



STORY CIRCLE JOURNAL

Vol. 17 No. 2, June 2013

The newsletter for women with stories to tell

Congratulations Monica Wood, 2012 Sarton Award Recipient



We are proud to announce that *When We Were the Kennedys*, by Monica Wood, is the winner of the 2012 Sarton Women's Memoir Award, offered annually by the Story Circle Network. The book tells the story of Wood's mill town childhood in Mexico, Maine, and her Catholic family's struggles after the sudden death of her father in 1963. Her family's overwhelming grief is tenderly, artfully woven into the whole nation's grief for the death of President Kennedy, and with the healing that comes with the acceptance of loss. One of our judges wrote, "I absolutely loved this book, and loved every single moment of reading it. It was the best book I've read in years, and I read a lot of books!" And we agree.

The award is named for May Sarton (1912-1995), distinguished American poet, novelist, and author of twelve outstanding memoirs and journals. It is juried by two teams of readers: one made up of Story Circle members, the second of professional librarians not affiliated with Story Circle. Both teams read and evaluated the submissions according to a rubric that helps to keep the evaluations consistent. You can read an interview with Monica Wood on page 8 of this issue, and a review of her book on page 11.

The 2013 award competition is now open. Memoirs by women authors published between September 1, 2012 and December 1, 2013 in the United States and Canada are eligible. The entry deadline is December 1, 2013. Beginning this year, the competition is limited to submissions from small/independent publishers, university presses, and author-publishers (self-publishing authors). Current and previous years' winners will be invited to attend and be honored at the 2014 Stories from the Heart, the biannual SCN National Memoir Conference, Austin TX. The 2014 winner will receive a cash prize of \$300, a commemorative plaque. Winners and finalists receive free advertising on SCN's websites. For full details, visit our website: <http://www.storycircle.org/SartonMemoirAward/>



Sarton Memoir Award



Stories from the Heart VII
April 11-13, 2014
Wyndham Hotel, Austin, TX

SCN Raffle tickets on sale
now through June 30 at
storycircle.org/raffle

The Susan Wittig Albert
LifeWriting Competition
May-June, 2013
Details on page 7

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Letter From SCN's President— Empowerment



I recently attended a writers' retreat where I was asked what motivated me to write a book. This is one of the easiest questions for me to answer.

In 2003 I was feeling pretty restless. I'd left one career and hadn't decided what I would do next. I had always enjoyed the jobs I'd had that required writing. I thought maybe I should check what's out there for writers. The writing gods must have been listening because the first site that came up was the Story Circle Network. I saw that they had internet writing groups. I was fascinated by the anonymity of being just out in cyberspace, but when it came time to submit I was definitely

scared. Would my writing be as good as the others? What if no one responds because it's just too awful?

Imagine my surprise when I received the responses to my first submission. "A great piece of writing." "Would love to hear more." "Your words resonated with me."

These encouraging words started me on my journey to become a "real" writer. I was excited when I was asked to take over one e-circle and jumped at the chance to take on another.

So, that's where it began for me. With the positive, encouraging, validating and empowering words from my circle members, I got up the courage to write a book.

I have spoken with other Story Circle Network members whose writing journey began with joining either an internet or local circle. If you haven't considered this opportunity I encourage you to do so.

If belonging to a circle doesn't fit into your life right now, you can take advantage of the other writing opportunities offered by SCN. Our Life Writing contest is now accepting submissions and there are always opportunities to submit to the Journal or annual Anthology. Whatever you decide let SCN be the first step in your writing journey.

~Pat LaPointe



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.

Story Circle Journal

The quarterly newsletter of Story Circle Network, 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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Membership Rates

One Year \$55 US
\$65 Canada & Mexico
\$70 Elsewhere
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International Postal Money Order.

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.

New Opportunity for SCN Members!

Judy Watters and Pat LaPointe

SCN's OWL program is a project designed specifically to provide an opportunity for senior women to tell their life stories. It grew out of the Older Women's Legacy project sponsored by Story Circle and funded by the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word.

We are excited to announce a new members-only brochure that facilitators can use to help promote workshops at various sites such as senior centers, retirement facilities, or women's church groups. The new OWL brochure is available on the members-only section of the SCN website: <http://www.storycircle.org/members/owlcircle.shtml>

Why facilitate an OWL Workshop?

First, these workshops provide an opportunity for older women to tell their stories. Although this opportunity should be available to all women, this generation has had the least opportunity to do so. Second, it gets the word out about the Story Circle Network. Third, it generates income not only for SCN when the manuals and workbooks are purchased by the facilitator, but for the facilitator herself through what she charges to lead the workshop. (Facilitators pay \$100.00 for manual and workbook; some charge a fee to participants.) Fourth, it is a most gratifying experience for both the facilitators and the workshop participants.

Judy Watters recently contacted a few of our OWL facilitators to ask about their experiences in leading these workshops. Here are their responses.

Jane Schooner facilitated several OWL groups between 2004 and 2010. Some ladies began writing groups of their own after being part of Jane's OWL group. Jane says, "I am so thankful to have had the opportunity to facilitate the OWL groups. I feel having held the classes left a legacy itself, for many families will now have the written stories of their mothers and grandmothers. I personally feel this was something the Good Lord wanted me to do. Thank you for writing and giving me the opportunity to be an OWL facilitator. It changed my life, enriching it and the lives of others as well."

Dana Loy, from Norman, Oklahoma says, "After purchasing my OWL manual I taught a class at a local arts center here in Norman, Oklahoma. I capped the enrollment at 15 and the age range was from 60 to about 80. We met once a week for six weeks. Since then, I've taught several more classes, maybe five, and two at the public library. Each one has been a big success. After the last class, a spin-off group developed, which has been meeting for about a year twice a month. It's not an OWL group, just a writing group, but they are all older women whose lives are clearly enriched through coming together for writing. I drop in and write with them now and then."

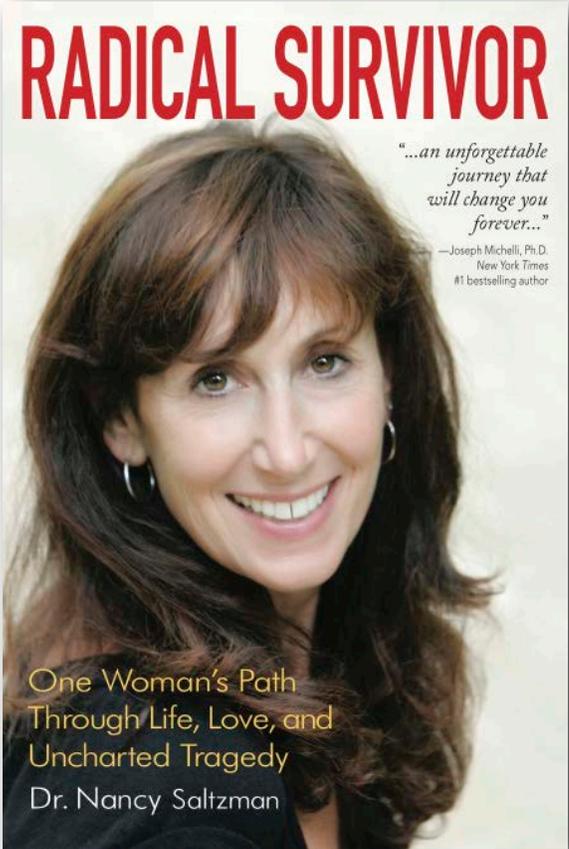
Rosalie Muschal-Reinhardt has led 3 OWL groups. Once Rosalie finishes the 5-week OWL class, she finds that the ladies want to continue. She has creatively added book studies to her groups; for example, Rosalie uses Kermit the Frog books, *Where the Wild Things are*, and Rachel Freed's *Women's Lives, Women's Legacies* to add

more writing topics. Rosalie's group even has officers: a social coordinator and a communicator. They take field trips some weeks to find more writing opportunities, such as the annual quilt show and the museum.

Judy Watters group started last March with seven ladies. They continue to meet every first and third Tuesday in her school classroom. Since she is an English teacher, she gives a short lesson on the elements of writing, then the ladies read what they have written on the prompt she gave out the meeting before. Now this group wants meatier critiques of their work, so she formed the Hill Country Christian Writers group and now has 22 members.

The OWL program is a great way to open many other avenues for women who have so much to say but need encouragement to get the words on paper. One woman in Judy's group said, "The OWL has put spunk and pizzazz in my life. That's all I ever think about now. I take a can of Prego off the grocery store shelf and start formulating a story right there about my mother's homemade spaghetti sauce."

Why not take this opportunity to provide a valuable, exciting experience for these women?



RADICAL SURVIVOR

"...an unforgettable journey that will change you forever..."
—Joseph Michelli, Ph.D.
New York Times
#1 bestselling author

One Woman's Path
Through Life, Love, and
Uncharted Tragedy
Dr. Nancy Saltzman

Read the review & find ordering details at:
<http://www.storycirclebookreviews.org/reviews/radical survivor.shtml>

More LifeWriting Opportunities

Advance Notice of our Annual True Words Anthology

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

Here's the 2013 Anthology Schedule:

- July 1, 2013 – the call for submissions opens
- September 1, 2013 – the call for submissions closes
- Mid-November, 2013 – you'll receive your annual Anthology

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

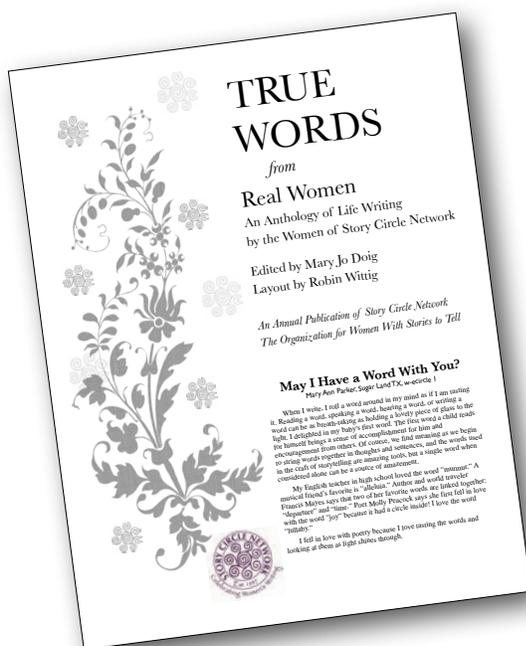
So, lift up your pen, write down the words that come into your heart, polish up those little jewels, paste them into the online submission form link that will be included in the Call for Submissions, and hit the Send button. We both welcome and look forward to sharing your words.

Warmest regards,

Mary Jo and Robin

Mary Jo Doig
Editor

Robin Wittig
Layout Designer



Conference Planning Underway

By Jeanne Guy

As I write this, we are 320 days, 4 hours, and 50 minutes away from the beginning of our seventh Story Circle Conference--the event that all of us at SCN look forward to every two years. But conferences (like babies!) require lots of pre-planning, teamwork, dreaming, and anticipating. SCN's conference is no exception.

Our conference planning begins with the board's selection of the date (Friday April 11-Sunday April 13, 2014) and the hotel (the Wyndham in Austin, where we've held the past couple of conferences). Then there's the choice of Friday-night keynote speaker (this year Linda M. Hasselstrom (read more about Linda on page 6) and our Sunday lunch speaker (Nancy Curtis, founder of High Plains Writing Press, publisher, and editor). There is the budget to be prepared and the dozen-plus conference committee chairs—all wonderful, generous volunteers—to be named, their assignments reviewed and clarified, and the master planning timeline created. Meanwhile, Peggy creates the conference website (www.storycircle.org/Conference), posted the registration form, and we're open for business.

