



STORY CIRCLE JOURNAL

Vol. 19 No. 2, June, 2015

The newsletter for women with stories to tell

Stories from the Heart VIII

Story Circle Network
Eighth National Women's Memoir Conference
April 14-17, 2016
Wyndham Hotel, Austin, Texas



Brooke Warner, Keynote Speaker

Plan now to join us for a unique and exciting event: the ***eighth*** national women's memoir conference of Story Circle Network!

Stories from the Heart VIII will bring women from around the country to celebrate our stories and our lives. Through writing, reading, listening, and sharing, we will discover how personal narrative is a healing art, how we can gather our memories, how we can tell our stories. We welcome readers, writers, storytellers, and any woman with a

past, present, and future. There will be opportunities to explore difficult or hidden issues, expand our relationships with other women, and discover different modes and media—such as art, dance, and drama—for sharing our stories. Come, learn, share, celebrate with us as we honor our stories!

Our Friday-night keynote speaker is Brooke Warner. Brooke's professional expertise is in book publishing, writing, and coaching writers through the completion of their book proposals and manuscripts. She offers writing coaching and professional publishing consulting to a broad range of clients who are looking to build their author platforms, better understand the complicated world of publishing, and get published. She has worked with novelists, memoirists, screenplay writers, poets, and artists. If your ultimate goal is to get your work published, Brooke can help you get there. She launched She Writes Press (<http://shewritespress.com>) in 2012 with Kamy Wicoff, founder of SheWrites.com. Read more on her website, <http://warnercoaching.com>

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.



Visit our conference
FaceBook page at

<https://www.facebook.com/storiesfromtheheart>

Subscribe to the Conference
eLetter mailing list, visit :

<http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/> and follow the link!

In This Issue

President's Letter	2
Conference Planning Underway.....	3
SCN Book Reviews	4
Conference: Call for Proposals	5
Interview with Yelizaveta P. Renfro	6
Internet Capter	10
NEW Anthology	11
True Words from Real Women.....	12
Susan Wittig Albert LifeWriting Contest	24
One Woman's Day	25
Sarton Jurors Needed.....	26
eCircle 2: Relaunched.....	26
Online Classes & SCN Offerings.....	27
SCN Registration Form.....	27

Letter From SCN's President—



It is an exciting time to be part of Story Circle Network!

For almost two decades women have been sharing their life stories, taking first steps into writing, enrolling in classes to improve their craft, expanding the length of their work, and forging life long bonds with fellow memoirists. Our writing conferences and retreats have offered gathering points and our publications have offered a forum for many women's first venture into print. SCN pioneered the first award for women's memoir when we established the Sarton Award. This year the award has been expanded to include submissions in the areas of contemporary fiction and historical fiction.

This is just the beginning of our expansion into fiction! We all know that women's stories can be true to women's experience whether they are based on a woman's life or grow out of her imagination. Fiction has always been an important way of telling truths. Also, we feel that by expanding our program focus to women's fiction, we may be able to expand our membership, as well. We will soon accept fiction submissions for our annual anthology, which you've been invited to help rename. (Watch for the new name, coming soon!) We'll also accept fiction in the True Words section of our quarterly journal. The call for proposals for the 2016 Stories From the Heart conference is out and we are welcoming proposals about fiction as well as memoir. This is all happening as we think ahead to the celebration of our 20th anniversary in 2017.

This expansion of our mission resulted in the following update to our mission statement: *The Story Circle Network is dedicated to helping women share the stories of their lives through memoir, poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and drama, and to raising public awareness of the importance of women's personal histories.*

Also upcoming: our annual Susan Wittig Albert Lifewriting Competition. Submissions are due by June 30th and we offer four prizes; \$100, \$75, and two for \$35. The winners will be published in a special section of the September Story Circle Journal. Rules and submission guidelines are on the Story Circle website.



Please check out the call for proposals for Stories from the Heart VIII and plan to join us in Austin. Share Story Circle Network with your writing friends, including fiction writers, and encourage them to join. And thank you for being a part of our wonderful, vibrant Story Circle Network!

Write on!

Jude

Jude Walsh Whelley
Dayton, Ohio USA

www.judewalshwhelley.com

Blog: *Writing Now*

Memoir, Women's Fiction, Poetry

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.

Editor: Robin Wittig
journaleditor@storycircle.org

This Month's Contributing Editors:

Susan Albert
Lee Ambrose
Sharon Blumberg
Mary Jo Doig
Jeanne Guy
Barbara Heming
Linda Hoye
Jude Whelley

We welcome your letters, queries, and suggestions.

Story Circle Network
PO Box 1670
Estes Park, CO 80517-1670
970-235-1477
ISSN: 1093-7528

©2015 Story Circle Network
Copyrights to all contributed works remain with the authors.

Membership Rates

One Year \$55 US if receiving
online publications;
\$65 if receiving *printed* publications
\$65 Canada & Mexico
\$70 Elsewhere

Foreign Memberships: Please pay by
International Postal Money Order.

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

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

Conference Planning Underway

By Jeanne Guy

Mark your calendars NOW for our best Conference ever:

**Stories from the Heart VIII
Story Circle Network
Eighth National Women's Memoir Conference
April 14-17, 2016
Wyndham Hotel, Austin, Texas**

Friday Night Keynote Speaker: Brooke Warner



Whew! Putting on our conferences requires lots of pre-planning, teamwork, dreaming, and anticipating. SCN's eighth national conference is no exception. Peggy has already gotten the ball rolling on our conference website: <http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/>

Be on the lookout for changes in our upcoming 2016 conference format! You told us what you wanted and we listened. (See Call for Proposals for full details: <http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/proposal/>) So what's new?

- Presentations will be 60 minutes rather than 90 minutes
- Two types of presentations will be offered: workshops with writing opportunities and (a new addition) interactive and engaging lecture-style presentations.
- We've expanded the topics to include fiction as well as non-fiction, memoir, personal essays, poetry, drama, dance, music, art and more.
- Presentations will now be identified by level: novice/beginner, advanced/experienced, or general/for all levels
- For the program, we've moved away from "tracks" to "Topic Areas" covering a wider variety of writing and publishing activities. Our topics will include the writing craft, the writing life, publishing, marketing, and writing as a business.

We're delighted to announce that Brooke Warner, a professional well-versed in book publishing, writing and coaching, will be our Friday night Keynote Speaker. Brooke launched **She Writes Press** in 2012 with Kamy Wicoff, founder of **SheWrites.com**. Read more on **her website**. If your ultimate goal is to get your work published, Brooke can help you get there.

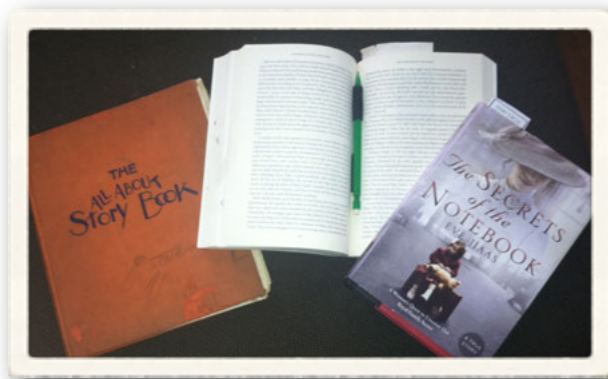
Our Sunday keynote speaker is Susan Wittig Albert, founder and president-elect of Story Circle Network. Susan will share her passion for our SCN community of women

writers and her ideas about how members can personally benefit from their association with SCN and can use SCN in their communities. Just as she was the one to create this organization, she is the one to lead us into 2017, our 20th anniversary.

In addition to our keynoters and our Saturday and Sunday workshops, there will be extras, plenty of them! As in prior years, we will once again offer optional Heart-to-Heart mini-coaching sessions on Friday morning, where you can bring specific questions to discuss with our well qualified and enthusiastic coaches. We'll offer two pre-conference workshops on Friday afternoon. Of course there will be vendors and door prizes and open mikes and our wonderful Story Wall, just as there have been at our previous conferences. We're also looking forward to the announcement of the winner of the 2015 Sarton Memoir Award, and both the 2014 and 2015 winners will be recognized. Peggy will be constantly updating the conference website (www.storycircle.org/Conference) as new information is known. We'll let you know when the registration form is available and voila, we'll be open for business!

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

We hope you'll join us. If this is your first time, we know you'll have the time of your life. And if it's your eighth time . . . well, you already know as well as we do: your presence and participation makes it a not-to-miss, meaningful and worthwhile experience for all who attend. We can hardly wait!



StoryCircleBookReviews.org
Review by Barbara Heming

In a brief moment, life as we know it can disappear. Hollye Dexter and her family experience such a moment on November 18, 1994, when they awaken on a record-breaking cold night in Southern California to find their house engulfed in flames. Dexter and her husband are trapped on the second floor with her four-year-old son as the fire whooshes into the rooms. Their only hope of escape is a thirty-foot drop out the window onto concrete below.

In her memoir, *Fire Season: My Journey from Ruin to Redemption*, Dexter narrates a gripping account of the fire and its aftermath... "The smell of that fire is something I will never forget. It is not the warm, cozy smell of a campfire, but the putrid stench of synthetic carpeting and drywall plaster and household appliances melting, the toxic cloud of our life disintegrating." Not only does her family lose all their personal possessions, their two dogs, two cats, and a bunny, they also lose their source of income from their home-based business. Fortunately, her six-year-old daughter was with her father that night. Nothing was insured.

The tasks that follow are overwhelming—replacing birth certificates, social security cards, drivers' licenses, credit cards, and the multitude of documents that are part of all of our lives. The family moves in with Dexter's mother and her husband. Friends donate clothing and household goods. Their musician friends hold a benefit concert. The local TV station features their story, which brings other material assistance. As difficult as the early days after the fire are, a Red Cross representative assigned to them warns of hard times ahead: "You are surrounded by

SCN's Book Reviews

Featured Review:

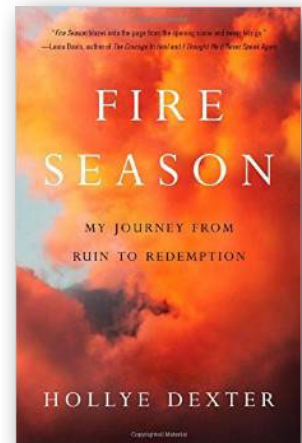
Fire Season: My Journey from Ruin to Redemption

by Hollye Dexter

people showing up to support you. Donations are coming in. You're getting phone calls every day. But soon, those things will taper off, and you'll be left picking up the pieces. That's the hard part, and that's when a lot of this loss will start to hit you."

Despite their optimism that life can only get better, the family suffers one blow after another. They must weather the loss of Dexter's kids clothing business when her partner withdraws the money needed to keep it going. A slowdown in the music business affects her guitar player husband's ability to get gigs. Finally, they are forced to declare bankruptcy. A sudden, inexplicable rift occurs with the couple who were their closest friends. The losses from the fire also uncover hidden fault lines in family history and relationships. Dexter unravels and must confront the question of who she really is now that she has lost everything. And so begins her path toward "redemption."

