

STORY CIRCLE JOURNAL

Vol. 15 No. 2, June, 2011

The newsletter for women with stories to tell...



Gail Straub: Keynoter for Stories From the Heart IV

Our Friday night keynote speech always leads us into a new understanding of the importance of our stories. This year, we are delighted to welcome Gail Straub, a leader in the human potential field, who tells the story of her personal journey to self-understanding in *Returning to My Mother's House: Taking Back the Wisdom of the Feminine*. This deeply honest memoir

is, as one reader has put it, a fragment of "a collective women's story" that we rarely have the opportunity to explore.

Believing that daughters often unconsciously take on the un-lived stories of their mothers, Straub uses her own personal story to show us how those un-lived lives can become a powerful motivating force. "I see now," she writes, "how my story is so many of our stories. It is the story of both men and women who have abandoned their inner lives, leaving behind their hearts where deep dark feelings reside; putting aside their intuitive imagination where dreams flourish..."

Straub grew up near Wilmington, Delaware; adventured widely during her activist college years at Skidmore and in Paris in the late sixties and early seventies; then joined the Peace Corps and went to Africa. She was there when her mother died. Giving herself no time to grieve, she went back to her life and then on to Boston. "I was lost," she writes, "adrift in my life." But throughout this period, she was active in the human potential movement, which appealed to her because of its commitment to enhancing the best in everyone. Married in 1981 to David Gershon, a passionate change agent, Straub joined him in a business venture designed to help people make choices that would "manifest their visions." The popularity of their Empowerment Training Programs grew, and they led workshops all over America and in other countries. Together, they wrote *Empowerment: The Art of Creating Your Life as You Want It*, a classic that has been translated into eleven languages.

Continued on page 3

"As I came home and was able to grieve my mother, her presence flooded back into me... Returning to my mother's house I came upon a great longing to return to my own feminine wisdom, to understand more fully my own allegiance to doing over being, head over heart and body, exterior values over interior attributes. Now I was especially fascinated to explore how my personal journey was a reflection of the universal desire of women all over the world to take back the feminine."

—Gail Straub

Books by Gail Straub

Returning to My Mother's House: Taking Back the Wisdom of the Feminine

The Rhythm of Compassion: Caring for Self, Connecting with Society

Circles of Compassion

Empowerment: The Art of Creating Your Life as You Want It (with David Gershon)



April 13-15, 2012

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Letter From SCN's President—

"If We Don't Write It, Who Will?"



There are many reasons to write down our stories: to leave a record for children or grandchildren; to understand our experiences better; or to make peace with the past. Yet underlying these personal reasons is a larger imperative we sometimes forget: we are witnesses to a time and place that disappears day by day as we approach the inevitable end

of our lives, and we have, as women, a unique and important perspective.

In my own personal history are three compelling examples of what happens when nothing is written down and women's voices are lost. The first is the knowledge, passed down from my paternal grandmother, that I have a Cherokee ancestor, a how-many-greats-grandmother lost in time. Other than the bare fact of her existence there is nothing left of her story, not even the years of her birth and death. I know only that she entered our family tree several generations ago, at a time when such intermarriages were shameful and secret, and that I yearn to know more about her. What was it like for her to leave her native culture and enter the white man's world? What did it feel like to leave her family, to adopt another language, another mode of dress, another way of doing things? What compelled her to take such a step? Without letters, a diary or even an oral history, it's only possible to guess.

I know a bit more about my maternal Great-Great-Aunt Gretchen, a widow who stepped off the boat from Germany with four children in tow, \$5 in her pocket and a determination to begin anew. I know she opened a boarding house in St. Louis and brought her sister Dora, my great-grandmother, from overseas to help her. I know that it was there that Dora met my great-grandfather, Jens Christian Bay, a Danish botanist and librarian. But there are no letters, no diary, no written record of these sisters' lives before or after that long journey to a new land. We have a pretty full record of my great-grandfather's experience, including not only his letters and published books but even his botany class notes. If only the women had written it down too! That is my second example.

For my final personal example I offer the publication in 2003 by Mary Stanton of *Freedom Walk: Mississippi or Bust* (University of Mississippi Press, Jackson.) My father, Sam Shirah, was just 22 years old in 1963 when he joined four other members of The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and five members of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) to carry a letter of protest against segregation written by slain U.S. postman, Bill Moore from Washington D.C. to Jackson, Mississippi. Ms. Stanton's book chronicles not only my father and the other freedom walkers' story but my mother's

as well—her journey south for the voter registration drive of 1964, my birth nine months later, and the ultimate breakup of my parents' short and rocky marriage just after my sister was born. What is important here is not the facts of the story but that neither my mother, my sister nor I were ever consulted before its publication. Mom never had the chance to tell her own version of events, to correct inaccuracies, to read dialogue attributed to her or even to decide whether she wanted her story told in the first place!

And that's what happens when we don't tell our own tales, and not just tell them but *write them down*. Either they are lost forever or someone else tells them with his own bias and agenda. How would our understanding of the Holocaust be altered had Anne Frank's diary never been published? What if Laura Ingalls Wilder had said to herself, "Oh these are just little family stories. They aren't really important." What do we know about life in Tehran during the Iran/Iraq war that we would not know without Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, or about slavery without Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*? How complete, after all, can history be without the accounts and unique perspective of the other, female half of the population?

In *Writing from Life*, the book that launched the Story Circle Network, Susan Albert says it better. "Our stories must be told so that the women who come after us will know how it really was, so that they know that their mothers and grandmothers and great-grandmothers are more than just the characters in men's tales, that we are dimensional, intentional beings with minds of our own, wills of our own, and dreams of our own." (Putnam, 1996, p. 3)

Personal narrative is more than a rewarding hobby, more than a tool for personal healing. It is a vital record of life lived in a particular time and place without which the understanding of "how it really was" by future generations will be narrow and incomplete.

~Lisa Shirah-Hiers

Great Gifts for Yourself...or the Writers in Your Life

Visit our online store! Choose from a number of products with the Story Circle Network logo, and some with quotations by, for, and about women.

Your purchases help support the Story Circle Network.

We plan to add new products, so stop by often.



www.cafepress.com/storycircle

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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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.

Gail Straub, Keynoter continued from page 1

As the eighties went on and the business became even more successful, Straub began to feel the stress of too much work and to measure the excesses of her too-busy life against the emptiness she felt within. "Too much, too fast, no pause, no pleasure," she writes. "All exterior, no interior." Reconnecting with her mother and truly grieving her death led Straub to a deeper desire to fill herself from a more profound source, to "take back the wisdom of the Feminine."

In the nineties, Straub continued her work with her husband, but began to work with women of many cultures, traveling to Bali, Russia, and China. These journeys helped her to understand that our stories are braided together, "forming an ancient pattern in which we [are] all one other's mothers, daughters, and sisters." This realization, in turn, led her to want to know more about her mother, an artistic, bohemian woman who "left behind more and more of her authentic self" as she tried to fit into a society to which she didn't belong. *Returning to My Mother's House* is the result of Straub's search for her mother, for her own deepest self, and for the meaning of mothering for all women.

I'm looking forward to hearing Gail Straub tell her own story, to attending the Saturday workshop she has promised to lead, and to learning from this dedicated teacher. I hope you are, too!

—Susan Wittig Albert

"I have thought a great deal about my mother's dreams. When were they born and when did they die? What did her deepest longings feel like inside her heart, before that heart became burdened and broken? How many of Mom's dreams shattered because of her own doing, and which ones were stolen away by the dominant society? And then the question that surrounds all my other queries: can a daughter ever make up for her mother's loss?"

—Gail Straub

Story Circle Network's Online Classes

Here are just two of the reviews we've received from our students:

I now have a better grasp of the quality of my writing and the process. I also have a plan of action and a timeline. I can do this! And I am excited about it. Thanks SCN!

—Gail A., Markham ON Canada

I found this class to be extremely helpful. I wasn't sure how this format would work, or how well it would facilitate the learning that I wanted to get from the class, but I have to say that I am 100% satisfied. The comments each week were very relevant and useful, and provided concrete suggestions that I can take and apply to future projects.

—Linda H., Auburn WA

Enroll NOW for June-July Classes
www.storycircleonlineclasses.org

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.

Kathy Cronkite Featured at Be Our Guest Event

by Jeanne Guy

Our March 23 *Be Our Guest* featuring Kathy Cronkite was a resounding success, with 65 guests in attendance. The free *Be Our Guest* programs are open to members and guests interested in joining Story Circle Network. Typically, SCN schedules 2-3 BOGs each year. The programs offer presentations that inspire and inform in areas related to lifewriting.

Kathy Cronkite's personal struggle with depression has led her to make a difference in the lives of others. Her arduous journey from darkness to light inspired her to become a tireless champion for mental health, striking down the myths surrounding her illness, determined to change the dialogue and educate others on healing and treatment.

While fighting her battle, she discovered that others, including many celebrities, had suffered from the same debilitating disease. This discovery prompted her to write the highly-acclaimed *On the Edge of Darkness: Conversations about Conquering Depression*, a collection of interviews with celebrities who have fought depression, including Mike Wallace, Joan Rivers, Dick Clark, Kitty Dukakis, John Kenneth Galbraith, and William Styron.

Cronkite, winner of the Mike Wallace Leadership Award, continues to fight the stigma attached to mental illness by educating people about depression and how they can get the help they need. Her outspoken advocacy is legendary, and her personal knowledge and work is well respected by professionals in the mental health field.

Her *Be Our Guest* presentation covered her story regarding depression and her thoughts on writing and publishing. She enlivened her presentation with compassion, humor, and honesty. Speaking with a conviction born of experience, Cronkite delivered a call to understanding for all of us. Feeling better is now a way of life for her. "I am filled with hope," she encourages, "Getting well is your first priority. Depression is very treatable. There is help; there is hope."

"What's wrong?" "Why don't you get out and do something?" "You'd feel better if you got up and took a shower." When I've started down that long black spiral into depression, such well-intentioned comments are more hurtful than helpful. The first two simply have no answer, and all three require answers or action of which I'm incapable and thus feed my feeling of hopelessness. The words that are most welcome are "What can I do to help?" Sometimes I need a hug, or someone to do a specific task that I feel is overwhelming, or just a quiet presence in the room, someone not trying to 'fix' the situation or supply answers or suggestions for improvement. Sometimes I just need someone to be there, so the dark isn't quite so big." — Kathy Cronkite, *On the Edge of Darkness: Conversations About Conquering Depression*

Conference Planning Underway

By Susan Albert

As I write this, we are 319 days, 21 hours, and 23 minutes away from the beginning of our sixth Story Circle Conference--the event that all of us at SCN look forward to every two years. But conferences (like babies!) require lots of pre-planning, teamwork, dreaming, and anticipating. SCN's conference is no exception.

