



# STORY CIRCLE JOURNAL

Vol. 17 No.3, September 2013

The newsletter for women with stories to tell

## Congratulations to the Winners of the 2013 Susan Wittig Albert LifeWriting Competition

by Pat LaPointe

SCN is proud to announce the winners of our 14th annual Susan Wittig Albert Life Writing Competition. The judges were faced with a major challenge as they sorted through 27 entries on the topic of “family” (suggested by our SCN President, Pat LaPointe). We invited writers to reflect on the following:

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

“I don’t visit my parents often because Delta Airlines won’t wait in the yard while I run in.” ~Margaret Smith

“Family”...the we of me. ~Carson McCullers

The first place winner for 2013 is Jo Virgil of Austin, TX for her story “Father Philosopher and the 100 Things”. Second prize goes to Karen Dabson of Columbia, MO for “The Family of Woman”. Denise Jacobs of Baton Rouge, LA took third place for “Man Things” with fourth place held by Lucy Painter of Sarasota, FL for “It’s Complicated”. The winners received cash prizes and their pieces appear both in the Journal and on the website at: <http://www.storycircle.org/Contests/winners.shtml>

The contest would not have been possible without the many hours of reading and reflection by our 19 wonderful volunteer judges. Thanks to all of you and my co-chair, Peggy Moody, for her terrific organizational skills and web wonder-working. Thanks also to all the participants for your wonderful stories and the hard work you put in to writing them down. I encourage all of you to keep writing and to consider entering again next year.

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

**Read the winning stories on pages three through seven.**



*Sarton Memoir Award*

**Submissions Due  
December 1!**

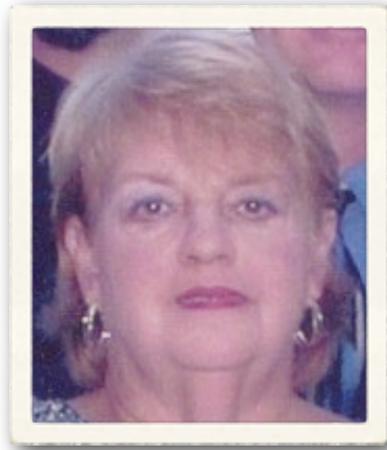


*Stories from the Heart VII  
April 11-13, 2014  
Wyndham Hotel, Austin, TX*

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## Letter From SCN's President— Opportunities



September already? It seems like summer just flew by. I'm not complaining, however. I'm one of those people who look forward to fall. Even as a child, I was excited at the thought of returning to school.

In those days stores waited until mid-August to begin displaying their school supplies. Now when we walk into a store on July 5th, one worker is taking down the flags, beach toys and lawn chairs as another worker follows behind stocking notebooks, pens, and backpacks.

So now my excitement over the promise of fall starts even earlier. And I find myself buying notebooks and pens, driven unconsciously by the desire to learn something new.

How fortunate we are to be members of the Story Circle Network with its promises of so many new things to learn throughout the coming year. In November, Jan Marquart will be the presenter at our Writing From Life workshop (<http://www.storycircle.org/Workshops>). We can all polish our writing projects by seeking out one of our talented editors any time we need her at <http://www.storycircleeditorialservice.org>. Or we can learn new skills taking one of our online classes <http://www.storycircleonlineclasses.org>. And of course, there is our Stories From the Heart VII conference in April (<http://www.storycircle.org/conference>).

It may be difficult to choose among all of the opportunities. So I say, take advantage of them all!

*Happy September!*  
~Pat La Pointe



Speaking of back-to-school, get in on Story Circle Network's online classes! For details visit: [www.storycircleonlineclasses.org](http://www.storycircleonlineclasses.org)

## Story Circle Network's Mission

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

### 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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#### Membership Rates

One Year \$55 US  
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**Missed Issues:** We try to ensure that *Story Circle Journal* arrives in your mailbox four times a year. If you miss an issue, send us a note and we'll mail you a replacement.

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



## Father Philosopher and the 100 Things

by Jo Virgil, Austin TX

Imagine being a teenager in West Texas and telling new friends that your father is a Captain in the Highway Patrol. Can't you just see the friends' eyes widen and their jaws drop, having that "Oh, bless your heart" look on their faces? Or maybe that "freaked-out animal trapped by a lion" look if they were a bit on the wild side themselves?

But the truth is that Dad's heart was gentler and kinder than most of the parents of friends I ever knew. Oh, I had heard some of the stories about criminals and drunks and rowdy roughnecks he had to deal with in the oil fields of West Texas—but those stories always came from his friends, not from Dad himself. I learned that he could be gruff and powerful when he needed to be. He used what his friends called "The Voice" when he needed to assert his authority in tense situations, and apparently The Voice worked better than any TV-cop approach. One story I heard many times was how Dad talked dadown a huge Russian wrestler who was on an angry rampage in a bar. The guy's wrists were too big to fit in the handcuffs, so Dad had to use The Voice to gain control. It worked, and Dad drove the wrestler to the police station and booked him with no problem.

But apparently Dad never felt the need to use those intense personality traits on his family. My sister, my brother and I knew him as a quiet, introspective man with both an intense gaze and a quirky sense of humor. He never gave lectures or yelled at us or threatened to ground us if we misbehaved. He often offered words of wisdom, usually in short sentences that seemed like deep philosophical insights that even a teenager could grasp, like "Are you sure that's what you want to do?" or "Remember that it's important that people know they can trust you."

In time I grew up, got married, moved far away, had children of my own. Mom and Dad moved to Dallas. Dad retired. Mom got very sick. Dad made the tough decision to place her in a nursing home when he could no longer take care of her, but he spent most of his time at the home visiting with her. When she died, I saw a dark emptiness in him, but, as he always had, he took a deep metaphorical breath and moved on.

After Mom's funeral, Dad called to ask if I would come help him pack up and clear out Mom's stuff. He

suggested that I bring my adult daughter, Lauren, to help sort through Mom's things and see if either of us wanted to keep anything. Dad never said—never, ever would have said—that going through Mom's stuff would be too emotional for him to do alone. But we knew.

Lauren and I arrived early one morning and spent the whole day going through Mom's clothing, her sewing supplies, her jewelry, boxing up most of her things to take to Goodwill. From time to time, though, I would run across something that I thought Dad might want to keep: the little stone buffalo from a trip they took to a state park in Oklahoma—the first trip they had taken alone, together, since they had children; one of Mom's early paintings of bluebonnets, childlike in its simplicity; a State of Texas rhinestone blob that was gaudy, showy, and very unlike Mom, but nonetheless her favorite piece of jewelry.

Each time we would come across one of these keepsakes, I would take it into the living room where Dad reclined in his leather chair reading *The Dallas Morning News*. I would walk in, keeping my voice light and upbeat, and say, "Dad, do you want to keep this?" and then gently remind him—unnecessarily, I'm sure—of the significance of the doodad. Each time, he would just give me that intense look and shake his head "no."

After three or four of those interchanges, I brought in one more keepsake that I was just sure he would want to keep. Dad carefully folded his newspaper, put it in his lap, looked me in the eye, and shared with me one of the most powerful Life Lessons I've ever heard, one that I carry with me every day.

"I have the memories. I don't need the stuff."

Conversation closed.

Now, more than a dozen years later, I am working on the 100 Things Project—a movement that encourages people to simplify their lives, to get rid of everything they own except 100 Things. Of course, we each get to define what constitutes a "thing," but the idea is to focus on mindfulness of all the stuff we own that we don't really use or need. As I go through my belongings, deciding what is necessary to a simple life, I hear Dad's voice gently reminding me, over and over:

"I have the memories. I don't need the stuff."

### About the author:

Jo Virgil is the Community Outreach and Information Specialist for the Texas Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities. Before accepting that job, she served as Community Relations Manager for Barnes & Noble for many years and learned much from the authors she worked with there. She has a Master of Journalism degree with a minor in Environmental Science, reflecting her love of writing and appreciation of nature. She has been a Story Circle Network member for many years and loves her WordWeavers group in Austin.

## The Family of Woman

by Karen Dabson, Columbia MO

Trisha reclines slightly in the old poolside chair, the one that has sprouted lichens and that she refuses to let her daughter clean. She loves the pale lacy trim of the silvery green fronds. Her feet stretch out and beyond her sun-tanned toes, the azure water of the swimming pool glistens. The waving palms of the garden weave patterns on the water's surface. She waits and listens and breathes.

The patter of women's voices falls on her ears like gentle raindrops. The women approach from the kitchen with buckets of warm water, sweet smelling soaps, and soft, fluffy towels.

They help her to remove her nightgown. She rests a moment, and the sun caresses her skin with its honey-colored fingers as it reaches through the dappled shade of the gum trees. They begin with her face, tracing brow and cheek and chin with a cloth, clearing her eyes of last night's must. Someone pours treacle, or perhaps it is shampoo, onto her short, full hair and massages it into a froth even whiter than her tresses. She can taste the cucumber and thyme of its scent and licks her lips.

With careful hands, they cradle her head back, and she feels the suds slide away in a silken waterfall of warm water poured from a pitcher. It reminds her of the magnesium infused seawater of Julie's pool, like swimming in silk had it ever been liquefied.

The next friends are ready with soap-soaked sponges. Arms are gently raised and bathed, delicate fingers lift her wrinkled breasts for cleansing, streaks of bubbles outline her hips, her calves, her feet. She cannot keep her lips from bursting with smile after smile as the women care for her, lifting her, turning her ever so gently, and then settling her back in the chair for the grand finale. Cup after cup of warm water glides over shoulder, then down across breast and tummy, slipping between her legs, cleaning her womanhood. Just then, a flight of teenage cockatoos with their black feathers and bright yellow cheek-spots bally-hoo overhead in celebration. Her smile travels on and on with each fresh swish of soothing water.

A subtle shift, and she is cocooned in towels, sun-warmed and detergent-fresh. She could stay inside forever,

but eventually, the women unwrap her. They help her don one of the Indian style blouses with African prints that are her hallmark, thread her legs through her underwear, and then slip on the black capri leggings that she favors. Someone has found her amber earrings—the ones from her jewelry collection of long dead African chieftains—and dangles them from her lax, loose lobes.

Deanna brings a sparkling red drink on ice to the table beside her. Trisha sips through the long straw and clucks her tongue as hints of strawberry, kiwi, and lime race across it. Another in the long line of delicious drinks they have invented for her—all that she can consume these days now that her bowels have shut down.

They circle round her with deck chairs, and someone dances a comb through the soft wisps of her hair. Musicians have arrived and along with them, the women take up the instruments from Trisha's backyard museum—drum and thumb piano and shepherd's pipe and wooden xylophone. The day of Trisha of Stuarts Point is proclaimed by all, and the guest of honor claps to the folk tunes that wind around the poolside.

By sheer happenstance, we call the New South Wales home from our place in Missouri to learn how our cousin is doing. Ron, Trisha's husband, answers in jubilant tones to describe the fete and the bath before. Half a globe away, I am so deeply touched by the thought of this community of women, one I have met, coming together as Trisha's family, coming to make her road to the big sleep one of joy and comfort, beauty and bliss. Though so distant, I am blessed myself by this family of woman to think how they have taken cousin Trisha into their hearts and their arms to make her journey every joy she has ever cherished.

May we all join that family and give of that love and care that I know Trisha engendered every day of her life. She worked her magic, not through saintliness, but through her ability to take an interest in everyone and everything and to gun her enthusiasm into your very core, so that you, too, could be a part of it. Thus, Trisha built her family of women from a new community, and thus, they came to be hers. Amen.

### About the author:

Karen Mocker Dabson writes novels and is seeking publication of her first two books, *Tarentum*, and *The Muralist's Ghost*. Her poems and articles have appeared in the *Story Circle Network Journal*, and the *Central Chapter, Missouri Writers Guild's 2013 Anthology*. Entitled *Well Versed: Literary Works 2013*, she received Editor's Pick for her short story, "Question in a Bottle." A member of the Missouri Writer's Guild and the Central Chapter, she has participated in their conferences, the Iowa Summer Writing Festival, and SCN on-line writing courses. Co-founder of Writing Women, Karen lives in Columbia with her husband, Brian, and Jack the Dog.