Dexter weaves her story of the fire and her struggles to rebuild a life with her history in a seamless tapestry. I was riveted by her no-holds-barred account of what happens when the life one has built is destroyed without warning, and the incredible strength needed to rise from the ashes. Reading Dexter's story will challenge readers to think about who they would be if everything in their own lives were destroyed.



Hollye Dexter is the author of two memoirs and co-editor of *Dancing at the Shame Prom* (Seal Press), praised by best-selling author Gloria Feldt (former CEO of Planned Parenthood) as "a brilliant book that just might change your life." Her essays and articles about women's issues, activism, and politics have been widely published in anthologies, as well as in Maria Shriver's *Architects of Change*, *Huffington Post*, *The Feminist Wire*, and more. She teaches writing workshops internationally and for at-risk youth in Los Angeles, where she lives with her husband and a houseful of kids and pets. Learn more about Dexter on her blog, <http://www.hollyedexter.blogspot.com>

Call For Proposals

Submission Deadline: September 15, 2015



Stories from the Heart VIII aims to encourage us to explore our lives, including hidden or difficult chapters of our life stories, and to return to our communities and share our discoveries with others.

The conference program will feature **two 105-minute pre-conference workshops** on Friday afternoon and **60-minute presentations** on Saturday morning/afternoon and Sunday morning. Each presenter will receive a discount from the full conference fee.

The ideas sketched out below are just suggestions—be creative! If you're offering a workshop, make sure you include at least two opportunities for participants to actually write and share their writing; if you're offering a lecture, ensure that it is interactive and engaging. Also, please tell us whether your proposal is primarily aimed at novice/beginner writers or advanced/experienced writers, or is general, for all levels.

Presenters do not have to be members of Story Circle, but must register for (at minimum) one day's attendance at the conference. Why do we require presenters to register? We've all attended conferences where the presenters are

"hit-and-run experts" who appear, give a talk, and then disappear. We want our presenters to be part of the conference and share their wisdom and enthusiasm about women's stories with our attendees for at least a day, and preferably, throughout the conference.

For full details, visit the conference website:

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

Suggested Topic Areas

Pre-Conference Workshops

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

60-Minute Conference Workshops

Attendees have expressed an interest in memoir, personal essay, fiction, and poetry—your presentation can focus on one genre or include more than one. Below are some areas to consider, but please don't be limited by these suggestions. We welcome your creative ideas.

Getting Personal: journaling, writing from the heart/reaching deep, developing an authentic voice, family history

Craft Matters: improving writing skills, learning to edit/proofread, revise, fiction fundamentals (characters, plot, setting, structure), hooking the reader

The Writing Life: managing time, creating a writing practice, working with a collaborator, critique group, beta readers; blogging

Breaking into Publishing: what first-timers need to know; crafting a pitch, proposal, query letter; looking for an agent; publishing paths (self/indie/traditional)

Marketing: secrets of social media, creating a publicity campaign; guerilla marketing (low-cost, unconventional marketing); building an author platform

Writing as a business: record-keeping, business records, best freelancing practices

Continued from page 4

Featured Reviewer: Barbara Heming

Barbara Heming has been a voracious reader ever since she learned to read. For her a snow day was a gift of time to journey into the worlds sandwiched between the covers of a book. She pursued a Ph.D. in Hispanic Languages and Literature which opened doors into the literatures of other cultures. Since leaving academia and moving to a remote canyon in northern New Mexico, she has turned her attention to her lifelong dream of writing fiction. Her second Hall of Fame Mystery book is in progress.



Barbara discovered the Story Circle Network in 2007 when a friend sent her a brochure for the *What Wildness is This?* Conference. She became a member and was a presenter at Stories From the Heart IV in 2008. She is SCBR's Distribution Editor, updating our Book Distribution Blog (a private blog for reviewers, featuring books we have available) and mailing review copies to those who request them.



An Interview with Sarton Award Winner Yelizaveta P. Renfro

by Susan Wittig Albert

Yelizaveta P. Renfro is the 2014 Sarton Award winner for *Xylotheque*, a collection of nine very personal and revealing essays that combine memoir and nature writing. She is also the author of a collection of short stories, *A Catalogue of Everything in the World*, winner of the St. Lawrence Book Award. She holds an MFA from George Mason University and a Ph.D. from the University of Nebraska. Born in the former Soviet Union, she has lived in California, Virginia, Nebraska, and Connecticut.

Read Susan's review of *Xylotheque* at <http://www.storycirclebookreviews.org/reviews/xylotheque.shtml>

Tell us about your writing life. When did you begin writing? What's your favorite place/time to write? How do you fit it into the rest of your life?

In a sense, I've been writing my entire life (or at least as long as I can remember). I have various diaries and journals going back to when I was about eight years old. I haven't always done the same kind of writing—I spent a period of time studying journalism and writing for daily newspapers, for example—but I have been pretty consistent about doing some kind of writing since childhood.

I have no favorite time or place to write. It's whenever I have time and wherever I happen to be. I teach writing full time at Westfield State University in Massachusetts, I teach writing part time online for UCLA Extension Writers' Program, and I have two kids in elementary school. A set writing "schedule" just doesn't work for me. When it's the end of the semester and I have over fifty essays to grade, I don't write at all. On the other hand, over the summer I might write a lot.

Yet in another way, I'm writing all the time. Let me explain. I have numerous notebooks of different sizes that I carry around with me pretty much all the time, and I jot notes down wherever I happen to be—at my daughter's swim practice, during my office hours, waiting for a flight, etc. At any given moment I am mentally working on a number of different projects, and whenever I have a thought about one, I jot it down. Then, when I actually have writing time, I sit down with all of my notebooks, and I type up all of these notations, stringing them together, bridging the gaps between them, until I have a story or an essay.

I was asked a couple of years ago to write a short piece on "the place where I write," which explores some of this further: <https://orionmagazine.org/2013/08/the-place-where-i-write-yelizaveta-renfro/>

You've written a collection of short stories, *A Catalogue of Everything in the World*. Which form do you like best, essay or fiction? Why?

People often ask me if I consider myself primarily a fiction or nonfiction writer, and my answer is that I am both. I can't choose just one genre as my favorite. There is some material that seems to lend itself better to fiction, some to nonfiction.

That being said, I should add that I came to creative nonfiction and the essay form rather late—and I love it! When I first started college, I was planning to major in journalism and become a newspaper reporter. As I describe in the essay "Quercus" (in *Xylotheque*) I discovered that this was not the kind of writing I wanted to do. Rather, I wanted to tell stories that mattered, stories that withstood the test of time, stories that I polished and perfected—and so I decided that I should become a fiction writer, because fiction was "literature" in a way that journalism was not. So I majored in comparative literature, read the classics of world literature, and then went on to get an MFA in fiction writing and then a Ph.D. in English with a creative (fiction) dissertation.

Along the way, I wrote a few essays, but I kept thinking that a "serious" writer would write fiction. It was only after completing my Ph.D. that I came to realize that creative nonfiction was just as serious and enduring as fiction, that the essay form was expansive and full of potential, capable of taking on the kinds of stories I wanted to tell. In a sense, I went from one extreme (journalism) to the other (fiction) and then came back to the middle: creative nonfiction. It's a genre that allows me to take my training in journalism and training in fiction and marry the two.

The essays in *Xylotheque* were written and published over an extended period of time—ten years or more. What prompted you to pull them together into a collection? How much rewriting did you have to do in order to fit the essays together?

At first, my essays were a side interest—a diversion—while I worked on my "serious" work of fiction writing. The first essay that I wrote is the first one in the book, "Living at Treeline." When I was working on my MFA in fiction, I was required to take a class in another genre, so I took a nonfiction class. One of the assignments was to

write a pastiche based on one of the essays in Annie Dillard's *Teaching a Stone to Talk*. I was fascinated with her essay "An Expedition to the Pole," the way it twined two very different topics together, so I modeled my assignment on that one. (You can read a bit more about this here: <https://northamericanreview.wordpress.com/2014/07/18/braiding-my-life-on-living-at-tree-line-by-yelizaveta-p-renfro/>.)

At this point, I had no intention of writing an essay collection, so I continued writing fiction. A few years later, I saw a call somewhere for submissions on the topic of "translation" (loosely defined), and it was at that time that I wrote "Translation: Perevod." I didn't submit the piece at that time because it was too long, but I did eventually place it in *Witness*. And still, I had no intention of making a collection.

The next essay that I wrote didn't even make it into the collection. It was an essay titled "Planting Trees" that came out in *Fourth River* in 2009. The reason I mention it is that after writing that essay, I came to realize that I was really interested in trees and that I could basically create an entire collection of essays linked thematically around trees. (I should also add that by this point I had finished my collection of short stories and placed them with a publisher, but I was having trouble working on any long pieces—like a novel—because I was taking care of a preschooler and newborn and my attention was always interrupted. Working on essays—something that I could easily see through to the end, something not too daunting—seemed like a good diversion while my kids were small.)

The remaining essays I wrote over a period of a couple years with the collection in mind, and as I finished each essay, I would send it out. All of them appeared in print before I put them all together and sent the book out as a whole. Because most of the essays were written with the collection in mind, I did very little rewriting to make them fit together.

Once your collection was complete, how did you go about finding a publisher? Did you have an agent? How long did this part of the process take?

Figuring out when my collection was "complete" was a challenge. But once it was complete, or as complete as it could be at that time, I began to send it out to publishers. I didn't work with an agent because there isn't much money in essay collections, and most agents won't take them (unless you're already a best-selling author). Instead, I researched the "small" presses that accepted queries directly from writers, and I sent out my book (or a cover letter with sample essays, depending on the submission requirements).

I started sending out the book in late 2010, and it was finally accepted by the University of New Mexico Press in May of 2013. In the interim, I sent the manuscript to seventeen different presses, and I did get a number of positive responses (editors asking to see the entire manuscript, editors praising the writing but claiming it wasn't quite right for their press, etc.). I should also note that the book I first sent out in 2010 is very different from the final book I delivered to the University of New Mexico Press in 2013. In the two and a half years that elapsed, the

title changed, the contents changed, and the ordering of the essays changed.

The essays in your collection are a form sometimes called "lyric essays." They are revealingly personal, which makes them an ideal form for memoir. Which of the essays in *Xylotheque* reveals most about you? Did you learn anything about yourself as you worked on it? Is there a special challenge for you in revealing yourself?

I certainly learned a lot about the lyric essay form as I was writing the essays; I also learned a lot about trees and a lot about myself, though I'm not sure I can easily summarize these personal "lessons." I think what I learned about myself is in the book. And yes, I think that revealing oneself in writing is challenging. The most revealing essay is probably "Translation: Perevod" since it deals with some difficult times during my teenage years and in my relationship with my mother. There's even more to this story that I haven't yet told, but I think sometimes the revelations occur in stages.

The lyric essay is, as you note, revealingly personal, but to some degree I think it allows for reticence as well. Here's what Brenda Miller has to say about the lyric essay:

Many excellent writers and thinkers have tried to pin down the lyric essay, defining it as a collage, a montage, a mosaic. It's been called disjunctive, paratactic, segmented, sectioned. All of these are correct. All of these recognize in the lyric essay a tendency toward fragmentation that invites the reader into those gaps, that emphasizes what is unknown rather than the already articulated known.