Our conference planning begins with the board's selection of the date (Friday April 13-Sunday April 15, 2012) and the hotel (the Wyndham in Austin, where we've held the past couple of conferences). Then there's the choice of Friday-night keynote speaker (this year award-winning, internationally-acclaimed memoirist Gail Straub) and the Sunday lunch speaker (our own and beloved Susan Tweit). Then there is the budget to be prepared and the dozen-plus conference committee chairs--all wonderful, generous volunteers--to be named, their assignments reviewed and clarified, and the master planning timeline created. Meanwhile, Peggy has created the conference website (www.storycircle.org/Conference), posted the registration form, and we're open for business.

At the moment, the most important committee is the program committee, chaired by Jeanne Guy. Jeanne and her team will review all the presenter proposals that arrive before Sept. 15 (the deadline). By the first of November, they'll choose the very best to fill the twenty slots in our four-track program. And by January, they'll have a tentative conference program ready for you.

But in addition to our keynoters and our usual Saturday and Sunday workshops, there will be extras, plenty of them! As we did in 2010, we will once again offer optional (and free!) Heart-to-Heart mini-coaching sessions on Friday morning, where you can bring specific questions to discuss with our well qualified and enthusiastic coaches. We'll offer a pre-conference workshop on Friday afternoon--or possibly two, since our 2010 workshop had a waiting list! And for Thursday (April 12), we're also considering offering outdoor writing workshops at selected sites in the Austin area. (Watch for an announcement of that activity later.)

And of course there will be vendors and door prizes and entertainment and open mikes and our wonderful Story Wall, just as there have been at our previous conferences. This time, though, we're looking forward to something new and very special: the announcement of the winner of the 2011 Sarton Memoir Award, who will be recognized on Friday evening, before Gail Straub's keynote address.

As you can see, we begin planning for the next conference almost as soon as we've unpacked our bags from the previous conference. Yes, it's a lot of work. But getting together, learning new ways to write and think about and share our stories, trading hugs and meeting SCN sisters we've only met online--all this is such a deeply, delightfully heartening experience that we can't wait to do it all over again.

We hope you'll join us. If this is your first time, we know you'll have the time of your life. And if it's your sixth time . . . well, you already know as well as we do: it will be the very best.

319 days, 20 hours, and 42 minutes. We can hardly wait!

www.storycircle.org/Conference/



Stories from the Heart VI Conference News: Call for Presenters

**Deadline:
September 15, 2011**

Tentative Presentation Tracks

Track A. Finding Our Voices

Some possibilities include writing in SCN story circles, blogging, journaling, creating an authentic voice, speaking out, raising our voices.

Track B. Nuts & Bolts

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

Track C. Putting Our Hearts on Paper

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

Track D. Storytelling: Ways and Means

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

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

Presenters do not have to be members of Story Circle, but must register for (at minimum) one day's attendance at the conference. Your registration and payment (at either the member or non-member rate) must be received by December 31, 2011. Presenters will receive a discount: full registration will be discounted by \$40, Saturday only by \$25, Sunday only by \$15. Panelists will receive a \$20 discount from the full conference fee; they must register and pay by February 15, 2012. NOTE: "double" discount people (those who are both presenters & panelists) should take the higher discount, not both.

Presenter-authors may choose to rent a vendor table to sell their books OR they may instead bring up to 10 copies of one or two titles they have authored to be sold at the SCN table. SCN will handle the sales at that table for a five percent contribution, with checks mailed to the presenter within two weeks after the conference.

Proposal Guidelines

We especially are seeking proposals with strong audience interaction/participation, rather than lecture-style presentations that primarily deliver information. Please provide detailed information about the methods you plan to use to accomplish this.

When you write your synopsis, remember that it will be used to promote both your presentation and the conference. So take advantage of this opportunity to "sell" your workshop and build excitement about the conference with descriptive, definitive words that go directly to the heart of the matter, explaining your goals for the workshop and the benefits participants can expect.

A catchy, definitive presentation title is important. Create something short and sweet that will appeal to conference attendees and whet their appetite.

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

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

Submitting a Proposal

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

The deadline for all proposals is September 15, 2011

Stories from the Heart VI

Story Circle Network
Sixth National
Women's Memoir Conference

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

April 13-15, 2012

www.storycircle.org/Conference/

SCN's LifeWriters Group



Join Us

by Dani Greer

The SCN LifeWriters Group on Yahoo.com boasts 120 members, many who post more than one message a week. This group is very active, and you can join the conversation. Go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/scnlifewriters/>

Story Circle Network's LifeWriters Group is an online community where SCN members get together to talk about lifewriting & 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 provide some structure, each day of the week is designated for special topics (but we never stick to just these).

Monday: Brazen Hussies Day (we brag!)

Tuesday: Teakettle Tuesday (maybe just one tiny gripe!)

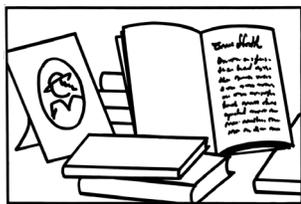
Wednesday: True Words (favorite quotes, mostly women's words, some guys)

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

Friday/Saturday/Sunday: What we're reading

The SCN LifeWriters listserv is one of SCN's official publications, and is designed to expand these and other aspects of SCN. It is open to members only. Our aim on the list is to share bits of lifestory but not formal stories--if you want to do that, please join one of the Internet Chapter's writing circles: <http://storycircle.org/ecircles.shtml>

"We are simply hungry for good stories, fiction or nonfiction. Story is the umbilical cord between the past, present and future; it keeps things known. Story becomes the conscience of the community, it belongs to everyone. When we think about what it means to be human, it is always answered or explained through story."
—Terry Tempest Williams



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[www.storycirclebookreviews.org/
frmadvertising.php](http://www.storycirclebookreviews.org/frmadvertising.php)

Help Story Circle Network Grow and You Win!

by Pat LaPointe

Story Circle Network's "Share and Multiply" program has been redesigned to offer greater rewards and bigger prizes for members who refer women to SCN, including larger discounts on SCN events and merchandise. Here's what you can win by helping Story Circle Network touch the lives of more women:

First Place (most women referred):

One year free SCN membership for herself or as a gift and an SCN t-shirt OR \$40.00 credit toward a National event to be redeemed/applied within 2 calendar years.

Second Place:

SCN t-shirt or \$25.00 toward a National event to be redeemed/applied within 2 calendar years.

Third Place:

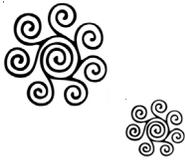
SCN coffee mug or \$10.00 toward a National event to be redeemed/applied within 2 calendar years.

Are you on Facebook, Twitter or any other social networking site? You can help SCN increase its visibility in the cyber world by mentioning SCN in your posts. Enjoying a book from the reading circle? Taking a class to enhance your writing skills? Writing to a prompt in your writing circle? Attending an SCN event? Tell others about it in your posts. If you recruit members through these posts you will earn Share and Multiply credits.

Do you have a website or blog? You can include an SCN "Button" on your site. Click on the "Who We Are" link on the SCN home page and then on the "All About SCN" to locate the "Button/Badges/Logo" link which provides the instructions for installing the "Button". If a new member indicates she learned about SCN on your site or blog, you will earn Share and Multiply credits.

Do you teach writing or facilitate a writing related workshop? As a member, you are eligible to list your work on the SCN website as an Affiliated Workshop. For more details go to the Members Only section and click on Opportunities and Benefits. If you recruit new members through your classes or programs you will earn Share and Multiply credits.





Susan Wittig Albert Lifewriting Contest 2011 Contest Entries Accepted Through June 30, 2011



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

"Courage allows the successful woman to fail and learn powerful lessons from the failure so that in the end, she didn't fail at all."

—*Maya Angelou*

"You can't test courage cautiously."

—*Annie Dillard*

"Pain nourishes courage. You can't be brave if you've only had wonderful things happen to you."

—*Mary Tyler Moore*

"The most important of all virtues is courage, because without courage you can't practice any other virtue with consistency."

—*Maya Angelou*

"Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage."

—*Anais Nin*

Failure so often carries a negative connotation. Many a successful woman has been confronted with failures that evolved into great successes all because she had the courage to not give up but to persevere:

Oprah Winfrey is now one of the richest and most influential women in the world but did you know that early in her career, she was fired from her job as a TV reporter because she was "unfit for television"?

Louisa May Alcott, best known for her book *Little Women*, was unsuccessful in her early attempts as a writer. Her family encouraged her to become a servant to help with family finances. It was through her letters home while she worked as a nurse during the Civil War that she got her real break in writing.

Harriet Tubman was born into slavery. Her living conditions as a child were harsh and punishments were brutal. After breaking free from her slavery, she went on to establish the Underground Railroad which helped many escape to freedom.

Lucille Ball was told by drama teachers that she should choose a different profession because she was a failure at acting.

Emily Dickinson was practically ignored in her lifetime. She died with fewer than a dozen of her nearly 1,800 completed works published.

JK Rowling spent years on welfare but kept penning her stories of a young boy and his magical wizardry only to become not only rich but amazingly influential in getting young people interested in reading.

Have you ever stopped to think about how your own perceived failure actually resulted in something far better than your original intent? Can you think of a time when, in the midst of failure, you had to dig deep to find the courage to go on—only to later realize that the outcome was not a failure at all? What lessons have you learned from what you thought was a failure? How has your life changed because you "failed" and were forced to learn from that process and turn it into something positive? Or, do you know someone—another amazing woman in your life—who has influenced you through her own courage in the face of failure? (Thank you, Lee Ambrose, for this topic.)

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

More LifeWriting Opportunities Advance Notice of our Annual True Words Anthology

It's time to begin thinking about our next annual True Words Anthology, which will be published in late fall of this year. The Anthology is a unique publishing opportunity in two ways for SCN members: first, your stories and poems can be longer than the SCN Journal True Words limit of 350 words (up to 1,000 words in the Anthology) and, secondly, there is no thematic prompt. Thus you can send in a life story on any topic you wish. There is also no limit to the number of stories or poems you can submit.

Here's the 2011 Anthology Schedule:

July 1, 2011 – the call for submissions opens

September 1, 2011 – the call for submissions closes

Mid-November, 2011 – you'll receive your annual Anthology

We seek stories and poems that tell the truths of your life. In this—our large international circle of women who share our life stories, these truths connect on so many levels with other women in ways that sometimes are unimaginable.

So, lift up your pen, write down the words that come into your heart, polish up those little jewels, paste them into the online submission form link that will be included in the Call for Submissions, and hit the Send button. We both welcome and look forward to sharing your words.

Warmest regards,
Mary Jo

Mary Jo Doig, True Words editor, Story Circle Journal
True Words Anthology editor, 2011



Take A Bow! Spotlighting Our Volunteers Marlene Samuels

by Robin A. Edgar

Marlene Samuels has been a member of the Story Circle Network for about six years, during which time she's presented at the biannual conference, Stories From the Heart, and contributed to the SCN *Journal* and the *One Woman's Day* blog. Currently a SCN board member, she recently volunteered to serve as SCN's program chair.

