



STORY CIRCLE JOURNAL

Vol. 20 No. 4, December 2016

The newsletter for women with stories to tell

Reflecting on Differences: 2016's New Writing Competition

One of Story Circle's most important and popular programs over the years has been our Spring lifewriting contest program. Since its inception in 2000, we have honored the work of 17 first-place winners and over 60 other winners. (You can see the full list here: <http://www.storycircle.org/Contests/winners.shtml>) Pat LaPoint, the coordinator of our contest program, reminds us why these contests are so important. It's because we believe in the importance of lifewriting, she says. "One of Story Circle's primary goals is to encourage all women to write the story of their lives."

Writing helps us to learn who we have been, who we are, and what we want to be when we grow up—so it's valuable for its own sake, even if it never leave your notebook. But we also believe that sharing our writing is a crucial part of owning it and claiming our places as writers. As Pat says, it is important to have our writing "appreciated and validated by other like-minded women." SCN's contest program (managed by a committee made up of Pat, Susan Schoch, and Lynn Goodwin) is one of our efforts to create regular opportunities for every member to share her writing.

This year, we expanded those opportunities by adding a Fall contest to our annual Spring competition, and by lowering the entry fee to make the contest more accessible. When we asked Pat, Susan, and Lynn to design this new contest, they offered "Reflections." While SCN members share a deep interest in writing, Pat says, "we realize that, in so many aspects of our lives, we are different. What is important is that our life experiences are enriched through learning and understanding these differences."

"Differences" was the topic, then, for our first "Reflections" personal essay competition. We asked you to write about a time when you encountered someone or some group you felt was very different from you. We asked you to show us how you discovered these differences and how they shaped you or impacted your world view. We asked you tell us what you learned about yourself. "In choosing this topic," Pat says, we want to "provide a safe and nurturing venue in which writers can share how they have responded to different *others*, and explore the ways their responses impacted their lives."

We're delighted to congratulate to our winners. We're grateful to all of the writers who entered this new competition. We also owe a huge debt of thanks to the judges who gave hours of their time to considering the entries; to the committee that oversaw the project; and to the generous donor who gave the cash awards. It takes a village, doesn't it? We couldn't have done it without *all* of you.

You will find the winning essays on pages 4-8 of this issue. We hope you enjoy them as much as we do.

Read the winning entries
of our first Reflections
essay competition on
pages 4-8.



The Sarton Women's Book Awards are presented annually in Memoir, Biography, Contemporary fiction, Historical fiction, & Young adult & New adult fiction.

The award honors May Sarton, remembered for her outstanding contributions to women's literature.

Limited to submissions from small/independent publishers, university presses, and author-publishers.

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Letter From SCN's President



Dear SCN Sister—

2017 will be on us before we know it, so this is a good time to look back, and look forward. And there's a lot to see in both directions.

This year, we held our *eighth* biannual writing conference. We're already planning our ninth, in July, 2018, with Joyce Boatright as our Conference Chair.

We're planning a 2017 LifeLines event that you won't want to miss. Join the remarkable Jeanne Guy for a memorable May weekend in the heart of Texas. See page 9.

Our Sarton Award program (now in its sixth year) has seen remarkable growth. We received over 100 entries this year, up from 59 in 2015. My fellow coordinator, Paula Yost, and I expect 2017 to be even bigger.

Our women's book review site, the largest on the Internet, is celebrating its fourteenth year and looking ahead to the fifteenth in 2017—thanks to the help of a great team of reviewers and editors. See page 15 for review.

Our Circles program continued to expand under the able and enthusiastic direction of Mary Jo Doig (read Mary Jo Doig's interview with Judith Helburn on page 12.) In our Internet Chapter, we added a fiction circle (thanks, Pat LaPointe!). And we have plans for an even stronger and broader Circles program in 2017. You'll read about in our March 2017 *Journal*.

The *Story Circle Journal*, which began in 1997, begins its twenty-first year of publication, powered by Robin Wittig's creative energy.

*Finding our voices and writing our lives is
more important now than ever before.*

Our anthology, *Real Women Write*, is in the capable hands of editor Susan Schoch--and in 2017, we will publish selections from several anthologies as a book.

Len Leatherwood has brought new life to our online class program, and we're looking forward to offering a fine calendar of classes in 2017. This includes an opportunity to enroll in a special class that will help us explore our feelings and experiences about race—especially relevant in a time of unprecedented national unease. Please take a look: page 14.

Our personal essay contest has been held every year since 2000, with 17 wonderful winners! This year, we added another essay competition, "Reflections." Read the winning essays pages 4-8.

And there's more, of course. Our online Writers Roundtables, our Authors Circle, our Bloggers Circle, our Facebook and Twitter pages, our Weekend Writers' Toolkit, our blogs ("One Woman's Day" and "Telling HerStories") and even more . . .

We are facing a year of challenge, as women and as writers. I know that this year will shape our stories—all American women's stories—for years to come, in ways that we cannot now even imagine. While we leave our partisan affiliations outside of our Circles, I also know that each of you has an important stake in the issues we are all dealing with now. I hope that you will document your experiences and feelings in this landmark year. Finding our voices and writing our lives is more important now than ever before

*With joy for your journey,
Susan*

P.S. You can find a handy summary and links to our activities on our webpage: "How SCN Can Help You Tell Your Story"

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

Susan Wittig Albert is the founder and current president of SCN. A NYT bestselling author, she is traditionally published and publishes her own work. She lives in the Texas Hill Country.

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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This Month's Contributing Editors:

Susan Albert
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 Mary Jo Doig
 Linda Hoye
 Len Leatherwood
 Jo Virgil

We welcome your letters, queries,
 and suggestions.

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

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

Our Fall Fund Drive Raises \$5,000 for SCBR!

Like most membership organizations, SCN's dues don't support all of our projects, so once a year, we turn to our members and friends for additional funding help. One of these is our website, StoryCircleBookReviews.org, which offers a unique review venue for women authors whose books are author-published or published by small, independent presses. Established in 2001, with over 1900 reviews and a team of thirty-plus volunteer reviewers and editors, SCBR is the largest and most comprehensive women's review site on the Internet.

But while our reviewers and editors are volunteers and our service is free to authors and publishers, SCBR comes at a price. The website, review posting, and monthly eletters cost about \$5000 a year to create and maintain.

Once again, we turned to you and to our friends across the country to help us support this valuable program.

And you did! With 60 contributions from 47 donors—and with the help of a generous donor who matched your gifts—our Fall Fund Drive met its goal! Thank you to each of you who contributed, and double thanks to those of you who gave twice. You're wonderful!

Amber Starfire
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 Becca Taylor
 Betty McCreary
 Candi Byrne
 Cheryl Bazzoui
 Cheryl Wild
 Christine Alethea
 Williams
 Deborah Bowers
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 Robin Wittig
 Ruth Crocker
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 Susan Morrison
 Terilee Wunderman
 Vicki Holmsten



Reflections 1st Place Winner

Not Quite Friends

Claire McCabe – Elkton, MD

In the 1970s, Richmond, Virginia, was caught up in the wave of school busing for desegregation that happened across the country. This attempt to equalize the broken public education system encouraged de facto segregation due to white flight into the suburbs. As a result, my local high school was overwhelmingly white. I'm ashamed to say that we had a "rebel" soldier as our school mascot and flew the Confederate flag at sports events. My yearbook reveals only a handful of dark faces in a class of 500. I was intrigued by those few students, who seemed so different from the majority in my school.

Zelda Carter was charismatic. Though older than I, she was in my grade, having missed a year of school to have a baby. Zelda was a talkative and flamboyantly stylish African-American student. I admired the way she carried herself with no apologies for her choices. Malcolm, her baby, brought her great pride. She clearly loved the baby's father, Malcolm Sr., who was often a topic of her conversation. In sharp contrast to the anorexic silhouette that many of the white girls considered desirable, Zelda dressed her tall, womanly curves in the latest styles, clearly proud of her body. She could sashay into school in an outfit envied by all – a bright yellow dress, statement jewelry, and a pair of platform shoes – and then brag about how her father had taken her shopping at the most sought-after boutique in town.

Zelda represented the exotic to me and possessed things I only dreamed about: a father who spoiled her, a true boyfriend, and a baby to love. I guess you could say I had a girl-crush on her. I happily stood on the sidelines and listened to her emote about her wonderful life. As a white student, I wanted to cross the racial divide and count her as a friend.

My opportunity came a week before a football game. Zelda announced that she was going to have a party afterwards; everyone was invited. I was thrilled. How much fun to go to a mixed race party, listen to music, maybe dance, and get a peek into Zelda's life! But as I talked among my white girlfriends, nobody wanted to go. I didn't have a car, and I knew I would have to convince one of my friends to come along with me.

Jenny, my go-to buddy, had her license. But she wanted to go to another after-game party being thrown by her brother's friend. I struck a bargain: Zelda's party first, just for an hour, and then the rest of the evening we'd hang at the other party. It was a deal.

Zelda's party was already packed when we arrived

shortly after the game ended. Dressed in my usual jeans, I had added a sparkly sweater to upscale my look for the evening. As Jenny and I walked toward the house, we saw so many black faces, we knew they could not have all been from our high school. It soon became clear that we were the only white people there.

Jenny was reluctant to go into the house. But I begged her to at least help me find Zelda and say hello. Clusters of Zelda's friends fell silent as we passed. I felt like an intruder, but walked into the house anyway. Once inside, I finally recognized a face from my school. I knew her name was Annette, but I had never spoken to her. Why should she acknowledge Jenny and me now when she was with her friends, and we were obviously outsiders?

I finally spotted Zelda, predictably surrounded by a coterie of fans laughing and gabbing. I waited for her to glance in my direction, and when she did, I waved shyly.

"Come on in here, girls; get yourselves a drink," she motioned us to a table loaded with bottles of alcohol and mixers. She then went back to chatting with her friends, none of whom I had ever seen before. But at least she had acknowledged us. Jenny filled a plastic cup with ice, coke, and rum, then told me she'd be waiting in her car. I looked at her in disbelief.

"Can't we just hang out for a few minutes?" I asked. "It's rude to grab a drink and leave."

"I'm going to finish my drink in the car, and if you aren't back there in 15 minutes, I'm leaving for the other party without you," she said.

I knew she meant it. But I hadn't come all that way just to turn around and leave. I said I'd stay just a few minutes longer and walked from the bar room onto the porch alone. Aware of my "otherness," I decided to just watch the crowd of people. As I started to relax, I chuckled at an overheard joke.

The guy who had made the joke turned to me, "What are you doing here?" he demanded. I knew he didn't go to my high school. Most of this crowd had come from the city, from the mostly all-black schools that white families had abandoned. I froze at his comment. Wasn't a party supposed to be fun, a place to get to know new friends?

"So what are you doing here?" he repeated, this time a bit more aggressively.

"I'm a friend of Zelda's."

"You aren't her friend," he said. "You don't belong here."

