



STORY CIRCLE JOURNAL

Vol. 19 No.1, March, 2015

The newsletter for women with stories to tell



Sarton Memoir Award

lives every woman lives. We believe that May Sarton would be especially proud of these fine books.

In 2010, SCN established the Sarton Memoir Award, a literary competition named for May Sarton (1912-1995), distinguished American poet, novelist, and author of twelve outstanding memoirs and journals. This year, we have named a winner and two finalists. Each is an outstanding example of women's memoir, an inspiration to readers, and a demonstration of the way women's stories document the private and public

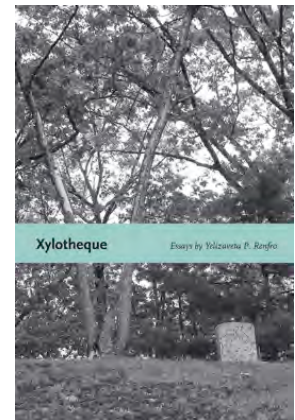


Photo by Jennifer Josey Borelli

2014-2015 Winner:

Yelizaveta P. Renfro, *Xylotheque*

The winner of this year's Sarton Memoir Award is Yelizaveta P. Renfro. Her memoir, *Xylotheque*, combines memoir, nature writing, and photography in nine essays that represent different seasons of a life. The word "Xylotheque" is defined, simply, as a collection of wood. But in Renfro's memoir, it becomes an inquiry into personal history, the cycles of change, and growth in several dimensions. One judge's comment: "This memoirist told a huge story concisely. She said more in 150 pages than most of the other authors that I read did in over 300 pages. Her narrative was complete without belaboring every detail of her complex life. I absolutely loved this book and her love of trees!" Published by the University of New Mexico Press.



Yelizaveta was born in the former Soviet Union to a Russian mother and American father during the Cold War. About herself, she says: "Growing up in Riverside, California, I spent a lot of time in orange groves and reading Russian literature. I have since lived in Virginia and Nebraska and currently call Connecticut home. In addition to writing, editing, teaching, and mothering, I spend a lot of time looking at trees."

2014-2015 Finalists:

Amber Starfire, *Not the Mother I Remember*

Janice Gary, *Short Leash: A Memoir of Dog Walking and Deliverance*

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"We become ourselves through stories. And our stories are the cocoons that gently hold the things that cannot be uttered." Yelizaveta P. Renfro, *Xylotheque*

Letter From SCN's President—



Dear SCN Sisters,

March in Dayton means first crocuses, then tulips and daffodils... hints of spring. I love the renewal that spring brings. Watching these brave little shoots break soil is a bit of encouragement for me as a writer. Sometimes I experience some late winter malaise and begin to get lax about my writing schedule. The determination of those plants reminds me that breakthroughs come from persistence and hard work. I'm using a spreadsheet to keep track of my word count and pages revised and that makes it easier to stick to a schedule. I just

hate seeing my graph flat for a couple of days in a row!

One good way to get back in the writing habit is to write for submission. *True Words* editor Mary Jo Doig posts submission deadlines and topics for every Journal. Take a look and make a commitment to send your poems and stories to her. I will look forward to reading your work!

We had to cancel our LifeWriting Retreat scheduled for May due to low registration (Read page 11 for more information). I was disappointed as Linda Hasselstrom's plans for the weekend looked amazing.

I am sending a heartfelt thank you to all who contributed to our GoFundMe campaign. We truly appreciate each and every donation to help cover 18 full months of our magnificent SCN Book Reviews site. The campaign is ongoing so you still have time to make a donation. I consider this part of my literary citizenship. No donation is too small, SCN belongs to us all!

Soon it will be warm enough here in Ohio for me to begin writing out on my deck again. Until then, I hope you have a cozy spot to curl up in with a good book and a cup of tea or coffee. Good reading inspires good writing!

Write on!

Jude



Story Circle Network's Mission

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

Story Circle Journal

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

Editor: Robin Wittig
 journaleditor@storycircle.org

Contributing Editors:

Pat Bean
 Susan Albert
 Lee Ambrose
 Mary Jo Doig
 Linda Hoye
 Trilla Pando
 Jude Whelley

We welcome your letters, queries, and suggestions.

Story Circle Network
 PO Box 1670
 Estes Park, CO 80517-1670
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Missed Issues: We try to ensure that *Story Circle Journal* arrives in your mailbox four times a year. If you miss an issue, send us a note and we'll mail you a replacement.

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

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2014-2015 Finalists:

Amber Starfire, *Not the Mother I Remember*

Janice Gary, *Short Leash: A Memoir of Dog Walking and Deliverance*

The judging team also named two finalists, each an outstanding—and very different—example of a woman’s writing of her life.

Not the Mother I Remember, by Amber Starfire. When Amber discovers boxes containing a lifetime of her mother’s journals and letters, she realizes she’s been given a rare chance to unlock the enigma that had been her mother. Alternating between her own childhood stories and her mother’s writing, this unflinchingly honest memoir tells the story of a sensitive girl raised by an exceptional and unconventional woman during a time of chaotic social change. Published by the author, under her imprint, MoonSky Publishing

Short Leash: A Memoir of Dog Walking and Deliverance, by Janice Gary. When Janice finds a stray Lab-Rottweiler puppy, she feels she has discovered a protector. But when Barney is attacked by a larger dog, he becomes dog-aggressive. It’s only when Janice risks taking him to a local park that both of their lives change forever. Part memoir, part meditation and part love letter to the natural world, *Short Leash* is a moving tale of love and loss, the journey of two lost souls finding a way toward wholeness. Published by Michigan State University Press.

Excerpt from “Mulberry,” in *Xylotheque*

Seeing for the first time the purple glints of my newborn’s eyes, her skin downy and puckered and tumescent, perfectly ripe for this world, I thought again of mulberries, of being held in their branches, of purple stains, of the burst of berry on tongue, and I saw giving birth was akin to climbing a tree: a reaching toward light, nourishment, endurance, life, a cradling and an offering of the most cherished to the world.

Maybe this is not true. Maybe I did not think of the mulberry then. Maybe I seamed it into my memory later: mulberry, birth. Who can say what thoughts occur during birth? It is stark physicality, a rending. It is an elbow against sky. And yet, on some level, the mulberry was there, subsumed by my laboring. Everything in my life was there with me, on that delivery table. Is it a lie to create memories after the fact? Is it a fiction to plaster over experience with words? Is it a violence to insist a tree means something other than itself?

Story Circle Book Reviews Needs Your Help

You know about SCN's unique and very special book review site, don't you? With over 1750 reviews and 70-plus author interviews, **StoryCircleBookReviews** is the largest, longest-running women's book review site on the Internet. Our all-volunteer team of 60 reviewers and editors reads and reviews the best books written by women and published by small presses and author-publishers. We post our reviews to Goodreads and Amazon, and we send out a monthly eletter to over 8,000 subscribers.

And it's all free, every word of it!

We do it because we love to read women's books, because we believe women's stories must be told, and because it's so darned hard for small presses and indie authors to find review venues. We know that our work is valued, because readers, authors, and publishers tell us so.

But we need your help! Our SCBR website, review postings, and monthly eletter costs about \$300 a month. \$5400 will allow us to show our love for women's stories for a full 18 months.

That's why we need you. If you love women's books and agree that women's voices must be heard, you can show your love by chipping in a few dollars to keep SCBR going and growing through 2015. We've made it easy, by setting up a GoFundMe webpage where you can safely donate, and share our campaign with all your friends on social media.

Please do. And thank you!

Jude and Susan

Judy Whelley, SCN President

Susan Albert, SCBR Coordinating Editor

Visit the GoFundMe page at:
<http://www.gofundme.com/storycircle>

When this newsletter went to press, we had
raised **\$3,461** toward our goal of **\$5,400!**



Sarton Women's Literary Awards™ Program Expands Into Fiction

By Susan Wittig Albert, SCN founder
Co-Coordinator, Sarton Award Program

Many of us know the joy and delight of watching children grow and mature into lives you could never have imagined for them. Well, one of the great personal pleasures of my life as SCN's founder has been watching its programs grow and mature over the nearly two decades since we began in early 1997. Our circles and online chat groups, book review website, online classes, and conferences and workshops—all are evidence of the strong commitment of our board and membership. Women supporting women who want to write: that's what we're all about.

And that's why it is my very great personal pleasure to announce a major change in our widely respected Sarton Literary Award program. Named in honor of May Sarton, acclaimed memoirist, novelist, and poet, this unique award has been granted since 2011 to memoirs published by small and independent presses, university presses, and authors. In our fourth year, we have recognized eight winners and finalists, and the number of entries continues to grow. Dozens of SCN members and professional librarians participate in the program, and that number has kept increasing too, to keep pace with the increased number of entries. On all counts, the program has grown into its own unique place as a literary award for women's memoir.

But memoir is not the only literary form in which women's stories are told, of course. Women's lives are written in fiction, as well. In fact, as I'm sure you know from your own reading and writing, so many fiction techniques are used in memoir that it is sometimes hard to draw the line between what is fact and what has been fictionalized.

That's why SCN has decided to expand our Sarton Literary Awards™ program to include novels by women authors. Beginning with the 2014-2015 competition, we will accept both contemporary and historical novels, published by small and independent presses, by university presses, and by authors. Entries are accepted from SCN and non-SCN members. You can find copies of our new guidelines, along with eligibility requirements and the application form, here: <http://www.storycircle.org/>



[SartonLiteraryAward/guidelines.php](http://www.storycircle.org/SartonLiteraryAward/guidelines.php) The deadline for this year's competition is November 15, 2015.

How will the new program work?

The Sarton fiction entries will be evaluated in the same way as the memoir entries, but with a different *rubric*, one designed specifically for novels. A rubric is a set of carefully chosen guidelines against which specific elements of each work is measured. In both memoir and fiction, judges evaluate the work for characterization, story line, settings, narrative voice, language and style, and presentation. You can find copies of the

rubrics online at http://www.storycircle.org/SartonLiteraryAward/rubric_list.php

We will use the same judging procedures for all three categories: a screening round in which entries are evaluated by SCN members and a final round in which a group of finalists are evaluated by a team of professional librarians from public and academic libraries.

Because we know that many contestants want to hear how their work has been evaluated, we have added another important feature in the 2014-2015 competition: an author feedback package. The package includes all scores given by Round 1 and Round 2 (if applicable) judges in each of the rubric categories, judges' comments, rankings in each of the categories, and final, overall ranking in the competition. The optional feedback package can be selected on the application form.