"I read about Story Circle in Writers' Digest and joined immediately. I was extremely attracted to SCN's mission – the fact that the organization really embraces and advances women telling their stories," she says.

And if anyone has a story to tell, it is Marlene. Born in Montreal, Canada, she is the child of Holocaust survivors Meyer and Sara Bernstein. Her Romanian mother and Russian father met in Germany after the war while in a displaced persons' camp (DP) run by the United States Army. Her one brother, Jacob, was among the first children born to concentration camp survivors in the DP camps. Along with thousands of other survivors, the Bernstein family moved from Germany to Canada when the United States government froze immigration visas for survivors without U.S. citizen sponsors.

"My parents had been liberated from the camps by American GIs and taken to American Red Cross hospitals, so Americans have always been considered great heroes in our family," recalls Marlene. "It never even occurred to me until I was really much older that people actually were Canadians. I grew up thinking that Canada was just a place where people lived until they got to be Americans!"

Marlene's father had been in a rabbinical seminary in Warsaw before the war. After the camps, the only way he could qualify for a Canadian visa was to have a trade, so he learned how to be a tailor – quite a departure from being a rabbinical scholar. He met Marlene's mother when she was teaching tailoring and sewing classes, the craft that saved her life in the camps.

When they first arrived in Canada, they lived in an extremely poor part of the old French Quarter in Montreal, which, in Marlene's words, was "an immigrant ghetto." Although they were very poor, she says she grew up that way and had no clue that there was any other way of life. At home, they spoke only Yiddish, no English. When the children started attending a British Protestant school, they learned English in the mornings, French in the afternoons, and then went to Hebrew school from 3:30 until 5:30 four days a week.

"I didn't hear a word of English once I got home until the next day at school. It was so incredibly confusing," says Marlene.

When she was 16, her family received immigration visas to the United States after a 15-year wait. They moved to Chicago

where Marlene recalls having a tough time because they lived in a very affluent suburb and they really stood out as immigrants.

"My parents were desperate to move to the Chicago area because my mother's younger sister, Esther, who survived Dachau with her, had immigrated to Chicago right after the war. My father had no one left alive and they had no relatives in Canada," she says.

Marlene remembers being painfully shy. Her English was marginal and she had no friends. Although she went to New Trier High School, where 99% of graduates attended mostly Ivy League colleges, her college counselor advised her to go to secretarial school, claiming that "an immigrant like you is hardly college material."

Her parents' primary goal for her, however, was to obtain an education. During the year after Marlene graduated high school, she took a few classes and worked, then was admitted to a small two-year college (Lincoln College in Lincoln Illinois). There, she received the encouragement and support she needed to improve her study skills and master the English language.

"It entirely changed the course of my life! More than anything, it built my self-confidence and a belief in my abilities," she says. "I'm extremely adamant about how critical education is to a person's opportunities and the quality of life."

Transferring to Northern Illinois University, she earned a B.S. and M.S. in psychology and special education. She worked with emotionally-ill teens for about six years and then attended graduate school at University of Chicago where she earned her MA and PhD in Sociology.

While she was writing her dissertation, Penguin-Berkley Books offered to publish her mother's story (Sara Tuvel Bernstein) *The Seamstress: A Memoir of Survival*, about her life before she was taken to the camps as well during and after. Her mother died just before the offer came, so Marlene edited huge portions of her mother's story, researching and rewriting it.

"That experience made me a believer in the value of the personal story. The only writing I had ever done up to that point was academic, almost entirely based upon research data. But during the process I learned how vital women's stories are to the way they identify themselves and, hence, how important it

is for us - as women, to tell our stories," says Marlene, who's gone on to publish a number of her own stories and essays with the encouragement she's received from SCN.

"I can't imagine that there was I time I didn't participate in Story Circle Network — it's had such a considerable impact on my writing," she says.

Last year, she attended Stories From the Heart for the first time, volunteering for a variety of tasks and presenting a workshop on the topic of research methodology for memoir. "The conference is an incredibly encouraging time when we can connect with other women writers and benefit from their insights and experiences. Overall, participating at any level, is a tremendous inspiration. It helps us improve our craft, reminds us how to focus, and teaches us about our sense of purpose," says Marlene.

Currently, Marlene is completing her short story collection entitled, *The Mental Health Poster Child*, which will be coming out this fall. She co-hosts the culinary website and writes the blog for www.expendableedibles.com. She and her husband

Larry have two sons, David and Michael, and live in Chicago with their two Rhodesian Ridgebacks, Harry and Bill. You can read more about Marlene, as well as excerpts from her work, at www.marlenesamuels.com.



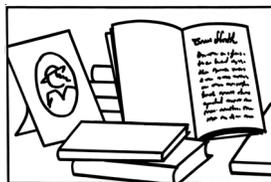
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Telling Herstories:

The Broad View

And Now...*One Woman's Day*

<http://storycirlenetwork.wordpress.com/>



Story Circle Network's Book Reviews

It's Personal

by Susan Ideus

Have you ever read a book that seemed to be written with you in mind? Perhaps you felt the author was speaking directly to you, or that the author had peeked into your journal--or even your soul. Does a book "speak" to you from the store shelf and once you've read it, it becomes apparent that it was just what you needed at that exact point in your life? Personally, I love it when I have such a deep personal connection with a book.

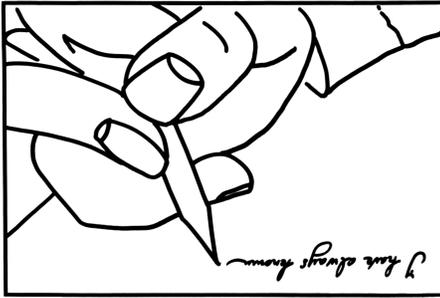
Laura Strathman Hulka recently reviewed *The Wilder Life: My Adventures in the Lost World of Little House on the Prairie* by Wendy McClure. Now, the fact that the same first name is shared by the subject of the book and our reviewer is no coincidence. She (Laura H.) says "I sometimes come across unusual books that remind me of my own history. *The Wilder Life* is one of those special treasures. My own mother was reading the Little House series to my three sisters when she was pregnant with me. At 13, 11, and 8, my older sisters were still enthralled by the novels penned by Laura Ingalls Wilder. When given a chance to help choose my name, 'Laura' was a resounding favorite. Knowing that back-story, I have always identified with Laura and been proud of that bond." She concluded that "Reading *The Wilder Life* was both a rejuvenating and a cathartic experience for me."

Many of you may have been following the journey of author and SCN member Susan Tweit and her husband Richard though Richard's ongoing battle with brain cancer. Susan has shared their struggles and their triumphs, their highs and their lows, all

the while gracefully maintaining an admirable strength and resolve. Through her personal blog as well as posts for Telling HerStories, she has imparted many lessons on chronicling the difficult parts of our lives. Last week, she found encouragement and validation for her unexpected caregiver role in *Passages in Caregiving: Turning Chaos into Confidence* by Gail Sheehy. In her review of the book, Susan says "What kept me riveted, though, were the passages of what Sheehy describes as 'raw experience' from her own journey. Although the book isn't billed as a memoir, this thread of personal writing is strong and compelling, and it spoke to me as a woman and a caregiver..."

Reviewer Linda Hoyer brings her wealth of life experiences as an adoptee to the books she reviews on the adoptive experience for SCBR; in a similar way, so does Judy Miller, an adoptive mom. Both are enriched by their reading, as we are by reading their reviews and observations. Susan Albert specializes in books about the environment and current affairs. In her reviews about subjects for which she has a passion, we are educated and made aware—and her passion for and kinship with her subject matter shines through, enhancing our own understanding.

What better reason could be found for reading and reviewing? Books do so much more than entertain—they edify and clarify and offer a glimpse into the kindred spirits of our sisters throughout the world. I wish for each of you the discovery and enjoyment of books that touch your soul and fill a need within your deepest being. Good reading!



True Words from Real Women

Gratitude

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 "Gratitude." Contribute your own True Words to the Journal. Future topics are listed on page 19.

Thinking, With Gratitude

June Baker Jefferson, Fayetteville AR
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Recently I've been thinking about "what-if's." Not the regretful ones, but the Really Good ones.

What if my mother had not been persistent in teaching me to play the piano? I wouldn't have the solace I have now. When times are rough and a melody plays, deep inside I know the action of the musician's fingers, hands, wrist and soul, because my mother "gave" me music, made me practice, memorize, and play in recitals. Otherwise, I would not have a place to go in the middle of the darkest night, to play and sing, mourn and praise.

What if my father, grandmother, and brother had never taken the time to point out plants, flowers, stars, and other natural events? The sunrises might have gone unnoticed, as well as the scent of air after a rain, a rainbow in an oily puddle, and the mockingbird's song which has given me hope/changed my attitude so many times.

What if my parents' friend, Mrs. Massey, hadn't taught me art? Those hot summer mornings on her screened-in porch in charcoal- and pastel-smudged hands, nose, and clothes gave me a perception which has never been the same. My world is multidimensional. It will never be flat unless I decide to draw it that way. I will always see the ellipses.

What if I had not walked down the driveway late one night at the insistence of my dog and cats? I would not have been overwhelmed by the clear sky, the crisp air, the pristine silence which literally brought me to my knees in tears as I struggled to understand the path my life was taking. My animal companions would not have licked my face and cuddled in my lap as I sat in the dirt. I would not have looked up, seen the miracles of stars streaking across the darkness and been reaffirmed in my beliefs.

What if I had not had the difficulties, the misfortunes, the learning, and the joys? Would I have made other mistakes or right choices which would put me in a better place? How is that even possible?

A Baby Grand

Erin Declan Philbin, Pittsburgh PA
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It's April 15, 1995, two days since my son, Brendan has been born. We're thrilled, as we've been trying for over six years to conceive. We're also crushed because Brendan has been born with bilateral club feet, and leg length discrepancy. He is missing bones and only has four toes on his right foot. During delivery,

he also breathed in some fluid and now has pneumonia. He is in intensive care getting intravenous antibiotics. I am allowed to stay in a nesting room in another part of the hospital. Days are long and lonely. I sit and wait for the nurses to call and say they'll allow me into the NICU to breastfeed Brendan. I am consumed with worries about his future. Will he be able to walk? Have friends? Be able to enjoy his life?

One of Brendan's doctors takes the time to stop in to see me after examining him. After updating me on his

status, she says, "He has such long fingers, I think he will play the piano."

I'm struck by her kindness. It's the first time anyone has said a non-medical remark, a looking to the future remark about our son.

It's April 13, 2011, Brendan's 16th birthday. After his Ultimate Frisbee game, he hurries home to see us, before rushing off to play practice. His high school is performing *Phantom of the Opera*, and he is playing flute in the orchestra. Brendan says he wants to major in Music Education. His friend, Adam, comes over and helps us move his birthday present into our house. It's a "new to us" baby grand piano. There are no words to express my gratitude for this day, for his life. I've never been an envious person but, by the same token, I've never given enough thought to gratitude either, beyond the usual "count your blessings" routine. The time is long overdue to talk of things for which I am truly grateful.

