



STORY CIRCLE JOURNAL

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The newsletter for women with stories to tell



Sarton Memoir Award

In 2010, SCN established the Sarton Memoir Award, a literary competition named for May Sarton (1912-1995), distinguished American poet, novelist, and author of twelve outstanding memoirs and journals. The award program was designed by a team of Story Circle past presidents and approved by the Story Circle board of directors. Paula Yost and Susan Albert serve as program coordinators. Two teams of judges (one group of Story Circle members, another group of professional librarians not affiliated with Story Circle)

volunteer to read and evaluate the submissions. For information about entering your memoir in the competition, visit <http://www.storycircle.org/SartonMemoirAward/>.

Story Circle Network just completed its third cycle of honoring an outstanding author with the Sarton Memoir Award. We have named four memoirs since beginning the award; and this year, we also named three finalists. Each is an outstanding example of women's memoir, an inspiration to readers, and a demonstration of the way women's stories document the private and public lives every woman lives. We believe that May Sarton would be especially proud of these fine books.

2013 Winner:

Tanya Ward Goodman, *Leaving Tinkertown*

Beautifully crafted and compassionate, this daughter's tale is the story of a father's early-onset dementia and the tragedy and unexpected comedy of caring for a funny, stubborn man who remained a talented artist even as he changed before his family's eyes. One of our judges commented: "This book clung to me as I read it; I couldn't bear to put it down." (Read Lisa Shirah-Hiers interview with Tanya, beginning on page 8 of this issue.)

2013 Finalists:

Laura Gray-Rosendale, *College Girl*

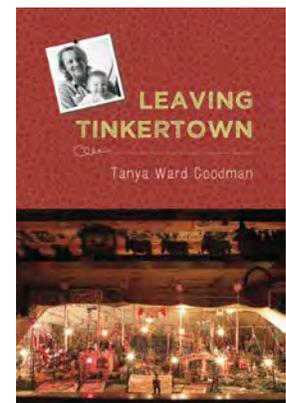
A university professor revisits the memory of a brutal sexual assault and recounts her long, circuitous route from trauma to recovery. A compelling memoir of trauma and recovery.

Carole Garibaldi Rogers, *Hidden Lives: My Three Grandmothers*

The search for the past through three immigrant families—one Jewish, one German, and one Italian. In each of these narratives, the central character is a woman—the author's grandmother—without power and without voice.

Kayann Short, *A Bushel's Worth: An Ecobiography*

A story of land and family that explores the author's farm roots from her grandparents' North Dakota homesteads to her own organic, community-supported farm, where small-scale, local agriculture borrows lessons of the past to cultivate sustainable communities for the future.



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Letter From SCN's President—



Dear SCN Sisters,

My memoir work is progressing rapidly due to the inspiration and expertise I gathered at Stories From the Heart. Talking with other women who are committed to telling their stories completely re-energized me. Thank you to Peggy Moody and Jeanne Guy for their leadership and commitment, and to all the presenters, volunteers, and attendees for creating a magical weekend. My wish is that each and every one of you can attend in 2016.

We are accepting submissions for our Susan Wittig Albert Lifewriting Competition now.

Please do submit. This is a tremendous opportunity to compete for an award. Go to our website and read past winning submissions for inspiration. This year's topic is Balance, a struggle for many of us. Write, revise, submit!

I also want to take a moment and thank all our circle leaders. I appreciate your efforts to keep each circle vibrant and productive.

It's so lovely to have these long periods of daylight. I'm spending time out on my deck with an ice cold glass of tea and my laptop or journal, writing away. I hope your writing is going well.

~Jude Whelley

"The healing that can grow out of the simple act of telling our stories is often quite remarkable. Even more remarkably, this healing is not just our own healing, it is the healing of all women. That's why, as we tell our stories to ourselves, it is also important to share them with others. This sharing brings a sense of kinship, of sisterhood. We understand that we are not alone in our efforts to become conscious, whole, healthy persons."

~Susan Wittig Albert



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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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.

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2012 Winner

Monica Wood, *When We Were the Kennedys*

The memoir 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.

2011 Winners

Leila Levinson, *Gated Grief: The Daughter of a GI Concentration Camp Liberator Discovers a Legacy of Trauma*

After the death of her father, a WWII U.S. Army doctor, Levinson discovers a concealed box of shocking photographs he had taken of a Nazi slave labor camp. *Gated Grief* reveals how unspoken memories and unshared stories can haunt us and speaks to the power of story to honor and heal the wounds of the past.

Jamie Patterson, *Lost Edens: A True Story*

Lost Edens is a memoir about Patterson's attempts to salvage her marriage. She is convinced that if she only tries harder, she can fix whatever is wrong. Ultimately she realizes that although she can't fix the marriage, she can fix herself. *Lost Edens* helps us understand that changing our stories can help us change our lives.

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



Meet Author & SCN Volunteer, Linda Hoye

Linda Hoye is a writer, a business analyst, adoptee, bibliophile, and somewhat-fanatical grandma. She recently published her memoir, *Two Hearts: An Adoptee's Journey Through Grief to Gratitude* (2012), and is a contributor to *Adoption Voices Magazine*. She lives in the state of Washington with her husband and their two Yorkshire terriers and is counting down the months until she retires from corporate life and moves to Canada to be closer to her grandchildren. You can connect with Linda on her award-winning blog, *A Slice of Life Writing*. (Since this interview, Linda fulfilled her wish of moving to Canada!)

Read Mary Jo Doig's review of *Two Hearts: An Adoptee's Journey through Grief to Gratitude* for StoryCircleBookReviews.org.

Interviewed by Mary Jo Doig

Linda, you were surrendered as a newborn by your birth mother and adopted within months by parents who both loved and supported you unconditionally. While the fact that your family had adopted you was never a secret, threads of secrecy always surrounded the process.

*When you decided to write *Two Hearts*, what did you want your audience to understand about the interior life of an adopted child?*

Some of the early working titles for my book included the words "detached" and "invisible"—words that describe how I felt growing up, still feel at times, and how many other adoptees feel. I wanted to shed light on the fact that the closed adoption system negatively impacts the psyche of the adoptee by putting them in a position of having to live under an unintentional umbrella of shame and secrecy. Asking a child to pretend to be someone they are not (the natural child of the adoptive parents) and to consciously or unconsciously forbid them to express curiosity about the tribe they were born into causes the child to have a sense that there is something inherently wrong with them. This sense of being flawed at the core impacts every aspect of

the adoptees life. It's my firm belief that a child deserves to know the truth—when that truth is available—about their family of origin to be able to grow into a healthy fully-functional adult.

Did you always know you would one day write a book about your adoption experience, or was there a particular moment or event in time that caused you to say, "I'm going to write a book?" And, then, what is your hope for this book, the primary reason you wrote it?

I dreamed of being a writer for as long as I can remember—but my dreams were of writing fiction. Life took me down a different path, but the longing to write was never far away and I continued to dabble through the years. It was my now-husband who convinced me that I needed to write a book about my experience as an adoptee. Over the years as I talked with him about how I felt growing up—acting as if I was someone I wasn't and knowing it would be wrong to confess my curiosity about my family of origin—and as I shared with him the deep ache that was still

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Linda Hoye, Continued from page 3

within me, he convinced me I had a story that could be used a tool to help others touched by adoption. It was as I wrote, rewrote, read passages to him, and came to understand how adoption had impacted my life that I developed a passion to get my story out. I want to help other adoptees know they are not alone, to tell adoptive parents how important it is to be open and honest with their adopted children. Perhaps most importantly I want to illustrate, by telling my own story, how an adoptee's need to know about her familial tribe in no way changes the love she had for her adoptive family.

When you began to search for your birth family, you encountered only brick walls, yet over time the adoption environment became much more open. Your book is testament to that fact. What additional changes would you like to see for adoptees in the future?

I'd like to see closed adoption done away with. I'd like to see sealed records of adult adoptees unsealed so they can gain access to their original birth certificates, medical history, and birth family members. I'd like to know that children being adopted today will never have to pretend to be someone they aren't and they will have the opportunity to grow up being mirrored by blood-related family members even while growing up in a loving adoptive home.

There are cases, often in international adoptions, where there is no information about an adoptee's birth family. This is a great tragedy, but educated and understanding adoptive parents can help their child by acknowledging their deep-seated grief over being separated from their birth family and helping them learn about the culture of their birth family.

It all comes down to transparency and honesty.

I sense you are very disciplined. Please tell us how you built writing a book into your busy life as a wife, mother, full-time working professional, blogger, and—as you describe yourself—a somewhat-fanatical grandma? Did you have other needed supports during the months you wrote your memoir?

It took approximately four years for me to write *Two Hearts*. The two things that helped me the most in terms of finding time to write were an understanding and accommodating husband and a flexible work schedule that allowed me to use every second Friday as my writing day.

Sometimes when I was feeling inspired or knew I needed time to finish something, I'd send an email to my husband with one sentence: PID until 6:00 (or whatever time I chose). That let him know I'd be sequestering myself in my office—my "woman cave" as I refer to it—until 6:00 and was not to be disturbed.

PID is our abbreviation for "pretend I'm dead." It's not as macabre as it sounds; it comes from a cartoon we read once together in the Sunday paper. The point is that I asked for what I needed and my husband allowed me that time. There's no way I could have written *Two Hearts* without his support.

During your writing of Two Hearts, did you discover any unexpected personal gifts? If so, would you like to share them?

As I said earlier, I wanted my book to speak to the sense of detachment and disconnection common to many adoptees. It wasn't until I was well into the writing journey that I realized the depth and intensity of the grief I still carried as a result of losing two sets of parents and other family members. Writing the book was a therapeutic and healing experience.

The book bounces in and out of what was present day as I wrote it so I was living sections of the book at the same time as I was writing it. Perhaps the most unexpected and profound gifts that occurred during the time I was writing was having the opportunity to read my adoption file and arriving at a place where I could wear those two gold lockets on a chain around my neck as a symbol of gratitude and healing.

You decided to self-publish Two Hearts. I wonder about three aspects of that decision: First, what led you to that decision and now, with hindsight, do you still feel this has been right for you?