Awards in the new program will be made in each of the three categories: memoir, contemporary novels, and historical novels. Winners receive a cash prize of \$200, a commemorative trophy, and a 12-month advertising package on SCN's websites, e-letters, and print publications. Finalists receive a cash prize, a personalized award, and the advertising package.

The winners of the current 2014-2015 round will be announced at the 2016 SCN National Conference, April 15-17, in Austin TX.

How you can help

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.

How else you can help

You can also help us by spreading the word about the Sarton Literary Awards™ to the various literary groups to which you belong in your community: writing groups, critique groups, reading groups. You can also mention our program website <http://www.storycircle.org/SartonLiteraryAward/> on your Facebook page, on Twitter, and on other social media sites you visit. And you can post our program advertisement on your web page (the ad and instructions are here: <http://www.storycircle.org/logos.shtml>)

With your help, SCN's Sarton Literary Awards™ will continue to grow, this year, next year, and on into the future!

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.

Here are a few more quotes to prime the pump:

Courage allows the successful woman to fail and learn powerful lessons from the failure so that in the end, she didn't fail at all. - Maya Angelo

It's failure that gives you the proper perspective on success. - Ellen DeGeneres

In a total work, the failures have their not unimportant place. - May Sarton

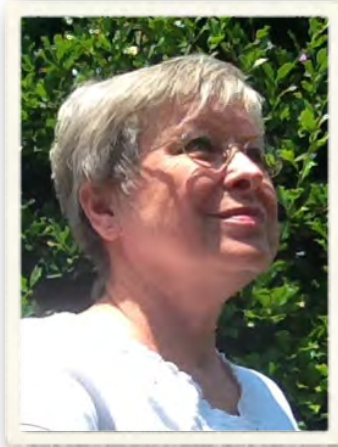
Failure after long perseverance is much grander than never to have a striving good enough to be called a failure. - George Eliot

For every failure, there's an alternative course of action. You just have to find it. When you come to a roadblock, take a detour. - Mary Kay Ash

What could we accomplish if we knew we could not fail? - Eleanor Roosevelt

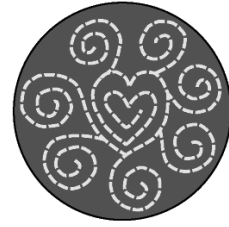
The contest is open to dues paying members of SCN and will be coordinated by SCN President Jude Whelley and Executive Director Peggy Moody. For contest entry fee, entry form and further information visit <http://www.storycircle.org/Contests>. Look for more details in the June SCJ and in our upcoming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

**Contest Entries Accepted
May 1 through June 30, 2015**



Internet Chapter: A Community Fueled by Volunteers

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.

As Story Circle Network's Internet Chapter turns 15 this year, I can't help but think that fifteen years ago its founders knew the truth in this Julia Cameron quote. They took to heart the idea that "logging on" would help create a sense of community for women from many walks of life.

Hundreds of members later, women from around the world could attest to the benefits of logging on as a member of the Internet Chapter and discovering the common threads that weave their way through our lives.

Uniquely our own and yet exquisitely shared by all, these threads have created bonds that neither time nor distance can break. Each woman's experience becomes every woman's experience through the sharing of our life stories, poetry and commentaries on the books read in the reading circle.

Communities are nurtured through the contributions of its members. Story Circle's Internet Chapter is no different than any other community when it comes to this well-known premise. Story Circle Network's seemingly effortless forward movement actually involves a lot of time and talent from a lot of volunteers. Countless volunteers have contributed an even greater number of hours to ensure that each member has a rewarding SCN experience.

Board members (whose term lengths vary based on the position) are all volunteers who steer the organization forward – always forward in keeping with its mission statement and bylaws.

Reading and writing circle facilitators are volunteers who, in addition to writing for their respective circles – and sometimes additional circles as well – are volunteers who recognize the value in giving back after they've been nurtured by those who came before them. They share their

own style of nurturing and encouragement with members of the circle and welcome newcomers in the same way they were once welcomed when they were the "new gals in town."

Book reviewers are volunteers who have collectively amassed a rather impressive number of reviews on the Story Circle Book Review site. Their reviews bring awareness of new books and authors to SCN members but also bring awareness of SCN to countless others who read

reviews on Amazon and Goodreads.

Others have found any number of ways to contribute their time and talents in an effort to give back to the organization. Whether planning for or helping to facilitate retreats or conferences, posting in blogs linked to SCN, submitting pictures and

commentary for the Member Post Card spot in the Internet e-Newsletter, nominating a circle sister's writing for Story of the Month, and a host of other opportunities, our members can be engaged in creating a strong sense of community.

Plugging in to the organization in such ways enhances the member experience. It is true that for most people your experience is directly related to what you put into it. The perks of membership are many. The perks of volunteering are rewarding in ways that are often difficult to quantify but definitely easy to take to heart. As SCN Internet Chapter turns 15 this year, you are encouraged to thank one or more of the many volunteers within our organization who have had a positive impact on your experience. And, in turn, you are encouraged to look deep within and see how you might pay it forward by volunteering here as well!

"We need to bridge our sense of loneliness and disconnection with a sense of community and continuity even if we must manufacture it from our time on the Web and our use of calling cards to connect long distance. We must "log on" somewhere, and if it is only in cyberspace, that is still far better than nowhere at all."

— Julia Cameron, *God is No Laughing Matter*



An Interview with

Suzanne Sherman, Author & SCN Member

by Pat Bean

It's always great news when one of Story Circle Network's own publishes a book. One of the more recent members to do so is Suzanne Sherman, whose book, *100 Years in the Life of an American Girl: True Stories 1910-2010* was released this past December. You can read Trilla Pando's review of it on page 10. Here's what Sherman has to say about herself, her latest book, and her life.

Please tell us a few facts about yourself.

I was born in San Francisco as the 1950s came to a close. My parents found the climate chillier than they'd expected after relocating there from New York, and within a year they relocated again, to Los Angeles. I grew up there, left as fast as I could, at 17, for college up north, where I've lived for most of the 38 years since. I live now with my partner of 10 years in a beautiful hilltop paradise ten minutes from the Sonoma Coast. My children have always been my beloved pets, and these last nine months, for the first time since I was 22 years old I have only the dear Bichon ("Bodhi") that I am auntie to. I loved my recently departed pets deeply and am warming up to welcoming a new dog or cat sometime later this year.

What are the most important things in your life?

Home has always been important to me, a place where my style is expressed and reflected, a place of serenity and beauty and safety. I have that, with serenity so sweet I sometimes even get to hear hawk's wings flap as they fly across the meadow by my windows.

Writing is in my soul, it's in my heart and fingertips, it's my true nature. I've been journaling since age 10, in diaries, three-ring notebooks, beautiful hardbound journals, and on the computer (where I'm not constrained by the pace of handwriting or whether or not the spine of the journal folds open easily). It's a unique, essential conversation — and relationship — I can't imagine living without.

Integrity is important to me, knowing my values and living true to them. Being perceptive and sensitive, diplomatic and tactful, self-reliant and resourceful, respectful and truthful are some of my values. It's how I relate to my memoir students, my friends, my family, everyone I meet.

Relationships mean the world to me. I wake interested and sleep well because of them.

Learning and being the bridge to others' learning. It's why I burst out of my editor's cubicle at 36 to also become a memoir teacher and part of what inspired me to create the 100 Years in the Life series, starting with 100 Years in the Life of an American Girl: True Stories 1910 - 2010 after nearly 20 years in the field.

What are things in your life you are most proud of having accomplished? Is there something in your life that you wished you hadn't done ... or had done sooner?

In 1989, I was 29 years old and I'd been an out lesbian for four years, after ending an almost 10-year relationship with the boyfriend I'd been with since age 16. I was hearing about lesbians marrying their partners and I became curious about why they were. What would a marriage do for them, how would their relationship be affected by it, how would their family relationships change (or not)? This was before the Internet, and working fast and hard, I found couples together 10 years and longer in every region of the country, and I interviewed them for the book I'd proposed and sold to Temple University Press, *Lesbian and Gay Marriage: Private Commitments, Public Ceremonies*. I'm quite proud of not only having written the first book on same-sex marriage, before the topic was popular, but of following my heart to pursue my curiosity and share what I learned through the voices of those who lived it.

Yesterday I saw *100 Years in the Life of an American Girl* on the center aisle shelves of a bookstore, cover facing out and five books away from Cheryl Strayed's bestseller *Wild*, and I felt a glow of joy like I've never felt before. That baby's been mine for four years, in the privacy of my workspace, and at last it's out in the world! I love what it's

wearing! I love what it says! What a beautiful, important contribution it makes.

If there's anything I wished I'd done sooner in my life it would be to have known what I wanted, felt confident about it, and stayed on a straighter trajectory for bringing it into being. Thank goodness I've been there for the last 10 years and get to experience it going forward.

What does your writing space look like. Do you have a writing schedule?

My writing space is, unapologetically, my bedroom. My office sits lonely, filled with books and files and read and unread papers, a stapler, pencils and pens and a printer. My living room "office" (a more spacious area), has a large table holding a desktop computer, stacks of recently published books, and files of things book-related. But it's not where I write. That desk is where left brain is in charge — the editor, the writing consultant, the publicist. My bedroom windows are large and they open to intriguing views of a redwood forest to one side and to my deck and a wide-open meadow on the other. The colors in here (yes, I'm writing here now) are lavender and white, from the walls to the bed coverings. This place of beauty, solitude and serenity is where I have the direct line to my writer's heart, to my voice.

When did you know you wanted to be a writer, and when did you accept that you were one?

Books were my first exposure to writing. I once copied what was written on the title page of a favorite book, "Betsy and Tacy Go Downtown," by Maud Hart Lovelace, by hand, in pen, on the facing blank page. I consider those wobbly words my budding vision of myself filling a page with a book title and author's name. I became a writer a few years later, when I started keeping a three-ring notebook as a journal so I could add as many pages as I needed. I was in seventh grade and there was a lot of record and reflect on. I studied and wrote poetry in high school, got a BA in creative writing and wrote a complete draft of a novel as my senior project. I had many more forays into the life of a writer in the ensuing years, including having a play produced and a book published, but it wasn't until about 20 years ago, when I started teaching memoir and devoting myself to helping others tap the source and shared all I know, that I really got it that I'm a writer through and through.

Where did the idea come from for your new book, "100 Years in the Life of an American Girl"?