Spring Equinox

Carol Ziel, St. Louis MO

I sit rooted to the earth
 With a lapful of spring weighing me down.
 A delicious weight of fragrant beginnings and daffodil dreams
 Infusing me with warm honeyed promises.
 The season unfolds around me
 Unwrapping the dingy shroud of winter.
 I cling to the tail end unsure about letting go.
 Winter's bones and bleakness did have its gifts.
 But here comes spring like resurrection
 Pulling me thru the catacombs and
 Into the light
 Into warmth
 Into gratitude for Life
 Again.

Finally Looking Outside Myself

Helene Benardo, Bronx NY

I had lovely parents and although they goofed at times (who among us has not?) my upbringing was filled with love. Okay, my mother wanted me—a shy, reserved child—to perform in public, but we worked that out.

At the beginning of our marriage, my husband was the “traditional male,” playing the role to the hilt. Came the Women’s Movement, I became the “mouse that roared” and, to his great credit and my astonishment, he changed completely and became a card-carrying feminist. Another crisis averted.

My sons, coming from this home, are hands-on fathers and husbands.

My profession, teaching, although not completely my choice at the onset, by dint of changing times and luck, gave me fourteen marvelous years at its conclusion, teaching in a high school for the gifted and introducing my favorite course in Women in Literature as a senior elective.

So how do I reconcile my normally melancholic disposition to all of the above? It’s not easy. It involves much hard work and stern talks to myself. But, how can I not experience heart-lifting gratitude when one of my four super grandchildren, at age six, raised his glass of apple juice at a birthday party and said, “I want to make a toast to a wonderful grandmother.”

My gratitude, indeed, “ranneth over.”



Peaceful Mornings

Denise Hanshaw, Palatine IL
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Every morning when I pass by Faith’s room I can’t resist stopping to look in on her. I cherish these moments which allow me to see my rambunctious daughter in a peaceful moment. As she sleeps, I watch the rise and fall of her chest just as I did four years ago when she spent the first month of her life in an incubator. I find it hard to believe that the girl lying in the pink bed was two pounds seven ounces at birth. During her first days, it seemed like an eternity before I could hold her. I’ll never forget when the day finally came and the nurse gently tucked Faith inside my shirt; the skin to skin contact allowing my body heat to keep her warm. As I stand in the doorway looking at her, I fight the urge to go cuddle next to her and feel her breath once again. *Let her sleep*, I think. Her long eyelashes flutter and I wonder what she might be dreaming about.

What will she be when she grows up? A doctor? A singer? Maybe a comedian. I notice her lips twitch and curl into a smile. Could she be reading my thoughts? Her left foot peeks out from under her blanket, taunting me to go ahead and tickle them. I can almost hear the giggles the action would inspire. “No, I won’t wake you up, little one,” I whisper. I know that once she is awake this peaceful moment will turn to pandemonium. The pace she sets is fast and furious. Daily I struggle to keep up with her, making sure she doesn’t hurt herself with her reckless abandonment. There’s no time to think, just react. But in the mornings while she sleeps peacefully, I have time to think. I reflect on how lucky I am to have my little preemie that was born twelve weeks early.

“I love you, Faith. Thank you for coming into my world,” I whisper before closing her door.

An Unforeseen Blessing

Connie Katusak, Leander TX

I think back to a day when my son was told he would have to give up his college curriculum if he wanted to play varsity football. His double major in Engineering and Business would not leave him time for the strenuous football program. As a child, he dreamed of playing professional ball. Working hard to overcoming the handicap of dyslexia, he became a high school varsity starter and won a full college scholarship. He recognized there were no guarantees; an unforeseen injury could easily disrupt his plans. The college degree, however, was important. He chose to give up the football scholarship. He was able to focus on the positive—getting a good education rather than harping on the negative—a potential lost football career. That decision was an unforeseen blessing.

How effortless to be grateful when life has dealt you four aces, a potential winning hand. Ease while others are struggling trying to decide what cards to retain, what to throw away. Your next hand might not be such a straightforward one and suddenly

you are the one deciding what to keep, what to discard. The cards might have possibilities—you must look for them.

Today our lives are filled with uncertainty. Stress and anxiety are our constant companions. When life is fraught with losing hands, you might be challenged to be thankful. I’ve heard people ask what good is a life full of pain and disappointments. Life in any form contains opportunity. Not everything is easy like holding four aces, but finding that winning hand can be a journey of exploration and reward. When that possible heart flush doesn’t materialize, be grateful for all the wins you have scored.

Life for my son can be compared to that card game, with some winning hands and some with prospects not readily visible. When times were bad, he looked for things in his life to be grateful for and kept moving forward. Bob’s accomplishments have been rewarding. Today he is a happy and successful businessman, owner and CEO of a multimillion dollar manufacturing company.

Little Things Mean a Lot

Margaret Titone, Rocky Point NY
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Our little wisp of a girl twirls around the dance floor, her Zumba coins jingling as the music beats Latin rhythms. Julielle, with her braces and glasses, smiles uninhibitedly. Fifteen other nine-year-olds are dancing with her to celebrate her ninth birthday. I am impressed with her graceful movements for one so young. But I am more moved by this birthday girl's kindness.

Her teachers tell us how much everyone loves her in school. At home she is simply our Juliette and we love her, but we have seen the pouts, the tantrums, heard the slamming doors when her parents and siblings would not comply with her wishes.

However, here in a room of dancing children, Juliette scans the room, then pauses her dancing and runs to a child clinging to her mother in the way I did as a child, the way most shy and timid children do. We have all seen them; the children who want so much to be a part of the group, but are afraid.

I watch her smile at the child and say, "Please come dance with me. Please be my partner."

Slowly, the child smiles and leaves her mother's side to participate with the group.

Again and again Juliette searches for the flowers that decorate the walls. She gathers each one with her gentleness so they too can fully blossom.

When it is time to change partners Juliette asks the youngest, least likely child to be chosen by the others to be her partner, and they dance and dance.

In this age when bullying has become epidemic in our schools, I gaze at my granddaughter and I am humbled by her spirit's generosity. I whisper a silent prayer of gratitude, "Thank-you God for this gift of grace You have given us."

Every Way Every Day Gratitude

Marjorie Kildare, Nova Scotia, Canada

I have my Great-Great-Great Grandmother's 1818 dictionary: *A Critical Pronouncing Dictionary and Expositor of the English Language*. My 3-G Grandmother's dictionary—"in which, the meaning of every word is clearly explained, and the sound to every syllable distinctly shown"—describes gratitude as the duty to benefactors, the desire to return benefits. More recent dictionary definitions are similar.

The *Oxford American Writer's Thesaurus* states gratitude as indebtedness, recognition, acknowledgment, and credit. In the *Collins English Dictionary & Thesaurus* I read: feelings of thankfulness for favours or gifts. *Roget's International Thesaurus* tells me to be appreciative, to never forget, to fall on one's knees, to overflow with gratitude. Being thankful to somebody for doing something is *Microsoft Encarta College Dictionary's* definition. Then, *Reader's Digest Illustrated Reverse Dictionary* reminds readers to pay tribute, a testimonial since we have a sense of obligation. And, *Rodale's The Synonym Finder* provides a simple thanks and thanksgiving.

Whatever definition, I know every way every day my indebtedness to Mother Nature. She's always present. So, I always pay her recognition, showing feelings of thankfulness for her favors: the sun and moon, the stars and skies, her Milky Way. I bless her earth and forests, mountains and rivers, plains and deserts, the sea, the shore. Every way every day she delivers plants and shrubs, birds and blooms, mammals and animals, and her weather provides rain and rainbows, snow and sleet, ice and hail, the wind.

So every way every day I praise her gifts. I bless my breath, born like bird song in flight. With a sense of obligation, I look to the heavens or fall down on my knees every way every day, acknowledging my benefactress, the Great Mother, her gifts overflowing. And, 'til my last breath returns me to Her, I shall sound each syllable every day with gratitude.

The Everyday Sacred

Doris Anne Roop-Benner, Richardson TX

Birds in a bath ~

Squirrels along the fence ~
 Watching from my window ~
 I'm Enchanted!

Listening to music ~

Making stories of my life ~
 Breathing the autumn air ~
 I'm Invigorated!

Wearing Mothers' ring ~

Remembering Grandmoms' hands ~
 Group hugging my family ~
 I Rejoice!

Sharing with my husband ~

Talking to my daughters ~
 Loving on my grandchildren ~
 I'm Content!

Angels in My Life

Sally Jean Brudos, Atherton CA
[e-circle 16, SallyJean@Brudos.com](mailto:SallyJean@Brudos.com)

Waking up from surgery I felt a cool hand on my forehead and a sweet kiss on my cheek. She was my angel. She went to the prosthetic store, while her three children sat patiently waiting staring at the fake breasts. She purchased the first padded camisole for me to wear when the bandages came off. She bought a nightgown with buttons down the front so I wouldn't have to lift my arms over my head. She coordinated visits and meals from her computer so my friends would know when to come and what to bring. She was my angel.

He managed my pain meds, took me for doctor visits and played games with me during my recovery. He was my angel. He, who years ago fainted at the sight of blood or went to bed when the kids got sick, helped me with the tubes and drains, diligently reading and recording three times a day. He was my angel.

Soft summer breezes brushed their veils across my face as I sat by the window trying to deal with the pain and the mystery of it all. Prayers were spoken across the country. Angels are around me all the time.

Awakened by Gratitude

Lynn Weiss, Lake Dallas TX

A wave curling upward holds and supports the air it envelops,
It teaches and changes the other
While being taught and changed by that other.

The water builds.
Moisture lingers,
In the air—air that feels water becoming tears of experience as
the wave

breaks in it
And air that then feels the thrust of change.

The water builds.
Moisture lingers,
In the water—water that slices through arid intimacy
And feels the thrust of change

The water-tears radiate energy that does not hurt,
Giving neither fear nor resistance, but the feeling of life instead.
Water absorbed by the air,
Becoming One who awakens with Gratitude.

Grandmother's Gift

Janice Kvale, Austin TX
e-circle 6; r-circle 1

From before age two, I have three memories of my grandmother. I know now she was dying when she bounced me on her knees while in bed. “Giddy-up, Maude,” she said bouncing her knees up and down. I giggled with delight.

Then she said, “Whoa, Maude,” and the bouncing stopped until she started again. I suspect these were rich moments for her also.

Later in a house lacking children's playthings, I amused myself jumping down stairs, one at a time. My mother stopped me saying, “You have to be quiet; Grandma is resting now.” The last memory is of Grandma in a black dress lying on a high bier surrounded by tall baskets of flowers. I felt puzzled seeing my grandmother in this place, so still.