## Man Things

by Denise Jacobs, Baton Rouge LA

In 1988, when my son Doug was 12 years old, he asked me if he could live with his father, who had recently moved a few blocks down the street. Doug told me with gentle sincerity that he had learned all that he could learn from a Mom. "I need to learn Man Things," he said.

Just eight years earlier, about the time his father and I divorced, Doug and I had walked along a Michigan beach with a friend who picked something precious off the shore and said, "Hmm. I wonder what this is."

"You should ask my mom," Doug said. "She knows everything."

Times had changed.

Doug made a good argument, and to a certain extent, I agreed with him; a boy needs his father. Also, a boy needs to know his father realistically, and thus far, the relationship had been idealized. Besides, my daughter, Larissa, was 15, and I already knew something about the futility of arguing with a teenager.

Doug's father had been largely absent for eight years, but in recent years, he had sobered up, moved nearby, and begun a fatherly campaign against which I was seriously out-manned. And so, in one of the toughest decisions of my life, I let my son move in with his father (although I retained legal custody).

Within four years, Doug's dad was once again drinking heavily, and Doug asked me if he could come home. While I will never know the details of what went on toward the end of their time together, I know that Doug's relationship with his father effectively ended then and there, at 16, in 1992. It was the end of a relationship, but it wasn't the end of the story.

We live in Louisiana now, and In March 2012, Doug and his wife, Stacey, a native of Louisiana, a Cajun from a large, closely-knit family, had a baby together. For a little over a year now, I have been watching my son—my son who served two terms in the U.S. army, including a tour of Bosnia—this man's man of a man—become the primary caregiver of his son. My son is in good company.

According to U.S. Census data, as many as 20 percent of children under the age of five are under the care of their fathers. In fact, in the last decade, the number of men who have left the work force to raise children has more than doubled. Perhaps, like my son, these fathers become primary caregivers because their wives' salaries exceed their own. That's not so unusual. United States Bureau of Labor statistics indicate that about 40 percent of women now earn more than their husbands.

### About the author:

Denise Jacobs, a SoulCollage® facilitator and monk art heart, has been writing to make sense of things her entire adult life. She supports herself as a part-time writing instructor and full-time program coordinator in the field of college access. In addition to writing newsletters, emails, and more PowerPoint presentations than should be allowed, Denise edits upper-level strategic documents and oversees a federal grant in ten schools in three low-achieving Louisiana parishes. She enjoys walking Boone, her pit-chow, singing in the church choir, swimming, and helping others find their voice. She might like to become a personal historian.

Add to that the cost and quality of daycare, and it made sense for Doug to be the stay-at-home parent. Besides, he wanted to stay home with the baby. Like so many other men in his generation, my son seems to value the emotional fulfillment of parenting over money and status.

This is a far cry from the father-as-babysitter model of my youth. Like my own father, Doug has long been the cook in the family, and he's no stranger to laundry, either. When stationed at Fort Benning as a new recruit, Doug wrote me with pride that he was the only one in his squad who knew how to wash, dry, and fold clothes. Still, in the past year, this new father's skill set has grown to include night feedings, bottle washing, diapering, applications of Boudreau's Butt Paste, holding, rocking, crooning, and trips to the children's section of the local library. He has a car seat in his pickup truck.

Larissa likes to tell a story about visiting her brother on Mother's Day, May 2012. After I went home for the night, the "kids" stayed up late to play Scrabble, passing the baby around the table as they played their hands. At one point, Doug took Talon into the nursery to change a diaper. The baby monitor was on, and my Rissa overheard Doug cooing to Talon, saying, "Do not worry my son. I've got you. I'll take care of you, and I won't let anything happen to you."

My daughter laughs, remembering the little boy who would hide behind a living-room chair, strategically setting up army bases of miniature plastic soldiers who would eventually take aim and fire at her Barbie dolls.

When I watch my son hold the baby—and, believe me, Doug was sometimes downright stingy about relinquishing his hold—I feel my own parental stirrings, and I am not without fear because I know that no matter how closely we hold our children, no matter how much we want to keep them from harm, there is so much over which we have no real control. We are oftentimes powerless.

Recently, in an unexpected twist of fate, the result of a process begun well before Talon was born, Doug was accepted into the New Orleans Police Academy. As much as Doug has enjoyed staying home with Talon, he thinks Talon will be proud to have a policeman as a father.

So now, three mornings a week, Doug hauls diaper bag and baby to Stacey's father's house where Paw Paw, retired now, takes his turn at taking care of baby, his first grandson, by the way.

I understand that the two men, my son and his father-in-law, often sit together over cups of coffee—talking, I imagine, about Man Things.

## It's Complicated

by Lucy Painter, Sarasota FL

The men in my family work hard, love their wives and children, but it is the women I most admire, those strong, self-confident aunts, mothers, and grandmothers. It is one of these grandmothers who taught me that love is not always simple, or easy.

Grandmother Effie wore cotton print dresses sewn by hand. Starch scratched against my cheek when she hugged me to her wide middle. Soft scents filled my nose, lilacs from her cologne and flowers from her kitchen table, lavender blooms drooping over the edge of a clear Mason jar.

"And don't you look pretty today," she told me in her warm kitchen, although at twelve I was decidedly not. Gangly, awkward, flat-chested, I towered over her barely five-foot frame. In her arms I was again five, crying over a skinned knee. Or I was ten and giddy from being chosen to play Mary in the Christmas play.

My grandmother's house on Maple Street shone with wax and polish, brass and china, sun-streaked windows she cleaned with vinegar and newspapers each month. She vanquished all dust and dirt, leaving the house spotless, so different from my own childhood home where two teenaged boys spread muddy boots and sweaty flannel shirts from room to room.

Every pot, pan, ladle and spatula hung in its place, so unlike my own mother's kitchen with casserole dishes piled onto mixing bowls, and forks tangled with spoons in squeaky-handled drawers. With short white curls tied up in a pink handkerchief, Effie bent over a steaming sink rinsing snap beans for supper. Over an enamel table under the kitchen window she kneaded huge balls of dough for her potato rolls. She hefted the wobbly, dense flour mixture up to her chest, dropped it onto the scratched enamel surface and began pounding the mass with both fists until it surrendered and lay submissive under her thumbs.

Kneading done, she sank into an old rocker beside the gas stove where rolls sat rising in the warmth. Scents of yeast and butter filled the room. White paint covering the rocker's arms had been worn away by years of children who sat in laps, who nursed at breasts and listened to nursery rhymes or cried for comfort after a spill out of the backyard oak. In its arms often lay Dudley, the stray cat who one day wandered into the back yard and never left. In the rocker's seat slumped a faded cotton pillow, indented with weight. On Sundays Grandfather Matt sat there in his three-piece suit, brown and shiny with age, his ear turned to the Philco radio on the window sill. In his fingers he twirled a cold cigar, unlit because my grandmother allowed no smoking in her kitchen. The Dodgers were beating his favorite team, the Orioles, and he had left the living room to avoid the squeals and flailing arms of our game of Duck Goose Duck.

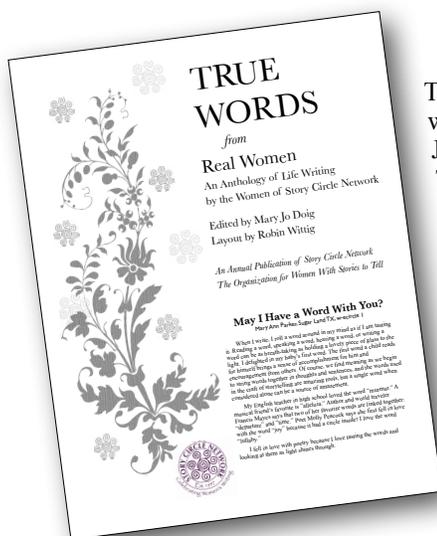
Grandmother also governed the outdoors, attacking worms and weevils with poisons and spades. Zinnia and azaleas, dahlias and gardenia bushes ringed the house and stretched into the yard. She knelt in brown dirt beside the wide front porch, her knees pressing into clods of earth where no weed dare grow. In spring she planted hyacinths and petunias and tended the clusters of pink peonies, their heads heavy with bloom. And of course, the lilac blossoms she snipped at the perfect moment to capture their scent.

Flowers and aromas from the kitchen filled the house with warmth, but underneath that softness lay a vein of steel. Grandmother's anger and disapproval appeared from nowhere, striking out without warning. We all knew it. We all respected it and feared it. What had we done?

"Lucy, how many times do I have to tell you to tuck in your shirt?" The cold voice did not belong to the woman who only an hour ago had held me in her arms.

Or on a cold Saturday morning when I wanted to snuggle under the covers and sleep, I heard, "Get up,

*Continue reading on page 7*



## True Words Anthology

The Story Circle Network's annual 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 and, secondly, there is no thematic prompt. Thus you can send in a life story on any topic you wish. The word limit for prose is 1000 words and for poetry, 40 lines. We will accept up to three pieces per author for consideration.

*Your submissions to the anthology are due by September 15.*

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.

[http://www.storycircle.org/members/anthology\\_submissions.php](http://www.storycircle.org/members/anthology_submissions.php)

*Continued from page 6*

lazybones. It's past 7 and you have work to do. Up, up, up."

Or when I offered an unasked-for opinion, "You're getting too big for your britches, young lady. I won't have it, not in my house."

"Not in my house." I remember those words. To my brothers bouncing a basketball against the house, bored on a Sunday afternoon while grownups chatted over iced teas on the porch. To my mother when she did not say "Please" when asking to borrow a yard of cloth for an apron she planned to sew for her church circle. To Dick, an African-American woman my grandmother hired to help with large family dinners and parties. Especially to Dick.

Dick sat in the old kitchen rocker, her black arms even blacker against the white paint. In summer she sat shelling peas, a large dented aluminum pan at her feet. Around her ankles pooled gray stockings, their elastic garters little circles over her rundown brown shoes. Green summer peas clinked into the pan as she hummed, usually an old hymn--"Amazing Grace," "Shall We Gather at the River." In fall apple peelings slid into her lap, perfect spirals of McIntosh red for the Thanksgiving pie.

#### About the author:

Lucy Painter lives in Sarasota, Florida with her husband Charlie, two rescued dogs and one old cat. After retiring from her career as a high school teacher, Lucy began writing family stories for her daughter and in doing so uncovered many memories she thought long lost. In Sarasota she belongs to a small writing group called WITS who have been writing and sharing together for over five years.

Grandmother Effie stood in the kitchen doorway, hands on her hips.

"Dick, go outside. You smell. Didn't I talk to you about wearing clean clothes, washing yourself up? I won't have your dirt in my house."

Didn't my grandmother know that Dick had no washing machine, that she lived in a house often without electricity, running water?

When I was eight I asked my grandmother why Dick had to eat in the kitchen while we sat in the dining room. I got no answer, only a stern glare and a "hush, or I'll send you to your room."

There it was, that steel under the soft cotton print dress.

Today I think of Grandmother Effie when I fail to rise before 7 am, when I leave dishes in the sink to wash tomorrow, when my ironing goes undone. But lilacs and fresh bread baking in the oven and warm strong arms around my frame bring her back to me. Underneath the steel, behind the reprimands and reproach ran warm-blooded love.