I was struggling for some kind of response when I felt a small tug on my sweater sleeve and a gentle but steady pull that made me step back to keep from falling. I turned around and saw a slightly built black fellow. He wore glasses and had a serious look about him. He just shook his

head, and held his finger to his lips, as if to say those comments don't need a response. He took my hand and walked with me back into the house and away from the hostility. He didn't say much to me at all, just made a quiet comment about no need to pursue every conversation. I understood immediately that this young man had deflated a potential conflict.

"Thank you," I said. "I go to school with Zelda."

"Yeah," he nodded. "We're her friends."

Although he had rescued me from a tense moment, he also was telling me that I didn't belong. I began to have an inkling of how unwelcome Zelda must have felt every day in our school, surrounded by white faces and a Confederate flag flying next to Old Glory at every pep rally and home game. As much as I wanted to be Zelda's friend, admiring her from a distance was not the basis of a solid friendship. She and I were both willing to pass a branch across the racial divide of the times, but neither her social group nor mine would support a real friendship between us. It broke my heart to know that my presence was putting a damper on the party.

"I'd better go now," I said quietly.

The young man nodded.

I started to walk away, then turned around and said, "Hey, can you tell Zelda goodbye for me?"

Reflections 2nd Place Winner

The Blackest Land...The Whitest People

Sara Etgen-Baker, Sara – Anna, TX

We entered Union Station and Mother whisked me toward the waiting area. I plopped down on one of the wooden benches and dangled my feet in front of me. Beneath my feet was a tile mosaic containing words that I couldn't read.

"What do those words say, Mama?"

Mother folded her newspaper and read: "Your strength is in your union... Your danger is in your discord; therefore, be at peace henceforward... and as brothers live together."

"What do those words mean?"

"You know how I tell you to be strong and get along with your brother, even when it's hard?"

I nodded.

"The man who wrote those words hopes we'll be strong and get along with others even when it's hard."

At that moment, a bigger-than-life announcement roared through the loudspeakers: "Train 16 bound for Springfield – arriving Gate 20 – train station platform below. Ticketed passengers proceed to the boarding area."

Mother sprang into action, corralled me close to her, then scurried me toward the staircase and the underground platform. But my feet and legs froze in anticipation, for I believed this staircase was an enchanted portal that propelled me to the faraway places I'd read about in school. Mother yanked on my arm. "Come on!"

"But I need to tinkle, Mama!" I darted toward the first restroom I saw.

"Stop! You can't go in that restroom. Read the sign."

I glanced up; the sign read *Coloreds Only*.

Mother pointed across the hall. "Our restroom is there. Here's a dime; go in. I'll wait for you here. Hurry. We don't want to miss our train!"

The sign on this door read *Whites Only*. Although baffled, I entered, placed the dime in the slot freeing the lock mechanism, completed my task, and returned to Mother's side.

"Mama, why are there...?"

"NOT NOW!" She grabbed my hand and we clamored toward the bottom of the staircase, where the train sat idling. The porter checked our luggage; the train's whistle blew; and the conductor shouted, "All Aboard!" We climbed aboard the train; the conductor stamped our tickets; and we scrambled toward our seats. The majestic Iron Horse jolted the train forward, pulling my stomach up to my throat and filling me with queasy eagerness.

I forgot about the restroom incident, sat quietly, and watched the landscape click by my window. I read *Fun with Dick and Jane*, escaping into its water-colored world, imagining myself as Jane taking a train trip to faraway places and meeting different people.

Our train clackety-clacked through the rural East Texas countryside, then ground to a halt at the railroad station in Greenville, Texas. While the train idled for passengers to board, I glanced out the window, followed the engine's steam clouds, and read the sign that hung between the train and bus station: *Welcome to Greenville, Texas – The Blackest Land...The Whitest People*.

"What does that sign mean, Mama?"

Mother stroked her chin. "Well...people here are proud of their black soil because it grows the food we eat."

"What does *Whitest People* mean?"

"Uh..." her voice trailing, "...the White folks here prefer only White people live in their town."

"You mean they don't like Coloreds? Why?"

"Not now!" Mother snarled.

"I don't understand." I sniffed, then bawled uncontrollably.

Mother wrapped me in her arms. "I need you to stop crying. I'm not angry with you; I love you. We'll talk about this later."

I choked back the sobs; and although my tears subsided, I simply couldn't grasp why all the unfamiliar sights, thoughts, and feelings seemed like arrows striking my heart. The train left Greenville and resumed its journey. Mother distracted me by slipping me Dick and Jane. But the day's incidents weighed heavily on my mind.

I closed my book and thought about Cora, our Colored housekeeper, whose comfort I sought whenever I hurt myself or became sick. Besides, Mother and Cora shared coffee together while I played with Cora's children. Although Cora's and her children's skin color was different than mine, they used the bathroom at our house. So I couldn't understand why they couldn't use the same public restrooms as Whites.

The contradiction between what I was experiencing and my personal reality disturbed me. I returned to my book, hoping to take some childlike solace in it. I turned the pages but quickly discovered it contained no Colored children. I screeched, "There are no Colored children in my book!"

"I hadn't noticed." Mother took my book from me. "Let's see."

Bitter tears streamed down my face. "And why are there separate restrooms? Do Whites not like Coloreds? Why?"

My innocent, water-colored world lay shattered in pieces before her. I wanted Mother to erase the day's incidents, erase my confusion, erase my fears, and somehow right my world again. So I watched as she methodically turned the pages in my book. She closed the book and took my hand.

Her carefully orchestrated response was, "You're right. There are no Colored children in your book, and there should be."

"But why aren't there?"

"I suppose the author didn't write the book that way."

"But you told me books are valuable. How could a book be valuable if Coloreds aren't in it?"

"You've asked some grown-up questions and deserve

answers to them all. I'll answer your questions, but you'll never be the same. Are you ready to be more grown up?"

I peered into her eyes and recognized the look on her face – it was the same one I saw when she told me the truth about Santa Claus and gently nudged me out of childhood fantasy into reality. "Yes, I'm ready."

"Today you learned that people are sometimes imperfect and unkind. Imperfection is part of being human – like forgetting to hang up your clothes. The author of your book was imperfect in forgetting to include Colored children. Being unkind, though, is quite different. You saw unkindness today on the restroom sign and also on the sign in Greenville."

"What makes people unkind, Mama?"

"People are unkind for lots of reasons. Mostly, they are unkind because they're afraid."

"So, Whites are unkind to Coloreds because they're afraid of Coloreds?"

"Yes. Some Whites are fearful; but like you, many are not."

"So why do Whites fear Coloreds?"

"Sometimes people fear others who are different. The difference might be skin color, hair color, eye color, place of birth, or even religion. That fear is called "prejudice," and it keeps people from seeing beyond differences."

"Do Coloreds fear Whites, too?"

"Yes, some do. Fear is a choice anyone can make. But remember, you don't have to make that choice."

Mother pulled me into her arms and hugged me; and the train continued traveling through the black lands of East Texas. Although years have passed since my 1959 train journey, its events exposed me to the perils of prejudice and the inhumanity of intolerance. Even though the segregated restrooms have long since disappeared from Union Station, the fear, prejudice, and discord that created them prevails. And the tile mosaic inside Union Station also remains, but its words serve as a constant reminder that peace and strength come not from disharmony but rather come from unity and living together as brothers.

We don't need a melting pot in this country, folks. We need a salad bowl. In a salad bowl, you put in the different things. You want the vegetables - the lettuce, the cucumbers, the onions, the green peppers - to maintain their identity. You appreciate differences.

Jane Elliot

Reflections 3rd Place Winner

Sisters

Lisa Hacker – Santa Fe, TX

They had been lying all along.

How many times had I admired the pictures of the girl with Shirley Temple curls in the photo albums? She was always standing next to a boy with a crew cut who was just a bit taller than her. There were pictures of them standing by a Christmas tree covered in gold tinsel, sitting on banana-seat bicycles, blowing out candles on a cake. She must have been someone important if her pictures were in the album, where black and white snapshots of dead people mingled with school pictures and postcards of pretty places.

But each time I asked who she was, my mother said simply, "Friends of your dad."

Then one day when I was eight and my brother was four, my parents sat us down on our plaid, scratchy sofa and confessed their sin: they had lied to us. The beautiful girl was my sister.

I didn't really understand the idea of dad having another wife before my mom. Years later the ugliness would reveal itself, but for now, the only thing that mattered was that I had a sister. And she was coming to live with us. I remember giving dad an extra long bear hug and kiss before he tucked me in, so excited I could hardly sleep.

The small, unused room upstairs with the dormer windows was transformed into a bedroom with a twin bed and the bulky Amana TV console that didn't work, except for the radio and record player. I imagined us staying up late playing games, listening to music, and picking on my little brother. Our little brother.

The morning she was to come, I looked in the mirror and thought about the two of us – sisters who had different moms but the same dad. We looked nothing alike. Lori was feminine and lovely with immaculately groomed hair, large brown eyes, and a pretty smile. I was a tomboy with stringy, dull hair and teeth that were too big for my third-grade mouth. How I envied the girl in that picture, had envied her for years.

When Lori arrived, she was even prettier than her pictures. I was shocked to see her wearing makeup. She was only twelve, and I had always been told "no makeup 'til high school." First day and she's already breaking rules, I thought.

But I soon learned that my rules and Lori's rules were different.

My sister was quite beautiful and really didn't need that makeup. But those were the days of glittery '70s lip

gloss and green eyeshadow, and she wore hers heavily. I would watch as she painstakingly applied mascara, marveling at the way her eyes were transformed with the layers of black goo.

One day, while my mother was braiding my hair, I asked if I would get to wear makeup when I was twelve, too. She laughed, "No."

Lori also had different rules about clothes. At twelve, she already had her woman's figure, as my mother told her friends. And the clothing that she wore only made that more obvious. Plunging V-necklines and low-riding bell-bottoms drew all the boys' eyes to her as she walked down the halls at school. My neckline had nothing to accentuate, but I knew without asking that the day would never come when I could walk out of the house like that.

I have lots of memories from that year. Lori and I dancing and singing to the radio in her room. "Hot child in the city...running wild and looking pretty." Lori telling my brother that if he didn't scratch her back, he would burn in hell. (She was Catholic and had been to Catholic school, so we believed her.) Lori sneaking out of the house to meet her boyfriend. Lori picking random numbers out of the phone book late at night, then calling people and telling them their son was in jail and they needed to come get him right away.

And then there was the day my mother took us shopping at the drug store, and the police officer followed us to the car. They took Lori into a little room and found makeup in her purse that she had not paid for. She cried and pleaded for my mom not to tell Dad, but I knew she would. Dad got told everything. Lori swore that she had just forgotten to pay, but the officer didn't believe her. Later that night she told me that he had even searched in her privates, but I didn't think that was true.

We had realized by now that sometimes the things Lori told us may not have been as she said they were. The stories about making out with guys at the county fair? Maybe true, maybe not. The story about her stepdad being John Wayne's brother? Hard to believe. And the time she told us the art teacher at school had touched her boobs? I never believed that.

Within a year, Dad sent Lori back to live with her grandmother. I was heartbroken. I watched from the dormer windows in her room as they drove away, her crying hysterically and him staring straight ahead as the van left the gravel driveway.