As a young woman about to be married, my mother confided this story to me. My grandmother, mother of three children herself, drew my mother aside for “the talk.” In 1935, the world was reeling from the Great Depression. My father's Stay-Crisp Company making honey corn and potato chips had just folded. He was headed to southern Minnesota with his new bride to begin farming one of his father's properties. Important to my parents was not having children during this tough economic time. Grandma told my mother what she knew about avoiding pregnancy. Except my mother learned later that Grandma got the timing reversed. What she said was the safe time was actually prime time for conception. I was born ten months after my parents married.

Grandma journeyed to my parents' farm for my arrival. There are photos of her looking tenderly at me, the new baby, held in her loving arms. Was her family planning advice to my mother really an error or was she aware that her breast cancer had spread and her life would be cut short? I like to think it was one of those hidden desires—in this case, to see her first grandchild—that alter unconsciously a person's intent. Regardless, I thank my grandmother for life.



Grateful For The Light

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Leader for Largo and Safety Harbor FL writing circles

My son died. Unexpectedly. But what death is really expected, even when we know it's coming?

I'd gone to my friend, Pat's, house for dinner. We'd picked up our forks and the phone rang. It was my daughter, Heidi. “I have bad news, Mom.”

My mental movie screen flickered with the faces of all my kids and grand kids. Who?

Greg's death was a shock. I couldn't move or speak. Pat took the phone. “Heidi will pick you up.”

I managed to call the other kids. We met at my son Dirk's house. Our family needed to be together.

Greg was 54 years old and lived alone. His friend Robbie had gone over to plan their workday. Greg was feeling sick. He wanted to go back to sleep for a while. Robbie went back two hours later and found Greg, on the couch, coffee cup nearby and the TV remote in his hand. Dead.

Greg lived in Pennsylvania. The rest of us live in Florida. I had seven children. This is the third one I have lost; along with a daughter, age 30, and a son, age 44. How can that be?

Numbness swallowed me. My two youngest sons went to Pennsylvania to handle the details.

“I can't go,” I said.

“That is what you have us for, Mother.” They brought Greg's ashes home.

Anger and disbelief pulled me down into a swirling vortex. I yelled at God, and yelled into the air. *Greg can't be gone. I just spoke to him a couple of days ago.* It took months to pull myself up out of that dark tunnel. And yet, today, I am full of gratitude: for having seven healthy babies, the years that they were at home in my care, the good people they grew up to be. I am grateful that I followed my intuition and spent a month with Greg last summer. I took my grandson. We camped, we laughed, and we sang.

I'm grateful to see the light again.

I Wish You Could See What I Can See

Amanda Zimmer, Safety Harbor FL
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Dear Darkside:

You are a fiercely masculine man housed in a crumbling shell. Terrified of the life cards you've been dealt, scared from your experiences. You hide behind drugs because of the feeling they give you, yet you have a blind eye to the joy you bring others. You say you have no place to go but are already needed where you are. You are very attentive and have a kind heart.

I wish you could see the talent you have as a musician. When you play your guitar, a look of confidence appears in your face. You shut your eyes and are transformed to the person you like to be. I wish you could embrace this person more by writing songs and singing them.

As a man you have a very seductive touch, a soft hum to your voice and the ability to make your partner feel sexy, desirable. When you found me, I was a bird with a broken wing, a broken heart and a broken spirit. Through time, with your gentle ways, you patched my broken heart by helping me see that some things are not my fault. My spirit found a new path, new strength. Suddenly there were things I looked forward to doing—new goals.

Today, I realize my broken wing is whole again. It's amazing to me, you were able to mend me yet you are stuck in fear and not brave enough to mend yourself. I wish you all the gifts you've given me. I wish I could be the one to bring them to you, but you don't need me. The gifts you need to move to the light side are already inside you waiting for you to open them.

It is time for me to spread my wings and fly. I give you courage. I will carry you in my heart, seeing you as the strong man you are; the man who stepped out of the darkness of the black cape and lived.



The slender young girl sat quietly atop a fifteen-foot high chunk of granite surrounded by pine trees in a seemingly uncivilized area of Washington State. She felt its ancient firmness beneath her. She was safe in this place that no one else knew about, not even her parents. Only she knew its location and the nearly-hidden hand and foot holds that allowed her to reach the top. She loved her secret place.

Small for her age and young for her grade, she sat wondering how it was possible to feel both happy and sad, grateful and angry, loved and lonely—all at the same time. Life was very confusing, but here the wind encouraged and masked her sobs as it dried her tear-stained cheeks. In this private and magical place she found release.

A tiny piece of moving whiteness caught the attention of her moist eyes. The object, propelled by small gusts of wind,

Plant Therapy

Teddy Broeker, Lakeway TX
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As the iris start to bloom, a profusion of purple bursts forth in my garden. My heart leaps with joy because of what this signifies to me. I am so grateful when I consider where these plants come from and the journey we have made together.

It was almost 20 years ago when I saw an ad in a magazine for a small collection of iris corms. Truthfully I do not know what possessed me to buy them at that time. I was flat on my back, unable to move so lacking in motivation was I. Somewhere along the way I had lost who I was and I was no longer a gardener. The only reason I can find to explain my purchase is that I have always been attracted to beauty.

I remember how I had to force myself to scratch the earth in a half-hearted attempt to plant them when they arrived. This slipshod planting speaks of their hardiness as compared to mine. And yet we have both seemed to thrive. Today my eyes jump from grouping to grouping as my mind traces the memories along our way together, they in the various places they have inhabited in my garden and me as I started to heal. Today I dig freely in the dirt so there is much to celebrate.

Last fall I again divided them and there must be at least 150 plants scattered in six groupings around my garden. I have lost count of the plants I have given away with the hopes that others might also enjoy them. In my case I record my progress back to wholeness as I witness the abundance of color. I know in some small way I have helped them to survive and become truly spectacular. What they have given me in return is priceless. They are a constant reminder of the bounty, in all its glory and diversity, that comes from the earth. There is so much to be grateful for as I am once again grounded and connected to the great mysteries of life.



Her Secret Place

a short story about Mother
Jane Steig Parsons, Austin TX

hovered almost motionless above her, then moved back and forth, lower and lower, closer and closer. To her surprise and delight it nestled into her outstretched palm. She saw, more than felt, its landing. Laughing aloud she realized it was a small white feather, its delicate edges trembling to the rhythm of her exhaled breath. Silently she studied its perfection. Closing her eyes to better feel its beauty inside her as well as in her hand, her anguish transformed into a sense of gratitude. She was at peace.

Her reverie was broken as a soft, familiar voice inserted itself into her consciousness. "Dinner's ready. Please come set the table." She wondered how long Mother had been calling. "Coming" she shouted, her voice splintering the silence.

Admiring the feather once more, and pursing her lips, she gently blew it upward, watching until it disappeared. Carefully she retraced her pathway down the steep rock, jumping the last few feet, and ran toward home.

My Sacred Privilege

Marie E. LaConte, Waukesha WI
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 w-circle14 and r-circle 1

When I was a young woman, I didn't like children, and didn't want any of my own. Only when I turned forty did I understand how my cynical attitude had deprived me of one of life's sacred privileges—raising children. Then I married a man with children.

My two girls started out as "stepchildren," but we never used that word. Those girls became mine, and I became theirs. We worked hard to make it so, since we did not share the physical bond of birth or genetic heritage, nor did we share the childhood years of their lives. We didn't even share the same native language. They didn't speak English when I met them, and I didn't speak Arabic, so we didn't even know the word "step" in each other's language. Their mother had left the family. Their father and I married as they approached adolescence.

Predictably, one of the girls gave me much grief, and I gave it back to her, while the other one floated through adolescence in a cloud of harmonious obedience. Predictably, again, all of that changed as the serendipity of life worked its guidance on our development as individuals and as family.

Eventually they left home, and came back, and left again, and came back again, and I divorced their father, and they got married, and one got divorced and married again, and then they both started having children of their own.

Through it all, the bond between us remained solid. Remarkably, those grown girls are still my children, and their children are my grandchildren. My grandchildren are still too young to realize the circumstances of our family origins. I have been their grandmother since before their births, and their mothers have paid me the highest of compliments—entrusting me with their care, in spite that I never raised babies.

I am immensely thankful for all of them. I love them unconditionally. These kids, both big and little, inspire me with such gratitude as would have astounded the twenty-something girl who eschewed the path of parenthood.

A Springtime Surprise

Teresa Schreiber Werth, Spencerport NY
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The late afternoon sun shines, windows are open, and the spring breeze ruffles the curtains ever-so-gently as we sit down for dinner. That's when he begins to sing, When the red, red robin comes bob, bob bobbin' along... He knows all the words. His pitch is perfect. He has just the right inflection as he cajoles, Wake up, wake up, you sleepy head. Get up, get up, get out of

bed. Cheer up, cheer up the sun is red. Live, love, laugh and be happy! My husband and I look at each other, smiling in amazement. How, we wonder, did our five-year-old grandson, learn this song?

I'm filled with gratitude for a music teacher I don't even know. By teaching kindergarteners like Trevor songs like this, she is ingeniously bridging the generation gap. We learned the words to The Red, Red Robin in the 50s because we were a captive audience to the music our parents played. We heard songs sung at family, church and public gatherings. That's how we learned Happy Birthday, Auld Lang Syne, holiday carols, Take Me Out to the Ball Game, and The Hokey Pokey. As Baby Boomers, we learned folk songs at Hoot 'n Nannies along with protest and civil rights songs of the 60s.

Songs of one generation don't always cross over to the next generation and certainly don't leap several generations without some specific effort. I once heard Tommy Smothers say, "Some of you learned our

songs when we first sang them. Some of you learned them because your parents played them, and some of you learned them in rehab!"

With a little research, I learned that "the robin song" was written by Harry MacGregor Woods (1926) and was featured in the 1946 film The Jolson Story. It was recorded by Jolson, Sophie Tucker, Mandy Patinkin, and The Osmond Brothers. The likelihood of this song making it into my grandson's musical repertoire seems remote, unless a clever teacher sees its value. Hearing him sing it with such accuracy and gusto brought a smile to my face and made my heart happy and grateful.

Gratitude

Nancilynn Saylor, Austin TX
 e-circles 4, 5, 6

Grateful—for delectable smells
 that drift from my kitchen this morning
 cooking since dawn for those who will come
 Heating up the house on this late autumn day

Grateful—for my delightful love
 who offers to make the last dash to the grocery store
 for whipped cream and dinner rolls
 forgotten in my speedy flurry of preparing for this feast

Grateful—for the sound of my son's voice
 across the 800 plus miles of telephone wires
 calling his children from the desolation of a prison cell,
 joining us for fifteen minutes, in the only way he is able

Grateful—for the grand children's babies
 all over this Thanksgiving home
 playing, laughing, crying, sleeping
 This ever-increasing family; full of life.

Grateful—for the nearly full
 Blue moon of November, swathed in a velveteen veil of fog and
 mist,
 flickering in this quiet spot on the back porch deck,
 shining down on this grateful, tired, aging woman

Grateful—for this very tiny, brand new puppy
 resting on my tired but contented lap
 Snuggling close on this, her very first night;
 Always changing and flowing with the river that is my life.