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

In addition to our keynoters and our usual Saturday and Sunday workshops, there will be extras, plenty of them! As we have in prior years, we will once again offer optional (and free!) Heart-to-Heart mini-coaching sessions on Friday morning, where you can bring specific questions to discuss with our well qualified and enthusiastic coaches. We'll offer a pre-conference workshop on Friday afternoon--or possibly two, since our 2012 workshop had a waiting list! The committees are still hard at work making changes, so be sure to keep reading the *Journal* and checking the website for the latest updates.

Of course there will be vendors and door prizes and entertainment and open mikes and our wonderful Story Wall, just as there have been at our previous conferences. We're looking forward to the announcement of the winner of the 2013 Sarton Memoir Award, who will be recognized on Friday evening, before Linda Hasselstrom's keynote address.

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

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

320 days, 4 hours, and 50 minutes. We can hardly wait!



Stories from the Heart VII

Conference News: Call for Presenters

**Deadline:
September 15**

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

Also we will again feature 4 pre-conference presentations. These 105-minute proposals will be judged more heavily on "appeal," as this is an optional workshop for which attendees pay an extra fee. Previous pre-conference topics: "It's 10 pm, Do You Know Where Your Story Is? Seven Steps to Successful Story Structure"; "The Power of Your Story: Rethink, Reframe, Re-Story Your Life"; "Writing with Heart: Five Easy Steps to Writing with Emotion, Energy and Color"; "Mapping Our Stories"; "House as Dream, House as Mirror of the Soul"; "So You Want to Publish Your Own Story: Pros and Cons of Self-Publishing."

Presenters do not have to be members of Story Circle, but must register for (at minimum) one day's attendance at the conference. Your registration and payment (at either the member or non-member rate) must be received by December 31, 2013. Presenters will receive a discount: full registration will be discounted by \$40, Saturday only by \$25, Sunday only by \$15. Panelists will receive a \$20 discount from the full conference fee; they must register and pay by February 15, 2014. NOTE: "double" discount people (those who are both presenters & panelists) should take the higher discount, not both.

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

Proposal Guidelines

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

When you write your synopsis, remember that it will be used to promote both your presentation and the conference. So take advantage of this opportunity to "sell" your workshop and build excitement about the conference

with descriptive, definitive words that go directly to the heart of the matter, explaining your goals for the workshop and the benefits participants can expect.

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

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

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

Tentative Presentation Tracks

Track A. Finding Our Voices

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

Track B. Nuts & Bolts

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

Track C. Putting Our Hearts on Paper

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

Track D. Storytelling: Ways and Means

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

Submitting a Proposal

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

The deadline for all proposals is September 15, 2013

www.storycircle.org/Conference/



Linda Hasselstrom: Keynote Speaker, Stories From the Heart VII April 11-13, 2014

By Susan Wittig Albert

Have you ever met an author through her books and struck a flame that kindled a long-distance, long-term friendship?

It happened to me when I read *Leaning Into the Wind*. That was in 1997, the year that Story Circle was born. *Leaning* is an anthology of women's writings—High Plains women, sheep and cattle ranchers, grassland farmers, rural teachers, wilderness rangers. The book was edited by three amazing women: Linda Hasselstrom, Nancy Curtis, and Gaydell Collier. Linda wrote a wonderful introduction entitled “Grass Widows and Wrinklebelly Women.” She told the story of how the book came to be, how all these storying women were invited to share their stories, and how their stories were braided together to make a book. A serious, substantial, sweet and funny book that celebrated women's stories.

You see why I was hooked? And if you're guessing that there's a connection between *Leaning Into the Wind* and SCN's anthology of women's writings, *What Wildness Is This* (University of Texas Press, 2007), you've guessed right. *What Wildness*, published ten years later, was modeled on *Leaning*. And Linda and Nancy and Gaydell were the wonderful editor-models that Susan Hanson, Paula Yost, Jan Seale, and I followed as we collected the stories of southwestern women for *Wildness*. In a very real sense, Linda's editorial team was the foremother of SCN's book, too.

Over the years, I've kept track of Linda by reading her memoirs, which always seem like a collection of letters from a friend who generously shares her life with me. I read them in order: *Windbreak: A Woman Rancher on the Northern Plains* and *Going Over East*, both published in 1987; *Land Circle* (1994); *Feels Like Far* (1999); and *Between Grass and Sky: Where I Live and Work* (2005). I loved to read about the life of this adventurous, compassionate, *fascinating* woman. I loved the way she storied the chapters of her life as a rancher, writer, poet, teacher, wife, widow, friend.

I took a break for a few years to work on *Wildness* and write my own memoir, but when I came back to Linda, there she was with *No Place Like Home: Notes from a Western Life*, which won the Willa Award for Creative Nonfiction in 2010. *No Place* is my favorite of Linda's books, as you can see from the review I wrote of it. Here's a snippet:

No Place Like Home is the very personal story of a woman who lives betwixt and between. Her voice is uniquely individual, wry and cranky and feisty, and her descriptions are rarely clouded by sentiment—or rather, the sentiment is buried beneath the surface, in the essential perception of

the place or the thing, rather than in easy expression. For all its love of place, this is a book by a writer who sees places and people too clearly to be at home with any of them: hence the irony of the title . . . This is a strong, pulls-no-punches book about what holds us together and drives us apart. It's important reading, no matter where you live.

You can read the full review on the SCN Book Review site at: <http://www.storycirclebookreviews.org/reviews/noplacelikehome.shtml>.

Over the years, Linda and Nancy and Gaydell assembled two more anthologies: *Woven on the Wind: Women Write About Friendship in the Sagebrush West* (2001) and *Crazy Woman Creek: Women Rewrite the American West* (2004). And poetry—we can't overlook Linda's poetry! Her latest, *Dirt Songs: A Plains Duet* (with Twyla Hanson, 2011) has won several awards. Before that, there was *Bitter Creek Junction* (2000) and *Dakota Bones* (1993).

I didn't just read Linda's books, of course. I began visiting her website, to see how she keeps herself busy when she's not writing. She is ranching and participating in the various issues that energize her local community. And she is also teaching—offering writing retreats at her ranch, *Windbreak House*, both for small groups and individuals. She offers online coaching to writers, via email. And she's blogging, at last, after resisting for years and years (and thanks to a few nudges from her friends).

No, I've never met Linda Hasselstrom—at least, not in the conventional, shake-hands-and-smile way. But her books and her website make me feel that I know her, inside and out. And you can bet that when I see her at Stories From the Heart in April 2014, I am going to rush right up to her and throw my arms around her with a cry of glad recognition. There will be some tears, I'm sure—there are always tears with friends, aren't there? But mostly there'll be rejoicing, and laughter, and “Why have we waited so long for *this*?”

And you can bet that when Linda steps up to the podium to offer our Friday night keynote address, I'll be right there on the front row, with a glad heart and wet eyes, listening to my friend tell us her wonderful stories about being a rancher, a memoirist, a poet, a teacher—and most of all, about being a woman who helps other women tell the stories of their lives.

If you'd like to meet Linda before the conference, you can visit her at her website, <http://www.windbreakhouse.com/>, where you'll find her blog, information about her teaching, and a complete list of her books.

The 2013 Susan Wittig Albert LifeWriting Competition

SCN is proud to announce its Fourteenth Annual Lifewriting Competition, named in honor of our founder, best-selling mystery writer Susan Wittig Albert.

This year's topic focuses on family. We all have one, be it the one you were born into, the one you created, or a community of people with which you share common interests and have a trusting, comfortable, validating relationship.

Whoever you consider "family" the following words are here to get you thinking, and of course, writing:

"Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family. Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one."

—Jane Howard

"The family—that dear octopus form whose tentacles we never quite escape, nor, in our inmost heart, ever quite wish to."

—Dodie Smith

"Family'...the we of me."

—Carson McCullers

The judges look for entries that are fresh and original, tell a compelling story in a clear and authentic voice, are responsive to the topic, and have been polished and proofread for presentation in the competition. The most successful submissions are rich in evocative detail and avoid generalizations and abstractions. Entries will not be returned; evaluations will not be available. The judging team will be made up of Story Circle Facilitators and published authors.

SCN will award one prize of \$100, one prize of \$75, and two prizes of \$35 each. Winning stories will be published in a special section of the September Story Circle Journal and will be featured on the SCN's award-winning website. Upon the judges' recommendation, other entries may be published in later issues of the Journal and in other SCN print or on-line publications.

storycircle.org/Contests

Previous Year's Winners

2012: Solitude

Janet Lucy, Santa Barbara CA
Debra Davis, Cle Elum WA
Peggy Christian, Missoula MT
Bonnie Frazier, Brookings OR

2011: Courage

Marlene Samuels, Chicago, IL
Susan Flemr, Fairfield Bay, AR
Nancilynn Saylor, Austin, TX
Stephanie Dalley, Forestville, CA

2010: Letting Go

Khadijah Lacina, Shihr, Yemen
Susan Kasper, Georgetown TX
Jo Virgil, Austin TX
Margaret Stephenson, Austin TX

2009: Overcoming Obstacles

Mary Lee Fulkerson, Reno NV
Linda Hoye, Auburn WA
Linda Sievers, Arcata CA
Michelle Welch, Bakersfield CA

2008: Evolution and Growth

Amber Polo, Camp Verde AZ
Victoria McNabb Wheeler, Stockton NJ
Carol Hyde, Round Rock TX
Karen Appleberry, Grapevine TX

2007: Birthings and Beginnings

Carol Ramsey, Austin TX
Katherine Misegades, Fort Wayne IN
Sandi Simon, Austin TX
Georgia Hubley, Henderson NV

2006: Truth

Pixie Paradiso, Acton MA
Sandra O'Briant, Los Angeles CA
Lavon Urbonas, Rancho Cucamonga CA
Gwen Hatley Whiting, Marietta GA

2005: Womens' Friendships

Laura Girardeau, Moscow ID
Barbara Smythe, West Covina CA
Patricia Daly, Largo FL
Lucy Ann Albert, La Mesa CA

2004: Mothers and Daughters

Ellen Collins, Vienna VA
Susan Schoch, Idledale CO
Diane Linn, Bryan TX
Diane Pattara, Austin TX

2003: Our Environment

Karen P. Ryan, Erie PA
L. Hazel Davis, Chelsea MA
Mary M. Elizabeth, Austin TX
Dee Stover, Concord NC

2002: Our Identity

Linda Joy Myers, Richmond CA
Jackie Woolley, Austin TX
Mary Jo Doig, Raphine VA
Lisa Shirah-Hiers, Austin TX

2001: Pain

Jean McGroarty, Battle Ground, IN
Erin Philbin, Pittsburgh PA
Sandy McKinzie, Lafayette IN

2000: A Revealing Relationship

Mary Faith Pankin, Arlington, VA
Duffie Bart, Monterey CA
Marie Buckley, Hillsboro OR
Carolyn Cook, Austin TX
Peggy Park Talley, Gonzales TX

Read last year's stories here:

<http://www.storycircle.org/Contests/winners.shtml>



Sarton Winner, Monica Wood

The Power of Story

by Lisa Shirah-Hiers

Monica Wood is the author of *When We Were the Kennedys: A Memoir from Mexico, Maine*, a New England bestseller, #1 bestseller in Maine, *Oprah* magazine summer-reading pick, and winner of the 2012 May Sarton Memoir Award. Her novel, *Any Bitter Thing*, was an ABA bestseller and Book Sense Top Ten pick. Her other fiction includes *Ernie's Ark*, *Secret Language*, and *My Only Story*, a finalist for the Kate Chopin Award. Her widely anthologized short stories have won a Pushcart Prize and been featured on public radio, including the NPR program *Selected Shorts*. Her books for writers and teachers include *The Pocket Muse*, volumes I and II. Her nonfiction has appeared in *Oprah*, *New York Times*, *Martha Stewart Living*, and many other publications. She lives in Portland, Maine, where she conducts a writing program for women at the Maine Correctional Center.

SCJ: Your memoir tells the story of your father's sudden and unexpected death of a heart attack and how your family experienced that staggering event. How were able to write about such a painful time?