*Be Our Guest!*

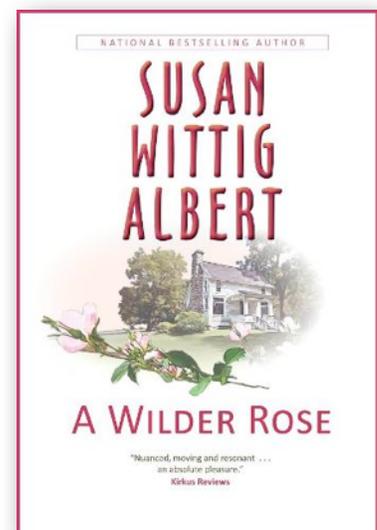
## Susan Wittig Albert

Date: Tuesday, October 8, 2013

Time: 7:00 - 8:30 pm

Place: Garrison Chapel, First United Methodist Church  
1201 Lavaca Street  
Austin, TX

Susan Wittig Albert, best-selling author & founder of Story Circle Network, will discuss her new book, *A Wilder Rose*, (<http://awilderrosethenovel.com>) published this fall by Susan's new imprint, Persevero Press (<http://perseveropress.com>). She will talk about the research involved in writing about the historical lives of real women, as well as the process of author-publishing. We'll have copies of the book for sale, plus copies of *Widow's Tears* (China Bayles) (<http://www.abouthyme.com/China/WidowsTears.shtml>) and her latest *Darling Dahlias* mystery (*The Darling Dahlias and the Texas Star*) (<http://www.darlingdahlias.com/books/TexasStar.shtml>). The book sale benefits Story Circle, so consider stocking up on signed copies for your Christmas list!





## Jan Marquart: Writing to Heal

# One Book at a Time

Lisa Shirah-Hiers

Jan Marquart is a psychotherapist and author who has written in every imaginable genre from fiction to memoir to poetry to self-help. She won the Writer's Digest Self-Published award in 2000 for *The Breath of Dawn* and the Achievement in Poetry Award by the International Library of Poetry in 2005 and has published poetry, stories, and essays in *Victim Poetry*, *ladyinkmagazine.com*, *Solecisms*, and *Random Access Poetics*. Her many books are available on Amazon and through her website. She is founder and CEO of About the Author Network, an organization dedicated to helping authors write, publish and sell their books. Jan has taught on-line writing classes

for the Story Circle Network and will be leading a Story Circle Network Writing from Life workshop November 2, 2013 in Austin, TX. Lisa Shirah-Hiers interviewed her via email for the SCJ.

SCJ: How did you become both a writer and a therapist?

JM: I was born in Brooklyn and lived there until I decided to go to college in California. I quit a great job as a legal secretary on Wall Street which disturbed my parents, but I couldn't see myself taking shorthand and typing someone else's ideas forever. I wanted to find out what I thought and desired to write since I was eight but tucked it away when my parents didn't show an interest. When I enrolled in UCSC I met a friend who recommended I keep a journal. I have written every day since June, 1972. I studied philosophy and then got my master in Social Work.

SCJ: What do you wish people knew about you?

JM: That is a great question. I have felt misunderstood most of my life and I realized that the thinking many people do is so limited and fearful. I suppose that's why I write so much. When the pressure builds inside me I have to say it somehow, through some genre and still keep hope and faith. It takes a lot for me to ask for help, not because I can't ask but because I don't believe my life's problems belong to anyone but me. I'd like people to know that for anyone who is suffering, me or anyone else, to receive an offer of help restores faith in humanity.

SCJ: Evidence for and trusting one's own intuition seems to be a major theme in much of your writing. Can you speak a little about that?

JM: In the last twenty something years I had quite a few people tell me I couldn't do something while something inside me told me I could. They thought I just wanted to battle with them but I wasn't battling. I wasn't being recalcitrant. I truly knew I could do what they said I couldn't and proceeded from there. Turns out I did everything others told me I couldn't. So when people tell me what they think I am or am not capable of, I listen to the message from my gut. Sometimes my gut agrees and sometimes it doesn't. When I know better and I rationalize

a reason not to listen to that voice, I suffer terribly. Listen to everyone but rarely take their comments to heart, especially when it comes to your capability.

SCJ: Another theme seems to be trusting yourself to know what is right for you. Do you think that is particularly hard for women?

JM: Yes. Women pay huge prices for not listening to and trusting themselves. But the truth is that to change this problem, the whole world has to change. There is only a narrow opening for women to fully take on their own lives. This problem is addressed on the news each day. The irony is women hold up the sky. We are so strong, creative, and resilient. We are told by society in so many subtle ways that we need to be told how to do this or that, even about our own bodies.

SCJ: Of all the various genres you have tried, which seemed to come most naturally? Which was most challenging?

JM: Once I start writing I don't feel as if I'm struggling with any of them. I think poetry is the most challenging because I don't know any formal poetry styles. I just write according to the power that comes through me.

SCJ: Do you think fiction is harder than non-fiction?

JM: Not really. In non-fiction you really have to know what you're talking about or you come off as an idiot. So when I write non-fiction I do lots of research and work to get all my ducks in a row before I publish. Fiction, on the other hand, shows me a way to have more fun with writing. I realized half-way into the manuscript of *Kate's Way* and half-way into *The Basket Weaver* that I could design any ending I wanted. In non-fiction that is not a luxury. Readers of non-fiction are counting on facts. *Kate's Way* and *The Basket Weaver* started out serious in that they started out with something I wanted to address or heal in my life. Then

it came time to create an ending and I realized the ending was only going to come about if I molded it the way I wanted. So it was like finger painting and pushing color into new spaces.

SCJ: Why did you write *Echoes from the Womb*? What do you hope readers will take away from it?

JM: I began *Echoes* because I was trying to come to grips with my own mother and because my story was replayed dozens of times in my sessions with daughters who brought in their mothers and mothers who brought in their daughters for counseling. I wanted women to not only read the book but to process how they could overcome the pain in their relationship with their mothers so I added journal exercises at the end. I received note cards from women all over the country explaining how this book helped them. It was heartbreaking and heartwarming at the same time.

SCJ: You just received your most recent book, *Cracked Open: A Book of Poems*. What can you tell us about it?

JM: I lived in NM for six years with the plan to heal from environmental illness. While I was busy doing that I met several people who brought more trauma to my life. There I was living on five acres of paradise with the most hellish experiences that involved people I thought I could trust and a serious health issue most people don't heal from. I went to NM because of the need for great physical healing but met with many relationship issues that needed healing as well. That's where I sat on the land and wrote many of my books. I knew if I didn't write out what I needed to heal in one genre or another, I would not get well.

When I moved to Austin I wanted to write about some of the traumatic events that occurred in NM but I didn't have the energy. So one day I wrote down a list of words to keep me reminded of what I wanted to write about when I got my second breath. Instead I wound up playing with the words and phrases. They turned into poems, although I do not consider myself a poet. On-line publications printed a few of them and slowly but surely *Cracked Open* emerged.

SCJ: Which book did you most enjoy writing?

JM: That's difficult. Each book had a different point of view and in a way I enjoyed writing each of them because with each came healing. I think [my novel] *The Basket Weaver* might have been more fun. Most of the book is true – and I wrote it to overcome my toxic relationship with my sister so I could free trapped energy for my own healing. Halfway through it I realized I could play with the story and thus wrote 'the rest of the story.'

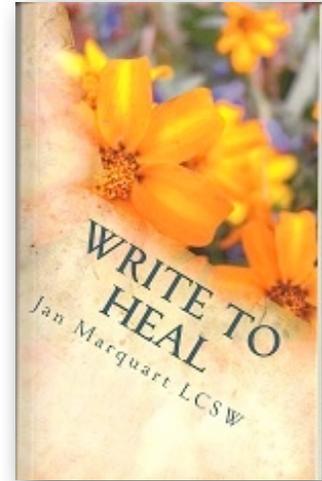
SCJ: Do you use an editor or agent?

JM: I had an agent for *Kate's Way*. I got her name from Lynn Andrews after asking her for an endorsement for [my how-to book] *The Mindful Writer*. As far as editors – I hire retired school teachers, friends, strangers, and anyone who would read my manuscripts. I like getting ordinary readers to give me their comments.

All writers need to know that it takes other people to tell them what they like to read. We write in isolation but we must come out into the world with our manuscripts to see if they even make sense. I only make the changes that don't compromise the integrity of what I've written.

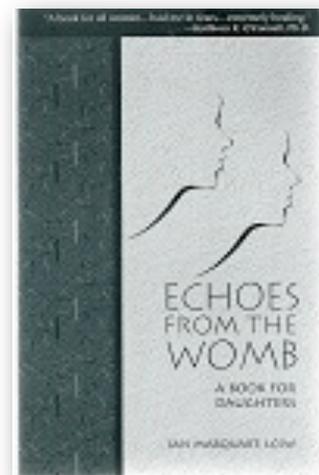
SCJ: In what specific ways have you promoted your books? What has worked well and what hasn't?

JM: The best way I've promoted and sold books is by reading but it is difficult for self-published authors to get accepted to [do a book reading.] With my new site: [www.AboutTheAuthorNetwork](http://www.AboutTheAuthorNetwork) I plan on arranging book readings for self-published authors so we can unite and not let the publishing world throw us off the cliff.



"Inevitably, over time, unexpressed pain insidiously weaves itself through current experiences hovering like an impenetrable barrier inhibiting well-being."

"I believe that developing resilience strengthens your own spiritual foundation and allows you to take a good dose of your own power and energy back."



"...waiting for unconditional acceptance and approval from mother before we accept ourselves is dangerous. We lose sight of our mothers as human beings capable of making mistakes around our needs. We lose sight of our own God-given power and the strength waiting inside us to create and reinvent ourselves, our way."

*Continued from page 9*

SCJ: What advice would you give to beginning writers?

JM: Don't worry about how to discipline yourself to write. Don't worry about whether you can write or not. If you have something to say simply say it. You can't edit or publish anything unless you have written something first. I hear writers tell me in my workshops how frightened they are that someone they love will be angry at what they write. In my experience too many people don't do what they desire because of the criticism of narrow-minded and fear-based people. This is a dangerous place for writers. Write. Let other people decide how to behave around what you write.

SCJ: What do you find most rewarding about the different aspects of your career?

JM: Years ago I wrote for my own benefit. When I was at work I'd counsel families and teach in corporations. As the years advanced I realized that my writing was therapeutic and my clients advanced in their healing faster when they looked inward and wrote. Now the process has become so synchronized I can barely tell them apart.

SCJ: What are some dreams you have for the future?

JM: I dream of developing a writing retreat for authors. My new site: [www.AboutTheAuthorNetwork.com](http://www.AboutTheAuthorNetwork.com) is a way to start paving a way to that dream. I also dream of being with a man who supports my writing. So far men have been threatened by any of my dreams. I'd love to own my own home again, build my finances to a place where I can help contractors build safe homes for the environmentally ill. Being homeless when you are sick is a nightmare I can't even find words for.

I'd like to develop my Write to Heal program so I can teach it in hospitals and clinics around the world. I'd like to write a memoir about the last 13 years but that book will require much to be written: finances, privacy, solitude, lots of Kleenex. When it is ready to be reborned it will present its labor pains.

SCJ: What are some accomplishments you are most proud of?

JM: No matter what anyone said about me I always worked to believe in myself. I healed two illnesses doctors said I couldn't. I have owned three homes in the last 30 years and never missed a mortgage payment, even when the financial challenges were great and everyone around me said I couldn't do it without a husband. I have made a conscious effort to remain kind and caring towards others because I learned that no matter what it seems, there is always a backdrop to every life.

To learn more about Jan's workshops and events or to order her books visit her website: [www.JanMarquart.com](http://www.JanMarquart.com). If you are interested in becoming an author or have a book to write, publish or sell visit the About the Author Network website at: [www.AboutTheAuthorNetwork.com](http://www.AboutTheAuthorNetwork.com).

## A Writing from Life Workshop with Jan Marquart Uncover, Recover, and Discover Your True Memoir

November 2, 2013, 9am-4pm  
Family Life Center (Epiphany classroom),  
First United Methodist Church  
1300 Lavaca St, Austin TX 78701

Just as there are many ways to tell a story, the personal stories of our lives can be seen from many angles. The perspective we choose can determine how we understand our lives, make decisions for the future, and heal wounds.