Those gaps or that white space also allows the writer to hold some things back, to make it the reader's job to create the transitions, the connections, between one section and another, between one part of a life and another. That makes it possible to present highly revealing scenes (such as the series of scenes with my parents on pages 72-74 of *Xylotheque*) without a great deal of commentary or analysis or emotion, and then trust the reader to put together these discrete pieces of the mosaic and stand back to look at the full image. This way, I am giving glimpses of my life without a torrent of sentimentality or raw emotion, and this doling out is the way that I, being a reserved person, am able to reveal myself on the page.

We read *Xylotheque* in one of our Story Circle reading groups, and several readers felt that the ordering of the essays is important. What can you tell us about this? What effects were you seeking as you ordered the pieces in the collection?

This is a challenging question. There are reasons why I ordered the essays the way I did, but I'm not sure I can articulate them (or that I am even aware of them all). As I sent the book out, I kept working on it—reordering the essays, taking some out, adding others, etc. I have a very difficult time deciding when something is "finished." As far as I'm concerned, it's never really finished until it comes out in print. So the version of *Xylotheque* that finally did appear in print became my finished book simply because a publisher decided to accept it and publish it at that time. (I have since written a couple more essays that

could have easily been included in the book, but now I'm saving them for a future volume of essays.)

I wasn't even aware that my collection of essays might be a "memoir," and memoir wasn't something I consciously had in mind as I put the book together. A memoir, as far as I knew, was a single, sustained narrative (like a novel, but only nonfiction). What I had written was, to my mind, a collection of essays loosely linked by their theme of trees. It was the publisher that decided to label my book as a "memoir" and later reviewers and readers who read it in that way. It was eye-opening to learn my book was a memoir. And now, I agree that it is. Just in the way that lyric essays leave white space or gaps where the reader is asked to make connections or interpret, so the essays leave between them the same kinds of gaps or white space that the reader fills in.

Originally I put my essays in the order that they were written, because I thought perhaps they revealed something about the development of my thinking. In other words, I was more interested in tracing the development of my internal life than I was in placing the external events of my life in chronological order. Later, I switched some of the essays around. I decided, for example, to group the essays that did not discuss my children in the beginning of the book to represent my writing and thinking before I was a parent (and so the first three essays do not mention my children). I wanted "Translation: Pervod" to be in the middle of the book because it felt like an anchor to me, a long, expansive piece that gave context to the essays on either side of it. Originally I had "Navel Country" as the concluding essay, but it felt a little dark, not as hopeful as concluding with the redwood essay, so I switched those two around. These are some of the reasons for my ordering of the essays.

One of the essays, "Soviet Trees," is written in second person, present tense—a compositional challenge that you have beautifully met. Please choose a couple of sentences or a paragraph that we could include with this interview, and say something about the effect you were trying to achieve. Or just tell us, in general terms, why you chose this person and tense for this particular essay.

I originally wrote "Soviet Trees" in the first person, but something about the voice and the tone felt wrong to me. I let it sit for a while, and then I tried to revise it, keeping it in first person, but I wasn't happy with it. Finally I decided to change the tense. Why not implicate the reader in my story? Why not ask the reader to take on my story? I knew it was a risky move to make; some readers don't like the intrusion of that "you," that insistence that the reader be an active part of the narrative. I think pulling it off depends on many elements—the voice, the tone, the subject matter. In the case of "Soviet Trees," I wanted to convey the sense that despite the somewhat foreign or exotic setting, the story I was telling was a basic one, a coming of age tale that could happen, with different details, in many times and many places. I wanted the reader to feel that connection to the material, and so I made the material the reader's. Here's a section from the essay:

Walking through the spongy duff of the forest floor, you think about many things at once. Your thoughts explode, embryonic but powerful, not yet born into language. You understand that all summer you've been yearning for a transformation, and you wonder, if the transformation refuses to come, can the very yearning effect a transformation? Do you have that power? Can we make things happen to us, not just on the outside but on the inside? Can carrying your body away through the forest cause a revolution in your mind? You don't have words for many things. You don't know what to ask but feel that you are brimming with nascent questions.

You tell yourself the words you know. You're an American girl walking through a Soviet forest. You're a Soviet girl running through a Russian forest. No, these statements are too limiting. There is more. It goes deeper than labels, than senseless words like *Soviet* or *American*. *Highland*. *Riverside*. The wind rushing in your ears insists it's so. The trees insist it's so. You want to make so much more of this than it seems to be. You want this experience to take on the quality of myth. You want your likeness to be embroidered on a tapestry, etched in wood, set down in a book. You want this day to be deeply symbolic, pivotal, a turning point—or else you want for there to be a moral. You want at least to be a character in a tale larger than your own scrawny life. You want others to look on you running in the forest and to learn, or to be awed, or to be swept away—or at least to acknowledge or remember you. You don't want to be swallowed by time, pressed away in its folds. You don't want to forget or be forgotten. You want to live forever and for there to be meaning, everywhere, all the time. And you don't want the meaning to be in blue jeans or hamburgers. You realize that you want the meaning to be in the sky and the earth and the trees, in what preceded us, in what we recognize as home, more elemental than the name of a nation or a political system, in what we share in common—or should share in common—if we weren't surrounded by and distracted by and dazzled by *stuff*.

You are, simply, a girl running through a forest. You are elemental. You stand for everything. Maybe it's the nineteenth century, maybe the Revolution of 1917 hasn't yet taken place, or maybe it's the new millennium and the Soviet Union is a great wrecked ship. That's how you feel, walking through trees. You've been lifted clear out of time.

I think the feelings this passage evokes are the heart of the essay—the sense that all of us, at one time or another, have wandered in a forest (real or metaphoric) in which we tried to find ourselves and in which we were able to feel something eternal. I wanted this to happen not just to myself but also to "you," to the reader, to anyone who comes upon my words in another time and place.

What advice can you give to a memoirist who is working on the story of her life?

First of all, patience is critical. Wait. You might not be able to tell the story of what happened to you last week or last year or even last decade. Distance—not just in place but in time—can be crucial. For example, I couldn't have written "Navel Country" until I was geographically removed from

Southern California, but also removed in time—in that case, about fifteen years. Had I attempted the essay before then, I would have been too close to the story.

And second, come at your story from different angles. “Tell the truth but tell it slant,” Emily Dickinson wrote. There are many different directions from which to come at the truth. Your particular “slant” is what makes your story. So try telling the same story from different angles—as a lyric essay, as a braided essay, in the second person, etc. Remember that truth is subjective and fluid, that your truth is not the same as someone else’s truth (even if you witnessed the same event). And remember that your own truth changes with time. The story I write today is not the story I would have written ten years ago, nor is it the story I would write ten years from now.

Third, do your research. Interview people from your past who might have a different perspective. Read newspapers, journals, diaries, public records—anything that can help you to piece together parts of the story you don’t know. Read about the historical era to put your story in a larger context. Read all about trees, if that’s relevant, or about anything that fascinates you and that you can use as a “lens” through which to view your own life. (When I was working on the essays that would make up *Xylotheque*, I used to say that I was writing my life as seen through the branches of trees.)

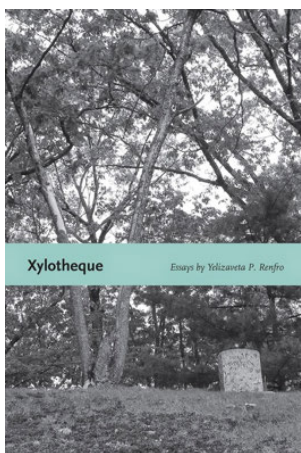
And finally, keep writing. Don’t give up. Find a system that works for you. Write every day, if you can, or spend a

whole weekend every month locked away with your computer. Make writing a priority. It can so easily slip to the bottom of that “to do” list. Give it a spot near the top. You can clean the kitchen later. Really. You would be shocked to see what my kitchen looks like most of the time, but for me, the writing is more important than the kitchen. You can set your own priorities. You have only so many minutes in a day. Spend them wisely.

Are you working on other pieces for publication? Essay? Short fiction? A novel? If so, what’s your timeline?

Yes, to all of those! I am writing essays and short fiction and a novel and a memoir. I have a completed draft of a novel, *What Would Walt Whitman Do?*, which I hope to find a publisher for soon. I’m also at work on a memoir that will take the material of “Translation: Perevod” and expand it into a book-length narrative. And I’m continuing to write short fiction and essays. For example, I recently had another “tree” essay published here: <http://www.splitrockreview.org/renfro/>. I’ve tried my hand at writing for children and am involved in a collaborative online writing project called *The Great Connecticut Caper* (<http://ctcaper.cthumanities.org/chapter-1-all-aboard-the-becky-thatcher/>). Also, this summer I’m going to be a writer-in-residence at Denali National Park in Alaska, so I expect more writing to come out of that experience as well.

Excerpt from *Xylotheque*: "Song of the Redwood Tree"



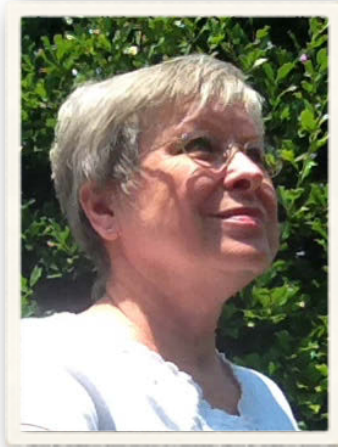
Xylotheque, is made up of nine essays accompanied by ten photographs. Every few weeks on her blog, Yelizaveta posts an excerpt from one of the essays along with a photograph that was not included in the book. "Song of the Redwood Tree" first appeared in *South Dakota Review* in 2011.

We look and look, but we do not see the trees. There is no place to stand to see an entire redwood. For hours we crane our necks, peering into the sky where the trees disappear from sight. We circle their behemoth trunks, stupefied. We are underwater. The light on the forest floor is murky, greenish, yet freighted with clarity. There is levity to our steps on the spongy duff. We are walking on the ocean floor. “The forest canopy is the earth’s secret ocean,” writes Richard Preston in *The Wild Trees*. Hundreds of feet above us, the trees collect fog from the

air. Their canopies are like root systems reaching into the sky. They seem as distant as the stars from where we stand in our green-tinged seafloor environment. The trees reach into the earth and into heaven, drinking, drinking. We are blind to the work of the roots under our feet, to the slow constant pull, to the enormous suck, the seep of water upward, unceasing for centuries.

“You really can’t tell much about what’s happening in a forest from the ground,” says noted redwood expert Steve Sillett in 2009 National Geographic documentary titled *Climbing Redwood Giants*. So true. From the ground, we do not see the life that teems within the canopies hundreds of feet above us; we never glimpse, for example, the salamanders that live their whole lives in trees without once touching the ground. We do not see the epiphytes, fifty-plus species of mites, copepods, earthworms, bumblebees, huckleberries, lichens, voles, rhododendrons, currant and elderberry bushes, or the bonsai groves of California laurel, western hemlock, Douglas fir, tan oak, Sitka spruce, and buckthorn that perch atop the sprawling canopies that are like land masses held aloft in the sky. The canopies of the world’s forests, I learn, contain half of nature’s species. The scientists who rappel themselves into the trees, scaling redwood trunks like the faces of sheer cliffs, go into this undiscovered country. And they see.

