



STORY CIRCLE JOURNAL

Vol. 20 No. 1, March 2016

The newsletter for women with stories to tell

Stories from the Heart VIII

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

Your Coach is Waiting!



In fairy tales, a coach takes Cinderella to meet her prince. At **Stories From the Heart**, a coach can take you anywhere you want to go, for our coaches are expert writers and publishers who can answer your writing and publishing questions and get you started on your route to success.

Our FREE 15-minute Heart-to-Heart Coaching sessions take place on Friday morning, 9:00-11:30. All registered conference attendees will get an email directing them to the website. You may choose one or two sessions—we will do our best to assign you to your top preference(s). This is strictly first come, first served, so you should plan to sign up early during the registration period.

You **MUST** use the signup form to register for this event. Please consider your interests and your specific writing-related questions and choose accordingly. The most productive sessions occur when you bring specific, prepared questions to your coaches. You can read more about this process here: <http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/coaching.php>

Here's what people said about their coaching experience on their post-conference evaluations:

**Absolutely superb! I am so grateful to my two coaches for focusing in right on my issues and giving professional and specific advice!!! THANK YOU!!!*

**Both of my coaches were wonderful and I've put new processes in place as a result of both. They are making a great difference!*

Of course, you only get as much out of a coaching session as you put into it. People who come with clearly focused questions leave with the feeling that they've moved miles along the road toward their writing destinations. And that's what our SCN coaches are all about!

Stories from the Heart VIII

brings women from around the country to celebrate our stories and our lives. Through writing, reading, listening, and sharing, we will discover how personal narrative is a healing art, how we can gather our memories, how we can tell our stories. We welcome readers, writers, storytellers, and any woman with a past, present, and future. There will be opportunities to explore difficult or hidden issues, expand our relationships with other women, and discover different modes and media—such as art, dance, and drama—for sharing our stories. Come, learn, share, celebrate with us as we honor our stories!

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

Letter From SCN's President—



Dear SCN Sisters—

The conference is still two months away, but I'm already thinking about what I want to say on Sunday, April 17. I'll be speaking at the wrap-up on Sunday, after we've all enjoyed our lunch and the nonstop lunch table conversation about our writing lives and our reading and our children and grandchildren—the bits of lifestory that we always share when we come together as members of a community.

And that's what I want to talk about on April 17—community. For Story Circle is more than just another organization of writers. For one thing, we are *women* writers. Story Circle is one of a small handful of organizations that have been created specifically to focus on women's writing, and to give women a focus for their writing lives. We believe that women's stories are a vital part of human history, and that recording our lives—in journal, memoirs, fiction, poetry, drama, dance, and more—is a vital responsibility that comes with the gift of literacy. Not many generations ago, many of our foremothers were illiterate: my own great-grandmother could read but not write. Think for a moment about the momentous change in human culture when women—many women, in many nations around the world—learned to write, to document their lives, to tell their stories, and *share* their stories.

That's where our women's writing community comes in. In this rapidly changing world, it's very easy for those of us who are committed to sharing the stories of our lives to feel alone, as if we are the only woman who has ever taken on this task. Through Story Circle, each of us has the opportunity (if we will take it) to connect with other women who want to do what *we* want to do: write about our lives, write about other women's lives.

- Through story circles in our own communities, we can participate in the energies of other women writers. (See Mary Jo Doig's interview with Jan Golden and Sheila McNaughton, page 12 for inspiration.)
- Through the Internet Chapter, we can join a writing circle and share pieces of the work we do and discuss it with other writers. (See Lee's article, page 9.)
- Through one of SCN's online Writers' Roundtables (Writer2Writer or Work-in-Progress) we can share writing ideas, tips, problems, issues, dreams, encouragement. (See page 27.)
- Through "True Words" in our *Journal* and our annual *Real Women Write*, we can expand our writing portfolios and develop an audience for our writing.
- Through StoryCircleBookReview, we can enlarge our reading experience and gain recognition for our published book reviews and author interviews.
- Through service as a juror in SCN's unique Sarton Women's Literary Award program and in our contests, we can learn to recognize what makes effective writing and help to honor outstanding women writers.
- Through service on SCN's board of directors, we can put our skills and experience to work to build a more effective community.
- Through SCN's conferences, "LifeLines" retreats, and online class program, we can meet face-to-face with our writing sisters, learn more about the writing we want to do, and strengthen our commitment to it.

Each of us belongs to many important communities: family, work, church, school, neighbors and friends, hobbies. Each community fills an important place in our lives. But as I'm sure you know from your own personal experience, we only learn and grow when we are fully engaged, when we participate, when we share, when we give back.

I hope you will reread the list above and consider the ways you would like to participate in and benefit from our women's writing community—what you would like to learn, how you would like to use your learning, how you would like to grow, and what you would like to give back. We would love to welcome you as an *active* member of our community.

With joy for your journey,

Susan

Susan Wittig Albert
SCN President, 2015-2017

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
 Jeanne Guy
 Linda Hoye
 Pat LaPointe
 Susan Schoch
 Amber Starfire
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We welcome your letters, queries, and suggestions.

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 \$90 Elsewhere

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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.



Conference Keynote Speakers

Brooke Warner: Friday Night Keynoter

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

Brooke will also lead a Friday afternoon optional preconference workshop, with Linda Joy Myers. Visit Brooke's website at www.warnercoaching.com.



Susan Wittig Albert: Sunday Keynoter

Susan is SCN's founder and president and a *New York Times* bestselling author. In addition to her acclaimed women's mysteries, she has written two novels about the real lives of real women: *A Wilder Rose*, about Rose Wilder Lane and her mother, Laura Ingalls Wilder; and *Loving Eleanor*, about the intimate friendship of Eleanor Roosevelt and Lorena Hickok. Susan will also participate on a panel, "Paths to Publishing," with Deborah Winegarten and Connie Spittler.

Visit Susan's website at www.susanalbert.com.

Pre-Conference Workshops:

Memoir: Crafting & Publishing Your Story

Writing a memoir? Planning to publish your lifestory or a novel? Our pair of back-to-back Friday afternoon workshops will give your work a powerful boost and help you find the right path to publication.

Breaking Ground on Your Memoir

In "Breaking Ground on Your Memoir," Brooke Warner and Linda Joy Myers lay the foundation every memoirist needs to tell a good story. You will gain new tools and a new perspective and be energized by the discovery of new ways to push deeper, go farther, and write the heart of your story. You will leave the workshop with skills and information that will make your memoir more heartfelt, powerful, and resonant—both for yourself and your readers. Expect a shot in the arm!

Paths to Publishing

In "Paths to Publishing," Susan Wittig Albert, Connie Spittler, and Debra Winegarten will outline the requirements, pros and cons, and challenges of traditional publishing, independent and small-press publishing, hybrid publishing, and self-publishing. You'll learn about time and costs, pre- and post-publishing tasks, and marketing strategies. You'll also complete and discuss a checklist of your own personal aims, experience, and resources. Whether you're writing memoir, fiction, or nonfiction, expect information and inspiration!