MW: Oh, but the writing was the opposite of painful! I loved being "back home," even in the fraught year I was revisiting. I have such wonderful memories of my childhood, and my family at that time. Being with them again was a balm to my soul.

SCJ: Who were you thinking of as you wrote?

MW: My audience for this book, for the first time in forever, was me. Just me. I'd hit a rough patch, both professionally and personally, and I was writing for comfort and consolation, not for publication. It was the most joyful writing I'd done in years.

SCJ: Your memoir is full of your early experiences with the love of words and books and stories. You describe in great detail the reams of beautiful paper that your father brought home from his job at the paper mill and the hours and hours you and your siblings spent filling the pages with drawings and stories.

MW: Well, I come from Irish stock, and a love of words is in the DNA. Everyone in my family tells a great story. I do wonder, though, if being from a paper-mill town might have nudged me along the writing path. I love paper: I love its smell, its feel, its possibilities. Unlike a lot of writers, a blank page fills me with joy, not dread.

SCJ: Let's talk a bit about those great family stories. What makes them so powerful?

MW: I teach memoir writing now, and I don't think I'll ever go back to teaching fiction. I've seen first hand the power of speaking stories aloud, of simply putting on paper the tragic or ordinary or quirky or mundane. I teach in a women's prison and I see every week how their stories not

only make them reflect on who they are, but how their stories connect them to one another in a place where human connection can be really risky.

SCJ: What else did you learn from doing the book?

MW: I learned that I have one memoir in me. I learned that voice is the key element in memoir. I learned that my skills as a novelist served me well in writing nonfiction. And I learned that every particular family story is universal.

SCJ: What do you mean "voice is the key element in memoir"? Can you elaborate?

MW: The memoir voice—at least the childhood-memoir voice—is a challenge. You want to bring the reader into your childhood experience, but at the same time you don't want to be limited to the child's vocabulary and range of insight. So you're checking, sentence to sentence, constantly, for what I call a "braided voice," the child/adult speaking in one voice. It was a big technical challenge for me, but once I got it—like reading Shakespeare, I guess—it got easier and easier to render on the page. I think the key is to establish at the get-go that you are an adult looking back (I did this in the prologue, which is completely in the voice of the adult me), and then, when you ease the reader back and forth between the child's experience and the adult's subtle interpretation of that experience, your reader comes along for the ride. In any writing—fiction or non—it's so critical to establish *that* authority at the beginning, which says to the reader, "You are in good hands. Trust me. Go where I go. You won't be sorry." So, when you give a line like "Dad's death is so big; my sister is so small," in the middle of a scene with very young sisters learning how to dance the jitterbug, your reader understands that your adult sensibility is gently guiding the procedure, which is fully immersed in a childhood experience.

SCJ: The title of your memoir alludes to the fact that the assassination of John F. Kennedy was a turning point in

your mother's grief. Why do you think this was so?

MW: My mother was ashamed to be a widow, which seems irrational, but I've since learned that it's not an uncommon emotion. She was afraid people would pity her, or think she could no longer support her children. She was shy, and didn't like to be different. I was the same way and took my cues from her. When we witnessed Jackie Kennedy's gorgeous grace in her own grief and widowhood, my mother's status somehow was restored—we weren't so different from the most glamorous family on earth, after all—and I, too, felt more "normal," knowing that Caroline, the First Daughter, who was near my age, was experiencing exactly the same thing.

SCJ: There are many metaphors in your rich memoir. Predominant among them is the paper mill that literally loomed large in your home town. There is a parallel between your family's loss of the father/breadwinner and the community's loss when the paper mill threatened to shut down. When did you become aware of the parallels between these two stories?

MW: The connection I made at the time was between the Kennedy family's loss and ours—that came from my mother. The potential loss of the mill is something I realized while writing the book—how the metaphor of lost fathers so perfectly fit this paternal, godlike behemoth that so benevolently ruled our lives. So much of a book's thematic and metaphorical weight comes late to me.... I have to begin writing the story first, and see where my subconscious language choices lead. It's a thrilling experience, to be writing what you don't yet know you know.

SCJ: Your characterizations are so vivid. How did you learn to describe people so clearly?

MW: I don't know. Honestly, I don't. My sister Cathy tells me that I was the kid who "noticed what people WEREN'T saying." Most writers I know were exceptionally observant children. That's the only way I can explain it. You're born that way. Technically, I tell writing students to avoid abstract descriptions and embrace the seeable, touchable, hearable, smellable aspects of people and things. That helps.

SCJ: What have you learned about publishing that you can pass on to those seeking to publish for the first time?

MW: It's hard to be a beginner right now. Publishing is changing in so many ways, and the big houses can't keep up with the pace. Everyone's afraid: to lose money, to publish a book that won't sell... But if you persevere after writing the best book you can write, the possibilities are there. You have to be really, really patient. Get an agent first.

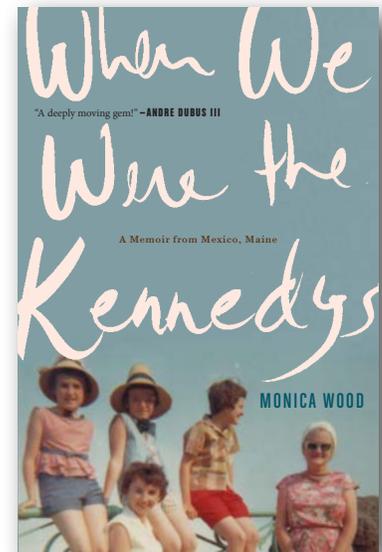
SCJ: In what specific ways have you promoted your book? What has worked well and what hasn't?

MW: The usual: bookstore appearances, library talks, book club visits, and so forth. The reviews were very good, so that helped. I already had an audience, so that certainly helped. I don't think social media did much for me. But I'm a "traditionally published" writer, so what I do may not signify for those starting out through alternative channels. I'm one of the leftovers from the old way. Thank God. It really is tough out there. My heart goes out to the newcomers.

SCJ: What are you proudest of in your personal or professional life?

MW: "Proud" is a loaded word for me. (Childhood lesson: get over yourself.) But I'm most "grateful" for the work I do in a women's prison, running a program in which I bring literature and writers into the prison. We meet with writers, we write, we read to each other, we create a bubble of creativity for two hours every week.

SCJ: What are some of the other childhood lessons you learned?



From *When We Were the Kennedys*:

"Our story, like the mill, hummed in the background of our every hour, a tale of quest and hope that resonated similarly in all the songs in all the blocks and houses, in the headlong shouts of all the children at play, in the murmur of all the graces said at all the kitchen tables. In my family, in every family, that story—with its implied happy ending—hinged on a single, beautiful, unbreakable, immutable fact: Dad. Then he died." P. xvii

"The world looks wrong after a death, its elements tilted, the insides of things exposed in ways you don't want to see; but you do see, you know things you don't want to know." P. 66

"We listen, all three, absorbing the sound as children from the coast might absorb the tidal sighing of a nearby sea, an ebb and flow so enduring that after a time the sound appears to be coming from within your own unsuspecting self. It's been a long seven months, April to November, a tender time bracketed by death. A father, a president; the one grieved only by us, the other by a whole spacious-sky, purple-mountains-majesty, grain-waving country. I listen, with my sisters, in a kind of stupefied surrender, as the mill's enduring breath smooths over us, inhale, exhale." P. 198

Continue reading on page 10

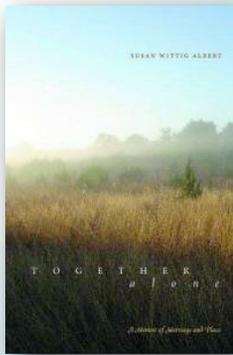
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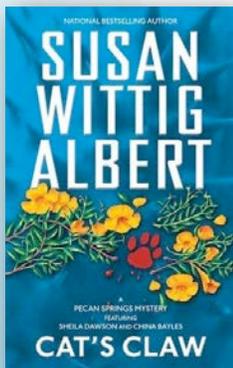
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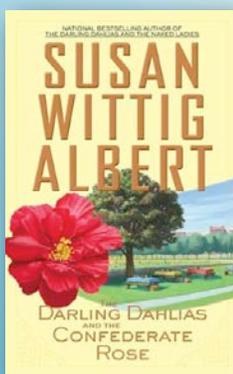
Together Alone

“As a writer, I learned that place goes beyond setting. Albert shows how place grows from the roots of history and extends beyond the borders of home. There is place in union and in solitude, in self and spirit, in heart and intellect. And through it all, we are together and alone.”
~Womensmemoirs.com~



Cat's Claw

“Quirkily, enlightening and suprisingly profound...an absolute delight to read: head and shoulders above most other amateur whodunits.”
~Ransom Notes~



The Confederate Rose
“[Albert] brings a small Southern town to live and vividly captures an era and culture--the Depression, segregation, class differences, the role of women in the South--with authentic period details. Her book fairly sizzles with the strength of the women of Darling.”
~Library Journal~

MW: Don't wallow. Don't brag. Be nice. Family first. If you're going to tell a story, make it a performance. Know you are loved. Go ahead and pat strange animals, especially if they are cats.

SCJ: What are some of other principles you live by?

MW: Envy is the evil lurker in any writing life; I refuse to succumb.

SCJ: What things/people/places make you feel most alive? Where do you find the most joy?

MW: Birds make me happy. And singing. And people I love. I'm very, very social, considering my solitary vocation.

SCJ: Tell me about other projects on your horizon.

MW: An audio book is coming—I will be narrating, which pleases me enormously. The paperback comes out in June. I'm working on a new novel, and a play.

SCJ: What other things do you hope to experience or accomplish in your lifetime?

MW: More and more, I live in the daily. I no longer set five-year goals. My desires are so modest, really; I wake up every day hoping something good will happen.

SCJ: How do you honor your muse?

MW: By sitting my backside down in the chair every single day. What other way is there?

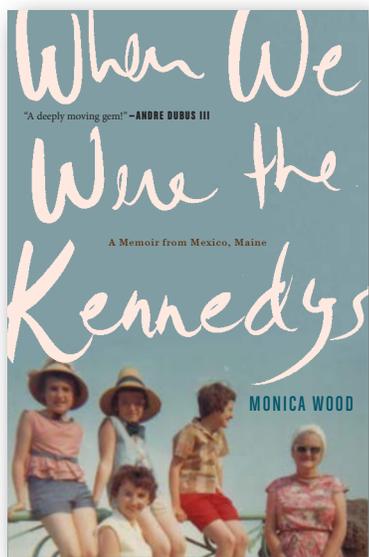
SCJ: Anything else you'd like to say?

MW: I discovered, through my own memoir, that one family's story is in some way or another every family's story: I've heard from people all over the country who believe I've written "their" story: either because they grew up Catholic, or lived in a factory town, or remember the 60's, or lost a parent young, or had an older sister who took care of them, or had a mentally disabled sibling, or, or, or... The connections are endless, and always surprising, always gratifying.

For more information about Monica Wood, her books, speaking and teaching schedule visit her website, <http://www.monicawood.com/>



Sarton Memoir Award



Story Circle Network's Book Reviews

When We Were the Kennedys

Review by Lisa Shirah-Hiers

Story Circle members love memories. They love writing about them. But more than that they love sharing—in writing groups, both in person and online, in this *Journal*, and in books. That's where Story Circle Book Reviews comes in. We review so many fine memoirs that last year we decided it was time to give an award to the year's best. The Sarton Memoir Award came into being. The outstanding *Gated Grief* by Leila Levinson and *Lost Edens* by Jamie Patterson became the first winners in 2012. And this year's? The riveting *When We Were the Kennedys* by Monica Wood. It's simply . . . but let me let Lisa Shirah-Hiers tell you about it.