Continued on page 11



Internet Chapter: Membership Has Its Privileges

by Lee Ambrose



In 2015, Story Circle Network's Internet Chapter turns 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.

Several years ago, a popular credit card company's ad campaign used the phrase "Membership has its privileges." The same could be said for membership in the Story Circle Network Internet Chapter. What is implied – even if it is not said out loud in the credit card company ads – is that in order to experience the privileges of membership to their fullest, members need to invest something of themselves. Again, the same could be said for Story Circle Network Internet Chapter. Credit card members only enjoy all of the perks of their membership when they shop where the card is accepted, utilize the card regularly and invest themselves a bit to reap the maximum benefit. Likewise, Internet Chapter members get the maximum benefit when they take full advantage of its perks. Weekly writing prompts are only as meaningful as the time invested in pondering and writing to them. Membership in the reading e-circle only becomes a perk when one reads the monthly book selection and participates in the oft times lively on-line book discussions. Writing e-circle membership only adds to a member's writing portfolio when she writes a monthly story. And a connection with other circle members can only be created when a member not only submits her own monthly story but also reads and responds to other circle members' posts. Those connections with other circle members become some of the best privileges of membership. And in the words of yet another credit card ad, they are priceless. But they only occur when members invest something of themselves in the first place.

In her book **STITCHES: A Handbook On Meaning, Hope and Repair** author Anne Lamott writes "*When we agree to being part of something bigger than our own wired, fixated minds, we are saved. When we search for something larger than our own selves to hook into, we can come through whatever life throws at us.*" Joining SCN's Internet Chapter may just be that "something bigger." It may well be the "something to hook into" that helps us to deal with whatever life throws our way. Over the years, members have weathered 9/11 together, they've struggled

with illness and death along with their beloved circle sisters, they've applauded successes and lifted up those experiencing disappointment, they've encouraged some to publish their works, they've nurtured novice writers and relished being in the company of accomplished writers. Whatever life has thrown our way; SCN Internet Chapter members have been there for one another.

Fifteen years ago, when SCN founder Susan Albert launched the Internet Chapter, she knew that women needed a safe place to tell their stories. Today, that fact has not changed. We still need a safe place to tell our stories. We share them in bits and pieces when the books we read in the reading e-circle touch us. We share them more fully when we write a story or poem of our own in response to a monthly writing prompt in the writing e-circle. We share even more of our stories when we invest a bit more time and thought in our responses to the stories of others. And, we allow pieces of our stories to unfold when we work with the weekly writing prompts in the privacy of our own homes. In creating SCN, Susan Albert gave each of us that "something larger than our own selves to hook into." The challenge to each member is just how far are you going to go to hook into it? How are you going to tap into the avenues that will help you to experience the privileges of membership more fully?

Perhaps one of the biggest perks of membership is the ability to find support, encouragement and camaraderie as we strive to write our own life stories in whatever form they may take. I've said it before and I'll say it again, if (and I recognize that this is a huge *if* for some) you write a story to every monthly prompt, you'll have twelve stories – potential chapters to a book or pages in a poetry chapbook – by the end of the year. Stop and think about how long you've been a member of SCN Internet Chapter. Quick! Do the math! How many stories (or chapters) might you have if you had written a story or poem each month for all of those years you've been a member? If you became a member at the birth of Internet Chapter, you'd have 15 x 12

stories. That's right, you'd have 180 stories! Sometimes that potential escapes us until a time such as this prompts us to calculate the membership benefit that we could be experiencing – if only we had invested a bit of ourselves each month along the way.

But why is writing down our life story important? If you are a member of Story Circle Network, chances are you already know how you'd answer this question. Story telling has traditionally fallen to the women of each society. Ours is no different. How many of us have wished that we had asked more questions or listened to more stories while a certain female family member was still alive? When was the last time you wished that you had taken the time to jot down a few details so that when you returned to the story, you could write it more accurately?

Anne Lamott writes, *"We forget so much. All those memories of great meals, travel, landscapes, conversations, insights, theater and scenes in distant cities, moments you swore you'd remember forever, so many wasted away like Etch A Sketch drawings."*

As I ponder Lamott's wise words, it occurs to me that one of the true membership benefits of Story Circle Network Internet Chapter is the assurance of fewer moments wasted away like Etch A Sketch drawings – which means more stories captured for our families, friends or perhaps the public in general. So let's all make it a priority to exercise our membership benefits to their maximum potential and in the process, to enjoy the journey that is uniquely that of a Story Circle Network member! Membership at Story Circle Network Internet Chapter *definitely* has its privileges!

Continued from page 9

Science has other ways of seeing. Researchers peer at the redwoods through microscopes, poring over cellulose, lichens, the structure of shrimp found snarled in trees hundreds of feet above sea level. They fly over the forests in twin-engine planes, using LIDAR, light detection and ranging, to create highly detailed maps of the topography of redwood forests, determining the heights of the tallest trees from the air. Dendrochronologists squint at great slabs of redwood cross sections, peering at the rings, counting, seeking out minute differences in annual growth. All of these are ways of seeing. And all ways glimpse only pieces of the whole.

Announcing:

A New Anthology

by Susan Schoch

A few weeks ago, we asked our members to help us find a new title for SCN's annual Anthology, one that would broaden its scope to include fiction, in addition to nonfiction and poetry. Many of you came up with wonderful ideas. Thank you so much for contributing to the process!

Linda Hasselstrom, Sherrey Meyer, Peggy Moody each offered suggestions that stood out, and we combined their ideas into a great new identity for our annual publication – *Real Women Write: Sharing Our Stories, Sharing Our Lives*. Sherrey, Linda, and Peggy each have our deep appreciation (and all win a year of membership in SCN).

This fresh title makes a graceful transition from the previous one (*True Stories from Real Women*), while it forcefully claims the authority of women's voices. It also acknowledges the importance of story in understanding our lives, and the value of women's sharing and support. It's a title packed with powerful meaning.

The call for submissions will be out soon. *Real Women Write: Sharing Our Stories, Sharing Our Lives* is going to be an exciting Anthology, with pages full of artful wisdom and words from our wonderful members. Time to sharpen your pencils!





True Words from Real Women

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.

Summer Kismet

Doris Shaw, Colorado Springs CO
dj_shorty40@hotmail.com

I grew up in the Ozarks. When you live on top of the mountain, the world is at your feet. When the heat of summer descended and all I wanted was relief, I would wade in the creek. Water would come up around my ankles as the stream barely flowed; only a thought of the torrent that flowed when the snows of winter melted and cascaded down the narrow gorge.

Men dreamed of containing the immense bounty and built a dam from one mountain to another. Now the water offered a respite from the heat in the depths of the lake. No longer could my feet touch bottom unless I strolled where the gentle waves lapped against the shore. Many times we camped on the bank and rose with the sun to run into the welcoming water.

Television brought views of immense spans of water and waves that raged against the shore. The water I knew was cold and so clear you could see the rocks on the bottom of the stream. The ones I saw had huge boulders that took the beating of the waves and sent the spray high into the air. From a distance, the water appeared endless shades of blue with bottoms of sand that glowed white.

I don't remember when I first saw the ocean. As much as the mountains made my spirit soar, the ocean calmed my soul. The waves spoke to me as I walked on the beach as the heat of summer warmed my back and sand seeped between my toes. My first glimpse has not been my last. If I had a bucket list, at the top would be a desire to see where the Pacific Ocean ends and the Indian Ocean begins. Isn't that what summer is: a time to explore and discover by kismet the longing that connects me to that small trickle of water from my childhood?

Bosom Buddies

Lois Halley, Westminister MD
joeandloishalley@comcast.net

We are a sisterhood, a small community of three white-haired women wearing matching hospital gowns and occupying the only chairs in the meticulous, narrow room. Today, our radiation appointments overlap, and we are engaged in an animated conversation.

We laugh because our bras feel full of goop from the ointment we apply to our radiation burns, and because each of us has given her afflicted breast a nickname: Rudolph, Riding Hood, and Crispy Critter. In laughing, we draw strength from each other.

Each of us has scars and a missing chunk of breast from the lumpectomies and lymph node dissections we have undergone for breast cancer. "It's all good," we tell ourselves. At this stage of our lives, breasts do not define us, nor do any physical attributes. Our personhoods arise from our experiences, careers, emotions, families, and so much more. Conversations focus on those topics as well as our cancer treatments, which are so technically advanced and individualized that no two of us has the same exact procedures.

After 33 treatments, five each week, I complete the radiation. All four of my radiation technicians are present, and there are hugs from each. I tell them how impressed I am with their skills and compassion and advise them to keep doing their good work. They present me with a small silvery bell attached to a pink ribbon and advise me to celebrate.

I leave to meet three friends for lunch—women I have known for twenty five years. More hugs are shared, and they give me a card with a small packet of confetti. The message is clear. It is too soon to know if I am entirely cancer free, but I will take my silvery bell and packet of confetti and celebrate all the adventures that life has to offer.

Cut Grass

Janice Strohmeier, Houston TX
jimmy768816@sbcglobal.net
r-ecircle I

The smudged eraser taps on my desk impatiently as though trying to free itself from the sharpened pencil that binds it. It is close to the last days of school in June, and I realize with dread that I am a prisoner in this third-grade class, held captive by Miss Sidowsky and the rules of Spelling and Grammar.

Outside, summer was chanting my name.

Just past the open window, amethyst-tinged lilacs exploded, crisp snap-dragons reached out to their trellis, pink bleeding hearts bowed their heads in the legend of their lost love. The humming of a lawn mower, droning and rhythmic came into focus as I watched the pattern that Mr. Calhoun the custodian made as he ran the mower over, up, and back, on the lawns outside the window. I would trade everything I knew about dropping the “y” and adding “i-e-s” for a chance at the freedom he had in that moment.

I am in my garden tending to my flowers as my husband mows diagonal patterns while he cuts our front lawn. The lawn mower hums, closer now as he turns abruptly and approaches the flowerbeds. The drone of the mower fades as he turns up the side yard away from me as he continues his task. I inhale deeply; my roses are coming up and the gardenias are sweet with bloom. The hibiscus covers itself with scarlet blossoms, each one competing for best-in-show. Freshly cut, deep green St. Augustine grass clings to my ankles, the damp heels of my sneakers. I sit back just a bit and watch as my husband turns the mower, coming back in my direction.

I close my eyes as the thick fragrance of Southern summer drifts around me. Finally free, retired, and now living in the land of constant summer, I recall the young girl held captive by the promise of freedom that summer offered just outside the third-grade classroom window. I exhale slowly, and the restless third-grader inside me cuddles around the memory of fresh cut grass and summer’s promise.