Call For Donations: Silent Auction, Door Prizes, and Gift Bags

Call for Donations deadline: April 14, 2016

Why donate auction items to Story Circle Network's 2016 Conference? Because women's stories matter! It's an exciting (and painless) opportunity for you to support women writing and telling their stories. And the Conference's Silent Auction is an important fundraiser that helps us keep our programs alive and well.

We're looking for unique, interesting, and artful items that demonstrate the artist's creativity and help us raise money for SCN. If you have something you'd like to donate, please tell us about it, and send us a photo! (You don't have to be an SCN member to contribute.)

If you have items you love but no longer use, if you own a business that provides products or services, or if you know someone who owns a business, you can help! Visit http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/callfordonations_ad.php for details.

Donate today! The sooner the better as auction items are displayed on the Conference website and help build wonderful momentum.

Gift Bag Items

We welcome pens, pencils, small notebooks, merchandise coupons, cosmetics samples, commercial product samples, etc, appropriate for the use of women with a special interest in writing and documenting personal and family stories. Our committee reviews and approves gift bag contributions, in order to avoid duplication or the inclusion of inappropriate items. We expect approximately 140 attendees; gift bags are given to all 2- and 3-day conference attendees.



Hand-turned wooden bowl, by Bill Albert.



Multi-colored toddler sized tree of life themed crocheted afghan, by Khadijah Lacina.

Open Mike Saturday Night, Live, in Austin Texas

It's Saturday night in Austin TX—what would you like to do after you've enjoyed a fine dinner at one of Austin's many great restaurants? Well, we could all hang out together and swap stories...*swap stories?*

Hey, what a great idea! And who has more stories to swap than women—women who have loved and laughed and cried and succeeded and failed and survived and, yes, triumphed!

And all you have to bring is you, and your story. Maybe it's a piece you've already shared with your Story Circle, or a poem or two that you've just finished, or a short autobiographical fiction piece. Maybe it's a story to be sung, or danced (if you need music, let us know ahead of time). Or perhaps you'd like to bring a piece of art that you've made—pottery, painting, textile, whatever—and tell us how and why it is part of your story. The sky's the limit, gals, so let's see how many different stories, and how many different ways to tell a story, we can all come up with.

Volunteers Needed!

Want to take on a responsibility that is fun and makes a positive impact on this phenomenal conference? We are seeking volunteers for our April 2016 Stories from the Heart VIII, SCN's 8th women's writing conference. Contact our volunteer coordinator (confvolunteers@storycircle.org) to get your name on the roster of volunteers.

Assignments range from working the exhibitors room, registration, sales, open mike, story wall, scrapbook, heart-to-heart coaching sessions, and that all encompassing duty known as floater. You'll be assigned a wonderful job and should be prepared to serve a mere two-hour shift.

Please email confvolunteers@storycircle.org...the earlier the better. We're making our schedule NOW and we don't want to leave you out. So please volunteer NOW...before you forget!



Stories from the Heart VIII

Conference Hotel

Wyndham Hotel
3401 South IH-35,
Austin TX 78741 512-448-244
fax: 512-443-4208

www.wyndham.com/hotels/AUSWC

To get the conference rate (\$117/night plus tax, double occupancy), call the hotel directly (512-448-2444); please be sure to say that you are with Story Circle Network, and make your reservations no later than March 19, 2016. Room rate includes complimentary airport shuttle service, parking, and high speed wireless internet.

Would you like to advertise for a roommate?
See our *Roommates Wanted!* web page:

[www.storycircle.org/Conference/
roommates.shtml](http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/roommates.shtml)



Friday, April 15

- 9:00 Registration Opens
Exhibitors Room Opens (Hrs: 9-4, 5:30-7:30)
- 9:00-11:30 Heart-to-Heart Coaching (sign up required)
- Noon-1:45 **Optional** Pre-Conference Workshop, "Breaking Ground on Your Memoir" with Linda Joy Myers & Brooke Warner (extra fee)
- 2:00-3:45 **Optional** Pre-Conference Workshop, "Paths to Publishing with Susan Wittig Albert, Connie Spittler, & Debra Winegarten (extra fee)
- 4:00-5:00 Conference Welcome Session
- 5:30-7:30 Dutch-Treat Dinner
- 6:00 Silent Auction opens
- 7:30 Sarton Memoir Award Presentation
- Keynote Address with Brooke Warner; dessert reception following

Saturday, April 16

- 8:30 Registration Opens
Silent Auction Open
Exhibitors Room Opens (Hrs: 8:30-12:30, 2-6)
- 9:00-10:00 **Session 1**
- 10:00-10:30 Break: Book Signing with Sarton Award Winner
- 10:30-11:30 **Session 2**
- 11:30-noon Free time
- 12:15-2:00 Lunch Entertainment: Readings from Sarton Literary Award winner's books
- 2:15-3:15 **Session 3**
- 3:15-3:30 Break
- 3:30-4:30 **Session 4**
- 5:30 Silent Auction Closes
- 5:30-6:00 Cash bar
- 6:00-8:00 Dutch-Treat Dinner; Special Interest Tables
- 8:00-10:00 Open Mike: *Storytelling from the Heart*

Sunday, April 17

- 9:00-10:00 **Session 5**
- 10-10:30 Break
- 10:30-11:30 **Session 6**
- noon-2:00 Lunch with speaker Susan Wittig Albert, *Community*

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

Stories from the Heart VIII

SESSIONS



Session 1: Saturday, 9-10am

The Writing Life

Write Like a Heroine! Ruth Crocker

This inspiring workshop will help you find your spiritual writing center and embrace yourself as heroine.

Breaking Into Publishing

Spin Your Stories into Magazine Articles: Marilyn Collins

Join this lively/interactive workshop and learn to convert life experiences and talents into regional/special interest magazine articles—print and online formats.

Getting Personal

Writing in Sorrow/Writing in Strength: Jan Seale

This workshop will help you learn techniques to deal with grief both passionately and effectively and turn your words on personal testing, crisis, and loss into a reader's solace.

Craft Matters

Creating Characters Through Dialogue: Susan Wittig Albert

In this workshop, we will practice turning narrative passages into dialogue that reveals characters' personalities, fears, intentions, and desires.

Session 2: Saturday, 10:30-11:30am

The Writing Life

Creating a Writing Practice: From Discovery to Action: Lynn Bojinoff

This interactive workshop uses journaling exercises and worksheets to help you discover your present priorities, write goals, make a commitment, and take away an action plan that will keep you moving along on your next writing project.

Breaking Into Publishing

Putting Your Book on Amazon is Not a Marketing Plan: Creative Ways to Market Your Book and Find New Audiences: Debra Winegarten

In this workshop, you will learn how to go outside the ordinary venues (retail and online bookstores) to sell your book.

Craft Matters

Having Fun in the Liberating World of Flash Fiction/Memoir: Len Leatherwood

This workshop will discuss what "flash" is and isn't, the essentials of publishable pieces, and markets for your work.

Craft Matters

Building Your Memoir with Scenes and Narrative: Linda Joy Myers

In this workshop, you will discover how to manage the elements of scene, dialogue, description, and narration to build a memoir that reaches the reader emotionally.