~Trilla Pando,

Monica Wood's writing is simply luminous as she magically conjures up a lost place and time—a small industrial Eastern town on the eve of the Kennedy assassination. The story of her father's sudden, shattering death and her family's attempt to cope with the incomprehensible loss is brought to vivid life through her precise and poetic prose. Her skill at characterization is so refined that I felt as though I really knew each member of the family personally: her no-nonsense little sister, Cathy; her solid, dependable big sister Anne; her forever-young handicapped sister Betty; her overwhelmed and anxious mother; her heart-broken Catholic Priest uncle, "Father Bob"; her sometimes incomprehensible Lithuanian landlords the Norkuses; and, of course, her beloved dad.

Wood's story begins the morning of her father's death of sudden cardiac arrest on the way to his job at the local paper mill. Because much of the story is told through the eyes of her fourth-grade self, we experience her shock as she struggles to understand what the loss will mean for her, her mother and her siblings. Her poignant realization that anyone can be taken from us at any time is painfully raw and moving. Through her eyes we watch her mother and her uncle's sometimes incomprehensible response to grief: a widow standing still and alone in a dark room, unable to return to her empty bed; a beloved uncle's hidden alcoholism and brief institutionalization.

"We were an ordinary family;" she writes, "a mill family, not the stuff of opera. And yet...my memory of that day reverberates down the decades as something close to music. Emotion, sensation, intuition. I see the day—or

chips and bits, as if looking through a kaleidoscope—but I also hear it, a faraway composition in the melodious language of grief..." (p. 7)

We watch as young Monica escapes her grief by delving into the world of *Little Women* and *Nancy Drew* and attempts to write her own novel poignantly titled *The Mystery of the Missing Man*. Here is a child in love with words, who copies them over and over on the beautifully made paper her father had brought home from the mill. Here is a child with the keen observational skills of the gifted author she will become.

Lost father archetypes abound: the death of her actual father, the closing of the paper mill on which he and the whole community depended, and the assassination of President Kennedy, father of the nation—a national tragedy that somehow brought her mother out of paralyzing depression. "In a different year Mum might have done like the other mothers, who are meeting at grocery counters to buy the Friday fish and break into tears. Instead, Mum stays home, watching the televised spectacle with a ferocious, private empathy. She, too, knows about bearing up. She'd followed her own husband's casket out of a church fogged with incense, her own mild brown eyes wounded and dry, her own coat buttoned up just so, as if to show everyone—even Jackie, had she been watching—how these things were done." (p. 170)

Though it doesn't shy away from the tragic and heart-breaking details, Wood's story is ultimately one of hope and healing, the power of love and family and faith which overcomes all.

Visit us on the Internet:

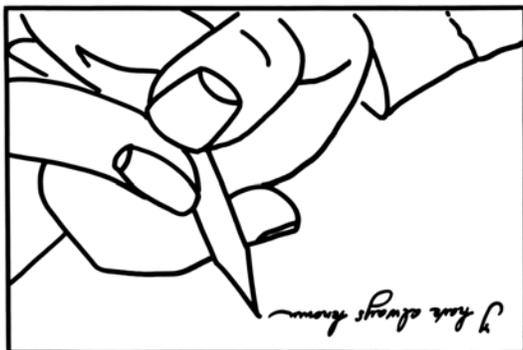
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Read an excerpt from *When We Were the Kennedys* at:

[http://www.monicaewood.com/
WWWTK.html](http://www.monicaewood.com/WWWTK.html)



True Words from Real Women

Hidden Treasures

A selection of short pieces of lifewriting by our members, edited by Mary Jo Doig. Contribute your own True Words to the Journal. Future topics are listed on page 28.

The Day the Music Died

Sara Etgen-Baker, Allen TX
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“Eddie, this is the sheriff.” The officer pounded on the front door. “You’re sister’s here to check on you.”

A few more sharp raps on the door. “You alright?”

We waited. Silence. No response. The sheriff’s urgent voice shouted, “We’re coming in!” Then his booted foot struck the door jamb leaving it in splinters as the door crashed to the floor.

The sheriff pulled his arm and sleeve over his mouth and nose. “Stay outside, ma’am.” I complied; he entered the house. Even before the sheriff confirmed my suspicions, I knew Eddie was dead.

After his body was removed, I remained behind, riffling through Eddie’s belongings hoping to make sense of his final days. I found piles of unpaid hospital bills, unopened Christmas cards, and unused bottles of heart and depression medication. Hidden deep within some papers on his night stand I discovered a note penned in his handwriting that read: “I sometimes wonder if the world would be a better place without me. Why do I continue this existence? This façade? This pain?”

Numb, I wandered into Eddie’s music room. His drums stood motionless patiently expecting his return while his now silent piano quietly waited for his fingers to glide across its keys. Scattered throughout the room were countless original scores of sheet music desperately hoping to be heard. I crumbled to the floor clasping his handwritten note and sheet music close to my heart.

Oh, Eddie! Why did you hide your talent inside this room? Did you fear rejection? Vulnerability? Success? My shoulders tightened. I gasped. But aren’t I just like you? Haven’t I hidden my talent and ignored the whispers of creativity I heard as a twelve year old that told me to be a writer? Haven’t I fallen victim to the same trap?

Now, I wish I could tell you that you were wrong. The world isn’t a better place without you! Even though your music died with you, your death helped me realize that the world needed your hidden songs, my hidden words, and our hidden voices.”

Buried Blooms

Ronda Armstrong, Des Moines IA
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Digging under scribbles about the back porch of my childhood home inspired my first newspaper essay. Buried in the jottings about porch life, I uncovered a memory of peony bouquets. On Memorial Day—during my upbringing in Emporia, Kansas in the 1950s and 60s—multi-hued pink and white bouquets stood in tin can vases wrapped in foil. They waited on a square table, nestled in the corner of the porch, ready for our family pilgrimage to the cemeteries. Like the peonies’ perfumed scent, the image lingered.

After packing the peonies in the car, we stopped at several cemeteries. I helped place the makeshift flower vases in the spring-green grass surrounding the granite gravestones. Following the annual ritual, family gathered for a meal and birthday cake celebrating my maternal grandmother, Mae’s, May 30th birthday, the traditional Decoration Day.

The pull of the peony image motivated me to dig deeper into its significance. Musings revealed not only did peonies link me to legacies of my ancestors, they also tied me to family still living, its members now scattered. Living away from family graves and no longer participating in the ritual didn’t remove the power of the image. When peony buds popped in my local area, flowering into floppy velvet blooms, their presence prompted memories that joined me to the living and the dead.

After developing a story draft, resisting temptation to call it finished, I let it rest. As the end of May neared, I dug it out of the drawer and nourished it to full fruition. “Remember the Peonies” ran on the op-ed page of the Des Moines Register on Memorial Day.

The essay’s publication confirmed for me the wisdom of digging to discover budding stories. Scraping the surface shortcuts the growing process, a pitfall for writers. At last I saw how digging, nurturing curiosity, and resting led to the evocative writing that engages readers.

Passionate resolve uncovers the potential of buds buried in the soil of memory. When cared for over time, buds burst into glorious bloom.

The Treasure in My Pain

Marian McCaa Thomas, Leawood KS
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When my husband broke his wrist, I discovered that I would make a dreadful nurse. He needed to use it to walk with his crutches, which he had used ever since the age of fifteen, when he contracted polio. The broken wrist caused him considerable pain, and my stomach ended up in knots as I watched him suffer. His pain became my pain, and my anguish did not make me a cheerful nurse. The patient wasn't patient, and neither was I.

Several years later I took my turn with pain. I injured my shoulder while pulling vines down from the garage, and soon had a "frozen shoulder," which was attempting to heal itself by growing new tissue around the torn area. I waited too long to see a doctor, and was given a choice: have surgery and wear an arm sling for six weeks, or do three months of painful physical therapy. The latter appealed to me more, so I began the process of having a physical therapist (soon to be called "physical terrorist" by me) stretch the shoulder to break the tissues that had formed, to regain range of motion. I faced this three times a week for twelve weeks. Even though I rested for twenty minutes under a special wrap of warm, moist cloth before the stretching began, the pain was intense. Each time I knew what was coming, and had to dig deep to find resources to handle it. No one could help me with that; I had to find the strength by myself, calling on resources deep within.

The next time my husband broke a bone—his leg, this time—I suddenly realized that his pain was his pain, not mine. He would have to find his own resources for dealing with it, just as I had found my own. I was freed from sharing his pain, freed to be a much better help-mate and nurse. I would never have known this without discovering the treasure hidden within my own pain.

Writing is My Treasure

Madeline Sharples, Manhattan Beach CA • madeline40@gmail.com

When my older son Paul took his life in our home, ending his seven year struggle with bipolar disorder, my first thoughts were: *I cannot go on. I want to get into the same bathtub where he died and put myself out of my pain and misery.*

Instead, I chose to live and take care of myself. And in that process I discovered the hidden treasure, the gift of writing, that was waiting for me in the wings.

I started to journal when Paul was first diagnosed bipolar, while our family was going through the emotional upheaval his illness created in all our lives. After he died, writing became an obsession. It helped me put my pain on the page. Keeping my fingers moving either across the page or on the computer keyboard became my calming and healing balm.

I also took writing workshops, at first feeling insecure about my creative writing abilities. That changed when I took a workshop called "Writing about Our Lives" at

The Love Letters

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Story Circle of OWL writers, Lone Star College, NHC
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There are several things that I cherish dearly. I cherish my mom's beautiful gold watch that I keep tucked away in a mahogany jewelry box that belonged to my sister Jen. Also in this jewelry box are two love letters written to me by my husband.

The love letters were written in 1975 for Valentine's Day and Mother's Day. My husband expressed such loving feelings for me in those two short but sweet letters. He let me know that a greeting card couldn't say what he wanted to convey to me, so he decided to write in his own words about his personal feelings.

What really impressed me about the love letters was the fact that it was totally out of his character to express his feelings in writing. When he gave the love letters to me in 1975 I thought it was such a nice gesture. He even drew red hearts on the valentine letter as he wrote of his love for me. The Mother's Day love letter was a letter of love and praise to me as a wife and mother. It was the sweetest thing he could have done. I don't remember the gifts that I received that year because the love letters took top priority in my recollection.

As the years passed I treasured the love letters more. My husband's revelation and pledge of his love for me were breathtaking. He continued to buy me nice gifts and attached the appropriate card for the occasion to each gift. The only words that he penned now were at the end of the card which simply stated: "*I Love You Always,*" Frank.

Today whenever I open my sister's mahogany jewelry box, I smile when I see my mom's gold watch. I unfold the wrinkled, worn paper and I read the most beautiful words again. I miss them all very much, but I am thankful for my treasures because there are so many sweet memories attached.

Esalen in Big Sur, California, and expressed my concern that I wouldn't be able to transition from a technical writer to a creative writer. "My writing is so factual, so plain, so devoid of descriptors, feelings, and imagination," I wrote. Later when a Los Angeles instructor taught me to "write like you talk," my concerns dissipated, and I was on my way. Poetry also seemed to spontaneously flow out of my pen at that workshop.

Once I got into the writing groove I never stopped. I had a memoir published, *Leaving the Hall Light On*, culled from my early journal entries and poems. Even now, I am steadfast with my resolve to write something every day. I journal, I write for my own blog, and I have articles published monthly on several websites. I'm also working on my first novel. Writing still helps in trying times.

My son's illness and death gave me that strength and power to find that hidden treasure of a writing life that had lain dormant for too long.

Dinos for Breakfast

Lee Ambrose, Kingsport TN
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w-ecircles 7 and 10, poetry circle 4

Buying groceries on Daddy's meager income was a challenge. But grocery shopping was always a family outing.

There were rules: No one was allowed to add anything to the cart unless asked to do so. And we were *never* allowed to beg for anything.