Over the next several years, things seemed to get worse for her. Now and then we would get a picture in the mail. (I remember one of her in a red and white cheerleading uniform.) But usually what we got was trickled-down gossip. She was smoking cigarettes. She was skipping school. She was sleeping with boys.

I never knew what was true and what was not, but I knew that even if all of those things were true, she was my sister. I missed her and loved her deeply.

When I was in high school, she called one night to talk to Dad. When he got off the phone, he was so upset he had to smoke a joint. "She's marrying a raghead!" he yelled to my mother. Soon a picture came of her all dressed up with a pretty blue veil wrapped around her hair, draping across her shoulders. I wondered when we would get an invite to the wedding.

But then she called and said the wedding was off. She found out he had a harem.

We both got pregnant within a year of each other. The only difference was that my boyfriend put a ring on my finger and married me. Hers beat her up and left.

Our paths have gone in such opposite directions since, and I've always wondered if that was the defining point. Finding herself with a baby that only she wanted, willing to live with any man who would help her raise him. Forty years later, we both have had two more children. One of hers is in jail. Another committed suicide at sixteen.

My children and I have college degrees and happy lives. Lori works as a housekeeper in a hotel.

I feel guilty sometimes for the life I lead. Guilty for the love I got that she didn't. And I still tell her that she is the pretty one.

She doesn't believe me, but it's true.

Advertising with Story Circle Network

As you plan the marketing campaign for your book, writing program, or writing-related workshop or conference, please consider Story Circle as a partner in your promotional efforts. Story Circle provides a unique voice and a wide range of services for women readers and writers. Partnering with us allows you to target your promotion efforts and take advantage of SCN's growing reputation in the international community of women writers. Depending on your budget, you can choose from five packages.

Here's where you can advertise:

StoryCircleBookReviews pages, National and StoryCircleBookReviews e-letters, Combo Ads on the SCRB website AND in the e-letters, Quarterly Story Circle Network Journal, Annual True Words Anthology

For details and submission forms visit:

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

NOTE: SCN dues-paying members receive a 15% discount off of the total advertising amount due.

SCN in the Social Networks

Story Circle Network has many opportunities for women to connect. You can find us on these social networks:

Facebook: We have 1,108 friends! Connect with women from around the globe. Get ideas, share your writing, read blogs, get inspired, or just hang out.

Twitter: We have 572 followers! Quickly find out what members are up to, link to articles and blogs by our members, and more.

Pinterest: We have 272 followers! Follow the Pins to link to StoryCircleBookReviews, Star Bloggers, HerStoriesBlog, One Woman's Day Blog, Online Classes, the Editorial Service, Members in Print, Writing Inspirations, and Writing Tools.

To get to any of these sites, start by going to storycircle.org, then SCN Online. Of course, if you're already a Facebook, Twitter, or Pinterest user, simply find us and follow us to receive updates and notifications as they happen.



We're looking for a few good women: we need several volunteers to help with some ongoing and upcoming projects such as: Sarton Women's Book Award Jurors, Story Circle Contest Judge, Story Circle Facilitators, Book Reviewers.

If you can help us, please send a note to:
storycircle@storycircle.org.

2017 LifeLines Planned for May 5-7

By Joyce Boatright

“Owning your story is the bravest thing you will ever do.” ~Brené Brown.

LifeLines Weekend Retreat



We've got the best date, the perfect place and the most fabulous facilitator. All we need is YOU. Whether you are an aspiring writer or a seasoned one, this is a retreat you don't want to miss.

Story Circle has scheduled the weekend May 5-7, 2017, in beautiful Fredericksburg in the Texas Hill Country with retreat leader Jeanne Guy, author and reflective-writing coach.

Our retreat theme promises to lead us through the weekend and leave with the inspiration and confidence to start (or finish) our memoir, family stories, novel, poetry, or short story. Fredericksburg Inn & Suites is a tranquil respite along Barons Creek, a relaxing haven where we can focus on ourselves. The program is designed so that we can reframe how we see ourselves as writers and come away refreshed, renewed and recommitted to our writing life.

“Coming to Terms with Your Story: Clearing a Path to Your Writing Life”

FRIDAY, May 5

6:30 - 8:00p

Session 1:

The Starting Point — Who Are You? What Do You Want?

8:00p

Wine by the fire pit

SATURDAY, May 6

8:45 - 11:45a

(with a break)

Noon

2:30 - 5:00p

(with a break)

5:00p

7:00 - 8:30p

Sessions 2 & 3:

Finding the Path — Looking at Where You Are and Where You Want to Be

Lunch on your own

Sessions 4 & 5:

Finding Your Focus — Looking at the Writing Life Through a New Lens

Dinner on your own

Session 6:

Finding Your Rita — Hearing and Telling the Right Story About Yourself

8:30p

Wine by the fire pit

SUNDAY, May 7

9:00 - 11:50

Sessions 7 & 8:

Embracing Being a Writer — How Do You Want To Be?

As you can see, Jeanne has planned time in the schedule for us to explore the Fredericksburg known throughout the Lone Star State as the “Heart of the Hill Country.” Fredericksburg is rich with the culture of its German settlers and boasts spectacular art galleries, boutiques, antiques and award-winning Texas wineries. May is Wild Flower Month in Texas, so expect to see acres of bluebonnets, Indian paintbrushes, buttercups, sunflowers, wine cups and more.

Registration fees for the weekend retreat:

SCN Members: \$220

Non-members \$275 (includes a 1-year membership)

Registration does not include your room. Call the Fredericksburg Inn & Suites: 830-997-0202 to make your room reservation. Be sure to mention you're registering for the Story Circle Network LifeLines retreat. Special room rate: \$150/night double occupancy.



Go here for full details, photos, and registration. But hurry—space is limited!

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



Joyce Boatright is our LifeLines coordinator. Her book, *Telling Your Story: A Basic Guide to Memoir Writing*, is available on amazon.com and on her website. She teaches writing at North Harris College in Houston, Texas, and steadily posts on her blog.



An Interview with Sarton Winner Susan Marsh

Wanderer With a Butterfly Net, and a Story That Matters

by Pat Bean

This is the final installment of Pat's series with the 2016 Sarton winners. Read interviews with Jill Kandel in the June issue, and Barbara Stark-Nemon in September's *Journal*.

Susan Marsh, winner of the 2014-15 Sarton Award for her contemporary novel, *War Creek*, has felt all her life that the beautiful and wild world we inhabit is of great importance, both for its own sake and for the psychic well-being it brings to our souls. Perhaps it is because she grew up near wild beaches, woods and mountains.

"My parents liked to car-camp," Susan says, "so we took the old Rambler to parks all over the state, and camped in an army surplus canvas tent. I was drawn to the natural world in part due to this upbringing, and also because of some teachers in high school and college who instilled in me a curiosity about science."

Susan, who was born in Seattle in 1953, received a geology degree in 1976, and then went on to graduate school to get a degree in landscape architecture. After graduation, she went to work for the Forest Service.

"I value community, family and friends and the concept of citizenship in the form of giving back," she says of her decision. Susan, who has over 30 years of experience as a wild lands steward for the Forest Service, admits to both selfish and public-spirited reasons for wanting to work in conservation.

"I sought outdoor work, and I believed in the value of our shared public wildlands where people could get away from the noise and congestion of cities and suburbs ... I chose the Forest Service because I had worked seasonally for the agency during summers between my years of college. I worked in many capacities during my time there, ending with a position of overseeing the recreation and wilderness program for the Bridger-Teton National Forest. The work that was most satisfying was having what influence I could to encourage respectful stewardship of the land we hold in common."

While *War Creek* is Susan's first novel, she has written several non-fiction books that speak of her love of the outdoors and her environmental concerns for the land. These include: *Cache Creek: A Trailside Guide to Jackson Hole's Backyard Wilderness*; *Saving Wyoming's Hoback: The Grassroots Movement that Stopped Natural Gas Development*; *A Hunger for High Country* (a memoir with a mission);

The Wild Wyoming Range (a coffee-table book featuring photographs and essays, coedited with Ronald Chilcote); and *Beyond the Tetons, Targhee Trails* (coauthored with Rebecca Woods).

While these books are mostly about Montana and Wyoming, *War Creek* takes place in the Cascade Mountains of Washington.

"Having grown up in the Pacific Northwest, where I was an avid hiker and backpacker, the North Cascades drew me like no other place. I spent a summer doing an inventory of roadless areas and got to know a number of great places on the east slope of the Cascades. I had wanted to write a story set there for a long time, and it took about as long to figure out what the story was going to be," Susan says.

"I wanted to tie together several elements—a fraught relationship between a father and his grown daughter, the destruction of old ranger stations and fire lookouts that symbolized Forest Service history, and imperiled wildlife and wild land. The setting allowed me to do this in a way that explored the basic themes of understanding, forgiveness and coming to terms with what is lost and cannot be saved."

"When one writes about an outdoor setting, a character can be given some reflective, solo time doing something other than staring out a window," Susan says. She thinks of setting as a strong participant in her story. "A character can be riding a horse or hiking to a high pass, or doing something else interesting ... In reading stories that are not based outdoors, I often find myself wondering—where are we? What time is it? Is it spring or fall?"

Susan also thinks of the grizzly bear in her book as a character. "The bear is an emblem of a quickly vanishing wilderness. A threatened species, it was being considered for reintroduction into North Cascades National Park at the time my story takes place. The bear, like the ranger station scheduled for demolition, is one of the valuable parts of a place in danger of being lost."

The authenticity of the setting in *War Creek* comes from the fact that Susan knew it well.



SARTON WOMEN'S
BOOK AWARD

STORY CIRCLE NETWORK

“It struck me at the time as a perfect wild area, sandwiched as it is between the Glacier Peak and Pasayten Wildernesses and North Cascades National Park. I have spent a fair amount of time in the mountains in that part of the state of Washington.” But she doesn’t know it as intimately as someone who lives in the region, she says. She sees this as positive because it allowed her to make up some places that didn’t exist for her fictional story.

“Though War Creek Ranger Station is made up,” Susan says, “the creek is real. I chose it for the title and main setting for the book because it is wilder than some of the adjacent drainages that have more trails and lakes as destinations, and the name seemed perfect for the relationship between father and daughter.”

The Sarton winner credits the women in her writer’s group as having the greatest influence in helping her understand the elements of craft and storytelling necessary to reach her writing goals.

“They challenged me to try fiction when I was focused on essays – and convinced that I couldn’t possibly write a made-up story. My editor for *War Creek*, Marthine Satris, was also enormously helpful in helping me make that book the best it could be.”