For instance, how would you describe yourself? This is a key question you must ask when writing your memoir. Although the emotional and psychological perspective you own is—in and of itself, part of your memoir, it holds the potential to color your stories, alter the facts, and overlook the true meaning and reasons behind events.

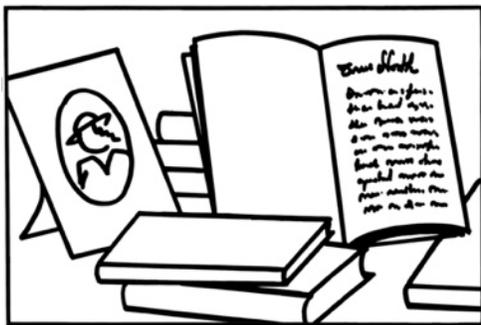
Often we fail to understand the motivation that initially led us to make one set of choices rather than another. Writing a memoir empowers us by giving us the opportunity to use our words to change unhappy outcomes, to recreate and to re-decide what we would like our futures to look like. Writing memoir is an act of extraordinary healing.

To uncover, recover, and discover your true memoir requires taking a look back into your memories that are comprised of the details, conversations, hopes, wishes, relationships, and other components of a memory. Your life will have its own editing and discovery through the act of writing your personal story.

Uncover, Recover, and Discover Your True Memoir will be a workshop of much creativity. Additional forms of personal expression will be used to set the stage for your writing experience, to keep you on task, and to remind you to look at your memories from a wider, deeper, and wilder perspectives.

### Registration Information

- ◆ **Date:** Saturday, November 2, 9am-4pm
- ◆ **Location:** Family Life Center (Epiphany classroom), First United Methodist Church, 1300 Lavaca St, Austin TX 78701
- ◆ **Cost:** \$150 for non-members (which includes a one-year SCN membership); \$95 for dues-paying Story Circle Network members. The registration fee covers the cost of instruction, lunch, coffee/tea, & handout materials. Enrollment is limited so that we can allow all participants time to share. Please register early via our online enrollment form at <http://www.storycircle.org/frmenroll.php>.
- ◆ **Registration/Payment Deadline:** Saturday, October 26. We must receive your registration and payment by this date!



## Story Circle Network's Book Reviews

# Reviewing the Reviews

by Trilla Pando

Visit us on the Internet:

[www.storycirclebookreviews.org](http://www.storycirclebookreviews.org) • [www.facebook.com/storycirclebookreviews](https://www.facebook.com/storycirclebookreviews)  
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January, 2001 was a good time for a resolution, and Story Circle made one—one that we've kept. Truth to tell, it hasn't been hard. Better: it's been fun.

On January 8 of that year StoryCircleBookReviews.org hit the World Wide Web with Susan Wittig Albert's review of *Nothing to Do but Stay: My Pioneer Mother* by Carrie Young. That that review was not alone: Story Circle members offered 24 reviews that day. Albert led the pack with 18 reviews (talk about a big reader!) but there were others. I was proud then, just as I am now, to be one of them.

I remember that first book well: *Through the Kitchen Window: Women Writers Explore the Intimate Meaning of Food and Cooking* by Arlene Voski Avakian. It was a great book to begin my reviewing stint with, for since then I've reviewed lots and lots, and while I've covered the territory, reviewing fiction and nonfiction, mysteries and memoir, I've specialized in food and cooking. The last review I posted just last week—yes, food. I loved *Stirring It Up* with Molly Ivins by Ellen Sweets in 2013 just as I loved *Through the Kitchen Window* in 2001.

*Stirring it Up* was review number 1,531 on our book review site and number 90 for me. Yes, 90! Both the site and I have continued to grow and read and review. And we intend to keep on reading and reviewing. I'm looking forward to breaking 100. I like being a reviewer and I like using the site to guide my reading.

As a reader, I rely on it. While I do my share of browsing at the library, at the book store or roaming Amazon hoping for a happy discovery, more often when it is book time I have something specific in mind, and SCN's book review site helps me out. Because it's divided into clear categories, I almost invariably find what I'm looking for, whether it's something fun and distracting or more serious. This summer I spent a lot of time in hospital and doctor waiting rooms; I was mighty glad I had the Story Circle suggestions in the mystery and travel categories to make the hours fly.

I read differently when I know I am reading to review. This normal lightning-speed reader slows down, savors, and thinks. I feel a responsibility to the author: I want to reflect her book fairly and honestly. But I also feel as great a responsibility to the reader. More than, "Is this a good book?" There are many good books out there. I want to share enough of the weight of the book to let the reader decide with some confidence whether she will like it or not. But at the same time, I mustn't give away too much. The flavor of the book—maybe a nibble—is my goal. Reviewing makes me a better reader and writer.

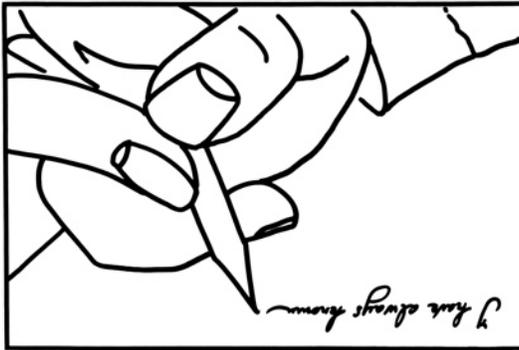
If you want to use SCBR for reading guidance, head right to the site, <http://www.storycirclebookreviews.org>, and start reading. Maybe you want to give reviewing a try. Go to the same site, where you'll find at the top of the homepage is a link to our review guidelines for new reviewers. Most reviews are of books by and for women, published in the last two years. If it is your first review, you'll want to send a query. If you join the team, Story Circle will offer you review copies of new books.

Confession time: over the last few days as I've thought about this page, I've visited the chronological listing of our reviews (<http://www.storycirclebookreviews.org/date.html>) more than a few times. I've found several books I missed when their reviews were first posted or that I intended to get but something intervened. I remedied one omission.

What did I do? I did what I ought to have done 12 years ago. I ordered *Nothing to Do but Stay*, Albert's first reviewed book. How could I resist after reading a quotation from the book, "If she wasn't having a baby on Tuesday, my mother ironed."

You can reach Trilla Pando at [ppando@gmail.com](mailto:ppando@gmail.com).





## True Words from Real Women

# Storms

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.

### My Old Brown Shoes

Marion Elizabeth Witte, Ventura CA  
marion@marionwitte.com, marionwitte.com

A girl in my class, at my school  
Saw my shoes had a little tear  
She said they looked like something that  
A hobo bum would wear

Another boy joined in with her  
Together they laughed at me  
Children can sometimes be so cruel  
My hurt they did not see

I cried that night, I was so sad  
Embarrassed and ashamed  
I wanted to dress like everyone else  
For that I can't be blamed

I asked my daddy for advice  
For the pain I could not bear  
He took a breath and smiled down  
These words he then did share

"Your shoes may be a little tattered  
And they are handed down  
Yet they are strong, and they are clean  
And we keep them polished brown"

"The shoes you wear, matter not  
They will soon be thrown away  
But the love you wear, in your little heart  
Will last forever and a day"



### Derecho

Fran Simone, South Charleston WV  
fsimone@marshall.edu

Last summer a derecho hit West Virginia. A friend and I were dining outdoors when the sky turned black, the wind ripped through the trees, and a wall of water somersaulted down the street. Soon after, the lights went out. I drove home slowly and dodged fallen debris and downed utility lines.

Early the next morning, I woke to wreckage in the woods surrounding my home. Two huge tree trunks had smashed through a chain link fence, a large evergreen had ripped apart, and the roots of two ancient beech trees had upended in what once a forested oasis in my backyard.

Although I had to accept that my home would never be the same, I was grateful that the damage wasn't worse. Others lost roofs and cars and went without electricity for over two weeks. Nevertheless, I was distraught over the loss of my lush landscape. I had to let go of shade, of privacy, and of dappled light filtered through leaves. The trees were gone. I could not change that.

There was something else that I could not change that summer. I could not change my adult son who was addicted to drugs, even though I prayed that he would plant his life firmly in recovery. I had tried to rescue him countless times. So when I received word of another crisis, I felt as uprooted as my fallen trees. But, I didn't panic. I didn't scramble to fix things. Rather, I offered to help locate a drug rehab facility. Nothing more.

A reading in *Courage to Change* states: "If I continue to do what I've always done, I will continue to get what I've always gotten." For many years, I'd gotten a whole lot of frustration, anger, sadness, disappointment, worry, fear, resentment, and self-pity.

Letting go of rescuing my son has been much more difficult than letting go of my beloved trees. For my son's recovery to take root, I must let go. He must plant his own seed and nurture its growth.

## Another Kind of Canadian Winter

Janet Caplan, Sooke BC

Winter storms are part of a Canadian's heritage. I've lived in four provinces and encountered serious winter weather in each: extreme wind and snow storms, freezing rain, perilous icy conditions, even lightning.

Not unusual in Quebec, Ontario, and Alberta. Winter storm stories can be like the proverbial fish tale: *that cold, eh?*

Now I live on southern Vancouver Island in British Columbia. We don't experience winter storms like that here. This is not snow country. But when a storm does hit, it can wreak havoc.

The winter of 2006 produced a storm unlike anything I'd seen. It was extraordinary even for seasoned residents of our rural, seaside community. It occurred over the Christmas holidays; most families were already together. Winds started off slowly but by 11:00 had picked up enough speed to bend and then break large tree branches in the forested area across from our home. Garbage cans left out by a neighbor tumbled down the road. Bicycles and toys that had been safely pulled up on driveways made their way down the street as if driven by ghosts. Quickly the skies blackened and storm clouds broke open. The rain that poured forth that morning and for the next five days, was unparalleled.

By two o'clock p.m. power lines were down. House flooding was rampant, and while the two grocery stores in town remained open, rationing supplies, most businesses were forced to close within hours of the onset of the deluge. Without a generator, it became imperative to evacuate. By mid-afternoon, we relocated to a motel in nearby Victoria where we stayed for several days; the city had not been as badly affected. We remained dry and warm and safe.

Upon returning home, we witnessed, in person, some of the images we'd viewed in the media. We saw houses with giant cedars strewn over lawns, cars bent in half, chimney stacks crushed and roofs with tree roots emerging from them. Flooding was commonplace and debris made a home on every front yard. It took months for restoration to be completed. Nobody complained; cooperation, helpfulness, neighborliness were always evident.

It pours relentlessly, chaotically. Beads of water drip from my hair. I'm laughing because I'm not wearing a hat and I don't have an umbrella. The summer storm is a novelty for me and I soak it in. I feel like a kid slogging through puddles. I walk quickly down the street in wet shoes and socks. My toes are cold but it doesn't matter because the air is warm. I stay close to shop windows under awnings, even though the wind is strong and the rain is blowing horizontally. My yellow blouse is drenched and clinging to my chest, my wet jeans are attached to my legs. I'm humbled and marvel at the size and strength of this Montreal summer shower. I love the contrast between it and the cold winter rains I'm used to in Southern California.

## The Angels Cried

Lois Halley, Westminster MD  
joeandloishalley@comcast.net

If it's true that opposites attract, that explains the friendship between Wormie and Victor. Wormie was short, round, brown-eyed and kept his black hair cropped close. He *always* wore his thick lensed eye glasses in their flesh colored frames. He never considered his nick-name derogatory, as it was affectionately bestowed upon him by his best pal, Victor.

Victor, older by two years, was tall, lean, and had blonde hair which fell onto his forehead causing him to habitually toss it back to keep it from covering his blue eyes. At age twelve, his muscles were already showing promise of the man he was not destined to be.

The boys lived on the same block, were altar boys in the same church, and were almost always seen together. I was ten, the same age as Wormie, when I met them. It was Victor who delivered the daily newspaper to my home, and I looked forward to greeting him as he pulled the paper from the canvas sack that hung from his shoulder. He had a dazzling smile and a dimpled chin. He was the most handsome boy I ever met.

