place for sharing formal stories is in a writing circle. Our goal as individuals is to be present to one another, to "listen one another into speech," as Susan Albert has said, and to discover how alike we are under the skin. In our cyber-circle, we become close friends, witnesses to one another's stories.

I have learned not to fear, but to celebrate, the rooting of my insights in the story of my life. I have learned to trust that when my writing is most open and vulnerable, it is also most powerful, most likely to touch a chord and to influence change in others. This not because all of our stories are the same, but rather because we are all embodied: the telling of one story opens a space for the telling of another.—Carol P. Christ



Take A Bow! Spotlighting Our Volunteers

Amber Lea Starfire

by Robin A. Edgar

Amber Lea Starfire's signature includes the phrase "Writer/Editor/Teacher," but that's not even half the story! A Story Circle Network member since 2007, she is also an accomplished photographer, blogger and publisher, as well as our very own Online Class Program Coordinator and the coordinator for the SCN Blog, HerStories.

Born in Oakland, California, Amber is proud to be a fifth-generation Californian. She and her husband moved to Portland, Oregon in 1973 right after they married. Twelve years later, and after a year in Amsterdam, they returned with their family to California to stay. Amber is currently in a loving, supportive relationship, with four children — three grown and one still at home — and four grandchildren. "Although I've moved around Northern California, from the Bay Area to the Foothills, this is definitely home," she says.

Stumbling upon the Story Circle Network website while doing some research about online writing critique groups, Amber became a member of online reading circle #1 and writing e-circle #12. She says she loved Story Circle's mission of helping women tell their stories. She believes that SCN empowers women to leave powerful legacies of story for their children and grandchildren—women who might not otherwise have the courage to think of themselves as writers or storytellers.

"I liked that the focus is on the stories themselves, not so much on the craft of writing. I feel that craft is important, but first we must give ourselves permission to write, and to do so imperfectly," she says. She adds, "The organization also helps each one of us realize that our stories are important to the world. I wanted to participate in and be a part of this empowerment."

Although she managed to attend the 2008 SCN conference and return to the 2010 conference this year, Amber says it is hard to keep up with her circles—and with all of her other activities. Teaching SCN classes online since the winter session of 2008, she also accepted the position of SCN Online Class Program Coordinator this summer, succeeding Susan Albert. In that capacity, she hopes to help SCN continue to attract qualified and talented teachers, expand our course listings, and serve more students. She also says she ultimately hopes the program will attract more women to SCN's membership.

"One of my biggest skills is the ability to quickly assess and analyze information and come up with intuitive solutions to problems. Of course, when I'm taking over a job from someone else, it's important to first learn how things have been done in the past. But I'm open to experimenting and trying new things.

So, openness, problem solving, and a take-charge attitude are all assets I bring to my job."

Amber also brings a great deal of administrative expertise. She has a background in curriculum development and the evaluation of educational programs, helpful for evaluating online course proposals and balancing the course offerings each session. She also previously held positions as a program director, a project manager, a database developer, a CEO, and (of course) a teacher. "I would say that my cumulative experience enables me to bring a variety of skills to the online class program."

She also recently volunteered to coordinate the SCN Blog, HerStories with hopes to expand the number of regular blog articles, enlarge the blog's presence on social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, and increase the number of followers and subscribers. She says, "Ideally, the blog will not only serve

as a resource for SCN members but will draw new members to the Network." She's also made the blog available on Amazon as a Kindle subscription for readers who want the blog downloaded automatically to their Kindles. (The link to subscribe is <http://tinyurl.com.237ft15> - or just look up HerStories in the Kindle store on Amazon).

In addition to her work for SCN and developing curriculum for her new online classes, Amber blogs and writes nonfiction articles on a daily basis. She is also the Editor/Publisher of The Writer's Eye Magazine, which she founded out of frustration about the fact that it is difficult, as a photographer and writer, to market in two different directions. Conceiving the idea of a magazine that publishes works by writers who are also visual artists, the name, The Writer's Eye, came to her while she was traveling in her car. "When I returned home, the first thing I did was to see if the domain name was available. Wonder of wonders, it was. So I bought it, set up the website, and began soliciting submissions," she recalls. The magazine was launched in November, 2007.

In The Writer's Eye, each story (fiction or nonfiction) and poem is accompanied by a work of art created by the story's author. On rare occasions, the magazine has published collaborative works, usually by creative teams in the same family. "I'm currently in the process of redesigning the magazine website

"I liked that the focus is on the stories themselves, not so much on the craft of writing. I feel that craft is important, but first we must give ourselves permission to write, and to do so imperfectly."

so that it will deliver continuous, live content, as the work is accepted and edited,” says Amber.

