

# STORY CIRCLE JOURNAL

Vol. 15 No. 1, March, 2011

The newsletter for women with stories to tell...

## SCN Launches Sarton Award

*The only annual literary award dedicated to women's memoir.*

The website for the May Sarton Award, SCN's new literary prize for women's book-length memoir, will launch in early March, according to Paula Yost, who was named Sarton Award Coordinator by the SCN board at its January meeting. "I'm delighted to facilitate this wonderful award," Paula says. "It will be a pleasure to help discover and name our very first winner." The website address is <http://storycircle.org/SartonMemoirAward>."

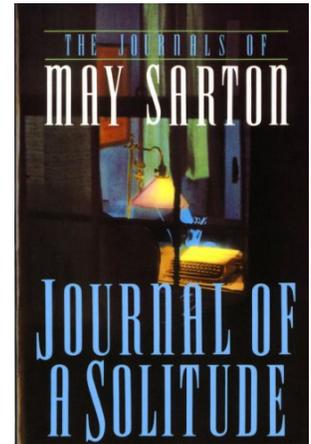
The only annual literary prize specifically dedicated to women's memoir, the Sarton Award recognizes the significance, breadth, and scope of stories written by women about their lives. It will be given annually to the author of the best woman's memoir published in the United States and Canada, selected from works submitted for the competition. The award is open to SCN members and non-members alike. The deadline for all submissions for this year's competition is December 15, 2011.

"It's fitting that Story Circle offer this prize," says SCN founder, Susan Wittig Albert. "Since 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 for SCN to accomplish its mission."

The prize is named in honor of May Sarton (1912-1995), distinguished American poet, novelist, and author of twelve acclaimed memoirs and journals. She explores 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, balanced life of work and personal relationships. Readers have found her work to be inspiring and moving. A full list of Sarton's memoirs, as well as her bio, may be found on the website.

The first award will be given for a book published in 2011, according to SCN president Lisa Shirah-Hiers. "We'll announce the winning author's name and the title of her book at Stories from the Heart, our biannual National Memoir Conference, Austin TX, April 13-15, 2012." Lisa adds that the judging will take place in two rounds. "Jurors selected from our SCN members will make up our first-round readers. The second round will be judged by a panel of professional librarians." SCN members interested in becoming jurors will find information and an application form here: [http://www.storycircle.org/members/sarton\\_juror\\_application.php](http://www.storycircle.org/members/sarton_juror_application.php).

The competition's procedures are outlined in detail on the award's website, <http://storycircle.org/SartonMemoirAward/>. Included are a full description of the award, complete guidelines, eligibility rules, and an application form. The entry fee for 2011 is \$60. Anyone—the author, the publisher, a friend or relative of the author—may submit an eligible work for consideration. Books must be submitted in final, reader-ready form, printed and bound.



*This journal is not only rich in the love of nature and the love of solitude. It is an honorable confession of the writer's faults, fears, sadness, and disappointments.*

- Cleveland Plain Dealer, 1973



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## Letter From SCN's President—

### "Re-membering Our World and Ourselves"



In coffee shops, at the kitchen table, on a walk, at the bus stop or waiting in line, we tell each other stories. They flow from us like water in the twin rivers of memory and imagination. As a species, we are story tellers. But where do our stories come from? How do we know what we think we know? How do we know that what we remember is true?

In his fascinating book, *This is Your Brain on Music*, recording engineer turned neuroscientist Daniel J. Levitin describes the latest research on how memory works. For a hundred years there have been two conflicting theories. In the record-keeping theory, memory is seen as a kind of organic audio-video recording which we can call up at will if we figure out the right neural key to access it. In the constructivist theory, memory is seen as relational. We organize information about what has happened based on relationships and categorizations.

There is research to back up both theories. Experiments with EEG recordings have shown, for example, that it is nearly impossible to tell whether someone is listening to a song or remembering it. "Remembering," Levitin writes, "may simply be the process of recruiting [the] same group of neurons used during perception to help us form a mental image during recollection." (pages 154-155) Even people who are not musicians, for example, can sing back their favorite rock and roll song at very near the same pitch and at the same speed at which it was originally recorded. The fact that we can do so is astonishing but multiple experiments have proven it true.

On the other hand, when we sing "Happy Birthday" at a party, Levitin points out, though we sing the same tune every time we may not sing in the same key. We adjust our singing to the pitch level of the person who began the song. Yet we recognize the tune no matter what key it is sung in or whether it is being played on a piano or violin, with or without harmony, at a loud dynamic or a soft one. The constructivist theory claims we recall the song based on categories and relationships: the distance up or down between the notes (called intervals) or the distance in time between notes (rhythm).

What scientists now know is that memory is a bit of both, relying partly on recall and partly on fabrication. The brain starts with what it knows from experience to be true, then fills in gaps with a "best guess" scenario.

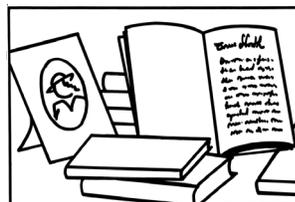
There has been a lot of discussion over the years about what memoir is, how much leeway a memoirist has regarding details and whether our memories are accurate or not. It seems to me

that many of these discussions are really clashes between the record-keeping and constructivist theories of memory. Certainly most of us cannot remember every word of a conversation we had in our childhood or even from earlier in the same day. So in that sense we don't carry a pre-recorded tape version. But we can certainly remember some of the important themes, the arguments, who said what and even make a guess as to their emotion when they said it, based on recalled visual cues, the timbre of their voice and other indicators. Certain sentences and details are engraved in our memories. Others are reconstructions.

In her fascinating memoir, *Unreliable Truth*, Maureen Murdock describes memoir as myth-making, for inherent in both is the search for meaning. Murdock writes. "Memoir, like mythology, shares a depth of inquiry. Both myth and memoir examine important questions in life: Who am I? Who do I belong to? What is my tribe? Where am I going? How do I make my way? What is my purpose?" (p.24) Myths are stories with particular meaning, teaching tales that help us understand our world, our culture, ourselves and each other. When we tell our own life stories we reconstruct what has happened based on our own interpretations related to the *meaning* of the event. And that meaning is shaped by our individual personalities, experiences and biases. This is why two sisters can remember a particular childhood experience—a particular holiday visit or vacation perhaps—very, very differently.

When we tell or write our stories, we are involved not in simple recall, but in meaning-making. Over time we may tell the same story differently, depending on changes in the way we understand ourselves, the others in the story, the circumstances and so forth. The way we tell the tale reveals a lot about how we felt at the time, whether we feel the same way now or not, and what this means for our future. Stories are the sign posts that tell us not only where we have been and where we are going, but how we feel about the journey. Through story we pull together and literally re-member our disparate experiences in order to understand ourselves, each other and the world we live in.

-Lisa Shirah-Hiers



## ADVERTISE YOUR BOOK

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## Story Circle Journal

**STORY CIRCLE JOURNAL** is a quarterly newsletter, published in March, June, September, and December. It is written by and for women who want to share their experiences. Its purpose is to encourage readers to become writers, guide women to set down their true stories, and encourage the sharing of women's lives. This newsletter is provided for information and is not intended to replace qualified therapeutic assistance. If you have special mental-health needs, please see a healthcare professional.

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We welcome your letters,  
 queries, and suggestions.

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**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.

*Continued from page 1*

## Sarton Award

"To assist our jurors and judges in evaluating the submissions," Paula says, "we've developed an extensive scoring rubric. We've also made it available on the website, in order to help people see what we'll be looking for. The rubric was developed with the expert aid of many people, including authors of published memoirs and writing teachers. We encourage everyone to take a look at it. You'll find a link to it on our Guidelines page."

A former freelance journalist, Paula Yost has been an active member of Story Circle since 2001. She has served on the board, worked as an editor of *What Wildness is This*, Story Circle's acclaimed anthology of women's stories about the land, taught frequently in SCN's online writing program, led workshops and conference sessions, and served as Coordinating Editor of [StoryCircleBookReviews.org](http://StoryCircleBookReviews.org), SCN's flagship book review website. She has also served as Vice President of the Association of Personal Historians. The editor of an anthology of lifestories, *My Words Are Gonna Linger*, she founded *Lifesketches* in 1999. "The board is absolutely delighted that Paula agreed to direct this wonderful new project," says President Lisa Shirah-Hiers. "She knows women's memoir inside and out."

For more on the Sarton project, read "Become a Sarton Juror!" below.

## Become a Sarton Juror!

By Susan Wittig Albert

It isn't very often that we get to be in on the ground floor of an exciting new project, one that is sure to attract attention around the United States and in Canada. But if you're a reader (or writer) of women's life stories, you have a once-in-a-lifetime chance to participate in a significant first: the very first competition for an international women's memoir award. The personal benefits are great. You'll get to read some fascinating books, you'll sharpen your reading and evaluation skills, and you'll enjoy the satisfaction of making an important contribution to a major literary award honoring women's lives.

We are now recruiting jurors for our 2011 competition. As a first-round juror, you will read and evaluate five contest entries (more if you wish) and then submit your evaluations online. Each book will be read and evaluated by three jurors, working independently. Their ratings will be used to help determine whether a book is sent on to our second-round panel of professional librarians, who will make the final determination.

We've set up a webpage that explains the process. You can read it here: [http://www.storycircle.org/members/sarton\\_juror\\_application.php](http://www.storycircle.org/members/sarton_juror_application.php).

I have submitted my application (an easy process that took about three minutes) and I'm already looking forward to receiving my first batch of books. Speaking for myself, I can't think of a more important way to support the many women who have the courage to put their lives on the pages of books and share those stories with the rest of us. I know that Paula Yost joins me in hoping that you will want to become a Sarton Juror, as well.

## 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.

Susan Wittig Albert

# Lifewriting Contest 2011

*Contest Entries Accepted*

*May 1 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."*

~MaryTyler Moore

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](http://www.storycircle.org/Contests)

Look for more details in the June SCJ and in our upcoming monthly e-letters.

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on the link to Create A Gift  
Membership Card**



## Story Circle Network's Online Classes

by Amber Starfire

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

### Lifewriting Classes for Women by Women

Spring term begins March 14th. We're offering dynamic courses in memoir, journaling, writing family history, writing through life changes, writing for personal growth and spiritual development, as well as ways to sharpen your writing skills, conduct interviews, and generate story ideas.

