



STORY CIRCLE JOURNAL

Vol. 19 No. 3, September, 2015

The newsletter for women with stories to tell



Stories from the Heart VIII

Story Circle Network
Eighth National Women's Writing Conference
April 15-17, 2016
Wyndham Hotel, Austin, Texas

Plan now to join us for a unique and exciting event: the *eighth* national women's writing conference of Story Circle Network! You'll find more information on page 3 of this issue of the *Journal*.



photo credit: Edgar Valdes

Brooke Warner: Friday Night Keynoter

Brooke is nationally known as the founder/publisher of She Writes Press, a writing/coach and teacher with a special interest in women's memoir and fiction, and the former executive editor of Seal Press. She is the author of *What's Your Book? A Step-by-Step Guide to Get You from Inspiration to Published Author*.

Brooke will also lead a Friday afternoon optional preconference workshop, with Linda Joy Myers. Visit Brooke's website, Warner Coaching at <http://warnercoaching.com>



Susan Wittig Albert: Sunday Keynoter

Our Sunday keynoter will be **Susan Wittig Albert**, SCN's founder and president and a *New York Times* bestselling author. In addition to her acclaimed women's mysteries, she has written two novels about the real lives of real women: *A Wilder Rose*, about Rose Wilder Lane and her mother, Laura Ingalls Wilder; and *Loving Eleanor*, about the intimate friendship of Eleanor

Roosevelt and Lorena Hickok. Susan will also participate on a panel, "Paths to Publishing," with Deborah Winegarten and Connie Spittler. Visit Susan's website at: www.susanalbert.com.

2015 LifeWriting Competition Winners

This year's Story Circle LifeWriting Competition winners, chosen for their freshness and originality, and the clarity and authenticity of the author's voice are:

- **Dinner for the Deported: A Tale of Two Sisters**, by Claire McCabe of Elkton MD
- **Tomb Therapy**, by Lorna Lee of Ridgefield WA
- **Perfect Failure**, by Linda Marshall of Centerville OH
- **The Last Banana**, by Debra Winegarten of Austin TX

The writers responded to questions about **failure**: How have 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?

We know you will enjoy these stories as much as we do; read them on pages 4-9. Congratulations winners!

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Letter From SCN's President—



Dear SCN Sister—

I am more than delighted to have been invited to return to the presidency of the organization that is so near to my heart, and look forward with an enormous enthusiasm to working with our writing community once again.

I'm sure you have your own private image of the truly unique women's organization we call Story Circle. Here's mine. I like to imagine SCN as a dynamic network of interconnected circles—

circles within circles within circles—where we are energetically engaged with many other women, all working together to share the stories of our lives.

Circles within circles? Let's think about that for a moment. How many different ways are you connected with other SCN women? How many of these circles-within-circles are a part of *your* writing life?

- You belong to our Internet Chapter and are an active writer—perhaps a facilitator—in one or even two virtual circles there.
- You meet with a face-to-face Story Circle or OWL Circle in your home town—perhaps you even facilitate that group.
- You're an active member (or facilitator) of one of our online writers' Roundtables: LifeWriters, Writer2Writer, WorkInProgress.
- You contribute to the *Journal's* "True Words," to our "One Woman's Day" blog, to our "HerStories" blog, to our anthology, *Real Women Write*.
- You have your own blog, and it's listed with over 100 others in our Blogging Circle.
- You're a published author, and you belong to our Authors' Circle.
- You share your writing-related news on our Members in Print page and with our Facebook friends.
- You've served as a juror for our LifeWriting Contest, or in our Sarton Award program.
- You're a member of our Book Reviewers Circle and write reviews for our important women's book review website.
- You're taking one of our online classes—or perhaps you're teaching one!
- You serve on SCN's Board of Directors and actively work to support SCN's mission.
- You're planning to sign up for Stories From the Heart VIII, and meet up with all the women you've been connected with through SCN.

See what I mean? Circles within circles, interwoven connections that strengthen our unique community of women writers. I hope you'll use the many resources of our multiple circles—and the many more that you'll find in this issue of our *Journal*—to enrich your writing life and help you to reach your writing goals.

*With joy for your journey,
Susan*

P.S. You can find a handy summary and links to most of these circles-within-circles on our webpage: "How SCN Can Help You Tell Your Story" <http://www.storycircle.org/howscncanhelp.shtml>

Story Circle Journal

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

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We welcome your letters, queries, and suggestions.

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

2016 Women's Writing Conference

New Approach, New Offerings

by Jeanne Guy



10 Reasons to Attend

1. We've expanded the presentation topics to include FICTION as well as non-fiction, memoir, personal essays, poetry, drama, dance, music, art and more.
2. Presentations will now be identified by level: novice/beginner, advanced/experienced, or general/for all levels.
3. We've moved away from "tracks" to the following relevant "Topic Areas": Getting Personal, Craft Matters, The Writing Life, Breaking into Publishing, Marketing, Writing as a Business.
4. Presentations will be 60 minutes rather than 90 minutes, allowing for more networking and relaxed time to get to know and share with one another.
5. TWO types of presentations will be offered: in addition to workshops with writing opportunities, we're introducing interactive and engaging lecture-style presentations.
6. Brooke Warner, a professional well-versed in book publishing, writing and coaching, will be our Friday night Keynote Speaker.
7. Our Sunday keynote speaker is Susan Wittig Albert, founder and president of Story Circle Network. Susan, who has authored 50+ books, will share her ideas about how members can both use SCN in their communities and can personally benefit from their association with SCN.
8. Friday night Welcome and Reception
9. "Story Wall" - Share Who You Are
10. Open Mike - Share Your Writing

Your 2016 Women's Writing Conference Checklist!

- Save the date April 15-17, 2016 (link to all general conference info) <http://www.storycircle.org/Conference>
- Sign up NOW - Early Bird Rate (available to members only!) is in effect through December 11, 2015. <http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/frmregister.php>
- Book your hotel stay. <http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/lodging.php>
- Interested in presenting at the conference? Get your proposal in! Deadline is fast approaching September 15, 2015. <http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/proposal>
- Exhibitor tables will go fast. Interested in displaying your wares? <http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/callforvendors.php>
- Donate items (yours or solicited) to the silent auction. <http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/callfordonations.php>
- And don't forget to make your travel plans!

And Note These Additional Opportunities:

- Pre-conference Coaching Sessions
- Pre-conference Workshops

Announcing New Conference Competition...Hot Flashes!

by Pat LaPointe

Story Circle Network continues to find new ways to support women's writing. The latest is a new competition: "Hot" Flashes. This is a flash fiction contest, open only to SCN members who are attending our 2016 Stories from the Heart conference in Austin.

Once your registration fee is paid, along with your conference confirmation will come the link to use for entering. This is one more good reason to commit early to attending. Deadline for submitting entries is March 1.

Flash fiction is by definition very short. Entries must be 600 words or less. The prompt for this year's contest is "Stories from the Heart." Please shape your stories around that theme. This is an opportunity to explore the short fiction

form, and to share your work with a group of women committed to supporting and learning from each other.

There will be a \$15 entry fee, with a limit of one entry per attendee. The panel of judges will be made up of published authors who are members of SCN.

The winning story will be announced by our founder and president, Susan Wittig Albert, at the Friday evening keynote. Our prizes: first place – \$100, second place – \$50, and third place – \$25. The first prize story will also appear in the conference program and the author may read it at one of the conference luncheons.

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



Dinner for the Departed: A Tale of Two Sisters

by Claire McCabe of Elkton MD

Folklore maintains that on All Hallows' Eve the veil between the living and the dead is thin. One can set a table for the departed and welcome them back to commune for an evening: sit with them, open one's heart to them, and

perhaps ease the grieving. I was desperate to try anything to assuage my guilt at failing to save my sister from herself. And I could not wait until October. Waiting had not worked 18 years ago.

Jeanne was four years older than me, talented, brilliant, the love of my life, and an alcoholic. She died when her car swerved off a country road in Virginia and into an oak tree. She was 43. The profound failure I felt over my plan to coax her into sobriety deepened my grief. I was waiting for her birthday in late September to write a long letter to thank her for all of the wonderful ways she had inspired me and let her know how much I loved her. I would send the letter with her birthday card.

Three weeks before her birthday, she visited a friend, had a few drinks and headed home. She never made it. I was grateful that she hadn't taken anyone else's life that summer evening. The Siamese cat on the birthday card that I would never send stared back at me for months as I struggled with my grief and guilt. I should have sent the card sooner. Why had I waited for an occasion to let my sister know how much I loved her?

This time I wouldn't wait. My dinner with the departed would begin immediately. I searched my pantry for foods she would like. She loved everything French: the language, the art, and the food heavy with butter and cream. I followed her Francophile lead in high school. Now, decades later in my gluten-free, vegetarian, low-fat kitchen, I would cook something decidedly not French.

I scrounged up a half pack of rice noodles in my cupboard and started the water to boil. The bands of white noodles folded in circles upon themselves reminding me of the pale blond hair that had earned Jeanne the nickname "nimbus" for the cloud-like halo of curls that once framed her face.

I gathered vegetables for a stir-fry to top the noodles as memories of Jeanne filled the kitchen. One summer I made ratatouille—a French vegetable stew—for dinner at her home in Richmond. When I told her I sautéed the vegetables in olive oil, she insisted on reheating the dish and adding several chunks of butter... "to enhance the flavor," she winked. We drank a bottle of burgundy with that meal on her balcony and imagined ourselves in Paris watching the pedestrians bustle by on the sidewalk below. Should I have refrained from drinking with her?

I tried to clear the bad memories and sliced an onion, which prompted tears that soon gave way to emotional ones. Jeanne's drinking started in the private girls boarding school that she attended on a full scholarship in the late '60s. She secured the leading role in several school plays and was elected class president. She excelled in most everything and kept me spellbound talking about the code of life contained in double helix DNA strands. She prepared a portfolio to submit to university art school, but never submitted it. Instead, Jeanne was eager to explore the free love, social justice, and psychedelic world she heard on the radio waves of her generation: Janis Joplin, Bob Dylan, Led Zeppelin. She found work at music festivals: folk music, fiddler's conventions, rock and roll...the kind of music didn't matter to Jeanne as long as she was ensconced with road crews for regional bands. The lifestyle involved lots of beer and wine. It didn't take long for the real cause of her drinking to manifest. She was self-medicating.

After her first psychotic episode, it became clear that the brilliance that earned her accolades and awards was the bright side of a murky mental illness known as bi-polar disorder. It would torment her until her death. I no longer found myself applauding as a member of an adoring audience. Instead, I waited for orderlies to unlock doors to mental wards for timed visits. The first few years after her diagnosis, psychotropic medications were in their infancy and had the subtlety of a sledgehammer. The meds made her mentally dull and physically lethargic. She gained weight and lost the light in her eyes. After each psychotic episode, Jeanne spent weeks heavily tranquilized in mental wards, far from the promise of her teenage years.

I willed my thoughts back to the kitchen, wishing bad memories could be as easily brushed away as tears. I sliced a green pepper. "Cut on the diagonal, it will be prettier," Jeanne would say. The vegetable's deep green color reminded me of a velvet dress I had long ago: a hand-me-down from Jeanne. The simple shift no longer fit her blossoming figure. Its lines, designed for a girl's straight form, were not stylish, but the fabric was luxurious. I had been invited to an 8th grade holiday dance. "Jeanne," I wailed, "I can't go. I don't have anything to wear. I'll look like such a baby."

She paused in her French translation homework. "Go put on the green velvet dress," she said. When I emerged from the closet, she had a scarf and belt ready. She adjusted the sleeves and smiled. "Put on a pair of black tights and my new boots. I'll style your hair, and you'll be fine." I looked in the mirror, thrilled. She had not only transformed the dress, but had transformed me into a teenager: stunning and sophisticated. At her funeral one of her friends noted, "Jeanne, could make something out of nothing." How true.

I added carrots, red peppers, and garlic to the pan, gave a quick stir, then finished with soy sauce and lemon juice. Jeanne would appreciate the colors if not the flavors. I plated the food on my best dishes, set the table for two, and gathered some snapdragons into a bud vase. Finally, I put out the candelabra. The last gift Jeanne gave me was a box of hand-dipped candles. Dinner for the departed was ready.

I ate slowly, thinking how Jeanne had been such a bright light burning furious and fast. I had been more subdued and depended on her to show me what was

possible and what was not. I saw that life could be filled with creativity, but all could be dashed away in a moment by a cruel disease or sudden accident. And wishing could not save a sister's life or bring her back.

Jeanne would've laughed at me sipping herbal tea from a wine glass but would applaud the crystal. It occurred to me that my brilliant sister had shown up for the party after all, with her sensibilities, humor and lasting impression on me. We had two very different lives to live, she would say. Yes, I failed to send a birthday card that fateful September. But I never failed in loving her, then or now.