At the beginning of this year, after a lot of soul searching and feeling torn between her two arts, Amber decided to make writing her top priority and photography her second. “I found that I didn’t have the time and energy to devote full-time to both. And when it came down to it, I realized that I felt more confident about actually making a living with my writing, editing, and teaching skills than my skills as a photographer.”

Amber is currently working on a book with the same title as her website, *Writing Through Life*, which she hopes to publish by next June. She is also writing a memoir, tentatively titled *A Mother Like Mine*, which is scheduled for completion in summer of 2012. And recently, she began the MFA Creative Writing program at the University of San Francisco. “I’m very excited about being around all these creative, brilliant writers, and will be exploring short fiction forms as well as the nonfiction forms I’m more familiar with,” she explained.

Keeping photography as a semi-professional/amateur occupation, Amber often uses photos from her portfolio with her blog posts and has been putting together galleries of photos on starfirephotography.com, her site on Fine Art America. She admits that her photography doesn’t always tie in with her writing, but she loves portrait photography, landscapes, and macros (close-ups) that create a sense of abstraction. She has been experimenting with High Dynamic Range (HDR) photography, which combines exposures from up to seven photographs to create one photograph that holds much more detail. HDR photos can be super-realistic or surrealistic, depending on how they’re processed.

When she is not working on her photography and writing or for SCN, she enjoys spending time with family, gardening, cooking, and cycling. “I am creating and living the life of my dreams everyday; it is a passion for me to empower women to grow as individuals and writers.”

You can find Amber’s stories, both in story and pictures, on her blog or website www.writingthroughlife.com!

Excerpt

The High Sierra Century, or Amber’s Blustery Day

A Nonfiction Story by Amber Lea Starfire, ©2005

... I don’t know if my forgetfulness is acclimation or the result of the scenery. Breathtaking, startlingly beautiful, the high desert stretches before us. The mountains are stark sentinels, devoid of almost all growth and lined with snow in deep crevices. Their colors are arranged in layers, from bright orange to cement-gray sand. The valleys are flat with stubby, rounded shrubs crowned with bright yellow flowers. The flowers here are all yellow, orange, or red as if, by being closer to the sun, they can do nothing but reflect its brilliance. I know that it’s too harsh here to support anything but summer growth. The peace is deceptive, and I want to live here forever.



A Story Circle LifeWriting 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; and the last day to register is September 24. 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.



When our bikes rush down the long hill from Dead Man’s 8500’ summit, I am gloriously happy. After 25 miles on highway 395, we turn right onto Hwy 120 and gather together to wait while one of our team members changes a flat. Mono Lake lies before us, its blue only a little deeper than the cyan sky, its salty waters clear, calm, and seeming empty. My eyes feast. I cannot get enough. My camera and my mind take pictures, but I want to stand here and breathe, fully saturated in the air and smells and sounds of this remote, quiet, and dangerous place....



A Conversation With Pattie C.S. Burke

by Mary Jo Doig

An accomplished teacher and artist, Pattie has broken through many barriers in her life's journey and now, in her seventh decade, has published her first book, a memoir titled *Women and Pedagogy: Education Through Autobiographical Narrative*. Using prose, poetry, and drawings, Pattie explores through her own story the inextricable connections between teaching and learning, the ordinary and extraordinary, the familiar and unfamiliar, leaving home and returning home, absence and presence, life and death, war and peace. Her story intersects with her readers' stories in a myriad of ways. Here is a recent conversation with Pattie.

SCJ: One of the things I often hear other writers struggle with, and am experiencing myself in writing memoir, is how to organize the material. Your memoir is comprised of a wonderful variety of genres: poetry, prose, art, and response essays. I found this combination very powerful and I'm wondering how you arrived at using these varied art forms to tell your story.

PB: It wasn't actually planned; it just grew, which made the entire endeavor much more exciting! Art had been a major part of my entire life prior to retirement. At that time, I began writing poetry and stories with the same passion that accompanied my art—as though the art begot the words. Therefore, incorporating some art into the volume felt natural; they are all part of my life story.

I don't want to give the impression that this was easy! I was unsure if any of it would work when I started. My oldest son was the sounding board for my doubts. It went like: "Patrick, should I include this? Is it too much?" and so on. His answer was always the same. "It's your book, Mother. Whatever you do is right." It didn't take me long to quit asking.