Check out the new classes at [www.storycircleonlineclasses.org/](http://www.storycircleonlineclasses.org/) and help promote SCN by sharing the link with your friends on Facebook, Twitter and other social networks!

### Faculty

Our faculty members, all women, are experienced teachers and published writers with a special interest in helping women explore their lives. If you are a skilled writer who is experienced in teaching memoir, journaling, life-based fiction, and other lifewriting forms and are interested in joining our faculty, we'd like to hear from you. Go to:

[www.storycircleonlineclasses.org/onlineproposal.php](http://www.storycircleonlineclasses.org/onlineproposal.php)

### Online Resources

We offer many resources to lifewriters. We also publish a regular e-letter, with information about our current online courses and other SCN activities. You don't have to be a Story Circle Network member to receive the e-letter; visit [www.storycircleonlineclasses.org](http://www.storycircleonlineclasses.org) and click on subscribe.

### Need Individual Help? Try A Mentor

We offer opportunities for self-directed writers who are working (or would like to work) on a specific writing project. We connect you with a helpful mentor who provides you with individually tailored, constructive assistance designed to help you strengthen your writing, sustain your efforts, and complete your projects. SCN mentors are published lifewriters. They fully understand the challenges we face when we choose to write about our lives.

How Does the Program Work? You choose a mentor from our list and work with her in a single no-obligation introductory session (required, unless you and the mentor have worked together before and she is willing to accept you to a mentorship or extended mentorship). If you and the mentor feel that you will benefit from her help, you may enroll for a mentorship of three sessions or an extended mentorship of six sessions.

[www.storycircleonlineclasses.org/mentors](http://www.storycircleonlineclasses.org/mentors).



# Stories from the Heart VI Conference News

## Stories from the Heart VI

Story Circle Network  
Sixth National  
Women's Memoir Conference

April 13-15, 2012

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



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

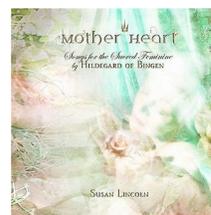
Our Friday-night keynote speaker, Gail Straub, is the acclaimed author of *Returning to My Mother's House*. Visit her website at

<http://www.returningtomymothershouse.com/>



Susan Lincoln, our Saturday lunch entertainer, began her career in opera and vocal performance at UT Austin, but soon branched into a broader understanding of music as a source of healing power. After a pivotal experience at the German Abbey of 12th century mystic and composer, Hildegard of Bingen, Susan committed herself to helping women heal through the power of their own voices. She returned to Austin and founded the Hilde Girls, spirit-song-circles of women she leads through Hildegard's music and healing wisdom. A gifted and charismatic teacher, Susan facilitates workshops, leads retreats and works with individuals using sound and vibration to heal. She has taught on the faculty of The School of Conscious Harmony, Sedona, and The Journey School, New Orleans. Visit her website at

<http://www.susanlincoln.com/>



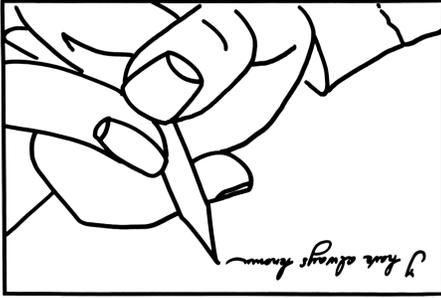
Our Sunday luncheon speaker, Susan Tweit, is the award-winning author of twelve books (including her memoir, *Walking Nature Home: A Life's Journey*, and *Colorado Scenic Byways*, winner of the Colorado Book Award), numerous magazine articles, and newspaper columns. Visit her website at

<http://www.susanjtweit.com/Susansite/Home.html>



Read our interview with Susan, from the SCN Book Reviews site.

[www.storycircle.org/Conference/](http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/)



## True Words from Real Women

# It Started as an Ordinary Day

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 "It Started as an Ordinary Day." Contribute your own True Words to the Journal. Future topics are listed on page 24.

### It Was An Ordinary Day Until. . .

Lynn Weiss, Lake Dallas TX

It was an ordinary afternoon when my eight-year-old granddaughter, Ginny, came by for a visit with her daddy. As she danced her way into my kitchen, I was reminded that a week earlier she'd asked him if she could take dance lessons again.

I very much wanted this for her because school had been difficult as she'd faced the realities of her learning differences—differences that undercut her sense of self-worth.

Her daddy had said, "I'll think about it."

Turning, I asked her, "Honey, has your daddy let you know what he thinks about your question?"

She stopped her kitchen dance before saying, "No."

"Well then, lets go check with him now. Okay?"

"Okay, Grannie."

Shyly, Ginny asked, "Daddy, have you thought about whether I can take dance lessons?"

His answer turned our sweet, ordinary day into a day filled with childhood sadness, as he said, "No, honey, you need time to study."

As her face and shoulders sagged, my heart felt squeezed. I had to do something, I needed to find a way to help her feel good about herself—to feel hope.

Remembering my own struggle to read and write, I suddenly had an answer. I could tell her my story about my struggles with learning.

After I finished, I looked her straight in the eye and said, "Ginny, I now know I was wonderful before I learned to read and write even when I was behind all the other kids. I know that you are just as wonderful as I was.

"Like you, I loved to dance and was good at it. It helped me to remember I was special. I bet it reminds you in the same way. So let's dance right now, with or without lessons."

And we did. Swinging and bending, dancing and twirling together, her sadness began to fade.

"Remember, Ginny, you will always be able to see us dancing in your imagination."

### From Stardust We Come, To Stardust We Return

Nancy Weaver, Driftwood TX

*(Author's Note: Most of the elements necessary for the existence of planets and human life were formed inside stars and dispersed by supernova and stellar winds.)*

I wake before dawn, stretch and exchange deep throaty good morning moans with my shaggy companion.

In the dim light, the Mayan pyramid painted on the wall looms out of its tropical landscape, mingling with lush bathroom ferns.

By touch, I measure six scoops of coffee and a pot of water, switch on the machine, add wood to the stove, and out we go, dogs and I, in grass crunchy from recent rain and overnight frost.

All of our bare feet tingle across the lawn, through the opening in the rock wall to paths mowed through elbow high meadow grass.

Venus looms brilliant in the pale dawn blue, the last to go home after the all night boisterous full moon party.

Cardinals and wrens sweeten the air. The neighboring rooster rings out tardily.

I wander the paths, feet on the earth, head in the lucent sky, following the older dog's nose. The shy younger fellow twists his body, blocking me, demanding a vigorous rub, then frisks away startled by his audacity.

Tawny Indian grass lays over in swaths and cowlicks; I like to think deer have bedded down here or beginners are practicing their crop circle art.

The statelier Bluestem stands tall and proud and adamantly purple red.

I practice belly laughs: hahahahahaha, hohohohoho, until they catch fire and a real laugh erupts HAHAHOHOO.

Then we are all glowing, all made of light and delight— grass and dog and star and girl.



## News on an Ordinary Day: January 8, 2011

Susan DuMond, Ashland OR  
gentlelife@me.com

## Sobering Thoughts

Marjorie Witt, Lafayette CA  
mzbull@wittbits.com;  
www.wittbits.blogspot.com

I am wet through  
and through with salt tears. Ice  
freezes my fingers, my tongue.

*...bullet to the brain*

I cannot erase  
this day, this deadly day.  
Explosions like fireworks  
rip limbs, faces, spirits.  
Death licks at our heels.

*...through the left hemisphere*

I half-stand.  
I do not blink. I do not look away.  
Our ruined majesty unwinds before me  
in grainy black and white.

*...if you can hear me, hold my hand*

I look to the sky,  
to the indigo night, for a sign.  
A tiny taste of hope lands  
snowflake like  
on the tip of my tongue.

*...thumbs up, arms up*

An ordinary day, in our household, changes with the decade. There are only two things that remain consistent: the sun rises and I peruse the daily newspaper with the first cup of coffee each morning.

It's the end of the eighties. We are in the midst of raising two teenage boys, I work more than full time, and life is challenging.

I wake up in the usual groggy fog, focusing my blurred eyes on the clock. My head throbs, my mouth is dry, and my stomach feels about to heave. I can't remember what I did the night before.

I pour my coffee with jittery hands and begin the morning nag ritual, an impatient drill to get the boys off to school. It is Wednesday, my work at home day. My concentration is poor as I am distracted with the task ahead of us this afternoon.

We have an appointment at a rehab for our fourteen year old son. We've been in counseling for months now and nothing has changed. If only he would clean up his act, we could be a normal family. He's resistant when I pick him up after school and inform him we are going to see a new counselor. He pushes his Dayglo green hair out of his eyes. "I'm not the one with the problem," he says.

As we wait in the lobby for the assessment results, I study the sign above the receptionist's desk, "This Too Shall Pass." An hour later the counselor delivers the recommendation. "Your son's drug habit is out of control. We can't risk him leaving here today." I am scared and desperate as she hands us papers to sign. Leaving the facility, I read the lobby sign once more. Maybe when the sun doesn't rise, I think.

When we return home my husband offers me the usual evening martini and I turn it down. It's not an ordinary day. I have decided I'll never pick up another drink.

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## It Started Out as an Ordinary Day Subtitle: My Life as a Meatloaf

Carol Walkner, Pt. Pleasant NJ  
carol@thedragonwriter.com,  
www.TheDragonWriter.com

A piece of my heart is in the oven  
with the meatloaf. It just fell off from a  
brittle edge right into the meatloaf pan.

Now what do I do?

It's the same color as the shredded  
meat, similar texture.

My heart hurts and makes  
My eyes talk their salty way of things.

She is turning away from me towards others.  
He'll be late home again, another  
business deal, my dear, he exclaims.

Sorry!

The meatloaf is burning my heart.

## "Oh, My" Meatloaf

2 pounds ground round

2 eggs

1/3 cup Italian bread crumbs, seasoned croutons smashed up  
or one piece of whole wheat bread broken into small  
pieces—for less dry, use 1/4 cup breadcrumbs

1/2 small sweet onion, diced

2 cloves garlic, minced

Salt and pepper to taste

A few dashes of Worcestershire sauce

1/2 cup shredded cheddar cheese (could use asiago, swiss, your  
choice)

Piece of heart—optional

Combine all ingredients except the cheese in a medium bowl, mix well with your hands, transfer to baking pan, and form into a loaf. Make an indentation/channel down the center of the loaf, pour in the cheese and close up the meat around the cheese. Bake with love at 350 degrees until your desired doneness, about 45 minutes for medium. Serves 4-5.