I started down the traditional path to publication with a deliberate plan. There were two specific publishers I intended to target with my book proposal—each one for a different reason. The first expected to have exclusive access to a manuscript while they evaluated it. This process took three months, during which time I did not submit anywhere else. When they, not unexpectedly to me, ultimately rejected my manuscript I immediately pulled out my proposal and query letter and prepared to target the second publisher on my list.

Then I stopped.

I'm a researcher by nature so during the years I was writing *Two Hearts* I was also studying and learning about the publishing landscape and the many options available to writers. As I polished my proposal and prepared to send it out again I had a strong sense that I needed to look closer at self publishing my book. I've become a bit jaded with "big business" and the idea of retaining control over all aspects of the book I had poured so much of myself into was extremely attractive.

Today, as I look back at that decision I know it was the right one for me.

Secondly, as a first-time author, what did you find was the hardest part of your publishing process? Was there any part that was easier than you'd expected? Did you experience any surprises?

As I said, I spent a lot of time educating myself about the self-publishing process so I didn't go in blind. The hardest part? I don't think there was anything that I would classify as being difficult about the process other than finding time to do everything that needed to be done!

Lastly, what sage advice would you have for aspiring authors considering self-publication? Is there anything you would do differently, knowing what you know now?

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The 2014 Susan Wittig Albert LifeWriting Competition

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

This year's topic focuses on **balance**. You may choose to focus on the word as a noun or as a verb but either way there are stories to be told and we look forward to hearing them. Here are some wise words to help you get started:

"Balance is not better time management, but better boundary management. Balance means making choices and enjoying those choices."

—*Betsy Jacobson*

"I always try to balance the light with the heavy: a few tears of human spirit in with the sequins and the fringes."

—*Bette Midler*

"My point is, life is about balance. The good and the bad. The highs and the lows. The pina and the colada."

—*Ellen DeGeneres*

Thank you, Jude Whelley, for this topic.

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

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

How to Enter: All contest entries should be made via the web form, <http://www.storycircle.org/Contests/>

Previous Year's Winners

2013: Family

Jo Virgil, Austin, TX
Karen Dabson, Columbia MO
Denise Jacobs, Baton Rouge LA
Lucy Painter, Sarasota FL

2012: Solitude

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

2011: Courage

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

2010: Letting Go

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

2009: Overcoming Obstacles

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

2008: Evolution and Growth

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

2007: Birthings and Beginnings

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

2006: Truth

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

2005: Womens' Friendships

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

2004: Mothers and Daughters

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

2003: Our Environment

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

2002: Our Identity

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

2001: Pain

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

2000: A Revealing Relationship

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

Read last year's stories here:
<http://www.storycircle.org/Contests/winners.shtml>



Thank you Donna Marie Miller and Jane Steig Parsons for capturing these beautiful smiles at the conference!







Sarton Memoir Award Winner: Tanya Ward Goodman

by Lisa Shirah-Hiers

Tanya Ward Goodman is this year's Sarton Memoir Award winner for *Leaving Tinkertown*, her deeply moving memoir chronicling her return home to the roadside museum, "Tinkertown," where she grew up, in order to care for her father as he battled Alzheimer's disease. Goodman's essays have appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, the "Cup of Comfort" series published by Adams Media, *Literary Mama*, *The Huffington Post*, and *Brain, Child Magazine*. In addition, she has written film and television scripts. She blogs for *TheNextFamily.com*. Lisa Shirah-Hiers interviewed her via email for the *Story Circle Journal*.

SCJ: What is your creative process like?

TWG: I make a lot of daily notes. I tend to keep several notebooks in circulation—a small one in my bag, a pad on my desk and I always have a couple of yellow letter-size legal pads in action. My creative process is a little bit of a mystery—I have a hard time staying focused, so I'm usually working on a bunch of different projects at the same time. I have one folder on my computer that is called "Work on this." That's where I keep the most recent unfinished projects. Though I'd like to say I write every day on a strict schedule, I usually wind up writing for six hours one day and then doing nothing for the next two. I used to beat myself up about that, but I think it's how I operate, so I try to be forgiving.

When I'm deep into a project, I sometimes have this very fleeting feeling that I've lifted off the page and am kind of hovering over the whole thing. I can see all the pieces and understand how they need to fit. It's a wonderful sensation and it seems a little magical, but I know it's actually the result of really knowing my story and being clear on my plan to tell it.

SCJ: Sounds like you've learned that giving yourself permission to have your own, unique creative process is important. What else have you learned about writing in general and memoir in particular?

TWG: [I'd say] write down everything you think and edit it later. Keep your pen or keyboard in action and don't stop to ask "why." The reasons will become clear the more you write.

Writing memoir is writing about real people and actual events; it's very easy for me to stop writing because I'm afraid of hurting someone's feelings. I found it very

important to remember that I was telling my own story. What I saw and felt were unique to me and informed by my experiences. I shared every draft of my book with my family and they honored me by letting almost everything stand. I absolutely adore my family and I worked very hard to make sure that my love for them was never in question.

*SCJ: So you knew that your unique experience was important enough write your own version of events. But why did you decide to publish *Leaving Tinkertown*?*

TWG: I started writing as a way to process my dad's illness. I'd taken a lot of notes when I was living at home with him and after I moved back to Los Angeles I continued to write down everything I remembered about our experience together. Focusing on one memory brought up another and so I'd keep writing to see where the story would take me. The pages started to pile up.

I originally began to write the book for myself as a way to bring my dad back to life. I missed him terribly and writing was a way for me to kind of hang out with him. The first complete section I wrote was about moving my grandmother from Aberdeen to Albuquerque. I wrote it as a stand-alone essay and gave it to a few friends. One of them asked if he could pass it along to someone going through a similar situation. I felt good knowing that my story would keep them company and perhaps offer a bit of relief. From then on, when I wrote, I felt as though my dad was keeping me company and I was returning the favor by doing the same for others.

I learned so much while writing (and continue to learn as the book makes its way into the world.) I learned the value of perseverance, honesty, resilience and compassion. I learned of the vital healing power of a good story.

SCJ: And you realized your story could heal others as well. How did you get your book “into the world” to do that?

TWG: I set up a small online media presence: Facebook, Twitter, GoodReads, Amazon. I tried to keep followers apprised of news about the book. I set up as many readings as I could in Albuquerque and Los Angeles. I threw a book release party in Los Angeles as a fundraiser for the Alzheimer’s Association which was both a lot of fun and a great way to get the book into the hands of a bunch of people. I’ve joined numerous online groups that are focused on Alzheimer’s and try to comment on other blogs and sites and in general be helpful and kind. I hired a publicist to set up some radio interviews. All of these things were helpful. With a small press or a self-published book, it’s really about making personal connections. Whenever my book was reviewed or recommended, I made a point to write to the author and thank them.

SCJ: What are some of things you learned from your dad? What has stuck with you?

TWG: My dad showed me that it’s possible to create your own happiness. He always said, “The show must go on,” and meant it in the true circus way—no matter what happened, try to stand up, put on your sequins and get back on the trapeze. I try to follow this advice as much as I can. I try to move forward with a kind heart and a positive mindset.

SCJ: The circus analogy is so apt because your parents were former “carneys” and your dad still made a living painting carnival rides after they “settled down.” What does that carny life style have to teach others?

TWG: More than anything, the carny life is a lesson in flexibility. When I was traveling with my dad, we slept in the back of the truck or inside a funhouse in our sleeping bags, we ate peanut butter sandwiches or burgers from a local stand, we washed up in truck stop sinks, and still had a great time. I try to instill that kind of flexibility in my own kids. You don’t need a five star hotel and a gourmet meal to have a good time. Be able to eat anything and sleep anywhere and you’re in great shape to see the wonders of life.

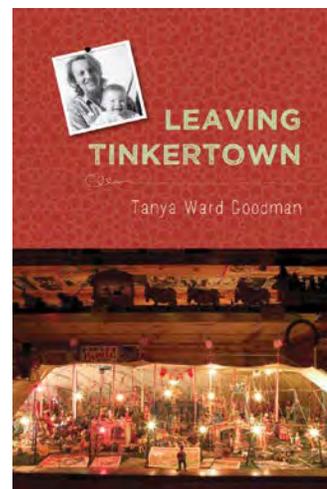
SCJ: And yet as a child you seem to have yearned for a more conventional life that contrasted with your unusual upbringing. You wanted to go to a regular elementary school your parents would have called “straight” where you found the routines comforting.

TWG: I liked structure. I liked things to be neat and tidy. I still do. I’m a bit overwhelmed by clutter and noise. I don’t think I understood how much I needed simplicity until I moved back home to Tinkertown when my Dad was ill. I left the walls in my room blank and it drove my Dad crazy—he was always sneaking in and hanging up a bunch of paintings. When I moved back to Los Angeles, I consciously started to keep a simpler house and it helped me think more clearly.

SCJ: You wrote Leaving Tinkertown in present tense. I thought that might be not only a way of bringing the reader into the story but maybe also a comment on living life in the present—especially when facing the day-to-day realities of life with Alzheimer’s. Was that your intention?

TWG: I love the meaning you brought to the present tense! I wrote in present tense because it helped me feel the story in a deeper way. Part of the difficulty of being a caretaker is that it puts you slightly outside the action—you’re always thinking about the other person, trying to stay two steps ahead, foresee all the challenges, solve all the problems. This makes it hard to be present. For me, writing in the present tense gave me a chance to go back and actually be in my story.

Continue reading on page 10



Quotes from “Leaving Tinkertown”

“Change is blowing in the air like so much desert sand. Something is wrong with Dad, but I don’t know what. I blink my eyes hard against the tears.” P. 18

“I suppose you could say that the upside of Alzheimer’s is that it makes every day seem like a surprise party. Dad seems hyperaware of the world and all its parts, stopping to admire a shiny beetle, a deep red rock, or just the feel of [the dog] Radar’s silky ears across his fingers.” P. 48

“All this time, we’ve been saying that Dad is battling Alzheimer’s. We’ve said it so much that I can close my eyes and see him, sword aloft, fending off the huge snake of forgetting.” P. 145

“I can feel the need to write under my skin. At times it feels like a surface wound and at others like a gnawing ache deep in my flesh. I want to do it, but I often have to force myself. Dad did not have to force himself. He just picked up a brush or pencil or a carving knife and the Angel of Talent was there, waiting for him.” P. 171

“We are all working to connect ourselves to one small detail, one small task so that we will have some tether, no matter how flimsy, keeping us attached to the world. These everyday details are what keep us moored in times of stress and sorrow.” P. 213

Tanya Ward Goodman, Continued from page 9

SCJ: Your dad expressed himself in very tangible ways: the constantly expanding roadside museum with walls he built of concrete and beer bottles, the miniature western “Tinkertown” he hand-carved, and later the tattoos he got symbolizing his most important memories as his Alzheimer’s progressed. What do you think this tells us about your dad and his particular genius?