*CSJ: Your title is *Women and Pedagogy*. My understanding of the word "pedagogy" is "teaching." Yet, after reading your book, my sense is there is a much richer, more multi-dimensional meaning to the word. Tell us your definition of "pedagogy" as it applies to your title and book.*

PB: Your understanding is correct. In fact, I considered using the word "teaching" until I searched Google and found that "Women and Teaching" was already in use. Therefore, the word "pedagogy" became a practical solution as well as an aesthetic solution that I have internalized. I love the word!

You are also correct in sensing more to the word choice: A few years ago I attended the Curriculum and Pedagogy Conference in Marble Falls, Texas, where I presented a reading from some of my stories. Through discussions that followed and presentations by others, I began to appreciate the importance that curriculum scholars place on autobiography in the classroom as well as in life. And for me, the word "pedagogy" also encompasses this life-writing method of teaching.

SCJ: Do you devote a certain amount of time each day to writing or artwork? If so, do you have a certain time and/or place where you do so?

PB: I am on the computer the better part of the day when at home. Most of the daytime writing is necessary business and personal e-mails. Late night is when the creative bug bites best! My desks, books, files, and computer paraphernalia are all in one room with a bed. (Don't let anyone tell you that this doesn't work!) I can be completely lost in writing until about 2am or later—whenever I feel sleepy—and fall into bed. If the phone rings in the mornings before 10, I will growl!

CSJ: You and your sons found unexpected gifts during the writing of your book. Please share a few examples with us. Did the writing of your memoir change you in any significant way?

PB: As verbose as I can be at times when I talk about my boys, this question has left me with a restrictive lump in my throat. Maybe some day I will be able to share to the extent this answer requires; for now, I can tell you that writing this memoir has given me an appreciation for the fullness of my life and for those who have been a part of that life, especially my sons.

SCJ: What was the hardest part of your writing and publishing process? Was there any part that was easier than you'd expected? Did you experience any surprises?

PB: The introduction was the most time-consuming. Although autobiographical, it required more research. The most tedious part was trying to work through all of the editor's queries, especially the ones concerning the Response Essays that followed my stories. I was grateful when my son, Patrick, took over part of that chore for me. (He may have been concerned for my sanity at that point!)

I was surprised at the frustration I felt over punctuation—not all punctuation; just commas! I can't say that anything about the whole process was really easy, but it was so satisfying when the words of the stories would flow freely and I could forget the technical stuff!

SCJ: You give us such a strong sense of place in the book. Has writing about New Orleans given you further insights into how your life was shaped by that time and place?

PB: Oh my, yes! I wallowed in those memories! When you read the story, I Know What it Means, in Part III—Home Is, you will probably see right through to my heart. Open and honest life-writing is a gift bag full of insights!

In addition to the insights discovered in my own writing, I was blessed with the gift of reliving New Orleans through the essays of my boys, Patrick, Kevin, and Billy. I could never have known them as well during those distracting years of extremes as I now know them through their writings.

SCJ: All told, from beginning to end, how much time was involved in writing and publishing your memoir? From your present vantage point, is there anything you would have done differently?

PB: It was over two years from the time I wrote the book proposal until the April, 2009 book launching. However, I had written several of the poems and stories much earlier and spent many hours revising and re-revising these early works before I felt they were right for the book. (My adult children have dubbed me "perfection-correction.")

I don't have an answer to your second question; it's not in my nature to think about what I might have done differently! I certainly learned a lot from the entire experience, which will be helpful in the future.

SCJ: Georgia O'Keeffe is one of your favorite artists and is the central figure in your chapter, "Art is Landscape." What drew you so strongly to her work and how has her work influenced your own?

PB: From the time my young boys were in school, and I was able to return to art, I became passionate about interpreting and painting landscape. I spent many hours painting and sketching outdoors with a small group in and around New Orleans. It wasn't until some time later that I discovered Georgia O'Keeffe and her compelling landscape paintings. Her passion for landscape was in her canvasses. She became the landscape. My passion was in the New Orleans landscapes: the cypress-filled swamps and magnificent oak trees with swollen boughs and powerful roots that spread their mighty muscles above and below the purple earth. That's who I was.

Then, in 1975, two months after my husband's death, I went to Abiquiu, New Mexico. I experienced Georgia O'Keeffe's paintings and the landscape that was her own: the mountains, dry waterfalls, bones, and rocks—they all became mine!