About the author:

Claire McCabe lives with her fiancé, two dogs, two cats and a sometimes-home-from-college son just steps away from a state nature preserve in Maryland. She teaches undergraduate writing courses at the University of Delaware. When not grading papers and playing with her pets, Claire writes and critiques for online and in-person writing groups. She has undergraduate degrees in English Literature and Journalism from Virginia Commonwealth University and a master's degree in English Linguistics from the University of Delaware.



Tomb Therapy

by Lorna Lee of Ridgefield WA

It is February 17, 1984 and I am standing in front of a church. This is an unlikely place for an atheist to be, but I did not come here to find God. I came here to end my life as I have known it. Being a closet drinker for ten years, I cling to the notion that I am simply a twenty-six year-old woman who has unresolved issues with vodka. My new husband disagrees. He sent me here so I can redefine myself as an alcoholic. I feel as if I am dying and, as such, I float in and out of my body—every sense alert to what is happening. What the heck is happening?

I begin my descent into the end of my life. My drinking life. A chill grips me. "This must be what stone-cold sober feels like," I think as I take a shaky breath.

The cement steps leading down to the scratched metal door are nearly all cracked. Small chunks are missing from the top and bottom steps, as if they get more use than all the others. The stairwell leads to a basement where an Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) group meets. Sparse lighting casts fractured shadows on the stone walls. I know I am in the right place even though there is no sign on the door. Last night, when I asked with the voice a punished child, "Where's the closest AA meeting," the anonymous man who answered the AA hot-line gave me this address. He knew this would be my first meeting and I would be on edge. Why did he send me to a crypt?

I open the door to a dungeon-like basement—windowless and grim. Cigarette smoke shrouds the chamber in a blue-gray veil. Many of these recovering alcoholics are smokers taking full advantage of their license to chain-smoke inside this unventilated space.

Before the glow disappears from one cigarette, the embers act as the lighter for another one fresh out of its package. Ashtrays litter the room. I do not smoke, but, in this place, my lungs do. "These people aren't like me. I don't belong here." This is what I tell myself as I cough. "How did I end up here?" I brush away tears stinging from smoke and shame.

The greenish-yellow walls of the basement are painted cinderblocks—rows of them stacked in a fortress-like manner. The only disruptions in the solid walls are three doorways: the main entrance, the door to a unisex bathroom, and a "mystery door" in the front of the room, covered by a vibrant over-sized "Ten Tips for Safe Driving" laminated poster.

Except for one stormy gray industrial wipe-your-shoes-off rug, the ash gray cement floors are naked. All of the dingy drop-ceiling tiles have splotches of varying hues of "ugly." Spaced evenly among the ceiling tiles, florescent lights flicker behind stained translucent plastic panels. Some bulbs are dead; some spit and sputter as if gasping for their final breath. Dried up flies make morbid polka dot patterns on the plastic panels.

The "refreshment area" is on the left wall toward the back of this suffocating space. Covering one banquet-sized folding table is a huge barrel of a coffee-maker with all of the "fixings" for any coffee drinker. Fresh-brewed coffee competes with second-hand smoke to create a pungent aroma. A sporadic and brief puff of fresh air enters with each anonymous attendee. A sea of pink Crispie-Cream donut boxes covers another large table next to the coffee table. Sanka packets, a meager assortment of tea bags and a small hot-pot of water are available on a tiny table at the

end of the refreshment area—a wink to the minority who do not crave caffeine.

Beige institutional-style folding chairs line both sides of the room, facing a podium. A clear center path separates one seating area from the other. Each row is aligned precisely and generously, allowing for easy movement in and out of the seats. The chairs are hard and cold, like everything in the room except the soft fresh donuts, the gentle swirl of smoke in the air, and the kind mumbblings of "welcome" or "I'm glad you came."

In preparation for the meeting, two people tape flimsy poster-sized papers to the side walls. Each paper has a hand-printed slogan in blue marker: "One day at a time," "There but for the grace of God," "Easy does it," "Live and let live," "Just work the steps," and several others. Most of the make-shift posters are cockeyed and unevenly placed on the walls. "The person who arranged the chairs didn't put up these sloppy posters," I think to myself, judgmental perfectionist that I am. The masking tape lets go on the corner of the "Just work the steps" slogan, so "Just work" is the message tonight.

Like the swirling cigarette smoke, sounds are surrounding me. The blue-gray air fills with animated chatter and slurping from Styrofoam cups. People are moving towards the chairs; I move, too. Friends sit together. I sit alone and so do a few others. "Are they new like me? Do they feel as awkward and embarrassed as I do?" I ask silently, trying to become small in my seat—

About the author:

Lorna Lee was a sociology professor. Creative writing is her new path since her premature disability retirement due to Chronic Fatigue and Immune Dysfunction Syndrome. Lorna has written two self-published books. Her first book, *How Was I Supposed to Know?* was awarded Best Memoir, 2012 by the Adirondack Writing Center. *Never Turn Back* is her second book and first novel. In 2010, she was a finalist in the memoir genre of the *Writer's Digest* Annual Writing Contest with her short story, "Monkey Business." Lorna currently lives in the Pacific Northwest. She has been sober for over thirty years.



There is no better set up for failure than being a perfectionist. I grew up in the shadow of a perfectionist mother, determined not to exact judgment on my children as she had on me. I failed, winding up doing a different version of "you're not good enough."

Over time, my children's behavior created one crisis after another. They had an undiagnosed genetic condition involving executive function deficits—a set of mental skills that help manage time, pay attention, switch focus, plan and organize, remember details, avoid saying or doing the wrong thing, learn from experience. As a result, my children found their impulses difficult, if not impossible to control. It was not something they would outgrow. Their

invisible among these anonymous alcoholics. Others stand, lining the walls as if they are guards armed with coffee cups and cigarettes rather than service revolvers.

The meeting starts. One by one, these anonymous alcoholics tell their stories of victory or defeat—sometimes both. Laughter, tears, applause, and spontaneous eruptions of praise create a choir of support. The meeting room transforms from depressing to encouraging—at least for me it does. The basement no longer seems a claustrophobic tomb; I see it as a refuge where wounded people heal themselves and each other with plenty of coffee, donuts, cigarettes, stories, and validation.

I rise from my chair. It scrapes the floor, announcing me through the blue-grey air. It is time for me to officially enter the ranks of the anonymous alcoholics and "just work," like the floppy poster decrees. "Hi," I say with a voice as wobbly as my knees, "My name is Lorna and I'm an...an alcoholic." I collapse into my chair and sob. In that moment I lose myself and I find myself. The pounding of my heart in my ears obscures the applause. Anonymous hands pat my back. Anonymous voices tell me I have taken the first, and hardest, step toward recovery. I am no longer just "me;" I am "me, the alcoholic."

My biggest fear is that I will have to start smoking and eating donuts to stay sober. I do not have to do either. All I have to do is remember who I am without the vodka. I am the woman with enough courage to walk into the tomb and come out alive.

Perfect Failure

by Linda Marshall of Centerville OH

progressive condition worsens with every generation. Their father's symptoms were mild.

In good perfectionist style, I attempted to control the uncontrollable in my husband and children—get them to shape up and behave "right"—"right" being the mantra of the perfectionist. When I failed in my attempts, my own behavior became precarious. It wasn't pretty.

My children were born in the late 60s and early 70s. Mothers were blamed for their children's behavior problems. Family physicians didn't assess for behavior disorders or offer assistance. Access to helpful information through the internet and Google was nonexistent. I was unable to find the help I needed to deal with their troublesome behavior. Eventually, school became a nightmare for my son, whose condition was more severe

than his sister's. Life became a nightmare for all of us. I grew exhausted and despairing at my failure to control them and create the healthy, loving family I'd longed for since childhood.

I judged myself harshly, another characteristic of a perfectionist, seeing myself as inadequate as a woman, unable to connect emotionally with my husband. Without knowledge of their condition, we could not know that blunted affect is a characteristic of their disorder. Their father and I divorced ten years before we knew the source of our angst.

I thought of myself as a "bad mother" unable to straighten out my children no matter how hard I tried. And believe me, I tried. Through the years, many professionals were consulted, but the condition itself was still in the process of being understood. To the best of their ability in their area of expertise, they gave us pieces of the puzzle, but the mystery remained intact until the late 90s.

Fortunately, I had an alcoholic grandfather who made me eligible for 12-step programs designed for family members. Even though my son didn't drink, his behavior was similar to an active alcoholic. In the mid-80s, I began attending meetings. I'd always been a spiritual seeker, and here was a practical program designed to help me apply spiritual lessons to my life. Those meetings taught me that I have no control over people, places, and things, a vital lesson difficult for a perfectionist. I learned that the only person I can control and change is me. As I redirected my focus from trying to shape-up my family to modifying my own thinking and behavior, I learned I had a lot that needed altering—a full-time and on-going job to be sure. I began the process of letting go and trusting my will and my life and that of my children's to a higher power.

So, in 1999 when I learned my twenty-eight-year-old daughter was pregnant and living homeless with the father of her baby, a man who'd spent time in jail for domestic violence, I was in a better position to deal with this latest crisis without drama. While I practiced letting go, I agonized about whether allowing my daughter to experience the consequences of her choices constituted detaching with love, especially with an innocent baby involved. I prayed for guidance and explored options for protecting my first grandchild, including the possibility of taking custody, even though nothing in me wanted to rear another child.

Two weeks before the birth, my daughter broke up with the baby's father and accepted my offer to be her support person and birthing coach. On the morning labor was induced, I arrived at the hospital armed with information about adoption. She turned away from me with tears streaming. I calmly said, "I'm going to leave the room now and give you time to think about and pray about

what's best for your baby. When I return, I won't say anything more about it. It has to be your decision."

Then I went into the hallway and found a quiet corner to pray. "God, you know if I could I'd stop this baby from coming. But I can't. I've done all I know to do." I lifted my head and arms and surrendered, really surrendered, for the first time in my life. "I'm turning it over to you." My back was against the wall. What else could I do?

To my surprise, a calm serenity like I'd never experienced opened up within me. Curiosity replaced trepidation. "Hmm, I wonder how this is going to work out." I remained in this state throughout the day. By midnight it became clear to me a miracle was unfolding.

Because I surrendered, I was able to recognize my granddaughter as a messenger, revealing the genetic condition, myotonic muscular dystrophy, that had haunted our lives since my thirty-one-year-old son was five. When I was escorted to Alexandra's crib side, tubes emanated from every orifice and a ventilator kept her alive. She wrapped her tiny fingers around mine as I caressed her head and expressed love and gratitude to her for coming and unveiling the mystery. Her little arm, with hardly any muscle tone, moved across her body toward me, validating for me her intention to come as a messenger. Continuing to beam love, I said, "Alexandra, you've fulfilled your purpose. If this living thing is too much for you, it's okay for you to go. We got your message. We'll be okay now."

After only a couple of hours sleep, my daughter summoned me back to the hospital. "Mommy, come quick. Alexandra's going downhill fast." When I arrived and headed down the hall toward her, she began to cry, "Alexandra's dying."

I touched her and looked into her eyes. "Alexandra has been such a gift to us. She came for a purpose and she's fulfilled her purpose. Now she doesn't have to suffer anymore."

My daughter visibly relaxed and went forth beaming with pride as she told others about her miracle baby. "She came to help my brother and me understand why we have so many problems and to give my mother peace from years of torment." In her short thirteen-hour life, Alexandra accomplished quite a lot.

And so it was that I learned about the destructive power of perfectionism in contrast to the transforming power of surrender. When I finally let go, my Divine spark within emerged, transforming me from a controlling mother into a mother and grandmother capable of demonstrating compassionate love. In this process of awakening, I was able to see beyond this seeming tragedy, opening instead to gratitude for this miraculous gift of grace—fundamental perfection itself.

About the author:

Linda Marshall, M.Div., is reinventing herself in retirement as an author. She is currently in the revision stage with her memoir, *A Long Awakening to Grace*. In 2013, she collaborated with four other women participating in a contemplative writing group in the publishing of *Sophia's Table: Women's Wisdom in Five Voices*. She lives in Centerville, Ohio, with her Taiwanese daughter of the heart and Siamese-mix cat. Her daughter by birth continues to open her capacity for compassionate loving. She enjoys participating in a variety of personal and spiritual growth groups in the Dayton area.



Finding a job in Austin, Texas in the winter of 1997 wasn't easy. I let my car insurance lapse because I couldn't afford the premiums, and my mother paid my telephone and electricity bill because she insisted she had to be able to reach me. A blustery winter morning in late January, I ate the last banana in my chilled apartment, drank two cups of instant coffee, took my last four quarters and boarded a bus for the Internal Revenue Service.

The IRS was hiring temporary seasonal workers for the upcoming April income tax season deluge. This was my final attempt at getting some kind of job. The auditorium-style room was abuzz with anticipation as the humorless supervisor passed out the test forms. I wasn't too worried, taking standardized tests is one of my favorite things to do, and with my master's degree from The Ohio State University, I felt confident I would score well.