Session 3: Saturday, 2:15-3:15pm

The Writing Life

Story Circles: Sharing Women's Stories: Susan Wittig Albert, Pat LaPointe

In this workshop, we will learn ways to create, market, and facilitate circles; explore "from the field" stories of the way circles operate; and practice the process by doing some circle work. You will receive a copy of SCN's revised Facilitator's Guide and learn how to connect your communities with SCN's Story Circle Program.

Breaking Into Publishing

Getting Comfortable with Social Media: Overcoming Your Fear and Promoting Your Writing: Kay Kendall

In this workshop, we'll survey the different media, their demographics, costs, and their best uses; share experiences; and learn what types of social media suit our particular needs.

Getting Personal

Sharing the Tough Stuff—Digging Deeply: Lynn Goodwin

We will use acting exercises to help you think and speak as a particular character, spark your imagination so you can come up with your own methods for digging deeply.

Craft Matters, Getting Personal

Writing from Found Texts: Deepening Your Fiction and Nonfiction: Yelizaveta Renfro

In this workshop, we will learn to become aware of the found texts in the world around us, increasing our writing repertoires and giving our storytelling more depth, edge, invention, and nuance.

Session 4: Saturday, 3:30-4:30pm

The Writing Life

Getting There... From Here: 5 Strategies to Creating the Successful Writing Life You Love: Carol Walkner

This experiential, interactive workshop will offer creative strategies to help each participant determine what her ideal writing life might look like, consider the steps she needs to put it into practice, and gain deeper clarity about herself, her writing life, and her passions.

Getting Personal

The Treasure of Your Coming of Age Stories: Suzanne Sherman

Explore what coming of age means to you and uncover the wealth of writing topics in this fertile subject. You'll write from one of your topics and take home a new story and a rich list of topics for future writings.

*Craft Matters***Creating an Ethical Will: Ann Haas**

We will learn about the ethical will as a storytelling method, survey steps in documenting our legacies using this format, and examine examples of ethical wills.

*Craft Matters***It's All about Voice: Writing Memoir That Readers Will Love, Buy, and Recommend: Lisa Dale Norton**

Writing memoir is about voice, the persona you bring to the page. We'll tease out your way of perceiving the world—and are you a closet essayist or fiction writer?—and use those strengths to create your voice. We'll explore key skills: writing with compassion, and casting yourself as a heroine.

Session 5: Sunday, 9-10am*The Writing Life***Transforming Your Writing Life in Just 20 Minutes a Day: Len Leatherwood**

Participants will understand the elements of daily timed writing and publishing via a blog and Facebook, gain information on the benefits of daily writing practice, participate in and share a timed writing, and learn strategies to face the obstacles inherent in this practice.

*The Writing Life***Trust Your Writing Voice: Cindy Eastman**

In this facilitated workshop, you will learn strategies and models for writing practice, understand the value of taking risks in your writing, and be guided to identify, hear, and trust your own writing voice.

*Craft Matters***Place as Character: Susan Tweit, Dawn Wink**

Learn how to evoke place and setting in vivid detail, how to use place as a character, how to employ place to illuminate often-unexamined truths, and how to weave place into your writing.

*Craft Matters***Oral Story Telling for Writers: Penelope Starr**

In this interactive workshop you will learn how oral storytelling can support your writing, become aware of your potential as storytellers, learn important elements of organization and presentation, and gain confidence in speaking to an audience.

Session 6: Sunday, 10:30-11:30am*The Writing Life***Travel Touchstones: Making the Most of Your Travel Journal Writing: Rhonda Wiley-Jones**

In this workshop, you will match types of travel with journaling tools and techniques you can use, learn narrative modes to enhance your travel journal, and discover ways to use your travel writing to enhance your memoir, create blog posts, and expand your writing portfolio.

*The Writing Life***Creating Powerful Writing Agreements: Carolyn Scarborough**

In this workshop, we will create a list of powerful intentions that motivate us in our writing and our lives. To find the ones that deeply resonate for us, we will use writing prompts, guided visualizations and practical exercises.

*Breaking into Publishing***Practical Tips to Market You, Market Your Book: Marilyn Collins**

In this practical workshop, you will learn doable (and often inexpensive) tips to successfully conduct a pre-launch campaign, launch your book, conduct successful book signings, exhibit at conferences, present workshops and identify/reach primary/secondary markets.

*Craft Matters***Research for Writing: Digging Deep and Avoiding Pitfalls: Noelle Sickels**

We'll explore ways to determine your research needs; avenues of inquiry beyond the obvious; interviews; using your research without overwhelming your story; and the role of courage and ethics in conducting and using research.

**Thank You, Amber Starfire!**

For the past five years, Amber Starfire has coordinated Story Circle Network's Online Classes (www.storycircleonlineclasses.org), working with women faculty and students to offer affordable cyber-

classes to SCN members and to the public. Recently, Amber announced that she is stepping aside from her position in order to pay more attention to her personal projects. We're sorry to lose her; she has been a creative and innovative force in the program since its early days.

Amber has always been passionate about helping others tell their stories, make meaning of their lives, and access their inner wisdom and creativity through the act of writing. In addition to the SCN program, where she has taught a wide variety of courses, she has taught writing in community colleges and businesses. She is the author of *Not the Mother I Remember: A Memoir* and *Week by Week: A Year's Worth of Journaling Prompts & Meditations*; and she has co-edited the acclaimed anthology, *Times They Were A-Changing: Women Remember the 60s & 70s*. She is a member of the California Writers Club in Santa Rosa and Napa, CA, the National Association of Independent Writers and Editors (NAIWE), and the International Association of Journal Writers (IAJW). You can stay in touch with Amber through her website: www.writingthroughlife.com

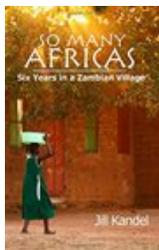
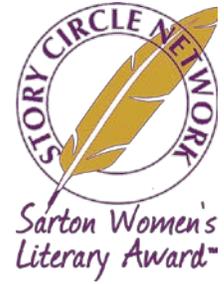
The new coordinator will be announced shortly.

2014-2015 Sarton Literary Award Shortlist

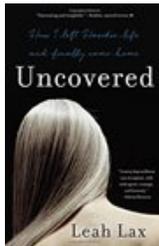
The Story Circle Network is proud to announce the 2015 Shortlist for the Sarton Women's Literary Awards™. Books are listed (alphabetically) in three categories: Memoir, Contemporary Fiction, and Historical Fiction.

The awards are sponsored by the Story Circle Network, an international nonprofit community of women writers. The program is named in honor of May Sarton, who is remembered for her outstanding contributions to women's literature as a memoirist, novelist, and poet. The awards are given annually to women authors writing chiefly about women in memoir, biography and fiction published in the United States and Canada and selected from works submitted. The awards are limited to submissions originally written in English and published by small/independent publishers, university presses, and author-publishers (self-publishing authors). The judging is conducted in two rounds. Professional librarians not affiliated with SCN select the winner and finalists. Previous award recipients may be viewed at: <http://www.storycircle.org/SartonLiteraryAward/>

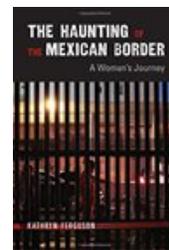
Three winners will be determined in a second round of judging and announced at **Stories from the Heart**, SCN's VIII biannual women's writing conference.