Cacti Warriors

Cindy Flora, Clearwater FL

During what has been described as Florida's Winter of Discontent, my beloved cacti began to exhibit signs of stress. Oddly enough, the first victim was a small barrel cactus who made his home inside my kitchen.

At first, he seemed to thrive, oblivious to the unnatural temperatures outside. Then one day I noticed that his spiky rounded countenance looked just a little less content. A few days later, I could see that he was collapsing before my eyes, his green exterior turning a disconcerting brown.

Then, seemingly overnight, he was gone. I woke one morning to find him a deflated version of his former self. Distraught, I showed him to my husband.

"This is what is going to happen to me if I don't get to the desert soon."

His response was one carefully raised eyebrow.

But I knew. Outside, I had already lost two pencil cacti to relentless freezing temperatures. Fearful of a similar fate befalling my Old Man Cactus, I quickly ushered him indoors behind protective French doors.

Then, finally, a frozen eternity later, it was time to journey west. Weaving our way through the Superstition Mountains, my daughter and I spied many fine Saguaros but we also saw that even in the desert there are dangers for cacti.

"Look, Mom, that cactus has fallen down." And so he had, sprawled head first, his arms flailed out like a fallen warrior.

For a moment, I remembered my little warrior back home—still in his clay pot—waiting for a proper, dignified disposal.

The day after I returned, I lay his remains in my rock garden, refilled his pot with soil, and sprinkled several saguaro seeds from a Desert Gathering seed packet.

According to the instructions, in three to five days, a seed should sprout, in ten years a young saguaro of five to six inches should be expected, but then—and the instructions were very clear about this—he should be promptly returned to the desert.

I was surprisingly grateful for that unexpected directive which paid tribute to the memory of my cactus and a winter too cold to forget.

Gratitude: Freedom As We Witness Oppression

Marlene Samuels, Chicago IL
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Several months ago I participated in a thirty-day gratitude challenge initiated on Facebook by a close friend, not exactly the most original of ideas. Numerous sites had posed similar gratitude challenges at the time. But it did get me thinking about gratitude on a regular daily basis—both the concept and the reality. Every single day, for an entire month, those of us who

agreed to sign on took one challenge: "write about something for which you're grateful today but that's different from your gratitude yesterday."

Gratitude—so what exactly is that? Within the context of our complex, high stress, western life styles, too many Americans take for granted the most obvious—albeit intangible, gifts of our lives. Yes, it very well may be cliché to say, "I'm grateful for living in a free country," or "I'm thankful for my health," especially when, during our conscious hours, we're bombarded with messages that prioritize material acquisition.

During my gratitude challenge, writing about a different gratitude each day became progressively more challenging until suddenly, one day I grasped how much we assume our freedom is a basic human right, that we feel it's an entitlement. Few Americans have grown up without it.

The first week, the posts were overwhelmingly trite and superficial. One participant was grateful that the dealer had his new car on time, another for an Aruba vacation, a third for having won a bet with his wife. But as the gratitude challenge calendar clicked forward, war and unrest erupted across the Middle East. And during the remainder of our gratitude challenge, our posts evolved—thankfully!

Gone were the materialistic pitches. Expressions of gratitude for living in a free country began to dominate the screen. Each post—while different from those posted the prior day as required by the rules—elaborated upon gratitude for freedom. Amazingly, it seemed there was no end to the ways in which we can be grateful for the freedoms we tend to take so much for granted.

Funny Odd

Susan Powers Bourne, Saxtons River VT
 Poet Knitter Writer
<http://susanbourne.wordpress.com>

Funny odd how circles go; how nearly every thing recycles; how histories re-surface—live again. Today, green-up echoes grandmas' ways: cloth-diapers, clothes-lines, backyard garden plots.

Then progress, convenience: cars, super-markets, stuff. Now we sit at computers—no time left to stretch, visit, breathe. Life colludes with death. Some grow old; others only touch earth, then go. Yes, end—

less cycles: days, tides, moons; each first rugged breath to every last moan or gasp. Then, deep-earth plates shift—and shake. Tsunamis rise; floods wreak devastation. Earth shudders, groans—heaves up her crust; leaves all dazed, hopeless or—full. Thousands disappear; millions survive, with years to mourn and fill. We watch nature adjust her cycles, re-draw lines—come to her own mysterious conclusions.

We witness as every virtual wave breaks. Some turn desperate, generous, humble; others stumble around in wonder, wander in crisis-encrusted circles till earth-circuits reconnect—and we all find time to ground.



Gratitude Grows

Regina Moser, Austin TX

I was once told one does not say “thank you” for a thank you gift. I thought, “What then to do about the feeling of joy in my heart?”

I collect gratitude quotes and live with an attitude of gratitude. I have heard gratitude defined in many ways. Melody Beattie states that it changes everything, that it makes what we have enough and then some. Fr. Ronald Rolheiser describes it as saintliness, a drawing closer to God and a realization of our relationship with God. Brother David Steindl-Rast describes gratitude as going beyond thanksgiving to joy and appreciation that leads into service.

I know I have much to be grateful for and I am profoundly aware of the gifts in my life. The words do not come easy and I am challenged to share this gift of gratitude and how it grows. I am fortunate to teach “Stretching toward Christ,” a class that focuses on nurturing and caring for the body by using yoga poses that quiet the mind, stretch, and relax the body.

I often share with my students that I am grateful for them, and I am touched by how much I learn and receive from them. At the beginning of class, I ask them to share what they are grateful for in their lives. I find the experience of sharing the gifts in my life and the lives of my students is like a gratitude list that expands and multiplies the feeling of gratitude, thankfulness, and joy; and is an amazing way to grow gratitude and build community.

When I stop and reflect on what I am grateful for it changes the way I see everything, it draws me closer to God in the knowing, that it is all gift and it calls me to service. When my students share their gratitude for the blessing of a loving spouse, the gifts of grandchildren, the delight and joy in their loving families gratitude grows in my heart. It is in the sharing of life’s gifts that I come to know that we are all blessed beyond compare.

Flight

Khadijah Lacina, Shihir Yemen
ummu.mujaahid@gmail.com

Ibn Qayyim, an early Muslim scholar, once wrote that patience and gratitude are like the wings of a bird, balancing each other to make flight possible. Indeed, I find in my own life that the combination of these two things helps me cope with anything that comes along, and allows my soul to fly high even when my earthly situation is less than perfect.

In times of hardship, I am thankful for my children. They are my little anchors, they help me keep focused, and remind me always of the important things in life. They look at the world very simply, always seeing the best in things. One of the ways we have always dealt with difficulties is with parties.

I started this when I was single mom. If I was stressed out by exams or boyfriends, I would buy some ice cream, bake a

My Great Full Heart

Doreen Myers, Valrico FL

My heart is bleeding. A woman, who was a stranger to me eleven years ago when fate stepped in, moved last Sunday to her old home in New York to be with her family. She is falling away. How far away I wonder, all the way to heaven? How long will it take for her to get there? Will I see her again before she's gone?

Liz was an interior designer looking for an artist to draw window treatments for her clients. I responded to the call and it changed my life.

I knew at once she was a special person. I met a lovely lady with smiling blue eyes with hair the color of salt and pepper, thick and short, brushed back in a wedge cut. She wore several sterling silver bracelets and was dressed in a simply designed tunic and slacks. She assured me I would do a great job on my first assignment. She's always shown confidence in me, no matter how difficult the project; she'd say, "You can do anything, I have faith in you."

She taught me the business of interior design and we developed a deep friendship in the process.

I was with her when she got the news she had multiple myeloma in 2004, a blood cancer with no known cure. She worried most how she would tell her mother. We laughed and we cried together, and gave each other support during those scary months while the chemotherapy took her physical strength and her beautiful hair.

I ran her business while she recovered from a bone marrow transplant, grateful I knew how. Throughout her ordeal she kept her grace; truly concerned about others, she maintained her sense of humor.

Last week, after enjoying three very happy days when she learned her myeloma is in remission, she was diagnosed with lung cancer.

My great full heart is breaking.

Keep fighting Liz, you can do anything, I have faith in you.

cake, and Sheehan and I would party with Bob Dylan and REM. After I married and my family began to grow, I went back to this tradition whenever my husband traveled. It kept us from wallowing in missing him. Games, homemade gifts and some treats—simple little parties that uplifted us all and reminded us of all we had to be grateful for.

Just last week we had a party—ostensibly to celebrate my new book being published—but really, I think, to remind ourselves of all of our blessings in this time of protests, riots, propane shortages, and general uncertainty. It is in times like these that the generosity and resilience of the human spirit really shines forth. As I saw each child's face light up with their little gifts, I was reminded once again of the importance of patience, and that balancing it with gratefulness creates the gift of flight.

Halftime Honors

Barbara Youngblood Carr, Austin TX
National Poet Laureate for the Military Order
for the Purple Heart 2005-2008

They stand on the sidelines
at Rice University stadium
in Houston, Texas;
in a straight line;
wait for their ceremony
to begin; orderly; they stand
where they are told to gather,
neat; as regimented today
as their military service lives
had been; these Purple Heart
Veterans. They followed today's
orders like the good soldiers
they always were and still are.
The honor guard marches out first,
leading this line of heroes who
had shed their blood for our freedom.
Our glorious flag waves in the
Texas breeze as cameras blaze.
These Veterans stand here today
to be honored in a football game day's
halftime ceremonies. They stand
here today because they stood
in battle for what we, as Americans,
all believe in, freedom. The crowd
mostly stands and applauds the Vets.
They stand here today, these Vets,
our friends, sons, brothers, fathers,
my husband, to be deservedly honored
for their service to our county,
the United States of America.
We applaud them for their selfless
duty to protect all of us
so we can remain free;
so we can be whatever we would be.

The Energy Of Gratitude

Deborah Doblado Bowers, Wimberley TX
wonder72@hotmail.com

Rocking gently to and fro on this tarnished red glider
Pattern of square holes aiming the way
Weaving in and out of breath and morning air
I contemplate moments of gratitude

Cradled in these rusty red arms once more
Exploring the heart of nature through journal and pen
The tickle of moisture on my skin
Awakens me to the pulse of a new day

Gratitude for these moments, to enter my being through nature
Assisted this morning by the shrill call of hawk and sweet song
of cardinal
The buzzing vibration of hummingbird wings,
And the tap, tap, tap of woodpecker

A gentle breeze stirs my soul and opens my eyes
To shades of green and dots of red, pink and purple
An inner vision sees the color and texture of relationships
A blended fabric of those I love and those I don't

Securely held in the arms of trees
Circle of rocks, stones of truth, strengthen me
Honoring the directions, the passageway expands
Opening each door, I dance the tune

Gratitude to the east for birthing a new day
To the compassionate and creative arms of the south
For the lessons of the west, letting go of little deaths and big deaths
For the courage to absorb the buffalo energy of the north

I am grateful for the groundedness of earth, the expansiveness
of sky
For the support of all my relations and the ancestral messages
guiding the way
The benefit of a morning practice fills my soul with light and love
I hold the energy of gratitude for all that enters my vision circle



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 14th 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.