TWG: My dad was very visual. He could look at a blank wall and see a whole mural. It was amazing to watch him start to paint without even a sketch for guidance. He had it all in his head all the time.

SCJ: I found it especially moving when you described your love of words as you watched your father lose his; you said “losing words for me would be like losing the ability to taste.” Do you think it bothered your dad less because he could still express himself through his art even when words began to fail him? What role does art have in coping with this disease?

TWG: My dad loved words, too. He was a great reader and an amazing storyteller. It was incredibly frustrating for him to lose his words, but I do think he filled in with pictures. He worked through so much of the disease in his paintings and drawings. I think art can be a great therapist, a wonderful guide, an outlet for anger and sorrow and a gift to those left behind.

SCJ: The title, “Leaving Tinkertown” is obviously a lot about leaving home, leaving the caretaker role and going after the life and love you’d left behind in LA. Is it also a

reference to your dad “leaving” as his memory faded, or the hand-carved Tinkertown he left behind when he died?

TWG: The original title of the book was “*Mighty Fond of You, Too*,” which was my Dad’s answer when I told him I loved him. The press asked for a different title—something that referenced Tinkertown—and my editor Beth Hadas, my husband and I started to toss around gerunds. We liked “*Leaving Tinkertown*” because it could mean so many things. As soon as I said it out loud, I knew it was right.

SCJ: Tell me about winning the Sarton Memoir Award. What was the best part of that experience?

TWG: Winning the Sarton Memoir Award was wonderful in so many ways. It was a delightful surprise to pick up the phone and hear Paula Yost’s warm voice deliver such great news. It was lovely to read from my book [at the Story Circle Conference] in front of such an appreciative audience and it was a real pleasure to meet so many terrific women. I was honored to be in such fine company.

SCJ: What are you working on these days?

TWG: I’m working on two novels and a bunch of essays. It’s wonderful to write fiction because I don’t have to worry about the feelings of real people, but I can’t stay away from non-fiction. It’s a way of understanding my life.

If you would like to learn more about Tanya Ward Goodman and her books and events visit her website:

<http://tanyawardgoodman.com/>
[Facebook.com/LeavingTinkertown.com](https://www.facebook.com/LeavingTinkertown.com)

Linda Hoye, Continued from page 4

knowing what to expect. Finally, as exciting as it is to hold that book in your hand for the first time, try not to rush through the process. Enjoy the journey.

As I look back to the tremendous growth I’ve witnessed in the past decade in Story Circle Network’s resources for writers, I feel we are close to being a one-stop shop. Did you use any of our resources to bring your book to fruition? If so, please tell us about your experience.

Yes, I had an excellent editor courtesy of Story Circle Network’s Editorial Service. Kathleen Kelly was invaluable, not only in the nuts-and-bolts of copyediting, but also in helping me find a structure that would work best for my story. She pointed out parts of my manuscript that needed to be fleshed out, clarified, or even cut entirely. I can’t imagine considering a manuscript finished and sending it out to prospective publishers, or even self publishing, without going through the all-import editorial process.

Are you considering writing another book? If so, will it be about adoption or a different topic?

I’ve just started work on a fictional novel loosely based on the life of my (adoptive) grandma who raised three children on her own during the years of the Great

Depression. I may not get deep into this project until I retire from my corporate job though. Writing a book while balancing all I’ve balanced for the past few years is exhausting! Also, I read somewhere that a writer should expect to spend at least two years promoting a book so I’ve still got work ahead of me with *Two Hearts!*

Is there anything else you’d like our readers to know?

I encourage everyone to take the time to write the stories of their lives. It doesn’t have to be a book, even compiling a collection of short vignettes or descriptions about people, places, and experiences, can help you to understand more about yourself and the path your life has taken. Life writing, memoir writing, call it what you will, can be a profound gift to yourself and to your future generations.

Finally, I’d like to thank you, Mary Jo, and everyone involved with Story Circle Network for all that you do to encourage women to write their stories.

And we thank you so much, Linda!

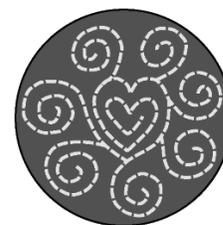


Internet Chapter: Challenges & Celebrations

by Lee Ambrose

In 2015, Story Circle Network's Internet Chapter will turn 15! Look to the SCN Journal, the SCN Monthly e-Newsletter and the SCN Internet Chapter Monthly e-Newsletter over the remainder of this year as we gear up for a grand celebration in print to honor Internet

Chapter founders and its members - past and present.



These are exciting times for all the women of Story Circle Network! In April, many attended the Stories of the Heart Conference. June 1 brought the open submission period for our annual writing competition. And we are on the countdown for the fifteenth anniversary of the Internet Chapter, which began in 2000.

By all reports, the Stories from the Heart Conference was a huge success. It always is! Many hours of preparation and planning went into it. Those who came for the first time were able to experience the thrill of gathering with so many women. And those who were repeat attendees, well...to quote one of them "It just keeps getting better and better every time."

One of the richest experiences for Internet Chapter members who attend the conference is the opportunity to meet in person the women to whom they've drawn close over the many months of sharing online. For some who have attended more than one conference, one of the bittersweet moments was reported to be the realization that a dear departed sister in writing had been in attendance the last time but would not be present this year. These women become our extended family members. The reunions are glorious and the void created by the loss of one so dear is undeniable.

Now, as members of SCN pen their stories for the writing competition, women around the globe are focused on writing to the theme, Balance. And what a grand theme it is for us! In homes here and abroad—and perhaps as in years past, from prisons and schools—women are thinking about and writing about balance. Our writing helps us find balance. Our relationships are forged through efforts to maintain balance. Our balance draws others into our circles and welcomes them as if they have always been part of the family.

What is difficult for some to understand is how women from vastly different backgrounds, cultures, and homelands can become such a cohesive group. We may take it for granted as we bask in the rich relationships that we've cultivated here at SCN. And until someone actually experiences it, it may be difficult to explain to others. I've said it before and I'll say it again, we are "every woman." It matters not where we live, what religion we practice, where we attended school, what our lifestyle preference might be.

There are common threads that bind us together in ways that are uniquely female. Thank goodness that many years ago our founder Susan Albert had the vision for a safe place such as this for all of us to read, write and grow.

I suppose that the growth part of that statement is optional. One could join SCN and choose to sit on the sidelines and not get involved. That would lead to no growth potential. But the thing about SCN is that circle life creates a synergy that is hard to resist. As members share, others do the same. As others do the same, all grow. They grow stronger and more confident in their writing skills. They form bonds that are unbreakable. They begin to experience a heightened sense of self-awareness as well as a deeper sense of community. By taking the first step in a circle—by posting an introduction—the new member opens herself up to a whole new world of women who are waiting with open arms and open hearts to help her become all that she can be. That is the kind of growth that is nurtured by those who have come before her. That is the kind of growth that she will one day help others to realize. That is the beauty of the circles within the SCN Internet Chapter. And it is that beauty that we will be celebrating all through the year 2015 as Internet Chapter turns 15!

"The circle of women around us weave invisible nets of love that carry us when we're weak and sing with us when you're strong." ~ SARK

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or the Writers in Your Life**



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True Words from Real Women

Clutter

A selection of short pieces of lifewriting by our members, edited by Mary Jo Doig. Please be sure that, if your story includes other people, you have not violated any privacy rights, that there is nothing defamatory in it, and that it does not infringe copyright or any other rights. Contribute your own True Words to the Journal. Future topics are listed on page 28.

Paper

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 w-rcircle 1, w-ecircle 4 and 9

Documentation of a life
 codified—
 multiple copies of so many endeavors –
 educational reports and papers
 IRS forms and medical records
 dated, saved and haphazardly filed

more tedious to read than write.
 Budget sheets, birthday cards,
 employment references and licenses
 to marry and own a dog
 mix amid yellowed birth announcements
 and ticket stubs from 2002.

They tell where we've been and
 what we do—help plan
 for a future and remember a past.
 I strive to organize and compartmentalize
 yet different perspectives of different times
 yield inconsistencies in the way I organize.

What once was current may be outdated,
 superfluous and trashed
 in a Spring cleaning spree.
 Others, though old, I persist in preserving,
 their value determined on the basis of
 nostalgic stirrings.

What once was necessary or unique
 may now simply
 be viewed as clutter
 void of any value
 that for some strange reason –
 I keep.

Let It Go

Anna Mae DuCharme, Framingham MA
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Suddenly things that seemed so important just don't
 matter anymore. When you are in pain all you can think of
 is getting through the day...getting through the night.

You see the clutter building up, but you can't address
 it. You have to let it go. You ask yourself, "Does it really
 matter?" A resounding "No!" comes back—when you are
 in pain nothing else matters.

I have always prized being organized and when life is
 "normal," organization is essential and important, at least
 in my view, to be productive.

I'll catch up when I'm well again, but right now it just
 doesn't matter.

What have I learned? ... Let it go if it's not essential.

I used to fear not having everything sorted out and
 organized (photos, writing, etc.) for my family before I die.
 In recent days, I have come to realize that that goal might
 not be achieved before I leave this earthly life.... Let it go,
 knowing you have tried. You have done the best that you
 can.... What isn't done, in many ways, will also be my
 legacy. My loved ones will have to pick up the challenge
 of finishing what I was unable to complete.... if it's
 important to them. If it is not important to them.... Let it
 go, let it go. All is not yours to control. Let it go.



Skeletons in My Closet

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When I retired, my clothes closet became dormant and insignificant—cluttered with useless fabric skeletons. For a while, these fabric skeletons remained silent, but there's something about closets, though, that make skeletons restless. And these skeletons were no different. Soon they began haunting me.