## Wonder

Suzanne Sherman, Sebastopol CA  
 ssherman@sonic.net;  
 www.suzannesherman.com

This evening I walked the Sonoma Coast headlands the hour before a sunset that lit the sky with crimson and gold. How good it felt to be high on a cliff seeing seagulls form a flock then cast apart on gusts. White caps pounded rocks for miles in both directions and beyond them the sea looked almost placid, readying for the night.

Suddenly, a siren sounded, something rarely heard here. I watched three police cars pass and wondered where they were headed as I walked back to the car.

Ten minutes up the road, there they were, parked in the lot overlooking the beach where the Russian River finishes its long run, fanning across the sand like a mirror for the crimson sky. Near these converging waters a helicopter sat parked, red lights flashing. I pulled in beside other onlookers and got out of the car in time to hear a teenaged boy say into his cell phone, “Yea, we saved a life today. Here at the beach.”

Who would need to be saved on a night like this? The tide was low, the ocean calm. I was puzzled.

Just then, the helicopter began to rise from the sand. A beautiful boy with almond eyes came up carrying a guitar under his arm, here, maybe, to play for the sunset. “She’s going to be alright,” he said.

“Do you know what happened?” I asked.

“She was trying to commit suicide but they saved her,” he said. “Can you imagine? Couldn’t she see what she has?”

I watched the helicopter turn toward the full moon that hung luminous in the eastern sky, toward a city where no one will see that moon, away from where I stood realizing a woman had nearly ended her life at the same time so many of us were filled with wonder. How unsettling it was to remember what different experiences we’re all having, to be reminded that not everyone could go breathless by a sky like this, that they could want to die under it, taken away by the cold, cold waters.



## One Morning

June Jefferson, Fayetteville AR,  
 SCN Reading Circle and e-circle 13,  
 jjefferson@arkansasusa.com

One morning you just wake up to a new world.  
 It can be filled with trouble or happiness;  
 you never know which.

One step at a time one step.  
 One moment at a time one moment.  
 One hour one hour.  
 Twenty-four.

Light dawns  
 hope reveals itself  
 god-driven,  
 protected,  
 assured.

You glimpse a clear opening  
 through the smoke of burning bridges.

## How to Become a Power Seller on e-Bay

Cindy Flora, Clearwater FL

It was an ordinary evening—me perched on the couch, half listening to *Will and Grace* as an inebriated Karen cautioned Jack on the signs of addiction—just a finger stroke away from listing a pair of What-Not-to-Wear jeans from my errant youth, when my husband burst breathlessly into the family room in a strangely excited, slightly triumphant state.

“Honey, what, what’s going on; what are you doing here?” I asked, in my best Karen imitation. His wild-eyed appearance was alarming me, for, by now, he should have been in his first deep snore, lulled to sleep by the flickering glow of ESPN sports center, the remote clutched in his hand like a

child’s beloved bottle.

“Did you know our bedroom door locked from the inside?” His eyes were still flashing in a slightly alarming *Tell-Tale-Heart* manner.

I frowned. “Well, yes,” I replied slowly. “What did you do, lock yourself in the bedroom?”

“Yes!” he shouted, the adrenalin still pumping almost visibly through his veins.

I started to laugh then and so did he, no doubt, a welcome release from the excitement of his unexpected incarceration.

“How did you get yourself out?” I asked.

I listened with appropriate spousal concern as he relayed the experience. Apparently, after his initial shock, it had taken some effort and a good deal of luck, to make his escape, all of this drama unfolding on the other side of our ranch home, unbeknownst to me and our sleeping teenage daughter.

“I almost called you on the house phone to come rescue me, but I was afraid I would wake up Kaycee.”

I reassured him that he was never in any imminent danger as he could have escaped through the back door from the bathroom, but I suppose the sudden sight of him in his shorts and t-shirt, his nose pressed up the French doors of our family room at midnight, would have scared me out of my pants.

Speaking of pants, I think the jeans will sell really well—they say buyers love personal anecdotes.

## A Day Without Crocodiles

Tracy Kauffman Wood, Ardmore PA

amitysma@comcast.net; www.whocanstopadream.blogspot.com

You ask me for an ordinary day  
 A day without the constant turning, endless stream of thoughts burning,  
 Churning through my shallow peace of mind.  
 I don't remember such a thing.  
 Does life start out that way?  
 Birth is not ordinary.  
 How can we expect anything subsequent to be?  
 We hop from drama to drama  
 Pillars of various sizes, consciously positioned on a pool of trauma,  
 Trauma like a crocodile bides its time.

You ask for an ordinary day  
 A day without crocodiles?  
 It never ever was that way.  
 And while I wish, weave and wait for my hour to settle and sate,  
 There will be tall, short, fat and thin days to be scaled and saddled,  
 Strewn with obstacles, sometimes dodged.  
 So long as this steady stream of concentrated life keeps churning,  
 The ordinary eludes me.  
 And every day is extraordinary.

## Dusty Rose

Rayn Plainfield, Portland OR; Facilitator SCN e-circle 1

It started out like every other day. That morning we were a family of four. By the end of the day, there were only three of us living in the house. Everything was normal until early evening.

It's January, 1961. I'm nine, sitting alone at the kitchen table doing my homework. Mom and Dad are probably in the living room. Dad usually reads and Mom pores over her cookbooks. I am working quietly. Then there is a commotion in the hallway: footsteps and the soft swishing of clothing. Next, dad comes into the kitchen, swiftly. There is a strange tightness in the air. Dad—usually so quiet, his step light and unhurried—now bursts into the kitchen with a wild look. Dad addresses me. Disoriented, I try to focus on the words. They don't make sense.

"You have to say good-bye to your sister." I must look lost. "Your sister is getting married. Say good-bye to her."

Meanwhile, Lil has quietly crept into the kitchen, silent as a cat, wearing the dusty rose velvet party dress Mom sewed, the wide skirt flaring. I'm stunned. It's a school night; there can't possibly be a dance tonight at her high school! Then I see her tear-stained face. I look from Dad to Lil, an unbearable silence shrieking out. Dad's demanding look petrifies me. What's expected of me? Lil looks down, unwilling to meet my eyes. They stand rooted there, waiting. Frightened, I can't find my voice. Dad's contorted, anxious face reveals his mounting anger.

I hoarsely cough out, "Bye." The next instant, they've vanished. I'm paralyzed, trying to make some sense here. Lil is getting married? Right now? She's 16; she's still in school! The gravity of the situation hits me. By the time I can move again to go looking for an explanation, I find I'm all alone. I look out the window. The car is gone. I yell upstairs in a panic, "Mom?"

No reply. Something terrible has happened. There is no one to tell me what it is. I'm left here, alone, helpless.

## Tuesday's Tally\*

Amy Greenspan, Austin TX  
 Austin Reading Circle, e-circle 4

One suit.  
 One tie.  
 One ski mask.  
 One weapon engineered for mass assault.  
 Two blocks, ten rounds  
 of rapid shots at no one.  
 Run.  
 Run  
 through second floor revolving door  
 up four flights, to Six, to find  
 the quiet to obliterate  
 nineteen years of life.

Fifty thousand students.  
 What demon chose this way for one to die?  
 What angel spared the rest?

*\* On Tuesday, September 28, 2010, University of Texas student, Colton Tooley, brought an AK-47 to campus and opened fire before killing himself in a university library.*

## Widower's Tracks in the Snow

Terry Schreiber Werth, Spencerport NY  
 twerth2@rochester.rr.com

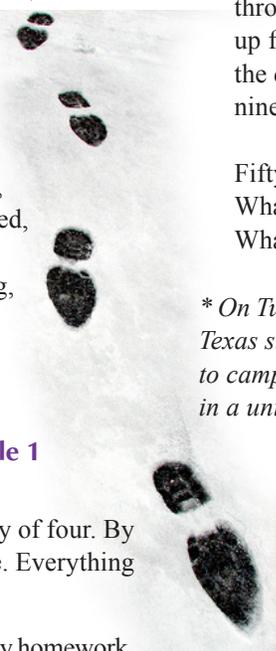
His tracks, deep in this morning's fluffy snow,  
 Mark the heavy walk of grief  
 to the newspaper box and back.

Part unspoken habit, part hoped for diversion  
 loneliness ripples through his brooding body  
 like an icicle's drip trickling down his back.

Gauzy, gray aching smothers an almost-laugh.  
 Cheerful memories of winter's past  
 Pushed into dark, far corners of thought.

Winter's gentle slumber, a respite  
 From the heavy weight of autumn.  
 Who knows if the promised affection of spring

Will be enough to coax fresh shoots  
 To rise up, hungry, eager to grow, to bloom,  
 to soften his steps, generate a bona fide smile?



## The Day My Old Life Ended

Connie Katusak, Leander TX  
Millwood Writing Group

It was late fall, a typical Binghamton day: dreary, damp, and cold. No wonder my muscles ached; nothing bad, just inconvenient. The week before, I had fallen while roller skating, but I'd been pushed – hadn't I? My doctor aunt made an appointment for me with a neurologist because, as she said, I tended to fall a lot. I wasn't worried: I was just clumsy.

After a grueling series of tests, my mother and I sat in his office waiting for the prognosis. Looking up, he said solemnly, "I believe you have Multiple Sclerosis."

What was he talking about? What was Multiple Sclerosis? It sounded really scary serious. Suddenly I wasn't a happy-go-lucky teenager. I had a disease.

There was no internet in 1959 and computers were unheard of, so I went to the only resources I knew, the public library and my aunt's medical journals. Thus began a quest to learn as much about the disease as was available. I was eighteen years old with no intention of dying before I lived. Articles recounted painful episodes with muscles spasms, loss of vision, and eventually a wheelchair before succumbing to death.

I learned there was a higher incidence of MS in men than women and statistics showed more cases reported in the northeast than the southwest. I vowed to leave the cold and migrate to the warmer south as soon as possible. The only treatment was an experimental one that involved injections of snake venom; not for me. Symptoms also seemed to disappear while a woman was pregnant only to reappear at a later date. Each night I spent hours meditating on the myelin sheathing, my nerves willing them to not dissolve. I refused the diagnosis that there was no cure. I would cure myself.

Was it really MS? Maybe. Through the last fifty years other symptoms appeared, again attributed to MS, inconvenient but no lasting infirmity. Can your mind really cure? I don't know the answer but, for me, taking charge of my life and my illness was an important step.