If all behaved, the one "treat" we were allowed was a box of cereal of our choosing. Most mornings we had oatmeal, so cold cereal was a gourmet treat. Then, as now, my favorite breakfast cereals were raisin bran and shredded wheat. But the others chose cereals like Alphabets, Sugar Smacks, and Trix. Their choices were based on the toy inside. I'm certain Daddy cringed every time they tossed a box of sugary cereal into the cart.

The next morning they would hurry to pour their cereal, shaking the contents and reaching deep into wax-paper-lined boxes in search of hidden treasure. Occasionally the toy was never found. But one morning they hit the jackpot. As they jumped for joy over their good fortune, Mom cried over her dilemma. They peered into the box, eyes wide and their mouths gaping. "Oh wow! Look at this!"

Pouring out the contents of the box the bowls filled to overflowing...with plastic dinosaurs! The more they poured, the more dinosaurs appeared. The more dinosaurs appeared, the more Mom cried. There was not one piece of cereal in that box. The boys were thrilled. Mom was distraught. What the boys saw as hidden treasure Mom saw as a major problem. She counted on her grocery store purchases to feed her family until the next shopping trip.

No one went hungry that week, even though they had to eat oatmeal all week long. A letter to the manufacturer eventually brought replacement cereal to our breakfast table. But to this day, whenever I shop the cereal aisle with Mom, she asks, "Do you remember the box of dinosaurs?"

Those dinosaurs were hidden treasures, indeed. Hidden treasures for three young children, then hidden treasures—called sweet memories—for Mom and me more than fifty years later.

Leavings

Teresa Werth, Spencerport NY
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Accumulation: attic, basement,
secret junk drawers, papers (sheaves
of papers). By-lines, deeply creased
and yellow-aged. Children, grown and fled,
bearing no resemblance to the dreams.
Hard to say
what may be chosen
from the heap of what was ours,
what piece
will be examined in the light.

Simple Treasures

Lois Halley, Westminster MD
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I placed three large, green, plastic bags on the floor and labeled them "Keep," "Donate," and "Discard." Then I began one of the most difficult tasks of my life: emptying my mother's little house after her death at the age of 95.

Systematically, I went from room to room, one closet, shelf, or drawer at a time. Memories, like hidden treasures, emerged all around me. There was the framed picture of my proud parents and me after my First Holy Communion, a day so important to Catholics that we drove to the photographer right after communion breakfast held in the church basement.

There was a small pile of colorful cotton aprons which she carefully laundered and ironed before placing them on the bottom of the blanket chest. I can still see her smile as she served the scrumptious ethnic dinners to family or friends.

When any of my playmates were available at lunch time, my mother always asked them to join us. She wanted her only child to be surrounded by friends as much as possible. We relished scrambled eggs with fried green peppers, or bacon, lettuce, and tomatoes on toast, or pierogi with melted butter and fried onions. We drank glasses of ice cold chocolate milk or something my mother called a shandy. The pink, bubbly, thirst quenching beverage was half white milk and half pink cream soda that came from the bottling company in town.

In her jewelry box were the necklace, bracelet, and ear rings of red plastic beads, a rare luxury she bought for herself on one of our mother-daughter shopping trips to Philadelphia. We would take the train early in the morning and shop all day in the cavernous old department stores, stopping to lunch on club sandwiches and ice cream sodas.

Since I have no siblings or children, I pause to consider, who will fill the green plastic bags for me, and who will remember?

Friends Forever

Abby November, Austin TX
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Judith Helburn Writing Circle, Austin TX

Sun, spring, smiles,
Mother pushes baby stroller,
Sisters on either side.
Anticipation, hurry, hurry.
Faster Mom!
Mom says we'll never be the same.
Yea! we're here.
The Brooklyn Public Library!
Gazillion books lining tall shelved walls
But first, librarian makes us sign our names,
My first library card!
Our armload of treasures are stamped and loaded in baby' stroller.
I will always have friends and adventures.
My own library card, my private treasure.
I will never be alone.

Roles and Performances

Pat Daly, Largo FL
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The stage of the workplace may outwardly resemble a long-running Broadway production like *The Phantom of the Opera* with more than 10,000 performances since 1988. But the template containing the stage, the music, and the story comes alive through the actors who play a role. The actors change over time, but the production itself does not.

Two years ago I retired from the workplace stage where my performance never won an award, but where I did play a role according to the outline of a job description and company policy. Perhaps I was not meant to be a workplace performer because I never felt at home on that stage and it certainly did not enable my soul to respond to its true calling.

Most of the time I felt like I didn't belong, like I was playing the role of a character the company was looking for in their script. I lived up to the expectations of others; I sang and danced on cue. Unlike the stage performer who dreams of being selected for a part in a performance, I dreamt of the day I could leave corporate theatrics behind and truly live the call of my best self.

It has taken two years to shed the costumes, the script, and the performances that defined my life for decades. I'm finally in a place where I experience the joy of my own hidden treasures of personality, spirit, and talent. It is fun to discover the child, the young girl, the woman, and the crone, all who are wise and compassionate. Now they step forward and take a bow. I watch them perform the role of me.



Hidden Treasures Lost Forever

Sara DuBois, Renton WA • fostywrites1944@gmail.com • w-ecircles 7 and 14

When my mother was growing up about a century ago, she knew that her mother, my Gramma Boots, could apply to an attorney in East Lansing, Michigan, to get extra money for special things Mom needed. Usually those were a few new clothes, school supplies, and once, a piano. Sometime in the late 1950s, Mom wanted to know more about an inheritance from her biological grandfather. She thought that someone else had taken the money supposed to be for her benefit

Mom wrote to the attorney, who supplied her with a copy of her grandfather's will, as well as a brief letter from him. The will was full of pages upon pages of wonderful information, to me, once I inherited it after Mom died. It had the names of all her grandfather's children, spouses, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren.

In 1996-97, I was teaching in the Yakima schools, and living with a friend and her two sons in a rented house. I

Deliverance

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I was warned.
Still I stood unsuspecting,
his car crammed,
roof rack packed
with snowboard and surfboard
intending to glide sleek
surfaces on his nest-exit west.

I owned him once
in my womb, on my breast,
protected him from every imaginable danger.
Now he gazes at me
from his towering frame
convinced he owns himself!

Tectonic plates within the earth
shift, a tsunami hits
water floods the serene pasture.
A stallion stands alone, aware of some impending threat.
I know what must be done
yet that bridle was buckled so long ago,
no easy task to release.

Fingers work—his nostrils flare
eyes stare, dart back and forth,
a tear.
Finally unfettered, the harness slips
easily over his sweaty head.
I race to the heavy gate, lift the latch
heave open the squealing iron enclosure
pat his brawny back.
I witness him streak into his new life
and realize I'm stumbling headlong into my own.

had lots of things to store and put them in the finished basement. Big mistake!

As we watered the lawn and tomato plants and lovely flowers outside, the finished basement leaked water inside through small cracks in the walls. Not long before the end of the school year, I went downstairs to find that the basement floor was flooded up to my ankles.

Several old books and atlases were nearly disintegrated, along with the manila envelope where I had kept the will and other pieces of family history from Mom's side. These items had been on the lower shelf of a metal storage shelf which had fallen over.

I learned a rather painful and profound lesson from this: *never* store important possessions in a basement, near the floor. Now, ever vigilant, I always place my treasures on high shelves in a room where no one—human or beast—can reach it.

Love Does Not Tarnish

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I know that material things are just that: things. However in my youth, gifts on Valentine's Day were important to me. I wished for a hunk on a white horse (or white Chevy) to bring me roses, five pounds of Godiva (or Nestles) chocolate, and a piece of gold (or silver plated) jewelry.

Over the decades, I have seen things rust, tarnish, or break. I have come to realize that the touch of a gentle hand or kisses means, "I care, I am here for you as long as I have breath in my body." Love is shown in more important ways. Our eyes embrace as we hear a familiar song we shared together while dating. When we held each of our four grandchildren, our love and connectedness swells in our eyes and hearts, and pours into our future legacy. Still almost five decades worth of Valentine's Days have passed without the Godiva or gold but something beyond things has replaced them: these wonderful shared memories of lives created and new journeys taken.

This past Valentine's Day we visited our Colorado grandchildren. I was presented a big cuddly purple and pink bear. I cried, cuddling my treasure. My granddaughter screamed, "Squeeze its hand." I did and heard their recording, "We love you so, so much forever."

How could anything top this hidden message of love which I will treasure as long as I have breath in my body?

I Stop the Questioning

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 w-ecircle 14

Each February I remember the fragile note,
 kept safe in the music box imported from Germany.
 Unfolding the faded and creased parchment,
 I read his words in soft murmurs
 while waiting for the old teapot to whistle.
 My aging hands are cold and less nimble;
 but my mind fights the weathering years.
 Scrawled in pale blue ink, he wrote:

"My dearest valentine
 I beg you, live well and laugh often.
 Bouquets fade and dry,
 Godivas digest,
 ahh...but love...love...
 think of me and smile."

I gently refold each crease and put away
 the only thing he left me.
 Still, I ask myself each year since his passing,
 were they written out of guilt or obligation?
 Sipping Earl Grey tea on this bittersweet afternoon,
 it was easier to believe in love.

Finding Treasure in a Dark Place

Cathy Scibelli, East Norwich NY • cmscibelli@optonline.net • www.iconicmuse.blogspot.com

Did you ever notice that, in adventure stories, treasure is always hidden in a dark place? I discovered recently how true to life those stories are.

Six months ago I found myself in a very dark place. I was told that the breast cancer I thought I had conquered had returned with lesions in my bones and small traces in some lymph nodes and the liver. You can imagine my devastation, how darkness descended on me. I was suddenly undergoing new treatments with unpleasant side effects, while the darkness of night brought scary thoughts that floated through my mind.

Then one day I woke up and realized I was wasting each precious day. I went back to writing the blog I had started earlier with a new focus on setting an example of living with cancer. I sometimes write to educate others about what this journey is like, but most often I share entertaining stories. My blog is written with a sidekick, a tiny 3" bear who always has something to say about

my posts. He's become so popular he recently started his own blog.

Through the blogs, I've discovered a whole new set of friends; many of them are on their own journeys with illness. Sharing my stories with them boosted my morale, and inspired me to get involved in other projects. I also reached out to friends and family to spend time together in new ways. For example, one day a week my best friend and I spend an afternoon at a local arboretum enjoying nature and each other.

I've realized that by not being afraid to look deeply into the darkness, I've discovered new treasures that make my life more meaningful and fun than when I was healthy. I know that sounds strange, and I don't want to downplay that I still get scared and I'm still dealing with the side effects of therapies. But it's as if I never truly appreciated all the treasures life can hold until I came face to face with the dark reality that it will end one day.

Found Closet Memories

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Grandmother was an accomplished seamstress and cook. I remember her hand sewn clothes, especially her Sunday dresses. She had also sewn all the draperies and curtains in her home.

She quietly painted beautiful outdoor scenery, which I only discovered after she passed. Her paintings had won awards while she was a member of the local Art Association.

I acquired several of them in old dusty frames that were found in the back of her closet. Several years later an aunt passed and I was given another of her paintings. Most of them feature trees in full fall colors, waterfalls, and winding roads.

My brother had found a self-portrait that grandmother had painted; he had no room or interest in it and gifted it to me. It shows a young, stylish young lady possibly in her twenties with a small brimmed hat, smiling with her head tilted to the wind. As she aged, she always wore a hat to church, and had quite a collection.

My grandmother had always taken time to be properly well groomed and dressed well. Seeing the youthful painting of herself gave me an insight to what she may have looked like in her early years.

Berta Bougher, or "Gram," as I called her, was a special elegant lady. I will cherish the beautiful artwork along with the memories we made together.

V.I.P. (Very Important Poems)

Teresa Werth, Spencerport NY
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Some mothers
 sketch their child's face,
 some mothers embroider dresses.
 Some mothers give their heirloom jewels
 or braid their child's golden tresses.
 Some mothers save the scraps of play
 or cards from each birthday charted.
 Some mothers do not save a thing
 (only the most cold-hearted).
 Someday when I am all grown up
 and think of my youth, fun and free,
 I shall look at the volumes
 embroidered and sketched,
 the words that were woven,
 the thoughts that were etched,
 the treasures she spun of
 how things used to be.
 My mother wrote poems for me.