So Many Africas: Six Years in a Zambian Village
Jill Kandel, Moorhead, MN
Memoir: Autumn House Press



The Haunting of the Mexican Border
Kathryn Ferguson, Tucson, AZ
Memoir: University of New Mexico Press



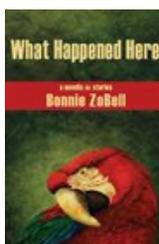
Uncovered: How I Left Hasidic Life and Finally Came Home
Leah Lax, Houston, TX
Memoir: She Writes Press



P.O.W.E.R.
Lisa A. Kramer, Auburn, MA
Contemporary Fiction: Word Hermit Press



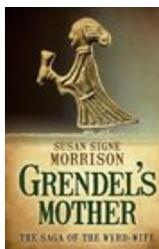
Stella Rose
Tammy Flanders Hetrick, Fairfield, VT
Contemporary Fiction: She Writes Press



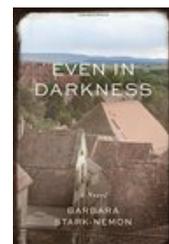
War Creek
Susan Marsh, Jackson, WY
Contemporary Fiction: MP USA



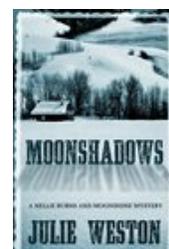
What Happened Here
Bonnie ZoBell, San Diego, CA
Contemporary Fiction: Press 53



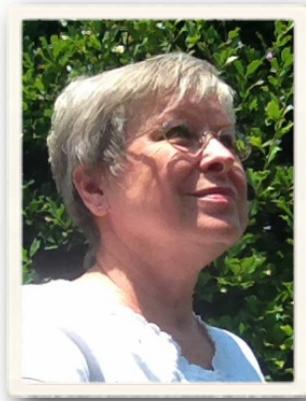
Even in Darkness: A Novel
Barbara Stark-Nemon, Ann Arbor, MI
Historical Fiction: She Writes Press



Grendel's Mother: The Saga of the Wyrd-Wife
Susan Signe Morrison, Austin, TX
Historical Fiction: Top Hat Books



Moonshadows
Julie Weston, Hailey, ID
Historical Fiction: Five Star Publishing



Internet Chapter:

Gentle Responders Nurture the Writer in You

by Lee Ambrose

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

Miki Agrawal

Every so often, there are those who ask about the SCN Internet Chapter's policy to practice "gentle responding" as opposed to providing "critiquing" of writing submissions.

When Story Circle Network's founder Susan Albert created the Internet Chapter, it was her intent to provide a safe environment for all women to write and share their life stories. Some of our members are published authors but many are not. Among those who are not published authors (by far the majority of our writing circle members) many have no desire to become published. These women are here solely to explore their own personal stories. And, that, my friends, is exactly why our writing e-circles were created. Over the years, we have found that the nurturing environment created by our "gentle responder" approach has allowed our members to grow at their own pace without the sometimes negative impact of a critique approach.

From our SCN Internet Chapter web page, the following guidelines for our circles:

- In keeping with the SCN Mission Statement, as participants in any SCN circle, members should seek ways to empower women, help women share the stories of their lives and increase public awareness of the importance of women's personal histories.
- Membership in any e-circle of SCN is based solely on current paid membership in the SCN National and Internet Chapter. There is no other screening process or list of membership criteria. Our organization has always prided itself on being inclusive and will continue to thrive in that spirit.
- "What happens in the e-circle STAYS in the e-circle"—no sharing of stories, artwork, photos, etc. outside of the e-circle and SCN, without permission from the author.
- We are encouraged to always be "gentle responders" when we respond to the stories our circle sisters write/share.

And again, from our SCN Internet Chapter web page, the information regarding the "gentle responder" approach:

*Julie Cameron writes in her book, *The Right to Write*, "In order for writing to have inner resonance, it cannot have too many outer influences. And the influences it does have must be benevolent. What do I mean by benevolent influence? I mean an influence that encourages growth rather than uproots it." Your response is meant to encourage the writer, to be positive and supporting. Think of yourself as a Friendly Reader, one Julia Cameron defines as someone capable of reading your writing out of a love of letters. Please respond with gentleness, friendliness and encouragement.*

The elements of our response form include several key questions that can be incorporated into the body of an email or answered directly from the form on the web page:

- How did this writing make you feel?
- What did you think was the single best line or thought in it?
- What would you change or want to make different in it if you could?
- What more do you want to know that the writer didn't tell you?
- What question do you want to ask the writer?
- What memories did it trigger in you? Remind you of?
- Any other comments?

If you have been reluctant to join a writing e-circle because you feared an "editor's approach" in the responses to your stories, fear not! Your stories will be greeted by gentle responders who will encourage, nurture, and wait expectantly for your next post. I guarantee that over time you will see yourself improving, gaining new confidence and going boldly where you once thought you'd never go in your writing life!



An Interview with Susan Wittig Albert

The Path to Becoming a Writer

by Pat Bean

Susan Wittig Albert, Story Circle Network's founder, will be the Sunday keynote speaker at our conference. Susan's energy for SCN and for writing is boundless. She recently talked with Pat Bean about both.

Tell us a bit about yourself, Susan. What are the things you consider important in creating who you are?

I spent my childhood on a farm in east-central Illinois in the 1940s-50s, attended a small rural high school, married the week after graduation, and had three children by the time I was 22. I'd always loved to read, and somehow, around the time my third baby was born, I got my hands on Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* and found a whole new way to look at the world. The next year, we moved to Champaign-Urbana and I enrolled as a freshman at the University of Illinois, majoring in books (that is, in English). After graduation the kids and I spent the next four chaotic years (1968-1972) in graduate school at UC Berkeley, so I could earn a PhD and teach (books, of course). The most important thing that has shaped me then and now: *books and reading*. Books gave me horizons I could not have dreamed of as a girl on the farm.

When did you first know that you wanted to be a writer, and then how did you go about making it happen?

Reading Nancy Drew in the 1950s, I knew I wanted to become Carolyn Keene when I grew up—and I did, actually: I wrote my first Nancy mystery in 1984. In between 1950 and 1984, I read as much as I could and wrote constantly: my journal and student papers in the early years, and academic papers and books while I was teaching. I wrote my first young adult novel in 1983 and left my professorship in 1985 for full-time writing—to become Carolyn Keene. I stayed with YA novels until the early 1990s, when I met China Bayles and began to write about her mysterious adventures.

What inspired you to create Story Circle Network? And what were the steps that you took to make it happen.

I began teaching journaling in 1987 at the Jung Society in Austin and began to understand the importance of documenting our lives as women. In 1996, for my students, I wrote *Writing From Life: Telling the Soul's Story*, which

was published the next year. I wanted to create a community of support for women writers, so I gathered together a dozen friends who shared that vision, and we set to work: filing the paperwork to build a non-profit organization, figuring out what it could do, imagining publications and conferences. I met Peggy Moody in 1997; she showed me that it was possible to create a cyber community that would eventually reach women around the world.