## A Bit of Magic

Linda Austin, St. Louis MO; moonbridge@earthlink.net

The familiar song of the cell phone alarm forced my eyes open to a dull gloom washing into the bedroom. Another rainy day, the fourth in a row. I lay in bed thinking of what was ahead: fix a school lunch for my daughter, clean the house, visit Mom in the nursing home. I wondered what home-made dinner treat I could cook for her to tempt her appetite as lately she had no interest in eating.

I rose from bed to wake my daughter, dressed, then headed downstairs to start the day. After my husband left to drop our daughter off at school on his way to work, I headed for the front door to fetch the newspaper and check out the weather.

## Something Happened That Day

Jamuna Advani, San Ramon CA; SCN e-circles 13 and 4  
jadvani@yahoo.com, www.jamunaadvani.blogspot.com

April 2, 1961 started as an ordinary day, as I headed for the Imphal airport. I had to go to Delhi for an interview for my post graduate studies. I would have been bored all by myself, but my friend, Soroj, came along with me. We hired a jeep and reached the airport much ahead of time. After checking in my luggage we took the vacant seats in the waiting area. Soroj and I chatted for some time and waited anxiously for the airplane to land. The aircraft was still at Kolkata airport and it was delayed for another twenty minutes. Soroj looked around and said, "Jamuna, look at that fellow, he has the latest *Filmfare* in his hand."

"Do you want me to ask him if we can borrow it?" I asked her.

"Sure, there is enough time; we can look at it and give it back to him in time."

I got up and went to that gentleman and asked him if we could borrow the *Filmfare* for few minutes. *Filmfare* used to be a very popular magazine written about movies stars. We both were crazy for the movie stars and their stories. As the airplane landed and every one was ready to proceed to the aircraft, I returned the magazine to the gentleman with thanks.

Once we were inside the aircraft I took my assigned seat and buckled up. After few minutes I saw the same gentleman coming to the seat next me. Surprised, I wondered if he had changed his seat with someone else to get this seat. Anyway when the aircraft was in the air and we'd settled comfortably in our seats, he introduced himself as Rup. He knew me as a nurse working in the civil hospital. We also knew a common friend, Kumar, who was a regular supplier of surgical equipments in our hospital. That day he was heading for Mumbai but he changed his destination. Instead he came to Delhi where his family lived.

I married this gentleman after six months.



The weight of my mother's deteriorating condition was on my mind. Drops of rain spattered my face as I stepped outside and looked at the pale gray ceiling above me. On the sidewalk along the street, the newspaper lay limp in its plastic wrap. I headed back to the house with it, ignoring the scatterings of rain that played like a preview of the coming main event. Stepping up onto the front porch, I paused to look down. There, plastered on the doormat, lay a bit of magic—a damp, red feather. My spirits rose at this little miracle, and floated upwards into the gray clouds.

## Our Miracle Horse

Patricia Daly-Lipe, Haymarket VA  
www.literarylady.com

The day started ordinary enough. I went down to the barn. The three horses were grazing on the lush green pasture. Then Dutch lay down. *Normal*, I thought. Then he began to roll, got up, but went down again, rolled, got up. Something was wrong: colic. I grabbed the halter, raced out, and began walking my big Belgian. Had to keep Dutch moving. I rang my husband on the cell. "Call the vet. Hurry. Emergency. It's Dutch."

The vet came but only after Dutch had rolled again. It was all I could do to get him up and moving. She inserted her gloved arm, cleaned the intestines as far as she could reach, then she attempted to remove anything down the throat with a pump. Nothing.

"Get him to the hospital. Quickly," she advised.

My husband hitched the horse trailer to the truck. We removed the center section so Dutch could turn freely if needed. Up the ramp, into the trailer he went and off we drove, lights flashing. I was terrified we wouldn't make it on time.

When we arrived at the Equine Hospital, the vets were out front ready to help as we unlocked the trailer. Dutch had turned around and was facing the rear. He descended the ramp and was walked into a stall. Down he went. One doctor advised, "I don't think he will make it."

His tongue was hanging out. Was his heart stopping? Another doctor continued to work on Dutch, shaving his side and inserting a catheter, injecting something. Dutch responded and rose. Immediately I took hold of his halter and led him to the surgery space, not a room, where Dutch would be lifted in a sling for the operation.

Ready to sit and wait, we were told to go home. "It may take hours. Try to relax. We will call you."

Once home, we checked the other horses, kept busy. Five hours later, they called. "It was successful. He is a miracle horse. His colon was twisted 360 degrees, but he made it."

And it all started as an ordinary day.

## Out of Nowhere

Libbye Morris, Dripping Springs TX  
www.libbymorris.com

It started out as an ordinary day. On my twenty-minute walk to work, I waited at a stoplight with countless other commuters, all of us bundled up against the November chill. A young woman about my age and her son stepped off the sidewalk and into the street before the "walk" signal illuminated. A bicycle courier careened toward them, and as he tried to slow down, his bicycle began to slide sideways toward them. Adrenaline engulfed me, propelling me off the sidewalk to push the woman and boy out of the way. They fell down, and the bicycle slammed into me.

"Damn it!" the bicyclist screamed. "What the hell is going on here! You idiots have ruined my bicycle!"

My leg throbbed with pain, and when I rose to a sitting position, I noticed that it sported a long, bloody gash, probably from the kickstand. Then I remembered the woman and boy. Someone was helping them onto the sidewalk, and they appeared shaken but unhurt. She rushed over to me, her son in tow. "Are you all right?" she asked.

"I hurt my leg, but I think that's it," I replied. "Is your son okay?"

"Oh, yes, he's fine. You saved us from being hurt. How can I thank you?"

"Don't worry about it," I said as she offered her hand to help me stand up. "Anyone would have done it. I'm just glad your son is all right. May I ask why you ran into the oncoming traffic like that?"

She ran her fingers through her long ponytail and looked down. "I saw my husband down the street. He was with a woman, and I wanted to see who she is."

"Maybe it's someone he works with," I offered.

"He works alone. He's an electrician."

"Oh, I see. Do you want me to help you figure it out?" I asked.

"Yes!" she said excitedly. "First, let's go to the drugstore so we can clean up your leg and bandage it." And the three of us made our way down the busy sidewalk.

## Magic Cherokee Moments

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

Early one morning,  
Before the rainstorm begins,  
A thing of beauty calls me  
Out of my "Life sucks" attitude.  
A medium-sized butterfly –  
All shades of brown and tan,  
Gold and yellow –  
Flutters near my head  
All the way from the back door  
Until I get into the car.  
It hovers near the car door  
As I carefully close it,  
Gently lands  
On my windshield,  
Peers into my space  
For a few instants,  
Then floats away  
Into some other world.

Just before sunset,  
When silver promises  
Outline clouds,  
I enter the warmth  
Of my home  
And remember  
That there is beauty  
And there are butterflies  
On this earth.  
And I know that  
All is well, all is well,  
With my world.



## Caution!

Sally Jean Brudos, Atherton CA  
SCN e-circle 16, sallyjean@brudos.com

Walk, run, hop, skip, jump, and by all means take the stairs: the mantra for the weight loss program at the Stanford Department of Dietetics. Okay, I can try that—and I did. But, now I am more cautious.

My son Eric had just started a new job in a tall building fifty miles away in downtown Oakland. “Come for lunch and I’ll show you around the office,” he said. “Call me when you get to the parking garage and I will greet you at the office door.”

After maneuvering the freeways 680, 880, and 980, I finally arrived at the building. Following instructions, I called him and started to go up in the elevator. The only problem was his office was on Floor 17 and the elevator that I had taken only went to Floor 15.

*So, I can take the stairs two floors up.* The stairway door; quite a heavy door at that, slammed shut, and I began my ascent. When I got to Floor 17, the door to the hallway was locked. Panic! *What do I do now?*

*Go back to Floor 15 and find the other elevator.* But, the door was locked on Floor 15 as well.

Panic! I took off my Patten leather dress shoe and pounded on the door to no avail. Then I saw a phone, but no one answered. Panic! I raced down the stairs and tried every door. I’m not sure which floor it was that I finally found unlocked or how many times I picked up the phone on each floor, but I do know it took fifteen to twenty minutes before I walked out of the elevator to Eric’s questioning eyes.

We calmly looked around the office and then went downstairs in the elevator to the café on the street level. Just as we were ordering our lunch, we heard the loud scream of sirens and saw three huge fire engines approach the building.

I guess that telephone did ring somewhere, after all!

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My husband and I were on a mission. We were traveling by train to bring back a *moon rock!* As a science center employee, it was an ordinary work day to him, but I was bubbling over with excitement. It was as if I, and not Neil Armstrong, was making that “one small step for man, a giant leap for mankind.”

A security guard led us through a maze of behind-the-scenes corridors into the inner sanctum. A table held an aluminum case with rounded corners, about the size of a briefcase. In bold black letters on both sides of the case were the words **NASA LUNAR SAMPLE**. So much for secrecy!

The case was opened and we saw a gray-colored rock about the size of a golf ball, mounted like a precious gem in a cut glass receptacle. Closed again, we were warned to not open it until it

## Give Me Ordinary, Any Day

Marcy Bashore, San Antonio TX

Tired but happy, we tumbled into bed after another one of our backyard parties. Everything was quite ordinary except for the incessant smoking of the grill, which my husband blamed for his slight headache.

By morning we knew something was terribly wrong, for he could not tolerate even the slightest ray of light. I tried to keep our young children calm as we headed for the hospital, at our ophthalmologist’s urgent direction. The doctor was concerned for the pain had settled in Walt’s right eye, his good eye. Several years before he had suffered an injury that blinded him in the left eye.

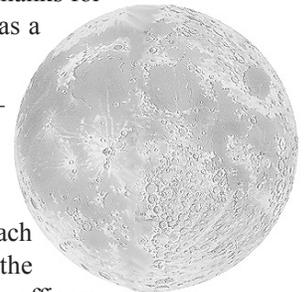
Emergency surgery was performed when it was discovered the cornea had ulcerated. In order to save the eye, and allow it to heal enough for a cornea transplant, a flap was cut from the sclera and sewn over the cornea. The healing process, including the wait time for a tissue match took about six months.

During this time my husband was blind, but undeterred. Just prior to the fateful evening, Walt had removed the engine from his Volkswagen for repair. He told me, “I think I could rebuild that engine if somebody can bring it in where I can work on it.”