An hour passed, and I turned in my test along with the other job-seekers, then waited anxiously for the results. My heart pounded as they called out the potential candidates 45 minutes later, after all the test grades were returned. To my relief, my name was called. Having a last name beginning with a letter towards the alphabet's end only heightened my anxiety. Sweat poured out of every pore when my name was finally called.

I stepped up to the fingerprinting machine to have my fingerprints taken so they could make sure I wasn't a felon. Now, I'm a sweaty girl. I get that particular trait directly from my father. And my fingertips were so wet that despite four different tries, they couldn't get a "clean" fingerprint.

"Are you on drugs?" the stoic supervisor asked.

"No, ma'am, I'm just really, really nervous," I replied, not daring to mention that I had smoked one joint almost a month ago on New Year's Eve, sure that, too, would disqualify me from the job I needed so badly.

"Uh, huh," she said, staring at me in what by now I was sure was total disbelief. "We'll call you if we can't find enough qualified candidates. You can leave now."

My heart hit the floor. I was out of options. Summoning the courage to apply for this temporary job, which, at the time, felt soul-sucking for the creative, free spirit I am, took every last bit of my fortitude. With her words resonating in my ears, I slinked out the door, and

The Last Banana

by Debra Winegarten of Austin TX

walked slowly back to the bus stop.

My feet froze as the biting wind tore through my tennis shoes, stinging tears freezing my cheeks. I had convinced myself that getting hired would be effortless, in that over-confident arrogant way to which I'm prone. Never did the inkling occur to me that I wouldn't get the job. Despair clouded my vision as I peered through the frosty bus window on my way back to my garage apartment.

Once home, too distraught to call Mom and tell her the bad news, I powered up my computer and checked my email.

"Good News," the subject line from a former client blinked.

I almost hit the "delete" key without reading the email, my black mood infusing every thought and action with gloom. I sighed and opened the email, resigned to read some silly joke or spam that my AOL program let through with regularity during those early internet days.

When I worked for this client previously, as payment for a white paper I wrote analyzing the impact of their educational product, I received the Israeli rights to the product.

"We are buying back the Israeli rights to the product you worked on for us for \$50,000, payable \$5000 now on the signing of this agreement, and \$1000 a month for the next 45 months," the email said.

"What? Are you kidding me?" I shouted out loud with no one in the room with me except my two cats, Mystic and Chanukah.

Blinking through tears for the second time that day, I reread the email three times. Each time, it said the same thing. I was about to receive a down payment on a contract and a stable monthly income for almost 4 years, which would cover my basic living expenses and allow me to pursue my dream of being a full-time author!

I printed out the email and contract, ran outside and jumped in my car. I drove over to Mom's house as fast as I could to use her fax machine to send the contract back. Mom was so surprised when I drove up. I hadn't told her the real reason I wasn't driving my car was that my inspection and registration stickers were expired, as was my insurance, that heart attack she didn't need. I knew I was taking a calculated risk for being stopped while not

road-legal, but I didn't care—with my soon-to-be-windfall, I could afford the ticket and get my integrity back in no time.

A week later, the cashier's check for \$5000 arrived in my mailbox and I had to wait almost another full week for my bank to clear that money. As painful as the waiting was, my exuberance in knowing my basic needs were handled for the next few years overshadowed my stomach's hunger grumblings.

Almost twenty years have passed since that fateful morning when the IRS failed to give me a job. I am now the proud author of six books, two of them award-winners, and two more on the way. During those years, I've buried

my mother and my sister and eight cats. I've personally sold over 5,000 copies of my books, and given talks to over 15,000 people. I've traveled to 12 states and had two book signings at the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum.

The best part for me has been learning I have a deep well of resilience and perseverance, which I carry into whatever project I undertake. And that I am living my dream—a successful author's life.

I hope one day to run into that IRS lady at the local grocery store. In hindsight, she did me a big favor. By closing the door on a job that would have sucked my creativity dry, she unwittingly gave me the freedom to follow my heart's desire.

About the author:

Debra Winegarten works in the Astronomy Department at UT in Austin, Texas. With a master's degree in sociology from The Ohio State University, Debra uses her research skills to write Texas women's biographies for middle-school students. She is also on the faculty of South University, where she teaches. *Oveta Culp Hobby: Colonel, Cabinet Member, Philanthropist*, Debra's sixth book, won the TAA 2015 Best Biography Award. She just finished an adult biography, *Zvi Yaniv: From the Mysterious Island to Nanotechnology*, and a children's book, *Almost a Minyan*, due out in January 2016 from her publishing company, Sociosights Press.

Real Women Write

Sharing Our Stories, Sharing Our Lives

Susan Schoch

It's time to submit your entries for SCN's annual anthology, *Real Women Write: Sharing Our Stories, Sharing Our Lives*.

By now, you've probably heard that the vision for our anthology has expanded. *Real Women Write* is now open to a broader range of literary forms, and will include **fiction, nonfiction, and poetry**.

We're excited about this wonderful opportunity for members to share their writing in a variety of forms. Your participation is important to make this year's anthology the best yet. **We have extended the deadline for entries to September 15, 2015.** Publication date will be January, 2016.

You may submit up to three pieces, on subjects of your choice. Each entry may be up to 1,000 words for prose or 40

lines for poetry. Send your entries to SCN via our **online submission form**. http://www.storycircle.org/journal/anthology_submissions.php. (You will need your members-only username and password. If you've forgotten that information, go to <http://www.storycircle.org/pwdprompt.php> and we'll send it to you.) Selection of work to be included is necessarily limited by space and editorial considerations.

As an SCN member, if you choose the PRINT publication, you will receive a beautiful print edition of *Real Women Write* in the mail. (All others will read/print the online version.) We would love to showcase your work in Story Circle's always-fascinating collection. So don't miss out. Please send your strongest writing, and enter soon!

“You may tell a tale that takes up residence in someone's soul, becomes their blood and self and purpose. That tale will move them and drive them and who knows what they might do because of it, because of your words. That is your role, your gift.”

— Erin Morgenstern, *The Night Circus*



An Interview with Keynote Speaker Brooke Warner

by Susan Wittig Albert

Brooke Warner is the keynote speaker at Stories From the Heart VIII. She is the founder of Warner Coaching Inc., publisher at She Writes Press, and author of *What's Your Book? A Step-by-Step Guide to Get You from Inspiration to Published Author*. In her fourteen years in the publishing industry, including eight years as Executive Editor at Seal Press, Brooke has shepherded hundreds of books through the publication process. As a teacher, coach, author, and publisher, she is a champion of women writers, with a special commitment to memoirists.

Many members of our SCN community know they have a story to tell, but they find it hard to get started. What suggestions do you have for them?

In my memoir-writing classes I always say to just start with one single memory and then to create a single scene. (This holds true for fiction, too, though in the beginning it's important to write what you know—whether you end up with fiction or nonfiction.) A scene will lead to a story, and a story can lead to a book. I know a lot of writers struggle with overwhelm, especially when they're working on a book. The sheer length is daunting. And that's why it's important to take small steps, to find a regular practice, to get into a rhythm. Writing is a discipline. It requires attentiveness and care. Doing a little bit a few times a week gives you confidence, until you discover that place where you actually want to do more.

What is your advice for memoirists, especially novice writers, in writing groups? What should they look for in a group? What should they be wary of?

Great question. Finding a *supportive* group is so important. My main piece of advice is not to stay in a group if it's not fully supporting you. I know a lot of writers who've been eroded by their writing groups. The place that was supposed to be a safe place turns out not to be. People bring their personalities to writing groups, so if you're in the position to start one, or if you're laying ground rules, establish what's not okay. Discuss with the group how you want to give and receive feedback. Have accountability structures in place so that if someone gives feedback that stings, or that's not delivered in the right way, that member of the group gets feedback as well. Writing groups sometimes suffer jealous members, and people can poison the well. But then there are also members who champion each other, who are each other's biggest advocates. When you find that, it's gold, but don't think that you have the power to change a difficult person or a complicated dynamic. If you're experiencing

something like this, it's probably best to leave and search elsewhere, or start your own group.

You've said that memoir is your favorite genre. Why? What about it has captivated you? What challenges you?

During my tenure as Executive Editor at Seal Press, I worked mostly on memoirs. Women's voices and stories were always at the center of the work. I loved bearing witness to the honesty a memoir requires. I loved being in process with authors and their truths—watching them triumph after so much struggle. Memoir is a unique, story-driven genre that asks so much of writers, and then it's so often dismissed as somehow “less,” as if opening your heart is something we shouldn't be in awe of. I personally am in awe of it, and I love reading it, teaching it, and editing it. It's very fulfilling for me, and I find memoir writers to be a very courageous bunch.

You wear a great many hats: you're a teacher, a coach, an editor, a publisher. As a teacher, you see a great many writers up close and personal. What kind of help do you think they need most? Do they need assistance in defining and focusing on their stories? On ways to tell the story? On the mechanics of writing?

The kind of help authors need has a lot to do with their personalities. Some need support and validation more than anything. They don't struggle with writers' block but do struggle with validation issues. They might not have anyone who's supportive of their writing. They might be the black sheep of the family. They might have people actively discouraging them from writing their book, or for spending time on “that hobby.” Other writers need help with their process—organization, how to schedule their writing, how to manage their time. These are my accountability clients and students. They just need someone to report into, and to help them brainstorm ideas and ways to actually do the writing. Then finally there are the craft folks, who really don't understand certain elements of writing—scene, scope, character development,

takeaway, whatever. These authors want someone to teach them the ropes and make their story better. They're trying to figure out what's not working, and they're actively wanting to learn along the way. Some of my clients and students want or need support in all these way, but others are more definitely in a particular camp. My work is getting to know them as writers, figuring out what drives them and what their strengths are. The variety is rewarding to me. It keeps me on my toes.

At what point do you think a writer can best use a coach? What should a writer look for in a coach--and how does she go about finding that coach?

I think writers would do well to look for a coach at the beginning of their writing process. Of course you can always look for a coach later, but too many writers come to me after a manuscript is complete, looking for a "fix." They know something is wrong but they don't know what. If they had worked with a coach from the beginning, there are so many rabbit holes they simply wouldn't have fallen down. But of course any point in the process is a good place to seek support. It's just that too often writers want to be lone rangers, and can't see all the ways a coach provides value, so they wait until they have a problem.

Finding a coach. Good question. There are many writing coaches out there, but too many of them who hang out their shingle without true experience other than having written their own books. I would recommend that authors ask other writer friends about coaches they've worked with. Coaches are easy to find at writing conferences, and usually they won't be invited to attend unless they have some credentials. Once a writer has identified a few coaches, they should ask to talk to them, and then if they want to, they can contact references. Even if publishing is not your end goal, it's good to look for a coach who has a track record of supporting authors all the way to publication. Many coaches will also refer other coaches they know and like. SheWrites actually has a stable of coaches, and I've been working to cultivate this list.

At SCN, we believe that the act of telling the story is very much its own reward--and for many of us, that is our chief goal. We want to develop a mature writing practice that we can enjoy and that allows us to tell our story with a creative passion. But some of us also want to publish our work. As a teacher/coach, how do you know when a writer is ready to consider that move?

Great question. I work closely with the writer to determine when they're ready based on what's going on with them. Because writers come in all different forms, some are very eager, too eager, to get their work out before it's really ready. Others are overly hesitant. I have worked with authors who've been stuck in revision land for upwards of ten years because they're stuck in fear of outcome, whether it's positive or negative. They're

unwilling to let go of the project. If an author is overly anxious and I don't think she's ready, I tell her that gently, but I also can't stop her from querying agents and editors if that's what she wants to do. If an author is on the other side of the equation, I try to work with her to consider what it would look like to get her work out into the world. Readiness varies so much, and I give really honest feedback to anyone who hires me to look at the work. Sometimes a work is "publish ready" but not commercial, meaning that it's a great book but one that a traditional publisher is unlikely to acquire. I help authors determine what their books need in order to be publish-ready, and work with writers to improve their books, to tighten and polish and get the books ready for publication. It's a somewhat subjective question you're posing, but the work of all teachers, coaches, and editors is to help a client get her book in the best shape it can be. And generally a person who's in this field as a coach or editor does have a clear sense of a manuscript's viability and should be able to convey that to the writer.

You've said that you and Kamy Wicoff founded She Writes Press because the barriers to traditional publishing were getting higher and higher for authors. Why were you interested in starting a press that would publish only women? What interests you in working with women writers?

I was interested in continuing to work with women authors after my eight years at Seal Press. I had been immersed in women's publishing and the advocacy issues that come along with that. Although I do have male clients, I wasn't interested in founding a press that would serve both men and women after having been in women's publishing for as long as I had been. I was proud of the work Seal Press was doing championing women and giving women a voice, and I saw how I could leverage this even more at She Writes Press. I founded SWP for all those women I had to turn down at Seal.