Tell us about your writing day, and what your writing space looks like. And what inspires you to be so tenacious in meeting your own writing goals, which seem never to end?

My first mystery was published in 1992. Since then, I've been under contract with Berkley Books (now Penguin/RandomHouse) to write two or three (occasionally four) books a year, in different mystery series; I've also written two memoirs, as well. Contracts have deadlines and deadlines have a way of imposing a schedule on a writer. In the last four years, I've reduced my commitment to genre fiction and begun writing biographical/historical fiction—but I still impose deadlines on myself.

When I'm working on a project, I settle down to work at 10 and quit at 5, with an hour off for lunch and occasional time off for Story Circle projects and book-related chores. I journal in the evening and spend an early-morning hour on social media. The laundry, errands, housekeeping, and cooking have to fit in there somewhere. My husband and sometime-coauthor Bill is extremely tolerant, for which I am grateful.

I work in a cluttered office at an L-shaped desk stacked high with books. My window looks out onto our woods—right now, edged with lovely daffodils. I work on a 5-year-old laptop and dread the day when I'll have to replace it. I'm inspired to write in part by the need to pay the bills (I make my living this way, you know), but also by my own deeply-felt *need* to write. I meet the world this way. Days when I don't write feel like lost, empty days. (I haven't decided whether this is a blessing or a curse—maybe a bit of both.)

Do you have any writer role models?

Not really. Every writer is different. I'm glad that Agatha Christie wrote into her 90s and hope I can do that, too. I admire writers who write through great difficulty—like Audre Lorde—and writers who seem to shovel the words out, Stephen King. I'm also fond of King's advice about inspiration: "Amateurs sit and wait for inspiration, the rest of us just get up and go to work." I'm most inspired by writers who share their gifts by writing regularly, like Barbara Kingsolver and Margaret Atwood. I am not inspired by writers who write just one book and then sit around for the rest of their lives (Harper Lee comes to mind).

Recently you have switched gears with your writing, doing more biographical fiction with *A Wilder Rose* and *Loving Eleanor*, both of which required a lot of research. Did this change give new energy to your writing life?

Absolutely! But it's not the research—that's always been there. Every book I've written is research-based, regardless of the time period or setting. Mostly, the energy boost in this new venture comes from the change in publishers. I submitted both *Rose* and *Eleanor* to traditional publishers, but neither (for different reasons) found a home. So I published both books myself, under my own imprint: Persevero Press (www.PerseveroPress.com). Both have been successful—*Rose* has been optioned for a TV mini-series. (I'll be talking about author-publishing at the conference, in our Friday pre-conference workshop, "Paths to Publishing"). I'm sorry that I had to wait so late in my

writing career to embark on this new adventure, but author-publishing has only been commercially feasible in the past four or five years, and my success in it is built on the platform created by the mysteries. There's been a strong synergy between the two.

You stepped back from Story Circle Network a bit for a while, but now have taken on leadership of the organization once again. Why now? And what do you hope to accomplish?

I didn't really step back from SCN, I just moved off the board and worked behind the scenes. During those years (2004-2015), I edited two books for Story Circle (the award-winning *What Wildness Is This* and *With Courage and Common Sense*), worked on StoryCircleBookReviews, and created the online class program and the Sarton Literary Awards—all with a lot of help from strong SCN members, of course! I came back on the board, as its president last year, and will serve through 2017. Like many small nonprofits, SCN faces some hugely important challenges—especially fiscal challenges—and I feel compelled to do whatever I can to help.

What's the best piece of writing advice you were given? What advice would you give to other writers?

The best advice was given me by my meditation teacher: "Tushie to cushie—that's the path to enlightenment." It's also the path to becoming a writer. It really does take ten thousand hours. At least.

Susan Wittig Albert Lifewriting Contest 2016

It's time to start planning your entry in SCN's annual lifestory personal essay competition! **Place and the environment** seems to be on everybody's mind these days, so let's take that as our topic for this year.

Some questions to think about: What kind of place do you live in? How do you feel about it? Is it a "mirror" of yourself, a "lens" into what you might become—or something else altogether? How does your place on this planet define you—and if it doesn't, why not? If you were a place, what would you be? Why? How has your place shaped your story—and your story nurtured your place?

Some women's words to consider:

"If I were a place, I'd be Labrador: improbably, impossible, tempestuous, serene, thinly populated. I'd be smooth boulders carried by great rivers of ice, plopped down at random, and balanced precariously against the odds of gravity for thousands of miles. I'd be spired mountains, crumbling ridgelines, and winds that literally make the water smoke. I'd be purple sunsets, bedrock that looks like marshmallows, and relentless green waves beating against the shore..." —Jill Fredston

"The environment is where we all meet; where we all have a mutual interest; it is the one thing that all of us share. It is not only a mirror of ourselves, but a focusing lens on what we can become..." —Lady Bird Johnson

"As much as we live in a place, we live in place... We live where we have made definitions, and in the process of making definitions, we create a place in which to live." —Sallie Tisdale

"Stories nurture our connection to place and to each other. They show us where we have been and where we can go. They remind us of how to be human, how to live alongside the other lives that animate this planet. ... When we lose stories, our understanding of the world is less rich, less true." —Susan J. Tweit

For contest entry form, details on awards and publication, and further information visit <http://www.storycircle.org/Contests>. Look for more details in the June SCJ and in our upcoming monthly e-letters. Contest Entries Accepted. May 1 through June 30, 2016.



Circles: The Heart of Story Circle Network

Writing Circles Corner

by Mary Jo Doig, Chair, Writing Circles Work Group

The words *Story Circle Network* evoke a striking image in my mind of a large, lusciously purple circle embracing a myriad of smaller circles representing the varied parts of our organization. My favorite circle glows brightest, like a sunny July day, and is filled with smaller rainbow-colored circles. These represent the heart and soul of SCN—the Writing Circles Group, comprised of women’s writing circles all over the country. In this issue we introduce you to two dedicated circle leaders, Jan Golden and Sheila McNaughton.

Some women have profound experiences at our national conferences. One year, I recall, three members conceived a memoir idea before going home. They returned to the next conference to read stories to us from their delightful book, *Times They were A’Changin’: Women Remember the 60s and 70s*. In 2008,

Jan Golden and her friend, Sheila McNaughton, attended Stories from the Heart National Conference. Deeply grateful to the presenters who gave rich knowledge about women sharing stories, both returned to Florida with a strong desire to give their community what they had learned: specifically, to reach out to women interested in writing lifestyles.

In 2009, Jan and Sheila began holding a writing circle meeting each month at the Safety Harbor library. A year later Jan started a second circle, the “Creative Writing Story Circle,” at the Largo library. Sheila facilitated the circle for a year, then returned to run the Safety Harbor circle with Jan. Jan named both the “Jan Golden Writing Circles” so women could link with her blog, which provides writing tips, ideas, and assignments for the women who can’t always attend, including snowbirds who live north in the summer. Sessions run from 6:00 to 7:45 p.m. on the third Wednesday of each month.