Patiently day after day, he sat on the floor turning each piece over in his hands to identify, only occasionally asking me to read a part number to him. No doubt his near photographic memory was intact, and the task was completed to his satisfaction. Friends returned, mounted the engine back into the car, and with the first turn of the key the engine roared to life!

A tissue match was found and, after a frantic race to the hospital, the surgery was successfully completed. Within six weeks we were transferred to a new duty station halfway across the country, with new doctors and new complications.

Each challenge has taught us to give thanks for ordinary days, and unwrap each one as a wonderful gift.



reached its destination. We glanced at each other as we were led back through the maze, this time flanked by six security officers.

We quickly got into a cab, and the driver asked, “What d’ya have in there, moon rocks?” My husband answered and the driver responded, “This ride’s for free.” I imagine he had a good story to tell that day.

Crowded into the standing-room-only train, some college kids who had seats begged us to show them the moon rock, which of course we could not do. As they whispered to each other, I hoped they were not going to cause trouble. Standing up, they said, “We want you to have our seats.”

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## Moon Rock Magic

Lois Halley, Westminster MD

## Messages in the Mail

Brianna Cedes, Austin TX

In my kitchen, I go through the mail routine: looking at bills, tossing junk mail into the recycle bag, and then open the letter from Sophie, my ex-mother-in-law. We've been writing for twenty-three years, since I moved with the children to Austin after the divorce. Our letters are warm, as befits long-time friends; still a little guarded. We write about books and politics; I always send news about her granddaughters; sometimes we share memories.

She writes about Sammy, my ex-husband and what a helpful son he is. Then I read, "He has been married to Judy Ann (in his heart) for more than thirty years."

I choke on the words. Suddenly it's twenty-six years ago. In an old kitchen, a younger me is reading the mail, puzzling over a hefty VISA statement. *What? The card account is for—Sammy and—who?—Judy Anne Pikarski? Who is this? What's going on?*

How stupid I'd been! All those nights when he came home from "work" after midnight! All those weekends he "had to work." How could I shield the children from his anger? How could I change myself so he would be happier at home? I shook, humiliated, mad, and afraid. My friends all knew. Sally said, "Surely you didn't believe that the department held meetings on Friday nights."

"Here," Mary said, "you need to call this lawyer."

My God! It had gone on for more than four years and I never wised up!

Why has Sophie chosen to write this to me now? How will I respond? I rub my achy forehead, then glance around. I see pictures of my children, stepchildren, and grandchildren, a booster seat, the dog's mat, Jim's half-done crossword puzzle. How lucky I've been! I am so grateful for my ordinary days. Sophie's letter, somehow damp, is in my blotchy old hands. Easy decision: just forget about it. I tear it up and toss it off to recycle.

## Black Hole or Just Luck?

Christine Gilbert, Austin TX; xinegilbert@yahoo.com.

It was a beautiful sunny day, the day before my 62nd birthday. I was driving on the busy highway from Santa Fe to the Albuquerque airport, on cruise control in the left lane at 70 miles per hour. A big blue Ford pickup zoomed onto the highway from a gas station access road at Santo Domingo Pueblo and was about to enter the left lane and hit the right front of my rented car. To avoid collision I veered onto the bumpy shoulder, trying to slow down, but I lost control, somehow steered back onto the highway and went into a spin on asphalt, sliding past speeding desperados, tires screeching, all a blur, stupidly thinking, "It's a rent car! I can't wreck it!" Suddenly the Cobalt stopped midroad facing oncoming traffic about 50 yards away. I fumbled at the key and, to my surprise, the car started. I quickly zipped around to face Albuquerque and speeded up.

"Thank you," I thought. "Thank you, God, and all my angels!" I felt out of body, shaking, gripping the wheel. I wondered if I had just been killed and gone through some kind of space/time

## June 18, 2010—Just Another Day?

Sara M. DuBois, Renton WA; sarai4419@yahoo.com

Just an ordinary day... get up...off to the bathroom;  
Get ice water and breakfast, and take meds, eat a bite,  
A couple more meds, then finish the meal.  
Then the rest of the meds...feel I'm part of a pharmacy.

Take a bath, wash hair, get dressed...Little do I realize  
It's the last time to do this the ordinary way for weeks

We're going to Home Depot...seven miles west of here...  
We arrive, park near the lumber section, a nice spot...  
Walk to the curb fronting the lumber part...step up  
Walk on the curb...and I trip off the other side...

Belly-flop onto the pavement... pain in elbows and knees.  
Can't get up as quickly as the folks want me to...  
My ordinary day is no longer...now something hurting.  
Ray and a store employee help me to stand.

I ask for injury paperwork to fill out...just in case  
This is more than scraped knees and abrasions

Walking painfully to restroom to see knees  
There are scrapes, abrasions, bruises  
Pain is getting excruciating; still need to walk out  
Ray finds a wheelchair and we go out to the van.

Next stop is Taco Bell drive-through...we need to eat  
Eight hours later, glad we did, no meal until we get home.  
Then on to Urgent Care to have this checked out.  
It's a broken kneecap.

To orthopedist and seven weeks later I'm done  
Now to get exercise: water-walking to make it easier  
Stationary bike too; only a little walking on land  
This fracture was a wake-up call: get moving!



warp into an alternate universe, like *The Twilight Zone*. A white van passed me, and the woman driver mouthed, "Are you okay?"

I signaled back, "Yes, thanks."

Then I passed the blue pickup pulled over on the right—the driver's head was down, another woman bending over her. I guess they'd seen what happened. Later she passed me on the left, sitting up straight, driving fast. She had a black ponytail.

I kept going, thinking, *I have another chance. I am protected all around by an invisible shield*. Yet I drove very carefully because my saner side told me, "You're not in the morgue in Albuquerque. You're still on the highway."

A big margarita in a bar at the airport soothed my shaking nerves, along with two more drinks aboard the plane. At baggage claim, I told my husband the story and asked him. "Am I really here?"

"Yes," he said, "You're really here. Happy Birthday."

## Why Does Everything Here Loom Larger Than It Is? or, Is it Really Larger?

Mary Sullivan, rc, Medford NY  
SCN e-circles 4, 7, and 8; cenaclemasrc@yahoo.com

I don't know.

This morning there were only three raisins in my box of raisin bran—usually there are at least twenty.

This week I learned four elevator names (names of people I meet in the elevator): Alice (unlike the three Cenacle Sister Alices I know) is sullen, keeps close to her walker. Then there is Al, a brand new resident, taciturn, thin, into himself. Wes and Lou are suitemates. They are wonderful! Wes has had a stroke, is not well, holds his stomach as he walks, but my name is “Sweetheart” or “Honey”—and I love it when he calls me that. Lou lost his previous room partner to unexpected death. He rarely speaks but continually looks out for Wes. I try to say these names every time I see them else I lose who they are.

Food and the dining room are horrendous! Noisy, food served swiftly and just as swiftly removed. I find myself hanging onto my plate for dear life else it is swiped away before I am aware. I have taken to pouncing, ready to impale a server to stop the quick exit.

Then I come up to my bedroom and the next door resident, who is really not with it, was trying to open her door without a key, begging me to unlock her door. I tried to explain that she needed to call the front desk. She refused. I totally lost my cool and shouted at her that I COULD NOT UNLOCK HER DOOR. I COULD NOT! I was so angry with myself; I knew she could not grasp what was happening but I could not stop myself. Every event is larger and not smaller, though it is smaller. I do not understand them, nor it, nor myself.

*Editor's Note: After living more than fifty years as a Cenacle sister in convents with her peers, Mary Sullivan was moved into a nearby secular assisted living facility, The Hamlet a few years ago. The above two stories give voice, in part, to some of her daily thoughts as well as to all seniors who transition from their own beloved environments.*

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## A Walk to the Mailbox

Sherry Bannan, Lady Lake FL; sherryban@embarqmail.com

My mother-in-law, Nellie, had been living with us for over six months. She was 88 years old and had some type of dementia. On this particular day, Nellie was getting ready to walk down the lane to the mailbox for the third time in the last two hours. She did this almost every day and I rather encouraged it. The mailbox was at the end of our long winding pine needle covered driveway, and I felt the walk was good exercise for her.

I watched her make her way slowly down the drive, swishing her cane at the Spanish moss that had fallen from the oaks, stopping to check out a flower, or just staring up at the sky.

Some time later, I looked down the driveway and she was nowhere in sight. I ran out of the house calling her name. Where could she have gone?

I rushed to Bill's shop and hollered at him to help me find her. He jumped on the golf cart and decided to head down the road

## What Do I Have To Look Forward To?

Mary Sullivan, r.c., Medford NY  
SCN e-circles 4, 7, and 8  
cenaclemasrc@yahoo.com

The room was cold. Rain and an oncoming darkness were outside. I waited. I listened. The woman admitted that she would turn seventy in a few months and had to retire. “I'm jealous of those younger than I. I miss the sex that my husband and I used to have.”

She cried. And she cried. And she cried. “I ask myself all the time now, when I retire what do I have to look forward to?”

Her frustrations, impotence, jealousy, were easily communicated. She did not lack the ability to articulate and share. This woman was the mother of five grown children, the grandmother of four, still in love with her husband, and he with her. They were looking forward to taking a few trips, working as volunteers in different organizations, but where was God in all this, she wondered.

She kept repeating her question. “What do I have to look forward to?”

Her question unsettled me. I have been carrying it around, feeling its weight and its significance. Why? It is my question living in the Hamlet.

I could not tell her that. It was important that she feel the freedom to say what she needed to say and to feel what she needed to feel.

Then she left. There was a glimmer of peace in her that had not existed before she came. As for me, I was stunned. Was this her question? Was this my question? Was this simply the question we all are asked to face in our seventies?

to see if she had gone that way. I headed for the dock, my heart pounding out a staccato tempo that hurt my ears. Mom loved to sit out on the dock with me in the early evening. I didn't think she would go there alone because she didn't know how to swim and was afraid of water, but what if she had?

I hurried out on the dock looking for any sign of her, peering into the water, which was fairly clear and not too deep. I saw nothing out of the ordinary and heaved a little sigh of relief. I headed back up the hill and met Bill, who had not found her either. I got on the golf cart and we drove up the hill to go down toward the end of the road. As we rounded a corner, there sat Nellie in the neighbor's yard. She was pulling weeds and singing her finest rendition of *Sweet Georgia Brown*. Life was good.