She Writes Press is known as a "hybrid" publishing house. What does this mean? Why is it important? What do authors need to know about this kind of publishing model?

To me, hybrid is anything in the gray zone between a traditional publishing model [where the publisher is responsible for underwriting the full cost of editing, producing, and distributing the book] and self-publishing [where the author underwrites the cost and does or manages the work of editing, production, and distribution]. She Writes Press is a hybrid; we're also a partnership publishing model. We are a publishing company, and our authors pay to publish under our imprint. The authors absorb the financial risk of their publishing endeavor; in return, they keep a high percentage of their royalties. We curate and have a selective acquisitions process. We have a publisher at the helm—me—making sure that here's a

Continued from page 11

cohesive vision and that all of the books are adhering to a level of quality that's on a par with traditional publishing. We offer traditional distribution and the extra benefits that brings, including preordering and data management. Our authors, like those working with traditional publishers, qualify to submit their books to the traditional review channels, *Publishers Weekly*, *Kirkus*, *Booklist*, and *Library Journal*. This is a boon to authors who depend on reviews to drive sales—namely novelists and memoirists.

I think the main thing authors need to know about hybrid models is that not all companies are created equal, and that publishing a book is not a reliable way to make money. There are companies out there taking advantage of authors, making false promises, and delivering substandard services. Many of these companies are not transparent about costs or possibilities for earnings. Some of our authors are earning back their initial investment and even earn a profit, but it's not part of what we promise. What we promise is the opportunity to play in the big leagues and to produce a book that can rival its competition. But there's no sure bet in publishing—not in traditional publishing and not in hybrid publishing.

As a publisher, in what way do you think She Writes can be an "industry game-changer"?

I think we already are a game-changer because we're forging new ground in the hybrid space. We're doing the hybrid thing at least as well as anyone else out there, if not

better. Our covers are superb, and that matters in today's publishing climate. We have all the right elements in place to have a breakout book or two—and I believe that will happen for us. When it does, it will raise the bar on what we're doing even more. In the interim, I'm very focused on advocacy issues. I write a lot about the prejudice against authors who pay to publish. The traditional publishing industry is looking for ways to classify "us against them" and I'm fundamentally opposed to this concept because it's archaic and it doesn't hold up. Authors subsidize their work at all different points in the process. Traditionally published authors may pay for their work to be edited before they land deals, and the savvy ones have their own publicist. No one balks at this. So the notion that a book is lesser because the author pays to publish (never mind the fact that self-published and hybrid authors reap the reward of much higher royalties) really gets to me. But the discrimination goes way past this, extending into book reviews, association membership, contests, and more. I feel that She Writes Press is a trailblazer because we're not trying to hide the fact that our authors invest in themselves. We're proud of this partnership, and the authors have earned a right to publish with us because we're not publishing just anyone. That's what should matter—the book's quality. We have begun to make some progress in leading this conversation and we have a lot of support for what we're doing. There's a surprising amount of controversy in publishing, though, and strong feelings about almost every issue. This keeps it challenging—and interesting.



Internet Chapter:

Community Health Assessment

by Lee Ambrose

"At the end of the day everyone wants to be heard... [storytelling] brings our community together and ... makes the love and support get deeper and stronger."

Miki Agrawal



As president of the Internet Chapter, I have a birds' eye view of the activity within the chapter and its circles. That vantage point allows me to see with clarity the areas of our chapter that are thriving, the areas that need a bit of tender loving care, and the areas that may need to be reassessed for viability.

I never thought of it in quite this way until I sat down to write this article, but in some ways, being in the role of chapter president, I utilize my nursing assessment and critical thinking skills for something far removed from patient care. Some of the same observations and assessments I use for patients can be applied to the health of our community – the Story Circle Network Internet

Chapter and its reading and writing e-circles.

As health care consumers, we are encouraged to have regular health assessments so that we can live healthy lives, prevent certain illnesses and control other illnesses. Upon completion of said health assessments, we are generally provided with data to help us understand our current state of health and helpful (although not always welcomed) recommendations for maintaining or improving that state. Any well-run organization makes a habit of regularly assessing its mission, vision, and resources. As president of the Internet Chapter of Story Circle Network, I would like to offer you the results of a recent community health assessment complete with recommendations for

improving the health of our community – which in turn will lead to a longer and happier life for the entire community.

Vital Signs (as of August 13, 2015)

•Total Internet Chapter Members	129
•Total Reading e-circle Members	30
•Total Writing e-circle Members	72*
•Total Facilitators	12**
•Total Facilitators in Waiting	0***
•Total Inactive Writing e-circles	0
•Total IC Members awaiting circle placement	0

* Of these 72, there are 24 who also belong to the reading e-circle and 9 who belong to more than one writing circles

** These facilitators are included in the total number of reading and writing circle members

*** Defined as those who have expressed a desire to facilitate a circle when one becomes available

**** Defined as former circles that have closed with no immediate plans to re-purpose.

Assessment of Vital Signs and Recommendations

Taking into consideration the fact that there are 24 out of 72 members already counted in the reading e-circle, in actuality, our circles have a unique membership total of 78 members. In other words, approximately 55% of our Internet Members belong to one or more of our e-circles.

Looking at the number of dormant circles, one can draw the conclusion that circle membership in general has declined in recent years. And, looking at the number of “facilitators in waiting,” we can draw a similar conclusion. Without available facilitators, the dormant circles won’t be re-purposed in the foreseeable future.

Still, there is much to celebrate and draw encouragement from in these numbers! More than half our membership is actively enjoying many of the benefits of Internet Chapter membership. The entire membership receives weekly writing prompts, reduced member-only rates for various SCN events, a monthly Internet Chapter e-newsletter, and all of the perks of belonging to the national organization.

But, I have to admit that it makes me wonder how much stronger our community might be if more of our members were engaged in e-circle activities – reading, writing, or both. I can’t help but wonder what might be possible if some of our long-time members stepped up to volunteer to become facilitators of e-circles. We are the story keepers of our own life stories. But additionally, those of us who have been here at SCN Internet Chapter for a while are the keepers of all the good things we’ve learned from others who came before us. We owe it to our new members to share the stories and the knowledge – to set an example and to create an environment where members can flourish.

In “*Community is Everything: How to Build Your Tribe*,” Inc.com columnist Miki Agrawal writes, “Building and growing a community is so much more about what you put in than what you get out.” What do **you** have that you could put into the wonderful community that exists at the SCN Internet Chapter? What would it take to give a little in order to get a lot? Where would you be if someone had not encouraged you at some point? Wouldn’t you like the opportunity to encourage other women who want to share their stories?

As Story Circle Network Internet Chapter winds down the observation of its fifteenth year, I offer you these recommendations for next steps:

1. Let’s all take time to reassess why we are here, what we gain by being here, and what we might offer that would make Internet Chapter an even stronger, more vibrant organization.
2. Consider joining one or more of our e-circles, send your request to join one or more to Lee Ambrose at leesmuse2@gmail.com.
3. Consider becoming a facilitator for future e-circles. For more information on this opportunity, contact Lee Ambrose at leesmuse2@gmail.com
4. Support your current e-circles with regular participation both in posting and responding to others’ posts.
5. Dream BIG and share your dreams for SCN Internet Chapter with us! Send your ideas for ways to grow our community and enhance every member’s experience to us! The leadership team will give all suggestions careful consideration. We look forward to reporting back to you in the months to come. Your suggestions can be submitted to storycircle@storycircle.org
6. Submit a picture of where you live or vacation to our Member Postcard section of the monthly newsletter (refer to the recent e-newsletter for an example). Believe it or not, this simple act helps build a sense of community. Submit pictures for the Member Postcard to Peggy Moody at peggy.moody@gmail.com
7. Read your e-newsletters with the idea in mind that you might find ways to help grow and strengthen our on-line community. And, when one or more of those ways to help present themselves, take action!
8. Respond to requests for input when asked. Your ideas *are* valued.
9. Share Story Circle Network information with your friends and family.
10. Give a Story Circle Network gift membership to someone who loves to write but wouldn’t give the gift to herself.

Three Enthusiastic Writers Join SCN's Board

By Pat Bean

Joyce Boatright began writing in the seventh grade and got her first byline when she was a high school sophomore. Linda Hoye has been writing all her life; her memoir, *Two Hearts: An Adoptee's Journey*, was published in 2012. Mary Jo Doig began writing short stories in high school, and is published in numerous places. But it is these three writers' desire to help other women tell their stories that prompted them to become Story Circle Network's newest board members.



Joyce Boatright

Born on an air base in upstate New York during World War II, Joyce is now a Texan from head to toe. She has a journalism degree from Sam Houston State University and a doctorate from Texas A&M. She lives in a Houston condo during her work week, and in an 1875 Victorian home in Navasota TX. It will become her permanent home when she retires next year.

Joyce is no newcomer to the SCN Board, having previously served as its president. She joined the organization after attending a Writing from Life workshop, because helping women write their life stories resonated deeply within her. "I believe the best thing about SCN is the way it welcomes women and opens their eyes to the importance of their personal stories," she says. Joyce feels that her own roles as teacher, writer, editor and storyteller will help her make sure that the organization continues in this direction. One of the things Joyce is most proud of in her life, besides her personal spiritual journey, is being able to teach students who hate writing find their voices, and then watching them enjoy their sharpened writing skills.

"I am enriched by the insights I get when I write about my life; my life is deepened in the company of other writers and creative artists. They give me courage to continue writing even when I am weary, or scared, or drained," she says. "At an SCN conference, we were given a three-minute writing exercise on why we write. I was taken aback to discover that my drive came from a yearning to matter, as if I were invisible without the concrete evidence of printed words. I followed that thread of thought and that's when reality—my personal truth—showed itself. I am the middle child born between two boys in an era where males were prized. Two boys overshadowed and outshone me for attention before I was

talking, and they out-shouted me once I learned to express myself verbally. Is it any wonder I write to be heard?"

Joyce writes from an office that offers a windowed view of her backyard and her three dogs, who play or lounge in the shade of 100-year-old trees. Her published works include *Telling Your Story: A Basic Guide to Writing* (2006), and *Stories from a Well-Lived Life Workbook* (2015). She is currently rewriting a novel and drafting a second one, both contemporary women's fiction.



Linda Hoye

Linda writes and participates in her many SCN activities from her home in Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada. Like Joyce, she is a returning SCN board member; she will be resuming her position as chair of the

Publications Work Group.

"The best thing about SCN is everything ... I love this organization and all it has done, and continues to do, to give voice to the stories of women's lives," she says. Linda's roles in this goal include serving as coordinator for SCN's One Woman's Day blog and editor for StoryCircleBookReviews.org and. A member since 2008, Linda says she "stumbled" across the organization after starting a personal blog and connecting with other bloggers. "It seemed to offer all that I was looking for: community, support, life writers. I credit this group with giving me the support I needed to write my memoir, *Two Hearts*."

Linda, who earned a college degree in information technology after her children entered school, says that her degree brought her stability and confidence, as well as a satisfying career. Last year, however, she was able to retire from corporate life and live at a slower pace. Now, she is enjoying a more leisurely life. Her faith and her family, are

her current priorities, along with writing, gardening, photography, reading, canning and “simply living.”

Although she has been writing one thing or another all her life, Linda says it was only after she had become an SCN member that she actually started thinking of herself as a writer. But she admits that she hasn't yet established a writing schedule for the book she is currently working on, although she does have a writing room of her own that looks out on a mountain view. “I'm enjoying the freedom to be flexible,” she says. Of course that flex time includes reading time. These days, she likes to read about family relationships. “Everyone has a story, and I find it fascinating to read about unexpected twists and turns life put in front of people, how they choose to navigate through them, how their character is shaped, and how they come out on the other side.”

Linda heard a saying when she was about 12 years old that has stuck with her throughout her life: “He who says it cannot be done is usually interrupted by he who is already doing it.” And that, she says, is good advice for writers.

Mary Jo Doig



Mary Jo has been active in SCN for 14 years, serving as the facilitator for Writing Circle 7 for 11 years, as True Words editor for 10 years, and as a book reviewer and editor for four years. She was the program chair for Stories from the Heart in 2014 and is the 2016

chair, as well. Mary Jo is enthusiastic about SCN's goal of

reaching out to women to tell their stories—her special interest as a new board member.

SCN has profoundly influenced Mary Jo's life. “As a child I learned to become invisible and used those skills in varying degrees for decades of my life,” she says. “I always loved reading and writing, though, and felt in my bones I'd write a book one day. I thought it would be a mystery, a genre I've loved all my life. As it turns out, I was the mystery I needed to solve, and when I revisited my past in order to better understand my present, I found the story I would write. I'm presently doing my final edit on my memoir, *Stitching a Patchwork Life*,” Mary Jo says.