Jan and Sheila take turns planning and facilitating each month, working closely with each other for ideas and training topics. “We provide a prompt for the next month’s assignment, post it on Jan’s blog, and include it in the announcement for the upcoming meeting,” Sheila told me. “Attendees bring that story and everyone has an opportunity to read their story and receive gentle feedback. After that we provide a short class on some aspect of writing such as dialog, setting, or editing. Since we have done so many classes (more than 70), we have covered many topics. Jan and I alternate this portion of the meeting. We discuss the topic with each other and offer suggestions if needed.”

I’m learning that each writing circle is unique, with



boundaries and structure that have evolved over time, based on the group’s needs. Jan notes, “In the past we wrote from a prompt, then each person who wanted to, read her work, then Sheila and I taught an aspect of writing. As our group grew larger (no one is turned away) we didn’t have time to do it all, and some members didn’t like timed

writing. So today we give a prompt each month. Members write at home and read their piece at the next meeting.”

“Personally,” Jan adds, “I find value in timed writing and joined a small writing group of four to five people. We write from a prompt, read to each other, and give suggestion of where a piece might be submitted. By the end of a few years I had enough to assemble in my memoir, which I am working on. I’d encourage any group to set goals and work in the direction of their goals. Consider: are women writing for family, for their memoir, or for healing? In a small group this works beautifully.”

Have any members gone on to become published authors? “Yes,” Jan says, “three so far,” adding, “It was nice that they give the circle credit in their publicity; one even used me as a character in her third book.” Sheila has completed her mystery, *You Don’t Know What I Have Done*, and presently seeks an agent. She believes she accomplished this because of her involvement in the group.

As facilitator of an online writing circle for more than a decade and now a facilitator of a community workshop, I never cease to be awed by the bonds that develop from sharing our stories. What has been your personal experience? I ask. Jan says, “Most absolutely exuberantly love their experience. For me, being with this group is the highlight of my month. We have grown close to each other and get magnificent feedback from the participants and the library.” Sheila adds, “I am always impressed at the honesty of the stories being told. The writers do not gloss over an error or problem of their own making but write boldly and fairly in describing difficult times in their lives.

When I asked, “How would you describe some of the multi-layered gifts of a writing circle to someone who’s contemplating joining or starting one?” Jan replied, “Everywhere I go I tell people they have a story to tell and nobody can tell it as they can. If it is for family, your own kids may not be interested but your grandkids will be. Consider how you would like to find a journal your grandmother wrote about her daily life, or your great grandmother, who may have thought her daily life was boring, but you certainly wouldn’t.”

Sheila expanded. “The opportunity to share your work with writers is an amazing gift. To share with people who do not know you and will not judge you or your writing is an incredible experience. People want to hear what you have to say through your written words.”

Jan and Sheila’s writing circle has completed two books of their stories and are working on a third. The first, in 2013, used the prompt “Tables.” The second, in 2014, used a photo to tell a story about what happened before, during, or after the photo was taken. For the third, they are using the prompt, “Music.” A member assembles the book and gets it printed at low cost, then the group donates one to the library and sells others to members for \$3. “The value of giving writers a chance to be published, to see their work in print, and share it is immeasurable,” Jan says.

So many moments stand out from meetings over the years. Jan remembers 80-year-old Pricilla Burke who attended for almost three years. Before she read her first story, Pricilla explained she had never written for anyone but herself and she was nervous. “As she read,” Jan said, “the room became quiet enough to hear a bird whisper. When she finished, the room broke out in applause. Her writing voice was so excellent, we felt we were present in her story. She came every month with new pieces that became better and better. Then she was hospitalized and returned when she got out. When we didn’t see her the next month, I called; she’d been hospitalized again, and died. We all loved Pricilla and dedicated our second book to her, including a beautiful poem she had written. We gave book copies to her sons, who were so thankful for what she got out of the group.

Sheila’s memory: “Another woman wrote about a time when she was very young and stole five dollars. She wrote in a child’s voice, explaining the actions and consequences in words that had me believing it was the young girl at the table.”

When I asked what sage advice Jan and Sheila would give to new and existing facilitators, Jan said, “Just begin, keep your eyes, ears, and heart open and your group will grow organically. Most important is to encourage your writers and not allow criticism.”

Sheila added, “Keep at it. Do it for the love of writing. Do it for yourselves because as you hear what others have

written it will keep your creative juices flowing. Provide helpful info to the members and they will keep coming back. We have been told the information we have provided has been incredibly helpful in improving their writing.”

Jan and Sheila’s feedback is structured. Listeners give comments based on these two aspects: I really liked *this* about the story...,” and “What I’d really like to hear more about is.... Stories are limited to 600 words to give everyone time to read and hear feedback. Jan noted that the word limit has improved writing skills for many. The group provides no critique, for Jan has seen new writers quit because of hard critique. “My goal,” she says, “is to nurture new writers.”

Sheila also feels, “Our consistency in meeting every month at the same location, same day and time, and sending out notices keeps people involved.”

I believe the greatest gift a writer can receive is to have someone listen and care about her work.” ~ Jan Golden

To share with people who do not know you and will not judge you or your writing is an incredible experience.

~ Sheila McNaughton

Dear Sheila and Jan

by Sandra Bruen

Dear Sheila and Jan,
I’m your biggest fan.

To the universe a call I made,
for teachers, I prayed.

So thanks are felt and needed,
because my call was truly heeded.

You are both busy women,
but still share the gifts that you’ve been given.

You share and care,
and always prepare.

Generous you are,
you may not realize your influence goes so far.

I was afraid to write,
but you two brought me to the composer’s light.

Now, my confidence abounds,
after a year has gone around.

I was afraid to expose my innermost feelings,
now it’s hard to keep up with my pen and keep my head from
reeling.

So Dear Sheila and Jan, thank you for coming up with your plan,
to share writers tips galore, now I am no longer a literary bore.





From the Blogs:

One Woman's Day

by Linda Hoye



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

Recently we were pleased to feature a post by Khadijah Lacina called **"The Ballad of Wild Bill"** about an adventure on her homestead.

Last Monday Primrose, our LaMancha doe, had twin bucklings. We woke up, and there they were, all healthy and happy, and Rosie was up and eating and drinking and causing trouble, as usual. Mu'aadh, my twelve-year-old son, named them Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill Hickock. Buffalo Bill was brown, and Wild Bill, gray. Congratulating ourselves for being clever enough to have such a wonderful creature in our herd, we left her to look after them.

Tuesday afternoon the babies were both missing, and Rosie was happily hanging out in the goat house. We mounted a search and found them in the field where the goats go to browse, sleeping. We returned them to their mother, quite sure that it was a fluke.

Thursday afternoon, I was on the phone when I looked out the window and saw that the goats had staged a breakout. They basically have our entire 25 acre property to browse on, with the exception of a small area directly adjacent to our house. The goats, of course, feel that this tiny bit of land must surely hold wonders that are not to be found anywhere else on the property. So they had gone through meadow and forest in order to browse by the storm shelter. I told the children to go and put them back in the field.

A few minutes later Maryam came in with the news that Wild Bill was nowhere to be found. Thinking of what had happened Tuesday – and mad at myself for not exiling Rosie and her babies to the goat pen – I told them to look all along where the goats had to have walked in order to get to the Land of Milk and Honey. After a half an hour or so, they came in and said they had not found him.