"Set us free!" they moaned from the cluttered darkness.

"Be quiet!" I shouted whenever I walked by.

"You'll never wear us again," they demanded. "Besides we're aging and becoming worthless here in the shadows."

"What if I return to the workplace? I'll need you then. You just never know." I reassured them. "Let's wait and see."

But in the middle of the night their shrill voices woke me. "Please, set us free. We don't need you anymore."

I pulled back the covers, flung open the closet doors, and flipped on the light. "You don't understand. You may not need me," I said as tears trickled down my face, "but I don't think I can live without you!"

"Don't you see?" The skeletons persisted. "You don't need us anymore either!" Then one of them whispered, "I believe you're procrastinating and keeping us here out of fear."

"No I'm not!" I insisted as I turned around, slammed the door, and crawled back into bed. Unable to sleep, I stood up and paced around the bedroom. What if the fabric skeletons were right? Why wouldn't I let them go? What was I afraid of? After a restless, soul-searching night, I realized my retirement frightened me. But why?

Let's face it. Main stream culture doesn't necessarily value retirees. So, my retirement seemed like a one-way ticket to insignificance and disenfranchisement from the culture as a whole. I was afraid of being useless—like the cluttered fabric skeletons in my closet. Eliminating them somehow meant I, too, was useless.

Later that week, I freed most of the fabric skeletons and embraced my retirement. In the process I learned that clutter is a postponed decision and is always about feelings—whatever those feelings might be.

My Wandering Jew from the Methodist Church

Betsy Boyd, Maryville TN
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Andy and I worked really hard to find a church to attend together. He came from a moderate-to-liberal Christian perspective, but left his previous spiritual home following a painful breakup with a woman who remained there. My own spiritual journey took me from Methodism to Unitarian Universalism and into New Thought territory. I was in a Sunday-morning-hanging-out-at-home-with-my-coffee-my-cats-and-Oprah's-Super-Soul-Sunday phase when we started dating, and I couldn't have been more thrilled. I had long thought Andy was cute and funny and had daydreamed about what it would be like to date him, even during times when I was involved with other guys. I desperately wanted this to work, and that meant finding a place where we both felt comfortable worshipping on Sunday mornings.

We spent almost a full year's worth of Sunday mornings traipsing from Methodist to Episcopalian to Lutheran to Presbyterian houses of worship. Everywhere we went we were showered with stuff: coffee mugs from the Presbyterians, pens from the Lutherans, calendars from the Baptists, and even warm, gooey chocolate chip cookies from the Episcopalians. But my favorite acquisition from those ventures was not something any congenial congregant handed to us. It was something I stole: a snippet from a beautiful, lush Wandering Jew plant in the ladies' room at Church Street United Methodist. With only God as my witness, I pinched off a piece, wrapped it in a damp paper towel and squirreled it away in my purse.

An affirmation from one of my favorite spiritual teachers, Louise Hay, asserts, "I release all things that do not serve my highest good: objects, ideas, habits, or relationships." One day I acknowledged something I had long sensed but resisted facing—Andy's and my foray into relationship was a mistake for us both. The search ended. I returned to my New Thought community while he stayed at Church Street, scene of my crime. And all of the stuff we'd collected looking for the illusive common ground went to the Habitat Restore. All, that is, except my Wandering Jew from the Methodist church. It took root and graces my kitchen window...because I love it.

"Give me the discipline to get rid of the stuff that's not important, the freedom to savor the stuff that gives me joy, and the patience not to worry about the stuff that's messy but not hurting anybody."

— Vinita Hampton Wright

clutter

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Clutter defines the last weeks of school. Cluttered desks full of graded or to be graded papers sit there waiting. Cluttered files of project plans to be assessed stand in the corner. Cluttered ideas on how to survive these last few days while maintaining classroom order fill my thoughts.

But there are other forms of clutter to add to these. Clutter in my house is mounting. I will deal with it when

school is out. A clutter of memories dance behind my eyes at night asking *when will you write us*, much like the clutter of my yarn stash saying *when will you knit us?*

Yet, all this clutter reminds me that in the twilight of my life, I am still working, still creating, still involved. So clutter—while it may not be neat, pretty, or useful—reminds me I am still alive and kicking (at the clutter!)

Curb the Clutter

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w-ecircle 9

Clutter is nothing but an unmade decision. A week out from the SCN conference in Austin, my mind is still cluttered with thousands of words, hundreds of images, and countless interactions with other participants. Not to mention an unpacked suitcase (which I stashed out of sight in the guest room), along with books to read, emails to send, notes to decipher, handouts to organize, groceries to buy, a toilet to clean, and a dog to walk. I'm not complaining. The conference was nothing short of terrific. So why am I not in a "no worries" mode today? Is it because I cannot decide which tasks to tackle and which to put aside until tomorrow or later this week? Should I devote a few hours today to research SCN author websites and blogs (I have neither)? Should I sort through handouts and compile the notes that I made during presentations? Or is my time better spent crafting this short piece on clutter? So I silence the cell phone and head to my office where I place my butt in my chair, face a blank screen, and see what comes.

What comes is the satisfaction of taming that voice that shouts, "You should be writing, but first you need to attend to this, that and the other." To counteract those pesky thoughts, I try to follow the advice of novelist, Neil Gaimin, "This is how you do it: you sit down at the keyboard and you put one word after another until it's done. It's that easy, and that hard."

Curb the clutter. Make a decision. Sit down and write.

"Clutter is not just physical stuff. It's old ideas, toxic relationships and bad habits. Clutter is anything that does not support your better self."

— Eleanor Brown

Little-C Big-C

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w-ecircle 14

2012-2013 were life-altering years. We were with our daughter when she gave birth to Ingrid. "We're grandparents!" was heard miles away. After three weeks, we drove home, packed and moved to our daughter's home so we could take care of Ingrid.

Being a full-time grandma was like being a young mom again. When I looked down to the sweetest face in the whole world and sang *You Are My Sunshine* to her, warmth moved all through my body. The days, months, and the year and a half of 4000 diaper changes, watching her do tummy time, sit up, crawl, walk, run, and whisk down the slide went by quickly. After two years on the waiting list, a spot was available for Ingrid at the sought-after nursery school. Tears rolled down my cheeks when we drove back home.

While the movers were unloading, I suddenly felt the need to de-clutter my kitchen and reline the shelves before unpacking. "Why?" I ask now. Plates, pans, and multiple souvenir glasses rest on our kitchen counter, floors, and table. Why did I need four jars of curry, three jars of oregano and five sets of cutlery? I have clutter removal goals each day though they're often unrealistic.

Wait! There is another kind of clutter that I have been dealing with this past year. Clutter in my body. I couldn't think straight after my doctor called. My husband, daughter and son-in law hugged me. The surgeon removed the cancer in my breast. My oncologist saw that the chemotherapy therapy was specific for my cancer. When completed, she ordered daily intake of hormones to prevent the cancer from spreading, though she reminded me: "They are no guarantees." No one can insure that the clutter in my body was removed permanently. No daily goals for this clutter.

I found out there two kinds of clutter: little-c that I can control and Big-C that is managed with medicine. I will take little-c any day. I will fight Big-C with hormone treatment and exercise. Hey, I have to see Ingrid graduate from high school.

"No, college," my husband admonishes.

Blessed Mess

Marian McCaa Thomas, Leawood KS
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Each time I face my study,
It makes my mind grow muddy.
You're sure to hear me mutter,
"Just look at all this clutter!"

The things I meant to put away
All seem as if they want to stay
in piles upon my desk and bed,
filling me with constant dread.

The filing cabinet's all full,
so tight some things I cannot pull;
the bookshelves have no room to spare,
it seems I'm in a true nightmare.

I'm looking for that old report
that someone now wants to distort,
but where, oh where can it be found?
I know it's got to be around.

But then I see that all this mess
results from all the things I bless:
meetings, books, and CD's too,
kids' mementos, things to do.

If I were bored, dissatisfied,
and beautifully organized,
it might look good to someone else,
but my life would contain much less!

A Clutter Mind

Roxinia Ware, Lockhart TX

My mind is so full of clutter. My thoughts are everywhere, like clothes that have been thrown all over the place.

Clutter: When I have many decisions to make, it feels like the junk drawer in the kitchen that's stuffed with pencils, pens, recipes, can tabs, tape, scissors, straws, rubber bands.

Clutter: When I'm so full of emotions, it seems like a china cabinet that is crammed with the souvenirs to so many memories—the good, bad, and happy times in my life.

Clutter: When my mind is full of pictures of the times when all my family and friends were together, it feels like a photo album so stuffed with pictures that it won't close and the pictures are always falling out.

Clutter: When I think about all the past loves of my life, it's like heaps of clothes that have become so worn out that they can never be worn again.

My mind is overflowing with so many thoughts. It is a clutter mind indeed.

Catch-All

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The "Catch-all" was the name of the room in our farmhouse,
Nooks and crannies held treasures... and oft times a mouse.

I had a pretend store where I sold the wares;
To imaginary customers seeking bargains here and there.

My folks lived through the Depression... all items were saved.
Our "clutter" was not hoarding, just items someday to be craved.

At my friend's house they called it a "junk room."
Good hunting grounds for a bride and groom.

Those once cherished items have now become clutter,
For moving them somewhere... well, just makes me mutter.

I now purchase items with the greatest of care,
For when it comes home, I will put it where?

Garage Sale

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w-ecircle 6

I think I'll have a brain garage sale.
I'll de-clutter the thoughts
that roll around my mind
and stick to the corners of my heart.

I dust them off,
look at them,
really look at them,
and determine what's no longer needed.

Act like a lady. (Whatever that means)
Do it right the first time.
Idle hands are the work of the devil.
Girls can't do that.
Don't be so bossy.

Oh, so many old childhood messages,
Hidden deep in my psyche.
They serve no purpose
but to create doubt and
fear within,
Strengthening my old companion
"not enough."

Time to move them out,
let them go.
I may not be able to sell them,
yet the task of dusting them off periodically
creates space for new stories,
New beginnings.

A Clutter of Chaos

Lutricia Youngblood-Smoots, Lockhart TX

Seems to me my life has finally found harmony with my spirit.