I write about this with some detail in the preface to the book. In short, my first memoir students were born in the early years of the 20th century. Over time, I saw their stories passing away with them and I knew I had to capture some of these precious stories and more, as the wheel of

time keeps turning and there's so much to see and explore and understand.

What was your own most memorable experience before you turned 13?

As I share in my story in the book, my mother had mental troubles (depression and a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia) and her experiences before I was 13 had a profound influence on me. In some ways her influence in other areas — her interest in the civil rights movement and aspects of the pop culture of the 1960s — also opened my eyes to the world I was living in. In my story in the 1960s chapter in the book, I write about what may not be the most memorable (to me, that word connotes something good), but the most impacting event of my early girlhood years: my mother took an overdose of sleeping pills when I was 11. I write of that night and the experience of not knowing what would happen. Would she die? Would I ever see her again? Would my story would be that my mother died when I was 11. Remember, I was a big reader; I understood life as story.

Do you have a favorite girl featured in your book, or two or three favorites?

It's hard to choose favorites in the book; I truly love them all. Every story in the book is eye-opening, whether it's about being a coal miner's daughter in 1915, climbing trees in a skirt and bloomers, dealing with the KKK in Little Rock, Arkansas, or getting a first computer at age four.

I'll share about two that especially stand out to me. The first has to be Mary Ann Natly (Chapter 1), for two reasons: She was 103 when I interviewed her and as sharp as a tack (she died December 28, 2014, at 107!), and she missed boarding the Titanic in London in 1912 when her family came over to the States from Europe. I love her stories about life in New York City in 1915, and chasing horse-drawn fire engines. It's a precious glimpse into another time in the words of a girl who was there.

Then there's Victoria Lester (Chapter 6), whose life shows the changing times. Her mother sold Tupperware for years before becoming active in the women's rights and civil rights movements. She was a first subscriber to the new Ms. magazine and she put whole-wheat bread in Victoria's lunch, which Victoria found embarrassing. Victoria went to folk concerts with her parents in the early and mid-1960s, seeing Bob Dylan and Joan Baez and others. In 1969, the family went to Woodstock. Victoria has her finger on the pulse of a changing era.

Aalaa Albaroudi (Chapter 10) was 11 on September 11, 2001 and a student at an Islamic school in Michigan. Her story of life before and after that day is a piece of history you'll never find in history books.

What obstacles did you have to overcome in writing the book, and in getting it to market?

I probably could have found a traditional publisher for this book since it has potential to reach a very broad audience, but after learning so much about the current and continuing revolution in the publishing industry, I decided not to go the route of finding an agent, having that agent find a publisher, waiting the requisite year for publication and then getting a royalty of about \$1 per book. It's an experiment, of sorts, being an indie publisher with 100 Years in the Life, and I'm giving it all I've got so I know by experience which route is best.

What genre of books do you read most? Who are some authors you admire?

Not surprisingly, my preference in books is memoir and fiction. I love reading lush description and complex, well-described interior views. They interest me more than mystery or science fiction. And I love a good story, a story about what's real that takes me somewhere new and expands my world. Favorite authors include Amy Tan, Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, Isabel Allende.

What's the best piece of writing advice ever given you?

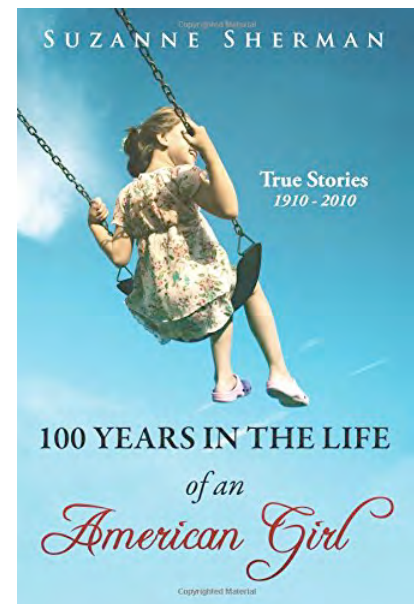
The best writing advice ever given me is the same I would give to other writers: write, write, write. Find your voice by writing. Discover what you need to write and what you want to say by writing. Once you write a piece and carve out the space for it you can shape and develop it. That first writing is essential and exciting, it's free and open, new words, new birth — no boundaries, no judgments.

When did you join SCN and why?

I joined SCN as soon as I heard about it five years ago. I was thrilled to learn about a growing community of women around the country ready to write more or to start writing and to put their stories onto paper and into the world. I taught a few classes for SCN, enjoyed them thoroughly, and wrote a blog about memoir for a number of months. At the 2012 SCN conference, I gave a workshop on truth-telling in memoir and I learned much at many of the other workshops. I've been published twice in True Words and have been a judge for a Story Circle writing contest. I enjoy the SCN members I've met and appreciate the opportunities SCN gives us for connecting with each other, sharing our stories, and enjoying each other's talents and offerings.

Suzanne Sherman is a memoir teacher, writing coach, author, blogger, and long-time SCN member. You can connect with her through her website: <http://suzannesherman.com/>, where she offers a newsletter, a free ebook (200 Great Jump-Off Lines for Writers), and much more.

Pat Bean is a retired journalist who traveled the country for nine years in a small RV with her canine companion. She now lives in Tucson, where she writes travel articles, works on her memoir, *Travels With Maggie*, and blogs at <http://patbean.wordpress.com/>. SCN recently recognized Pat with the 2014 Super Star Blogger award.



"History books give the hard facts, not the juicy real-life stuff, the breakthroughs and disappointments, the hopes and thrills. Reading for pleasure and not as a teacher and editor was showing me culture in ways I'd never seen it before."

Suzanne Sherman

That straight brown hair of mine was a torture because Mother insisted on putting it up in kid curlers before I went to bed. . .When those curlers were unwrapped the next morning my hair stood out like weeds.

Mary Kent "The 1910s"

Mother would take one of the plugs out of the console, pull up the attached cable, and plug it into the jack below the light. "Number please," she'd say into her mouthpiece. "Hello, Central,; would come the voice on the other end of the line.

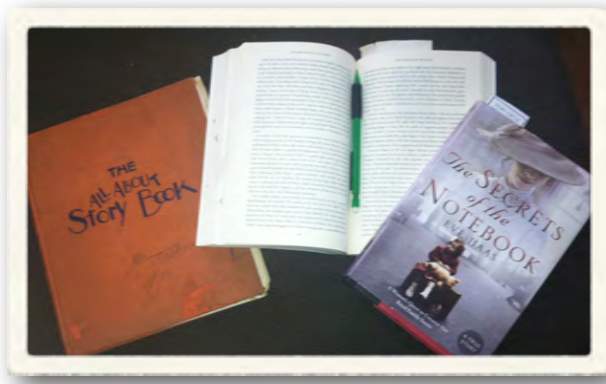
Julia Murray "The 1920s"

I'd lie on my bed and cry, wondering if anywhere else at that moment—maybe in China—another girl was crying on her bed after being sent to her room.

Suzanne Sherman "The 1960s"

I'm more artistic than athletic, like my sisters. They play sports, I make movies. I use iMovie on my laptop and I've made tons of movie trailers with it.

Clare McKenzie Walsh "The 2000s"



SCN's Book Reviews

Featured Review: *100 Years in the Life of an American Girl*

StoryCircleBookReviews.org
Review by Trilla Pando

100 Years in the Life of an American Girl: that's an intriguing title. One American girl? Which one? I flip to the table of contents. I'd like to learn more about this girl. Where was she born? In California, Texas, New York or Korea? Maybe Viet Nam? The answer of course, is all of the above and many more. The American girl may be a docile piano player who minds her manners, does her homework, and always, yes, always pleases her parents, or maybe she's a rebel who leaves home determined to do the opposite of whatever her parents suggest. A quick look through the table of contents confirms that there are lots of American girls. Suzanne Sherman looks at a century of these lasses, each speaking in her own voice.

As I heard each one, their voices triggered others. Voices I knew from across the ten decades that span this book, those of the American girls in my own family. Mother, born in 1911, kicked it off. Then I came along, and my daughter and finally my granddaughter born in 2005, right with the last of the girls Sherman includes. I wasn't far into that first decade before I'd grabbed a notebook and pencil. The stories of Mary Ann, Florence, Emma, Beulah—my mother's contemporaries—brought back memories Mother told me of her growing-up years. Stories I had not thought of in decades bubbled back.

The bubbles got thicker as I moved through the book. What color was my first bicycle? Blue. And the boy across the street—my partner in mischief? Yes, Joey. My daughter's decades sent me scurrying for the photo albums. And finally, I rejoiced that my nine-year-old granddaughter is coming for a visit. If her contemporaries Marina, Dylanne and Aalaa (girls whose stories appear in the book's final chapter) are old enough to tell their stories, so is she. A brand new notebook and plenty of pencils will be in her welcome package at the airport. "What do you remember about the last time you visited?" I'll ask her, and then we'll write those memories down. I predict that most of the readers of this book, whatever their ages will have a similar reaction.

In 1996 Sherman began to teach classes for older adults in a program at her local college. She describes her job as a "storycatcher" rather than teacher, helping her class participants not only write their stories but "realize the value of their experience." Some of these stories spoke so directly to Sherman that she couldn't let them go. After 15 years, she had quite a stack, and realized what a treasure she had. These were not just life stories, they held the history of the times. Like Sherman, I'm no novice at recording memories. I've kept journals and worked with others on recalling their own memories, both in classes and in interviews. I salute her for the fine way she has reaped her teaching experiences for a delightful harvest of stories.

The early stories here, through the 1940s are taken from the stories written by class members. Sherman uses direct interviews cast in first person voice for the subsequent years. She sets the stage for each decade with a profile of the times. Were we farmers or city folk? What did we do for fun? Gathering around the family piano for an evening of singing, gawking at Elvis's gyrations on the new television, or tucking away in a corner to concentrate on video games. What we ate, what we studied, even the most popular girls' names for the decade. I always wondered why they named my 1911-born aunt "Hazel." Turns out that lots of new arrivals got that name—it's seventh on the list for that first decade, right behind Virginia.

"If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten," the great storyteller Rudyard Kipling observed, and these stories bear him out. It may take me a moment to remember when Warren G. Harding led the country or when Hawaii became a state, but Charlotte Oram's recounting of her family's decision to leave their Russian-Jewish community in East Chicago, Indiana because they feared the Klu Klux Klan make 1923 become as real as 2015. Just ten years after statehood, in the 1970s, Jennifer Lei Bowen felt as much an outsider as Charlotte. She was the only fair-skinned child in her sixth grade class of Hawaiians. Because of her skin color she could not be in the running for class queen, but she could comfort herself

with the local delicacy of boiled peanuts. I'd add geography to Kipling's history suggestion.