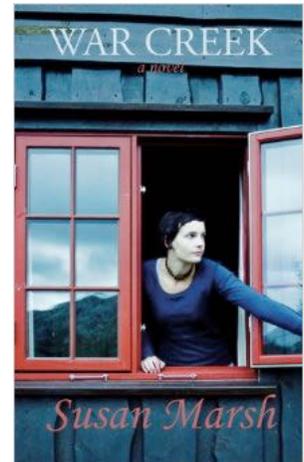
Susan also credits insightful readers, whether writing friends or professionals, for challenging her to dig deeper. She is thankful for other writers “whose work I read with wonder at their ability to turn a phrase, tell a story, and find fresh ways to illuminate age-old themes. “I’m lucky to be retired,” she adds. “While I was working full time I used to get up at 5 and write for an hour or so before getting ready for work. Then I had my evenings to write. This wasn’t ideal in terms of my best-energy schedule, but it was the time I had and I was determined to do what I could. Now I can use the hours between rising and mid-morning, which are my best hours for writing. It is a gift.”

Even so, Susan makes writing a first priority, rather than trying to cram it in among other activities. “I don’t travel, or go to parties, or overschedule my days. I don’t answer the phone between 7 and 10 a.m., and most of my friends know that. I do have a writing space. It’s in an upstairs bedroom, and at the moment, it’s terribly cluttered. But I can close the door and have the quiet space I need to concentrate.”

When asked what advice she would give to other writers, her first suggestion is to read, then she repeated a quote by Judith Barrington: “Just as composers go to concerts and artists visit galleries, writers read. You will learn, in the most enjoyable way, more about style and language from reading good literature than you will ever acquire from workshops and how-to books.”

But Susan also says that each writer has to discover what works for her. “In general, I’d say to take in all the

advice you can. Everyone has a unique set of schedules, rituals, and other behaviors that help bring on the work.” Things that work for her include not waiting around for inspiration, Susan says. “The more consistent you are the less time you’ll spend trying to remember what you were up to, and can reenter the state of mind required to dive into your work and move onward.



“Ask: what you are trying to understand or reveal to yourself? Many authors say they write to understand how they feel or what they think, and I agree with that. If the revelation that comes feels fresh and insightful to the author, it will be so to the reader. If you already know the answer, why ask the question?”

Susan also suggests that it’s helpful to fill notebooks with draft prose, and recommends pencil and recycled paper. “Anything that feels temporary, so you don’t get hung up with having to write your best when you are really a wanderer with a butterfly net trying to grab things out of the air. Ask yourself: Why does this story matter, and why do I care enough about it to write it?”

“Talent is less important than persistence. Revision is your friend, but there is a fine line between not enough and too much. Tune your editor’s ear and have others look at your manuscript – but only after you’ve taken it as far as you can without help. Don’t get discouraged when the right words refuse to come. Writing is hard work.”

Winning the Sarton award, Susan says, has given her the boost she needed to stop questioning the value of her efforts and get back to work on a set-aside novel.

“Several people are reading for me, and I will have a developmental edit by a professional editor before I start sending out. So that will keep me busy for a while. I have the beginnings of another story coming into being, so it’s waiting in the wings for my attention. And I’ve been picking up the poetry notebook lately. Though I don’t consider myself much of a poet, I find that writing and reading poetry helps my prose.”



Pat Bean is a retired, award-winning journalist who traveled around this country for nine years in a small RV with her canine companion, Maggie. She now lives in Tucson, Arizona, where she is putting the finishing touches on her book, *Travels with Maggie*. She is passionate about nature, birds, writing, art, family, reading and her new dog, Pepper.



Circles: The Heart of Story Circle Network

Writing Circles Corner

by Mary Jo Doig, Chair, Writing Circles Work Group

I'd like you to meet Judith Helburn, facilitator of Austin's Sharing our Stories circle.

Judith believes this circle, which was organized in 2000, has the distinction of being Story Circle Network's very first writing circle. Judith started in the newly-born circle as a member; then, when the leader resigned soon after formation and the group was leaderless, she stepped up to become facilitator. While Judith does not consider herself a "fine writer," she has had lots of experience facilitating and leading groups over the years. Sixteen years later, she remains the dedicated leader, an impressive commitment.

The concept of writing circles evolved from our founder, Susan Wittig Albert. *Sharing our Stories* members meet monthly for an hour and a half, opening with the facilitator lighting a tea candle, sometimes reading a poem, and then setting up a miniature altar. The writing prompts often are framed by different aspects of the same concept, such as *Now and Then*, or *Best and Worst*. Beyond that, Judith follows the original writing circle format of two spontaneous writings followed by sharing, laughter, and tears. The group does no critiquing.

Here's what Judith has to share with us about her Circle experience:

The gifts of participating in face-to-face writing circles

Face to face is a strong factor, as body language tells so much. Of course, on-line, these days users might be using Zoom or some form of face to face.

Many of my original members have gone on to facilitate other circles. I feel like a proud parent. We always have a festive lunch in December at which we share usually gently used gifts. I wear a couple of scarves from those gatherings. Once I had the gals work on collages; it was so much fun.

I certainly have become a better writer because of my talented writers. Some of us have been together since the 2000 onset, and the regulars consider ourselves good friends. We certainly know a lot about each other.

How members share stories beyond the writing circle

Probably half of my members have submitted to the *Journal* and/or the annual Anthology, now known as *Real Women Write Anthology*. Some are published writers, but that is not *Sharing Our Stories'* purpose. I do remind members annually that they can only publish in Story

Circle publications if they pay their membership. I think all are members.

Participation ebbs and flows

There has been an ebb and flow. We are now at 8 members. I have announced that they need new inspiration and new leadership. I'm hoping someone will pick it up because I would like to continue as a member. For a few years, we have used certain books to inspire us and it has worked well.

Unforgettable gatherings

One woman, no longer a member, wrote of being raped. It was the first time she had written about it. We have all been surprised by what our friends have revealed about childhood and earlier difficulties. Occasionally, I have brought in poetry or color samples from the paint store to surprise the group for some creative writing. All writing is somewhat biographical.

Sage advice for those thinking about joining or starting a writing circle

- First, I would say that you don't have to be a great writer to either join or facilitate a writing circle. It's the *story* that's so important.
- Don't take yourself too seriously.
- Then, I'd tell you that I have enough stories to fill a book—and plan to trim some stories to fit into about 20 pages for a gift to the family.
- Next I'd tell you that the stories of others will trigger their own memories.
- And, last, I'd tell you it is a wonderful way to meet interesting women and make new friends.

To learn more about SCN's Circles, visit our website at these locations:

- Story Circles around the World (which will soon be updated) at <http://www.storycircle.org/circles.shtml>
- Facilitator's Guide at: <http://www.storycircle.org/facguide.shtml>
- Or, contact Mary Jo Doig, at doig.maryjo@gmail.com

Happy Writing!



Mary Jo Doig joined SCN in 2001. She is a member of the SCN board, a reviewer and editor for StoryCircleBookReviews.org, a Sarton juror, "True Words" editor for 13 years, and facilitator of w-Ecircle 7 for several years. She is near completion of her memoir, *Stitching a Patchwork Life*. Visit her blog: <https://maryjod.wordpress.com/>

Sarton Award Program Grows!

Our Sarton Awards (named for acclaimed memoirist, poet, and novelist May Sarton) is one of SCN's most successful programs. The number of entries we've received is one measure of our growth:

2012: 11 entries
 2013: 22
 2014: 33
 2015: 59
 2016: 114

Another measurement of our growth are the categories in which the awards are granted.

We began with memoir (2012-2014) and added fiction in 2015.

In 2016, we divided fiction into three categories (contemporary, historical, young adult) and added biography.

Memoir continues to be the largest single category (58 this year), with contemporary fiction (28), historical (19), and young adult (7) trailing behind. We had two biography entries in this first year of the category; it will likely be our smallest category for some time to come.

As the number of entries have grown, so too has our stalwart team of first-round jurors. This year, each juror has read and evaluated at least three books; some have taken six and a few have taken nine. We are very grateful for their patient work.



What do jurors gain from the process?

- They get to read (and usually keep) books they might not have chosen for themselves, often discovering new avenues of knowledge and enjoyment.
- They learn what makes a “good” book and what a writer needs to do to connect successfully with readers.
- They gain in reading confidence and writing skills. It is absolutely true that every book we read and consider carefully makes us a better writer.

Our jurors' work is priceless, but from SCN's point of view, we can put a dollar measurement to their contribution of time and expertise. The entry fee this year was \$70. Jurors who read three books helped to generate \$210 for SCN. Jurors who read six: \$420. Jurors who read nine: \$630. We thank them for their contributions!

The program is growing, and we **need more jurors!** We would like to double (at least!) the size of our jury for next year. If you enjoy reading and consider yourself a reader of “average” skills, we would love to have you on our team.

We've created a web page that outlines the process. There's an application form there, as well: http://www.storycircle.org/members/sarton_juror_application.php Please take a look.

Please volunteer to help SCN meet the growing demand of this vitally important program!



Thank You to all Our Sarton Award Jurors

Mary Jo Doig
 Lynn Goodwin
 Diane Stanton
 Sherry Wachter
 Joyce Boatright
 Lynn Bojinoff
 Mary Jarvis
 Pat LaPointe
 Mary Devries

Paula Stallings Yost
 Judy Alter
 Linda Marshall
 Anita Lock
 Susan Schoch
 Susan Morrison
 Judy M. Miller
 Sallie Moffitt
 Juliana Lightle

Jeanne Guy
 Pat Bean
 Jo Virgil
 Carol Ziel
 Lee Ambrose
 Penny Appleby
 Susan Wittig Albert
 Jude Whelley
 Marianne Waller

Judy Plazyk
 Nancilynn Saylor
 Lynn Walters
 Susan Davenport
 Sally Nielsen
 Barbara Heming
 Kathleen Paul
 Merimee Moffitt
 Debra Dolan

“Reading is the magic key to writing. The best writers are also (and always) the very best readers.”—Susan Wittig Albert



Lauren Ross



Maya Lazarus

Online Classes: Writing through the Lens of Race

by Lauren Ross and Maya Lazarus

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

Race plays a big part in our lives in subtle and blatant ways. We wish that it were not so. We wish that our country lived up to its original ideals of equality and justice for all. We wish there were more women of color in our Story Circles and in our organization. What a benefit that would add to our relationships and our writing!

These thoughts gnawed at us when we met face-to-face for the first time at the 2016 StoryCircle Writing Conference last April. What could we do to get more diversity into our StoryCircle? After some discussion we decided on an unusual path. Since StoryCircle women are mostly white, why not offer a course to explore racism and white privilege using some writing tools and techniques, along with the many resources available on the internet?

As a result, this March, 2017, we will offer a StoryCircle self-discovery course called, *Writing through the Lens of Race*. Here is the class description:

Our success as life writers depends on an ability to dig into the difficult material. For most of us, race is a difficult subject because we have been taught not to think about it, talk about it, or understand the role it plays in our lives. During six weeks of self-discovery we will read, think, and write about racism. We will watch videos, read articles, and share responses to thought-provoking questions. This class is for writers at every level interested in writing and experiencing their worlds courageously.