When I used to look at the clutter of my life that had me so bound up, I felt like I could choke. For so long I went from one crisis to the next—one addiction or another: drugs, gambling, relationship problems. I lived a fast life. I was separated and estranged from my family, which had me in pieces.

I never felt confidence, courage, or completion.

But I have found a way to feel renewed, released, and restored.

I always thought that clutter involved things: my house, my car, my yard. I was living inside a box. Once I stepped outside the box—through incarceration—I was overwhelmed at first and didn't know what to do.

Be still.

Then I realized that I'm not the only one with such trials, and something from above—to borrow from a favorite poem—beckoned me to befriend myself.

I found what I had been searching for.

I now have the confidence that had eluded me most of my life to move forward, not backward. I have the courage to begin again and close the door on the past. I know I can complete my goals.

I thank the higher power whom I choose to call God.

There is now a reassurance that if I seek restoration, forgiveness, compassion, peace, and healing, I will find them all—once I let go of the clutter.

Bless this Mess

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Clutter is my middle name. It is also synonymous with family and love.

My parents' home was organized disarray. The garage had no room for the '57 Chevy due, in part, to piles of comics, magazines, and class notes from 1927 through the 1940s that were kept for future reference. My grandparents' bedroom barely fit their two single beds. Grandma Bubs' closet overflowed with her former "thin clothes" and her current clothes. Grandpa Zayde stored his stash of Jack Daniels and Johnny Walker, his best friends, next to his black wing-tips. The schnapps was medicinal: it prevented illness and, once ill, it cured it.

My sister and I shared the middle bedroom. We had one closet for both of us as well as the two younger kids. The two little ones slept in bunk beds in my parents' room.

Our basement had two unfinished rooms and one working toilet. Dad confiscated one of the rooms for his hobby *du jour*: model airplanes, photography, or tropical fish. His room appeared cluttered, yet he knew where all his items were stored.

I could not imagine a home with a *place for everything and everything in its place*. When my grandkids tease me about the state of my car, I tell them, "It's a purse on wheels."

My favorite aunt had a neat house, so how did my mother, who shared her DNA, miss the neatness gene? Why am I not emulating Aunt Muriel?

Clutter is the bane of life!

Laura Strathman Hulka, Sacramento CA
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C is for confusion. Clutter disorients, and physical clutter creates a cluttered mind.

L is for liability. Clutter in your living spaces creates a liability to living life. Minimize your clutter, maximize your living.

U is for unappreciated. When your life is cluttered, there are special things that get pushed to the side, and unappreciated. Reduce the paperwork and the unread magazines, bring out the family pictures.

T is for time. Clutter consumes time. Time spent looking for the lost; time expended that is not used on more pleasurable, affirming actions, is wasted time.

T is for things. Clutter creates too many things, and not enough people and important events. Get rid of unnecessary *tchotchkes*. Pass 'em on to your kids.

E is for environment. Both personal and environmental spaces are brought down by useless clutter. Cancel magazine subscriptions, or share newspaper subscriptions with a neighbor. Be open to the environmental benefits of reducing clutter.

R is for release. Just like practicing catch and release in fishing, you need to release those things in life that no longer enrich your life. Let them go, donate them to charity.

The Clutter Clinger

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 PJ Pierce's WordWeavers Writing Circle

Sorry, efficiency experts. I'm keepin' it all. Sure, I've read all the studies of the detrimental effects of clutter in your life: mental confusion, physical depression, emotional dependence, spiritual morasses. One session I attended speaking on the popular side of De-Cluttering had a sweet little irony that, with my childish feeling of superiority as a Clutter Clinger, I noticed: dozens of handouts! Ha!

Perhaps you're now pointing an un-bejeweled finger (I, who have inherited and kept 49 rings!) my way about now and whispering that Closet Hoarder is only a few garage boxes away. Maybe you're right. Still, I'm sticking to my side of the too-full house.

I've turned into my mother-in-law and am proud of it. When you were at her house and needed something, you could ask her for anything, *anything*, and she'd so cheerfully jump up and say, "I think I have that." Then she'd come back a few minutes later with a purple velvet ribbon exactly six inches long or a Mardi Gras glittery costume ball mask. You could never stump her. Now that she's passed on and has the wonders of the entire Universe at her fingertips, probably just by thinking it, I like assuming her role as Matriarchal Amasser.

In addition, the streamlined approach to all family photos being on a CD doesn't warm my heart. I want to flip through the actual albums and feel the weight of turning through the milestones of my family's lives. Distantly related is the issue of taking a Kindle or Nook to bed. No thanks. I can't turn the pages or smell the ink and paper, for that matter.

So, don't worry about me. I have plenty of old helmets around that I can don when I approach a bulging closet that is surely going to drop something on my head when I open it.

Schmutz (Dirt)

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 Judith Helburn Writing Circle, Austin TX

Here's to the piles morphing day by day
 Here's to the file straining at its seams
 Here's to the file so deep in the black hole that
 Never seems to see the light of my eyes
 Never finding files, folders or forms
 A scavenger hunt gone awry.
 Here's to the daily chaos I call my life:
 Reach for one file and toppling a mountain
 But finding important yellowed wrinkled scraps of life.
 From the depths of my purse come shopping, to do, and call lists.
 Important forms, overdue bills, phantom phone numbers, and gum wrappers.
 My purse mirrors the folders of my mind:
 Without structure, form, or order.
 Schmutz: But in a good way

For the Sake of Keeping

Ronda Armstrong, Des Moines IA
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Unruly strands of ribbon, collected adornments, pretty sacks and scraps of wrapping paper spill from department store boxes. From chaos, I fashion creative touches for special gifts.

Journals, notebooks, and single pages have taken up residence in untidy stacks, along with napkins, backs of receipts, any item bearing scribbled to do lists, words, quotes, observations or random thoughts. These accumulated words enlighten me; they are a witness to earlier ages.

Photos in assorted albums, drawers, or baskets, serve as glimpses of unfolding stories. I also save snapshots in picture frames, even those with broken glass, like the double one that holds Mom on the intact side and Dad on the broken side. This, and a cracked ceramic vase glued together—among other injured items—remind me that the broken become whole again.

The 60-year-old blue stuffed monkey from childhood, one I begged Mom to buy me, sits on a shelf in the "catch all" room upstairs. She's still clad in the dress I put on her, a faded yellow baby dress of my own.

A stuffed cat, resembling a big ginger tom I once had, arrived at the hospital years ago filling a shoebox, snug in a bed of tissue. To this day, he waits close by, ready for yet another hospital trip to comfort me over long nights.

I treasure pillowcases and tea towels embroidered by my aunt, as well as countless place mats, oven mitts, and hot mats she made. Her limited sight did not stop her from creating beauty and sharing generously.

When reading my mother's Bible I leave it as it was when she died 25 years ago. Her presence lingers with bookmarked pages, underlined passages, hash marks, and pieces she stashed in it: poems, meditations, a list of favorite scriptures, a devotion she wrote.

Some call these collected bits of life clutter. I call them keepsakes. Every remnant, every tidbit tells me who I am and what I value, mapping the paths I journeyed from there to here.

"Write that novel, sail that boat.
 And if you can't, immerse
 yourself in the fantasy, be the
 ultimate dabbler, just enjoy what
 it is you enjoy. It'll help you get
 well if you're going to get well,
 and it'll help you sail that great
 boat in the sky if that's what's
 going to happen. Onwards and
 Upwards. No regrets."

— Meg Wolfe

Aunt Jeanie, Fly Lady, and Me

Jude Whelley, Dayton OH
w-ecircle 3

“Now I am going to give this to you. You take care of it. It belonged to my Aunt Annie and it was given to her by her husband and he had money so you know it's good.”

That speech came with a white gold ring with lots of filigree and diamond chips. A similar spiel came with almost everything else passed down, from furniture to table linens, to *tchotchkes*. Each had an emotional or monetary charge. The ring had both. I accepted all with a promise to be a good caretaker. Forty years later, the “gifts” were overwhelming, both as physical clutter and emotional baggage.

Aunt Jeanie met her match when I discovered Flylady, a woman who once taught fly-fishing, hence her name, and managed to extricate herself from not only an abusive marriage but also a mountain of clutter. She realized we hold onto stuff because we allow it to have a hold on us. Hmm. Via her website (www.flylady.net), she teaches how to conquer the clutter fifteen minutes at a time.

Flylady says, “You can't organize clutter.” I knew that to be true; I was moving stuff around, getting it into different piles and boxes, and filling my garage with unused furniture, getting nowhere. I was so frustrated! Now I sort into keep, toss, or donate piles. The toss and donate items go out of the house immediately and the keep are put where they belong.

Also helpful was the emotional sort. Is it respectful of Great Aunt Ann or Aunt Jeanie to have their belongings sitting in a garage or gathering dust on a shelf? No! Get them to someone who can use them. Does it make me smile when I see it? No? Pass it on!

Now my home reflects me; it is spacious and tidy and welcoming. I do have items that were passed down but they are there because I love them and they match who I am. Slowly but steadily I am releasing, without guilt, all the loaded stuff and it feels so good.

Flying Apple Storm

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

Five grandfather clocks. My father-in-law, “Tid,” built each child and himself one. 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 carried the clock the length of the car, resting on the dashboard and 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, and now I can't even remember why, 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, hitting with target accuracy on the long, thin glass door that housed the weights, chains, and chimes of Tid's clock, shattering it with a jingle-jangle clang that didn't sound like Westminster chimes.

Dumbfounded, my tirade stopped mid-sentence. To my husband's great credit, who was 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.

What is Clutter?

Carolyn Sullivan, Austin TX
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Neat is nice; clutter is messy. I just acquired a fabric file box, which helped me to de-clutter my craft supply shelf. These days it is filled with neatly labeled folders of beautiful colors of cardstock. Now that looks neat!

Clutter is the dining table, covered with medications, bills, napkins, books, crossword puzzles, and a calendar. Not neat, but necessary. So is that clutter? Maybe not. Clutter is something out of place that makes me anxious to see it.