Time Alone

Doris Shaw, Colorado Springs CO
dj_shorty40@hotmail.com

Get up early each morning
Enjoy the time alone just to listen
Use it as a time to think and
Contemplate with no
Distractions

Augusts of Yesteryear

Georgia Hubley, Henderson NV
geohub@aol.com

Judy and I were ten when we first met. She was spending the month of August on her aunt’s farm that was nearby my parent’s farm. I was elated when Judy’s aunt invited me to lunch and to spend the night. Judy and I became best friends that day, as we devoured Sloppy Joe sandwiches and shared our lives.

Judy lived in the city and I lived in the country, forty-five miles apart.

“You’re so lucky to live on a farm,” Judy said.

“You’re the lucky one,” I said, envying her city lifestyle. “You can walk to school and to the movies. I live ten miles from town and have to ride the bus to and from school.”

The next morning, Judy’s aunt nixed our plan to pitch a tent in the backyard.

“A storm’s brewing,” she warned as thunder rumbled overhead.

After breakfast, we ignored the raging thunderstorm and formed a tent over the front porch swing using a brown plaid blanket and clip-on clothespins. While we huddled inside the tent and waited out the storm, Judy spotted a car and made the most piercing whistle sound I’d ever heard. I asked her to teach me to whistle.

“Okay, watch me,” she said. “Put your fingers on each side of your tongue, press down, then blow real hard.” No luck. All I managed was a sputtering raspberry sound.

That summer we spent many afternoons on the shady front porch, snacking on apples, giggling, painting our nails, playing games and watching cars drive by. Daily, I tried to whistle, to no avail.

At the end of August, Judy returned to the city, but our friendship blossomed across the miles by keeping in touch by phone calls, writing letters and exchanging photographs. All year long we counted the days until Judy’s next August visit to the country.

Those August visits of yesteryear continued through our teenage years and we treasured every moment, even though I never learned to whistle.



Thor Wields His Thunderbolt

Connie Katusak, Burnet TX
ckatusak@aol.com
Milwood Group Writing Circle

Thunder crashes,
Lightning flashes
Across the sullen sky.

Rain and hail
Like bullets flail
The dusty dreary dirt.

Mother Earth drinks,
Beneficial water sinks
Soaks the sleeping bounty.

Precious drops
Fertilize crops
Giving life to dormant seeds.

Thor wields his thunderbolt
Energy and nourishment float
On silver sheets to earth.



Geometry

Marsha Pincus, Bala Cynwyd PA
marshap1124@gmail.com

The slope of your chin
The plane of your cheeks
The angle of your profile

We are all geometry
Curves and symmetry
Lines and arcs
Nearness and distance
Balance and imperfection

We are all that which
Cannot be put into words
Sources and mouths of great rivers
Chaos and order
Stasis and flux
Dreams waking into
The light of day



A Surprise Gift

Madeline Sharples, Manhattan Beach CA
madeline40@gmail.com

The long drive to Miami Beach
from Chicago was hot, cramped.
My dad and mom sat up front
while my older brother,
and 11-year old me
bickered and played fisticuffs
as we vied for room in the back seat
away from our baby sister's throw-up stench.

By the time we entered
our teeny hotel room
I was ready.
I jumped into my new bathing suit
that showed off my blossoming breasts,
my still ample belly, and chubby legs
and went to the bathroom
before going down to the pool.

I was stopped cold
by a surprise present—
a brown-y red, thick gunk
in the crotch of my suit.
Hysterical, I yelled for my mom
who had to admit
she didn't do her motherly job.
After all, eleven was way too young
to talk about such things
to her little girl.

Summer Serendipity

Letishia Watt, Norman OK
lettywatt65@gmail.com
w-ecircle 4

Circles and balloons in yellows and blues
Ribbons and strings flaunting purples and greens
Sock it to me orange connecting colors
So goes the flow of that old '60's towel.

A beach towel flashed and flipped on the fence
Dripping and dangling like a captured kite
Smelling of fresh swimming pool chlorine
Radios blaring, bright red balls bouncing

Images of summers dance in my mind
Of steamy hot concrete burning bare feet
Of icy clear waters catching our breath
I drift back in time on a summer's breeze

And wake up refreshed and young once again.

Letter to a High School Senior

Kassie Ritman, Indianapolis IN
kassieritman@gmail.com
CCC Writing Circle, Indianapolis IN, w-ecircle I

Dear Goddaughter~

I wonder how often you've been told that this year will fly by in the space of a breath or the blink of your eye?
It's true.

I wonder how often you've heard that College is an incredible time of growth and learning beyond academics?
It is.

I wonder how often you've been asked, "What are your plans for next year?" and wondered whether adults can say anything else to you...ever?
They will...eventually.

I wonder how many times you've been told that you are wonderful and talented and can do whatever you set your heart and mind to?
Because you can.

I wonder if you understand how privileged your life is with schools and your family and community
Because you are.

But I never doubt what sort of person you'll be a few years from now.
Because I know the people you come from, I've seen the kindness of your ways, the quiet attention to your work, and the way you hold yourself and walk with your eyes set on a faraway goal.

I find these traits of yours admirable, and amazing especially in a world where it's far easier now to be "less," to do just "enough," and to "get by." I sense you are cut out for something better, and I believe that you are fortunate enough to treasure God's plan for you.
I'll be excited to sit back, here at home and watch your life unfold. I think it will be a magnificent journey. And I look forward to being surprised!

In the words of my own patron saint, the feisty Catherine of Siena:
Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire.

Believe in yourself, Sweetheart ~ you're gonna change the way things work!

One Last Journey

Mary Devries, Hutchinson KS
flossiehanna@gmail.com, w-ecircles I and 6

Preach no elegant eulogies
Sincere praise is often quiet
Print no picture obituaries
They never ring faithful
Truth is in the hearts of those who loved
Set my ashes free
Fling me to the wind
One last journey
Wind powered, widespread
Put aside the trappings of tradition
Loss is but part of life
Rituals do not lessen it
Rather write the memories in your heart

Ode to the Sun

Lily MacKenzie, Richmond CA
lilyionamackenzie.wordpress.com,
lmackenzie@pacbell.net

You dazzling
dazzler flirting

with stars and
planets, taking

a long breath
every night when

you slide beneath
the horizon, winking

a few times before
slipping out of view.

And oh those sunsets
you leave in your wake,

the rainbow of colors
sweeping across

the hushed sky
from your renowned

palate. No wonder
we can't wait

till you return
each morning, lifting

the world out
of darkness—never

giving up.



My Date With Count Yorga

Lorna Lee, Ridgefield WA
 dizzylorna@hotmail.com, <http://lornasvoice.com>

Count Yorga and I had a date. We were meeting at the Stardust Drive-In Movie Theater. Unfortunately, my mother and two sisters were chaperoning. That's how it was in my youth—we did things as a family, including going to creepy movies at the drive-in.

The Stardust was only open during the summer and only played movies with easy-to-follow plots for which sound or picture quality didn't matter. *Count Yorga* was a perfect movie for the Stardust crowd who could, for five dollars a car load (children under ten for free), enjoy an evening full of entertainment.

The fun commenced with the hunt for the “perfect” spot to view the movie. We had to be in the middle, not too far back, and convenient to the Concession Stand. Mom and my older sister, Tina, commandeered the front seat. Lisa, my younger sister, and I were relegated by birth order to sit in the back seat. Positioning the car on the viewing mound was a major production. Mom would jockey the car back and forth until no one was satisfied with their view of the behemoth screen.

If we were lucky, the speaker wouldn't crackle too much. A broken speaker meant the hunt for a new spot and the subsequent jockeying for the “perfect” positioning had to begin again.

As dusk descended, so did mosquitoes. We rolled up the car windows. A fog descended inside from the heat and moisture of multiple excited females. Mom sent Tina to the Concession Stand for relief supplies: French fries and at least two Mosquito Pics. The fries are self-explanatory. The Mosquito Pics were spirals which, when lit, slowly filled the car with smoke and nerve agents meant to kill the flying blood-suckers. Smoke, not steam, filled the car. We rolled the windows down, but it was too late. Our fries tasted toxic, so we added more ketchup.

I didn't care. I wanted to meet my vampire date..., but it was taking forever to get dark enough.

Inpatient, with an empty container of French fries on my lap, I begged Mom, “Honk the horn..., please?”

Aces and Graces, an Unforeseen Blessing

Connie Katusak, Burnet TX
 ckatusak@aol.com
 Milwood GroupWriting Circle

I think back to a day when my teenage son was told he would have to give up his heavy curriculum if he wanted to play college football. A double major in engineering and business would not leave time for the strenuous football program.

As a child he dreamed of playing professional football. Working hard to overcome the handicap of dyslexia, he became a high school varsity starter and won a full scholarship to college. Recognizing there were no guarantees and an injury could easily disrupt his plans, he chose to give up football and concentrate on the degree. He was able to focus on the positive, getting that education rather than on the negative, a potential lost football career. The decision was an unforeseen blessing.

How effortless to be grateful when life has dealt you four aces—a potential winning hand—ease when others are struggling to decide what cards to retain, what to throw away. Your next hand might not be a straightforward one and suddenly you are struggling what cards to hold and what to discard. The cards might have possibilities. You must look for them.

Today our lives are filled with uncertainty. Stress and anxiety are our constant companions. When life is fraught with losing hands, you might be challenged to be thankful. What good is a life full of disappointment and pain? Life in any form contains opportunities. Not everything is easy like holding four aces. Finding that winning hand can be a journey of exploration and reward. When that hand doesn't materialize, be grateful for the wins you have scored.

My son's life can be compared to that card game with some wins and some prospects not readily visible. When times were bad he looked for things in his life to be grateful for and kept moving forward. His accomplishments have been rewarding. He is owner and CEO of a successful manufacturing company.



A Greyhound Ride

Maya Lazarus, Caldwell TX
deblazarus@yahoo.com

Remember this. 1966.
99 days for 99 dollars enticed
my mom on a journey
to visit friends and family
across this United States.
My two brothers and I, five weeks
of adventures
through 6000 miles visiting
people in unusual places,
riding the Greyhound trails.
Youngest brother sat apart
wanting to meet new folks
while I, a teen, flirted and stared
at the bus-riding travelers.
Minneapolis, childhood home to mom.
Wheat farm in Montana where I fell from a horse.
South Dakota, a summertime inferno.
Mississippi, Whites Only, Colored Only signs.
New Orleans, no blacks allowed
in the hotel pool. This girl
from Brooklyn couldn't
comprehend. All my friends
back home were black.
Not one would talk to me here.
Grand Canyon left me without words.
San Diego, LA, San Francisco, Seattle—
glorious places—
but my lasting impression
why so many distant unhappy faces?

Resurrection

Mary Devries, Hutchinson KS
flossiehanna@gmail.com, w-ecircles 1 and 6

Brittle Brown Sere
Tall grasses, winter battered
Conquer, color the land
In the haze of death
But, Wait! Look down
Small green spears Pierce the earth.
Resurrection

Turning A Corner

Arlene Howard, Arlene, Rancho Mirage CA
arlene@alum.calberkeley.org
w-ecircle 14

In 1960, spring arrived late in California. It was almost summer before the almond trees were awash with pink blossoms.