For Adam

Beyond Imagining

Karen Mocker Dabson, Columbia MO
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Deep beyond beyond,
 Imagination cradles a tiny spot
 Upon the sea of my waters
 And I am carried away. Away
 Into the depths of cells,
 And the universe of atoms—
 Into the fibers of my being

Sailing, sailing
 Almost dizzy with the effort
 Of staying afloat,
 I lose myself to the descent,
 Not knowing where it will end.

But like the prickles of light that blink
 In the black blackness of very dark rooms,
 Slowly, slowly, I come to see that
 The end is a beginning.

It swims within me,
 Gently, gently, a feather
 Tickling my sides

No—truly, more a fluttering,
 A joyous flutter in my very core,
 Calling, calling my name.

A smile slides onto my face, unstoppable.
 You are my special secret, little one
 A gift—a treasure—hiding, hiding from all but me for now.

Margie's Christmas Cactus

Darlene Hayman, Montrose CO
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You stood hidden in the cold closed room
 between May and September
 on a stand in Grandma's parlor.

You gathered strength, treasure and power
 in your pendulous stems
 ready to spill your fuchsia splendor.

Grandma kneaded dough for bread
 in the sweltering kitchen,
 her heart filled with sorrow,

longing to burst into elegance
 vivid as you.

In Plain Sight

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 w-ecircle 14

“Thanks Mom. I can always use another potholder.”

“But it's not a potholder. It's a dishcloth!”

I was taken aback: a pink dishcloth? *Looks like a potholder to me*, I thought. I am sure she thought that her forty-year-old daughter should know the difference between a dishcloth and potholder.

My mom was always making something with her hands. She would arrive from a 3000-mile cross country trip with a suitcase packed with goodies. She couldn't wait to distribute her handmade gifts. The potholder was rather silly looking so I put it away in my bottom kitchen drawer. There it remained hidden. Each move, it would be packed and then when unpacked pushed to the back of the drawer.

Recently I made a move to a small apartment so I could help take care of my new granddaughter. I went through my things seeing what I could pack for this temporary move and not have to spend any extra money. There hiding in my kitchen drawer was the pink potholder. *Oh good*, I thought, *I'll take it with me*.

I unpacked my things and settled in. The pink potholder was put on a hook next to my stove. As it's in plain sight, I see it each time I am in the kitchen. Not only do I see it but I see my mom and hear her voice. This pink potholder has become a daily reminder of my mom.

Two weeks ago, wanting to knit something, I decided to make a potholder like my mom made. Searching YouTube, I found the pattern. It was labeled “Traditional Dishcloths.” Right again Mom!

“What are you knitting Mom?” my daughter asked.

“I wonder what you think it looks like?” I replied.

“Looks like a pad that you can put a hot dish on. Oh Mom, it is so silly looking.”

I howled.

I am going give it to my daughter. Who knows, someday when she is gray haired she might find the dishcloth-potholder-hot pad and call it her treasure. If she does, she will hear me and her grandma laughing.



Sound of Rain

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 w-ecircles 3,4,10, and 13, r-ecircle 1

This morning I awoke to the sound of rain.

Growing up in Wisconsin, I took the rain for granted. Cool morning showers, refreshing afternoon downpours, late night severe thunderstorm warnings, being woken by the ear-splitting crash of thunder...these were common occurrences, a part of everyday life. I loved the rain, it nourished me and renewed me just as it nourished and fed the earth under my feet. I even loved its cold weather counterpart, snow. Every day of winter was a day of thanks and happiness as I reveled in the miracle that is snow.

The desert awakened in me a yearning for the rain. Day after day of sunshine and heat, we looked forward to the rainy seasons we hoped would bring welcome relief to eyes seared by sharp blue cloud-free skies, and to a heart that longed for the green of home. Then, the rainy season would come, bringing nothing but the occasional scent of rain from years gone by. Water pumps pumped day and night, bringing moisture that had been locked away in the earth for years to light, saturating crop lands and bringing the coolness of subterranean caverns to the people gathered around, filling up old oil jugs and water containers each morning, to last them throughout the day. I would pour cool water over my head before going out, let my pores soak up the water like parched earth, and always search the sky over the hilltops for the dark clouds that could be the forerunners to the rain.

This morning I heard the first call to prayer, and struggled to achieve consciousness. Turning over, I put my arm over my eyes and began to doze again. Then I heard it...pit...patpat...pitpatpit. I came instantly awake, wondering what could be causing such a strange noise. Then the roll of thunder, a deep, throaty noise like a giant clearing his massive throat. And then I knew. I lay and waited for the second call to prayer, my heart swollen with gratitude and love for the One who sent His angel-driven clouds to bring me, this gift, of rain.

Hunting Treasure

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 w-ecircle 6

At the end
 An era gone
 Memories and family twisted, torn
 All that defined me erased
 I paused, shrugged
 Stepped into the new
 It was all before me

The Treasure of Time

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Like a toddler approaching the ocean's shore, I tiptoed toward retirement. One foot ready to jump in; the other stuck in the sand. Then a friend landed in an assisted living facility and my sister's boyfriend died of a sudden heart attack. So I took a leap and plunged into uncharted waters. There I discovered the gift of time.

When working, I slogged through early mornings. Now, I don't rush to greet my students or attend a faculty meeting. Instead, I sip my third cup of coffee; read the morning newspaper and daily meditations; walk Woody, my Westie; and admire birds alighting at the feeder. Mind you, I am not a complete slug. I arrive at 10:30 am to cha cha with the girls at Zumba Gold. Our energetic instructor is a gem, and my leisurely mornings are a treasure.

When working, I rarely did lunch. I usually ate a carton of yogurt and an apple while sitting at my computer responding to emails. Now, I lunch with friends almost every week. Like me, most are retired. We don't fight crowds, and we linger over dessert. When I'm not eating lunch, I serve it at the Manna Meal Fellowship which provides free breakfast and lunch, seven days a week, 365 days a year, to those who cannot afford a meal. Anyone can partake; no questions asked. The staff, cooks, and volunteers who prepare and donate food provide a wealth of generosity and goodwill. Another treasure.

When working, I rarely made time for my writing. That isn't to say that I didn't write. But most of my output was devoted to lesson plans, grant proposals, reports, etc. When teaching online, I provided extensive feedback to students' drafts, essays, and projects. Done well, this takes time. Now, I make time to write. While I am not prolific, I am not without a plan. While a draft is in process, seed ideas germinate in a file. Perhaps riches, like a great lead, vivid image, or golden line, might be buried there.

Fearless

Darlene Hayman, Montrose CO
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Trouble comes to all of us,
buries our dreams and hopes.
Friends we trusted let us down,
loved ones went away.

Standing firm and sometimes not,
we rose above the crush.
Truths discovered like precious gems,
were treasures hidden deep.

Pearls of wisdom we now own.
Nothing breaks us now.
We came through again, again,
Bring tomorrow on.

My Mother's Gift

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w-ecircle 6

I was twelve years old when I scanned through the beautifully bound books that comprised our family library. I don't know why I decided on that particular day to look through those volumes. Perhaps it was cold outside and the idea of curling up with a book in a cozy room was alluring. Whatever the case, I remember very well the book I chose: *Jane Eyre*.

Ah, what a transformative choice that proved to be. Jane, Mr. Rochester, Bertha Mason, oh my. Who knew that a story could be so dark; so compelling? From there, I picked up *Wuthering Heights*. If one Bronte sister was good, then two might even be better. And, of course, that was exactly the case. Who can compete with the love story of Heathcliff and Catherine? How brooding and romantic. And then I headed off to *Mutiny on the Bounty*. Dear Lord, Fletcher Christian versus Captain Bligh.

I don't remember the books that followed, but it hardly matters. Over that year I stumbled into a treasure trove of wonderful stories that grabbed me by both lapels and yanked me firmly out of my little Texas town and into vivid other worlds where people grappled with dark and haunting problems that had no simple solutions. I fell in love with the written word and have spent much of my adult life either reading and editing other people's stories or writing my own.

My mother read to me every night when I was young, so love is wrapped up in the whole activity of reading. I still remember the warmth of Mama's body as I snuggled against her. She also was the person who gathered up that library of books. Without them, my life would have been different. But the characters are the primary reason for my love of literature. They demonstrate the complexity of the human condition as they tangle with love, hate, greed, pride, and envy. Their fight is my fight and I learn from them. How lucky I am to have such teachers. How lucky we all are to have them.

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Dad's First Seder

Sandra Simon, Austin TX
Sharing our Stories Writing Circle, Austin TX

Mother was quiet, but Dad!—he always seemed excited and noisy. Early in the morning after reading the paper, he was on the phone, yelling. He raced out headed to the factory, on the road to sell furniture, or to go fishing, slamming the den door behind him. As he drove, he sang, “Oh, island in the sun.” He commanded us—“Come, come quickly! Wake up! Sleep on your own time! Look at those geese flying! Smell! I'm making special eggs and salami!” When he was angry, “Honey, Honey!” he shouted for Mom.

He had always insisted that we go to his older brother Uncle Sol and Aunt Sally's home for the seder, the Passover meal.

“We must be with Family!”

Why? I knew he and Sol argued bitterly, screaming at one another. For my sisters and me, those Passover gatherings were long, boring, and tense, filled with pitfalls for humiliation from our sarcastic uncle and Hebrew-proficient cousins. And Dad would look nervous and on guard.

Then one year something changed: we would make seder at our house. Mom prepared the many dishes for the festive dinner. In the dining room, beneath the chandelier they loved, we set the table with a tablecloth, the rarely-seen good china, the holiday candles.

We sat down, just our family, Dad at the head of the table. He poured the wine and lifted his glass and prayer book, and sang about three syllables—before he stopped, silent, unable to continue, and began to cry.

We stared dumbfounded at him.

Nobody knew what to say or do.

He pushed away and left the room. We remained, quiet, hardly moving.

After what seemed a long while he returned.

“What's the matter?” he asked, “Can't a man cry when he has his first seder with his own family in his own home?”

The spell of fear was broken. Mother, my sisters and I all talked at once, “Of course, yes, of course, you can.” Still a little uneasy, I raised my grape juice with him as he began again telling the ancient story of deliverance from oppression.

Treasures Found

Sara DuBois, Renton WA • fostywrites1944@gmail.com • w-ecircles 7 and 14

For six months, I have been going to the Edmonds Museum to do historical research on my old home town of Edmonds, Washington, and discovered so many beautiful vintage photos there. Katie, from the Museum, sent me ten test scan photos to use to send to the publisher I work with, Arcadia Publishing. I've been working on creating 50-70 word captions for them, after checking out the photos in Photoshop to be sure they fit Arcadia's specifications.

Then, a man who had decided he could not finish his own book about Edmonds (his work schedule would not allow time or the energy needed for that) offered to share some of his own vintage postcards. My husband and I met Mark at the Edmonds library this past Monday and for two hours we looked at many postcards while discussing them. The next evening he sent me an email saying he had discovered some more Edmonds Museum photos he could share with me and sent those that same evening.

Laying of Hands

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w-ecircles 3,4,10, and 13, r-ecircle 1

stone on stone
sparks fly
a halo of fire
between hands
of flesh

I had the knack
to strike flame
from stone
a look
a smile
a touch
words hung
from cloudshine
gift of life
hands cupped
prayer uplifted
I search
through years
to find
the gift anew
rekindle heat
and lay
my hands
on you.



Not only that, but there is even one wonderful photo I have never seen anywhere before about a specific Edmonds leader from the early years. I found it online. I can order it from the University of Washington Library's Special Collections and pay a rather hefty (to me) price to get it to use in my book. This is a photo of at least 100 people who went to a special Socialist Party picnic on Labor Day of an early 20th century year. It was celebrated in the Edmonds City Park.