Life changes in an instant, and one overcast day my mother grabbed the black, man-sized umbrella as we went out the door to the bus stop. Buttoning our raincoats against the wind, we emerged from the bus and walked up the hill to the funeral home. As we approached the coffin, I tried to understand why Victor lay there, dressed in a suit and tie, blue eyes closed forever. Why did he have to die in a horrific car crash?

I spotted Wormie, not wearing his glasses for the first time, in a far corner of the room. He was drying his eyes on a big white handkerchief.

Outside, the rain was pouring down, and as we shivered under the umbrella, my mother said, "The angels are crying." They were the words that allowed me to release my own tears. I will always remember that the day Wormie took his glasses off was the day the angels cried.

## Rain Storm

Barbara Beaton Dubey, San Diego CA

I get to the restaurant. My friend is there before me, waiting inside.

"How can I go back to work after lunch looking like this," he says pointing to himself with both hands.

I try not to laugh. I try to look serious. He's wearing a suit and is as wet as I am. He looks ridiculous. Storm clouds blow north as we eat. When we're done, the sky is clear and the streets are drying out. Everybody we see is dry, as if the storm never happened. Only my friend and I look like wetland muskrats. He is still in a quandary about his appearance. I'm looking for a rainbow. I feel like dancing!

## Storm Watch

Marilea Rabasa, Rio Rancho NM  
marilea@rabasa.com

When I was born my mother, overwhelmed with a new baby, sent my sister away for a year. My brother was ten and my sister was five. But I, who had no say in this decision, paid a heavy price for what my mother did.

We lived in an old converted schoolhouse surrounded by woods. My sister resented me from the day I was born, my brother was sent away to school, daddy drank in the basement, and mom cried in her bedroom.

I was so unhappy in that house. Just to get her attention, I went into my sister's bedroom, stole her shoes, and smashed her ballerina figurines. But my mother never punished me. And my sister retaliated by erasing me from her life.

Many years later we would come to terms with what had happened in that schoolhouse. What lessons were taught to the people who lived there? What did I learn about family? About right and wrong? As a child there was no healthy resolution—only intense judgment both self-inflicted and otherwise—that would serve to punish me when my parents didn't.

Completely isolated in my own family, I took refuge in nature. I've always loved hurricanes. Carol swept through southeastern Massachusetts in August of 1954. I remember going outside, jumping up in the air and grabbing the leaves that were prematurely separating from the trees. I twirled around in the wind, wishing it would carry me away and put me down, like Dorothy, far away from Kansas.

I was happiest outdoors, away from the stress inside that schoolhouse. I wanted to attach myself to the natural world, like lichen on a rock. Outdoors I could create my own world: a natural world full of wilderness and beauty, and though trampled on too much by humans, it had great resiliency.

I learned about survival by studying nature: dead tree trunks, hosts—all over the forest floor—covered with plants growing out of them, new trees growing out of burnt forests. Nature is powerful and resilient.

Much later on, I would discover my own resilience.

## joining revised

Mary Devries, Hutchinson KS  
flossinhanna@gmail.com, w-ecircle 6

The black funnel called us	Sacrificed to your evil need
Its vortex bewitching	Father, son, friend
We chased it	Beauty in your fury
Father, son, friend	Drew us closer
We knew your danger	We answered your call
But the power entranced	Father, son, friend,
Father, son, friend	No longer chasing
We followed your path	We became one with you
Spoke of the mother and child	Father, son, friend.

## Weathering the Storm

Sara Etgen-Baker, Allen TX  
sab\_1529@yahoo.com, www.saraetgenbaker.blogspot.com

I stood on the front porch watching the storm brewing on the horizon. "Can you feel that?" mother asked, pacing back and forth. "The hair's standing up on the back of my neck. A tornado's coming."

Thunder screamed across the sky as the embattled clouds slapped into one another. The sky darkened as threatening hues of grey, green, and black filled the sky; the wind began blowing, quickly turning from a soft breeze to churning gusts. Suddenly a crack of lightening cut through the anvil-shaped green cloud that hovered over Garland. Hail began to spit. Day turned to night as a terrifying funnel dropped from the green cloud and began snaking its way back and forth through town. Then I heard the screaming howl of a freight train.

Time collapsed while I watched, mesmerized and frightened by the tornado's destructive, chaotic power as it tossed things up in the air and flattened everything in its path. I was just five when I witnessed the tornado that destroyed downtown Garland. Although I survived the storm, I was never the same. Those powerful images, buried deep within my subconscious, have stayed with me and occasionally surface in the surrealistic world of my night-time dreams.

The dream is always the same. I'm watching as a storm brews and churns on the horizon; the funnel drops from the clouds. I hear the loud roar of a train in the distance. Although frightened, I watch debris fly through the air all around me. Entranced, I never attempt to hide from the chaos and destruction. I wake up breathless feeling changed but safe, calm, and relieved that I survived the storm.

I often wondered what this reoccurring storm dream could teach me. I discovered that my storm dream occurs when I'm in the midst of some type of change or personal upheaval. The tornado represents the fear and uncertainty I must weather when faced with the chaotic but seemingly destructive power of impending change in my life. Although I always survive the storm, I'm forever changed, feeling safe, secure, calm, and comfortable with the new me.

## omen

Mary Devries, Hutchinson KS  
flossiehanna@gmail.com, w-ecircle 6

the sky is pewter.  
the leaves are stilled.  
the lull is here.  
this is not a blessing,  
but is it a warning?  
man no longer reads mother's omens  
I await the puzzle's answer  
but wait,  
the leaves are moving.

## Santa Fe Storm

Cindy Flora, Clearwater FL  
lonestargs@aol.com

When you're in Santa Fe, you are usually on a journey: physically, emotionally, intellectually, or spiritually. Sometimes it is all four. Maybe it's Santa Fe, or maybe it's the altitude, but whatever the reason, intuition seems heightened, often determining the path you choose in your journey. Most of the time, that is.

Intuition was telling me that heading out to the Plaza that afternoon with angry July storm clouds brewing against the Sangre de Cristo Mountains was not something we should do. My companions were not much concerned, since up to then, dark skies had threatened stormy weather every day but nothing had come of those threats.

Nevertheless, I persuaded them to wait for some sprinkles to pass and then, with me still skeptical, we began the three block trek to the Plaza. Country music beckoned ahead punctuated by occasional claps of thunder. As we entered the Plaza, I was struck by the surreal contrast of the dark shroud overhead and the melodious blur of human activity below. Something was not right.

I felt the explosion as much as heard it. The energy of the lightning bolt and its thunder ripped across and around the plaza and in the distance I could see a tremendous swirl of leaves fluttering to the ground. The band suddenly ceased playing. A teenage girl began to cry hysterically. There was a collective gasp and a moment of stunned silence. Then, all at once, or so it seemed, the animated crowd around the bandstand cleared to the sidewalks.

My companions were shaken but okay. Miraculously, no one was killed or seriously hurt but a beautiful stately cottonwood tree which had seen a hundred years or more of Santa Fe history pass before it, now bore a wound which could not be healed.

As the Plaza slowly returned to life and my companions went on with their plans for the evening, I made my way to the tree. I stood there a while thinking about its journey and the one that had led me there that night and how our paths had crossed for a moment in time.

Crack reached Houston in the 1980s. My crack habit started out slow and cloudy.

Some days, it began to feel windy because the crack would go so fast. It seemed like the wind would just blow it away.

Other days, it rained crack. There was plenty all around me. I would run to a covered space to make a deal or to a hidden space to light my pipe.

Many times, I would wonder if lightning would strike. I would look around and make sure I didn't see a police

## Safe to Share

Lynn Goodwin, Danville CA  
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When the rain and wind whipped up a fierce storm, our electric heat went off and the TV would not work. We weren't supposed to open the refrigerator or freezer; all the cold would leak out and the food would spoil.

The loss of power brought out candles and flashlights, and a legitimate, unbalanced meal of cookies or crackers.

Trapped by an electric garage door that would not open, we gathered in my parents' bedroom to wait out the storm. Through rain-splattered windows we saw the distant lights of San Jose twinkling below. Sharp black rooftops and ebony tree limbs blotted out portions of San Jose, years before it became Silicon Valley. We sat high atop the world in the hills of Los Gatos.

In the shadows, my parents began to tell tales from the past. My father remembered a blackout in Martinez during World War II. A friend and he went outside when all the lights were extinguished and all the shades were drawn. They were two lone figures, walking through a blacked-out neighborhood. My father lit a cigarette.

A neighbor woman rushed out and scolded him. "Those ashes glow. If I can see them from my window, the enemy can see them too."

"So I dropped the cigarette and stepped on it to shush her," he said, laughing at how seriously the old woman took those glowing ashes.

My mother remembered wrapping Christmas packages years earlier. She told us she held the paper in place with rubber bands until the ribbon was firmly tied.

"No Scotch Tape?" my sister asked. It was impossible to imagine a world without it, though it was easy to remember the time before TV. It was 1961.

My mother and father continued telling stories we'd never heard.

No judgments.

No put downs.

The deepening shadows made it safe to share.

I sat on my mother's bed, looking from one darkened face to another. We were all in the same room that night, a family united by the storm until the power came back on.

## The Crack Storm

Roxinia Ware, Lockhart TX

car with its blue, red, and white lights.

When a crack storm would end, I could see that I had survived—yet again. Deep inside, I hoped there would never be another crack storm.

In the end, crack storms only bring disaster and separation and death. There is no calm. There is no beauty. Everything is dark. All feelings are numb and fake.

One day, I saw a rainbow, the rainbow of life. No more darkness. The rainbow meant a return to a bright, colorful life. My crack storms have ended for good.

## Great Winds Across the Sky

Susan Burneson, Austin TX  
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“Tornado! Go!”

My husband and I had reached the southern end of the Kansas Turnpike, and the toll booth attendant’s words startled us. She motioned for us to go through without paying. We darted on down the road.

It was tornado season. A partly cloudy sky turned ominous hours ago. We had seen two electronic signs with tornado warning alerts for certain mile marker areas. Already past them both, we continued on.

Since fifth grade I’ve been fascinated by weather, so I was not afraid. In 1974, I lived in a trailer in Illinois during a historic tornado outbreak. In 1993, I dreamed of becoming a storm chaser and took meteorology classes. Now, heading south through the heart of Tornado Alley, we both were excited by the possibility of seeing a twister but not anxious to put ourselves in harm’s way.

In Oklahoma, I checked weather radars and warnings on my smart phone. I kept an eye on dark gray-green clouds and lightning all around us. We listened to live coverage on the radio. We quickly found cover in Moore when hail hit.

Later, we stopped in Norman to eat. Storm chasers came into the restaurant, and I envied their experiences and skill. But, that day and the next in Oklahoma, two seasoned meteorologists were injured and three more killed as they pursued tornadoes in the name of science. Others were killed, too, including people in cars along our route. Moore and other towns sustained serious damage.

When we tallied it up, we dodged half a dozen tornadoes in Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. If we had been an hour earlier or later—or stopped in Moore the next day—we likely would have seen or been in the path of at least one tornado.

More than dumb luck or even wise planning, our safe trip home felt like grace, as mysterious and powerful as the tornado itself. It reminded me of a saying from years ago:

“Sometimes I go about pitying myself, and all the time I’m being carried on great winds across the sky.”

Greater even than those of a tornado.

## The Tempest

Abby November, Austin TX  
Judith Helburn Writing Circle

Dark clouds, thunder and lightning smash within my skull  
My heart thumps in time to the thunder  
Lightning sizzles in the sky,  
bolts of it thrown from some watching, angry deity,  
laughing silently at my discomfort.  
Squirrels scurry nonstop, owls screeching at the silvery snatches of light.  
Kasha, my Golden, panting and shivering on cold terrazzo tile.  
I lie beside her and hold her close, warm dog breath on my cheek, she shakes no more.  
Sun fights through the clouds and cobwebs within my skull.  
Squirrels and owls cease screeching.  
Respite at last.