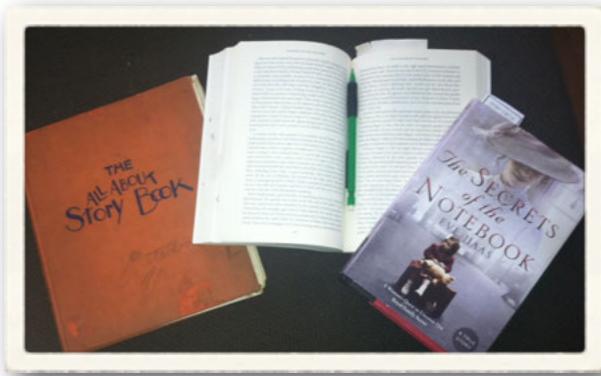
We will begin with an exploration of what racism and white supremacy means and how our understanding of racism affects the way we operate in the world. Students will read and respond to relevant readings. Then we will explore our ancestral stories and, after that, our personal stories related to race and racism. We'll go on to look at what it means to be white in our present society and how racism plays a role in our daily lives that we may not even be aware of. Finally, the journey forward—what will our legacy be?

That is the work we will wrestle with in *Writing through the Lens of Race*. We will dig for our deep humanity; uncover and stare into the face of what is usually invisible to us. Dive into an honest study of how the places we've come from shape the world we interact with every day. By writing through the lens of race, we will know more truly who we are and tell more authentic stories about our lives. Will you join us?

Note: This course is based upon and honors the anti-racist analysis and work of the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, European Dissent, Paul Kivel, Ann Braden, and other courageous pioneers for racial justice.



Len Leatherwood, Program Coordinator for SCN's Online Classes, has been teaching writing privately to students in Beverly Hills for the past fifteen years. She has received numerous state and national teaching awards from the Scholastic Artists and Writers Awards, the oldest and most prestigious writing competition in the U.S. She is a daily blogger at 20 Minutes a Day, found at lenleatherwood.wordpress.com, as well as a published writer of "flash" fiction/memoir with pieces appearing in *flashquake*, *longstoryshort*, *All Things Girls*, SCN's *True Words Anthology*, *Provo Canyon Review*, as well as *A Cup of Comfort Cookbook*, currently available on Amazon. She was a nominee for a Pushcart prize, the best of the small presses, in 2015.



StoryCircleBookReviews.org
Review by Susan J. Tweit

The first thing I knew about Grandpa was that he told amazing stories. Stories about his family, his work, and his life: they just poured out of him.

Not that this was immediately apparent: Grandpa was a quiet man, absorbed by his own pursuits. He was a great reader. He read Ellery Queen, Zane Gray, and actually became a member of the Harlequin Romance Book Club - the only grandfather I knew who did this. And he shared his books, sneaking them to us like the contraband they were, trusting us to keep them safe until we returned them.

Sherry Wachter's grandfather, William John Zimmerman, known to the men he worked with at the Waukesha Cement Company as "Zimmy," and to others as simply Bill, was an ordinary working man, one of a passel of kids born to an immigrant German farm family in the Midwest. His life might never have made it into a book, except for his ability to spin stories that captivated at least one of his grandkids, offering her a portal into a world beyond her own difficult fundamentalist childhood.

The stories Wachter tells in this slim volume, beautifully illustrated with her art and hand-colored family photos, range from the innocent—the time when young Bill put a frog in the bucket of spring water he and a girl student fetched to refill the cooler at their one-roomed schoolhouse—to the dark, like the terrible trucking accident when a cattle truck slid into Zimmy's semi during a blizzard and he was thrown free, only to be crushed by his truck and the concrete drain pipes he was hauling, and then, lying "in a pool of red-stained, melting snow" trampled by the terrified cattle.

Wachter learns that "the magic lay not in Grandpa's experiences, but in him... Grandpa's greatest gift was his understanding that while life happens to us, we can shape our stories—and we can make them magic."

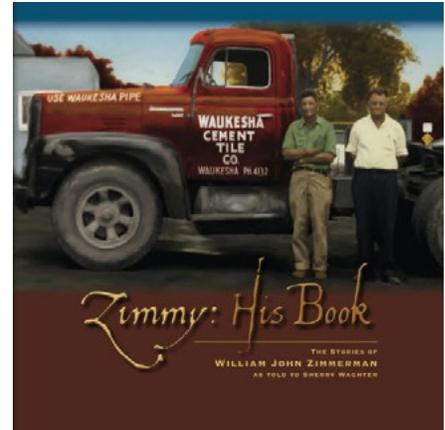
Sherry Wachter is a writer, editor, designer, illustrator, and college writing teacher. She has a son in college and two formerly feral cats who love their humans and detest each other. She has written three memoirs, two novels, a collection of short stories, and a number of children's books, including *The Very Good Dog*.

SCN's Book Reviews

Featured Review:

Zimmy: His Book

by Sherry Wachter



That kind of realization is what lifts ordinary family tales into the realm of memoir. It is what we learn from those stories that makes them something worth sharing with the wider world, something universal, offering a grain of truth about life and living that widens our perspective.

Wachter tells Zimmy's stories and some of her own (including a very difficult one about family sexual abuse), making this a thoughtful and insightful personal memoir as well as a tribute to her grandfather. These stories read like a window into the human soul, into our potential to rise above the worst and, as Wachter writes, make magic of our lives. Magic that outlasts us, and inspires others to become the best people they can be.

Reviewer Susan J. Tweit is herself the author of 17 books. You can find a title list and read her blog at www.SusanJTweit.com.

Our reviewers are important people in the lives of authors and publishers, but it works both ways. You can build your publication portfolio, your writing skills, and your library (think free books) by joining our review team. Email bookreviews@storycirclebookreviews.org for details.



From the Blogs:

One Woman's Day



by Linda Hoye

Since its inception in 2011, our One Woman's Day blog has grown into a rich tapestry. Threads of humor, grief, celebration, and just about every other thing you can imagine, connect our stories and our lives. We're honoured to share stories about the days of our lives with a readership from around the world. Learn more, and find out how you can contribute, at: <http://onewomansday.wordpress.com/about/>

Recently we were pleased to publish a selection by Lisa Hacker titled "When I Heard Bill Had Passed Away".

It never failed.

If I had missed church the previous week, I knew that during greeting time he would sneak up on me. Between handshakes and hugs, he would just suddenly appear. Some might say it was his height that made it easier for him to slip between folks, but I think it was just his sneaky nature.

"Hello, I'm Bill Self. Nice to meet you."

It was his way of saying, "Where were you? You were missed."

At work, he often did the same thing. I would look up and he would just be there, in the doorway, with that precocious smirk on his face. Sometimes he would get a cup of coffee. Sometimes he would rant at some thing or another that had gotten under his skin. But more often than thought, he came, in his own words, "Just to harass you."

If you needed him, he was there without question or complaint. Whether it was a trip to the airport or a malfunctioning electrical outlet, Bill Self was your man. He was as solid as granite and as sure as the sun.

I remember one evening as we chatted in his backyard,

getting a tour of the new chicken coup he had built, I spotted a skunk moseying around the side of his garage. Without saying a word, he stealthily slipped into the house and returned with a shotgun. I won't lie. When he lifted that gun to his shoulder, there was a bit of Elmer Fudd in him. Needless to say, the skunk didn't bother Bill Self after that.

He was a man who didn't accept BS and didn't serve it. You got the truth whether you wanted it or not, and you were always better for it. He had a heart that melted like a Hershey's Kiss when he spoke of his beloved grandchildren, and he had a love for his wife that inspired every married couple who knew him. They both looked at each other with stars in their eyes.

He told me more times than I could count that Bev was the best thing that ever happened to him, and he didn't know how she put up with him. But the truth was that 'putting up' with Bill was a privilege of the highest honor.

He was, perhaps, the best thing that ever happened to us all.

Lisa is a community college writing center supervisor, an adjunct writing instructor at a local university, and a freelance writer. She lives in Santa Fe, Texas, and enjoys traveling and crochet. She looks forward to the day when she can live in a little house in the woods, in the middle of nowhere. Her website is www.writingthequeensenglish.com.

Looking for Lady Writers...Looking for YOU!

Every woman has a powerful story to tell. Join our Queen's Quillers Ladies Writing Circle [facilitated by Lisa Hacker] as we meet each month to write, share our writing, and encourage each other. If you are in the Houston or Galveston area, you will find us easily accessible. We meet at The Coffee Connection in Texas City the fourth Friday of the month, from 1-3 pm. Email Lisa at writingthequeensenglish@gmail.com for more info.



More From the Blogs:

And You Thought You Were Finished: The Revision Process

by Madeline Sharples

SCN's "Telling Herstories" blog, (<https://storycirlenetwork.wordpress.com/>) began in 2012. It is written by women writers and teachers who want to share their passion for women's stories. Our topics include the art, craft, and publication of women's memoir, fiction, biography, poetry, drama, and more. If you're a writer, teacher, or coach who would like to be published at "HerStories," please email herstories@storycircle.org. We look forward to getting to know you!

Here's a recent post from Madeline Sharples we'd like to share:

My publisher advised me to revise the second half of my memoir, *Leaving the Hall Light On*, almost entirely when she decided to publish my book. To that end I used many of the steps I learned while working as a writer-editor-manager of proposals to the U.S. Government to revise my book. Here is my revision process.

1. Plan before doing. I created a revision plan based on notes from my publisher and advice from my first reader. Then I got my publisher's buy-in.

2. Read before revising. Since I hadn't looked at my draft for almost two years, I read it front to back with my revision plan in hand. I marked up a hard copy with a red pen and made no electronic changes until I was through. Wow! did I find lots of things to edit, including typos, awkward sentences, repetition, and inconsistencies. I also noted where I needed to insert new material, move things around, and update.

3. Use storyboards. I set up foam storyboards along the hallway next to my office and pinned up a printed copy of each chapter as I electronically finished incorporating my first round of edits. Storyboarding allowed me see the book all at once and better spot redundancies, inconsistencies, places that needed cutting, moving, and expanding, and where each chapter best belonged. I highlighted problem areas in yellow so I could see text I needed to revisit again.

4. Get others to review. After I completed these edits and reworked the yellow-highlighted portions, I gave three

willing writer friends an electronic copy. One person did a line-by-line edit. He also found punctuation and sentence structure problems. Another friend looked at the content for repetition, inconsistencies, and writing accuracy. And the person who originally helped me create my revision plan read it again for organization problems. She made suggestions about where to move, eliminate, or combine material.

5. Stay in control. However, I made the final decisions about whether to take my editor's notes or not. Even my publisher, said, "... Others can only offer advice. Only you can write this book." So I reviewed each comment and only fixed what I thought relevant.

6. Stay on schedule. Because I was reliant on other people's inputs, I created a tight schedule. I allocated five months to complete everything, including incorporating my revisions and reviewer's comments, merging the finished chapters into one document, gathering photos for the cover and body of the book, getting permissions to use quotes from other authors, and writing dust jacket copy.

7. Know when you're finished. After incorporating review comments, I still felt the needed to make a few changes, add a few words, and edit a little more. Finally when I didn't have any more changes or adds or deletes or reorganization ideas left in me, when my mind stopped living and breathing the book every waking moment of every day, and when I felt comfortable letting it go, I knew I was really finished.