“I joined SCN in 2001 when my children were grown and building their own lives. I had just moved to Virginia, where I lived in solitude in a small cabin on a Blue Ridge mountainside. I was filled with stories oozing from my pores. I was assigned to Writing Circle 2 with facilitator Marie Buckley, and a few months later joined Writing Circle 9, known then as a Risky Writer's Circle, with facilitator Nancy Rigg. Both these wonderful women were so supportive of my writing that I grew significantly in confidence and skills that have brought me to today.”

Mary Jo writes from her living room, in front of a large window with a view of nature. Her day begins with at least a half hour of what she calls “quality reading,” then she works at her desk from about 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Her stories have been published in various places, including SCN's *Kitchen Table Stories*. Currently, she is working hard on building a blog that she calls *Stitching a Patchwork Life*.

Mary Jo has taped Goethe's encouraging quotation to her computer: “Whatever you think you can do, or believe you can do, begin it. Action has magic, grace and power in it.” Her own best advice to other writers comes from a cartoon of a dog sitting in front of a computer, whose owner says: “Sit. Stay.”

We're Looking For a “True Words” Editor!

SCN is seeking an enthusiastic SCN member to edit the “True Words from Real Women” section of the quarterly *Story Circle Journal*. The editor works with the *Journal* editor, who does the layout, to produce the final product.

The “True Words” Editor selects stories and poetry from among the submissions and edits these appropriately, following the SCN editorial guidelines. She emails authors promptly and sensitively to let them know the status of their submission(s). She responds to the many emails received. She exchanges emails with authors regarding editing changes and keeps authors informed of progress. She compiles approximately 10 pages of True Words stories and poems each quarter and submits them electronically to the editor of the *Journal*. Compensation is approximately \$200.00 per issue, based on column and word count.

Deadline: September 21, 2015.

To apply, visit: http://www.storycircle.org/members/truwords_info.php





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. This month's topic is Autumn Traditions.

Back in '73

Marjie Giffin, Indianapolis IN
 mggiffin@gmail.com
 Circle City Writing Circle, Indianapolis IN

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

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

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

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

Editor's note: This poem was inadvertently published incompletely in our June Journal. Here is the author's work in its full loveliness. I regret the previous omissions. MJD

Autumnal Transition at Weko Beach

Marilyn Ashbaugh, Edwardsburg MI
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Hints of crispness fill the night air,
 And paint crimson hues on apples.
 Pumpkins plump and pregnant on the vine
 Portend autumnal birth

Clouds languish in Sleeping Beauty skies,
 As Monarchs make mosaics against the sand.
 No longer littered with blankets and books,
 Beaches surrender to the setting sun.

To mourn summer's end.
 Seagulls stand at attention.
 Listening to sunset Taps
 Tugs a tear from my eye

As sherbet colors encircles the sky
 Waves whisper wishes
 A final goodbye
 Evokes summer scenes from years gone by

Reverie ends
 As skies turn midnight blue.
 I bid my beloved Lake Michigan
 Adieu.



An Act of Faith

Sara Etgen-Baker, Anna TX
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I nudged my way through the throng of women and positioned myself at the starting line, an archway of variegated pink balloons. It was mid-October, and the autumn breeze ran through my veins stiffening my legs and muscles. I bent over; stretched my leg muscles; then retied my running shoes. When I stood up, my stomach gurgled and lurched forward in my throat.

“This your first race?” asked the brown-haired woman next to me.

“Yes.” I forced a smile.

“I have as many doubts as you.” She patted me on the shoulder. “Standing on the starting line, we’re all cowards. But crossing the starting line is an act of courage.”

The starting gun fired, and I shot forward. “Remember your race pace,” shouted my husband from the sidelines. Adrenalin surged through my body; my heart pounded harder heating my blood and loosening my tight muscles. I lengthened my stride; quickened my pace; and ran adjacent to the brown-haired woman. I ran with no thought of speed, time, or distance—not until the digital clock at the two-mile marker told me I was running two minutes faster than my race pace.

“Look!” said the voice inside my head. “Most of mile three is uphill, you can’t continue at this pace.” I dug in. Sweat poured down my face, my muscles cramped, and I began hallucinating. On the hillside I saw the ghosts of leering faces and laughing eyes of everyone who’d ever told me what I couldn’t do. A voice whispered, “You’re not an athlete; no one will care if you stop.” I ignored the voice and ran with all my might across the finish line, collapsing on the ground.

“Congratulations!” The brown-haired woman pulled me up. “Crossing the finish line is an act of faith.”

“Faith? What do you mean?”

“Faith gave you victory over your pain and the voice in your head that told you couldn’t make it one more step.” With that, Francie Larriou Smith—the five-time Olympic runner—walked away leaving me with a new-found love and respect for the tradition of running.

Thanksgiving Memories

Candace Wright, Lockhart TX

Thanksgiving Day is wonderful for me. I spend time with the ones I love but don’t always get to see. We all meet at Granny’s house, which is filled with amazing smells and is a little on the warm side because of all the cooking going on. Kids laugh and play, while most adults sit around and talk.

Mom and I help Granny get everything together. Once the food is ready, we all gather in a circle. We hold hands, and Grandpa says grace. Then we fill our plates and enjoy the company. Afterward, we clean up and play games. We laugh, talk and eat even more until it is time to say goodbye. We leave with wonderful memories, and can only hope to all come together again next year.

Butcherin’, A Social Event?

Patricia Roop Hollinger, Westminister MD
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Farming is a life of chores from dawn to dusk

Socializing is baling hay, milking cows,

Or an activity that is a must.

Why! I never knew that folks had sodas and ate OUT!

When there was cool clear water from the spout.

Come fall, it was time for the annual butchering,

Not exactly an event to hear a soloist singing.

Folks gathered from near and far

To yarn a tale with words they would spar.

The hogs had been killed out of sight,

For that could be cause for quite a fright.

There were cauldrons of water boiling and steaming,

I know, for the reader this all seems unseemly.

I often was found scraping intestines of a hog,

While also swatting away a pesky dog.

Did you know sausage into the intestines go?

They are cleaned with water, just so you know.

Other folks chopped parts into tenderloin,

Yep! It is part of the pig’s groin.

We caught up on news of the neighbors...

Some gossip, but mostly who was

doing whom yet another favor.

So when for breakfast you eat your bacon

Just know others had fun in the makin.’



Soul Fill Mission

Lorna L. Earl, Ridgefield WA
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The daylight hours are waning. Summer is a memory. A crisp breeze sends shivers skittering around my limbs. I know it's time for my annual pilgrimage. I have two equally important missions that take me on a full day's journey. When these missions are accomplished, all of my senses will be delightfully full and sated with the gifts that only the perfect autumn day can provide.

The resplendent colors of autumn leaves—red, yellow, orange—fill my eyes with hills and mountains carpeted in nature's bright palette. I snap pictures of the same trees each year. They take my breath away every time.

As I stand outside, I hear the honking of Canadian geese. They are on their own annual pilgrimage. I wonder, "Why don't I ever hear them coming back in the spring?" Smiling, I vow to listen for them in April.

When I have photographed so many splendid displays and bursts of autumn color that I hear myself dismissing this tree as "dull" or that one as "not full enough," I know that it's time to move on to my next mission.

Apples.

An apple picked from the tree is best. The fruit is still warm from the sun. When I take my first bite, I hear *snap!* The skin resists, and then juice bursts from the firm flesh, sticky sweet. Cortlands are my favorite, a variety native to the Northeast. They are sweet with the perfect tang to offset the sugar.

Farm stands selling apples also sell apple cider, donuts, pies, and other baked goods. The warm calorie-laden aromas waft in the cool air, drawing me in.

I head home with a camera full of pictures, a car full of apples, a bag full of sinful goodies, and a soul full of nature at her most splendid.

My Magical Mother

Nancy Kilgore, Burlington VT
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Magic. It was what my mother lived for. We'd go to a magical place, a party, a carnival, a world apart where clowns appeared and juggled balls, where ballerinas danced on horses under the fantasy lights in the middle of the ring, and the music tinkled and waved like the ocean, organic and beautiful, beneath the dance.

We'd go to the circus, to every fair and carnival that came to town. She would find people who led magical lives: this woman an artist who creates colors and scenes, that one who lives on an estate in the hills, with butlers and stables and grooms, and she herself would sew her fantasies. Dresses of Hong Kong silk, suits to copy Chanel, any costume I could think of for Halloween: she would make it. One year I was a storybook doll in a gold satin dress and a box with a window in it that I carried over my head, with my powdered hair and Marie Antoinette makeup, including the beauty mole. The next year I was Batman, all black satin and mysterious with a mask. I always won the costume prize.

We'd go to the ocean, to that magical land called Cape Cod, the place we would dream about all year round and hear about in a voice laced with longing and wonder. The people there were so quaint: they talked in those enchanting Massachusetts accents, they had names like Nickerson and Sears, and their families had been there fishing and sailing and owning stores and driving milk trucks for centuries.

She went to college during the depression and majored in costume design. Her father, a good puritan, always disapproved of this frivolous pursuit, but he supported her anyway. She was his charming and beautiful daughter who was named after the love of his life, her beautiful mother, who died in childbirth. She was the child of this mythical mother. And so she knew, in some unconscious way, that she had to be beautiful and charming. She had to be magic.

Autumn Agenda

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 w-ecircle 4 and 2



There's no grade book sitting on my desk
 No manila folder bursting with papers to be graded
 No school attire in the closet
 No alarm clock set for 6:00 a.m.
 No new classes to greet
 No new students to meet
 But with Labor Day
 The teacher's circadian rhythm kicks in for me
 Labor Day is still my New Year's Eve
 Time to review the past year
 Time to plan for the new
 Investigate other interests
 Reinvent myself

Cider Barrel Rules

Candi Byrne, Martinsburg WV
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Our family loves roadside attractions—the more super-sized and kitschy, the better. For years, we made a pilgrimage every September to the Cider Barrel, a rotund, 30-foot tall structure painted in patriotic stripes, which served up liquid ambrosia.

The barrel had a wee window with a lilliputian square of formica countertop where you'd place your order. There was only one item: cider; the only decision was how many gallons to buy.

We'd name a number, and the woman behind the counter—it was always the same woman, pleasant with arm muscles Michelle Obama would envy—hoisted a gallon at a time onto the formica. She'd swab the condensation from the outside of each plastic jug with a worn dishtowel, then ask our favorite question: "Wanna taste it?"

She'd give a jug a vigorous one-armed shake, twist off the cap, and pour shots of the amber potion into tiny dixie cups. We were as discerning as an oenophile contemplating a fine wine. After an appreciative sniff of the apple bouquet, we'd take a sip, tasting first the cold, then sweet followed by a complex mix of apples, the varieties singing in harmony to the taste buds.

We'd nod at each other, nod at the woman, and *mmmmm* our delight. "Best ever!" we'd say every year. And every year we were right. We'd binge drink ourselves into intestinal distress, then freeze the rest, rationing to ensure we'd have enough for hot spiced cider at Thanksgiving and Christmas.

A year after the formica countertop was replaced—the original completely worn through from thousands of jugs sliding across its tan top—we noticed a small sign announcing the Cider Barrel would close permanently at the end of the apple season.

How could this be, we asked the woman with apple biceps. Developers offered them a price they couldn't ignore, she told us. The orchards would be bulldozed, and rows of townhouses would take their place.

The iconic building remains, still big and kitschy. But without the promise of cider, we've lost the taste for visiting.



Changes

Miriam Deeds, Lockhart TX

Vibrant colors, circling around
Reds, yellows, oranges, browns

Cold winds are blowing
The branches bare

Where did it go?
When did this happen?

Moving slowly, warm and inviting
The new is coming
The old is leaving

The smell is familiar
Just keep it flowing
and never ending.

a note to those who follow

Mary Devries, Hutchinson KS
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w-ecircles 1 and 6

Being a memory means you leave a legacy. Both my grandmothers are memories and each touched my life: Janie with her tea brewed the proper way and egg custard, and Flossie with her blue roaster and love of cardinals. Both gave me a love of handcrafts—knitting.

What will be my legacy? I imagine it will be my writings and my fierce independence: the independence that some find it hard to live with because I speak out when I should just shut up. Still, when I see someone saying one thing and doing another I will call that person on it. Sorry grand kids, that is me. I love even when I am mad as a hatter and I do not hold grudges. Still when I am done I am done; I become really polite but cease to be involved in the drama after that point. It is not a grudge as I do not harbor ideas of vengeance but I cease to interact on a deeper level.

I have quirky sense of humor. I hope someone gets and cherishes it. It will render the bumps in life easier.

I am a surveyor, but it is my faith that allows that. I accept God's path for me. I do what I can about my life and then I let go and let God. It saves a lot of worry about things I cannot alter. My faith is my inner core and I do hope my grandkids get that faith. My faith does not judge others. I am no better than any other person, and I try to treat them as Jesus would.

So this a short survey of my legacies. I hope that my family will remember my legacies and me, and maybe actually adopt some of them.