This, to me, is a real treasure, because anyone who has read about socialism from any part of the 20th century knows that you could be hung or shot or jailed for any kind of participation in the Socialist movement. Nothing is mentioned about this in any other book about the history of Edmonds.

I will find other treasures as I see more photos. So far, however, this is the best one.

Attics

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The farm was a place to wander and explore
Nooks and crannies filled with artifacts of yore.

Rainy days caused quite a conundrum
Being house-bound led to boredom.

No doubt my mother could find chores galore.
But I didn't seek them out; that's for sure.

Ah! the attic; what might be up there to explore?
There were cobwebs, dust and creaky floors.

They held mystery and awe for my inquisitive mind
Boxes with cobwebs, musty books—quite the find.

Dolls without bodies and missing heads;
I kept digging though; in spite of some dread.

A stack of magazines turned yellow with time
Caught my attention; I became sublime.

Foreign places came alive with pictures and words
It was magic...why I even traveled to places with
swords.

Whoa! Some folks barely wore clothes
I inspected the body parts from heads to toes.

“Shhh,” I said to myself
Just put these back on the shelf.

“Oh dear, it must be time for dinner
I better wrap this up while I am still a winner.”

The attic held the hidden treasure of words for me
And I continue to explore all their possibilities.

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Story Circle Network's Benefit Raffle

Circles: The Heart of Story Circle Network

Connect

by Nancy J. Wurlitzer



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. Typically, a Circle meets once a week, or perhaps twice a month. It may have a set number of meetings (say, 6, 8, or 10) or the schedule may be open-ended.

Many Story Circles have successfully been organized around Susan Wittig Albert's book *Writing From Life: Telling Your Soul's Story*, which was written specifically for Story Circle work. Members of the group are also invited to become members of the Story Circle Network and subscribe to the Story Circle Journal.

Each meeting of your Circle usually includes 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. Some groups have even organized an optional yoga session or a period of meditation before they start.

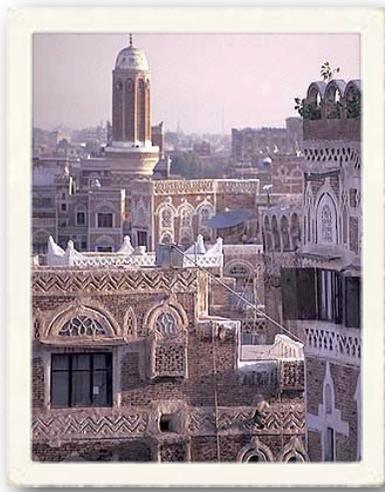
Many Circles are made up of women who have never met one another, and have responded to an e-mail, a flyer, or a posting in a local library or bookstore, or an invitation from the leader. Other Circles are made up of friends, members of a group, a church, participants in a social organization, or neighbors. Some Circles are led by therapists who incorporate life-writing into the process of therapy. Others are led by people who just want to help others find meaning in their life's journey.

I receive many requests as the Story Circle coordinator, and many are from people who want to write but don't know how or where to start. We have info we can send you with recommendations and ideas of how to help you get a Story Circle started in your area. If you want, as a member of Story Circle Network you can also join our on-line story circle as well. Just in the last few months I have received requests and sent info to start a circle to over 20 people who didn't even know they could be part of something like this either in their own town or area or in an Internet chapter with people from all over country. Some even select to belong to both.

So don't just say, "OK, someday I'll write my story". Let's get you involved with Story Circle group now, and you'll be glad you did. Send me a request for info and I'll send info right back to you. I'll look to hear from you soon!

Happy Writing!
Nancy J. Wurlitzer

Story Circle Coordinator, NWurl@CapeCod.net



Take A Bow!

Khadijah Lacina

by Pat Bean

Many of us have experienced defining moments in our life. Khadijah, a complex woman with multi talents, has had many. The most life changing one, however, was the day an older brother introduced her to Islam, a way of belief and life that had come into his life just three years earlier.

Khadijah, a college student and an unwed mother at the time, said she saw how he had changed for the better.

“Because of this, I started to look into Islam a little bit, just being curious.” But after doing some reading about the religion, she embraced it fully. “It was a defining point in my life on any number of levels, and changed the course of my journey totally.”

Khadijah grew up in the Kickapoo Valley of Wisconsin, in a small town with a hippy-back-to-the-land movement. This might explain her longstanding desire to have a homestead in the middle of nowhere. It might also explain her choice of a mate after her Islamic “protector” brother, sent her a magazine with Muslim classified ads in it. She was in her senior year of college at the time.

“He had circled three ads. I ignored all of them and zeroed in on one that mentioned homesteading in Alaska, and living Islam as a way of life. I wrote, he wrote back, and we were married a couple of months later, two months before I graduated from college. He is without doubt the love of my life, my partner and my friend. We have seven children together, in addition to my oldest son.”

To that union, Khadijah, who grew up as Tracy Joan Lacina, brought a background of strong family connections and a tradition of being helpful. When Khadijah was in fourth grade, her mother was diagnosed with Lupus, and from that point on the young girl took over most of the cooking and cleaning. When she was in fifth grade, her mother’s mother had a stroke and came to live with the family.

“We gave her my room, and I slept on the couch in the living room ... Later, after Grandma Rosanna passed away when I was a freshman in high school, my other grandma came to live with us. I only mention all of this so you can see maybe where I come from, and where I get some of my ideas about family and society. My life was so enriched by all of this, especially having my grandmas live with us for so long.”

Although Khadijah got pregnant while still a teenager, she finished high school and went on to college with earned scholarships and graduated cum laude in the early 1990s. Afterwards, she and her growing family travelled from one place to another, searching for a place to settle.

“Eventually, that led us to Yemen, where we went to learn about our religion and ... to make a home.” While there, Khadijah, who manages to stuff more meaningful activities into a day than there are hours, studied Islam with both male and female scholars and then began teaching it.

But the family’s time in Yemen and their plan to make it their permanent home was interrupted by war, including a blockade and battles with the Shi’ites in their village. The dangers eventually bought them back to America.

Khadijah said her time in Yemen taught her what was important in life and that it was not stuff, not politics, not negativity and certainly not hatred and oppression.

“I learned how precious life is, and how important it is to live every moment, good or bad, to its fullest,” she said. Khadijah’s No. 1 priority is her family. She homeschools her children and said she tries hard to teach them to be kind. She also teaches both Muslims and non-Muslims about Islam, and currently works from her Kansas City home for Little Pickle Press.

In addition, she is a certified herbalist, who enjoys gardening and growing healthful food to help feed her large family; she also loves to write, seeing it as a tool to make a powerful difference in the world.

Story Circle Network, she said, “has had my back for 10 years. I found them in my early days in Yemen, and haven’t looked back since. They have made a huge difference in my life. I have found both friends and mentors among the women there.”

Khadijah has repaid the circle in kind. She is facilitator of the online Circle Three writing group, and a member of circles Four, 10 and 14, and recently she took over as chair of the Publications Committee. .

A woman full of sparkle and quick wit, Khadijah demonstrated this facet of her character when she commented on being named a member of Story Circle’s Board of Directors.

“I have no idea how that happened, they must have been sharing a bottle of wine when they approved me ... I could go on and on about SCN, they are definitely one of my passions,” Khadijah said.

It’s the list of Khadijah’s current activities that could go on and on. She is working on a book about her Yemen

Continue reading on page 23



From the Blogs:

Telling HerStories One Woman's Day



Telling HerStories and One Woman's Day are the Story Circle Network blogs; women writers sharing their passion for the art and craft of lifewriting. Visit the blogs at: <http://storycirclenetwork.wordpress.com>.

A Big Red Bird Is All That Remains of My Past

by Pat Bean

Today, I hung all memories from the past on my wall.

The year was 1978 when I found myself single with two of my five children still left to support. It wasn't an easy time, especially that first month when I had to borrow money to pay rent. Although there have been many difficult times since that day, as there are for all who occupy this planet, my life from this point forward only got better and better.

I spent the next 26 years finishing up a 37-year career in journalism, following it--and twice where my heart led me to go.

My career took me to the Star-Telegram in Fort Worth, Texas, for three years, then to Ogden, Utah, as features editor for the Standard-Examiner. I stayed for three years here before love took me to Las Vegas for eight months that included a stint working for the Las Vegas Sun.

When love betrayed me, I took myself away from the neon lights to Twin Falls, Idaho, where I stayed for two years as regional editor for the Times-News. It was then back to Ogden, where my former newspaper offered me a job as assistant city editor.

In 1987, I answered my heart once again and moved to Erda, Utah, and undertook a daily 56-mile commute to my job in Ogden. But in 1989, I moved back to Ogden alone, and happily stayed there until 2004, at which time I sold my home and bought my RV, Gypsy Lee.



With few exceptions, everything I owned was either packed into my 22-foot home on the road, sold or given away. The exceptions, mostly books, were eventually stored at my youngest daughter's home here in Tucson, where I recently moved into a small apartment after almost nine years spent living on the road exploring America from sea to shining sea.

Sunday, my daughter brought me a few of those bins. And this morning, I hung the only remaining possession that remained from 1978 on the wall of my apartment.

As I stood back and looked at this simple sketch of a cardinal, which belonged to my grandmother, whom I adored and whom died when I was only ten years old, tears came into my eyes

The colored-pencil drawing, which even for a while accompanied me in my RV travels, held a lifetime of memories. It is the only thing I own that connects me to my past. As a person who prefers to look forward not backward, I have no regrets that there is nothing else.

But my heart tells me that this red bird may be the most precious thing I own today.

Pat Bean, who thinks of herself as a wandering-wanderer, is a former journalist who lived in an RV for almost nine years and recently moved into a third-floor apartment in Tucson. Her passions are writing, reading, hiking, birds, art, family and her canine companion, Pepper.

Continued from page 22

journey and also a Muslim Woman's Herbal Book; she has had several books on Islam published and a poetry book of colors for children; she writes two blogs, one on her personal journey and the second on sustainable living and the environment.

Khadijah credits getting up before dawn and not going to bed until the sun is long set as one of the ways she accomplishes so much in a day. But then she adds that she's also good at prioritizing things and taking small steps to achieve her goals.

Her dream for the future, meanwhile, is the same one she had when she chose her soul mate back in her college days, seven children back.

"I lived for years without running water or electricity, and I miss that," she said. "I would love to have a homestead in the middle of nowhere, with goats and gardens, where we could work to be as self-sufficient as possible."



Internet Chapter:

There's Always Something New!

by Lee Ambrose

Story Circle Network's Internet Chapter is an exciting place to be if you are a female writer who enjoys sharing her life stories with other women! I've been a member for over ten years now and can honestly say that never in all of those years have I felt that it has become stale or that it is ever "more of the same."

For starters, **new members** join the Internet Chapter every month. Some choose to join the Internet Chapter but not join a circle. Those members enjoy all the benefits of full membership and use SCN and its Internet Chapter as a way to network with other writing women, to be able to attend conferences or workshops, to take online classes, or to avail themselves of the editorial services offered at SCN just to name a few reasons. Others join so that they can enter into a writing community that "meets" on their own schedule and from their own location. We literally have members around the world. Whether it's because of location, work schedules, family commitments or lack of available resources to attend a face-to-face writing or reading group, members find that their Internet Chapter circles provide the community writing experience that they might not have otherwise.

Writing Opportunities

All members of the Internet Chapter have a **new writing opportunity** each Monday as they open their "Women's Wise Words." Fresh **new quotes** by women and for women, coupled with equally fresh **new writing prompts** to spark the muse within, appear in each member's inbox every Monday morning. The beauty of the weekly prompts is that they can be savored and used at one's leisure with no deadline from anyone. Write to them during the week they arrive. Tuck them away for a future date. Begin to work with them upon arrival and then pull them out from time to time to add to them... It's all up to you!