As one American girl who has lived through more than half of the decades covered in this book, I relished the stories and the personal memories they recalled, and I happily recommend it to my contemporaries. But in these unruly and divisive times, I'm more interested in seeing younger people—those who may think that they are Americans and therefore, all Americans are like *them*—take this book into their hands. It won't take many of these stories before they realize that there are many different ways to be an American girl.



Trilla Pando lives in her favorite city, Houston, Texas where she writes, volunteers at the Museum of Fine Arts, and enjoys all the fun a city offers. She says: "I particularly relish writing book reviews. Reviewing has made me both a more careful reader, as I seek to capture the essence of a book, and a more adventuresome one, as I enjoy the fun of sharing a new

experience and books I might not otherwise have chosen."



Lifelines Retreat Update

by Jude Whelley

It was disappointing to have to cancel Lifelines due to low enrollment. LifeLines is the bi-annual writing retreat held at Festival Hill in Round Top, Texas. It is a weekend where a group of women gather under the direction of a facilitator to write and reflect about the writing process. I have attended two of these retreats, one with Susan Wittig Albert and one with Christina Baldwin. I came away from each enriched, inspired, and newly dedicated to my writing practice.

I was very much looking forward to working with Linda Hasselstrom. She had an outstanding plan to guide writers. Linda was the keynote speaker at Stories From the Heart in 2014 and if you were there you had a taste of what the retreat would have been like. If you would like another way to work with Linda, she offers retreats at Windbreak House (www.windbreakhouse.com) in South Dakota and writes a blog that often offers writing tips: www.WindbreakHouse.Wordpress.com. Linda also works with individual writers both in person and online.

One of the joys of a retreat weekend is spending time with other writers. Many friendships and collaborations are born during these experiences. As we consider LifeLines one of the premier offerings of Story Circle Network we will be carefully studying and exploring how to make the next weekend viable. Please contact me (whelleyj@aol.com) with LifeLines in the subject line if you have any suggestions or input. Thank you for your understanding and for sharing your thoughts. We all have stories to tell!

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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.

The Power of Thanks

Patricia Roop Hollinger, Westminister MD
woodschrone@gmail.com

I wrote a check to someone in need
Feeling it was a very good deed.

Would they say thanks or just set it aside
The wondering I could hardly abide.

Days and then weeks came and went
Had it been cashed... already spent?

Was my gift given with strings attached?
My pure motives were... let's just say, dashed.

Then one day, there it was on Facebook
Could it be... was it... let me take a look.

A thank you so effusive it still brings tears
The check solved financial woes and fears.

The check came at a time of financial angst
Not knowing what to do... maybe rob a bank?

The rest of the day I felt light and airy
That "thank you" felt as though I had been touched
by a fairy.

So when receiving a gift, I implore you, give thanks,
It is worth more than money in the bank.

Bom 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 25 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.

The Greatest Adventure of All

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

Bow to your corner; bow to your partner; join hands and circle left. Petticoats swished and boots shuffled across the wooden gym floor. I watched the dancers from the sidelines, feeling once again like an awkward seventh grader at my first junior high dance. *Allemande left; weave the ring.* But once the music stopped, dancers dispersed as single men went to one side of the gym and single women to the other.

I stood with the other women clutching my empty dance card in my left hand. As the music for the final dance began, a red-headed, bearded man wearing cowboy boots strolled toward me. He extended his right hand then reached for mine. "Would you care to dance the last tip?" Without saying a word, I placed my hand in his and followed him onto the dance floor.

After the last tip, he escorted me to the front door. "May I walk you to your car?"

I nodded. "Yes. That would be lovely."

While the flame red harvest moon sank upward, we sat on the hood of my car and talked. His aura grabbed me like the moon pulling the tide, and the hours passed imperceptibly. As the harvest moon sank downward, the morning dew formed on my car's windows.

He jumped off the hood. "Oh! We need to get to work!" He extended his hand and eased me down to the ground. "May I see you again?" We exchanged phone numbers and went our separate ways.

As with most new friendships, getting to know one another was joyous, magical, and transformational. He gathered the pieces I was and somehow gave them back to me all in order. Even after marriage, we remained friends and developed an extraordinarily strong, almost holy connection that became life-giving for us both.

We've entrusted one another with our imperfections. We've suffered through painful but rewarding trials and tribulations and learned to forgive. Forgiveness became our friendship's biggest gift. Now our friendship serves as a profound reminder that friendship is the greatest adventure of all—full of risks but also full of endless possibilities.



Hey Naysayers

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

"You will feel so much better," they all said.

"No! No! I won't," I wailed.

Each day since January 1, my husband and I have worked on our 2015 goal: to get rid of fifty years of stuff. Some of the stuff included our daughter's clothes, many crocheted by my Mom, some sewn by me. I thought she would want them for her daughter. *Mom, no.* I will cut up the clothes and piece the fabrics into a quilt. The fabrics have memories built into them, memories I don't want to forget. A closet full of my work dresses, my husband's suits, and a pressure cooker never used will go to Salvation Army. Folders with garden and house remodeling plans, including a photo of a new stove we bought in 1979 for \$150 went into the recycling bins. Now what can we do with 25,000 photo slides?

Yesterday I dumped four drawers of folders on books I started to write but never finished. When the folders fell into the recycling bins, I felt I had fallen in too. My words. Ache. Shoe boxes full of rocks I collected were dropped into the bins. Thump! We found programs from plays and concerts we had seen over our fifty years in another file drawer. Some of the programs my daughter colored.

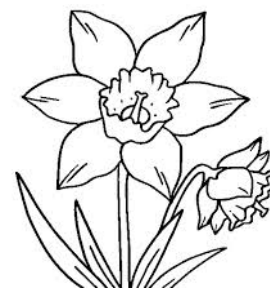
"Into the recycling bin?" my husband asked.

"First, let's make a list of them for my memoir."

As my husband read the names on the programs, I typed the information into a spreadsheet: *The Mikado*, *Richard III*, *Les Miserables*. Soon some of the pain was replaced by laughter. We were reminded of our travels and the good life we have experienced. Hmm, I wonder if we could sell any on eBay?

I don't feel better. I love my things. But I can't pack a lifetime of possessions into a truck and move to a smaller home. I will carry the memories of our life, pieces from my daughter's clothes, and a few rocks in my pocket with me.

Hey naysayers, shush! You don't have to get rid of everything.



Here's the Deal

Patricia Roop Hollinger, Westminster MD
woodschrone@gmail.com

I found these words after your death;
they hit me as I read on until I was out of breath.
High school brought with it experiments with drugs;
I did not ignore it with an "Oh well" and a shrug.

Treatment was sought to which you agreed;
I discovered much later drugs were more than just weed.
Your grade never wavered or faltered;
Surely, your mind was not that greatly altered.

Chronic pain from an injury resulted;
It was then that a M.D. in pain management was consulted.
The meds brought physical and psychological relief.
I watched as meds increased with horror and disbelief.

Concerns with the M.D. were addressed.
He dismissed us with just an "Oh yes."
A year later after you were long dead;
I learned the M.D. to court was led.

You found God in the Buddhist tradition;
For it offered peace in the midst of your condition.
At O Bon your ashes were scattered...
A request you had made before either of us could
have known how much it mattered.

Tweety

Roxinia Ware, Houston TX

My pet chicken, Tweety, was a beautiful shade of orange. I was a girl and she was a chick when I brought her home in a Kleenex in my hands. I made a box for her. My mother said I needed to keep the box clean. And feed her. And make sure she had water.

Tweety grew up to become a smart chicken. She would sleep under the covers with me, roost on my dad's chair, and eat the cat's food. She even seemed to know when her picture was being taken.

My mother fell in love with my chicken because Tweety would sing, and my mother liked listening to her. It would put a smile on my mother's face.

I could take Tweety for walks on a string, and she would start to chase the school bus when I left for school. My sister would have to hold her so she wouldn't actually follow the bus.

I was devastated when we came home from visiting my Aunt Sara one day to find Tweety dead, killed by a dog. She was my friend, and I cried like a baby. I wanted that dog dead. Instead, I let it go, knowing that Tweety had gone to chicken heaven.

The whole family missed her, even Dad. I think he missed shooing her out of his chair.

There will never be another Tweety. Like a dog is man's best friend, Tweety the chicken was mine.

A Simple Word

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

As is such a little word—just two letters. Yet it is often the fulcrum changing a simple phrase into powerful thought, demanding I ponder consequences.

Comparisons of two things use the word "as." If I say, "Tom is as tall as..." I can visualize his height. A comparison can also be ironic such as, "Ellen is as funny as Folsom prison," or it can add meaning to a sentence when used as, "It will be done as he desires." Just two little letters, one little word.

Lately, "as" in one statement has been dominating my thoughts. Are you ready for it? Here it is: *Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.* Wow, does the word pack a punch there.

As we forgive lays the action on me. *Forgive us as we forgive.* Does that mean I will be forgiven in the same manner as I forgive? That is a scary because forgiving is not something I or most people find easy. Sure, I can let the little things go easily. If somebody slams me verbally, I can shrug it off. I can forget and forgive those who see me do

something stupid and laugh. I know they will do something silly someday. These little forgivings are painless.

Forgiving the big things, though, now that is the tough stuff of the phrase: *as we forgive.* The betrayal by a friend or spouse lingers long after the actual act. Big things seem to be unforgivable; revenge is so tempting. If I want true forgiveness for my own mistakes, forgiving those betrayals is a commandment.

Think about it. If forgiveness is given to me in the same manner I forgive others, I have to practice real forgiveness. I have to really work at it. *As* is the pivot upon which the concept of forgiveness takes on a deeper meaning.

I find myself looking at how I practice forgiveness. Do I allow bitterness to weaken my forgiveness? Do I limit my own forgiveness because I cannot forgive? It took me years to forgive my ex-husband. Does he know this? No, but I do.

As, then, is not always such a simple word.

Lost and Loved

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

I cherish the yellowing photograph of my great grandmother. The gentle beauty of her face is something I can only touch through veils of time. I wish knew her beyond the photo fixed on her crumbling naturalization papers. I'd like to tell her how I feel; to offer thanks in appreciation for my own existence.