## A Window Opened

Ruth Cloud Hetrick, Pennsburg PA  
skippingstar@aol.com

It started as an ordinary day. Can I possibly explain how magnificent that is? It has been almost two years since I have enjoyed an ordinary day, for every day I have awakened, not knowing who I would be. Would I be lost, fearful, powerless, exhausted, lonely, sick, confused and worried?

Those are just some of the words that described me, a woman trying desperately to recover from being an “accidental addict” to a prescription drug given to me many years ago for anxiety due to a serious health crisis. Now, after almost a year of being drug-free and suffering horrible withdrawal symptoms, existing through a life that I no longer recognized, becoming a negative, sad, frightened version of myself, I awoke to an “ordinary day!”

No longer shaking all over, I lay there for awhile. There was no heavy darkness weighing down my brain, no fear that some unknown horror was going to descend upon me, no body jerking, no anxiety, nausea or crying.

No, this day I was not lost to myself. I felt normal, just as the people in my internet support group had told me would happen. They told me a window would open and give me a glimpse of normalcy and then I would know that the “real me” was still there. Two year is a long time to be “lost” from yourself and I had doubted that my brain and central nervous system would ever heal and that I would get my life back. I had prayed every day to just be “me” and to have an ordinary day where I would not be afraid to take a shower, get off the sofa, go grocery shopping, cook a pot of soup, make a bed or a phone call or step outside, just to do things that most people take for granted.

Today, what started out as an ordinary day has turned into an extraordinary day for me. I am no longer lost; I am found and I am—oh, so gratefully—finally going forward with my life!

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## It Paid to Listen to My Mother

Helene Benardo, Bronx NY

It was a Sunday afternoon. I was 24 years old and had just returned home from my week-end hospital volunteer job. I was exhausted and wanted nothing more than to “veg out” (or whatever the 1960 expression was!)

My mom reminded me that I had said I would go to the home of an aspiring politician in our area to work along with a group stuffing envelopes.

“No, I’m too tired. Maybe next week.”

“It’s a good change of pace for you; give it a try.”

“Oh, all right, Ma. I’ll go for a little while.”

I drove over and, just as I was parking, a young man emerged from the house—one of the early-shift helpers. I guess my bright red jacket had an effect on him; he turned around and went back in!

Long story short—he and I started dating. We liked each other, but there was no spark. One evening, he said he was planning to have a party, some old friends of his I’d never met.

Came the night of the party—I was introduced to one man and, as the evening wore on, felt a deep interest in this person but, as is the case in so many gatherings, he was across the room in one group; I was on the other side with another one.

When I returned home, I told my parents that I had met the kind of man I would like to know better, this knowledge gleaned from having listened to him across the proverbial “crowded room.” My folks said, “So call him up.” This was a very progressive suggestion for those days.

I did. In June, we’ll be married fifty years!

## An Extra Ordinary Day

Khadijah Lacina, Shihr, Yemen,  
umm.mujaahid@gmail.com  
SCN e-circles 12, 14, poetry circle 4,  
Facilitator of e-circle 3



such an ordinary day  
we speed down sea side  
road to Mukallah  
thoughts dwell on scenery  
dead planes litter  
old airfield  
flags snap smartly  
saluting badly trimmed  
trees in fantastic  
unnatural shapes  
“all praise is to Allaah”  
some enterprising man  
declares with white rocks  
on brown hillside  
all is fine, doctor says,  
baby is quiet, waiting.  
late afternoon  
pain begins  
uncertainty turns to surety  
on the road again ten p.m.  
no outer sights distract  
I picture you whole and new  
know that soon you who have  
kicked turned hiccupped  
inside will be in my arms  
we have work ahead this night  
as an ordinary day  
gives birth  
to the extraordinary

## Extra-Ordinary

Arlene Roman Howard, Rancho Mirage CA

After three years of looking, we found our dream retirement home. “We better keep our last appointment,” my husband said. Sun shining, palm trees swaying, we drove to the next house.

Bam! Crack! Missing a half-step on the walkway to the house, I came crashing down on my left hip. No time for my brain to scream to my hands, “Stop the fall!” Everyone gasped. I lay there on the cold grey cement, my body reeling with pain.

The pain stopped. We all sighed. “Just a bad bruise.”

I called my medical student daughter. “Does it hurt to wiggle your toes?”

“No.”

“Can you move your legs?”

“A little.”

“I’ll meet you at the hospital.”

After being x-rayed, I heard, “A broken femur.”

“No!” I cried out.

The surgeon arrived. “Young lady (oh, how I wish), you have two choices. I can operate and you can ski again or you can let it heal by itself and no more skiing.” All I could think was sometimes one doesn’t live through operations. *What if I die, what if I die* keep flashing across my brain.

At 2 p.m. I went under. Two hours later I awoke. “Oh my gosh, I’m alive, held together with three pins.” The next morning, a handsome (“Hot Mom!”) therapist put me on my feet, “Walk.”

I spent the next three months in a wheelchair. No gardening or walking. On the other hand no grocery shopping or vacuuming. My wheeled legs and I became quite a couple. My husband, daughter, neighbors, and my dog, Nala, pampered me. There were moments when I thought I could get used to this. There were also moments when my husband remarked, “Stop whining.”

The experience wasn’t one I would have chosen. It chose me. “Hey you!” Surprisingly, I am grateful it did. It gave me time to reflect on my sixty-three years of living and provided me with enough ideas to write about until I run out of life.

Epilogue: A year later we found another great house; eighteen months later, I skied. A quilt on the sofa commemorates my extraordinary day.

## A New Perspective

Teresa Schreiber Werth, Spencerport NY  
twerth1@rochester.rr.com

Everything in my environment is ordinary. The sun is shining. The dog is jumping and ready to play. The morning newspaper proclaims disasters great and small. The oatmeal, raisins, and walnuts all tumble together and cook in the microwave just as they always do. It’s on ordinary days like this I feel especially far from my son and his wife. They live and work in the Caribbean on the island of Barbados in the West Indies.

As I take my breakfast out to our screen porch, I try to imagine what they might be doing...same time zone, same bright sunshine, but half-a-world away I realize that I don’t really know what their ordinary day is like. From our infrequent visits there, I remember some of their routine, which is really no routine at all. Everything that’s said about “island time” is true. Their friends, a chef, a Long Island insurance guy who works from Barbados half the year, a bar and restaurant owner, some or all of them drop in for breakfast sometimes. Or our son gets up and goes surfing or golfing or to the college to teach or help students with their projects.

I’m still sunk in this decade-belated “empty nest funk” when I finish breakfast, clear the dishes and go to my desk. Turning on the computer, I start to plan the rest of my day: chores, meals, correspondence, projects. I call up my Gmail, and there’s a message from the far away son with an attachment. Nothing in the text box. I open the attachment.



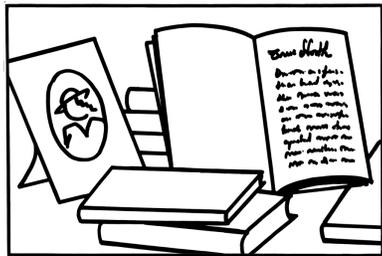
It’s not an ordinary day, after all!



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



—Elizabeth Ehrlich



## Story Circle Network's Book Reviews Book Corner

by Susan Ideus

Normally, the focus in this spot is books, and of course, books are our primary focus at Story Circle Book Reviews. We request, receive and review books regularly. However, we have another feature at SCBR that I want to make sure you know about. Occasionally, we are fortunate to be able to interview an author whose book has been reviewed.

Now if you're like me (an avid reader as well as an aspiring author), you have a selection of books on your shelves about writing. Some of them I've decided to add to my library as a result of reviews I've read at SCBR. All of them I consider as valuable resources. I've discovered another valuable resource for writing tips—our author interviews!

These women are so generous with their time, offering up not only reflections about their books and their personal experiences, but also about writing: what it means to them, the processes they employ, the lessons they've learned along the way. Reading the interviews will yield many nuggets of useful and motivational information about writing and journaling.

For instance, in our latest interview, Patrice Rancour (*Tales From the Pager Chronicles & The Pager Chronicles, Volume Two*) shares that she draws on her writing both in her profession and in her private life.

Language is the clinical tool I use to motivate, reframe, transform and empower others in their own personal work. I have often used writing as a means of working with patients facing major illness. In fact, I've published many clinical papers on such a practice. I frequently work through my own personal therapeutic impasses using writing to understand the meaning of whatever suffering I am personally experiencing.

Have you ever wondered about the background research that goes along with writing a novel? After all, it's fiction, right? Read what Daphne Kalotay (*Russian Winter*) has to say.

I'm not a historian and even now don't consider myself at all an expert on Russian history. I had to do a lot of reading—years' worth—in preparation. Much of the specific research I did (and I think this is true for most writers) probably never even appears in any identifiable way in the pages of the book, but all of it was necessary in that it became the invisible scaffolding that supported the story as a whole. Without that knowledge base, I wouldn't have been able to create a believable fictional world—not only because it would have lacked the necessary historical details, but also because I wouldn't have felt I had the authority to go ahead and make up a story in that time and place.

Writing fact or fiction, establishing a firm sense of place is vital. SCN's Susan Wittig Albert speaks with eloquence on this subject.

I am a creature of place, and the place that shapes me exists in a temporal continuum, within an evolving history. ... We can't know who we are until we know the place where we are, whether we've chosen that place deliberately or simply find ourselves in it by accident... And of course, setting (that's what place is about, isn't it?) is an important element in every novel. But I do try to foreground setting, and the books of mine that I like best include a great deal of setting material... books about people who are shaped by the places they live and the times they've lived through.

These are but a few examples of what you can find in the interviews we have posted on SCBR. Mini lessons and motivation await at <http://www.storycirclebookreviews.org/> interviews and I do hope you'll check them out. You won't be disappointed.



## SCN Sugar Bowl Scholarships

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

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

# Take A Bow! Spotlighting Our Volunteers Our New Board Members

by Robin A. Edgar

The SCN Board of Directors oversees the Network's classes and programming, publications, web site, and sponsored projects. The board operates according to the adopted bylaws and policies and procedures manual. Currently, the board has twenty members from eight states, and two countries. SCN would not be possible without the work of these dedicated women. In January, the Board elected three new members. Welcome Kira, Judy, and Khadijah!