The clouds were moving in and there were only a couple of hours until sunset, so I went out and tried to look



for him systematically. I walked the forest at the end of the orchard first, since that would have been the path of least resistance for the goats – something they value very highly. No Wild Bill. I then walked the field in a grid pattern, looking more with my peripheral vision than straight on, hoping that what worked for hunting small game would work for searching for small goats. It began to get dark a half an hour in; half an hour later it was full dark and raining, with the wind picking up.

I, of course, was crying for poor Wild Bill, out there without his mother.

So I walked, and cried, and snot poured out my nose as I thought what a wimpy homesteader I was, crying over a lost goat.

Eventually Hudhaifah, my older son, came out with a flashlight and helped me finish walking the field. Wisely, he stayed quiet as we walked and I berated myself for being a bad goat-herd, and Rosie for being a bad mother after all. I mean, I had eight children, and to date I have never misplaced any of them. She, on the other hand, had lost two once, and now one again. Eventually the rain and wind became too strong, and we had to go in. Baby Asmaa and I kept bursting into tears over the loss of dear, sweet, Wild Bill.

The next morning Alice, my ever practical goat mentor, told me to suck it up and get out there and look again. The children and I looked in all the places we had looked on Thursday, as well as some places that really, if the goat had been there, we would have had to call him Houdini. No Wild Bill. Four days old, no milk for a day and a half, no protection from the elements; surely, Wild Bill had to be in the happy browsing ground.

Saturday morning was busy, as I prepared to go and get a new computer. My old one had, in an act of solidarity with Wild Bill, completely crashed and burned. I had lost many files from my hard drive, and it was clear that it was the end for that erstwhile machine. I looked out the window and saw that Lily, our herd queen, was plotting an escape out by the fence. Maryam went out to foil her plans. When I looked out again, Maryam was walking back and forth, as though looking for something. She went into the goat pen and came out again, running to the house.

“I heard maaaaa maaaaa maaaaa from somewhere. I was afraid it was Buffalo Bill, but he is in with Rosie.”

Could it be?? Could Wild Bill have possibly followed in the tough guy footsteps of his namesake and survived two and a half days away from his mother?

A few minutes later Nusaybah came in with a very thin, shivering, and chastened-looking Wild Bill Hickock in her arms. Apparently he had taken shelter in the upturned root system of a toppled tree, and had decided to remain silent the whole time we were looking for him. We wrapped him up in towels and made him a bottle. Nusaybah held him and

fed him. He finished it off in minutes. I left them there by the fire and went to look for a new computer.

When I returned, Wild Bill, wearing a diaper, was jumping around the living room like he had spring-loaded feet.

And so the saga of Wild Bill drew to a close. He is currently out in the goat house with his mother and Buffalo Bill, having a grand time. Alice said we should rename him Miracle; I think that Wild Bill suits him just fine.

Khadijah and her family are currently homesteading on 25 acres in southern Missouri. She is a student, teacher, herbalist, writer and translator who has had several books published on the subject of Islaam, as well as a children's poetry book. She is currently working on a women's herbal book and another children's book as well as her own story which you can read about at Yemeni Journey. She also writes about sustainable living at Wide Earth.

Yemeni Journey: <http://www.yemenijourney.com>

Wide Earth: <http://www.wideearth.org>

Jane Ross: Around the World In Many Stories

Long-time SCN member Jane Ross recently completed her Master's degree at the Lyndon Baines Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin and is moving to the other side of the globe—back home to New Zealand.

Jane is a global citizen. Her early career included work for multinational print publishers in three countries (the U.K., New Zealand, and Brazil) and in a variety of roles, from editor to business manager. In 1996, she established a freelance editing business in Austin TX. In 2000, she joined SCN and became deeply interested in personal narrative and memoir. In the years since, she has contributed richly to the life of the organization: editing the *Journal*; serving a term on the board; and compiling and editing the SCN anthology, *Kitchen Table Stories*. (We'll never forget her launch party!).

Recently, Jane wrote to tell us about her plans and to let us know about the importance of Story Circle in her life. In her letter, she reflected on her SCN affiliation: “My work on the *Story Circle Journal* boosted my confidence,” she wrote, “and all the work I did for SCN was enormously satisfying, both intellectually and emotionally. The friendships I made through Story Circle have been the most lasting and rewarding of my 24 years in Austin.”

About her relocation, she writes that she and her husband Felipe had been considering a return to New

Zealand to be closer to her family. “The opportunity came when Felipe was offered a senior position in the Math Department of the university in my hometown of Christchurch,” she says. “That clinched it for us.”

Jane's dream is to find a position connected to Christchurch's rebuilding after the 2011 earthquake, which caused the demolition of some 80% of the city's center. She hopes to be able to “investigate the power of story to affect public policy and the need for more opportunities for members of the public to feel that their stories have been heard. This is a largely unaddressed area in the policy world,” she adds. “The work I hope to do there draws on what I have learned about personal story.”

We are glad to know that SCN has had an impact on Jane's professional life, as well as on her personal life. Those who are making public policy decisions need to know the stories of those whose lives are affected. Personal narrative can be a powerful component in decision-making at all levels. And Jane Ross is exactly the right woman to make this happen.





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 New Beginnings and Fresh Starts.

Stopping in the Woods on a Snowy Morn

Sara Etgen-Baker, Anna TX
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As I ran through the snowy woods one morning, the nippy air frosted my breath; soon my breathing mixed with my footfalls, creating a rhythm that allowed me to run almost effortlessly. I immersed myself in my surroundings and felt my frustrations vanish.

Why do my frustrations lose their foothold out here in the woods? What are frustrations? What causes them? I stopped and plopped down on a nearby stump. An insight: I become frustrated when a difference between my expectations and reality occurs. For instance, when the driver who is in the right lane in front of me stops at a traffic light, I expect him to make a right turn on red. When he doesn't, I'm frustrated. I expect my stepdaughter to spend more time with me; when she doesn't, I'm frustrated. I expect my husband to read my mind; when he doesn't, I'm frustrated.

My perspective shifted; I realized that I enjoy running and being in the woods because I expect nothing from it. No wonder my frustrations vanish! Ah! An epiphany! My

expectations are the source of many, if not all, of my frustrations. I stood up and turned around, expecting to follow my footprints in the snow and return in the direction from whence I came. But the falling snow had covered up my footprints, and I could no longer go home the way I came. At first I felt the familiar twinges of frustration, but then I realized that, once again, my expectation was at the core of my frustration.

I learned an important lesson that morning in the snowy woods that led me to ask myself these questions whenever I feel those twinges of frustration: "What am I expecting from this person or situation? Is this expectation realistic or is it my attempt to control either the circumstances or the person involved?"

By asking, then answering, these questions, I've reframed my life, and in so doing I'm slowly freeing myself and those around me from my expectations. And sometimes my life feels almost as effortless as my morning runs through the woods.

Grandma's Rocking Chair

Doris Jean Shaw, Colorado Springs CO
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I felt really loved when my grandmother hugged me. She would let me help with breakfast. I would stir the milk gravy she served over fluffy biscuits.