I was at the Stanford Shopping Center buying a new summer travel outfit. As I came out of Macy's and turned the corner, I saw a camera shop. "I will buy a camera for the trip," I said. Soon I was holding a \$4.99 Kodak Baby Brownie in my hand.

Friday night at midnight two Stanford boys picked me up. I'd never met them. One was a friend of my high school friend Kitsey. My Mom initially was reluctant to let me travel 700 miles to Oregon with two nineteen-year-old boys I didn't know. The boys, Alan and Dick, had sweet-talked my Mom and convinced her they were very reliable boys from Stanford. "After all, my uncle is a doctor," Alan told my Mom.

The weekend was spent with Kitsey, Alan and Dick. Kitsey's Oregon boyfriend was sandwiched in-between. Since Dick and I were not having much fun and Kitsey was trying to ditch Alan, I began to notice how nice Alan was, cute too. In spite of all the shenanigans, we had a good time. After they dropped me off at home, I realized I had left my Brownie in the car. I called Dick. Alan returned the call. "Would you like to come to the club for dinner next weekend and go to the flicks? I could give your camera back."

"Golly, yes," I said. He even kissed me on the first date. By midsummer we were in "like." Still are after fifty-two years of marriage.

Recently I read a story about President Woodrow Wilson meeting his second wife Edith. After Edith saw him in the White House, where she had been invited for tea by her cousin Helen Bones, she told Helen, "You never know when you turn a corner you might meet your fate."

I wonder what's around the next corner? I will have my camera with me, maybe even ready to leave it behind. Alan still thinks I did it on purpose. I'll never tell.



Lyme Disease

Patricia Hollinger, Westminister MD
woodscrone@gmail.com

Lyme Disease season is upon us, so listen up to all readers who live on eighteen acre wood lots with herds of deer.

Yes, I contracted this dreaded disease and the word limit will not permit me to share the gory saga I had with the medical profession, in spite of the evidence of someone removing the deer tick and the classic bull's eye that resulted. I received a prescription for a standard regimen of ten days of antibiotics, which no doubt had some positive effect in deterring even more severe repercussions of this disease.

However, I ultimately had to have my right hip replaced as it dissolved into mush within a three month span. There were x-rays to prove the time span of this deterioration.

Ah! With physical therapy I could now do necessary house chores, mow the lawn, prepare meals and return to work. Life was good again.

Two years later the identical intense pain I'd felt in the hip began in my left shoulder, pain that led me to just lie supine on the bed. My prayer began like this: *"God, I have no time for a formal prayer, I just need HELP!"*

The next morning, as I struggled to prepare breakfast, there was a knock on the door. I opened the door and there stood Tony, a local man who did odd jobs from time to time. He said, "Do you need any help?"

He received a hug like no other and I explained my dilemma. "Yes, the lawn needs to be mowed," I said, and of course, gave him the scoop about Lyme disease.

"Oh," he replied, "I know an M.D. in Hanover, PA who treats Lyme's very effectively.

"Give me his name and number," I replied, which he did. I made an appointment and after six months of antibiotics plus supplements I share this story as being one of the most significant serendipitous moments of my life.



John and Mary: A Love Story

Lois Halley, Westminister MD
joeandloishalley@comcast.net

To tell you John was a quiet boy would be an understatement. His unfortunate childhood influenced him to be seen and not heard. His father died when he was a baby, and his mother died when he was four years old. The uncle who took him in was an alcoholic whose drunken rages were often directed at the child, whom he would beat and lock out of the house. On those occasions, the boy crawled under the porch to sleep.

He made friends with a boy named Frank who lived a block away in a huge house filled with brothers and sisters, pets, music, laughter, and love. Frank often brought John home, and Frank's mother would give the eight year old the job of rocking her new born, Mary, in her cradle. If the baby woke, John was to call the mother immediately. For this task, he was rewarded with a candy bar.

The summer that John turned twelve and finished sixth grade, a farmer came to town on a horse-pulled wagon looking for a strong boy to work on his farm. "I'll go!" volunteered the youth, without a moment's hesitation. He remained on the farm, growing tall and strong, until he was eighteen.

Resuming his friendship with Frank, he saw that ten year old Mary had become a lively, talkative, mischievous tomboy whom he enjoyed teasing.

Years passed, and when Mary became eighteen, she and a friend went to New York to work as nannies. After a few months, her homesickness drove her back to her small town.

It was a cool August in 1934 when John saw Mary again. They were the antithesis of each other: she, five feet tall, with unruly black hair, twinkling dark eyes, and the same mischievous spirit. John was ten inches taller than Mary, with serious grey eyes, wavy brown hair, and a quiet nature.

Did John ever expect the baby he rocked in a cradle would become his wife, his unexpected treasure, for sixty-one years? I am proud to have called them Mom and Dad.



Back in '73

Margie Giffin, Indianapolis IN
mggiffin@gmail.com

Back in '73, he was "killing me softly
with his song," and I was longing
to be his bride. While car idled in the wood
by the lake, old motor humming,
he crooned and stroked my cheek
and promised me the moon
would beam down on us forever.

I traced continents all across his back,
and he found hints of the sea
in the green flecks of my eyes.
We traveled sitting still, slept and
awakened, wondering at the expanse
of places that neither of us
had ever before been.

The hush of the woods
enveloped us, and we were alone
in our vast but secluded world.
We vowed always to be explorers,
always to probe finger and toe
until all regions became known
to our most tender touch.

Like an unspoken promise,
the honeyed stillness lulled us
into a thrill for the uncharted
and a faith in our own magic
to conquer ocean, plain, and sky.
Time was a blur, and we let loose
our dreams, and for one
singing moment, we believed.



I Didn't Know I Loved That

Maya Lazarus, Caldwell TX
deblazarus@yahoo.com

In summer, I make visits to a glade
devoid of other two-legged creatures,
I even bring my own chair.
I didn't know I loved orb-weaving spiders.
They eat much of their web every night,
make it anew in the morning dew.
They know exactly where to place their
death traps for maximum attraction, invisible
in the play of light.
I didn't know I loved how moss feels
underfoot—supportive yet yielding,
gentle, caressing my sole/soul.

I didn't know I loved all the shades of green
that I see, hear, and smell.
When I look down,
crimson, violet, white, yellow,
and brown fungi are looking back at me.
I didn't know I loved that.
Everything says, *Look at me.*
Everything says, *We are part of you.*



Sharing Serendipity

Cindy Flora, Clearwater FL

When I was a kid growing up, every summer abounded with serendipity...just being free from classroom constraints was a catalyst for spontaneous imaginative happenings. It was amazing really that I found myself a teacher one day...one day that stretched into years and is now winding back down to one day again.

Despite my career choice or maybe because of it, summers continued to have a special pull on me, the promise of adventure and travel west with friends and family. They still do. And especially the one quickly approaching, the last one before I leave the building, like Elvis, for good, hopefully, on an Indian Summer Day.

The only fly in the ointment is that I will begin this summer with a full-time companion—not just Missy, also known as the Little Yellow Dog—but also my husband who has decided to coincide his retirement with my last summer break. It wasn't ever supposed to be this way. My plan had always been to retire before him, but you know what they say about the best laid plans, and as an English teacher who loved Steinbeck, I definitely should have known better.

So here we are, poised to jump into summer together—well, as in my husband's case, with a bit of a push. He will no sooner walk out of his building than we will hop in the SUV and cross the state to celebrate the All Things Tiki at the Hukilau in Ft. Lauderdale.

"I don't even own a Hawaiian shirt and I'm not wearing shoes without socks," he frowns.

"If you don't want to go, that's fine, but you need to tell me now and I will ask Leslie since I'm going to New Mexico with Betsy in July."

Serendipity has never come easily for my husband but over the years he has come to expect that it has a way of finding me first and then eventually him.

"I guess I could go to Dillard's and use my gift card to maybe find a shirt that would work, but I'm wearing tennis shoes."

Why, sure, like Gilligan, he just may need them for that three hour cruise.

Waiting 'Round the Bend

Patricia Hollinger, Westminster MD
woodschrone@gmail.com

It all began at Baugher's in 1955... carhopping milkshakes in order to survive.
A handsome guy in a new Buick pulled up one evening.
"And how may I help you?" was my initial greeting.
He was shy, so the answer I do not recall. I suppose I brought him a milkshake just to say "Hi."
Soon he was driving me home around midnight.
I did not object, for he was a delight!
The summers came and the summers went,
Our ways parted in any event.
An airport encounter in Houston, Texas,
Became a point for another nexus.
A pretty far cry from Westminster, for both of us,
So we made some time to chat and discuss.
The years brought us each life's joys and pains
For when nothing is ventured then nothing is gained.
Careers, children, travels and new spouses
Led to our discovery that the distance between us was just a few houses.
We waved, smiled and said hello,
Pleased that we both were more mellow.
The years brought declining health to our spouses,
Then death knocked at the door of both our houses.
Memories from Baugher's began to emerge,
The carhop wondered if the guy in the Buick just might have the urge...
I picked up the phone with no hesitation,
Whetting his appetite for some conversation.
It became evident there was more to say,
So we agreed to meet again, some other day.
I know you all wonder how this all ended...
Yep! we're now married with lives that are blended.



Listen to Mother

Helene Benardo, Bronx NY
hlmb2h@yahoo.com, writing circles 15 and 9

It was a hot Sunday afternoon in July. I was 23 years old and had just returned home from my week-end hospital volunteer job. I was exhausted and wanted nothing more than to "veg out" (or whatever the 1960 expression was!)

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

"No. I'm too tired. Maybe next week."

"It's a good change of pace for you. Give it a try."

"Oh, all right, Ma. I'll go for a little while."

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

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

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

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

I called; it worked; we've been married for 54 years!

Connecting the Dots

Sara Etgen-Baker, Anna TX
sab_1529@yahoo.com

Although familiar with the word serendipity, I'd not thought much about its origin or meaning. Nor had I ever thought about the role serendipity has played in shaping either my life or the course of history.

Quick research revealed that Horace Walpole coined the word serendipity in a 1754 letter to his friend, Horace Mann. Evidently Walpole was impressed with a fairy tale, "The Three Princes of Serendip," (now Sri Lanka) who were always making discoveries by accident and sagacity of things that they were not pursuing.

Over the years, serendipity's meaning shifted from "accidents and sagacity" to "looking for one thing and finding another." Even many historical and significant events can be attributed to such accidental and unexpected discoveries:

- Columbus was looking for a new way to India and found the Americas instead.
- Before leaving for vacation, Alexander Fleming didn't disinfect bacteria cultures; upon his return, he found the cultures contaminated with penicillium molds that actually killed the bacteria.
- The Kelloggs brothers left cooked wheat unattended for a day. When they tried to roll the mass into a sheet, they inadvertently obtained a flaky material instead. This discovery led them to create the beloved breakfast cereal Cornflakes.