## Rocking Life’s Rhythms

Ronda Armstrong, Des Moines IA  
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“Hearts swell with thanks for storms that  
rock life’s rhythms....”

~from the poem, *Illumination*, by Ronda Armstrong, published in *SUMMER: Women’s Writings for the Season of Beauty and Resilience*, edited by Debra Landwehr Engle and Diane Glass

During a year of mounting medical concerns, joining with Iowa authors at a local bookstore to read our contributions to the book, thrills me. The poem pays tribute to turbulent upheavals that rock us out of ruts and nurture new insights and directions.

Three weeks later, on July 11, 2013, my husband Bill swiftly negotiates traffic, heading toward the emergency room. For weeks we’d been counseled about the possible onset of dreaded fevers, though none emerged. Until now. Even though we had returned home from Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota only a day earlier, we don’t waste time when my temperature spikes over 100.4 degrees.

The emergency physician listens attentively to Bill’s concise description of my longtime history with Carney Triad, a rare tumor syndrome, and the recent difficulties with a blocked bile duct requiring placement of a temporary drain.

“I have lots of questions,” the physician says. “This may be serious.” He jots down the name and number of the Mayo physician who placed the drain and disappears to contact him.

He returns. “I reached him. We’re not taking chances. Your white blood count has also risen, so we suspect infection.”

“We could admit you here, or you can return to Rochester by ambulance.”

Bill and I eye each other. With my unusual history and longtime association with Mayo we both say, “Rochester.” Decision made, my husband returns home, preparing to drive himself to Rochester the next day.

Loaded in the transport for the 210 mile ride, I arrive at St. Mary’s Hospital in Rochester at 2:30 a.m.

Though aware a storm might blow in, its power still surprises me. Back home after more procedures, treatment, and a week’s hospital stay, I mull over the storm’s meaning within the rhythmical weather of life.

## My Storms

Jan Golden, Largo FL  
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I'm really scared. My twenty-nine year old daughter, Jill, is terminally ill and I am leaving Grand Cayman on Monday, to see her in Boston. Then I hear the news bulletin. We are in the path of Hurricane Gilbert.

"Jan, its Bob. I'm tracking this hurricane now a category five; it just hit Jamaica with 175 mph winds. There has been wide spread devastation. You better pack up and get to the airport now. Expats are evacuating and the airport will shut down after the last flight to Miami at 10 p.m."

My house is in danger. But so is my daughter. I'm being chased by two storms, out of the hurricane and into the eye of my daughter's storm.

Can I make it? Panic grips my body.

I got one of the last seats! In Miami some news filters in: Cayman Kai Resort and Rum Point are gone. Wiped out. Both are very near my house.

At Massachusetts General Hospital I take my daughter into my arms, her bony frame relays the devastation of her illness. Please God, I can't lose her. Dark thoughts swirl around me.

During the next ten days I barely think about what the storm has done to my home; its loss can't compare to my fear of losing my child. Then Jill's storm calms and I'm able to return home. I'm numb. What will I find? It doesn't matter. Jill will die soon, compared to that, what is losing my house, my belongings, my history? Nothing.

Gripping the wheel I make my way toward the North Side of the island, trees and debris strew the road. The power is still out. I tremble with relief when I see it. My house is still standing. Nothing has been damaged; there is only the stench from the rotting food in the refrigerator.

I throw myself on the floor and weep; in gratitude for my home and in terror for my daughter.

Spending over twenty years of my life in the northeast, I experienced a variety of Mother Nature's acts: hurricanes, blizzards, and heat waves.

Yet nothing prepared me for a move to Madison, Wisconsin in 1974.

I had read *The Wizard of Oz* to my children. The awesome power of a tornado developing from a funnel cloud and lifting a person miles high and away was impossible to imagine. Uplifting trees and rooftops also must be a myth or exaggeration.

I was a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin. Driving in rainy or snowy weather was no big deal to this Yankee, but the cold was another matter. By

## Storm Cave

Lorine Andresen, Forest Grove OR  
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In the Midwest where I grew up, there were no sirens to warn us of approaching storms. That job was up to Mom and Dad. Some nights we'd hardly get to sleep before Mom would wake us with an anxious voice, "Go to the cave."

This was a serious order; grab your pillow, the dog, and follow her across the darkened house, down the basement steps and into the storm cave. No giggling or foolishness allowed.

Our cave was underground and beyond the basement walls. The floor, walls and ceiling were concrete. The door was heavy metal kept closed from inside by two crisscrossing bars. At the end of the 10'x8' room was a ladder attached to the wall, which led to a manhole at ground level should the house collapse into the basement and trap us.

Once inside, there was strict routine. My brother and I climbed into our bunked cots and stayed quiet. Mom would light the storm lantern then count noses, ours, and the pets. Dad would bolt the door then climb the escape ladder to check the manhole. Satisfied all was secure he'd lay down on his cot. We'd listen to the wind flapping the vent pipe cover above ground, wondering if we'd shut the barn doors, closed windows, or hooked the chicken house screen. Sometimes we'd tell stories or just listen to the powerful storm raging above us. Dad often wondered aloud if there would be a corn crop left in the morning.

I liked cave nights. It was exciting to hear the storm above and fun to snuggle under the covers with my dog, Jiggs. He wasn't allowed on my regular bed upstairs. Most of all I felt safe. And, I knew if the storm lasted awhile we'd check the food shelves. There would be home canned peaches and cookies from Mom's magic tin to comfort us.

Sometimes storms come from nature, sometimes from life's circumstances. No matter where they originate, it is good to have a safe, comfortable storm cave with those we love surrounding us.

## You're Not in Brooklyn Anymore

Abby November, Austin TX  
Judith Helburn Writing Circle

October, I was garbed in all my warmest items. My family and I were driving home one evening when the wail of tornado sirens began. We drove faster hoping it was a test. I was both afraid and excited to check the validity of the myth. As my husband clenched the wheel of our little green Ford Pinto, I glanced out the rear window and saw a funnel cloud touch down far behind us. I said nothing, not wanting to scare the kids or my husband. We sped up, then eased as close to a ditch as possible, parked, and waited. Our Pinto trembled. Silence. We looked behind us and saw missing roof tops on the far side; our side was untouched.

Restarting the car, we realized we had added tornado to our adventures. And the knowledge that, indeed, the myth is a reality.

## Storm at Sea

Janice Kvale, Austin TX, [janicekvale@yahoo.com](mailto:janicekvale@yahoo.com),  
<http://vegemite-ales.blogspot.com>, w-ecircle 6, r-ecircle 1

We knew our Antarctic itinerary was weather dependent. However, no one imagined how violent storms could be in the Southern Ocean. Now, a spectacular Antarctic storm rages. The ship bucks, pitches, rolls, and twists. We are sent to our bunks and struggle to remain in them. A crewman checks the port hole in every cabin.

In the morning, we are forbidden to go out on dangerously slippery decks. My roommate, Suzanne, has taken to her bed seasick and eats a little of what I bring her from the dining room. My appetite takes no holiday despite the storm.

The morning activity is a briefing on the storm and the plans to get us out of this rough sea. Few passengers show up. Nathan explains that we are seeking only to stay safe and find shelter from the storm. Low pressure dominates over the South Pole, so we are in this weather system until that changes.

“This is part of the Antarctic experience,” he says. Adam gives an illustrated talk on penguins, followed by a documentary. We are being kept occupied.

Clutching hand rails and using a wide sea-leg stance, I make my way three flights up to the Bridge. An orange-suited Russian helmsman grimly stares out the windows while guiding the ship in a roiling ocean. Windows on all three sides are covered with ocean spray. The sea is gray with peaks, troughs, and swells of at least five meters. I take pictures from an open door; stepping out would be foolhardy. I get a video of a terrific wave that washes five stories high right over the window in front of me.

Later our ship anchors back in relatively calm Commonwealth Bay, a relief to all those who took to their beds sedated with sea sickness drugs.

The next morning the ocean is calm. Bundled into winter wear and rubber Wellingtons, I venture carefully out on the Main Deck. In the brilliant sun, a coat of crystalline ice reflects rainbow shades over the entire ship. It has become a fairy ship. The storm is over.

On January 11, 2010, a storm began for me. I failed to notice the signs that warned me of flooding ahead. Eventually, I hit a slippery section in the pavement.

There was fog. But as I looked ahead, I could still see that I was entering a downpour.

I searched for shelter. But all around me, there was destruction. As the winds began to beat harder all around me, I began to lose sight of those who I felt could help me. The harder the downpour, the cloudier were the people before me.

I lost so much in this storm—my home, my car, my family, even my fiancé.

I weathered the storm, constantly wondering when the calm would come. The winds would die down, and I would

## Heroine in the Whirlwind

Gloria Ramirez, Lockhart TX

Childhood comes with many wonders, like a fascination with superheroes. As a child, I was told a story that made me feel like I was born to one.

I am new in the world, enjoying a day in my special waters, naked in my mother’s womb. I picture her, a pretty Mexican woman who is 29. In one hand, she carries groceries. In the other, she holds the hand of my beautifully bright older brother.

Perhaps she is telling him the importance of manners and of minding his elders. Easily distracted to playfully shoo bugs, he tugs his hand free. In innocent youth, he carelessly runs into the street, when suddenly a whirlwind in the shape of a car and a drunken driver appears, out of control and headed for the very reason my mother breathes.

In my safe, warm pool, I feel a jolt. What is it? Awareness. She sees the danger that threatens her son and her sanity if she does not reach him in time.

Like an Olympic gold runner, she is off. I feel every heel-to-toe stride she makes to save her loved one.

Instantly, I feel safe too. She is Wonder Woman! I feel her relief as her hand makes contact with my brother’s back, pushing him out of the way. But then I’m struck with the blow she feels on her side. What is this? Pain. An overload of pain. I hurt too, mostly from wanting her to be okay.

Others arrive and take her to be treated. I feel her need to place her sight on her son, to know he is alright. It is the only way she will be able to rest.

Hours pass, then I see a light.

No longer in the comfort of my pool, I cry. Where is my Wonder Woman? Eager arms grab for me. Yes, it is her! Amazed at her love, I feel even more comfort than I felt in my special waters. As we drift off to sleep, all I can think is: “Thank you, God, for my heroine in the whirlwind.”

## Through the Storm

Shunta Bailey, Lockhart TX

see a sliver of sun. But as quickly as the sun would come, so would the lightning and thunder.

Day after day, night after night, I watched as more and more destruction gathered around me.

But through it all, the storm never took me under.

The day finally came when the sun shone bright and there were no more clouds in my view. I looked around and noticed I hadn’t lost absolutely everything, and I realized there were others near me who had survived their own storms.

We were there for one another, and through the storms, we had gained the power to stand.

I weathered my life before I entered prison. In here, I can finally relish the calm.

## The Avalanche

Sara Fernandez, Lockhart TX

It is wintertime. To be more accurate, it is the day after Christmas 2008. I wake up close to 9:30 a.m., after having a nightmare. I lie there, next to my significant, trembling at the thought of snakes attacking me.

I pull myself together before climbing out of bed to tend to my daughter, Trinity, who has been vomiting since Christmas Eve. I come out of my bedroom and see my oldest and my step-daughter eating cereal. I ask if her baby sister is awake yet. She tells me no. I proceed to Trinity's room.

My child is not breathing.

All I can hear is my own voice. I am screaming at the top of my lungs. I feel nothing and everything at one moment's time. To begin CPR, as the dispatcher is prompting me to do, is unreal. I just know I am going to wake up at any moment. Somehow, my nightmare must not have ended.

Suddenly, the avalanche of reality hits me. I am suffocating. I cannot dig my way out. I cannot breathe.

As time has passed, that avalanche has slowly begun to melt. It has turned into water, filling me with remorse but also with an understanding of the precious value that one life can bring to another human being.

What surrounds me now is the memory of Trinity's sweet, angelic face. The clearing of the water has brought peace and an understanding that her journey was completed. Mine must begin again.