## Take A Bow: Kira Holt from Wimberly, Texas

Kira Holt joins the Story Circle Network Board of Directors for a three-year term, replacing Linda Thune. Kira is new to SCN, but she has served as Senator for Texas Association of Assessment in Counseling for the Texas Counseling Association and on the Board of Directors and as President of Texas Career Development Association as well as the Texas Chemical Dependency Counselors - San Marcos chapter.

First introduced to SCN by a friend, Kira attended the 2010 SCN conference, "Stories from the Heart," and immediately decided to join. Although she has participated with SCN for only a year, she has found being a member to be very beneficial on a personal level as far as building her confidence as a writer and opportunities to publish her work.

She says, "Gathering with other women interested in writing inspires me to write more. The more I'm involved with like-minded people, the more creative and inspired I feel."

With a B.A. in English and a M.A. in Human Services, Kira has

worked in education for 28 years. She also has researched publishing, contests and the business of writing in general, working to stay current with what is happening in the field. She was an essay finalist in 2010 William Faulkner Creative Writing Contest and was a short-list finalist for her novel, *Nightmare in the Grand Canyon*, in the same competition.

With a firsthand knowledge of the benefits of writing as the central focus of her personal time, Kira was delighted to join the SCN board. With the skill sets she has acquired from her professional career as well as her previous board membership involvement, she hopes to actively participate in the areas of networking and marketing.

She says, "I want to get the word out about how Story Circle Network helps and inspires women to write their stories."



## Take A Bow: Judy Miller from Zionsville, Indiana

Judy Miller replaces Martha Meacham on the Story Circle Network Board of Directors, serving for the remaining year of Martha's term. A self-professed bibliophile, she heard about SCN from a friend and colleague and decided to become a member of SCN as a birthday gift to herself in April 2009.

"I had just begun writing and I loved the idea of women mentoring women. I knew I needed the guidance SCN had to offer," she says. "The Story Circle Network does such a great job of supporting and encouraging women to share their stories with the can-do energy among the members."

Married to her childhood sweetheart, who she says still makes her heart go pitter-patter, Judy has degrees in anthropology and forensics as well as an MPA. A writer and teacher of her own and other curricula about adoptive parent education (online and face-to-face), she also edits two newsletters, her own and a non-profit.

Although she dreams of getting her PhD in anthropology, she says, "I have four kids who teach me more than I thought I'd learn in a lifetime, and I'm so grateful for those lessons."

Volunteering a great deal in the short time that she has been involved with SCN, Judy has participated and presented at "Stories from the Heart." A Story Circle Book Review editor

and review team coordinator, she writes Book Learning posts for "Telling Her Stories" and served on the Sarton Award Procedures committee.

Bringing a spirit of organization and positive energy to SCN, Judy says she would like to see SCN receive more traffic, exposure and public acknowledgement for what the organization offers. "I have an immense appreciation for the importance of women's stories and of how the sisterhood of the SCN process creates a deeper perspective of how stories can be shared and written."

Judy would like to focus on program development and planning while on the Board and hopes to continue building on what has worked in the past. She recognizes that, as publishing technologies change, there will have to be some adjustments for the future. She would love to see SCN reach out to women of all ages, mentoring them through the use of story circle facilitation.

She says, "Being a mom to girls and observing what young women struggle with in our society, it behooves me to consider the possibilities of merging reading and discussion with mentoring."



## Take A Bow: Khadijah Lacina from Shihr, Yemen

A member of the Story Circle Network for eight years, Khadijah Lacina has joined the Board for a three-year term, replacing Robin Edgar. Attracted to SCN because it was all women, she says she perceives it as a “safe” place for her to tell her story, to meet people, and to expand her writing horizons.

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

In addition to her work with the women in her village, Khadijah is an active participant in two SCN writing e-circles, the poetry circle, and the lifewriter’s group, She facilitates e-circle 3 and hosts a free range circle. Her piece, “Finding Home,” won the 2010 SCN Lifewriting Competition.

“I have made some wonderful friends and found some amazing role models in SCN,” says Khadijah. “I have grown in my writing and become more confident, learning to look more critically at my work, but to not be overly critical of it.”

A certified herbalist, practicing both Western and Arab herbalism, Khadijah home schools her children. She is a translator and

writer, and speaks to various women’s groups all over the world about Islam and the role of women in society. Good at getting things done on time, she also does a great deal of editing for her husband’s book publishing business.

She says, “I really enjoy people, and I am very good at organization (with eight children I have to be!).”

Delighted to be able to give back to SCN as a new SCN Board member, Khadijah hopes to bring a larger cross section of people to the membership, increasing the number of minorities, people with a restricted income, and more. Convinced that it is important to get more and more women participating, writing and telling their stories, she would also like to see more publishing of book anthologies of member writing, like the Kitchen Table Stories.

“I would like to work to spread the news of SCN far and wide!” Hoping to work with new members and to develop new programs to build an even larger sense of community, she says, “I want to pay SCN back as much as I can for all the blessings I have gotten from being a member. The work SCN does is incredibly important, and I want to be as much a part of it as I am able.”



## A Story Circle Affiliated Life Writing Retreat with Robin Edgar

**WHEN: October 7-9, 2011**

**WHERE: Wild Acres Retreat, Little Switzerland, NC**

**COST: \$250 for SCN members,  
\$275 for non-members**

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

Guests stay in lodges with rooms that have a private bathroom and accommodate up to two guests. There are no televisions or telephones in the rooms. See [www.wildacres.org](http://www.wildacres.org).

Registration is limited to 12 participants. Fees for this weekend retreat include a double-occupancy room for two nights and five meals. (Depending on registrations, single rooms for a higher rate are available upon request.) To register, please contact Robin Edgar at [2robinedgar@gmail.com](mailto:2robinedgar@gmail.com) or visit [www.robinedgar.com](http://www.robinedgar.com).



*The Candy Fund offers up to 50% scholarships for women, 21 years of age or older, who reside in Western North Carolina.*





## A Conversation With Janet Riehl: Real Life as Poetry

by Lisa Shirah-Hiers

Writer, artist, musician, and storyteller Janet Riehl has traveled extensively through Africa, Asia and Latin America, implementing development projects, training and teaching. She's worked in diverse communities including Native American Pueblos, inner-city African American and Latino neighborhoods, and major corporations. A member of the Author's Guild, Janet has been published in the Harvard Review, Cream City Review, and the International Poetry Review. Her book *Sightlines: A Poet's Diary* won honorable mention in the 2007 DIY (Do It Yourself) Festival. The subsequent audio book "*Sightlines: A Family Love Story in Poetry and Music*" <http://bit.ly/aZVd1e> won an honorable mention at the San Francisco Book Festival Awards. To learn more visit her website and blog at: <http://www.riehlife.com>

**SCJ:** When and why did you begin writing poetry?

**JR:** I've written poetry throughout my life but think of myself primarily as a memoir writer. *Sightlines: A Poet's Diary* is a memoir told in story poems of the year following my sister Julia's death in a car crash in 2004. I commuted between Northern California to our family home place in the Midwest as my father and I partnered in caring for my mother until her death in 2006. I began *Sightlines* sitting up and writing in bed an hour before I rushed down to care for my mother. Truly, these poems are a poet's diary.

**SCJ:** Who were the mentors who helped you along the way?

**JR:** My father gave me a model of how to be a working writer. He's always done manual labor, but found time to write too. Pop might be clearing brush, then rush off to jot down a love poem on a paper bag. During a bad weather break he'd find a corner in the company locker room to jot down stories on lined paper in a blue cloth binder. He is one of the most productive people I know. Even as I type this answer he is downstairs banging away on yet another novel.

**SCJ:** Tell me a little about your creative process. Do you write on schedule? Escape to a remote retreat?

**JR:** I earned my living as a professional writer for decades and I'm grateful for the discipline and craft I learned writing to deadlines. I do write on a schedule. I've discovered that Catholic monasteries are supportive, inspiring, and inexpensive. I always set up a daily structure for eating, writing, walking, reading, and sleeping.

**SCJ:** Why do you think some people are intimidated by the idea of writing poetry?

Writers err on both sides. Those who feel intimidated have bought into the notion that poetry lives in rarified air. Then there are those who think that poetry is prose with line breaks. I'd say unless you're writing in classic forms with rules—like haiku or sonnets—just write and don't worry too much about whether it's prose or poetry. You can figure this out later.

**SCJ:** Tell me more about your book *Sightlines: A Poet's Diary* and the audio book that followed: *Sightlines: A Family Love Story in Poetry and Music*. How does the audio book enhance the print work?

**JR:** Most of the 90 poems that appear in the five sections of "Sightlines" were written in six months. My father contributed 25 archival photos from his collection. The audio version augments the book. It's a quilt of poetry, music, family stories, and banter between my father and me. As I read my poems, their meaning sharpens through pace, pauses, emphasis, tone, and pitch. You hear me choking back tears and you hear me laughing. Each poem is framed by music we recorded in my father's parlor. Curiously, the music brings out the emotion more clearly while also giving a little rest.

**SCJ:** Yes! It really is quite a different experience to listen as you read along. The music adds so much depth, especially as your eye wanders from the text to the wonderful family photos in the book. What is it like for you hearing your father's voice and music on the CDs?

**JR:** My father's voice is heard throughout, reading his own poems, dialogue lines I wrote for him in the poems, and other poems I thought would benefit from his voice. When I traveled to Africa in 2008, I carried the rough cuts of the audio book with me and when I was homesick, I listened to the recordings of my father's voice. I didn't have to phone home.

**SCJ:** Tell me about your blog magazine *Riehl Life: Village Wisdom for the 21st century*.

**JR:** When *Sightlines* was published in 2006, I started a website to promote the book. It was good for that purpose, but limited. I wanted to go beyond the book to give myself a bigger field to play in. Riehlife is both a blog and a stand-alone website. It's given me the chance to participate in a wider conversation about creativity and community. The mission of Riehlife is to create connections through the arts and across cultures.

**SCJ:** Tell me about the importance of "voice"—in poetry, life, relationships, and memoir.

**JR:** That is a topic for a master's thesis! We contain and command a multiplicity of authentic voices. I saw this in my consulting work with clients ranging from Native American tribes to large corporations. Voice shifts according to the need of the client and the type of project. If you were to track me through just one day, you'd use up all your fingers counting the voices I use in different situations and with different people: one for the telemarketing call, one for my 10-year-old great niece, one for my father, one for my sweetheart. In our writing, too, voice shifts. We are most free when we know the lexicon of a wide range of registers and can shift at will.