When I pause, I can certainly recount serendipitous moments in my own life. For instance, I've experienced sweet scenarios reminiscent of those in the film *Serendipity* (that delicious summer when my husband and I met while taking square dance lessons). As well as such serendipity-based coincidences, I've witnessed "negative coincidences" (The subway train door shuts in my face just as I'm about to step on.); "neutral coincidences" (bumping into my cousin at the local supermarket); and "real serendipity" (that summer evening I dropped in on my brother-in-law who told me about a job vacancy at his school—leading to an important move and career change.)

In fact, when I reflect upon my life, I can connect the dots to the almost magical unfolding of people, places, and events leading me to ponder: Exactly what is serendipity? Perhaps, just perhaps, it's a higher power bringing important events together.

Somebody Stole My Fish

Nancy Davies, Portland OR
nrdavies@comcast.net

I had a recent interaction with my father that brought about a curious new insight. He is 88 years old and struggling with Alzheimer's. He is convinced that there is a thief coming into his house at night and taking his things, or sometimes just moving them around. On this particular day, he was concerned about a big taxidermied fish that hangs in his office, so he moved it into the spare bedroom; hiding it so it would be safe. Half an hour later, he burst into the kitchen declaring, "Somebody stole my fish! I've searched my office and it's gone."

At the time, it was actually kind of funny, although as I write it down, it sounds more sad and distressing. However, the flash that struck me that afternoon was that my dad's actions are not really all that different from actions that most of us might turn to on any given day. How many of us unwittingly hide things away only to tell ourselves that we've been robbed? We hide our feelings, our fears, our creativity, and then wonder who stole our happiness. We bury our truth and can't imagine where our peace has gone. We disguise our bad decisions then blame someone for hijacking our freedom. You get the picture.

The thief in the night has come calling on many occasions in my lifetime, stealing things both ordinary and precious, and usually leaving behind the same riddle for me to solve: where did I hide my fish? It seems innocent enough but it's a question that requires a little bit of soul searching and a whole lot of honesty. It's about paying attention to that subtle voice that is no longer satisfied to hide behind the fear. It's about releasing the blame that comes so easy. But it is also a waking up process and at the end of the day, as the intruder slips away, we are hopefully left with the epiphany that the real treasures in our lives can never be taken from us.

"It's a bizarre but wonderful feeling, to arrive dead center of a target you didn't even know you were aiming for."

— Lois McMaster Bujold

Snow, More Snow

Sue Buck, Niles, MI
sbuck882@gmail.com

The headline read “Buried” by the time the news arrived
and after the tempest had passed us by.
I shoveled and snow blew the driveway three times in 24 hours
all one hundred feet dressed like an overstuffed mummy.
Eyes only naked to the icy blast that somehow still burned my face,
the snow engine and I chugged a slow pace.
The white, biting crystals continued to fall and fall and fall
all through the night and next day
like Heaven was having a huge pillow fight.
This time the weatherman’s stern warnings proved sadly right.
The back deck is finally cleared for now
after two scrapings and slingsings one day
and still more aching back bailing the next
with less good humor in each hurled scoop.
Every deck trip displayed dog shoulder-high puffy piles
for Fawn and Cocoa to tentatively tunnel through.
Malamute Beau, taller and stronger, of our four-legged gang
found downright dog delightment in this frozen stew.
Serving as eager snowplow for the smaller crew
he leaped and barreled his way around
this wondrous, undisturbed, white desert scene
of a back yard totally transformed, but strangely serene.
He buried his face a foot deep down as ducks might do in a pond
and relished this gift of glorious whip cream galore
just as his wild ancestors once did to explore wild, wicked weather.
Between bundled bouts to this walk-out freezer
the sky spit more snow and drifts grew deeper.
Cocooned inside we waited for the sun to smile away this Arctic cold
while plotting some way to hijack any Storm God’s grim future plans.
There is only just so much we mortals can stand.

Sonnet 1- My Father’s Voice

Nathalie Sorrell, Austin, TX
nathalie.sorrell@gmail.com

If I could have another life to live
an actress on the stage is what I’d be,
and then my Father surely I’d forgive
although he still might not encourage me.

Those words he spoke when I was seventeen
conveniently have rung within my brain,
causing me to hesitate between
staying inside, or dancing in the rain.

Oh, dancing in the rain! What joy! What grace!
And why on earth would ever I refuse?
If thunder crashes, God may show his face!
And locked inside, though dry - what do I lose?
Somewhere, I think, there waits an empty stage
where free at last, this child will come of age.



Summer Dance

Joyce Boatright, Houston, TX
joyce.boatright@lonestar.edu, OWL Writing
Circle

My honey took me dancing last night at the
Western Club, which is out on the highway from
Navasota, TX. It was our first time there, and
Jody Nix was playing the best western swing
I’ve heard since I was nineteen and saw Bob
Wills and his band play at the local VFW. Jody
Nix’s band covered a lot of those old Bob Wills
songs, along with others made classic by Ray
Price.

At the Western Club, the average person on
the dance floor is 65 years old, doing the Texas
two-step, moving in a circle around the dance
floor as one big happy mass. There were easily
two hundred people, paying \$15 apiece, to drink
longnecks and belly rub with their wives, or a
widow woman, or divorcée, or a neighbor’s wife.
It was amazing to see so many folks out having a
rousing good time without even one of them
getting knee-walking drunk.

These men and women came to dance, and
dance they did—even during the band’s breaks
when the music was piped through the club’s
sound system. They two-stepped, waltzed, and
jitterbugged the night away.

In case you decide to stop at one of these
dance halls that speckle Texas’ landscape, you
might want to know what the dress code is, so
you don’t stand out like a dude. The men wear
cowboy hats (straw since it’s summer), snap-
button cowboy shirts they probably bought at the
Tractor Supply Store (which has lots more than
tractors for sale), and Levi or Wrangler jeans
held up by silver buckled belts. Their women
folk are clad in jeans or skirts with a
Southwestern flair and white blouses or western
shirts. Most wear no makeup, just the sun-kissed
complexion from daily work in a garden, but
their hair is newly coifed. Nearly everyone wears
boots.

We slept in this morning. We don’t have
cattle and chickens that we need to rise early to
care for, so we stayed in bed. Our animals are
family dogs, and they were more than happy to
sleep in with us.



Assuming the Chalice Pose

Betsy Boyd, Maryville, TN
bboyd2153@outlook.com

A Facebook friend recently invited everyone to post what they did that day “LIKE A BOSS,” and, boy, was I ready for that one! “I spent \$2000+ on my car today LIKE A BOSS,” I cracked. “It was easy. All I had to do was slide my VISA across the counter, sign on the dotted line and drive away.”

While the actual transaction required to bail my car out of the transmission shop was, indeed, easy, wrapping my head around its implications was a bit more challenging.

You see, two special people, my friend Cindy in Florida and my sister Jan, are both celebrating birthdays this year—significant ones with a “0” at the end. For months we have been anticipating celebration trips. Cindy and I planned to break bad and call Saul in Albuquerque in July, then Jan and I would be indulging in song and dance therapy at a Hall and Oates concert at Red Rocks Amphitheater in September.

Then I learned the transmission in my Mazda Tribute needed a complete overhaul. Not just an it-would-be-a-good-idea overhaul, but a you-need-to-do-this-if-you-don’t-want-to-destroy-your-vehicle one.

I spent the week waiting for the call that my SUV was ready, vacillating between disappointment and grief that my special trips with my special peeps were out. There would be no driving around the New Mexico desert looking for film sites, no waving our “Knoxville Loves You” sign from our second-row concert seats. Instead, ahead lay a long, indeterminable number of months of dutifully sending payments to VISA and driving to and from the job that makes the payments possible.

Then Facebook delivered another idea: “There comes a time when you stop pushing and striving to make things happen and you just assume the chalice pose. You create space. And you open to the magic of the Universe.”

The heavy cloud lifted and the way became clear. I will eventually pay off VISA, but I need to go on my trips this summer, both of them. I need to create space in my life for a little magic to enter. I don’t know what unexpected joys and adventures await me on my travels this summer. But then, isn’t that what serendipity is all about?

The Substitute

Abby November, Austin TX
abnova@earthlink.net
Judith Helburn writing circle, Austin TX

As I was wheeled toward the operating room, Mom bent over and kissed me. Her eyes were red as if she was crying. But why? She had promised me, “It’s just a little nothing. He’ll take it out.” Next, I remembered seeing white gowned, ghost like people, bright lights, and then a mask going over my nose and mouth. A voice said, “Count backward from 100.” I think I made it to 94, yet the ether smell sticks to my nasal passages still.

What a bummer of a summer for anyone, especially a fourteen year old nerdy kid from Brooklyn. The Brooklyn doctor who had been treating me for juvenile arthritis with hydrotherapy, massage and chicken soup finally saw clearly on the twentieth x-ray that a bone tumor had developed and now engulfed the head of the humerus. It wasn’t funny! The thought was that this was a sarcoma, a malignant rapidly growing bone cancer necessitating amputation.

Both parents were with me at New York Hospital for Joint Diseases. I had never seen my dad cry; now his eyes were red rimmed. He claimed to have a cold! Dad worried? No, he was a perennial Peter Pan who never matured. Yet if he was frightened for me, I knew I should be also.

A new Chief Resident was introduced to us, Dr B., who explained that he was a last minute substitute for my regular surgeon who’d had a personal emergency. In the midst of surgery, Dr B. insisted on waiting for the frozen section before closure: “you can cut later.” The results were benign. Even with all physical signs and the X Ray history, they were wrong, my arm and I are still together. Dr B scheduled a second surgery the next week and all the tumor was removed. Even with the ugly scars and limited range of motion, I’m alive and have both arms. I had to have a bone graft from my pelvis to fill in the void left by the tumor.

A substitute doctor I’d never met and a last minute cancellation made such a difference in my life.



Serendipity is nice, but hoping for luck and the magic of happenstance shouldn't be an excuse for a lack of proactivity. I had to learn for myself that waiting isn't a life plan.

Karen Finerman

Susan Wittig Albert Lifewriting Contest 2015

SCN is proud to announce its sixteenth annual lifewriting competition named in honor of our founder, Susan Wittig Albert. This year's topic is a bit unusual and, we hope, thought provoking.

Failure

I really don't think life is about the I-could-have-beens. Life is only about the I-tried-to-do. I don't mind the failure but I can't imagine that I'd forgive myself if I didn't try.
- Nikki Giovanni

We are a success-oriented society. It is good to succeed. It is bad, almost shameful, to fail. How realistic is that? We all fail sometimes and if we take a closer look at our failures; if we look at them as opportunities, maybe even as gifts, can we see how failure benefits us? Does fear of failure prevent us from trying the very things that may catapult us to success?

It is impossible to live without failing at something, unless you live so cautiously that you might as

well not have lived at all, in which case you have failed by default. - J. K. Rowling

Your prompt asks, how have your failures changed your life? Was there a moment, an incident, or an experience that left you feeling like a failure that in retrospect was a changing moment? Can you imagine a life without failure? Was there someone whose support during a failure experience forever changed your life? Tell us those stories.

The contest is open to dues paying members of SCN and will be coordinated by SCN President Jude Whelley and Executive Director Peggy Moody. For contest entry fee, entry form and further information visit <http://www.storycircle.org/Contests>. Look for more details in the June SCJ and in our upcoming monthly e-letters.