Monthly Newsletters

The monthly Internet Chapter Newsletter follows a familiar format but it is an entirely **new newsletter** each month as well. With "Lee's Musings," Story Circle's Internet Chapter president, Lee Ambrose, shares personal thoughts on writing or brings members up to date with the latest happenings within the Network and its Internet Chapter. Circle facilitators take turns writing for the "Facilitator's Corner" column. Each offers her thoughts about the organization, the art of facilitating, and the abundance of blessings from being a member of a circle, or shares her words of wisdom with other women who long to share their stories.

Internet Chapter members are encouraged to get involved in the monthly newsletter in a variety of ways: First, they're urged to read the newsletter and follow the links (when provided) to "read more...." A special place within each newsletter is reserved for a *Member Post Card*. Sometimes that space is filled with the most spectacular views of one of our member's hometown or vacation spot. Other times it is empty.... It is during those months that members see the message "What's Missing?" (along with a request for more postcards from members). By sending a jpg image to our web mistress Peggy Moody, any Internet Chapter member can have her favorite location featured in one of our monthly newsletters. From time to time Peggy and Lee strategically place **new features** to involve our members more fully in the publication. In the past, we've had segments on grammar, columns on FAQ's and even a *Dear Abby* sort of column. We're always looking for ideas on what our members might like to see in our newsletter!

Story of the Month

Each month, one of our members has a story chosen to be in the spotlight as our **new Story of the Month**. The story is featured in both the National and Internet Chapter monthly newsletters. Members of the writing circles can nominate their circle sisters' stories by contacting our web mistress Peggy Moody at mmoody1@austin.rr.com or our president Lee Ambrose at leesmuse2@gmail.com. I remember the first time I had a story nominated many years ago. It was such an honor to know that those in my circle felt that my story was good enough to be chosen for the Story of the Month.

Reading Circles

The reading e-circle offers a **new book** each month. Often the books are by fresh, new voices or are on topics unfamiliar to most. This is a fabulous way to introduce members to books and authors they might not otherwise read. Lively discussions led by our reading circle members themselves on a volunteer rotation engage everyone to the degree that they are able to participate.

Writing Circles

Writing e-circles have **new topics** each month. And each new topic means an opportunity to write a **new story**. For someone who's been a member for a long time like me, that adds up to a lot of stories over the years! I dare say that many of these stories might not have been written without the support and sense of community that comes from belonging to a circle. The calendar acts as an informal deadline but submissions are accepted even after a change in the month's topic so that all who belong feel comfortable working within the month as their time and muse allows. Most circles have a gentle mix of experienced and novice writers. Some are published authors, some have no desire to become published but are driven to write their stories for their friends or family. All have a passion for writing and sharing.

New Circles

Over the years, Story Circle's Internet Chapter has stretched and grown to better meet the needs of its members. Sometimes our efforts to offer new circles are less than successful; other times they have stellar results! Our first really stellar new circle launch was the Poetry Circle, which has been hugely successful. Recently, a **new "Mindful Writing" circle** was introduced. Within the first two months, it reached maximum capacity and is now thriving. The potential for other new specifically focused circles is unlimited.

Mother-Daughter Circle

New on the horizon we are excited to announce that we are hoping to launch a **"Mother-Daughter"** circle for women with daughters ages 11 – 18. We hope that this new circle concept will help to instill the love of writing in young girls and deepen the bonds shared between a mother and her daughter. Those who have ideas for new focused circles are encouraged to submit their ideas in writing to Lee Ambrose at leesmuse2@gmail.com. She and executive director Peggy Moody, along with SCN President Pat LaPointe, will consider each request and work with the author of the submission to explore its feasibility. The prerequisites for consideration are that the request will contain a description of the new focused circle concept and identify a facilitator for the circle.

Yes, *there's always something new at Story Circle Network's Internet Chapter!* If you're not already a member, you really should consider joining so that you don't miss out on a single opportunity to be involved in this rich community of writing women.



Your manuscript deserves respect...an editor who understands you. That's where the Story Circle Network's Editorial Service comes in.

We know editors and can help you find the one who is just right for you and your project. Whether you're a member of Story Circle or not—we're here to help.

Tired of rejections?

An editor's fresh perspective may identify something that's standing in the way of your success.

Submitting your short story or memoir vignette to a literary journal, anthology or contest? A proofreader will be your extra set of eyes, checking for typos.

Preparing a full-length manuscript to go out to agents or publishers? A copyeditor can help polish your final manuscript, make it sparkle.

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SCN/ES offers you all of this...and more:

Choose the editor you want from our experienced editorial team; review their profiles and pick the person you most want to edit your manuscript.

Rely on women who are experienced in working with both fiction and nonfiction manuscripts.

You don't have to do it alone!

Contact us to get you started! Visit:

storycircleeditorialservice.org

Members In Print & The News

March

- **Louise Saxon's** book, *Journeys and Getaways: Women in Midlife Find Paths to Stability*, was recently published; it is available on amazon.com in both paperback & Kindle formats.
- **Susan Wittig Albert** recently announced the launch of her new author-publisher enterprise, Persevero Press. Persevero will publish her book, *A Wilder Rose: Rose Wilder Lane, Laura Ingalls Wilder, and Their Little Houses*, later this year.
- **Paulette MacDougal** won the opportunity to have her new play, *Sisters Under the Skin*, developed at Stage West Theatre in Ft. Worth. This resulted in a professional public reading of her American Civil War espionage drama with five Equity actors on February 25th. And in January, her short comedy, *Rauschenberg's Eagle*, was presented at Frontera Fest in Austin.
- The March issue of *Costco Connection Magazine* features an interview with **Marlene Samuels** and a write up about her recipes and food philosophy. These are excerpted from Marlene's upcoming book, entitled *Another Day Gourmet: Less Waste, More Taste*. Additional selected recipes are on **her blog**, under the header *Another Day Gourmet*. The blog site for the magazine *Women* has posted several of Marlene's recipes and associated essays. One of her essays, entitled "Regrets Done or Undone," has been accepted by the eZine, *Long Story Short* for their March issue. Two of Marlene's proposals to present at the Ghost Ranch Retreat for A Room of Her Own Foundation have been accepted. She will conduct a Mind Stretch Workshop and will be one of the consultants to advise participants in their research strategies.
- **Nan Phifer** is facilitating "Spontaneous, Compelling Memoirs for Life-Review," a demonstration workshop for the **American Society on Aging Conference** at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, 151 Wacker Dr, Chicago IL, on March 15.

April

- **Renee Cassese's** short story "Rose" was accepted for publication by **Persimmon Tree**.
- **Helene Benardo, Renita Collier, Joan Connor, Melissa Dellago, Mary Jo Doig, Denise Hanshaw, Katherine Kasza, Dawna Kreis, & Susan Lines** had essays published in the April, 2013 issue of the **Changes in Life** newsletter.
- **Sara Etgen-Baker's** piece, "The September Wind," won First Prize in the anthology *Times They Were A Changin'*. Sara tells us, "I'm grateful to be a part of this important anthology for women who experienced the 60s and 70s." Another piece Sara wrote, "Ticket to Ride," appeared in the spring issue of *Halcyon Magazine* (p. 18).
- **Marlene Samuels** has been selected as a finalist in **A Room of Her Own Foundation's Orlando Prize**, non-fiction category for her story entitled, "The Pretending Suitcase Game."

May

- **Marlene Samuels' essay** "The Pretending Suitcase Game" will be published in the *L.A. Review* in October. And her culinary writing has now been accepted by **A Woman's Health Magazine** blog and will be appearing regularly.
- **Susan Schoch's** new book, *The Clay Connection: Jim and Nan McKinnell*, was released on May 18, in conjunction with an exhibition at the American Museum of Ceramic Art in Pomona, CA.
- **Ronda Armstrong's** piece, "Do Less, DELIGHT MORE," was published in the May 15th issue of *Sprout Online Magazine*, part of a sixty-page issue on the topic of delight.
- **Kendra Bonnett & Matilda Butler** were thrilled that their book, *Writing Alchemy: How to Write Fast and Deep*, won the top spot for nonfiction at the 45th Annual Conference and Writing Contest of the Oklahoma Writers' Federation Inc (OWFI). The book also earned an honorable mention at the New England Book Festival (December 2012) and is a Finalist in the Next Generation Indie Book Awards (Education/Academic category).
- **Judy Watters's** book, *The Road Home: The Legacy that was, is, and is to Come*, will be published on June 1.
- **Sara Etgen-Baker's** article, "He'd Walk A Mile For A Camel," will be published in *The Joys of Christmas*, a special issue of *Guideposts Magazine*, in November 2013.
- **Lois Halley's** article, "Little Swindlers," was published in the May/June 2013 issue of *Good Old Days magazine*. Lois tells us, "Thank you, SCN, for helping us to build confidence in our writing!"
- **Jazz Jaeschke's** poem "Timing" was selected for the 2013 Austin International Poetry Festival anthology, *Di-Verse City*; her poem "Breaking on Lava Rocks" was included in the 2013 anthology for **Poetry at Round Top**.

 <p><input type="checkbox"/> This membership is a gift.</p> <p>My name and address:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>My phone and e-mail:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<h2>Join the Story Circle Network!</h2> <p>Annual Membership:</p> <p>_____ USA: \$55</p> <p>_____ Canada & Mexico: \$65 (International MO)</p> <p>_____ International \$70 (International MO)</p> <p>_____ Internet Chapter: \$20/yr (in addition to your national dues)</p>	<p>Make your check to Story Circle Network PO Box 500127 Austin TX 78750-0127</p>
	<p>06/13</p>	

<p>Name _____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>City _____ State _____ Zip _____ - _____</p> <p>Phone _____</p> <p>Email _____ Amount enclosed _____</p>
<p>Become a supporting member and help Story Circle Network grow. Check here:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$75 Friend <input type="checkbox"/> \$125 Supporter <input type="checkbox"/> \$225 Sustainer <input type="checkbox"/> \$400+ Benefactor</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Donor <input type="checkbox"/> \$175 Contributor <input type="checkbox"/> \$300 Patron</p>

Membership Dues Increase April 1

After very careful consideration the Board of Directors voted in February, 2013 to increase the SCN membership dues by \$10.00, effective April 1, 2013. We did not make this decision lightly. Our membership dues no longer cover our administrative and production costs with postage and other expenses continuing to increase. This increase will allow us, among other things, to provide the quarterly *Journal* and *Annual Anthology* in print form rather than resorting to eliminating them in favor of on-line versions only as other organizations have done. We are determined to continue providing all of the current opportunities to our writing women as well as create new services and programs.

Finally, we want to continue to offer scholarships via our Sugar Bowl fund to those women who cannot afford to pay for their memberships.

The new annual dues are as follows:

*National Membership for US = \$55.00 (Canada and Mexico = \$65.00, elsewhere = \$70.00)

*Internet dues will remain the same at \$20.00

Pat LaPointe
President, Story Circle Network

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 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.

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April 11-13, 2014
Wyndham Hotel, Austin, TX

Call for Presenters: Details on page 5
Proposals due
September 15, 2013

True Words: Looking Ahead

We're always looking for stories rich in evocative detail, showing the struggles, challenges, and resolutions of real people living real lives. We prefer that you submit your work directly to the website at:

**[storycircle.org/members/
frmjournalsubmission.shtml](http://storycircle.org/members/frmjournalsubmission.shtml)**

**Future Topics and deadlines for
upcoming Journals:**

- September, 2013 (due July 15)—Storms
- December, 2013 (due Oct 15)—A Winter Gift
- March, 2014 (due Jan 15)—Action
- June, 2014 (due April 15)—Summer's Arrival

ADVERTISE YOUR BOOK

on SCN's Websites! Targeted audience, low-cost
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storycircle.org/frmadvertising.php