**SCJ:** I was moved by the poem "Amelia's Double Rainbow Wisdom" (Pp. 16-17). Your sister Julia's granddaughter, Amelia, saw a double rainbow soon after Julia's death. In the poem Amelia says that when good people die they go up to Heaven on a rainbow bridge; the rest of us rise up on a sunset. Tell us more about the origin of this poem.

**JR:** The days following my sister's death were such a tender and precious time. The poem came out of quiet moment with Julia's two granddaughters on my father's second-story screened-in porch. It was one of those times when I rushed to record what she said in my journal. My sister Julia's sudden death was a profound reminder for our entire family of how fragile life is. It dragged us out of every cozy, safe hidey-hole and cave we'd ever hibernated in. When an accident of this type occurs, metaphorically everyone in the family is in the car.

**SCJ:** There is a lot of humor in your book as well. I love the poem, "Grooming Pop," where you describe washing your elderly father's glasses. You put them back on his face and he grinned saying "It ain't near as dark a day as you think it is." Is this part of his personal philosophy?

**JR:** I'm so glad you caught the humor! The lighter moments help balance the grief. My father isn't a person who looks on the bright side. He's a practical and complete realist who worked with his hands and got them dirty. A co-worker said this to Pop when his glasses were spattered and it became part of our family story shorthand. It gives a sense of my father's extremely wry and dry sense of humor which you can hear in his voice in the audio book.

**SCJ:** Your mother sounds like quite a pistol! Her nickname, "Sweet Little Dove," was kind of a joke because she could be anything but sweet. In your poem "Praising Mother" (pp. 62-64), you describe her as "an original" with a "will like a steel bolt" who "fought and scraped and plotted for what mattered" and was "never one to purr [her] way to favor".

**JR:** My mother was definitely a matriarch who would do anything to protect her family. My father was a patriarch, and not in the least overshadowed by my mother. Stronger resolutions came out of hammering out differences and difficulties together. Mother contained contradictions as we all do. She was both modest and bold; fragile and strong. There are so many things she forced me to do—such as learning to sew and type—that

served me well in my adult life. The biggest gifts in our relationship as mother and daughter came during the last two years I cared for her before her death in May, 2006.

**SCJ:** There's a sense of place that runs throughout your book. After your sister's death you returned to your family's "home place," *Evergreen Heights*, after spending most of your life in other parts of the United States and the world. Your poems look into the past—your own and the six generations that lived on the land—and that past becomes deeply woven into the present. Is there a sense in which your "home place" is a character in your family's life story?

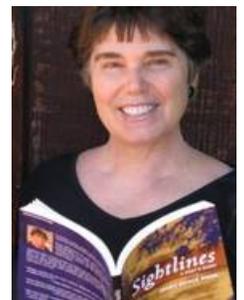
**JR:** Most definitely! My great-grandfather bought the land in the 1860s. My father grew up and raised his own children there, cared for his wife before her death, and now, at 95, is living out the end of his own days there. The land, the stories, and strength of character come from that and bind our family together. The land is a shaping influence in our lives—a larger reason for being, an all-knowing, embracing presence.

**SCJ:** What things do you hope to experience or accomplish now?

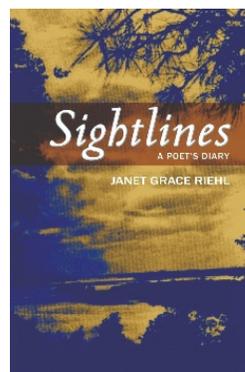
**JR:** I continue to partner with my father as he approaches his death. We've vigorously harvested his life wisdom for future generations. I've begun sorting my journals, papers, finished pieces, ephemera, and digital output. It's a daunting task, but filled with rich raw material for reflection and writing. Losing my last parent will be a major marker. It's hard to imagine a future without him.

**SCJ:** What are some of the most important lessons you've learned on your life journey?

**JR:** As a girl I was the mascot for my father's Boy Scout troop. I learned to tie a bowline knot and rope a cow. When I think of principles, values, and lessons I learned from the scout pledge to be trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent. I can't be all of these at the same time, and there may even be times when I don't want to be obedient, cheerful, thrifty, or reverent. In fact, it makes me happier to be cheerfully irreverent! I'm most interested at the borders of where things meet and meld. That can get messy. But, at those intersections light from all sides streams down.



From "Amelia's Double Rainbow Wisdom" (p. 16)



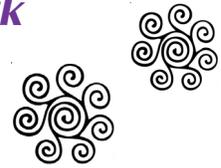
*A week after a good person dies then a rainbow happens.  
The rest rise up on a sunset.  
The special angels like Grammy Julia go to Heaven on a rainbow.  
It's a bridge. An archway to Heaven.  
The best people earn an Express Trip to Heaven.*



## *Circles: The Heart of Story Circle Network*

# *Share Your Gift!*

# *Be A Circle Facilitator*



by Barbara 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. One group has even organized an optional yoga session and a period of meditation.

Our Story Circle Network operates out of the deep conviction that every woman has a story to tell. Our stories, which put our memories into prose, return the gifts of personal awareness, healing, legacy and life direction.

As the Circles Chair on the SCN Board, I have been in contact with many of the circle facilitators over the past several weeks. What I've learned has been illuminating. Some of the groups listed on our website are very active, often spinning off additional circles in their locale. Other circles are transient and meet for only a short while.

Many members are hesitant to become a circle facilitator. All of us need to consider offering the opportunity of story writing and sharing to the women in our communities. Women all around us yearn to tell their own stories, to find their voices amidst the cacophony of everyday life. The rewards, for the circle facilitator and participants, as well as the community at large, spin out beyond the circle of women writers.

I asked Leia Francisco, facilitator of a story circle in Kerrville, Texas to share with us her own experience. She writes,

“Our Story Circle, the first one established in Kerrville, Texas, began in 2009. Co-facilitators Vicki Luther and Leia

Francisco invited ten other women who would enjoy and contribute to a circle of creative expression, mutual respect, and the spirit of exploration. We respect agreements about group process as well as our writing, and we benefit from skilled facilitation and rotating facilitators—giving us fresh perspectives and shared responsibility.

“Our members find that this intentional time and space for writing empowers us to write from a “true voice,” and we delight in surprising ourselves about where the writing takes us. For those who have specific writing goals, our meetings spark creativity. We are listened to and gently challenged to deepen our writing. We enjoy sharing new resources and techniques and have added poetry, journaling, and related modalities to enrich our experience. Chocolate and laughter are usually in the mix! Our challenge will be to blend diversity, like-mindedness, expansion, and, always, honoring each woman’s story.”

YOU HAVE A GIFT TO SHARE! Step up, use the many resources provided by Story Circle Network, and begin a writing group in your area. I recently put out the call for a new group. The response was affirming when more than a dozen women arrived for our first meeting. You will be rewarded greatly.

## *Great Gifts for Yourself...or Someone Else*

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

Browse the store and buy anything you like. Your purchases help support the Story Circle Network and its programs.

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



[www.cafepress.com/storycircle](http://www.cafepress.com/storycircle)



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Annual Membership:

- \_\_\_\_\_ USA: \$45
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- \_\_\_\_\_ International \$60 (International MO)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Internet Chapter: \$20/yr (in addition to your national dues)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sample copy of the *Story Circle Journal*: \$5

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## SCN's LifeWriters Group Blogging—and More!

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/>

Spring is almost in the air in much of our world. It's been a winter of ups and downs for most of us, weather and otherwise but we've managed, haven't we? That's how it's been at the SCNLifewriters Yahoo!Group, the listserv where about 120 of us get together every day of the week.

We have a new project we're trying out—supporting each other in our blogging efforts. Some of us are old hands at blogging, but others are new to the game. A group of us has created and shared our blogs related specifically to lifewriting.

Every Monday, we brag about our blog and leave a link so our sister members can visit us and leave comments. I've set up my blog, News From Nowhere <http://newsfromnowhere.blogspot.com>, so that my pals have a link in the sidebar and I can see when they last posted. As soon as a new post is up, I visit them. It makes the whole process more fun and interesting, and it reminds me to stay in touch and catch up with their latest writings.

For some members, like Pat Bean, blogging has a more serious purpose. Much of Pat's blog at <http://patbean.wordpress.com/> is the basis for a travel memoir she is writing. For her, the blog is partly a rough draft of her book. But it also lays the groundwork

for a dynamic promotional platform once her book is published and she wants to promote using online opportunities. To help, we make it a point to visit Pat often, leave comments, and share her blog links with our other friends in order to boost her blog rankings. Well, that's only half of the story. We love Pat's blog, for the excellent stories as well as her stunning photography! Give yourself a treat and visit the blog today.

Supporting each other in this way is just one of the activities of our listserv, but of course we are active in other ways, as well—sharing our writing experiences as well as fragments of the stories we are living, trading recipes, passing on tips and news from the publishing world, and helping one another be the best we can be. Won't you consider joining us? We're an interesting, encouraging, caring, and intelligent group of women, and most of us wouldn't want to spend a day without each other online. Our webpage: at

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

There, you will find all the information about us as well as a link to join. We hope to see you soon!

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## True Words: Looking Ahead

We're looking for stories rich in evocative detail, showing the struggles, challenges, and resolutions of real people living real lives. We're not looking for generalized, abstract truths about life. We want to read your stories, not your essays! Please make sure that your stories are **350 words** and your poems are **30 lines** or less. We may edit your submissions for grammar and spelling. Members only please. Here are the topics and deadlines for 2011:

**June (due April 15)—*Gratitude***

**September (due July 15)—*Change of Direction***

**December (due October 15)—*Holiday Stories***

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

There you will find questions about biographical info you might like included with your writing, if published.

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. (This will eliminate lots of extra typing!) Send your work to Mary Jo Doig: [maryjo\\_d@yahoo.com](mailto:maryjo_d@yahoo.com).

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

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 biographical information, you can contact Peggy Moody ([mmoody1@austin.rr.com](mailto:mmoody1@austin.rr.com)) who will contact the author to ask her permission.

## Time to Renew?

Check the expiration date on your mailing label, or check online at <http://www.storycircle.org/members/expire.php>  
Go to [www.storycircle.org](http://www.storycircle.org) and use your credit card or PayPal account to renew immediately.

### Member Benefits:

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

[www.storycircle.org](http://www.storycircle.org)

*Susan Wittig Albert*

## Lifewriting Contest 2011

*Contest Entries Accepted  
May 1 through June 30, 2011*

*Details on page 4*