Neat is the way my photograph scrapbooks look on the shelf. They hold a lot of memories: of my family, of vacation trips, of myself as a young girl, of my travels with

my grandchildren. They are neat because I can pull out one at a time and relive those long ago, or maybe not so long ago, memories. Then I can put them back on the shelf, neatly lined up.

Clutter is the bundle of bad memories that haunt my dreams and wake me in a sweat some mornings. They are a jumble of past bad experiences, mistakes I made, and just plain awful memories. I need to find a way to get rid of that kind of clutter. I de-cluttered my photos and memorabilia by putting them in scrapbooks. But how do you de-clutter your dreams?

Story Clutter

Cindy Flora, Clearwater FL
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"Why don't you take a picture of the garage and write about that," my husband quips smugly, managing to bring to a halt the easy camaraderie we were sharing in the car on the way back from the airport.

Really, like I needed to be reminded at that moment that the garage and "messy middle bedroom" are in imminent danger of becoming featured players on the next episode of *Hoarders*?

I count to three before responding. Twenty-five years together have helped me hone that relationship strategy.

"That's a little obvious, isn't it?"

To his credit and his own unrequited writer's heart, he agrees.

I then remind him of what we had recently heard Anne Hillerman, the daughter of southwestern mystery writer Tony Hillerman, share about her father the week before while speaking at the Heard Museum in Phoenix. She, a writer herself, said her Dad likened himself to "bag lady." You have to forgive his political incorrectness on that one; he was calling himself a bag lady who collected all kinds of stuff that could inspire story ideas for later on.

I like to think I'm in good company there with Tony, but I know that doesn't give me total absolution for the hot mess of things stewing around in my home: amazing thrift store finds, boxes of dead or discarded things—both mine and my daughter's, decades old magazines, decorations for every holiday, e-bay possibilities, and an incredible amount of memorabilia of my parents and from my childhood... just to name a precious few.

Yes, and some clutter does, indeed, inspire ideas and an occasional story or two but not without a certain amount of angst.

But the physical clutter inhabiting our living spaces is not the clutter I fret over the most. Instead it's the clutter of story ideas racing through my head, scribbled on paper, captured in journals, and often staring me in the face everywhere I go. Even in the car.

"I already have an idea," I tell my husband. "I just need to get started."

After having two yard sales, and making donations to local charities, my mother in law sold her home and prepared to move into our home. She had been ill, and we felt she was unsafe to live alone.

We cleared our spare bedroom, which had also doubled as my den. Most things went to a storage unit. Making her comfortable in her new bedroom, we brought her rocker, dresser and two bed tables, and lamps. She packed several boxes holding antique dolls, costume jewelry, and other precious collectables.

When my mother in law passed away in December 2013, we donated some of the items and moved other items

A Writer's Mental Clutter

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r-ecircle I

My mind needs spring cleaning right now, just like the rest of my house. The ideas are piled up like laundry ready to be sorted and folded and put somewhere. They are mental meteors ready to land and make a big splash, promising to be the beginning of an adventure on the page, but the lights on the landing field are obscured by all the junk on my desk. My brilliant gems zoom off un-tethered into the stratosphere.

Peter Walsh believes that organization begins in the mind rather than our closets. Walsh became famous as an organizer of clutter on the TV series, *Clean Sweep*. He doesn't focus on objects, he goes right to the heart of the matter. He asks his clients: "What's your vision for the life you want?" He starts with the purported "purpose," picking up things and asking the homeowner if it moves them closer or farther away from their life vision. If it's further away, out they go.

Let's visit my writing space. My laptop and printer are definitely keepers, but what about the pile of unopened mail and the mountain of magazines and newsletters? They are mostly about writing, but are they part of the vision? I don't think so. They lure me into reading about writing, especially when I feel weak in front of the keyboard.

How about the futuristic lamp from IKEA and the bookends carved with monks reading? Useful and calming, important parts in the vision quest, but what about the pile of Christmas cards and unanswered letters? Nope. They arouse my guilt about not writing because I realize I'm not even writing to my friends.

Okay. Flash forward. I've followed Peter's advice asking myself the purpose of every object and scrap of paper in my writing area. Now what?

Walsh says there is one more step: never say "later" again. If you let the mail pile up, you're back at square one. The only problem is that I will have to say "later" to the dishes, the laundry and the rest of the house, but maybe I will un-clutter my mind.

Room Full of Treasures

Carole McGhee, Riverview FL
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Busy Pens Writing Circle

to our master bedroom, to make room for a visitor in the spare room.

In several corners of my master bedroom I have stacked items that for now do not have a space. The spare room is now ready for new carpet. Boxes will be sorted, sold, or donated. I never meant to clutter the room, it just happened.

Words echo in my head from Grandma. "A place for everything and everything in its place," she would say. Our garage also holds a dining room table and six chairs along with a rocker and two parlor chairs that will be donated to de-clutter our garage. Some treasures will remain with us as well as the memories made.

Some Writers Need a Cluttered Mind

Barbara Youngblood Carr, Austin TX

Clutter! Clutter everywhere and I begin to think—
 Clutter! Clutter fills our home—perhaps I need a shrink!
 If I pitch this or discard that, as sure as I was born
 It will be something that I need on some far distant morn.
 Of magazines! I have a pile—can't seem to pitch out one
 For fear that choc'late recipe is the world's best cake, bar none.
 Of *Geographics*—they cannot leave—so full of pics and history—
 For who knows one day my grandson may need one for homework's drudgery.
 Well books! I have a zillion all piled along our walls because
 There aren't enough bookshelves so they're stacked along our halls!
 A stack of empty boxes of every shape and size—
 Since Christmas is a year away for wrapping a surprise!
 Collections! I have a-way too many—I collect fossils, rocks, lots of pigs, and such.
 Some of it has to find a new home because for our house it has become too much.
 The things that I surround myself with my husband calls a mess!
 To clear or not to clear some out—it causes such great stress!
 I know they say a cluttered mind is not the way to be—
 But you all know that to be otherwise is not the real true me.
 I need my stuff around my bones—it makes me warm and fuzzy—
 But maybe someday I'll have one chair, one flower, when I learn that feng shui.

The Chaos of Clutter

Nancilynn Saylor, Austin TX

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 w-ecircles 3,4, and 6

So many stacks, almost
 a periodical tower,
 growing piles of "stuff" that threatens
 to soon over power

Junk mail and notices from the health plan and such
 Things I should open and things not so much

There's still room at the table
 for our evening meal
 plus some petite piles of junk mail
 not quite surreal
 Coffee table mountains
 begging to be read
 or tossed to recycle
 into composting shreds

I wait for assistance, yet no one arrives
 Could clutter consume me and my love, alive?
 Each New Year's I write down, aloud I will utter
 Someone please save me from this world of clutter.

Assortments of catalogs, seed packets—so much...
 (Did that one box just wiggle? That one I won't touch!)
 I search for suggestions to reduce all my clutter
 but each day brings more here to hang out with the others.

A Cluttered but Happy Home

Judy Watters, Spring Branch TX
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 judywatters.com

Cleaning day. Rip the sheets off the bed, get them in the washer, clean off my kitchen counters, clear my desk—and that's when I remembered—I hate cleaning. However, with the washer going and my bed needing clean sheets, I had to continue—at least with the bed. Why was this so difficult? When I retired, I told myself, "Self, you will write to your heart's content and keep the house clean at all times." Why, oh, why did I make that promise? I can only assume it was made in a delirious moment of retirement glee. Well into my 60s, I am finding I am the same messy, carefree soul of my youth.

I could blame my sister. Try as she might, Virginia never completed my training in the fine art of cleanliness. As children, my side of our shared bedroom held mounds of interesting finds. I knew I would eventually need something in one of those piles. My clothes never found their hangars on the clothes rack that stood in our bedroom corner.

Bless her heart. Virginia tried her very best to teach me "each item had a designated place, and each designated place needed certain items." However, Virginia loved me, her little sister by 5 years. So she attempted to coax me into sharing her passion for a clean room. "Judy, I'll hang up this shirt while you get a hanger for that one."

In all honesty, I tried to follow her direction; however, my eye would inevitably spy a special marble in one of my stacks or my favorite flannel shirt I would wear tomorrow so why hang it up today? "Oh, Virginia, I'll take care of it all later. I need to help Daddy."

Virginia knew the hayfield was my favorite place on the farm. In desperation, my OCD sister gave in to me and took it upon herself to clean her side as well as mine.

So fast-forward to today. If you plan to visit me, my house may be cluttered, but our back porch is always better for a visit anyway.

Mom's Secret

Georgia Hubley, Henderson NV
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"Bulletin boards are not a piece of art. No one wants to see that much clutter on the wall," my mom often said when she glanced at the messy bulletin board in my kitchen.

"My clutter could be another woman's treasure," I'd tease. Then I'd insist the notes and clippings kept me organized and informed, while I tidied that corner of my kitchen.

Unbeknownst to me, Mom had kept a secret for many years. She had clutter of her own. When I opened two of her kitchen cabinets, seldom opened by family or friends, I discovered over one hundred messages taped inside each door. 'Don't forget' and 'things to remember' notes were taped on top of each other—some were in large hand-printed letters and others in scribbled handwriting. Clever ways to remember or describe pertinent persons, places or things were jotted down on color coded squares of paper. These were Mom's way of coping and surviving on a day to day basis.

For a moment, a twinge of guilt washes over me as I recall the day our family realized that none of us had the skills to provide the proper care for Mom's Alzheimer's disease, and the agonizing decision made for her care at an around-the-clock convalescent facility. But I know she's safe and comfortable.

I've come to terms with the fact that time—today, tomorrow, yesterday—and clutter are insignificant to Mom. But my memory banks are cluttered and overflowing and I'll continue to tell her stories. Maybe one day there will be a glint in Mom's soft brown eyes and a flicker of recognition.

Driving Back Clutter

Lynn Goodwin, Danville CA
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I'm sitting in Starbuck's at a small, clean, round table, reading contest submissions and listening to a math tutor two tables away. He's explaining a process for organization rather than math. Maybe math is organization. I remember my dad saying it taught a system of thought. My mind is filled with random thoughts.

I came here to get away from paper, books, dust, and from Eddie McPuppers who barks, "Notice me," as he leaps and turns.