About Madeline Sharples: I've worked most of my professional life as a technical writer, grant writer, and proposal process manager and began writing poetry, essays, and creative non-fiction when my oldest son, Paul, was diagnosed as manic depressive. I continued writing as a way to heal since his death by suicide in 1999. My memoir, *Leaving the Hall Light On*, first released on Mother's Day 2011 in hard cover, is about living with my son's bipolar disorder and surviving his suicide. My publisher, Dream of Things, launched a paperback edition in July 2012 and an eBook in August 2012.

I also co-edited Volumes 1 and 2 of *The Great American Poetry Show*, a poetry anthology, and wrote the poems for two books of photography, *The Emerging Goddess* and *Besides* having many poems published in print and online magazines, I write regularly for *Naturally Savvy*, and occasionally for *PsychAlive*, *Open to Hope*, and *Journeys Through Grief* and *The Huffington Post*.



True Words from Real Women

A selection of short pieces of lifewriting by our members, edited by Jo Virgil. 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 32 (the back page). This month's topic is Tall Tales and Little Lies.

Mother-isms

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e-circle 3, e-circle 4, e-circle 6

My mother told me “things”
I think she thought would help
when I was a kid.
Oh you know the kinds of things –
I called them
Mother-isms
You have a sassy mouth
You talk too much
You are just boy crazy
Turn that radio down or you’ll go deaf
You are lying, I can see it in your eyes
You are so hard-headed!
Quit biting your fingernails,
they’ll get stuck in your appendix!
D is for dumbbell –
That’s what you are!
How can you hope to be a nurse, and wear white,
Your clothes are always a mess!
Get your hair out of your eyes
Get your hair out of your mouth
You look better in short hair!
When bald becomes fashionable for girls
you’ll be the first one on the block to try it!
Don’t slump like that – you’ll ruin your back
Those heels are way too tall, you’ll fall and hurt yourself
Look where you are going – you are so clumsy!
Stop looking at the ground when you walk
or you will fall again!
I hope someday you have kids
and they grow up just like you.

Amsterdam

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Think Amsterdam: I see a barge going up the canal and we head off to the local village. Walking down the sidewalk, we stop as a small drawbridge is raised and a one-person boat glides through. The men in front of us clog along in their wooden shoes but what I notice is the hopscotch drawn with chalk on the sidewalk; it is just like the one I played on as a child.

Fields are green and the cows seem to be wading in water over their hoofs. Lines and lines of water crisscross the massive green fields, each with a huge windmill at the end to take water from the canal and dump on the fields. The windmills turn ever so slowly in the wind and make a creaky sound that vibrates in the ears. What do you do with all that milk from the dairy cows? You make cheese. Cheese comes in every variety and taste. A person could get full letting the yellow globs dissolve in the mouth and slip down the throat.

The only way to see the town is by boat. Houses are built with water frontage; the street lies along the canal with houses going up and back. We spotted a piano being hoisted up using a block and tackle attached to a hook in the top of the roof. All the space under the bridges are covered with bicycles. As we pass Ann Franks’ home, the lines are so long we opt to tour an art gallery: Vermeer, Rubens, Van Gogh, Rembrandt.

Diamonds are one of Holland’s exports, and we toured the diamond exchange. Seeming to serve as a back drop for diamonds, across the street was a row of shops with haute couture fashion displayed in the windows. We had just enough time to hit the flower market. Row upon row of barges hugged the wharf, displaying a spectrum of flowers to boggle the mind. I did manage to grab a Danish with a cup of tea. I finished the night by jumping into the waist-high bed; I stretched and sank into the bed, pulled up the down covers and ...

Shared Sister Secrets and Tiny Lies

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My one Sis. We merely exchanged glances and the unbroken “Sister Secret” pact activated.

One dog-day of summer on the farm, Sis and I played the outdoor game of Swinging Statue. One person held another by the hand, swinging her around, then letting go. The other(s) had to guess what the “frozen statue” was. Ballerina? Tightrope-balancing pole walker?

My turn came to be swung; Carolyn was the swinger. During the dizzying swing release, my shoulder hit the long, above-ground water well pipe hard. Since Mama’s frequent wrath frightened us, Carolyn shot me the “Sister Secret” look, and I shook the pain off.

When I stumbled inside, my shoulder hung at a rakish angle.

Mama took one look at me and said, “What’s wrong with your arm?”

“Oh, I was trying to stand on my head and fell over. I bumped it on the well water pipe.”

Mama lifted my arm. I yelped. Carolyn shot me a stronger pact look, but I couldn’t suppress the genuine pain.

“If I’ve told you girls once, I’ve told you a hundred times not to play around that pipe. Why don’t you ever listen?” Mama’s usual pound-of-flesh harangue began.

“Get in the car. I’ll go call Dr. Fitch,” Mama sighed. I was an accident-prone child, and the drive to the doctor, which we made often, was 30 miles away, and rural dairymen didn’t make much money.

X-rays revealed a broken collar bone. Sis and I kept our secret for over 50 years! By then, Mama had mellowed with age. During a family meal and confessions of small lies, we ‘fessed up.

“You girls!” Mama countered. “I always thought you were full of prunes with that story.”

Sis and I exchanged looks. We knew Mama was “full of prunes” this time. We had totally gotten away with our secret lie, or she would have grilled us more.

That day: Sisters-1, Mama-0.

Chasing Memories

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As I grow old, the equilibrium between past, present, and future is tilting dangerously, and the past is accumulating power. People I thought I forgot appear in my memory as do old stories. So, I give up and grant myself the permission to delve into the past, only to encounter a peculiar group of memories – the ones that never happened.

Memories of things that never happened are unpredictable and elusive, like soap bubbles or colorful butterflies. I chase them, intrigued by the colors, but when I finally pin them down, I realize how they fooled me all along into a false quest. Still, I will do it again and again; they are enchanting even if I know now that the stories they tell me are nothing but a lie.

How I was born in the midst of a massive snowstorm, the biggest the country ever had. Lie.

How I was named after my maternal grandmother, who died when I was three years old. Lie, lie, and never happened.

How my grandfather on my mother’s side did not have any siblings. A quick research revealed at least four.

Consumed by a sense of mystery and the excitement of tracking the story lines and pointing at the inaccuracies, I feel like a detective. Did it happen? Maybe not? Perhaps to someone else? The endless possibilities make me breathless and giddy. Like that time I was sure I found my third cousin twice-removed and was sure that he was the owner of a beautiful mansion on the other side of the Danube, in Budapest, but then, all images shattered when I realized that it was another man with an identical name.

Chasing memories is like a treasure hunt, but often without a map. I try to connect the lines between scattered bits of information, but more often than not I end up with a handful of stones that shine like diamonds but crash into nothing but ash.

“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 that they might do because of it, because of your words. That is your role, your gift.”

— Erin Morgenstern, *The Night Circus*

Get Off the Plane!

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The tale I'm about to tell you might seem far-fetched, but you would be wise to heed the warning.

On a trip to the Grand Canyon, we decided to spend a few days in Sedona and Flagstaff, Arizona, even though we knew these were "hotspots" for extraterrestrial sightings. Our connecting flight to Flagstaff was at the other end of the Phoenix terminal, giving us no time to check out the plane or crew before we hurdled into our seats just before takeoff. It was a small plane, and looking out the window I could see that the wheels were housed in some sort of pods. The shadow-shape of the cabin on the tarmac was also pod-shaped. Strange.

The flight attendant's voice was high-pitched and more mechanical than human. She looked surprisingly old for a stewardess, and her skin was ashen. Her colorless hair, which may once have been swept back into a neat chignon, had escaped confinement and swirled like a vortex around her head.

It was clear to me that the flight attendant was an alien, who had been living on this strange pod-plane for many years. Obviously, this commuter plane was really a front for extra-terrestrial beings, taking selected flights to their Mother Ship. Where would we be taken? Flagstaff, or somewhere else?

The pod-plane, with its pod-crew and captive passengers, finally began to taxi on the tarmac, gained speed and took off like a regular plane. The man sitting in the center of our bench seat had folded his hands prayer-like and began chanting, "I don't like to fly. I don't like to fly."

Great! Just great! We're doomed!

By some miracle we were spared and arrived in Flagstaff an hour later. The strange-looking flight attendant chirped her farewells and thanked us for flying with them. Thank *you*, Miss Alien, for not choosing to take us to your Mother Ship!

If you choose to make this same trip and notice the flight crew seems a little unearthly, I suggest you get off the plane immediately. You might not be as lucky as we were!

Tiptoe Through the Tulips

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I read the note Ron slipped me during class: "Skipping school; going to record store to see Tiny Tim. You wanna go?" Although I wasn't a Tiny Tim fan, I had a larger-than-life crush on Ron and would've traveled to the moon with him if he'd asked. So, without thinking I scribbled: "When? Where?" and slid the note back to him. He replied: "Front parking lot. 10:15."

So, at precisely 10:15, I sneaked out of school, clambered into Ron's Volkswagen Beetle, and sandwiched myself amongst five other co-conspirators. Ron turned the key in the ignition, floor boarded the gas pedal, and whizzed undetected out of the parking lot. Moments later we arrived at the local record store, scrambled out of Ron's car, and mingled with a throng of other teenagers who, like us, had skipped school, all in the hopes of catching a glimpse of Tiny Tim and his famed ukulele.

"There he is!" shouted one crazed groupie. The crowd pushed forward, knocking over displays and attracting the attention of the local news media whose cameras were rolling. Tiny paraded through the store much like the Pied Piper of Hamelin singing "Tiptoe Through the Tulips" in his high falsetto/vibrato voice. We marched behind him as he led us to the front of the store where we bought autographed copies of his latest album.

Once the mayhem subsided, we rushed back to school arriving just in time for our afternoon classes. After school, I walked home as usual. I nonchalantly strolled past Mother, retreated into my bedroom, and listened to my ill-gotten copy of Tiny's album, all the while believing that Mother was none the wiser.

But during dinner Mother inquired, "Anything unusual happen to you today?"

"No." I fingered my necklace and then straight out lied. "Just an ordinary day."

"Hmmm ..." Mother laid down her fork. "Then can you explain to me why I saw you on this evening's news?"

"The news?" I choked on my mashed potatoes.

"Yes, young lady! News cameras captured you with your friends at the record store this morning. You're grounded for a month!"

Moral: Never lie to Mother.

Tall Tales and Little Lies

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e-circle 6, e-circle 10

She was 35 years old and her family was almost grown. Her doctor suggested that she find a job and get away from the house a few hours a day if she wanted to save her sanity. Her husband was adamant – his wife would not work outside the home.

She went against her husband's wishes and found a job, but she made every effort to kept the job separate from her personal life. At work, her office held no hint or photos of a family, friend, or hobby. She neither made nor accepted personal phone calls during her work hours. And so her life became a series of tall tales and little lies.

Her husband instructed her that when they were in the company of family and friends, she was never to discuss her job or the night school classes that she was taking. He was embarrassed by her activities and there was no need for people to think he couldn't or didn't support his family.

At home her job was seldom mentioned, and if it was, she maintained the illusion that she worked exclusively with women – the equivalent of a convent. Her family and co-workers never met during the first years she worked.