The Joy of Dogs in the House

Maya Lazarus, Caldwell TX
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Three culprits bark and harass at early
light, wanting a morning walk.
The joy of dogs in the house.
Hair dancing in sunlight
seeking corners in our rooms,
shedding that never ends.
The joy of dogs in the house.
Sneaking on to *my* sofa
when they have their own beds,
stealing our socks and shoes
for play.
The joy of dogs in the house.
Receiving dainty wet licks
on the mouth, a big wet one
from our Lab, enthusiastic greetings
when we've been gone
but a few minutes.
The ultimate joy of dogs in the house.

Autumn in April, New Zealand

Janice Kvale, Austin TX
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w-circle 6; r-circle 1

How can this be April?
Days grow cooler and wetter
my lined pink jacket warm
I walk briskly inspecting gardens
rose petals bear brown edges
lilies collapsed to the earth
asters bloom brightly
wood smoke in the air
trees balding of scabbed red
and dingy yellow leaves.
Mountains wear a recent coat
of snow. Crisp fall apples, cabbages
on supermarket display. Facing
winter, vegetable gardeners harvest
a final burst of tomatoes and zucchini.
Under the Southern Cross, life
goes into hibernation as bluebonnets
and redbud burst forth in Texas.

Wide Ruled Paper

Alice Kaspar, Ganado TX
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r-ecircle 1

My mother and I shared an autumn tradition that was rooted in the seasonal cycle of childhood. As adults, when stores began their Back to School sales in August, we could not resist wandering the aisles, reading the school supply lists and even purchasing a few items.

The start of each school year was a welter of senses and emotions. The smell of a fresh package of wide ruled paper, the firm smooth skin of a new No. 2 pencil, and the unmarred chubbiness of a pink eraser gave us shivers of bliss.

We talked of school days past, our minds transported back to walk the halls of the elementary school seeking the new teacher's room. Her stories went back to Trinidad, and mine only to Gullett Elementary in Austin. Sharing our memories was a precious event for me, especially now that she has passed from this earth.

Date Night

Lori Mellinger, Lockhart TX

My daughter is late, busy mapping out the address to a new candy store. Candy is her weakness; she is mine. But this night is for me, a treat she's springing for. We're headed to the fair, our fall tradition. I've been waiting all year for tonight.

She and I have regular dates, at her insistence. That's what we call them anyway. Usually we go out to eat or meet for drinks. Tonight, though, is special.

I *love* the fair. and so does she: the lights, the sounds, the people, and the food. It's a sensory overload that neither of us can resist. I'm anxious to arrive.

We buy our tickets and orient ourselves, digging in for a contest of wills. We always have trouble choosing the rides. She and I differ when it comes to fear. I have none; she has a little. But we agree on the Gravitron, the ride that encapsulates you in a cylinder, spins quickly, and then drops the floor. Centrifugal force holds you to the wall. It's always cool inside, air conditioned, with a soundtrack of largely outdated rock tunes.

One round isn't enough for us. We need two. Once the floor drops, we scoot ourselves around and upside down, laughing like the children we no longer are.

The drive home is less hurried, more relaxed, like we're drawing out an inevitable and unwelcome end. The sunroof is open to a cloudless sky and Marvin Gaye blares through the car stereo.

There is no one I'd rather spend my date nights with.

Decoration Day

Doris Jean Shaw, Colorado Springs CO
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How do you feel about cemeteries? Do you avoid them at all cost and go there only when you are carried? Some of my fondest memories revolve around cemeteries.

Each year there has been a Decoration Day at the cemetery in Alco. Families who moved away to find work made it a point to come home that weekend. Some churches called it homecoming but Alco had no church directly attached to the cemetery.

Preparation for Decoration Day started long before the date when my aunt bought crepe paper in various colors and painstakingly made flowers: bouquets of roses, daisies, and others multiplied in the box she slid under the bed. The day before the celebration, the community got together to clean up the cemetery. It wasn't a lot of work as the cemetery clung to the side of the mountain and rested on the rocks. Relatives began to trickle in and the talking never ceased.

Dressed in our Sunday best, we made it to the cemetery where flowers were placed on family members who had gone on before. First stop was at my grandmother's grave. I barely remember her.

The cemetery sloped down to a low spot that was covered with benches trying to find a spot to hang out under the shade of the few trees that clung to the sparse soil.

Singing started whenever a group had chatted long enough and decided to sit a spell and rest their feet. The voices bounced off the mountain and wrapped one with *Sweet Bye and Bye*, *When the Roll is called up Yonder*, and *Just Over in the Gloryland*. Preaching started when the preacher had finished his previous sermon and made his way to stand in front of the pews. He balanced his Bible on his hand and shouted to be heard in the back. People gathered to hear and rest.

You can learn a lot in a cemetery. Seven generations of my Grandmother Louisa's family are buried here. Stroll through one sometimes and see for yourself what you can learn.

Autumn Traditions

Gayle Cain, Visalia CA
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Fall came in stages to our little town, which was nestled at the base of the Sierras in California's central valley. The scorching days and muggy nights of summer gave way to crisp mornings, cooler evenings, and shorter days. The trees that lined the streets and parks began to whisper the promise of the deep scarlet, blazing orange, and sunny yellows that would gleam wildly as Japanese maples, Ginkgo's, sycamores, and crepe myrtles began the slow unfurling of their majestic show. The sounds of high school marching bands, practicing half-time tunes and homecoming songs, began punching the afternoons with the staccato sound of drumbeats.

Fall marked the onset of a particularly delightful tradition that had been established by my father. Every Sunday evening our family, my younger sister and myself, my parents, and often our grandparents, gathered around the medium-sized television in the den room, just off the main part of the house. The den was equipped with several deep cozy chairs, a large couch, and a huge braided rug that sat under a wooden coffee table. My mother's piano occupied one wall and a floor to ceiling bookshelf another. A neat stack of TV trays leaned against the wall next to the door that led to the large backyard, ready for use at a moment's notice.

The Sunday line-up included the Lawrence Welk and the Ed Sullivan shows. Sunday afternoon my mother would put several candy bars in the freezer, usually Milky Way, Snickers, and Mars bars, so they would be nice and frozen for the evening. Dr. Pepper, "the friendly pepper-upper," was served piping hot in ceramic cups with a thinly sliced lemon floating on top. The frozen candy bars were sliced and placed on a colorful plate lined with a paper doily. Everything looked very elegant as my mother carried the plate of chocolate down into the den, my dad following with the steaming mugs of Dr. Pepper. We did this faithfully every Sunday during the fall months and into the early winter. It's a tradition that remains one of my favorite childhood memories.



Best Dressed

Breanna Sauls, Lockhart TX

The year was 2010. My boyfriend at the time invited me to be his Homecoming date. I had spent three months planning what I was going to wear. That's because this year, there was going to be a Best Dressed/Most Beautiful competition.

I picked out a huge, yellow ballroom gown, something a princess would wear. My shoes were also yellow with "diamonds" on them.

It took me hours to get ready. My boyfriend and his mom picked me up. His mom jumped out of the car, flashing her camera. She handed me a beautiful sash with the number of my boyfriend's football jersey.

We arrived at the party. It was jumping, packed. Spiked punch was everywhere. Friends knew I was nervous and kept fixing my hair and calling me *diva*.

At the end of the night, it was results time. I was so nervous. I was sweating. They seemed to read the results so slowly. And then I heard my name! I finally took a breath. I could breathe again!

We went to an after-party, and I was given my boyfriend's football jersey. It was 4 a.m. by the time I got home. I was no longer best dressed and got in trouble for breaking curfew. But I will never forget that Homecoming night.

On The Road To Family

Shawntrell Dawkins, Lockhart TX

It's the time I prepare for almost every year. It's time to get on the road to visit my family for the holidays. It's my favorite time of year.

My husband and I make sure to get our vacation days off from work. We load the car with luggage, drinks, food, and gifts. The drive is long and peaceful. He listens to music, while I sleep most of the ride. When I wake up, we talk or I watch the scenery. The wind is blowing, but it's still a little warm.

Finally, we pull into my parents' driveway. I get out and stretch my legs. I open the front door and hear my mom, dad, brothers, aunts, nieces, and nephews laughing, talking, and playing games. My nose catches the smell of my mom's warm, delicious food.

I walk around the corner and everyone turns. There is joy on their faces and warmth in their hearts.

I melt.

I love this time of year.

Wind In My Hair

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October! Brilliant blue sky! Crisp invigorating air! The sharp whack of wood on ball!

No, not baseball, but field hockey. Every fall beginning in junior high school and continuing through my senior year of college, I took to the field to run like the wind with the ball, taking it down the left sideline and driving it to the center for a teammate to take a shot on goal. To do this I turned the hockey stick for a "reverse hit," something I could do well because I had developed a strong backhand playing tennis with my left-handed brother. I knew I could fly on my feet ever since second grade races at Glenside School, where I was called "the fastest girl in our class." I tried but could never outrun Jack, the fastest boy. We were the shortest kids, but that didn't keep us from racing against our classmates.

Even now, 55 years later, on bright, crisp October days the memories come flooding back: making sure cleats are tied tight; securing shin guards in place; taking deep breaths as nervous energy mounts just before the game starts; hearing the first whack of stick on ball as play begins; trying to ignore the shouts of bystanders ("Mother, don't embarrass me by yelling so loud!"); thrilling to the feel of wind in my hair as I fly down the field; sucking on chilled orange quarters during breaks, their sweet, sticky juice running down my fingers. Above all, I remember sharing the thrill of victory or the resignation of defeat with my teammates, returning from away games on a bus filled with the chatter of high spirits or the silence of tired bodies, depending on the outcome of the game.

Fall is here! A Triptych for Autumn in Haiku Style

Colleen Claire McCabe, Elkton MD

fall chill, crisp and cold
sweaters exit storage chest
cedar scent hovers

leaves soft descending
stains of yellow, orange, red
sun fades low in sky

father raking leaves
builds a pillar of color
son leaps in, laughter



Harvest of Memories

Sandra Heggen, Kempner TX
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w-ecircle 6

Splat! Splat, splat, splat!!

Missiles rained all around me and I was struck in the upper chest. I looked down and saw red rivulets running down my shirt. With a savage yell I rose and hurled my own missiles toward my enemies barricaded on the other side of several long steel troughs bearing cool running water and more missiles floating by. I heard a very satisfying *Aauugh!* from where the others had set up their ambush.

My little sister, kneeling behind the heavy trough by my feet, whimpered and I saw red pulp in her hair, red rivulets running down her face. She'd been struck in the head. Mom was gonna kill me! My sister was only five and we'd been told not to mess around the cannery. My best friend, Mary, on the other side of my sister, lobbed several missiles in a row and then caught one on her shoulder. Red rivulets ran again.

Maybe it was time to go home. These were the last hot sultry days of August before school began and the tomatoes floating in the cool water in the troughs had been more than we could resist. This was back in 1950 or so and in our small farming village in Ohio there wasn't much need for security at the plant. Or maybe we sneaked through a fence or something, I don't remember.

In any event, it was a long walk back to the other edge of town where we lived and the sun was lowering, so we decided to call a halt to the battle. Mary's brothers agreed and we all warily stood up, making sure there'd be no last minute strikes. Everyone had tomatoes in their hands but we honored the cease-fire. We dumped our missiles into the flowing water, where they were carried away into the cannery to be turned into ketchup or tomato juice or something, and we headed home to face the music.

These were the harvest days around our town.

Autumn Traditions

Janan Hale, Tyler TX
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Do children decipher the changing of seasons? Their world is so filled with amazement and the joy of developing; they may not take note of the orange, gold and reds of the fall leaves. It was not until my adulthood that a grandmother pointed out, in a letter to a homesick granddaughter, that frost had come early that year and the Texas hardwoods released their leaves before they colored and beautified the season. The job of raking harvested only crispy brown skeletons. I've never forgotten her words and now pay more attention to the temperature and the palette of autumn colors.

September brought the end of barefoot days and summer heat. Typically we did a little shopping for school supplies and some new clothes. It seemed in my childhood, it got colder much sooner than it does today. In September we needed at least a heavy sweater. We looked forward to finding who our teacher would be. We walked to school in groups and felt safe. The world was more child friendly in those days. In upper grades we joined friends to attend football games. A warm coat, gloves, and a blanket was required to fight the chilly wind that whipped under the bleachers. During half time we waited in line for delicious hot dogs being sold and served by parents in support of the PTA or athletic Booster Club.

There were fun piles of raked leaves to jump into or to be burned by a parent, bringing the sweet smell of oak or sassafras and a curving column of smoke reaching upward toward gray skies. Autumn had much to offer. Hot vegetable soup on a cold night warmed both stomach and soul, especially if there was buttery cornbread fresh from the oven. Darkness came earlier and families stayed snug indoors playing games, reading or listening to the radio. We entertained ourselves without the aid of digital electronics.

Although today is sweltering outside we will soon be welcoming the change. We will be ready for new horizons. We'll celebrate fall.