I want to notice you, Little One, but I need to write. Comments on Flash Fiction and Memoir count as writing, don't they? Between a Writer Advice contest I'm judging and the AAUW Local Scholarship Committee I just finished heading, I'm drowning in non-creative writing.

I tell myself I'm still writing. After all, lists are writing. Which reminds me I have to buy paper towels. There goes the clutter again. So many "to-do" lists. So little time.

Sometimes it's hard to know where multi-tasking leaves off and clutter begins. But yesterday I wrote a list that went beyond paper towels into thoughts, decisions,

Divestiture: A List Poem

Janice Kvale, Austin TX
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<http://vegemite-ales.blogspot.com>
w-ecircle 6

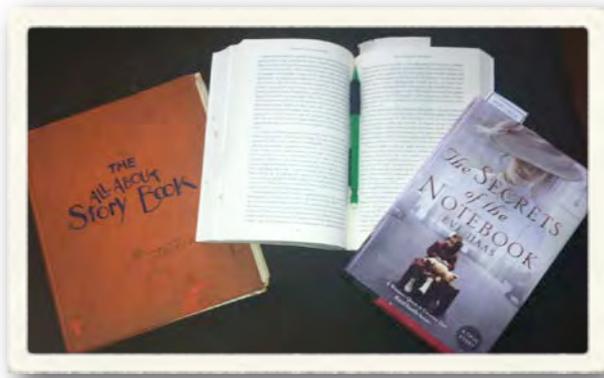
As I walk through my house I see
clutter—my life stacked in piles
divorced of individuality, valueless.
Books never opened, unsorted papers,
neglected mail, fabric never fashioned
into frocks, yarn yearning
to be mittens, an egg carton,
broken jewelry, my collection
of Indian cooking devices
for puttú and dosas (I mastered neither).
In the garage a car-sized space
stacked high with mystery boxes.
The question: Where is. . .
The answer...in a box somewhere.
Time to divest.

and choices. Here are my list titles:

What my husband doesn't know
What I want my husband to know
What my sister doesn't know
What I want my sister to know
What I don't know and what I can do about it
I particularly recommend the last list.

I need time away from the clutter in my condo and my head, so I've rented a cabin for a few days. I'll have Sunday through Thursday to read, write, revise, daydream, and concentrate. I'll read my young adult novel straight through. I'll write in my journal, get the young adult novel ready to send to agents, and delete from my to-do list until it looks like the white space in a concrete poem.

In truth, I prefer a cluttered desk to a clean one, but cleaning up makes space for new thoughts and opportunities to come rolling in. Starbucks is a good alternative to housecleaning, though. It gives me a place to let burning ideas and creativity rise above the ever-advancing clutter.



SCN's Book Reviews

Summertime in the Swing

by Trilla Pando

After years of living in rural Georgia, Trilla now lives in her favorite city, Houston, Texas where she writes, does volunteer work, and enjoys plays, concerts, museums and general city fun. She has been an SCN member for many years, as well as a contributing editor for the *Story Circle Journal*, a board member, and SCN president.

Visit us on the Internet:

www.storycirclebookreviews.org • www.facebook.com/storycirclebookreviews
www.twitter.com/SCNBookReviews

In my grandmother's swing in her shady back yard, up in the willow tree where no one could see me, sprawled across my bed in the middle of the day—it didn't much matter where I was during summer vacation, most likely I was reading. I lived for the trips to the library. I usually had my Reader's Award by the middle of June. I'd even volunteer to dry the dishes on my sister's night if it meant that I might get an extra dollar to put toward my next new book.

I loved the library's books, but even more I loved owning books. I still have some of them on the shelf in my guestroom. Even if I am a bit grown up for some of the stories it is still a pleasure just to hold them.

Summer is reading time. I'm a lucky person. Two libraries are walking distance from my house. And a book store within a couple of miles. So I never worry about running out of something to read. But as much as I read, I'm always looking for something new. Something unexpected. That's when I head to the Story Circle Book Review site. I can get loads of ideas in minutes. I love history, and to me the best way to learn is through good historical fiction. Right now, *The Johnstown Girls* tops my list. I haven't ordered it yet but it's definitely on the list. You can share my enthusiasm by reading the review here <http://storycirclebookreviews.org/reviews/johnstowngirls.shtml>.

While you are on that page, check out two of our newer review categories. We now have reviews of books for teen and middle-grade girls. What a great idea! Mothers and their reading daughters can see lots of options with candid reviews. One book I hope young women will read this summer is *Oveta Culp Hobby: Colonel, Cabinet Member, Philanthropist* by Debra Winegarten. Hobby founded the Women's Army Corps during the Second World War. Later, she served as the first Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare. Hers is a great story. I can vouch for that. I reviewed the book. You can read the review at <http://storycirclebookreviews.org/reviews/ovetaculphobby.shtml>.

No child is too young for books. Story Circle knows this and we are helping in that area as well. Our "books for younger readers" section is full of great suggestion. I've gone there often, because my granddaughter lives far away—in Spain. I don't get to see her nearly as often as I like, but I can send her books. Next up for her is *The Wonder Book*. It's a poetry book that sounds like great fun. <http://storycirclebookreviews.org/reviews/wonderbook.shtml>

Just exploring all the categories of reviews is good summer reading by itself, before you head out to the library or the bookstore. If this is your first visit to the site, you may be surprised at how many books we've reviewed "by, for, and about women," as well as for young adults and children. If we've missed a book you enjoyed, maybe you'd like to review it for us, or perhaps you'd like to read and write about one of the new books we are offering for review. In either case, you'll want to go to the "Reviewing for SCBR" page and learn the ropes. If you have written a book that you would like to see reviewed then "Getting Reviewed" is the place for you. SCBR is a great place to reach many readers—readers who want to read you.

Now back to my books! If you'd like to share more of my reading life, be sure and visit my monthly blog at Story Circle's great blog, "Telling Herstories" at <http://storycirlenetwork.wordpress.com>. Find me at the "Book Learning" tab.





From the Blogs:

Telling HerStories One Woman's Day

by Linda Hoye



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

What can you say about a day in your life in five hundred words or less? A lot, if you ask the over sixty Story Circle Network members whose stories we've been privileged to share on our One Woman's Day blog. A look at some of the categories gives you a sense of the diverse set of stories we've published: family, gratitude, wisdom, pets, profession, and health concerns, to name just a few.

Recently we were pleased to share the following inspirational and humorous post by Cathy Scibelli. It's a perfect illustration of how attitude, and one tiny bear, can make a big difference. Cathy calls it "Chemobearapy."

I write a blog dedicated to those with serious illnesses but rarely discuss topics specifically related to illness, preferring to focus on stories that will make people laugh and forget for a while the problems they face. However, there are times when the very act of dealing with illness brings love and laughter into my life. I thought I would share a recent example of how I've changed "chemotherapy" into "chemobearapy."

Every three weeks, I go to the Monter Center on Long Island to receive a "maintenance dose" of Herceptin to control the breast cancer that has metastasized in my body. My blog sidekick, a three-inch teddy bear named Stretch, comes along with me.

Most of the nurses in the center know about Stretch, so when we arrive he's greeted and fussed over. Last Friday we had a nurse, Jane, who hadn't treated us before, so she was curious about the hubbub that Stretch causes. I explained to her about the blog and introduced her to Stretch. Their eyes met, she smiled at him, and it was love at first sight.

Stretch, of course, wanted to impress her, so he volunteered to help her by watching my IV monitor. As he was sitting on the monitor, another visitor arrived, a social worker named Sandra who came to tell us about some new support programs the Monter Center is starting for breast cancer patients. In turn, I introduced her to Stretch.

Well, that fickle little bear left his post at the IV monitor, crawled into Sandra's pocket, and proceeded to charm her and offer his assistance in getting the word out about the new programs. But he deftly managed to get back to the cubicle in time to look as if he had been sitting there diligently watching the chemo monitor just as the alarm went off to indicate the session was completed.

We shared some hugs and laughs all around, Stretch presented Jane with a St. Patrick's Day plant to assure her that she was Number One in his heart, and we went on our way feeling that not only had we treated our cancer, we had also replenished our spirits.

Living with a life-threatening illness is like being on a roller-coaster. Friday was one of the days when you reach the top of the hill and instead of crashing down in terror, you plunge laughing and waving your arms, forgetting your fears. Unfortunately you don't get to step off the roller coaster at the bottom. But as the ride continues it's always good to look forward in hopeful anticipation that the next loop around the bend will be fun instead of scary, and make sure you take along fellow riders who give you courage and inspire you. I was going to suggest that you might want to find your own little mascot, too—but be warned that they are high maintenance and tend to take over your blog, as well as run your life.

Cathy Scibelli has been living with metastatic breast cancer since 2012. She blogs at:

<http://www.iconicmuse.blogspot.ca/>

about the ways she continues to enjoy her life with her sidekick Stretch, who always has a unique perspective on their adventures.

We would love to have the opportunity to share a story about a day in your life too. Learn more, and find a link to our One Woman's Day blog submission page at:

<http://onewomansday.wordpress.com/about/>



Take A Bow!

Jude Whelley



by Pat Bean

Jude Whelley is “darn proud” of Story Circle Network and “honored” to be its new president. These are simple words from a person who holds psychology and educational degrees from three universities. But then Jude is a plain speaking person whose joy for life is quickly felt by all who meet her.

Jude first became aware of SCN when she met the organization’s founder, Susan Wittig Albert, when Susan was giving a talk on herbs at the Cox Arboretum in Ohio. She was impressed by Susan’s speech and shortly afterward joined the organization—and gained what she calls “a network of like-minded sisters.”

“It was just when I was beginning to think about memoir in my writing, and it was a wonderful moment in my life. Susan really knew what she was talking about when she called it a network,” Jude said during a phone interview from her Dayton, Ohio, home.

Even long distance, the SCN’s president joyful personality could be felt. “Jude has a wonderful energy and an infectious enthusiasm that simply sets people aglow,” says Susan, who has worked with Jude on several conference committee team. “I know that Story Circle is going to benefit hugely from the contributions of this rare woman.”

Susan’s words about Jude are echoed by Peggy Moody, SCN’s executive director and web master. “Jude’s passion for women’s stories permeates everything she does,” Peggy says. “She is a tireless worker and great fun to be around. SCN is very lucky to have her.”