How long was it before she outgrew the need to please her husband at all costs? In time, through education and exposure to the world of adults, she learned that she had a personal identity and that her needs were just as important as his. At last he was given the opportunity to accept her in her new role, or he could leave and be happy alone. Somehow an understanding was reached and she was happy and successful both in her career and marriage. There is even the possibility that he would admit that his lifestyle improved with the increased income.

Lies My Mother Told Me

Abby November
San Diego CA

“When you eat in the dark while standing, you don't gain weight.”

“Always spoil your husband or a skinny bitch will steal him.”

“Don't trust anyone with a flat tush.”

These words resonated with me and my sisters for decades. One sister stayed with an abusive man for decades, because “better a bad marriage than no marriage!”

My younger sister and I didn't drink all Mom's Kool-Aid, but we did believe that a fat woman is not selfish and that she always puts the needs of family before her own. Hence, the not trusting a flat tush.

Years of life experience, therapy, and leaving Mom's gravitational pull enabled us to gain a clearer insight on the Truth. The myths Mom believed were her own insecurities, fears, and low self-esteem – a fear of the world in general, and losing her “trophy” (in her mind) husband specifically. Dad was present physically, but not emotionally. He was more involved with his hobbies du jour than even his job or kids. He was often “between jobs” and Mom was the main provider.

After 50 years of living and loving all types of tushes, I learned that one judges another by the content of their soul and heart, not by the contour of their tush.

Scarface

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Living on a country road sometimes offers adventures unimaginable. Walking west down the dirt road with our dog, I am always glancing for oncoming cars and trucks or prairie birds gracing the low skies. Lucy, our blue healer mix, runs pell-mell every which direction with her nose to the ground. I become her protector from traffic while she chases field mice, birds, cows, horses, and squirrels.

Not far down the dirt road away from the tree line we spotted a squirrel skittering around. As we walked closer, I noticed the horses in the field were mesmerized by the critter making her way hither and yon on their grazing turf. As the horses ambled closer on two sides, Lucy and I closed in from the roadside leaving only high prairie grass for escape. The nearest telephone pole stood a short dash down the road. Just then the squirrel panicked. Her short attempts at escape from the now-barking dog near the electric fence and the formidable horses took her nowhere. Then suddenly she noticed two tan legs that must have looked like saplings. In an instant, she crossed the bar ditch and scrambled up my left leg.

When my eyes met hers, a frightened scream and frantic leap erupted from my rigid body. The squirrel flew from my waist to midair and down. In passing, she took a swipe at Lucy's barking nose. With blood now trickling down my leg and dripping from the dog's nose, the distraction gave the squirrel a chance to run the fence line and up the nearest telephone pole.

From the top of the pole she had the nerve to chatter and spit on us as we limped by. By the time we wiped our bloody wounds with last year's Kleenex in my pocket and walked on home, any signs and thoughts of frustrations or worldly issues were far from my mind.

We both healed with only a few scratches to show of our encounter, but since that day we now call our dog “Scarface.”

Motorboat Fellers

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My husband Pa and I are sailors, the kind of people that the big motorboat fellers love to hate. Not only are we sailors, our boat is five times smaller than the big motorboats that mosey up and down Maryland's Chesapeake Bay on the weekends. I am also a fisher lady who loves to knit. As we troll, Pa keeps his eye on the sails and the wind and the big guys, while I keep my eye on the nodding of the fishing pole while I hold my knitting needles.

Weekend after weekend, we sail, often taunted by the big boats.

"Oh, how they wish we would go away," I say. Their noise, their arrogance, is so annoying. They don't want us in their paths. I also think they don't want us to catch any of *their* fish.

This went on for several summers. Then one year – Bam. Splash. My knitting needles went flying into the water. My fishing pole bobbed up and down with furor. Pa loosened the sails. I started reeling in my catch. Soon I saw its tail, then its head. Several of the big boats came to watch me reel in the fish. Then more boats came in close. I dropped my line again – another hook. Soon three fish were flopping in the well of our boat.

We heard the big boat horns honking. Then: "You did it lady!"

We sailed into the marina. Our three fish each weighed over 13 pounds. They were big enough to earn a signed certificate from our soon-to-be jailed governor. We shared two of the fish with neighbors. Ours, we stuffed with Maryland crab and steamed in white wine.

Several weeks later, as we were getting onboard our boat at the marina, I saw a brown bag hooked on the hatch. When I opened it, there it was – my knitting. Though damp, it was only missing one needle. A note was attached: "We saw this hooked on a mooring. We knew it belong to you."

You know, I came to love those motorboat fellers.

Christmas 1982

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It was the last time I spent Christmas with my family and, although it was not an intentional coping strategy, I smoked dope to get through it. There were beautifully painted t-shirts distributed upon arrival from Uncle Dee that said "Dolan-Schiller Family Reunion."

At 24 years of age, I felt like I had entered a David Lynch movie. On the surface, it all looked so loving and happy. The house, as always, was beautifully decorated, and mother beamed. Nevertheless, all that is never said or acknowledged hung in the festivity like a very dark cloud following me in each conversation and every room. Without notice, I had interrupted my extended traveling journey because I felt lonely, so I came home for the holidays. The year before, I had been in New Zealand and previously in Italy. The feeling of being companionless was not eradicated with this decision; it was compounded to a deeper despair and utter sadness that I had not always experienced with the family. I had fooled myself into believing that it would be different this time because I wanted it to be so. I absolutely did not belong in this house with these people; I decided to spend most of the visit in the basement laundry room because that was where I was least likely to be found. Nancy eventually ratted me out, but that wasn't until others had a puff or two and shared some stories.

December has been a time of inner conflict since I was young. I love the lights with the dusting of snow, cards, pressies and carols, and celebrations surrounding my Sagittarian birth; however, I can never erase the memory of my step-father molesting me under the pines in 1969 while drunk.

I never wanted all those presents showered upon me during that surprise visit, nor did I want to endure his company simply to spend time with my mother and beloved siblings. I wanted the presence of a mother who was a lioness with her cub. That year I wanted her to finally take a stand, no longer wanting to hear that I am the only thing they fight about.

Drake's Sonnet

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Silver-white tendrils frame the toddler face of my son as he rests against my side. The ceiling fan hums in the rhythmic pace of its pattern. He's listening, eyes wide in ponder as I speak letters into the words of his favorite fable. Pressing one soft finger to his pink lips, a new look of wonder fills his face. Then he leans in and whispers, "Hey! Am I the only one who hears those drums?" Yet the room is still. I listen closely for the sound of the pum-pum-pum, wondering if it is real. He angles an ear towards the left – his heart. A smile spreads quickly. "Oh! There they are!"

She Was More Than Glam and Glitz

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As a young girl growing up in the '50s, I was fascinated by Hollywood's glamorous and glitzy lifestyle. Popular actresses such as Jane Russell, Ava Gardner, and Rita Hayworth captivated me with their mink stoles, high-heeled shoes, Dior gowns, and overstated jewelry. But of all the women I saw both on-screen and off, my Aunt Betty was the most glamorous woman I knew.

Whenever she strolled into a room, I couldn't help but notice how her warm, chestnut-colored hair captured the light just right. And her long, gorgeous eyelashes trimmed the gentlest, kindest pair of coffee-brown eyes – eyes that always held a tiny warmth within them and sparkled with bliss whenever she smiled. Her lips, glistening with meticulously applied cherry red lipstick, were flawlessly sculpted, while her face, slightly lighter than ivory, was rouged and florid just like Jane Russell's.

Aunt Betty frequently wore ostentatious earrings that clung to her earlobes and sparkled like tiny chandeliers made of Austrian crystals; whenever she turned her head in any direction, the earrings twinkled like stars scattered across the night sky. And draped across her shoulders was her favorite mink stole – a dark, glossy fur that reminded me of the high-fashion pieces associated with Hollywood's glamour and glitz.

And, yes, Aunt Betty was every bit as glamorous, graceful, and seductive as Ava Gardner; yet, beneath that fashionable mink stole and those glistening earrings was the most strikingly independent woman I knew. In fact, she was the only single woman I knew, and she was the only woman I knew who fashioned a career at a time when a woman's only life choice was motherhood. Aunt Betty both inspired and influenced me, for just being in her company made me feel as if I, too, could one day be both a glamorous yet strong, independent woman.

"This is our story to tell. You'd think for all the reading I do, I would have thought about this before, but I haven't. I've never once thought about the interpretative, the story telling aspect of life, of my life. I always felt like I was in a story, yes, but not like I was the author of it, or like I had any say in its telling whatsoever."

— Jandy Nelson, *The Sky Is Everywhere*

In the Office

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I don't want to be here.

He's reading my paperwork, and I know what he's thinking. I know that what I have written is shocking. Even I could not believe the totality of my answers as my shaking hands filled in bubbles and provided descriptions and explanations, certain that he had never met this level of crazy. He glances at my hands twisting in my lap, the repetitive picking at my thumbnail.

He makes a note.

It has been 15 years since I had been in a psychiatrist's office, and I had believed that I would never have to endure that again. The feeling of judgment, the unease of having my every thought put under the analytical microscope. The humiliation of sharing every compulsive thought that had plagued me for months.

I'm not even going to tell you everything.

I don't know how it snuck up on me like this. Well, it didn't really sneak. More like infested, infiltrated. That is how it feels when you realize that your thoughts are not quite right, your actions are not healthy. You just aren't *you* anymore, and you have to stop lying to yourself.

I started lying to myself about a year ago, when I first recognized that something was changing inside of me. I have never forgotten my battle with mental illness, and I've always felt a sense of control in that I've been able to nip the episodes before they can fester, before they can explode. So when I began to feel sick again, I convinced myself it was situational. I blamed it on the stress of grading papers, my husband's extended traveling, the long-awaited promotion at work that kept getting promised but never came to fruition.

But the day came when the lies became bigger. I began hiding certain behaviors and engaging in dangerous habits, and even as I ventured into these destructive places, I made excuses for myself. When you are alone and you isolate yourself from friends and family, it becomes easy to believe those lies.

Today, the lies are coming to the light.

I'm not myself anymore.

My Cruellest Little Lie

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e-circle 3, e-circle 4, e-circle 6

He was thoughtful &
romantic;
He brought me purple flowers and told
me I was beautiful.
He loved to travel & even
took me to see my favorite team, the Cubs,
play baseball, all the way to Houston.
He loved holding hands,
& he liked going to the movies.
I overlooked his major flaws –
He thought I had none.
When he got down on one knee
Holding purple flowers
& said he wanted to be
my “‘til death do us part,”
he got tears in his eyes.
When he & again dropped to one knee
in front of hundreds of people
in the jewelry store
at the mall
He said, “I love you,” & as he slipped the
pretty solitaire on my finger,
I said, “I love you, too.”