Bittersweet Season

Ardine Martinelli, Tacoma WA
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w-ecircle 6



A bittersweet time
This season called fall
Vivid oranges, reds, yellows dot
the landscape
Yet, sorrow as summer fades

Crisp cool days
Daylight shortens
darkness creeps in
Catching my exuberance off guard
Browns take over
as earth hunkers down for winter

The busyness of summer retreats
My body slows down,
yearning for quiet time
To listen to be
I crave the silence
And mourn the passing of summer

Garden Hopes

Lois Ann Bull, Easton CT
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I think our daughter should join 4-H,” my husband announced. “There’s a meeting tomorrow night.”

“4-H? Here?” I gulped and folded my napkin to hide my confusion. This wasn’t the Midwest, the agricultural belt. We lived in a sophisticated college town in Massachusetts.

“There’s an Equus group for kids who keep horses in their backyards,” he said.

“But,” I shot back. “Abbie’s pony isn’t in our backyard. This 4-H thing. You’re not thinking of moving her pony from the stables to live here, are you?”

“No, no,” his tone calm. “This street isn’t zoned for horses.”

“Three cheers for that. So why does she need 4-H?”

“Because she’d learn that there’s more to horses than winning ribbons. Her pony should be a learning project and she’ll enjoy horses more if she can experience them with other kids.”

“What time is tomorrow’s meeting?”

“Seven.”

“Well, if you think she should go, you take her. Horses are your thing, not mine.”

The next night, Abbie came home from 4-H bubbling. Her eyes sparkled as she snuggled next to me. Excited words spilled from her.

“Daddy said I could join. The girls were so nice. They served cupcakes with chocolate sprinkles.” Some, I observed, still clung to her shirt.

“The older kids said when I get bigger and ride better, I’d be able to ride in a garden.”

“What garden?” I asked, curious to know who would allow anyone to ride in their garden.

“I don’t remember. But it’s far from here.” A giant yawn interrupted her tale.

After I’d tucked her in, I settled down to read and glanced at my husband. “Abbie said that by being a member of 4-H, she’d be able to ride in someone’s garden. Who’s that crazy?”

“Oh,” he replied, glancing at me with a mischievous grin, “she’s referring to Madison Square Garden.”

“Madison Square Garden? My God! She means The National Horse Show?”

“Yes. The 4-Hers talked about it tonight. Kids dream. It won’t do her any harm.”

But it changed my life for the next fifteen years.

Viewpoint

Lois Ann Bull, Easton CT
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I failed as babysitter, at the grandmotherly age of 71. When my son and his wife traveled to Germany, I stayed with Natalie (7). At after-school pick-up time, I arrived at her bus stop. A yellow school bus was just leaving.

Oh good, she’s here. But I didn’t see her. A man with a child said, “If you’re looking for a small girl, the bus driver wouldn’t let her off. No one was here for her.”

Oh my God, I’ve lost her. Hornets riled inside me. Where did that bus go? How will I get her back? How could I lose a kid? Sick with embarrassment, I decided to let the parents know first. Maybe they’d have ideas on what to do.

I pulled out my phone. With fear for the child’s safety building, I pushed my daughter-in-law’s cell number desperate for advice, directions, whatever.

“I’ve lost your daughter. I wasn’t here in time. The bus driver wouldn’t let her off. She’s still on the bus. I don’t know how to find her.” So upset, I half shrieked, half cried.

“Whoa! Settle down. It’s okay,” Christiane soothed. “Natalie’s school is on the phone with your son. She’s still

on the bus. When the driver finishes his route, he’ll bring her back.” She sounded so calm.

I felt dumbstruck. The school had called my son. He was four thousand miles away. Sometimes my mind became stuck in the 20th century. The 21st “tech” century overwhelmed me.

That the bus driver even had a phone with him was hard to comprehend. So I waited. A school bus came. I hurried to its door. I wanted this nightmare over. But, high school students got off. I felt silly standing there, being flashed weird looks.

Then an empty bus approached. Holding my breath, I prayed the driver saw me. It slowed and stopped.

The door folded open. Natalie stood on the top step, eyes sparkling, smile huge. As she got off she said, “That was neat. I’ve always wondered where the bus went after it dropped me off. Now I know!”

Mom's Cranberry Relish and Long Tables

Arlene Howard, Rancho Mirage CA
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1947. Mom baked pumpkin pies and made cranberry relish. The Packard took us to Almaden on the Kings Highway, the highway where Spanish priests built missions from 1769-1823. We all sat at the long table in my aunt's living room, including great-grandma Ma. Her Pa had driven her at age two in a wagon from Iowa to California along no highway. We stuffed ourselves with turkey, bread dressing, pumpkin pie and Mom's cranberry relish. Outside blue agapanthus waved their blooms in the breeze. Inside five cousins staged a play while our parents ate pumpkin pie with cream from the top of the milk.

1962. At the same long table, my fiancé sat with us. Eaten with the turkey, dressing and cranberry relish, was a sweet potato soufflé I created.

1984-1998. Each year my daughter anxiously awaited *Gourmet* magazine's November issue. New recipes inspired us. No turkey but lamb, stuffing with jalapenos, Banbury apple, pumpkin and mince pies and cranberry relish. As we ate at our long table, we looked out to the snow in the Maryland woods.

2014. We sat with our daughter, granddaughter and son-in-law at their new long table. The table was bedecked with plates of deep-fried turkey, stuffed acorn squash, fennel gratin, sweet potatoes spiced with lime and tequila and Mom's cranberry relish. Wedges of apple, blackberry and pumpkin pies tempted us. Outside the wind caused pin oak leaves to dance on the lawn.

I am thankful that Mom passed on her love of cooking to me. My daughter and granddaughter carry the same love-of-cooking gene. It's fun creating new food traditions, although Mom's cranberry relish will always be the only relish served at our long table at Thanksgiving.

Cranberry Relish

1 pkg. cranberries, 10-12 oz.
1 c walnuts
2 pkgs. raspberry Jell-O, 4 oz. each
1 can crushed pineapple, 15 oz. drained
1½ c boiling water
1½ c pineapple juice

Prepare Jell-O with 1 ½ c boiling water; add 1 ½ c pineapple juice; cool. In a Cuisinart, chop nuts finely; separately chop cranberries. When Jell-O is cool, add cranberries, pineapple, nuts. Pour into mold; chill overnight.



In My Mind's Eye

Georgia Hubley, Henderson NV
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I've always loved October 31, Halloween, and the fact my birthday is the following day, November 1. This indeed adds to the festivities and joviality of the holiday.

Once, I asked my mother if storks really did deliver babies, and she smiled, then told me I was delivered by a witch on a broomstick. I was thrilled and she knew I would be. My imagination tended to run amuck and during my childhood I dwelled in the land of make-believe.

When I was ten, I wrote a poem about a ghost I'd conjured up in my mind's eye called, Oscar B. Ghostly. My teacher was impressed with the poem. Years passed, and the poem was stored with other keepsakes and forgotten.

When my son, Nick became enthralled with Halloween and the spookiness of ghosts, witches, bats, and black cats, he was delighted when I shared the poem with him.

This Halloween season, Oscar B. Ghostly makes a comeback:

The Ghost Who Thought He Was

Georgia A. Hubley

There once was a ghost named Oscar B Ghostly,
Who loved Halloween and to scare people mostly.
"So, you don't believe in ghosts," he'd cry,
While floating near and far, to all he'd go by.
Mr. Ghostly was proud of being a ghost.
"I spook, I haunt, I scare," he'd boast.
"I can float high and low at slow or fast speed,
-I'm the grandest ghost of all, Oh, yes indeed."
Feeling so important and grand, he failed to see,
No one could hear or see, Oscar B. Ghostly.
Invisible he was and for many a Halloween,
He floated near and far into the night unseen.

Golden Inspiration

Cindy Flora, Clearwater FL
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When my daughter was a toddler, I shifted our family vacations from July to late September ostensibly to avoid crowds and escape the Florida heat but my ultimate goal was to catch a glimpse of fall. Well, not just any glimpse, but, specifically, a glimpse of glittering gold aspen, a goal inspired by the cover photo on a calendar I was given by a yearbook publisher.

Soon after receiving that calendar, I stripped it from its binding, laminated it and used it as a poster and inspiration for classroom writing assignments. Never mind that most of my students, including myself, had never actually seen an aspen tree in person, let alone in the fall. Together we became literary miners of its golden promise subtracting and adding people and animals, and creating stories about the wooded scene in the photo.

Eventually, one late September just north of the Teton Mountains, I spied my first pot of aspen gold, a small stand just beginning to change at the crest of a hill. The trees were not quite the golden glory of the trees in the photo but seeing them was a Kodak moment that I would always treasure.

Back home in Florida, I lamented the absence of real fall color for years. Then one summer a fast growing rogue tree popped up among a cluster of ancient oaks in my backyard. I was intrigued by the shape of its leaves which fluttered reminiscently in the breeze. Normally, I was a protective steward of my oaks and struck down intruders, but I let him stay and he continued to grow weaving his delicate branches between their grey twisted trunks and limbs. Visually, it was a pleasing May December marriage. And then February rolled around and the leaves began to do more than flutter. They began to change.

Gradually, but perceptually, the leaves lost their green and began to turn. Could it be? Bright yellow and once on the ground they became a profusion of gold and red. Fall had finally come to Florida and inspiration from my own backyard.



High School Football

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OWL Writing Circle, Lone Star College, Houston TX

When the weather cools and the leaves fade from vibrant green to yellow, red, and orange, my state prepares for football. If you've ever seen "Friday Night Lights," you know that in Texas, football scores are more important than the closing numbers on New York stock exchange.

I vividly remember homecoming last year in my new hometown, Navasota, TX. Despite threatening rain clouds, the entire town showed for the game. Alumni as far back as the Class of '35 were honored (that's 80 amazing years!), and the bleachers groaned under weight of the crowd.

Navasota's Rattler Nation included a marching band complete with a majorette and six flag girls, the Diamonette drill team, a slew of cheerleaders, and no less than 54 football players suited up for the game. In contrast, back in my high school days, fighting Huntsville Hornets had no drill team, no flag girls, only six cheerleaders, and maybe 20 players, max.

But the hometown spirit was the same: Friday night football in Texas rules!

In the 1960s, girls wore fresh mums to homecoming. Afterwards we pinned the flowers to our mirrors where they turned brown and dried to fragile artifacts. The corsages I saw last year were made of artificial flowers and accessorized with bling on steroids. Varied styles, too. The style I'd consider traditional was worn on the left shoulder, but holy moly, the glittered streamers flowed from shoulder to ankle. There were also corsages as necklaces, as armbands, and the most popular: as a garter worn on a girl's thigh.

The Rattlers won their homecoming game last year. Then, they fought all the way to State, winning trophies, prime time television sports reportage, and pages of newspaper coverage.

We have high hopes for this season, too, as we prepare for autumn in our Texas small town and Friday night football. As Kenny Chesney sings in his country hit: *When I feel that chill, smell that fresh cut grass/I'm back in my helmet, cleats, and shoulder pads/Standing in the huddle, listening to the call/Fans going crazy for the boys of fall.*



Pumpkin Jubilee

Karen Mocker Dabson, Columbia MO
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Every year, five little pumpkins glimmered down the steps from the house. The grand pumpkin sat on the porch proper gazing out over his progeny. Some gave a traditional toothy grin, while others bore the look of orange alien visitors come to spook the earthlings.

My sons loved the end of October—as did I—when the colors of autumn faded, and the leaves blustered in brown hurricanes over the lawn. Raking them into giant piles beneath the rope swing, they, and Wolfie-Elizabeth, their dog, plunged into the leaf mountain again and again. The spicy smell of crushed leaves colored the air.

Their fall signaled the countdown to Halloween. Home-made costumes took shape, and topics at the dinner table veered toward which houses supplied the best candy. We would agree to buy pumpkins at the Saturday farmer's market, an event the boys eagerly anticipated mainly because, for once, they would be allowed to use sharp knives on the orange squash. Finally, the day would come when they arrived home from school, and I would announce, "Time to carve!"

Just warm enough to remain outside, we spread newspapers across the front stoop along with the tools of our trade: a couple of ice cream scoops, three paring knives, some crayons, and one grapefruit knife.

After listening to my annual cautions with half an ear, my sons selected their pumpkins and settled down to work. Little lids were created, and then the boring task of scooping out the seedy pulp came next. When they'd had enough of that, they drew their scariest designs on the face of each little pumpkin and proceeded to cut them out. In the meantime, I continued to scrape clean the big pumpkin. Before I knew it, four little pumpkins leered at me, and the boys had deserted all of us for their afternoon cartoons.

Eventually, I finished, saving some seeds for snacking and placing a candle inside each jack-o-lantern, including my own small contribution. The boys would light them later, and I would savor the smell of roast pumpkin as I passed out candy bars.