Much of my time is spent writing stories about long-gone family members. Knowing they are each a part of the fiber from which I am woven, I try to find something to love about each of them. Even so, I find that more than all of the others, this gentle soul who I call Grandma Mary is especially dear to me. Even though she was gone years before I was born, I feel she watches over me.

Holding the fragile photograph in my hand I am comforted by her gaze. Clearly this picture shows the heart of a humble woman singing with pride. I have in fact known her face forever. I was accustomed to seeing it long before I knew this photograph existed. Hers are the same features I knew in the faces of her son, my own doting grandfather and his siblings. As my great grandmother looks up from the old paper, across 100 years, to meet my own gaze, I wonder if she sees me looking back at her in admiration. Our connection feels deep and enigmatic. Without words I know her strength, her determination, and her work ethic. I sense the joy she felt bearing her children on US soil, sealing their fate, and the fortune of generations to follow as citizens of this country.

I feel her love for me too, though I cannot say for sure that it is real, or whether it's just an emotional conjuring of my own making. The way that I can't look away from the old photo without smiling or lingering I know is genuine. She seems to love me, yes, but also to beg me to write the stories that will keep her from fading away.

My Father's Tool Shed

Patricia Roop Hollinger, Westminister MD
woodscrone@gmail.com

I spent hours left to my own devices living on a farm. Shirley, five years my elder, was in school discovering a world beyond the end of our gravel lane; which became our version of an Olympic track come spring. We shed our shoes and ran barefoot until I proved that my feet were of the Gold Medal quality, meaning the toughest.

Since competitions of this sort were few and far between I explored the numerous sheds on the farm, as they begged to be explored. My father's tool shed became one of the favorites as I breathed in the perfume of oil and grease that gave it a distinct identity.

In his haste, after many urgent repairs, tools were lying askew on the table. "Phew," I said, as I passed by the one that reeked of dried, smelly shit after a manure spreader repair.

Pliers, wrenches, and bolts of all sizes and shapes fascinated me. That, coupled with my own innate obsessive/compulsive desire for them to be "orderly," became a challenge and a method to obtain the praises of my father. With suspense I awaited this at the supper table (farm folks have supper, not dinner) as Dad said, "Pat, thank you for cleaning my shop today."

He had just inadvertently given Shirley the message that my skills being honed out of the classroom were as praiseworthy as hers in the classroom. His own one room schoolhouse education came to a halt when he reached the 8th grade. Farming chores were first and foremost. It was clear that our classroom education was to be pursued, but never should we be negligent in our ability to master skills such as shutting gates that enclosed the barnyard or learning how to milk a cow by hand.

A New Beginning

Teri Heard-Ralbovsky, Chelmsford MA • teriheardralbovsky@gmail.com

I open a new word document and pause. My fingers rest lightly on the keys of my laptop while the cursor blinks, keeping a silent two-beat pace. The page in front of me is as unblemished and white as fresh fallen snow. The opaque whiteness of the page glares back at me, empty and hollow; if I screamed at it no sound would echo back.

False starts buzz around my head like annoying flies that I swat at as I search for the right word, the best first sentence.

The cursor blinks... waiting... waiting... waiting.

To quiet its demand, I begin to type.

Black letters chase the cursor across the page, gibberish at first and then a flow of thoughts course through my fingers like electricity flowing from an outlet to an appliance. The letters follow the cursor and then the cursor chases the typos and then the letters chase the cursor again like a game of tag.

After awhile, once there have been more advances than retreats, the shape of an idea begins to appear on the page.

Emerging From the Ashes

Laurinda Wheeler, Prince George BC
 laurinda585@hotmail.com, http://
 laurindasseasonsoflife.blogspot.ca/

The hardest part of moving forward is trying to loosen the hold that the memories, hopes, and dreams still have on you. There is no amount of time, no words, nothing that can erase the imprint left on your heart and mind, leaving the ecstatic rush that once consumed your life, as nothing more than an elusive sensation.

The intense intertwining of body and soul sizzled so fiercely, like electricity coursing through your body, allowing you to soar to heights you'd never felt, imagined, or believed possible. You felt yourself being enveloped in a fairy tale, so amazing it could never end. You whispered words that had never before crossed your lips, shared secrets and truths, your stories became part of another. You created memories, moments, history, that could never be recaptured, remade, retold. Before your eyes, a world opened up, a beautiful story begging to be shared.

The darker moments which you tried to ignore, began to move in, clouding your vision. The insidious words, the ones you knew you'd try to, but be unable to forget, began to haunt your days and nights. They flew at you without warning, constantly exploding, spilling over until you felt like you were drowning. Reaching out, grasping for anything familiar, you tried to hang on. It all became like a mirage in the desert; the beautiful, shimmering image, so far from reach, that the falseness of it all began to shine clearer than the reality you were living.

Suddenly, the door flew open, and you realized you were standing at the end of a darkening hallway. Looking back at everything, hanging on the walls like old family portraits, fading below layers of dust, you realized there was no going back. The sadness of it all fell from your eyes, leaving trails in the ashes of that which remained.

You understood then, there was nowhere else to go, but forward. Despite all you created, shared in promises from the heart, all that you hoped, dreamed, and planned for the future, you put one foot in front of the other and walked on...

Friendship, Forgiveness and the Black Madonna

Marilyn Ashbaugh, Edwardsburg MI
 Ashbaugh108@gmail.com

Forgiveness is the fragrance that the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it.

~ Mark Twain

Donna desires three spiderworts, seven daylilies, and five hostas from my garden. I will share these if she helps with the digging and division. Donna agrees and I suggest she wear boots, long pants, and garden gloves.

At our meeting time, I begin shoveling and soon have a wheelbarrow full of plants but no sign of Donna. This is not the first time Donna baffles me. On a visit to a retreat center, my eye catches a picture of the Black Madonna: dark, mysterious, captivating. The flyer announces Donna is leading an icon painting retreat welcoming all experience levels. I am no artist, yet I mail my payment. The class is an intimate five people and once I find my seat Donna tells me that Janine will be my teacher. When I tell Janine, she briefly looks up from her painting and tells me to enjoy myself. I feel like she just pushed me off the deep end to teach me to swim, so I go for a walk to clear my head. Feeling desperate and alone, I encounter the Black Madonna who provides solace and perspective. I return to the studio. I tell Donna that Janine has no interest in teaching, and Donna can either teach me or provide a refund.

The way is dark and difficult. My brushstrokes are clumsy, awkward and slow. The others spend evenings in the studio but I am exhausted. They speak of faults in their work yet all their Black Madonnas look beautiful and flawless. I take long walks in the woods with my small Madonna image. Why did she call me here?

My musings end when I see Donna's van. She is dressed for a walk on the beach: tank top, white shorts, and dainty sandals. I load the plants in her van as she looks on, and then drives away. She didn't uphold her end of the bargain, and I choose to forgive her.

The Entertainers

Maya Lazarus, Caldwell TX
 deblazarus@yahoo.com



Cramped and dilapidated cage
 on the patio floor. Three green parrots
 stare out. Wings clipped to thwart their nature.
 Paco, Pepe, and Jay munch on sunflower
 seeds, hang upside down, do pull-ups
 with their beaks and crap in their water bowl.
Estupido and *torpe*, they scold.
 They know a lot that goes on here.
 Sometimes they sing, in chorus. Lovely
 sweet voices. Next minute,
 rude curses. *You're screwed*,
 they yell in Spanish, over and over.

Root Cellar

Kristie Vincent, Willard MO
k-vincent@sbcglobal.net

Moss covered and uneven stone slabs
lead to the netherworld under Granny's house.
The heavy wooden entrance groans in discomfort
as it is lifted.
Dusty air scented with cobwebs and soil
escapes as the door is laid to the side
and we venture down the rocky steps.
The beam from the trusty yellow flashlight cuts through
a maze of cobwebs and shines upon shelves filled
with mason jars—our food for the time of snow.
Tiny feet skitter in the corners and we hear a slithering sound
from behind us.
Yes, there was the gardner snake at his usual guard post
letting only the trusted ones in.
We step closer into the dark abyss, our hand searching for the fragile string
to turn on the solitary bulb that showers us with weak light.
The feeble light shows the shelves loaded down with jars. If a person
didn't know any better, they may expect to see eye of newt, or a severed hand,
or a pickled piglet in this strange place.
No eyes, hands or piglets to be found here. Just row after row
of green beans, carrots, potatoes and the ever loathsome beets.
We rearrange and add to the already heavily burdened shelves
with the newly processed fruits and veggies while
swatting cobwebs from our eyelashes and hair.
Our box, now empty, will go back to the kitchen as we reverse our expedition,
step over the guard snake and close the wooden door.



Chauffeur

Marge Setzer, Peoria AZ
mjmse7@msn.com

Driver to games,
A car full of teens,
A pack of sardines
Bulging at seams.

After-dance pick-ups,
The later the better.
From Pontillo's or Critic's
Appetites whetted.

Pizza and cokes
Hot fudge sundaes consume us
As dance-weary legs,
Beg for forgiveness.

A phone call is made
To one who is tireless.
"We need a ride,"
And my father chauffeurs us.

The Pleasure of Their Company

Susan Keizer, Davis CA
susankeizer8000@comcast.net

I slide onto the banquette behind my table across the room from a bank of windows. The sidewalk beyond is busy with foot traffic: couples chatting, as they meander along; skate boarders weaving in and out; the occasional baby stroller; and the odd sniffing dog. It is still early for dinner but the restaurant is beginning to fill. Two women sitting diagonally across from me are lingering over their wine. One is tall, slender, dressed in the "I don't care" university-town style, a shapeless sweater of nondescript color, no makeup, sitting across from her companion of the velour hat, narrow brim, rakishly pressed on blond, shoulder length hair. They lean towards one another, back and forth, exchanging comments, like a ping pong game.

Against the window, his face lit up by his computer screen, a young thin man bends over his dinner, drinks his water, wipes his mouth, and leans his head back over the keys.

I recognize the man at the next table by the window. I have seen him here often: short, white bearded, reading the

newspaper as he eats, no wine. I imagine his living a kind of life of rules, allowing little in to disturb his order.

What is that man doing over there flossing his teeth? He must be part of that threesome just leaving. The older woman must be his mother.

In the background I can hear the grease sizzling in the open kitchen just beyond the bar, Spanish chatter back and forth among the cooks, silverware being replaced on vacant tables.