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. Please make sure 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.

September's prompt for True Words: Change of Direction.

Each day brings change into our lives, whether directly to us, our family or friends, our neighborhood or community, our country or the world. The weather changes, our health and/or weight changes, our perceptions change as we grow wiser, relationships change, and the changes in our yards and gardens, particularly at this time of year, occur daily.

Perhaps change brought you to a new and better place. Barbara de Angelis says, "No one is in control of your happiness but you; therefore, you have the power to change anything about yourself or your life that you want to change."

Sometimes change does not take us to a better place. Consider Maya Angelou's words, "I can be changed by what happens to me, but I refuse to be reduced by it."

Maybe you're contemplating change. Audre Lorde tells us that "Poetry is not only dream and vision; it is the skeleton architecture of our lives. It lays the foundations for a future of change, a bridge across our fears of what has never been before."

Change. It permeates every part of our lives. Tell us what a change has brought to your life.

Future Topics and deadlines for upcoming Journals are:

December (due October 15) –Holiday Stories

March, 2012 (due January 15)—A Quilt

June, 2012 (due April 15)—One Summer Day

We prefer that you submit your work directly to the website at: <http://www.storycircle.org/members/frmjournalsubmission.shtml>.

You may also send your writing via email or as a Word attachment. 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. Send your entry to Mary Jo Doig at scn.truewords@gmail.com. Be sure to note any biographical information you'd like included, if published.

If you do submit typed or handwritten stories, please make sure that every word is legible. Mail to: Mary Jo Doig, 2468 Craigs Store Road, Afton, VA 22920.

Not all our authors choose to list their email addresses, when published. If you would like to contact an author who does not include her email address with her published piece, you can contact Peggy Moody (mmoodyl@austin.rr.com) who will notify the author.

Members In Print & The News

SCN members make the news by publishing books, articles, essays, poems, dramas, and art. Below are some of our members' achievements during the last few months.

If you're an SCN member who has made the news, please let us know by sending and email to news@storycircle.org.



March

Susan Wittig Albert's memoir, *Together, Alone: A Memoir of Marriage and Place*, was released in paperback by the University of Texas Press.

Mourning Gloria, the nineteenth mystery in Susan Wittig Albert's China Bayles series, will be in bookstores on April 5. For a full list of all the China Bayles mysteries, go to <http://www.abouthyme.com/China/index.shtml>

Linda Hoye's piece, "Reunion," has been published in the Winter 2011 edition of *Adoption Circles*.

April

Renee Cassese's short story, "Lucy's Couch" was accepted for publication in *The Storyteller Magazine*. They also publish nonfiction so a good market for life stories as well.

"Writing My Way Home," *Susan Tweit's* essay on the view from her writing desk, appears in the new anthology, *An Elevated View: Colorado Writers on Writing*, just out from Seven Oaks Publishing. The book includes pieces by mystery writers Margaret Coel and Mara Purl, among others.

May

Susan Albert's China Bayles mystery series will be extended through three more books, to appear in 2013, 2014, and 2015. (She recently turned in *Cat's Claw*, the 2012 book.) In addition, the dramatic rights to her memoir, *Together, Alone: A Memoir of Marriage and Place*, have just been acquired by Redwood Audiobooks, for production and release in the next twelve months.

Diana Nolan's parody, "The Real South," has been published in the current issue of *Discover Southside*, an online magazine. She has been invited to be a regular contributor to this E-zine.

Theresa May's unique dolls are featured in a three-page spread in the magazine, *Doll Collector: For the Love of Dolls*, July 2011. Theresa, an SCN members since 2002, is a member of the Original Doll Artists Council of America. You may have seen her dolls at the 2008 and 2010 Stories from the Heart conferences. Theresa says "I go to bed thinking about art and I get up every morning with a head full of ideas." For a look at her imaginative work, [click here \(pdf\)](#).

Susan Tweit's audio essay collection, *Wildlives: Celebrating the World Around Us*, has won the 2011 Colorado Authors League award for essays.

SCN's anthology, *What Wildness is This* (University of Texas Press, 2007), was recently reviewed in *AAUWsome News*, the newsletter of the Kerrville TX Branch of American Association of University Women. Reviewer Chris Bradley (an SCN member) writes: "Everyone who draws strength from landscape, everyone who loves wildlife and nature, should own this book."



Photo courtesy of Ave Bonar

Kathy Cronkite's *On the Edge of Darkness: Conversations about Depression*

by Lisa Shirah-Hiers

Kathy Cronkite is the author of *On the Edge of the Spotlight: Celebrities' Children Speak Out About Their Lives* and *On the Edge of Darkness: Conversations About Depression*, (Doubleday, 1994) for which she interviewed many celebrity sufferers of depression including Mike Wallace, Kitty Dukakis, William Styron, their families and leading researchers in the field. She has published numerous articles in periodicals such as *American Baby*,

McCalls, *US*, *Self*, and the *Austin American Statesman*. Diagnosed with depression in her thirties, she has become a leader in the effort to raise public awareness about depressive illnesses and an advocate for those struggling with these disorders. She has served on the boards of the Mental Health Association of Austin, The Mental Health Association of Texas, the National Institute of Mental Health, the Robert Wood Johnson Project and the University of Michigan National Depression Center. She is the recipient of the Mental Health Association's Media Award, the National Mental Health Association's William Styron Award and, most recently, the University of Michigan Depression Center's Mike Wallace Leadership Award. Lisa Shirah-Hiers interviewed her by telephone for the SCJ.

SCJ: What made you decide to write *On the Edge of Darkness*?

KC: When I was first diagnosed I realized that so many of the huge challenges I had faced had been a result of the depression which I hadn't known I had. I kept the diagnosis a secret for a while because of the stigma; I was ashamed and afraid of what the ramifications would be. Would I have to leave my job or [lose] the respect I had in the community or would my friends think that I was crazy? I worried people would dismiss me in ways that I didn't want to be dismissed. Then when I read the interview with Mike Wallace [in *U.S. News and World Report*] I thought, well if he can talk about it, it can't be all that bad. I can talk about it too. One reason was the effect his open discussion had on me, the relief of shame and the understanding that it wasn't just this minority of weirdoes that have this diagnosis but also very respected, accomplished and successful people. I wanted to bring that same feeling of "Oh, this isn't so bad. It's nothing to be ashamed of," to other people. Another is that I had been undiagnosed for so long and had so much of my life trashed by a very treatable illness. I wanted to help other people see that this is what it looks like and feels like. If you need help, get help.

SCJ: A few celebrities lately have come out to say they have bipolar disorder. I'm thinking particularly of Catherine Zeta Jones. How do you think the public's perception of these illnesses has changed over the years?

KC: Oh, I think it's changed hugely. My former husband was very generous in giving my book a lot of the credit for that. I think that's hyperbolic but very sweet. William Styron's book probably did more, even though I took issue with that book. There was around that time this sort of leap of understanding, research and discussion about depression as a medical illness. People like Mike Wallace and Bill Styron talking about it openly made a huge change in the way the public and to some extent public policy dealt with those

issues. At that time bipolar was sort of the stigmatized piece of depression. I have to admit that even I felt then as though, well, I have this terrible depression but those people with bipolar—they're *really* in trouble. In recent years the understanding of bipolar has begun to catch up—that it's not that rare and doesn't doom you to a [terrible] life. There's a lot better understanding of these illnesses and yet a lot less than we would think there would be with all the knowledge we now have. It's astonishing to me to still run into people who will say "Oh you know, my son does all these things" and just go right down the list describing someone with depression—then say "He just needs to pull himself up and get a job." There are people that still really don't get it: that this is not a 'pick-yourself-up-by-the-bootstrap' or 'just-whip-yourself-into-shape' thing. It's a real, medical illness. It amazes me that there are still people who don't get that. We do have better but still not adequate insurance parity. We've made a lot of progress in the 20 years I've been doing this. And we've also got a long way to go.

SCJ: I'm wondering if that has changed somewhat as people understand that this illness is on a continuum. You can have the real crazy manic behavior that looks more alarming to people than what depression looks like—because when people are depressed they hole up in their homes. Or you can have milder symptoms. Do you think that the public is beginning to see there's a continuum on these illnesses?

KC: No. I think some people are beginning to somewhat, but many people really don't get that. I think people in general in this country are very stuck in black and white thinking. A lot of things in this country are wrong—the most obvious is politics—because people want to polarize and make everything binary and very few things are actually binary. I work with Out Youth* which is an organization for LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) young people and it's one of things we talk about—you're not

necessarily male or female, gay or straight. That there's a whole lot of variation among those different things.

SCJ: Let's talk about your work with the various mental health organizations. Can you tell us some about that?

KC: Actually it's interesting because most of my work on the Mental Health Associations here, locally, was before the book ever came out. But that led to other things. There have been really three fantastic opportunities I've had with organizations later in my career. One was to be on the National Advisory Council to the National Institute of Mental Health*. That was an amazing experience, an opportunity to really do something that had a very broad and huge effect. Basically, we were deciding which projects and which researchers and which interests would be funded. That was a weighty responsibility to make those kinds of decisions, and exciting to see the different projects that people were doing, to get to work with really brilliant people in the field. That led to work on the Robert Wood Johnson Depression in Primary Care Initiative* with projects to help primary care physicians understand and treat depression better. That led to my joining the board of the University of Michigan National Depression Center* which I'm still on and which has been incredibly fun, gratifying and interesting work. But most of what I do is give speeches to different groups, talking about the book and what my stories are about, about being able to recognize, treat, destigmatize and change public policy on depressive illnesses. I love doing that—traveling around speaking to different groups and I love the different kinds of groups I get to speak to. I went to a convention of lawyers once talking about depression in lawyers. [I've spoken to] doctors, psychiatrists, religious professionals, at colleges, high schools and even elementary school classes.

SCJ: Do you think that, because of your illness, you've become more attendant to your own need to fill the well and nourish yourself?

KC: You know I'm not great at doing the things that are good for me, just because they're good for me, even if they're things I enjoy. But I'm a lot better at pacing myself, of saying "no" and saying "it's okay if I leave that task or that invitation for now because I've got as much as I can do and still stay calm and enjoy myself." I've just got a better sense of how to take care of myself in that way.

SCJ: Let's switch a little and talk about storytelling. Do you think writing our stories is transformative? Is writing them down important in a different way than telling them?

KC: I think that the process of telling stories and the process of writing stories serve different functions for us internally. When we tell a story, each time we tell it, it's a little bit different. We find different kinds of truth in it depending on the moment in which we're telling it. When we write a story it fixes it in time and in our head. When we write down a story it can have, of course, a lot broader range; it goes farther out into the world. If it's a story that's valuable to the reader, you're exposing it to more people which is a good thing. There's an immediacy to telling your stories face to face that you don't get on the page. But in writing it there is that timeless quality of setting it down and it's there forever theoretically. There's a value to writing it down and fixing it in time, being sure it isn't lost whether or not it's published. There's a value in doing that—particularly any time you're giving voice to the voiceless.