## Surviving the Storms to Discover the Calm

Lutricia Youngblood-Smooths, Lockhart TX

My storm was the thunderstorm of addiction. Ironically, the thunderstorm spawned much worse after I stopped using drugs every day.

I faced hailstorms of confused days—not knowing why I was still trying to stay clean, not knowing that the wiser me was trying to break out, break through.

I searched and searched for the calm that had eluded me most of my life. Finally, a rainstorm came my way, clearing my view. I put on my boots, went out, stretched my hands toward the sky, and reached out to claim my restoration.

But my precious rain did not last. Instead, it transformed into a hurricane. I lost everything I had earned and possessed. Eventually, I was homeless, with no car, no job, no friends. I was estranged from my children and the rest of my family.

The calm finally came when I found myself incarcerated in the Lockhart unit, especially when I started working as an animal caretaker and trainer for the Paws in Prison program.

My calm came in the form of Dusty. I have learned humility, compassion, and hope as I have cared for this dog.

*Guess what?* I saw a rainbow today as I was taking Dusty for a walk.

## Flying Apple Storm

Bonnie Watkins, Austin TX  
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PJ Pierce's Wordweavers Writing Circle

Five grandfather clocks. My father-in-law, "Tid," built one for each child and himself. To add to this amazing feat, he brought the clock to us in the car, when my husband and I were stationed in California and they lived in Texas. Because it was too long to fit in the trunk or the back seat, he placed the clock lengthwise in the car, resting one end on the dashboard and the other on the space near the rear window, between him and my mother-in-law.

She laughed, "If one of us needed to stop, we just knocked on the clock."

Needless to say, this clock was one of our most treasured heirlooms. Its delicate parts and glass door weathered every military move we ever made.

One day, I lost my temper in a storm of anger. Off on a tirade in the kitchen, probably because no one was helping me and we were all starving and grumpy, I was cooking and reached for an apple from the fridge. Slamming the door, I threw the apple hard onto the kitchen counter. Our open kitchen connects to the family room with no wall between.

That apple went airborne, flew across the entire family room at jet propulsion speed, and hit with target accuracy on the long, thin glass door that housed the weights, chains, and chimes of Tid's clock. The door shattered with a jingle-jangle clang that didn't sound like Westminster chimes.

Dumbfounded, my tirade stopped mid-sentence. To my husband's great credit, sitting in the family room reading a book, he looked up wordlessly and then back down at his book. Our sons waited for the storm to pass and then slunk out of the room just in case their insane mom could irrationally find some way to blame them.

Thankfully, the clock was not damaged, and some nice folks at a local glass store replaced the broken piece perfectly for a nominal fee. Today, far removed from the event, we can all laugh about the day of the flying apple storm.

## Fire Storms

Bette J. Lafferty, Valrico FL  
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Bloomington/Florida Writing Circle

Contentment  
Conflict,  
Brushed aside, forgotten,  
Yet smoldering.

Firestorms,  
Yelling,  
Screaming,  
Vomiting.

Think,  
Reason,  
Breathe deep.

Think again,  
Hear the words,  
Separate the action.

Cry for help,  
Silence,  
Then laughter comes.

The pressure eased,  
Peace returns,  
Until the next wave.



From the Blogs:

# One Woman's Day

by Linda Hoyer



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

Three years ago I was sitting in my lawn swing on a sultry summer afternoon reading the stories of women's lives. I was honored that year to be one of the second-round judges in Story Circle's Lifewriting Competition and was captivated by the stories I was reading. The topic that year was "Letting Go" and, as you can imagine, the stories were as rich and diverse as the talented women who had written them.

As I read these stories and experienced a glimpse into the lives of the authors, I wondered about stories my mother or grandmother might write about a day in their life and what a treasure it would be to have those stories written down to be cherished and shared.

I conceived an idea for a blog where we could give opportunity for women to share the stories about a day in their life. After a time of refining the idea, getting input from others, gaining the necessary approvals, soliciting posts, and developing the site, on January 1, 2011, "One Woman's Day" published its very first post by Stephanie Barko. Since then, "One Woman's Day" has been honored to give voice to sixty-five Story Circle Network members, in a total of 144 posts that have been read by readers all over the world!

And the stories! Ah, the stories we've told. We've laughed at tales of mishaps like that of Sally Jean Brudos's "Caution." We've been awe at tales of medical miracles

like "A Beautiful Cornea," by Mary Jo Doig; and we've wept at stories of loss like that shared by Patricia Roop Hollinger in "The 'Ring' of Death." We've been privileged to introduce readers to Story Circle Members and link back to their own blogs like Cathy Scibelli's "The Iconic Muse" and Letty Watt's "Literally Letty." But mostly, we've just enjoyed reading the stories about a day in the life of another woman and providing a venue for members to share their stories.

One thing we've learned over the past three years is that, though our lifestyles may be diverse, we can usually find something in common with another person once we hear their story. This is the gift of storytelling and "One Woman's Day" is a way of sharing the gift of your story with others.

It has been a pleasure for me to work with "One Woman's Day" co-coordinator Laurinda Wheeler to present your stories. We thank you for sharing them and look forward to many more. You can submit your own post to One Woman's Day via our submission page at <http://onewomansday.wordpress.com/about/>.

*Linda Hoyer is a writer, editor, adoptee, a somewhat-fanatical grandma, and author of Two Hearts: An Adoptee's Journey Through Grief to Gratitude. You can catch up with her at A Slice of Life Writing at <http://www.lindahoyer.com>.*



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## Circles: The Heart of Story Circle Network

# Connect

by Nancy J. Wurlitzer



"Do well for yourselves, but also consider doing good for your community and our world."

—Christiane Amanpour

The Story Circle inquiries have been so interesting these last few months! There are people joining from all over the country. Just in these last few months I have heard from ladies in Texas, Utah, South Dakota, California, Vermont, Arkansas, Washington, South Carolina, Ontario, New Jersey & Florida.

We average at least 10 new members a month. Many are new to connecting online, some have never written a book, some have already written a little or a lot and some are already authors, and others have qualifications to teach online classes!

I contact all these new members and give them information on the options to start or join a story circle in their area or to join an online story circle. I check their qualifications and their other listed interests so I can recommend other options, according to their background and interests, and connect them to the information on our website or with the correct person within Story Circle.

Many of the inquiries I receive have interests in going to our Story Circle Conference, so I send them the information on how to connect and keep updated on all the options available to them and encourage them to visit our

website often at [www.storycircle.org](http://www.storycircle.org). I've had people who want to do book reviews, start a story circle, teach classes, or take classes. I've heard from those who have never written anything at all and need or want to start, and already-published authors looking to connect with others! It is so interesting to hear from all these interesting women!

Leading a circle or belonging to a local group or an online group may seem a little intimidating, but you will find that you can become a much better writer, make many friends, and become more active in the Story Circle Network. Even if you cannot commit to a specific day or time, that's okay, too. There are some groups who connect only online, and you can log in and participate on your time available schedule. The rewards are truly satisfying. Please don't hesitate to contact me directly by e-mail if you have further questions. I am here to assist in any way possible.

So, get involved, take that step, give it a try. You'll be so glad you did!

Nancy J. Wurlitzer  
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## Take A Bow!

# Laura Hulka

by Pat Bean

All you have to do is mention the word “book,” and Laura Hulka’s face crinkles into a big smile and her eyes take on a sparkle that speaks volumes about this woman’s love of the written page. Even her e-mail moniker – readerwoman – and blog name – Readerwoman Redux – shout this woman’s passion for books.

After family, books top Laura’s list of the most important thing in life. But this SCN Board member also has a strong desire to empower women to write their own stories.

Laura is a native Californian who attended four colleges but came away without a degree, probably because, as she puts it: “I could never decide what I wanted to be when I grew up.” She’s been married to the same man, the love-of-her-life, for almost 40 years, and the two of them have two children and two grandchildren.

“I’ve made lots of bad choices in my life – marrying Ed was not one of them,” she says. But she also admits that “the road hasn’t always been smooth...but we have never stopped looking at each other with smiles, laughing at the absurdities of life, and loving what we have made together.”

Smiling and laughing is also the way Laura faces life. She is an upbeat person who believes each of us has a purpose for being on this earth. “Our job,” she says, “is to find out what that purpose is and then be true to it.” Her outlook on life – to accept what comes and move forward – began to form when she was 26 years old, and her dad died.

“I realized then that every day is a treasure that unfolds, and we need to savor them all.”

One of the things Laura treasures today is her position as co-editor of the Story Circle’s book review team. It was even a book review that Laura did of one of Susan Wittig Albert’s books that led her to Story Circle Network. Now she cheerfully and eagerly reviews books for SCN on a regular basis and manages the book review data base—a very big job.

When not reading, Laura loves to bake and craft and says she is always trying something new. That willingness to accept change in her life has come in handy recently, as she is experiencing apartment living after 38 years of living in a home that sat on lots of land.

Of course if you hadn’t already guessed it, finding room for all her beloved books in her smaller digs is her biggest challenge in the lifestyle move.

Asked what her three favorite books were, she complained that the number was too low, but then rattled off that if she could name only three, they would be “Listening Valley” by D.E. Stevenson, “Locked Rooms” by Laurie King, and “Thyme of Death” by our own Susan Wittig Albert.

Despite not having been raised during the age of the computers and the Internet, Laura has become one of the computer-savvy among us. She goes so far as to express thankfulness for the way the Web has allowed her to keep close in contact with loved ones and friends, and perhaps even play a game of Scrabble with some of them on Facebook. She follows several bloggers regularly, saying that their stories “enchant me, teach me, and embolden me on my own paths to wisdom and discovery.”

An active voice on SCN’s LifeWriter’s chat group, Laura constantly shares her upbeat thoughts and encouraging words with others. And she finds this group of “unapologetic women ...(who are) devoted to words, to reaching out to others, and expressing themselves so as to enrich the lives of readers and other writers” to be one of the most rewarding things about belonging to Story Circle Network.

But then, this book lover could have been describing herself when she talked about these strong women she so admires -- which is why SCN says: “Take a bow Laura Hulka.”



## Fall 2013 LifeWriting Classes for Women

### Memoir and Lifewriting:

- ◆ Writing the Essence: Memoir in Poetry and Flash Nonfiction (September 30-November 11, 2013)
- ◆ Holiday Storytelling: Start a New Tradition (October 14-November 11, 2013)
- ◆ What Would Grandma Do? Developing a Personal Legacy (September 16-October 7, 2013)

### Journaling & Self-Discovery:

- ◆ Let Your Characters Journal (September 16-October 14, 2013)
- ◆ Conversion Stories: Exploring Transformation and Change in Personal Memoir (September 23-November 4, 2013)

### Sharpening Skills:

- ◆ Travel Essay Writing: Your Inner Wanderer at Large in the World (September 16-October 28, 2013)
- ◆ The Power of Writing Short: A Class in 'Flash' Fiction/Memoir (September 16-October 21, 2013)

### Poetry:

- ◆ Sacred Poems (September 30-November 11, 2013)
- ◆ Poetry for the Truly Terrified (September 16-October 21, 2013)

### Session 1: Independent Study Program:

September 16-October 14, 2013:

- ◆ Lynn Goodwin
- ◆ Lorraine Mejia

### Session 2: Independent Study Program:

October 14-November 11, 2013:

- ◆ Lynn Goodwin
- ◆ Lorraine Mejia



*Sarton Memoir Award*

## Sarton Memoir Award Honoring Women's Lives

The award is named in honor of May Sarton (1912-1995), distinguished American poet, novelist, and author of twelve memoirs and journals. It is sponsored by the Story Circle Network.

### 2012 Winner

#### **Monica Wood**

*When We Were the Kennedys* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012). 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.

### About the 2013 Award

The winner of the 2013 award will be announced on the Story Circle Network websites and to its extensive email list in April, 2014 (in April of even-numbered years, our current & previous years' winners will be invited to attend and be honored at Stories from the Heart, the biannual SCN National Memoir Conference, Austin TX).