Here comes another couple. She's sitting down and he, stooped, baseball cap firmly placed on his head, stands looking at the paper in his hand. He sits down, keeping his eyes on his reading material and she brings out her Kindle. There is more excitement in the kitchen than at that table.

I see the waiter approach with my dinner. I shift my gaze onto my plate, hoping my table manners will bear the scrutiny of my fellow diners. After all, turnabout is fair play.

Chosen

Barbara Feinberg, Cleveland Heights OH
barbfein@sbcglobal.net

I started at Baker School in seventh grade, moving from a small town and its barely-adequate schools. This suburban junior high would launch me into one of the reputedly best high schools in the country, a terrifying thought.

That first year had been anxiety-saturated, with intermittent episodes of panicky wailing. I absolutely knew I'd never ever be able to complete the history and English study units, a satanic combination of syllabus and related homework guides. By eighth grade, though, I'd settled in, as much as a slightly school phobic kid could. I'd even kind of mastered the technique required to complete my assignments.

But walking into homeroom still challenged my fragile self-confidence. My classmates, as the oldest in the school, assumed without much apparent effort the mantle of the superiority granted by virtue of seniority. Not I. Rather, I saw myself as sort-of-tolerated by most of my fellow students. Although my parents always told me how smart I was, my grades—B's and C's—told me otherwise.

Despite my worries, I actually enjoyed Mrs. Campbell's English class. Pretty and young, she clearly encouraged my addiction to reading, and sometimes quirky questions. I, in turn, became "the best I could be" although still a 12-year old fish out of her small town pool.

That day, Mrs. Campbell told us that three boys and three girls would have the honor of writing the traditional eighth grade graduation program. "This group will have to spend many hours after school for the next two months. This is a very serious responsibility. The whole school and your parents will see how creative and talented this class is and...." Well, you get the drift.

To my amazement and probably to that of my classmates as well, she called my name. Hours with my favorite teacher and five students I thought were really smart. Me! Even though I had only recently mastered study units.

She thought I belonged with other bright kids.

That spring day, she gave me a life-changing gift: a new, affirming way of seeing myself.

I had been chosen.

Tai Chi and Apocalypse

Diane Sward Rapaport, Hines OR
jhpress@centurytel.net, <http://homesweetjeromedrapaport.wordpress.com/>

Turning on the news, I learn that history begins at breakfast. Four horsemen trumpet apocalypse: conquest, war, famine and death. Yesterday's news has been eclipsed. "Life is changing fast," I murmur. "I can't keep up."

However, at a vista in Utah's Canyonlands National Park, I see that history began long before humans could observe the slow changes that sculpted this wilderness of pinnacles, canyons, and rivers. Those four horsemen from the last book of the New Testament hadn't yet been invented. The pinnacle I stand on was once sand dunes.

In this time scale, whatever legacies ancient races left behind are lost in the detritus of petroglyphs and ruins; they have become metaphors of greatness and transience. I feel myself disappearing into the breath of the wind.

To steady myself, I start the slow movements of tai chi. Roots of juniper and piñon trees coil downwards, forging pathways into sandstone. I move carefully around the petrified logs of a forest that existed some 200 million years ago.

Tai chi slows down my internal rhythms and tunes me into this present moment. The twin forest of death and rebirth at my feet teach me about cycles of change and rhythms of fast and slow time. If this wilderness, in its pristine and natural disarray, had not been preserved to visit and quiet myself down, it would be more difficult not to give in to primal bewilderment.

History would always begin at breakfast. Visits of the four horsemen would fill me with fear. I would hoard my treasures, arm myself with guns, and guard my larders of food and water. Greed and loneliness would become constant companions.

Instead, I return home purged of meanness. My enthusiasm and curiosity are restored. I have recovered equilibrium and my courage to support all life.

I teach tai chi to family and friends to help them stay healthy and quell anxiety. I advise them to consume less; conserve more; seek the wild lands; and shun companies that sell death.

I write what I care about. My heart follows a path of peace.

It's what I can do.

Hidden Love

B. Lynn Goodwin, Danville CA
Lgood67334@comcast.net, www.writeradvice.com

After I got my driver's license, I borrowed my father's car to drive to and from school, and when 5:30 rolled around, I picked him up at The Village Store for Men, which he owned. I entered through the back door, and if he was with a customer, I sneaked into the back room and sat at his 2-foot wide, built-in desk, flanked by a curtain that hid it from the rows of suits, waiting to be purchased.

I stared at a black and white photo he had taken the Easter I was three. My mother stood behind my sister and me, looking down at me with such love in her eyes. My sister turned towards me too, as I burst out laughing at the exact moment my father clicked the shutter. I don't remember my father noticing me very often, but the photo shows me I was wrong.

A color shot of my sister and me nine years later was paper-clipped next to the Easter photo in my father's tiny office. It shows us flanking a life buoy on our cruise through the Inside Passage of Alaska. My sister looks prim and proper with her hands clasped in front of her, but I do not. My hip juts out slightly and my head is cocked suggestively.

At twelve I had no idea my body was saying, "Notice me" or "Love me." My father captured both my 12-year-old eagerness and the woman I might someday become with a single click of his Rollicflex. Both photos showed a sharp eye for composition and a love for me that he didn't express verbally.

As a young girl, I knew nothing of the dreams a father might have for his daughter. Now, though, I get to imagine his thoughts as I look at the two old photos, which live in the drawer of a Duncan Phyfe drum table from our old living room. They show an artistic side my dad rarely explored and his silent love.

Prescription for Murder

Sue Buck, Niles MI
sbuck882@gmail.com
Edgewater Writers, Cassopolis MI

Laugh and smile—like "Anna"
Tell jokes
the same ones twenty times.
Talk always about being
positive and tolerant
but interrupt a lot
and don't ever listen—just rant.
Be ambitious and ever busy.
Reason enough for losing or forgetting
the keys, or camera, or grade book
or your destination or yourself.
Be cordial and complimentary.
Invite lucky groupies to lunch
until you are crossed or outflanked
on some unproved, unimportant hunch.
Be concerned and adult-responsible
as you direct and advise the rabblement's lives.
Morally guide the less enlightened
who dare say maybe, just maybe
the issue could have two sides.
Always remind folks of Thomasville,
your home where they "do things right."
Point out the path to the mountaintop
as we stumble toward the light.
Be tenacious and persistent as a bulldog
biting through a rope or reputation.
Understand you can't lose.
No never means no.
Never let go
when you know you're always right.

Trash Day

Janet E Harris, Austin TX
janete_harris@hotmail.com

Nestled under the covers of my warm bed, a deep rumbling and low, mechanical-growl disrupts the early dawn tranquility. An assortment of rude, rough noises grows louder outside my window. Short farts, belches, noisy clatter, and motorized gnashing suggest a huge, automated beast is roaming indiscriminately through the neighborhood streets, banging open the inhabitants' waste bins and snuffling noisily through the stinking garbage before shambling laboriously on.

Wouldn't it be amazing if we could so easily rid ourselves of emotional debris? The flotsam and jetsam from our damaged childhoods. The spiritual fall-out from lifetimes of second-guessing and blame-finding. Round it all up, toss it into tidy, seamless bags bought from the local grocery, and have the whole, ugly mess and its taint conveniently carted away from our curbside domiciles in less time than we dedicate to home toilet-bowl cleaning in a week.

I Remember... You Remember

Lee Ambrose, Kingsport TN • leesmuse2@gmail.com • w-ecircles 4,7, and 10

Young man not birthed by me but every bit as much mine
You are my miracle child and you always will be.

I remember your premature entry into this world.
I remember falling in love from the moment I first saw you.

Now, at age fourteen, it is your turn to remember...
You tell me you remember much from when you lived with me
I am in awe of just how much a young mind can store.

Living with me until the age of four and a half –
When the court said to your father you must go
I was unaware of how many memories you'd saved.

You remember the Halloween costume of a toddler dinosaur
You remember our dance to the Count's songs on Sesame Street

I remember the day you breathed without the ventilator
I remember Saturdays in the rocker in the NICU –
You lying on my chest, your respirations in sync with mine

You remember walks on the Naples Pier and beach
You remember PopPop teaching you to play catch

I remember how hard you fought to survive the odds
I remember the day I realized you'd overcome those odds.

You remember tubby time and stories before bed.
You remember sneaking into my room to wake me up.

I remember the overwhelming sense of joy holding you in my arms.
I remember the devastation at having to relinquish you to a parent who had
been absent for more than four years
I remember trying to be brave on the outside; feeling anything but brave on
the inside

You remember ...I remember ...
You love ...I love ...

Ten years later, we've proven that no court decision can weaken the bonds we
created in those first years.
I give thanks for the memories I have of your early life with me.
My heart is warmed to know that you have equally warm memories as well.

My Mother is Not My Mother

Maya Lazarus, Caldwell TX
deblazarus@yahoo.com

My mother is not my mother
but a confused child.
I am no longer her daughter
but her caregiver/taker.
She calls me landlady
and my husband, sir.

I hurt, Mom, when you tell
my sister or her daughter
"I love you"
and you can't tell me,
even though I'm with you
every day
and they call *occasionally*.

My mother is not my mother
And I am no longer her daughter.
She soaks the bed
and I clean it up.
She wants the TV
and I turn it on.
She wishes for the Sunday
NY Times and I go buy it.
She needs a bed
and I give her mine.

My mother is not my mother
and I am no longer her daughter.
Every day is a new day for her
and a very old day for me.



Azalea

Jan Marquart, Austin TX
jan_marquart@yahoo.com

my father planted a vibrant pink azalea
in our front yard
a gift to my mother for their anniversary –
its radiant blossoms pushed delicately out into the air
in compact abundance
announcing the advent of spring

passersby stopped to stare
cameras in hand to take
pictures at the stunning beauty
that took over the yard each year

how they loved to watch that azalea
give birth to spring year after year

another family enjoys it now
and watches the azalea put forth its blossoms
—or maybe—
passersby no longer fall
in love with my memories

Needle Point

Candi Byrne, Martinsburg WV
candiland@mac.com

I'd hinted to my parents that for my high school graduation present, I'd love something zippier than the sluggish Dodge van they'd bought at police auction. Nothing as fancy as my mother's Mercedes, or as sporty as my Dad's T-bird convertible, just something where speed was measured in miles per hour, not hours per mile.

Alas, they gave me a sewing machine. Arguably, if it had wheels it would likely have bested the Dodge in time trials, but still....