When Autumn Comes

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w-ecircles 3,4, and 6

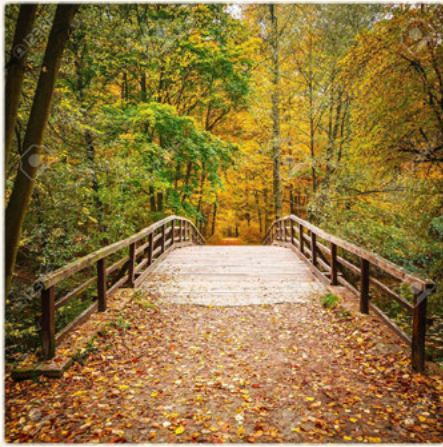
Now, in these harshest of summer days,
my thoughts drift ahead to Autumn, like an anxious woman in a car trip
anticipates the next rest stop.
Ahead to the cooler days and pleasant nights,
to colorful leaves drifting down-
flushed with my favorite hues of copper and sienna
amber and golden umber.
The smiles are returning to faces locked in grimaces
against heat rising well above the century mark for weeks on end.
Recipes reappear for squash soups and Texas chili!
Football parties and kites will be dancing in the clear skies of October
Fall rains will kiss the wildflowers as they slumber.
Monarchs flirting and feeding on the milkweed planted just for them
fueling up for the long trip south-
Colorful hummingbirds dip down to do the same.
Today, I make a list that will include being grateful for life and
the ever changing of Nature's guard.

Waiting with Autumn

Carol Ziel, St. Louis MO
ziel.carol@gmail.com
w-ecircle 6

Autumn moon moves
toward sweet dawn
toward winter's fierce embrace.
Trees shake down leaves.
Seasonal books of well used pages
flutter to the earth.
I sit in a pool of rust
the color of menstrual blood.
Their scent as bitter as grief.
I contemplate my own autumn.
Years scatter around me
brittle as November
honeyed as July.
Winter waits to embrace me.
With a hand full of leaves
I, too, sit and wait.





From the Blogs:

One Woman's Day

by Linda Hoye

What can you say about an ordinary or extraordinary day in your life in five hundred words? A lot, if you ask the over seventy Story Circle Network members whose stories we've been privileged to share on our One Woman's Day blog. We would love to have the opportunity to share a story about a day in your life too. Learn more, and find a link to our One Woman's Day blog submission page at: <http://onewomansday.wordpress.com/about/>

Recently we were pleased to feature a post by Mary Connerty called **Gesher Tzar Me'od – The World is a Narrow Bridge** reminding us that faith conquers fear.

The best conversations I have with my son seem to happen in the car. A few weeks ago, while driving home from our synagogue after teaching in our religious school program, my son asked why we call Sunday school "Gesher" and not Sunday School or Hebrew School.

Hmmm . . . I tried to rack my brain to remember what I had learned about this moniker, but could only think to tell him that Gesher meant "bridge" in Hebrew and, in true practiced educator fashion, turned the question around and asked him why he thought that might be appropriate.

After a "harrumph" and a "Mom, why can't you just ever answer my question?" I got him to suggest that the bridge referred to bridging childhood to adulthood, to leading to a knowledge of Judaism, to paving the way for living in the world. Pretty good for a 15-minute drive, I thought, but something felt missing. So I began to research:

Gesher (Hebrew: גֶּשֶׁר, lit. Bridge), according to Wikipedia, may refer to:

- *Gesher*, a former political party from Israel
- *Gesher*, a kibbutz in Israel
- *Camp Gesher*, a summer camp in Ontario
- *Gesher*, the former codename of a microarchitecture computer chip

Not very helpful.

A deeper search led me to a quote from Rabbi Nachman: "The whole world is a very narrow bridge; the important thing is not to be afraid."

Rabbi Nachman was an amazing 18th century Hasidic Jew who combined Kabbalah and Torah study to teach that one should face life with simplicity, faith and joy. In fact, for Rabbi Nachman, experiencing joy was a mitzvah, a commandment. When he teaches that the world is a very narrow bridge which we must not be afraid to cross, he transcends any peculiarities of his 18th century Hasidic Jewish world and gives us a timeless roadmap for life. After all, fear is not particular to any one group of people, and living fearlessly can be a real and daily struggle for many of us.

For me, the Nachman quote explains perfectly why Gesher is the perfect name for Sunday School lessons of any faith, but also can serve as an anchor for all of us, particularly women, to live beyond our comfort zones. Mustn't we try to teach our children and to remind ourselves that life is precious, that care must be taken, but to live in fear is not to live—it is to stay stuck on one side of the bridge?

Each day, we all face bullies, spiders, pressures from school or work, family illness, cyber hackers, potential terrorists, and who knows what else. So, as strange as it may seem for 21st century women (who may or may not be Jewish) to learn from an 18th century Hasidic rabbi, we learn from Rabbi Nachman that if we have faith, we don't need to be afraid, or, at least, we can move forward in spite of our fear. This is a lesson for us all, and a reason to keep walking across the bridge.

Mary Connerty is a mom, wife, Linguistics Ph.D., runner, gardener, and writer. She is tentatively, yet daily, stepping out onto the bridge.



Welcome to Our New Members Since June !!

Stacy Curtis of Spring, TX
 Shawntrell Dawkins of Lockhart, TX
 Miriam Deeds of Lockhart, TX
 Tammy Delatorre of Hermosa Beach, CA
 Martha Gilliland of Tucson, AZ
 Kathleen Harrington of Bend, OR
 Daphne Jack of Houston, TX
 Nancy Kilgore of Burlington, VT
 Linda Mansfield of Indianapolis, IN
 Ruth McCully of Great Falls, VA

Lori Mellinger of Lockhart, TX
 Jane Scott Newton of Las Vegas, NM
 Leslie Nyman of Pelham, MA
 Karen Phelps of Yorktown Heights, NY
 Breanna Sauls of Lockhart, TX
 Janet Squires of Santa Clarita, CA
 Robin Turner of Dallas, TX
 Charlotte Wlodkowski of Allison Park, PA
 Candace Wright of Lockhart, TX

Welcome Back to Our Renewing Members Since June !!

Sally Jean Brudos
 Tiffany Benton
 Jeanne Guy
 Colleen Harrison
 Nancy Jurka
 Mary Ann Dejewski
 Julie Whitmore
 Grace Fiandaca
 Stephanie Dalley
 Lois Ann Bull
 Susan Keizer
 Judy Plazyk
 Janice Strohmeier
 Natalie Weinstein

Maureen Riley
 Alicia Anderson
 Harriot West
 Sue Schuerman
 Barbarann Ayars
 Cindy FLora
 Jane Parsons
 Helen Lowery
 Melissa Dallago
 Rhonda Esakov
 Joyce Spurgin
 Patricia Daly-Lipe
 Leilani Rose
 Sheila Bender

Barbara Feinberg
 Kassie Ritman
 Andrea Savee
 Cheryl Reynolds Linck
 Jean Erler
 Abby November
 Bonnie DeMars
 Marion Hunt
 Annie Quinn
 Katherine Misegades
 Karen Appleberry
 Sara Etgen-Baker
 Marsha Fields Jones
 Candi Byrne

We appreciate your membership and hope that you'll find many different ways to link with the many circles-within-circles that make up our unique women's writing community.

Join Us on Facebook!

You've published an article, a book review, a blog post?
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www.facebook.com/storycircle



Stories from the Heart VIII Registration Form

Send this form with your check to:
Conference Registration, Story Circle Network
PO Box 1670, Estes Park, CO 80517-1670
To register online and use your credit card, go to
www.storycircle.org/Conference/frmregister.php

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Current Member of Story Circle? yes no

Registration Type		Members-Only Registration (through 12/11/15)	Regular Registration (12/12/15 to 3/11/16) member/non-member	Late Registration (after 3/11/16) member/non-member	Amt Due
<input type="checkbox"/> Full Registration (Fri keynote / Sat / Sun)		\$325	\$365/\$420	\$405/\$460	
Partial Registration (please check all that apply):	<input type="checkbox"/> Friday (Keynote/ dessert reception)	\$35	\$40	\$45	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Saturday only (includes lunch)	\$166	\$195/\$220	\$224/\$249	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Saturday lunch only	\$35	\$40	**	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Sunday only (includes lunch)	\$122	\$130/\$155	\$138/\$163	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Sunday lunch only	\$35	\$40	**	
Friday Pre-Conference Workshop (Not included in full registration: optional, extra charge.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Noon-1:45 pm session	\$30 each	\$35 each	\$40 each	
	<input type="checkbox"/> 2-3:45 pm session				
Saturday/Sunday lunch preference: <input type="checkbox"/> chicken <input type="checkbox"/> vegetarian				Total due:	

What is included in my full registration fees?

- All General Sessions
- Workshop Sessions
- Friday Evening Keynote Address & Dessert Reception
- Two Meals (Sat. & Sun. lunch)
- Refreshments/Snacks
- Opportunity to sign up for free 15-minute Coaching Session

What is not included in my full registration fees?

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

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

* Non-Members who choose to join prior to the end of the conference on Sunday, April 17, 2016 will have a portion of their registration fee applied to their dues.

** You MUST register for lunches by April 3, 2016! Registrations for these events will NOT be accepted at the door.

Refund Policy: Cancellations are accepted until March 11, 2016, and are subject to a cancellation fee of \$50 for a full conference registration or \$25 for a one-day registration. No refunds after March 11, 2016.



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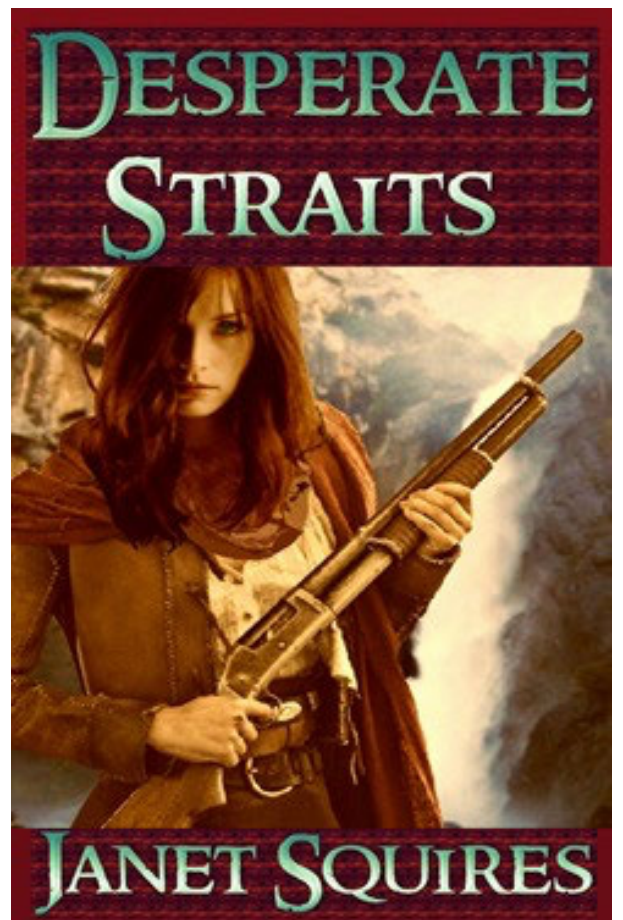
Just when order returns, veteran lawman, L.T. McAllister rides in. He's a dangerous man determined to do what's right regardless of the personal cost. L.T. believes himself ready for anything until he meets Sarah. Her ideas about the man he's become soon pit his lifetime of duty against desire.

L.T.'s and Sarah's loyalty to Will catapults them into a life for which neither one is prepared. And when L.T. and Sarah defy Sheriff Grant Simpson, they trigger a cataclysm of retaliation that escalates into kidnapping and murder. L.T. and Sarah are forced into a battle for justice... and their lives.



About the author:

I began my career writing short stories and nonfiction articles and I've won awards in fiction and nonfiction. I provide presentations on writing and teach workshops. My interest in the historic West stems from the stories I heard growing up. My family pioneered their way through Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona as ranchers, miners, and lawmen. Visit my website: <http://www.janetsquiresbooks.com/>



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

Future Topics and deadlines for upcoming Journals:

- December, 2015 (due August 15)—A Winter Memory
- March, 2016 (due January 15)—Topic to be announced
- June, 2016 (due April 15)—Topic to be announced



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.

Be Our Guest Event...

Paths to Publishing

You're writing a book—or thinking about it? Don't wait until you've typed "The End" before you start considering your publishing options. What's the best way to get your book out into the world? Should you go with a traditional publisher, a university press, or take the somewhat daunting leap of self-publishing?

If those are your questions (and they should be), join award-winning authors Susan Wittig Albert, Debra Winegarten, and Connie Spittler as they offer some answers. Between the three of them, they've published four different ways, maybe more. No matter where you are in the book writing process, this panel promises to be well worth your time.

Sunday, September 20, 2015: 3-5 p.m.

Bookwoman

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