That's very important to me—to be sure people are heard who need to be heard.

SCJ: What are some things you are looking forward to?

KC: Well I'm working on a new book, but it's too early to talk about it. I'm very excited about being in a new writer's group. You know the book is something that's sort of been simmering but I haven't really written anything down much and like many of us I'm not terribly disciplined. Being in a group will be helpful since I'm going to need some good feedback on it. I'm delighted that I'm going to have that feedback. I could go on and on about writers groups. I think it's important to choose one that has a similar level of writing and similar goal. If your goal is to get your stories down for your family or for yourself or to be published, those are all kind of different. It's also valuable to have people who are writing all different kinds of things—not just memoir. For me anyway.

SCJ: What are some things you are proudest of?

KC: I just got the Mike Wallace Award from the University of Michigan Depression Center which meant so much to me because it was reading the interview with him that sent me on this whole path. He was also the first person I interviewed for my book. And his having been a friend of the family made it even more meaningful.

SCJ: Let's talk about what we might call the gifts of depression. Are there things that you learn from having to struggle with it?

KC: Yes. Absolutely. I mean I think that's one of the greatest lessons of life. Part of what storytelling does is to put things in the context of a meaning that helps to make sense of them. I think that's absolutely what the task is with depression or with any other kind of challenge. One of the most beautiful moments I've had around the depression was when—I think it was the *Today* show—came to interview my kids for a story they were doing about the children of depressed mothers. There's pretty distressing research about the children of depressed mothers. It's not an easy life for them as you can imagine. Bill (my former husband) and I sat behind the lights while they were being interviewed. I just remember squeezing each other's hands and wiping away tears as the boys talked about—I don't think anybody used the words "gifts"—but the lessons that they learned through dealing with my illness, about having, for one thing, empathy, being able to respond with care to friends who had depression or other kinds of problems. It was very, very moving. In the first interview I did with Mike Wallace for the book he said too that he felt that it gave him more empathy. Mike Wallace and empathy aren't words that people usually put together—you know he was such a tough interviewer. But whatever his professional demeanor was, he had gained a way of looking into people that took into consideration the process that they were going through. And he said he felt it made him a better interviewer. I think that *is* a kind of gift.

*For more information about the organizations mentioned in this article visit their websites. For more about Out Youth go to <http://outyouth.org>. For the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation visit <http://www.rwjf.org/>. For the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) go to <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml> and for the Mental Health Association (now Mental Health America) visit <http://nmha.org/> or <http://mhatexas.org/>.



Circles: The Heart of Story Circle Network

Circling Together

by Barbara Lindquist Miller



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.

My feet hit the floor just as the alarm goes off. Today is the day for being with my Story Circle sisters at our monthly writing circle gathering. Final touches are needed on the piece I wrote last week about one of the many places I have lived in years past.

Settling in at the computer, with a hot cup of tea at the ready, I am quickly immersed in the ethos and pathos of my home “stomping grounds” during the years of mothering three small children. The innumerable benefits of living in the northern Sacramento valley create a stream of gratitude within me. Learning to “eat local” in the midst of agricultural plenty started for me in those early '70's. The treasures of a university town were tempered by the town/gown split evident everywhere in Chico. Many lessons were learned as we navigated the social scene which was directed by the cultural chaos of the day.

“O.K.! O.K.! Enough of this rewriting. It's time to hit the road.”

Our gathering starts in the front garden. We soak in the beauty and fragrance of the spring floral display, the result of Mary's dedication to creating a place of grace for all who pass by. Our chatter continues as we settle around the dining room table. The first order of business is to get the various versions of chocolate out of purses and book bags and onto the table for sharing.

Helen, with us for the first time, silently watches and listens until the commotion subsides. I ask her to tell us about herself and why she wants to be a part of a story circle.

“I just recently discovered the Story Circle Network on the web and quickly decided that I wanted to be part of a writing circle. My family has been after me for years to write the many stories of my life. So, here I am, ready to unpack the raw materials of life experience, place, joys and trials. Will you share something about yourselves?”

“Most of us have been together for almost three years. How about a couple of sentences from each of us to give Helen a sense of why we're here?”

“Being eighty-two, I'm also getting pressure from children and grandchildren to write,” says Peggy. “The amazing thing is that one memory leads to another and soon I have quite a treasure trove to pass on.”

“I have three small children”, Karen shares. “I want to capture the life we are living together now so they have a record when it is their time to reflect and write.”

Frances jumps on Karen's words. “My two adult children claim to have no interest. They are busy being about their own lives with no time for reflection. I, on the other hand, am learning a great deal about myself as I write about incidents out of my past.”

“The bond we have developed between us, despite or maybe because of our very different lives, gives me a place to speak my authentic voice and affirm other women in their own search for that voice. This is much more personal than the writing I do professionally. Sometimes it's scary,” declares Marie.

“Amen! I do agree about the scary part.” Sonja pauses as her eyes begin to tear up. “As I remember and reexamine my own teen years, I find it difficult to be patient with my own teen age children.” The murmurs of understanding go round the room.

Soon we are immersed in the places of habitation from our past lives. Life abroad, years in the Rocky Mountains, a humble abode of early marriage, season after season in a fishing village in Maine, all painted with words of both positive and negative emotion. We learn a bit more about each other. We experience the growth in our writing skills. We leave with the treasures of the day and anticipation for our next writing assignment: write about a day that changed your life.

Are You Mining the Treasure?

Each of us, as members of Story Circle Network, honors the life stories of women. We each have a story to tell, a gift to share with other women. Are you in a story circle? Belonging to SCN is only the beginning. The next steps bring great rewards. The possibilities are right in front of us.

Join a story circle in your geographic area. You can find one on the SCN Website.

Start a story circle with friends, neighbors, others in your community. You have what it takes. Make the leap!

Become a part of an Internet Circle.

Join or start a Reading Circle to enjoy memoirs and stories of other women authors.

Make plans now to attend the SCN “Stories from the Heart VI Conference” in April 2012 to meet your many SCN sisters.

I am always available to answer questions about finding, starting or maintaining SCN circles. Send me a note to circles@storycircle.org. Hope to hear from you soon.

—Barbara Lindquist Miller, *Educator, Writer, Artist*

The May Sarton Award

I have never written a book that was not born out of a question I needed to answer for myself.—May Sarton

Here at SCN, we're all very excited about our new project, the Sarton Memoir Award.

This prestigious award will be the first of a series of awards to be given annually to the author of the best woman's memoir published in the United States and Canada. The winner will be selected by panels of jurors and professional librarians from works submitted for consideration. The name of the winning author and the title of her book will be announced at Stories from the Heart, the biannual SCN National Memoir Conference, to be held in Austin TX, April 13-15, 2012.

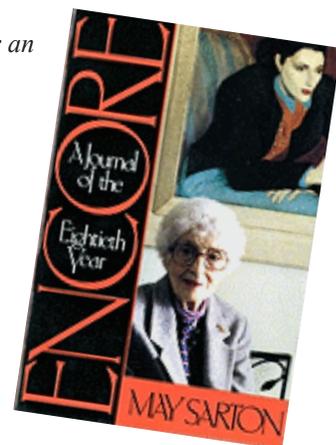
A panel of SCN members (Susan Albert, Penny Appleby, Joyce Boatright, Judith Helburn, Susan Ideus, Patricia Pando, and Marlene Samuels) designed the award and its procedures. They chose to name the award for May Sarton (1912-1995) in recognition of her enormous contributions to the literature of women's lives. A distinguished poet and novelist, she also left a legacy of outstanding memoirs and journals. In her wide-ranging work, she explored such universally significant themes as friendship, love, and nature; feminism and sexuality; the search for fulfilling work and the need for recognition; illness and aging; and the desire for a harmonious, peaceful life. Readers have found her memoirs and journals to be inspiring, moving, and thought-provoking.

The SCN board has named Paula Yost as the first Sarton Award Coordinator. The details for eligibility and submission are on the Award website, at <http://storycircle.org/SartonMemoirAward>. The deadline for all submissions for this year's competition is December 15, 2011.

SCN founder, Susan Wittig Albert, is enthusiastic about the award. "SCN's new Sarton Award fills an important gap," she says. "There are plenty of prizes for novels, poetry, drama, film—you name the medium or genre, and there's a prize. But until now, there has been no prize specifically for women's memoir. This award will recognize the significance, breadth, and scope of stories written by women about their lives. I read my first Sarton memoir, *Journal of a Solitude*, in 1975, and I've been a fan ever since. And of course, I'm delighted that the award is being sponsored by Story Circle. Since the very beginning in 1997, we have been dedicated to not only helping women tell their stories but also to helping readers, writers, and publishers understand the importance of women's personal histories. The Sarton Award is another way—a wonderful way—for SCN to accomplish its mission!"

Books by May Sarton:

- I Knew a Phoenix: Sketches for an Autobiography*
- Plant Dreaming Deep*
- Journal of a Solitude*
- The House by the Sea*
- Recovering: A Journal*
- At Seventy: A Journal*
- After the Stroke*
- Endgame: A Journal of the Seventy-Ninth Year*
- Encore: A Journal of the Eightieth Year*
- At Eighty-Two: A Journal*



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From Our Founder

Over the years since SCN's 1997 beginning, I have come to realize just what a unique organization it really is, and how many opportunities for self-discovery and self-realization we offer our members. I had no idea, when we began with a dream and an idea, that we would grow to become an international organization, offering such an enormous range of opportunities for participation to women around the globe. That all these wonderful things have happened is entirely due to the vision and energies of hundreds of women, who have joined hands and hearts to share their stories and make SCN the strong and vibrant organization it has become.

I invite you to explore the many opportunities that SCN offers you. Join a circle, create your own writing circle or reading circle. Participate in the Internet Chapter, and in our Yahoo group. Submit your writing through our Journal. Join our Blogging Circle. Become a book reviewer. Join the Speakers Bureau. Create an affiliate workshop. Volunteer to help out at our conferences. Consider volunteering to serve on our Board of Directors.

There are so many possibilities, so many ways to use SCN as a springboard for your own growth and development as the storyteller of your life. And as Carol Christ says, "the telling of one story opens space for the telling of another." Every time you share your story, you help the rest of us to tell ours, to learn and grow—and grow stronger, together.

We are a very special community, a community of storytelling women. And SCN is a hearth for our hearts.

Susan Wittig Albert
Founder, President Emerita

Susan Wittig Albert

Lifewriting Contest 2011

*Contest Entries Accepted
Through June 30, 2011*

Details on page 7



**More Publishing Opportunities!
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**STORY CIRCLE
JOURNAL
E-EXTRA!**

We did not receive enough submissions to publish an *E-Extra!* supplement for June. Please support this publishing venue by sending us your work! Details and online submission form: www.storycircle.org/members/frmjournalsubmission.shtml