The Sears Kenmore was boxy, utilitarian, and the color of weather beaten putty, not like the rounded, feminine elegance of my mother's glossy black Singer on which I'd learned to affix flower power patches to my bib overalls.

It sat untouched for almost a year until two days before my Justice of the Peace wedding. Forbidden to marry, I snapped open the machine's clam shell case and hacked together a simple white frock. Ha—showed them; I'd used their ugly, crappy, unwanted gift to create a sad sack in which to pledge my troth to a man they despised. Score!

Two years later, I made maternity clothes, then curtains for the nursery and a cunning clutch ball safe for teething. As time went on, I stitched seasonal wreaths and colorful pillows. Hemmed uniform pants: first, military, then fire department

Paul at Christmastime

Karen Mocker Dabson, Columbia OH
karen@mockerdabson.com
www.mockerdabson.com/category/blog

I remember you
With your two front teeth missing
As you grinned into the Christmas tree.
Your eyes fixed on some treat we'll never know,
A spot of chocolate on your cheek.

You knelt there,
The patched knees of your dungarees hidden from view
While the toy train puffed its fake-smoke way
Past the paper and the ribbons—
The scat of presents recently unveiled.

In your plaid flannel shirt,
You clutched your new toy Tommy gun,
Shiny fresh from its wrapper,
Waiting to chase the girls in the neighborhood
And show off to Billy Yoder.

Fuzzy figures hurried to and fro behind you
In gray and grayer hues,
Putting on the turkey dinner,
Tending the fire,
Tuning in the football game.

But you remained,
Ever-captured,
Ever-happy,
In the now
Of another Christmas morning.



for my husband; school, Boy Scout, then fire department for my son.

I taught my daughter to sew on the clunky machine. She started a business cobbling custom leather front shields for fire helmets. Her father, brother, and others were wearing them as they rushed to the Pentagon on 9/11.

Almost 40 years to the day, the Kenmore froze and would stitch no more. The repairman at the quilt shop said there was nothing he could do; it was time to pull the plug.

It was easy in the end to let it go, not because it had been an ugly, crappy, unwanted gift, but because a patchwork of memories created through it are bound together with a timeless golden thread.

I think I just heard my parents shout, "Score!"

Love's Embrace

Maya Lazarus, Caldwell TX
deblazarus@yahoo.com

I tap on the solid, wooden door, worm gray with remnants of white paint embedded in the worn cracks. There is a hand-carved design around the inner and outer edges, but time, weather, and location have changed it irrevocably, smoothing it down with salt air, sand, and heat, so that whatever it once represented is no longer obvious to this newcomer. The doorway is the entrance to a deteriorating Spanish colonial house that once stood proudly in this neighborhood some 20 years ago when most other houses were wooden. The parents died and their unmarried daughter took charge of the crumbling sarcophagus.

No one answers my knock and I have no key, so I move towards the open window on my right where a melodic Viennese waltz is drifting through the rusting, vertical bars of this sentinel. I shield my eyes on both sides to block out the midday sun and peer inside, noting the antiquated record player from which the waltz is flowing, the patterned ceramic floor tiles of a forest hue, faded and uneven, and the young man lying on the floor, dark, curly hair pressed close on his forehead by the heat, café con leche-colored chest naked and hairless, eyes closed, vicariously living in a European royal court of a past century, I suppose.

I recently rented a room here, shortly after arriving in Cartagena, Colombia to teach English, and I would like to go in. The young man looks attractive, but he isn't the coffee baron of my dreams. He must be the nephew. I pound the door with the side of my fist, feeling faint from the heat and longing to enter a darker, if not necessarily cooler place. The thought never crossed my mind, not for one millisecond, that this shirtless man on the floor would become my husband, my soul mate, the chivalrous savior whose commitment and loyalty have endured through 32 years of married life.

My Anchor

Ann Fowler, Ogden UT
ptcfowler@aol.com

The early morning—cool, dark, soft—surrounds us like black satin. I wake.

Our imperfect bodies fit together perfectly, two pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Interlocked.

Heat radiates between us. My skin seeks yours, magnetic opposites. We touch.

Stay beside me always, I think. Never leave. But it wasn't always so.

When youth still possessed me, before Life had been lived, I longed—to be free.

I went my way, you went yours. We shared only children, an address. And bills.

So many diversions called to me. So many reasons to go. Why stay?

You held me down, I thought, no fun, no romance, a weight to be borne. An anchor.

So many years passed just so. You became you. I became me. Somehow—We became we.

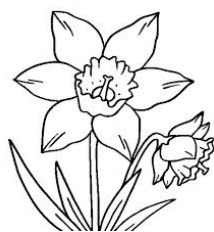
Day by day we built a life—one unrent life. We grew to become one, inseparable. Please.

As storms assaulted, you were strong. You kept us safe, intact, together. An anchor.

We are greater than the sum of our parts. I love you.

Mood Melody

Sue Buck, Niles MI
sbuck882@gmail.com
Edgewater Writers, Cassopolis MI



The house does its best to greet me. It's warm, but it does not smile. I kick off tight shoes, unfold the news and wipe off red cheer for a while. My exile—I'm safe, no intruders as the quiet locks me away. Just keep out those pesky, unwelcome guests called Sad Memories. They've no manners, they linger, they overstay. It is much nicer here away from the din. But I'll never laugh at lonely again.

Crones Just Wanna Have Fun

Betsy Boyd, Maryville TN
bboyd2153@outlook.com

Our mother calls us groupies, but we prefer to think of ourselves as back-up singers. Before our first Hall and Oates concert in June 2011, my sister researched the line-up and burned us CDs of the playlist so we could familiarize ourselves with the songs. For months I kept my CD in my car and played it everywhere I went. I “Sara Smiled” on my way to Wal-Mart or Kroger, and when I had a particularly trying day at work, belting out “I Can’t Go for That” at the top of my lungs became my stress reliever of choice. By the night of the concert, we knew all of the lyrics and, more importantly, knew when to chime in and when to let Daryl Hall take the lead. We’d done our homework, bought our concert dresses, and had seats close enough to make eye contact with our famous band mates. As Jan said the next morning, it was magic.

Three years and I’m-not-sure-how-many concerts in how many cities later, Jan and I have earned a reputation among our family, friends and co-workers as being, well, a bit eccentric when it comes to the best-selling rock-and-soul duo in the history of music. It is true that one time we made a trip to Virginia Beach by way of Rochester, New York, because we had snagged front row seats at a concert. And not many of our friends know it, but on that same trip we spent an enchanting afternoon meandering around the Hudson Valley tracking down Hall’s home, where the *Live From Daryl’s House* shows are taped.

Jean Shinoda Bolen redefines the word crone in *Crones Don’t Whine*, as “a juicy older woman with zest, passions and soul.” She warns that others may label us eccentric because we don’t conform to the stereotype of how a woman of a certain age should act. But crones also have the courage to live with authenticity and joy. I embrace both the label and the joy.

Now, if you’ll excuse me, there’s a concert coming up next month and Dillard’s is having a sale on concert dresses.

On Being Female

Anna Mae DuCharme, Framingham MA
ducharme@yahoo.com

Huddled together on the doorstep of our home at dusk as the stars were beginning to show their tiny, twinkling lights in the darkening sky, my sister and I hugged to keep warm. It was early spring of 1951 and a little chilly. She was my best friend, and I could go to her for anything.

How did Mom and Dad have babies?” I asked.

I was not prepared for what I heard. I was 12, and Claire was 15, only three years my senior, but in my innocent and naïve eyes, she was much more worldly than I. Shocked and repulsed at what she told me, I could not imagine my parents doing “that!”

I knew I wanted to have babies, but, “Isn’t there any other way?” I pleaded.

“No,” she replied, somewhat amused by my reaction. She seemed okay with it. “You’ll get used to the idea and someday you might even like it if you meet the right man.”

“Never!” I thought. “Well, okay, if that’s the only way to have babies, then I will just have to grin and bear it.”

A former college boyfriend called me some years after we graduated. I told him I was married and had three children. His comment was, “How did that happen?”

Evidently, I somehow managed to get used to “it.”

In the late 50’s and throughout the 60’s and beyond, the whole fabric of society seemed to be falling apart: the sexual revolution, the birth control pill, women’s liberation, the drug culture, commune living, to name just a few changes that were taking place. It was very difficult to hang on to one’s values. I was not immune to these changes, but always hung onto the idea of traditional marriage. I never saw myself as not wanting to be married and have children. Call me “old fashioned.”

Today’s women have many choices, yes, but are they any happier for it? I think not. You decide.

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 almost two hundred posts 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/>. See **this month’s featured blog post on page 25**.

Nano Person

Abby November, Austin TX
abnova@earthlink.net

Judith Helburn Writing Circle, Austin TX

Pink papoose
Perfect
A nano person.
Human energizer bunny
Of six and half pounds.
So delicate like a small yellow bird
I had to be taught to hold.
She held my heart with her hazy blue eyes.
Laser sharp to my soul
Her cries called my name
I knew she would,
Although only I heard it.
Her fragile fingers encircled my one.
Forever linking us.
I've made mistakes, but I loved.
I bellowed at times, but I have loved.
I have nagged, cajoled, and screamed
But it was through loving too much.
Afraid to let go, to loosen the fingers of need.
Both hers and mine.
Afraid of the hole remaining in my heart.

Circles Are The Heart of Story Circle Network



The Story Circle Network always encourages women to establish Story Circles in their local communities. If you're interested in writing and sharing your story, *this invitation is for you.*

A Story Circle is a group of women who come together to read, write, and celebrate the stories of their lives. A Circle may be made up of as few as two or three people, or as many as twenty.

If you are interested in organizing and/or facilitating a Story Circle in your area, you may want to read "*A Guide for Story Circle Facilitators*," by Susan Wittig Albert. This booklet is free for dues-paying members of the Story Circle Network (downloadable from the members-only part of the SCN website), and \$3 for non-members. Just email us at circles@storycircle.org or snail-mail us your request: Facilitator's Guide, Story Circle Network, PO Box 1670, Estes Park CO 80517-1670

Pinterest for Writers

by Jude Whelley

Are you familiar with Pinterest? This website, www.pinterest.com, is the latest tool in my writer's toolbox. Pinterest is a free site where you can sign up for an account profile and immediately start "pinning." You establish "boards" of your own design and then whenever you see a pin on the site that you would like to keep for future reference you "pin" it by clicking on a red Pin It button in the upper left corner. A screen pops up listing your boards and you select where you want to store the pin and send it on its way. There will also be a screen saying where the post came from and if you choose, you can click and follow that board. Your feed will reflect the boards you have chosen to follow or you can go to the search box at the top of the page and search by name if you are looking for a friend or by topic. For example, I searched for Clocks and got hundreds of images. It has me thinking that clockmaker might be an interesting profession for one of my characters.