Want to enter your memoir? Visit the website for full details:

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



## Stories from the Heart VII Conference News

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### Call For Exhibitors: Works of Heart Marketplace

*Call for Exhibitors deadline:  
March 1, 2014*

We welcome exhibitors (including small publishers) who would like to sell books that they have written or published, paper products, print-related services, writing-related items, and hand-crafted items of interest to women.

We have a limited number of tables available in a reserved "shopping area" for Friday-Saturday, April 13-14. Exhibitors must be members of SCN. (To join, click the button in the Exhibitor Application at the link below: "I want to join now & pay the annual dues of \$45")

Apply early! Postmarks will be considered when assigning table location to accepted artists. Application deadline: 03/01/2014

<http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/callforvendors.php>

### Volunteers Needed!

Want to take on a responsibility that might actually be fun? One that directly affects SCN's ability to put on this phenomenal conference? Volunteers are being accepted now for our April 2014 Stories from the Heart VII, SCN's seventh national women's memoir conference. Contact our volunteer coordinator at [confvolunteers@storycircle.org](mailto:confvolunteers@storycircle.org) to get your name on the roster of volunteers.

Assignments range from working the exhibitors room, registration, sales, open mike, story wall, scrapbook, heart-to-heart coaching sessions, and that all encompassing duty known as floater. You'll be assigned a wonderful job and should be prepared to serve a mere two-hour shift. Assignments, times and contacts will be given to you in March.

Please contact us by email at [confvolunteers@storycircle.org](mailto:confvolunteers@storycircle.org), the earlier the better. We're making up our schedule NOW and we don't want to leave you out. So please volunteer before you forget it!

NOTE: We are looking for a volunteer to record some/all of the conference sessions, so that those who cannot attend can watch online after the conference.

### Call For Donations: Silent Auction, Door Prizes, and Gift Bags

*Call for Donations deadline:  
April 10, 2014*

We are looking for donations for our upcoming women's memoir conference. We need items for our Silent Auction and door prizes that will be given during the luncheons. If you can help out by making a donation, please fill out the form at [http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/callfordonations\\_ad.php](http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/callfordonations_ad.php). If you have more than one donation to make, please fill out a separate form for each item.

We're looking for unique, interesting, and artful items that demonstrate the artist's creativity and help us raise money for SCN. If you have something you'd like to donate, please tell us about it, and send us a photo! (You don't have to be an SCN member to contribute.)

#### Silent Auction Items & Door Prizes

Some examples of the donations we are looking for: paintings, handcrafted stationery, jewelry, hand knitted items, fabric art, etc. Also welcome would be copies of your latest published book and gift certificates for services such as workshops, massage, editing. This is a good opportunity to showcase your talent and help the Story Circle Network continue to encourage and inspire women with stories to tell.

#### Gift Bag Items

We welcome pens, pencils, small notebooks, merchandise coupons, cosmetics samples, commercial product samples, etc, appropriate for the use of women with a special interest in writing and documenting personal and family stories. Our committee reviews and approves gift bag contributions, in order to avoid duplication or the inclusion of inappropriate items. We expect approximately 125 attendees; gift bags are given to all 2- and 3-day conference attendees.

We will display your photos and info about auction and door prize donations on our Silent Auction page at <http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/silentauction.shtml>. SCN is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Your gifts are tax-deductible to the extent allowable by law.

Email a high-resolution, jpg or gif formatted photo of the item to [storycircle@storycircle.org](mailto:storycircle@storycircle.org). We would love to have a photo of the artist/creator/donor, too, if at all possible, to personalize the item.

## Conference News Continued

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### Story Wall & Heart-to-Heart Table

We'll have a section of wall set aside where we can all post stories, photos, and other goodies that tell something about ourselves. Be sure to bring anything you'd like to post. You can take it home with you, or (better yet!) bequeath it to our creative Scrapbook Maven, Linda Wisniewski, who is in charge of the Stories From the Heart Scrapbook.

**NOTE for the Story Wall:** We'd like to create a Story Wall to introduce ourselves. For those who would like to participate, please bring a short introduction of yourself. Here's one way you can do this: set a timer for 3 minutes and write whatever you feel is important for us to know about you. Then polish it up a bit (type, if possible). Bring it and, if you like, a current photo of yourself. In addition to your written introduction and your photo, you may also want to bring a postable item that illustrates a part of your story. (This might be something you've created, a different photo, a newspaper clipping, or a symbol.)

**NOTE for the Heart-to-Heart Table:** Do you have some brochures, descriptive literature, or cards that you'd like to share with other conference participants? We'll have a table set aside for this use. Bring up to 100 copies of one or two items for the table. (If there are any left, be sure to take them home with you.) Conference registrants only.

<http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/>

### Story-Telling From the Heart: Open Mike Saturday Night, Live, in Austin Texas

It's Saturday night in Austin TX—what would you like to do after you've enjoyed a fine dinner at one of Austin's many great restaurants? Well, you might take in a film, or visit Austin's disco district (the River City is widely known as the Live Music Capital of the World).

Or we could all hang out together and swap stories.

*Swap stories?*

Hey, what a great idea! After all, isn't that what Story Circle is all about? And who has more stories to swap than women—women who have loved and laughed and cried and succeeded and failed and survived and, yes, triumphed! Creative, canny, crafty, clever, courageous women. Women who have lived ordinary, extraordinary, and sometimes downright outrageous lives!

So for Saturday night's entertainment, we offer you—ta da! (a flourish of trumpets and rattle of drums, please)—an open mike!

And all you have to bring is you, and your story. Maybe it's a piece you've already shared with your Story Circle, or a poem or two that you've just finished, or a short autobiographical fiction piece. Maybe it's a story to be sung, or danced (if you need music, let us know ahead of time). Or perhaps you'd like to bring a piece of art that you've made—pottery, painting, textile, whatever—and tell us how and why it is part of your story. The sky's the limit, gals, and the only thing we have to fear (as some famous man said once) is fear itself. So let's see how many different stories, and how many different ways to tell a story, we can all come up with.

### 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.

<http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/frmpresenter.php>



## Internet Chapter:

# Third Places

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."

Author Wendy Welch (*The Little Bookstore of Big Stone Gap*) writes "Third places are those needed spaces, neither home nor work, where we are known by our names and valued for being whatever we decide to be – the clown, the intellectual, the quiet person ... having a place where you don't have to be anything to anyone makes a pleasant breather." For Wendy, The Little Bookstore of Big Stone Gap (not only the title of the book but also the name of Welch's used book store in Big Stone Gap, Virginia) had become such a "third place."

As I pondered what Welch wrote, I realized that Story Circle's Internet Chapter is my "third place." And, I'd venture to guess that it is just that for many of our members. Actually, Story Circle's Internet Chapter is probably the ultimate in "third place" environments. The big difference between Story Circle and Welch's bookstore is that our "third place" is a virtual one.

Many women who join Story Circle Network's Internet Chapter do so in the hopes that they will find a place where they feel safe to share their personal writing. Before I joined SCN I was one of those writers who never felt my writing was never good enough to let anyone read. I wrote and wrote and wrote. Then my writings were tucked away – safe from the prying eyes of family. Friends would say, "I'd love to read what you've written." And my standard reply was, "Maybe someday." But someday never happened.

Then I took a creative writing class at a local college. My final exam took the form of submitting a first draft of the first chapter of a proposed book. My professor gave me the only A in the class, said she loved it, and told me she wanted to be the first to read the final manuscript.

Riding the waves of self-confidence and creative energy, I took a very uncharacteristic [for me] plunge. I joined Story Circle Network's Internet Chapter. All of a sudden I was part of a writing e-circle filled with women I'd never met – and probably never would meet. Somehow, that felt much safer than sharing with my family or co-workers. The first couple of months, I was more than a wee bit anxious as I hit the "SEND" button. I worried if what I'd written would measure up to everyone else's standards. I wondered what the other women would think of this novice writer's musings. Eventually, however, I realized that the women of my circle were warm, encouraging, nurturing, and supportive. And just for the record, over the years, I've met several of those women – the very ones that I was oh-so-certain I'd never meet. Meeting them has not lowered my level of comfort with sharing my writings with them. If anything, it has made for an even stronger connection.

Over the many years that I've written here at Story Circle, I've written prose and poetry. I've written deeply personal, serious pieces. Other times, I've written whimsical pieces that border on clowning-around. No matter the form of the writing, no matter whether it is funny or heart-wrenchingly serious, my writing has never been anything other than true to myself. And it is the circle environment that makes it okay for me to remain true to myself and still share my writing.

SCN's Internet Chapter has become my needed space – neither home nor work – where I am known by my name and valued for being who I am. I know that the same thing is true for many of our members. It's part of the magic that it is a wonderful safe place for the women who come together to write and share their life stories.

"As much as we live in a place, we live in place; we inhabit a condition of the soul. We live where we have made definitions, and in the process of making definitions, we create a place in which to live."

—Sallie Tisdale

# Stories from the Heart VII Registration Form

Send this form with your check to:  
Conference Registration, Story Circle Network  
PO Box 500127, Austin TX 78750.  
To register online and use your credit card, go to  
[www.storycircle.org/Conference/frmregister.php](http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/frmregister.php)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Current Member of Story Circle?  yes  no

Registration Type		Early Registration (through 2/11/14) member/non-member	Regular Registration (2/12/14 to 4/01/14) member/non-member	Late Registration (after 4/01/14) member/non-member	Amt Due
<input type="checkbox"/> Full Registration (Fri keynote / Sat / Sun)		\$260/\$310	\$285/\$335	\$310/\$360	
Partial Registration (please check all that apply):	<input type="checkbox"/> Friday (Keynote/ dessert reception)	\$35	\$40	\$45	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Saturday only (includes lunch)	\$128/\$153	\$138/\$163	\$148/\$173	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Saturday lunch only	\$35	\$40	**	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Sunday only (includes lunch)	\$97/\$122	\$107/\$132	\$117/\$142	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Sunday lunch only	\$35	\$40	**	
Friday Pre-Conference Workshop (Not included in full registration: optional, extra charge.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Noon-1:45 pm session	\$30	\$35	\$40	
	<input type="checkbox"/> 2-3:45 pm session				
Saturday/Sunday lunch preference: <input type="checkbox"/> chicken <input type="checkbox"/> vegetarian				Total due:	

What is included in my full registration fees?

- All General Sessions
- Workshop Sessions
- Friday Evening Keynote Address & Dessert Reception
- Two Meals (Sat. & Sun. lunch)
- Refreshments/Snacks
- Plus Informal Sessions and Networking

What is not included in my full registration fees?

- Optional Friday Pre-Conference Workshops
- Hotel rooms are not included. Contact the hotel to reserve your room.

Male guests are welcome at our three public events: the keynote address and the Saturday and Sunday lunches. Our conference sessions are designed for women only.

\* Non-Members who choose to join prior to the end of the conference on Sunday, April 13, 2014 will have a portion of their registration fee applied to their dues.

\*\* You MUST register for lunches by April 1, 2014! Registrations for these events will NOT be accepted at the door.

Refund Policy: Cancellations are accepted until March 11, 2014, and are subject to a cancellation fee of \$50 for a full conference registration or \$25 for a one-day registration. No refunds after March 11, 2014.

Story Circle Network, Inc.  
PO Box 500127  
Austin TX 78750-0127

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

*Check out the conference news on*  
*pages 24 and 25. Registration form*  
*on page 27.*

## 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:**

- December, 2013 (due Oct 15)—A Winter Gift
- March, 2014 (due Jan 15)—Action
- June, 2014 (due April 15)—Clutter
- September, 2014 (due July 15)—Grace
- December, 2014 (due Oct 15)—Friendship

## ADVERTISE YOUR BOOK

on SCN's Websites! Targeted audience, low-cost  
advertising:

**[storycircle.org/frmadvertising.php](http://storycircle.org/frmadvertising.php)**