Jude’s loves include her 37-year-old son, her Yorkie canine companion (which she got as a puppy and was concerned might fail puppy kindergarten), gardening, books, travel, birds ... The list would probably have gotten longer if Jude hadn’t stopped her train of thought to tell me about the brilliant color of the American goldfinches, the nesting robins, and the spunky cardinals that are currently visiting her yard.

Like most women, Jude has survived some rough patches. Her son, who lives with her, has disabilities and a congenital heart defect; she was recently frightened when he had pneumonia and his health worsened for a while. She has lived through the scare of—and survived!—breast cancer. She has lost loved pets. And her divorce after 35 years of marriage wasn’t the easiest, she admits. But life, she feels, usually unfolds as it should.

Jude comes from a Wilkes-Barre, PA, coal-mining family—both of her grandfathers worked in the mines. She gained her love of storytelling from her father. “You could get away with just about anything if you could tell a good story,” she says.

And from her mother, she learned that she could be anything she wanted to be. “My mother faced life full on,” she says. “I went to Italy with her when she was 81, and she wanted to climb the 320 steps to the top of St. Peter’s Basilica.” Jude chuckles. “She made it with a smile on her face, and I was exhausted.”

The anything-you-want-to-be lesson from mother to daughter encouraged Jude to choose a career as an educator. She taught students ranging in age from preschool through the doctoral level. “The only thing that changes,” she says, “is the body size.” And then she laughs with a wonderful throaty sound that wraps you in its warmth.

Jude has a doctorate in special education with an emphasis on language and literacy. She co-founded a charter school and was responsible for its professional development, grant writing, and public relations. She retired in 2007 and has been writing “like crazy” ever since and traveling every opportunity she gets.

A member of SCN since 2006, Jude has been involved in the organization’s online reading and writing circles, co-edited the True Words anthology in 2008, was involved in the publication of Kitchen Table Stories, and was an interviewer for the organization’s podcast. Serving on SCN’s Board, an assignment she first accepted in 2009, was a logical step for someone who had served as board member and president of the Monco Corporation, an organization focused on sheltered employment for persons with developmental disabilities; as a board member for Camp Emmanuel, a summer program for children with hearing impairment; and as a board member for Rhythm in Shoes, a dance program.

When asked what she hoped to bring to the SCN board, Jude replied, “passion, creativity, excellent

communication skills, and a strong work ethic.” These are the same qualities, of course, that she brings to Story Circle as its new president. But she has a problem. From her point of view, the women’s writing organization is “damn near perfect. It’s going to be hard for me to see how I can improve on that.”

That doesn’t mean she doesn’t have a few ideas. Jude is especially excited about the Sarton Award, the first and only women’s memoir award out there, and the Susan Wittig Albert Lifewriting Contest. She would like to see both of these things get more publicity.

“It’s astonishing when you look at all the things SCN does,” she says. “My job will be to just keep everything moving forward ... and perhaps to push our writers to accomplish longer works, to work at the book level.”

Those of us at SCN will be right behind you, helping you as much as we can. Take a well-deserved bow, Jude.



SCN’s 2013 Super Star Bloggers



Matilda Butler



Kendra Bonnett

We are delighted to announce that **Kendra Bonnett** and **Matilda Butler** have been selected by our SCN members as our Super-Star Bloggers of 2013.

Their blog, *Writing Alchemy*, is a treasure trove for lifewriters, so be ready to take notes while you are there.

They discuss character development, writing about the painful events in your life, the intricacies of theme, managing your timeline and much, much more. Stop in and sign up for their free newsletter.

Just make sure you have some time to stay and visit, because once you start reading, they’ll have you hooked!

Read this blog post that Matilda & Kendra wrote after receiving news of their Super-Star Blogger award:

<http://womensmemoirs.com/memoir-writing-prompts/award-and-honor-from-story-circle-network-turns-into-memoir-writing-prompt/>





Members in Print & The News

SCN members make the news by publishing books, articles, essays, poems, dramas, and art. They also make presentations, lead workshops, facilitate groups, and organize programs. Below are some of our members' achievements over the past three months.

If you're an SCN member who has made the news, please let us know by sending email to: news@storycircle.org. If you've published a book, we'll also add you to our SCN Authors page.

February

Lois Halley's nonfiction short story "Nothing to Fear" was published in the March/April issue of *Angels on Earth* magazine.

Nan Phifer, author of the award-winning book *Memoirs of the Soul: A Writing Guide*, is currently offering complimentary copies of her book for any writing teachers or leaders of memoir groups. You can order a copy from her website: <http://memoirworkshops.com/request-review-copy/>

March

Kathryn White has several short stories available as ebooks on Amazon.com. These include *Heart to Heart*, *Are You Using Your Gifts?*, *The Mission of the Brightest Angel*, as well as most recently a children's story, *Odin the Ferret*. More information can be found on her website at <http://www.kathrynwhite.com>

Freelance writer and photographer **Donna Marie Miller** contributes articles and photos to Austin-area print & online magazines & newspapers. Recently, during SXSW, her interviews with Neil Young and Lisa Marie Presley were published in *Austin Fusion magazine*.

Times They Were A Changin', the anthology edited by SCN members **Kate Farrell**, **Linda Joy Myers**, and **Amber Lea Starfire**, is a finalist in the Foreword Reviews 2013 Book of the Year Award. **Linda Joy Myers'** memoir, *Don't Call Me Mother*, is also a finalist.

Pat LaPointe's essay, "Losing Caroline," was published in *Aspiring to Inspire: 2014 Women Writers' Anthology*.

Renee Cassese's poetry collection, *I am My Mother's Only Poem* has just been published. Renee tells us, "It's been a year in the making and I had lots of help from SCN instructors and writers."

Jan Marquart was interviewed on *The Janet Love Show* about writing and healing. She also talks about her teaching through *Story Circle Network's online classes program* in this program.

Ann Lonstein just published *Everything is a Journey*, a chapbook of personal reflections from her blog, *Every Journey Traveled*.

Thorndike Press has just published the large-print edition of **Susan Wittig Albert's** *A Wilder Rose*, and lists the novel as an "Editors' Pick" in its March catalog.

Alicia Anderson's memoir, *On Daring and Life*, was recently published.

Dena Blatt has authored the "Dear Dena" handwriting column in Canada's *True Blue Spirit Magazine* since 2011.

Lily Kaplan's memoir, *Two Rare Birds: A Legacy of Love*, was published. She hosted a book launch event in Austin, on May 18; and BookPeople highlighted the book during the month of May.

April

Sherry Wachter's latest memoir, *The House Leroy*, was published in April. The book tells the story of an accidental meeting that changed the life of a woman, a boy, a man, and a house. *The House Leroy* is the fourth in a series of memoirs, "word pictures of my life," as Sherry describes them.

May

Ruth Crocker had a reading and book signing for her new memoir, *Those Who Remain: Remembrance and Reunion After War*, on May 17 at Bank Square Books in Mystic, CT.

Barbarann Ayars's story, "Mama Was a Boom-Boom Girl," a description of her mother's work making bombs for the Navy, will be published in the June issue of *America in World War II*. Barbarann calls the magazine "a tour de force commemorating the 70th anniversary of D-Day. I am so very proud to be included in this issue. Five pages in print of this few days of my life! Rare is an account by a small child written anywhere, thrilled to be part of Mama's war story." Barbarann also has a two-part story published on Matilda Butler's & Kendra Bonnett's websites.

Susan Tweit won the 2014 Colorado Authors' League Award for a series of essays from **her blog**, <http://susanjtweit.com>

Pat LaPointe's piece, "But For the Love of JoJo," will be published in *Summer Shorts II* (June 2014, Durham Publishing).

Marlene Samuels' short story, "The Pretending Suitcase Game," receiving an Honorable Mention in the **Idaho Writers Guild's** 2014 writing contest.

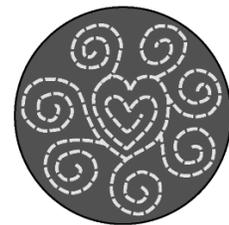
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Circles: The Heart of Story Circle Network

Write in Circles

by Nancy J. Wurlitzer
Story Circle Coordinator
NWurl@CapeCod.net



The winter weather is now behind us and everyone is looking forward to spring and warmer weather. We saw 24 new member inquiries about starting a Story Circle. These inquiries came from so many interesting women who are feeling that desire to write their stories! As I contacted these women and sent them information on how to connect by joining with either a local, regional or an online Story Circle Group, I also suggested they form a group within their community. They can belong to several groups and see what works best for them. It is wonderful to hear back from so many of them that have connected and are enjoying it.

The Story Circle inquiries I received over the last couple of months are from new members in thirteen different states. They include women wanting to connect and tell their stories, looking for information on how to get their stories published, or how to connect across distance.

Many of our new members are just learning how to connect with other women online. Many have never

written a book, some have already written a little or a lot, some are already authors, and some have qualifications to teach online classes.

Many inquiries are from women who want to do book reviews, start a story circle, teach classes, take classes, never written anything at all and need or want to start, to already published authors looking to connect with others! It is so interesting to hear from all these lovely ladies!

Leading a circle or belonging to a local group or an on-line group may seem like a challenging step for some people, but you will find that you become a better writer, make new friends, and become more active in the Story Circle Network. The rewards are exciting.

So, get involved, you'll be so glad you did!

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True Words Anthology: Call for Submissions

All you dues-paying Story Circle members, boot up your computers or pick up your pens! SCN's yearly anthology, True Words from Real Women, needs you! Each year we publish an anthology of stories and poetry to showcase the wonderful writing of our members.

There is no theme for the anthology, and we accept prose and poetry and both short and long pieces, though greater consideration is given to shorter pieces. The word limit for prose is 1000 words and for poetry, 40 lines. We will accept up to three pieces per author for consideration.

Submission period:
July 1 - September 1, 2014

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:

<http://www.storycircle.org/members/frmjournalsubmission.php>

Future Topics and deadlines for upcoming Journals:

- September, 2014 (due July 15)—Grace
- December, 2014 (due Oct 15)—Friendship
- March, 2015 (due Jan 15)—Childhood
- June, 2015 (due April 15)—Synchronicity

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