You can go to my Pinterest page at <https://www.pinterest.com/judewhelley/> to check out my boards. My Writer's Life board has over 1,000 pins. I just started a new board called Writing Prompts so I have a go-to place when I need a quick writing prompt. When I have some extra time I will search through My Writer's Life and repin some of the prompts there onto the new board.

The main character in my novel is an artist who turns furniture into functional art works. When I am writing a work scene for her I go to my Painted Furniture Inspiration board for inspiration. The main character in the next book in the series is a baker, so I have a board called Eat Cake!

If you pop over to www.pinterest.com/susanwalbert/ you will see that Susan has boards for A Wilder Rose, The China Bayles Mysteries, and the Daring Dahlia's among others. You can choose to follow one board on a page or all of them.

Warning! Pinterest is an addictive visual feast. People use it for all sorts of purposes: recipe collecting, cooking tips, DIY projects, decorating, gardening, quote collections... the possibilities are endless. So start a character board, a writing prompt board, or a collection of inspiring writing quotes and give your writing practice a visual boost.





From the Blogs:

Telling HerStories One Woman's Day



by Linda Hoye

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

Story Circle's One Woman's Day blog is an excellent venue for members to share the stories of their life with readers from around the world. A quick look at the blog statistics reveal visitors from the United States, Canada, Ireland, Australia, and the UK to name just a few countries. Whether you're looking to build your platform, to draw new readers to your blog, or just to tell the story of a day in your life, OWD is the place for you. Recently we were delighted to feature a post by **Fran Simone**, who made a blunder many of us can identify with.

I'm out-of-town visiting my friend, Ted, at a skilled nursing facility. He sleeps. I read a book on my iPad. Hours pass. Ted's daughter arrives. I wait for her in the lobby where I place my coat and Baggallini tote on a chair. I love that bag. It's lightweight with multiple compartments, including an iPad slot. Susan joins me and we head out for dinner.

After dinner, I drive to Comfort Inn and grab my suitcase from the car trunk. My bag isn't there. I search inside the car. No bag. Not a problem. Probably left it in the lobby. I settle in and call the nursing facility, confident it's there. No bag. Still not a problem. I call the restaurant. No bag. Maybe it fell in the parking lot.

I call Ted's sitter. "Please double-check the lobby and if my bag isn't there, then look in the parking lot." No bag.

Now a problem.

The next morning, I check housekeeping at the nursing facility. No bag. I call customer service at Apple to report a lost or stolen iPad. I learn that I need my Apple ID and password or serial number.

"Well, what if I don't have either one?"

"Then call the place where you purchased your device for the serial number."

Who carries around the serial number or memorizes their ID and passwords?

I call Best Buy back home to track the serial number. No dice. I need my credit card number.

My iPad was a gift to myself when I retired in 2011. Since then, Bank of America issued me a new credit card, one with a chip.

I call my daughter.

"Calm down, Mom, we'll figure it out."

She calls back. "Mom, check your Amazon account which lists old credit card numbers."

I track it down.

Back to Best Buy. They find the purchase order, but don't keep track of serial numbers.

My daughter calls again. "Mom, I located the serial number."

I don't ask how.

Back to Apple.

"We can now resolve your problem but not over the phone. You have to report the loss in the cloud."

What's the cloud?

It's late and I have a six-hour drive ahead of me. Although exhausted when I return home, I locate iCloud and report the loss. My iPad's locked and can be located. Triumphant I fall into bed.

Next day while unpacking the car, I push aside a blanket in the trunk and uncover my tote bag. I am elated. My iPad is located at my home address. I am embarrassed.

During that frenzied day, I learned to keep track of serial numbers and passwords. More importantly, I learned that loss of an iPad is small potatoes compared to Ted languishing in a nursing facility. Mistakes happen. No doubt I will make many more this year.

"I hope that in this year to come, you make mistakes."

- Neil Gaiman

*Fran Simone is a Professor Emeritus at Marshall University, South Charleston, WV, campus. She directed the West Virginia Writing Project and taught classes and conducted workshops in personal narrative, memoir and creative non-fiction. Her memoir, *Dark Wine Waters: a Husband of a Thousand Joys and Sorrows*, was published last year.*

Change in Membership Dues

The Board of Directors recently approved the following membership fee changes. We want to make membership available to as many women as possible, but have to adjust for increased printing and mailing costs. We will now have two options, effective February 1 for all new members, and upon current members' next renewal:

- 1 If you are willing to **receive the quarterly *Journal* and annual *True Words Anthology* on-line**, your membership dues will **remain the same** in the USA & decrease for those outside the USA.
- 2 If you elect to **receive the quarterly *Journal* and annual *True Words Anthology* in print form**, your dues will **increase by \$10 in the USA, \$20 internationally**.

Membership Rates:

- 1 National SCN Memberships—**On-line Publications**: Worldwide: \$55
- 2 National SCN Memberships—**Print Publications**: USA: \$65 (Canada & Mexico: \$85, elsewhere: \$90)

Other membership levels will remain unchanged:

- Friend: \$90
- Donor: \$125
- Supporter: \$150
- Contributor: \$200
- Sustainer: \$250
- Patron: \$325
- Benefactor: \$400+

This change is effective February 1 for all new members. Current members will continue receiving print publications until they renew, at which time they will choose to continue receiving print publications & pay the higher rate, or opt for online-only publications & pay the lower rate.

We are working to increase our membership and would welcome your efforts to introduce Story Circle Network to your fellow writers. Thank you for being part of our SCN family!

Our online membership form:

<http://www.storycircle.org/frmjoinscn.php>



2014 Super Star Blogger Pat Bean

A growing number of Story Circle Network members are sharing their stories by blogging. If you're a dues-paying SCN member and have a blog, let us know (at **news at storycircle.org**) so we can list you here.

Each month, we choose one of our SCN bloggers to be featured in our national eletter. The selection is made on the basis of the blog's outstanding content, visual appeal, and the importance of its contribution to the growing universe of lifestory blogging.

At the beginning of each year, a team of judges completes a first-round screening, choosing five finalists from among all the prior year's Star Bloggers. Then all SCN members are invited to vote on their favorite. We are happy to announce that Pat Bean was selected as our 2014 Super Star Blogger. Her blog: *Pat Bean's Blog*, of course.

Pat receives a two-year Story Circle Network national membership, a copy of *Kitchen Table Stories*, and publicity in our SCN publications.

Congratulations, Pat!

To see all the SCN blogs, go to:

<http://www.storycircle.org/blogs.shtml>

For Pat Bean's blog, go to:
<https://patbean.wordpress.com>

You'll be glad you did!





This membership is a gift.

My name and address:

My phone and e-mail:

Join the Story Circle Network!

Annual Membership:

- _____ Canada & Mexico: \$65 (International MO)
- _____ International \$70 (International MO)
- _____ Internet Chapter: \$20/yr (in addition to your national dues)
- _____ USA: \$55 if receiving *online* publications; \$65 if receiving *printed* publications

Make your check to
 Story Circle Network
 PO Box 1670
 Estes Park, CO 80517-1670

3/15

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ - _____

Phone _____

Email _____ Amount enclosed _____

Become a supporting member and help Story Circle Network grow. Check here:

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| <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 |



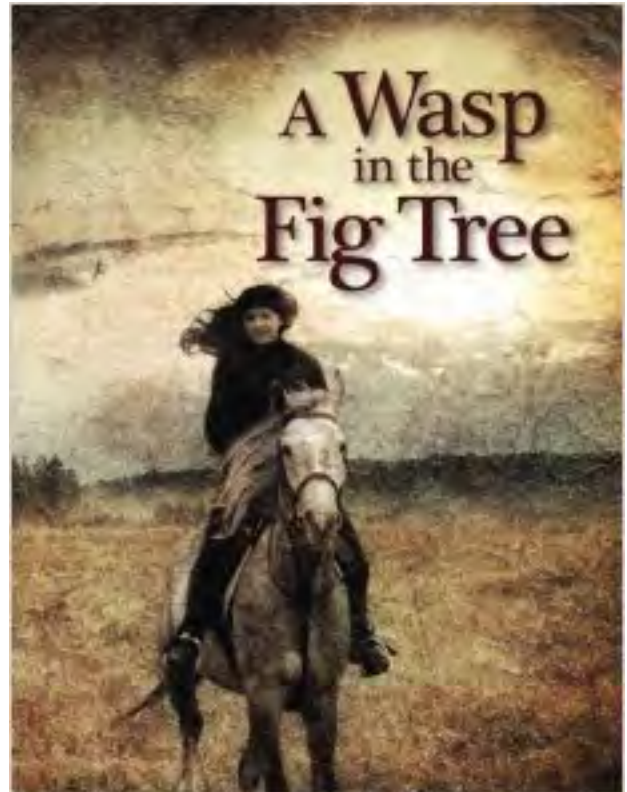
Mary Bryan Stafford is seventh generation Texan and a member of The Daughters of the Republic of Texas. She graduated from The College of William and Mary in Virginia with degrees in English and Spanish but got back to

Texas on the fast train. She and her husband now live in the Hill Country near Austin where she spends her time writing and training her two horses, A Lucky Ferrari and Briosio.

An award-winning author, she was a quarterfinalist in the Amazon Breakthrough Novel Award Contest and is published in the anthology *Women Write about the Southwest*, winner of the Willa Award, in the anthology *The Noble Generation III* and many times in the *Texas Poetry Calendar*.

Former editor of HarperCollins and St. Martin's Press, Erin Brown says—"A Wasp in the Fig Tree, the compelling story of young Isabel and her Texas clan, is rich in literary flair. The characters, setting, and plot have incredible depth, resonance, and vibrancy in this tale of family and friendship that explores the complex cultures, prejudices, and history of South Texas."

You may reach Mary Bryan Stafford at
 marylynn@mstafford.net
<http://www.marybryanstafford.com>



Mary Bryan Stafford

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

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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:

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

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



Story Circle Book Reviews Needs Your Help

Visit the GoFundMe page at:
<http://www.gofundme.com/storycircle>

When this newsletter went to press, we had raised \$3,461 toward our goal of \$5,400!