Contest Entries Accepted
May 1 through June 30, 2015

Previous Year's Winners

2014: Balance

Sara Etgen-Baker of Anna TX
Lois Ann Bull of Easton CT
Brenda Black of Prairie Grove AR
Lois Halley of Westminster M

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 Flemr, Fairfield Bay, AR
Nancilynn Saylor, Austin, TX
Stephanie Dalley, Forestville, CA

2010: Letting Go

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

2009: Overcoming Obstacles

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

2008: Evolution and Growth

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

2007: Birthings and Beginnings

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

2006: Truth

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

2005: Womens' Friendships

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

2004: Mothers and Daughters

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

2003: Our Environment

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

2002: Our Identity

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

2001: Pain

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

2000: A Revealing Relationship

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

Read last year's stories at:

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



From the Blogs:

One Woman's Day



by Linda Hoye

Our stories connect us and bind us together with others we might otherwise not find something in common. It is through sharing our stories that we generously give of ourselves to those who bear witness. We find that, though our paths may be diverse, the joy, grief, longing, and other myriad of emotions we experience are not so different after all. We connect; we find commonality; we understand ourselves better and we become collectively stronger all through the power of story.

Story Circle's One Woman's Day blog has been giving voice to the stories of ordinary and extraordinary days in our lives since 2011. With a readership from around the world, OWD has developed into a tapestry of experiences reminding us of these shared connections.

Recently we were pleased to feature a heartfelt and bittersweet post by new contributor, Lorna Earl she titled **Our Magical Goodbye Walk**.

I was sickened with grief.

My canine companion, a scruffy three-year-old Terrier mix I adopted, died suddenly when he slipped his collar and ran into traffic. He was thirteen years old. The last time I felt as lost, abandoned, and downright empty was when my husband left me. He's still alive.

Phil, my fiancé, tried to keep me busy, but he was grieving, too. We were a sorry pair. He was worried that my chronic fatigue symptoms would flare from the stress. So was I. I thought about scientific articles correlating pet ownership to health. How ironic. I took extra medication to help me sleep.

Fearing depression and an inflamed immune system malaise, I woke knowing I had to pull myself back from the hole into which I was falling. The hole in my heart.

I laid in bed and asked myself, "How can a hole feel so damned heavy?" Irony was everywhere.

I reached over and poked Phil. He stirred.

"I'm going for a walk," I said.

This was an act of courage because every morning I took Scrapy for a walk and this walk would be solo.

"Do you want me to come with you?"

"No, I have to do this alone."

"Okay. Just be careful." It was dark, raining, and windy. Phil worries about me.

"I will. I just need to do this."

And I did. Armed with my rain gear and a handful of tissues, I headed off into the pre-dawn darkness.

That's when I started talking aloud to Scrapy. First, I told him how sorry I was for not protecting him from harm.

"I hope your soul left before you felt any pain, Buddy. After you rest a bit, I bet you'll be running and exploring with the best of them wherever you are."

Second, I talked about our journey together and how maybe he knew it was time that I travel alone. We met when we were both abandoned souls, teaching each other about trust.

"I'll always love you, Scrap. Thank you so much for being right there with me through those tough days. Remember when it was just you and me?"

Finally, I told him about how I was strong enough to walk alone.

"You were my brave and perfect companion but you don't need to protect me anymore. It's your time to do what you want."

When I said this last declaration to him three things happened simultaneously: The pelting rain stopped instantaneously; the wind that kept blowing the hood off my head died down to nothing; and the grief-grip on my heart released.

I smiled, knowing that my independent pal finally understood something I said. We spoke soul-to-soul and he got the message.

His sparkling love now fills my heart, effervescent and light. Do I miss him? Sure I do. But on our magical Goodbye Walk, something shifted and he was with me in a new way.

We still walk together every morning . . . in that new way.

Lorna was a sociology professor and creative writing is her new path since her premature disability retirement due to Chronic Fatigue and Immune Dysfunction Syndrome. She has written two self-published books: a memoir and a historical fiction novel. Lorna has been blogging since 2010 at Lorna's Voice (<http://lornasvoice.com/>).

Sarton Women's Literary Award Jurors Needed

The recent expansion of the Sarton Award into fiction means that we will have more entries for the award. And more entries in this unique and important program mean that we will need more jurors to help us with the first-round evaluations!

Each of our first-round panel of jurors reads and evaluates five books (of course, she may read more if she wishes), and submits her evaluations online. If you would like to take part, please fill out our application form:

http://www.storycircle.org/members/sarton_juror_application.php

We are already receiving entries, so we'd like to start empaneling jurors very soon! If you are planning to submit a book this year, you shouldn't apply to be a juror. But if you're thinking of submitting in the future, you will find this experience invaluable. Many of our jurors and judges have been with us ever since we began, and they tell us that their work has made them more careful, thoughtful readers and writers. We're sure that you'll feel the same way.



Sharon Blumberg shares her feelings about the IC eCircle that she is facilitating. All IC facilitators share a commitment to helping writers in their groups to share their lives, develop strong writing practices, and learn from one another.



eCircle 2 Relaunched: A Reunited International Sisterhood

by Sharon Olivia Blumberg

I am proud to be the new facilitator of eCircle 2, a group that was relaunched in January 2015. We are seven members strong, and growing. We have members not only from various parts of the United States, but from all over the world.

Starting a new Internet writing circle offers new beginnings and new challenges. I welcome those challenges. I want to be the nurturing writing leader who encourages members to share intimate aspects of themselves and mold us into a united sisterhood. I will never give up on new possibilities!

At the beginning of each month, and every few weeks, I send out a reflective writing prompt. Then I encourage members to respond to my prompt, come up with their own, and/or respond to each other. I encourage them to write in any way that they prefer. If poetry suits them, that is also awesome. I can't wait to see how we will evolve. As we test the waters with one another, may we be bathed in support, warmth, and acceptance. We are family. Not only are we Story Circle sisters of eCircle 2, but a united international sisterhood. The best is yet to come.




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

Visit our online store!
Your purchases help support
the Story Circle Network.

cafepress.com/storycircle

What can you say about an ordinary or extraordinary day in your life in five hundred words? A lot, if you ask the over seventy Story Circle Network members whose stories we've been privileged to share on our One Woman's Day blog. 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/>

 <p><input type="checkbox"/> This membership is a gift.</p> <p>My name and address:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>My phone and e-mail:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<h2>Join the Story Circle Network!</h2> <p>Annual Membership:</p> <p>_____ Canada & Mexico: \$65 (International MO)</p> <p>_____ International \$70 (International MO) 6/15</p> <p>_____ Internet Chapter: \$20/yr (in addition to your national dues)</p> <p>_____ USA: \$55 if receiving <i>online</i> publications; \$65 if receiving <i>printed</i> publications</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>City _____ State _____ Zip _____ - _____</p> <p>Phone _____</p> <p>Email _____ Amount enclosed _____</p> <p>Become a supporting member and help Story Circle Network grow. Check here:</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$90 Friend</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$150 Supporter</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$250 Sustainer</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$400+ Benefactor</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$125 Donor</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$200 Contributor</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$325 Patron</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$125 Organizational Membership</td> </tr> </table>	<input type="checkbox"/> \$90 Friend	<input type="checkbox"/> \$150 Supporter	<input type="checkbox"/> \$250 Sustainer	<input type="checkbox"/> \$400+ Benefactor	<input type="checkbox"/> \$125 Donor	<input type="checkbox"/> \$200 Contributor	<input type="checkbox"/> \$325 Patron	<input type="checkbox"/> \$125 Organizational Membership
	<input type="checkbox"/> \$90 Friend	<input type="checkbox"/> \$150 Supporter	<input type="checkbox"/> \$250 Sustainer	<input type="checkbox"/> \$400+ Benefactor					
<input type="checkbox"/> \$125 Donor	<input type="checkbox"/> \$200 Contributor	<input type="checkbox"/> \$325 Patron	<input type="checkbox"/> \$125 Organizational Membership						
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <p>Make your check to Story Circle Network PO Box 1670 Estes Park, CO 80517-1670</p> </div>									

Join SCN for Online Classes and So Much MORE

If you are a skilled writer with experience in teaching memoir, fiction, poetry, basic writing skills and are interested in joining our faculty, we'd like to hear from you.

We are now accepting proposals for these classes:

- Summer 2015: July 20-September 14 (deadline May 31)
- Fall 2015: September 21-November 16 (deadline July 26)
- Winter 2016: January 11-March 7 (deadline Nov. 15, 2015)

To learn how to propose a class and join our faculty team go to:

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

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

Programs for Women

Our central program focus is writing about our lives—about women's lives. We have offered courses and educational programs (both as workshops and online classes) in memoir, reminiscence, journaling, poetry, family stories, kitchen table stories, writing-as-healing, place writing and nature writing, writing for personal growth and spiritual development, and poetry.

We teach general writing skills, organization, and critical editing, as well as technical skills in book design and development, online marketing, blogging, and other Internet-related activities.

We are expanding our course offerings so that more of our

teaching work is available online, open to both members of the Story Circle Network and women non-members.

Our faculty members, all women, are experienced teachers and published writers with a special interest in helping women explore their lives.

Online Resources

We offer many resources to lifewriters. We also publish a regular e-letter, with information about our current online courses and other SCN activities.

Our Books

SCN is an active publisher of books, anthologies, a quarterly journal (*The Story Circle Journal*), and an annual anthology (*True Words from Real Women: An Anthology of Story Circle Writings*). Our published titles include: *What Wildness is This, With Courage and Common Sense: Memoirs from the Older Women's Legacy Circles*, *Kitchen Table Stories*, *Starting Points: Weekly Writing Prompts for Women with Stories to Tell*, and *Your Life, Your Story*.

Book Reviews, Podcasts, Contests, and More

In addition to its educational programs, SCN sponsors a women's book review website, monthly podcasts, an annual lifewriting contest (open to members only), and biannual conferences: LifeLines Writing Retreat and our National Memoir Conference. To learn all about Story Circle Network, visit our website: www.storycircle.org

Story Circle Network, Inc.
PO Box 1670
Estes Park, CO 80517-1670

Nonprofit Org
U.S. Postage
Paid
Austin, TX
Permit #215

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, 2015 (due July 15)—Autumn Traditions
- December, 2015 (due August 15)—A Winter Memory

Story Circle Book Reviews Thanks You For Your Support!

When this newsletter went to press, we had raised \$3,796 toward our goal of \$3,600! THANK YOU! We don't have to stop there...every little (and big) contribution helps!

Visit the GoFundMe page at:

<http://www.gofundme.com/storycircle>



Invitation to Apply for SCN Board Membership

Each year, we select new board members from our national membership. If you would like to be considered now or in the future, please review this page on our Members-only site:

<http://www.storycircle.org/members/frmboardnominee.shtml>

We Need Readers!

We need readers who love reading women's books to help us judge entries to SCN's Sarton Literary Awards (memoir, contemporary and historical fiction). If you would like to take part, please fill out our application form at the link below, and we'll do the rest.

http://www.storycircle.org/members/sarton_juror_application.php