Kosher Trash

Abby November
San Diego CA

When I grew up
There was no grass, flowers, or trees.
Brick and concrete
were my street
But another world only a bus away was
Prospect Park, with grass, flowers, and lake,
Ducks, squirrels and boats to take.
Where I grew up
Brick and concrete
Trolley car rumbles down the street
Buses billowing smoke down the street
There are no trees on my street
When I grew up,
Hand-down clothes were a treat, one pair of shoes a year.
Feet, make them last.
When I grew up
We played stoop ball, hide and seek
on our brick and concrete street
Big sister and I shared a bed.
Family of 8, we shared a toilet
Yet I never thought we were poor
On our street of brick and concrete

Underarm Dingle-Dangle

Madeline Sharples
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HerStories Circle

Semi-inflated balloons
hang under my upper arms.
My friend June used to call this
flapping-in-the-wind phenomena
kimono arms, or, to get right to the point,
underarm dingle-dangle.
They resist every try
to firm them up. I can't bear heavy weights,
and sissy little three-pounders do no good.
Yet I do my puny triceps and biceps moves
at least three times a week anyway.
I've exercised like a fiend
most of my life: playing tennis, running,
practicing Pilates and Yoga,
and now walking miles
along the ocean.
My obsession keeps me sane –
it saved my life and
out of the psych ward after my son died –
and trim enough to defy
those who called me fatso
when I was a little girl.
No, I can't get rid of the dingle-dangle –
I won't it cut off
as once suggested.
Nor will I expose it in public
by wearing halter and tank tops
and strapless gowns.
But I can suck it into
a tight-fitting long-sleeved tee.



Jo Virgil, True Words Editor, has been a Story Circle Network member for many years and recently accepted a position on the SCN Board (Publication and Program member) and to serve as editor for True Words. Jo has a Master's Degree in Journalism and has worked as a reporter, as a writing workshop teacher, as Community Relations Manager for Barnes & Noble, and as Community Outreach Coordinator for the Texas Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities. Writing and sharing stories are her passion.

Facebook Frenemy

Marilyn Ashbaugh
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I live in the Rust Belt and I enjoy photographing the many lakes, streams and ponds that surround me. The hardwood forests call to me to share their beauty and I often do so on Facebook. Some photographers plaster their names across their photos but this is not for me. I tag mine, which does not disrupt the image but can make them vulnerable to theft.

I enjoy Facebook for the connections with friends and family all over the world. Luci married a childhood friend and I have enjoyed reading family news through our Facebook friendship. While scrolling through the newsfeed of friends' activities, I noticed that Luci had posted one of my photos on her page but had removed my tag, and by her comments implied the photo was hers. I enjoy sharing my photos as much as I enjoy sharing my stories, but the enjoyment would turn to hurt and anger if someone stripped my byline to replace it with her own.

I chose to think this was a misunderstanding on Luci's part; I retagged my photo and thanked Luci for sharing it. I was mistaken. A few months later she took a photo that I was particularly proud of, and placed it on her own page after removing my nametag. I scrolled down her page to realize she had taken many of my photos with my attribution removed. I returned my nametags to all my photos. Luci is an educated person who teaches children—surely she knew this is not only wrong but illegal. But in betraying my trust, did she realize how hurtful her actions were?

Reconciliation remained possible if Luci had reached out to me, but she did not, nor did she remove my photos from her page. I contemplated what to do and decided I needed to take action to prevent further theft, so I blocked her from seeing any of my information on Facebook. A challenging decision, but easier when I realized that a true friend would not behave this way. This was the work of a frenemy.

"Stories have to be told or they die, and when they die, we can't remember who we are or why we're here."

— Sue Monk Kidd, *The Secret Life of Bees*

Announcing the Maya Unpublished Manuscript Competition

"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you." — Maya Angelou

Story Circle and She Writes Press have agreed to co-sponsor an important new manuscript competition called "The Maya," for revered poet, memoirist, and essayist Maya Angelou. The award will be given for the first time in 2018 for an unpublished memoir manuscript written by a woman.

The winning author will receive \$2500 in cash and publication services toward publication of her book by She

Writes Press. Additionally, SCN and She Writes will co-sponsor a Kickstarter campaign to help her meet the remaining costs of publication.

Watch for eligibility guidelines and other details in upcoming issues of the *Journal*.

PROFESSIONAL DIRECTORY

Our SCN members offer writing-related help in 9 areas: Author; Editors (content, manuscript, copyediting, proofreading); Freelancers; Ghostwriters; Marketing Services; Publishers / Publishing Services; Speakers; Teachers / Coaches / Mentors; Web Services. If you're looking for help, look here first. If you'd like to be featured in our new directory here and online, please go here: www.storycircle.org/frmjoinscn.php

Brief Bios of SCN's Professional Members

Susan Wittig Albert: Author of mysteries, historical fiction, memoir, and nonfiction. She is available for a limited number of speaking engagements. www.SusanAlbert.com **Author, Speaker**

Stephanie Barko: Literary Publicist specializing in pre-pub nonfiction & historical fiction adult book shepherding, including platform creation, endorsement & review acquisition, positioning, publishing advice, social media, and radio pitching. Guidance on web & book design, trailer production, list building, and author events. www.stephaniebarko.com **Marketing Services**

MaryAnn Easley: Award-winning author & educator, MaryAnn Easley teaches memoir & fiction writing, poetry & journaling, hosts literary salons & poetry events, and does occasional boutique publishing. Awards include Junior Library Guild Selection, teacher of the Year, Quick Picks, and California Reading Association Award of Excellence. www.authormaryanneasley.com **Publisher, Speaker**

Patricia Fisher: Editor World's panel includes academicians, published authors, and retired professionals who love words more than anything else. Choose your own personal freelance editor to edit your work based on his or her qualifications, expertise, and skills, and benefit from our fast turnaround and affordable fees. **Editor** www.editorworld.com

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B. Lynn Goodwin: Owner Writer Advice and blynngoodwin.com. She's drafting a memoir, has published a self-help book and a YA, and has numerous short pieces online and in print. She's an experienced editor, reviewer, writing coach, interviewer and mentor. www.writeradvice.com **Author, Editor, Teacher**

Jeanne Guy: Author, speaker and self-awareness writing workshop facilitator. She is a member of SCN's Board of Directors & the 2014 & 2016 Conference Co-chair. www.jeanneguy.com **Teacher**

Linda Hasselstrom: Poet and nonfiction writer who conducts writing retreats on her ranch on the plains of southwestern South Dakota. With a BA in English and Journalism, and a MA in American Literature, she has been a teacher of writing for more than 40 years. www.windbreakhouse.com **Teacher/Coach**

Mary Jarvis: Librarian, quilter, and author currently living and working in the Panhandle of Texas. Email: mejarvis@suddenlink.net **Author**

Kay Kendall: Writer of atmospheric mysteries that capture the spirit and turbulence of family and personal memories. She is a member of the national board of Mystery Writers of America, president of its southwest chapter, and also a contributing editor to "The Big Thrill," the online monthly magazine of International Thriller Writers. www.austinstarr.com **Author**

Pat LaPointe Psychotherapist who conducts both group and individual consultation. She uses this experience to create programs designed to enrich women's lives through interactive writing workshops. She facilitates online and on site writing groups including groups designed to assist senior women in legacy writing. www.changesinlife.com **Author, Editor, Teacher**

Khadijah Lacina: Writer who is passionate about helping other authors build their tribes, create a strong online presence, and market their books. <http://bizforge.net/> **Freelancer, Marketing Services, Web Services**

Juliana Lightle: High School English teacher whose career experiences include college administrator, corporate manager, author, horse breeder and trainer, and educator. She currently writes, sings, and wanders the world. <https://julianalightle.com> **Author**

Maryglenn McCombs: Maryglenn McCombs is an independent book publicist based in Nashville. She graduated from Vanderbilt University. www.maryglenn.com **Marketing Services**

Donna Marie Miller: Donna Marie Miller is the author of *The Broken Spoke Legend: More than 50 Years as Austin's Favorite Honky-Tonk*, to be published in 2016. Her articles have appeared in several magazines including: *Elmore*, *Creative Screenwriting*, *American Rhythm*, *Austin Food*, *Austin Fusion*, *Austin Monthly*, *Fiddler*, and *The Alternate Root*. <https://donnamariemillerblog.com> **Freelancer**

Sallie Moffitt: Award-winning author whose work has been anthologized in Story Circle's *True Words Anthology* and published in literary journals such as *Ten Spurs Vol. 5* and *Ten Spurs Vol. 9*. She has worked as an editor and has judged writing contests. **Author, Freelancer**

Kim Pearson: Kim's ghostwriting services have helped over 45 others become authors of polished, professional, and compelling books and memoirs. Her book *Making History* shows writers, especially memoir writers, how an individual's life participates in and contributes to "big" history. **Author, Ghostwriter**

Annie Quinn: Author, publisher and speaker, Annie "Enjoys the Moments" of writing, reading, spending time with family and friends and sharing her journey in publishing with others. Annie supports her local writing community by hosting monthly writers meet-ups in Newport Beach, CA. <http://ballycottonpress.com> **Publisher, Speaker**



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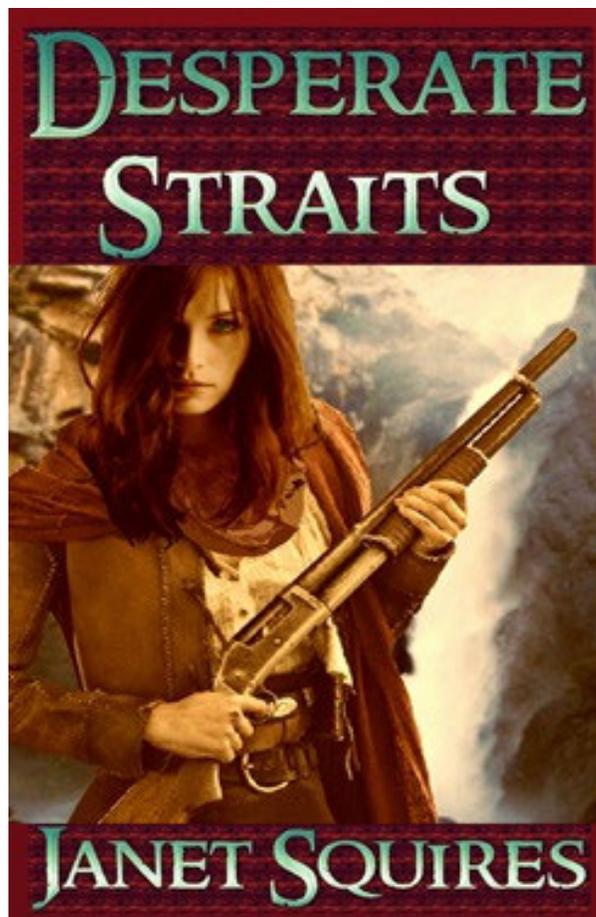
Sarah Ryan's hope for a new life in the Arizona Territory is shattered in an instant by gunfire. Suddenly, she has to rebuild an uncertain future with her orphaned nephew, Will, and take on the challenges of a cattle ranch.

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>

Use these topics, or write on a topic of your choosing for upcoming issues of the *Journal*:

- March, 2017: Buried Treasure (deadline January 15)
- June, 2017: A Little Thing that Mattered (deadline April 15)
- September, 2017: Music and Memories (deadline July 15)
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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.