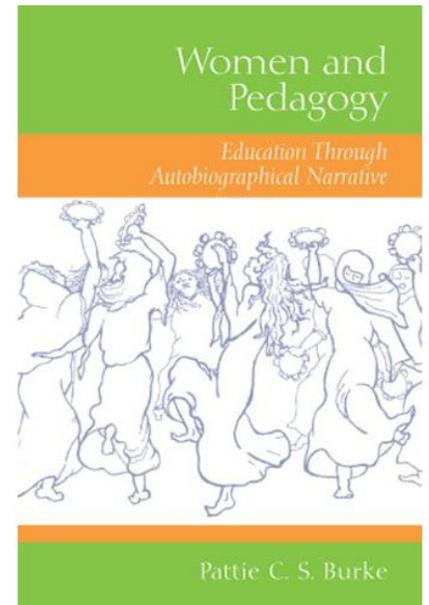
SCJ: What is your hope for this book, the primary reason you decided to write it?

PB: Actually, I started writing before I decided anything. Like many of us who start autobiographical writing, we do it because we have to! I also began reading and sharing my stories with groups. It was very satisfying when women in the group spoke to me about how they were living through many of the same situations that I had faced. I love to know that I am giving others a deeper understanding of their own lives and, hopefully, the incentive to write and share.

As for organizing these stories into a book: I may never have done so if it weren't for my son, Patrick, telling me that I had to do this. Actually, it was more like a command! When he found a publisher for me, I knew that I could complete the book. I had to do it!

SCJ: The book is finished, Pattie, yet I have the strongest sense that you are still uncovering deeper layers of your story and that process will never stop during your lifetime. Can you envision writing a second memoir?

PB: On the day I completed the book, I knew that I would have to write another memoir. Then, I thought of how much of my life I did not cover in this book and realized that one more book wouldn't be enough! In fact I had been working on some stories that I want to go back to whenever...I guess the answer to your question is yes.



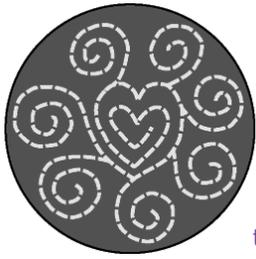
Pattie C. S. Burke's story begins right on the book cover with her sketch of women of all ethnicities freely and gracefully expressing themselves in beautiful, individualized dance. It is titled, "We Have Our Own Dance to Do."

Read Mary Jo's review of *Women and Pedagogy: Education Through Autobiographical Narrative* at www.storycirclebookreviews.org/reviews/pedagogy.shtml

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

PB: Yes, it is important for me to let our readers know that I have an even deeper appreciation than ever for the support and encouragement Story Circle has given me. I am especially grateful to you, Mary Jo, first of all for the generous and professional Story Circle book review you wrote for Amazon.com; secondly, for compiling these challenging, thought provoking interview questions. You forced me to dig even deeper into those unending depths of discovery!

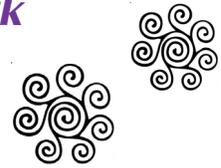




Circles: The Heart of Story Circle Network

We Are A 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.

I am pleased to announce that we have a new Circles Coordinator! Barbara Miller has been a member of SCN for four years and joined the board in January of this year. She's participated in a writing and a reading circle in Austin for the last three years. A retired Certified Educator of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) she served as Director of Education in several congregations and at the regional levels of the Presbyterian Church. She has been married for 48 years to Kent Miller, a retired Presbyterian minister and has three grown children and four grandchildren. She continues to volunteer in church education, and enjoys creating art through various mediums, writing memoir and family history, traveling and grandparenting.

Barbara says "I would like to see SCN be much more aggressive in putting the word out about the organization. Each time I tell someone about SCN they are amazed that such a group exists and want to know more. SCN circles are a place where women can find their writing voice and also give voice to their sisters. A vision for the growth of SCN sees us nurturing circle facilitators on a regular schedule and encouraging circle members to become active members of SCN. My own personal experience with circles tells me that involvement in the total organization is extremely rewarding." I know we're leaving our circles and facilitators in good hands!

Florida member Jan Golden has not only led several circles but has been instrumental in fostering new, spin-off circles by recruiting facilitators from their participants. Through her efforts and those of fellow Florida members Val Perry and Sheila McNaughton, there are now 6 circles operating in that state. Jan shares her circle experience for those who would like to do the same.

"Our first story circle started when I returned from the first conference I attended in Austin. We've been meeting weekly ever since. The first 5 years we wrote from a prompt and had notebooks full of seeds of stories. Some of us wanted more so we began to support each other in editing and submitting our work; others just want to write for self-reflection. Since we have

snowbirds in our group, who are only here for the winter, our number varies from 3 to 6. We meet for 2 1/2 hours, usually at the public library, but we love to write outside in nature when our hot Florida weather permits.

"I began to approach local libraries and gave presentations on Memoir, which I hoped would lead to more circles. My friend and Story Circle member, Sheila McNaughton, and I did a session for CASA, a Women's Shelter. There is an issue with public libraries: you can't have a women-only group if the library is promoting it because that's discrimination. So from the larger library circle, women-only groups must be formed. That is no problem—except finding a leader for the group is tough because many women attending don't feel that they can lead a group.

"What I have learned is that it takes diligence and lots of follow-through to spin off circles. We have never charged any participants, even though we do incur costs of materials, transportation, and time in planning and facilitating. You'll need to take this into account. The process has been very rewarding. It is always a thrill for me to see women around a table, heads bent over notebooks, pens in hand, bringing forth their stories."

The SCN now boasts 48 story circles in the US, Canada and Yemen. If you would like to join a story circle in your area, check our "Story Circles around the World" listing on the website. You'll find it under the "What We Do" tab. Facilitators and journalists alike can also make good use of SCN's *Starting Points: Weekly Writing Prompts for Women with Stories to Tell*. This wonderful collection features the best prompts of SCN Founder, Susan Wittig Albert's popular Women's Wise Words weekly email series. It's available directly from the publisher, Lulu, at <http://www.lulu.com/content/774054>. A hard copy is just \$8.00 plus shipping and handling, or download for just \$5.00!

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

“Circles create soothing space, where even reticent people can realize that their voice is welcome.”

~Margaret J. Wheatley



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Story Circle Network's Book Reviews

The NEW StoryCircleBookReviews

by Susan Ideus

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!

As we transition into fall this year, I find myself giving a sigh of relief. It's been a busy summer, with our move back to our beloved New Mexico—packing and unpacking is something I do not wish to repeat anytime soon. However, a huge plus side to all of this is that I now have more time to read. And, read I have! Hopefully, each of you found ample relaxing times to sit back and enjoy a favorite book or two.

How do you do your reading these days? There's so much talk about e-books and whether they are the doom or salvation of the publishing industry. I have an e-reader and I love it, especially for travelling. No book bag to pack and carry—and if I need something new, I can have it in a click or two. (I have to confess it's a guilty pleasure to get a new book that quickly!) I've even reviewed a few books from my e-reader, although I admit that I miss the sticky notes, comments, and highlights that find their way into my print copies. (I know you can make notes on an e-reader but it doesn't feel quite the same.) How do you feel about e-books? Do you have an e-reader? Send me your comments (suellen.bookaddict@gmail.com) and I'll write or post about them at a later date. I'd really like to know how you feel about this trend.

As far as new books, we've had lots at SCBR—28 reviews in July alone. Please take some time to look them over. I'm sure you'll find something to add to your To-Be-Read stack—you

have one of those, right? I can't be the only one with unread books calling my name.

We have a new category that seems popular right now—Animal Companions. Two of our newest selections are *A Dog Named Sluggo: A True Story of the Service Dog That Changed My Life* by Leigh Britt; and, *Dog House: A Love Story* by Carol Prisant. If you're an animal lover and/or pet parent, you'll love these.

Another trend is the growing interest in ecological and environmental concerns. These are problems that won't go away any time soon, and we're trying to find informative and challenging books for our readers in this area—education and information are essential if we're to be proactive. In this category, you'll find *Diet for a Hot Planet: The Climate Crisis at the End of Your Fork and What You Can Do About It* by Anna Lappé; *Bothered by My Green Conscience* by Franke James; *Kitchen Literacy: How We Lost Knowledge of Where Food Comes From and Why We Need to Get It Back* by Ann Vileisis; *Edible: A Celebration of Local Foods* by Tracey Ryder and Carole Topalian. Thanks to our reviewers for tackling these tough subjects in order to keep our readers well-informed.

Whatever your taste or present reading mood, there's a book for you—memoir, history, mystery, contemporary novels. Our fall line-up looks just as promising. Keep up with us on Twitter and Facebook, and you'll always know the latest from SCBR.

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The online version of the Journal is inter-active! You can point to any website address from within the online pdf document and that page will open up in your browser. We'll be adding more links to make it even more user-friendly.

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:

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: 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.



A SC Book Reviews Milestone!

Break out the bubbly, blow up a few balloons,
and join us in celebrating our
1000th book review posted this month!

Congratulations to our fine, hardworking team
of reviewers and editors, who generously donate
their time and energy to seek out books
that tell the truth about women's lives.

Special thanks to Sharon Lippincott,
writer of our 1000th review!

See the review at:

<http://www.storycirclebookreviews.org/reviews/brightside.shtml>

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