Then she got to where she couldn't talk. A scan of her head showed she had a brain tumor. Surgery was done. Grandma came home with a bandage on her head. She spent hours rocking the little ones on the front porch.

I was six when she died; the chair was passed from one cousin to another until I acquired it. It brought me comfort when I rocked in it. The steady rhythm of the rock takes away the stress. After 50 years, I feel her presence when I sit in the rocker and rock. Cares and troubles just seem to disappear.

A New Pair of Shoes

Marilyn Ashbaugh, Edwardsburg MI
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Mrs. Crimmins drove an ocean-going station wagon in which there was always room for one more. In the back seat on the driver's side was a rusted floor board with a huge hole. Joyce and I became intrigued with watching the street zoom past through this unusual window. But the fascination didn't stop there.

During one ride, Joyce stuck her left foot in the hole so that it lightly touched the pavement below. Mrs. Crimmins asked whether we heard a strange noise.

"No," responded all passengers.

It wasn't until we arrived at her house that Joyce lifted her foot out of the hole and stepped out of the car. Her left shoe was a disaster. The white polish on the toe of the shoe and all the leather was completely worn off. The sole was worn down, especially on one side. Comparing the right with the left shoe was like day to night. The perversity of the stark contrast amused rather than alarmed Joyce, and we both started laughing. Joyce would place the right shoe

forward on the ground, as if for a round of Blue Shoe, then return it to its companion. Next she would place the left shoe forward, and we'd start giggling all over again.

We continued this until we saw her mom's car pull into the driveway. But rather than run inside and change her shoes, as I would have done, Joyce ran to her mother: "Mom, I have to show you something!"

Her mother was barely out of the car when Joyce presented her right shoe. "Mom, look at this shoe." And her mother, tired but dutiful, looked down at Joyce's right shoe and quickly looked back at Joyce. But before her mother could speak, Joyce said, "Now, Mom, look at this shoe!" And Joyce stuck out her left shoe.

A pained expression befell her mother's face. "Joyce, what on earth happened to your shoe?"

"I don't know, Mom, I just don't know. I came home from school with Mrs. Crimmins and when I got out of the car, my shoe looked like this."

First Meeting

Mignon Martin, San Antonio TX
mignonmartin@hotmail.com

I was three months old when I met my father. We were living in Sulphur Springs, an East Texas town previously known as Bright Star, population 5,000. The name change was an early marketing ploy to attract businesses to the mineral springs in the area, which were being touted as healthy and rejuvenating. The resort identity never materialized.

Mother and Daddy moved there at the close of WWII when he was released from the army. By then, they already had two children. My next brother was born shortly after the move, and I came along two years later. Daddy was a general practitioner, and because his sisters lived in Sulphur Springs, he wanted to live there. Mother just wanted to live with Daddy. She didn't care where.

He was a continuing education junkie, so when he found a nine-month course of study in New York City, he just had to go. He thought it would make him a better doctor, his lifelong pursuit. He boarded a train leaving my mother pregnant with me and responsible for three preschoolers. They had saved money, borrowed money and lived frugally to make it possible to live with no income for almost a year.

When it got close to my due date, Aunt Lilly took Mother to Ft. Worth Harris Memorial Hospital, where Daddy had selected a doctor to attend her. She went to sleep, and when she woke up, I was there. That's how they did it back then. She called Daddy in New York City to tell him I'd been born, and he was shocked; he had divined that I would be a boy. After staying ten days in the hospital, Mother and I rode the 112 miles home to Sulphur Springs in an ambulance.

Three months later, on a crisp November morning, as Mother stood by the sink savoring her first cup of coffee and the brief silence of sunrise in the old house, Daddy surprised her by walking through the kitchen door. She expected him later that day, but she so loved surprises, and Daddy knew it. He was always the main surprise of her life though – that he loved her, that he was hers.

After tears and kisses, she grabbed his hand and took him upstairs to where I was asleep in my crib. And so we met.

Mean Girls, 30 Years Later

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Every high school introvert knows the feeling. All we want is a quiet place to eat our lunch with a close friend, sharing time in deep conversation. Gossip and small talk is an alien world to us.

Although I left high school many years ago, some things have not changed. I arrive early at my favorite lunch spot to stake out a table for two and to sit in quiet expectation for my friend Jackie. There is a table of four seated behind me and I smile at one of the women whom I recognize.

At 12:15, I see Jackie. She rushes to the table, full of apologies as we hug. She explains that she could not find the tiny restaurant sign until the third trip down the street. Fellow diners disappear as I focus on our intimate conversation. We are finishing our lunch when a woman from the table behind me walks over. I recognize her from the theology classes we took together.

“The four of us are discussing Teilhard,” she shares.

“Teilhard de Chardin?” I gush. She knows he is my favorite theologian.

She continues: “We are an exclusive discussion group. A closed group.”

I am sure she sees my hurt and disappointment. I think of Teilhard, ostracized and silenced by the church for his expansive and inclusive thoughts on the holiness of the entire cosmos, the universe as a living host.

“Exclusive? Closed?” I ask her with a quizzical look on my face. “We are thinking of two very different Teilhards. Good luck with your group.”

I stare directly into this woman's eyes, and she reflexively steps back. She has revealed something to me and I have revealed something to her. No longer the high school girl filled with fear and longing when excluded, I am strengthened by the wisdom born of suffering. I find peace and freedom in knowing that “closed” and “exclusive” describe no group I wish to be a member of. And I smile triumphantly, for I recognize the makings of a short story.



A Good Time?

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It is 1975. I am 15 years old and live in San Antonio. I am going to my first concert with my friend BeBe.

My parents say I cannot go, so I lie and say I'm going to the lake with BeBe and her family. BeBe's mom doesn't speak English, so there is no way for my mom to verify my story.

Mom drops me off at BeBe's. We leave for the concert in her very cool, metallic green Camaro with T-tops. Along the way, we stop at her boyfriend's house to get him and one of his friends. My first blind date, and he's cute!

I'm wearing my new bell-bottoms, hip-huggers with a peace-sign belt buckle and a dark-blue gauze shirt with rainbow-embroidered designs. We get to the Austin stadium. It's an all-day concert with ZZ Top, Santana, Joe Cocker, and Bad Company. It is so cool!

We lay out our blankets to sit down. Hippies everywhere. Hey, I realize, I'm a hippie too! Awesome!

Joints are thrown at us. Topless women run around. There's even one with a snake wound around her arm. Over the loudspeaker, I hear: “Don't do the purple acid. It's bad.”

Good thing I did the yellow.

It is my first time getting high.

I never stop until I end up in prison so many years later.

Homeless

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Homeless ... in my mind, in my soul
A tornado came carrying me in His vortex

Away without my nest,
Away without a place
For my heart, for my breath.
Where are my stars and my sun?
Away from my mind, all gone.
Can I find a corner in His life that is mine?
In my soul in my heart:
A safe haven quiet and free:
A scrap of space I call my own?

The Fateful Phone Call

Patricia Roop Hollinger, Westminster MD
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It was May 2009.

My life at that time was not so fine.

Death was hovering like birds overhead,
I began each day with somber dread.

With each morning I had less to give,
Why, sometimes I wondered if I wanted to live.

The obituary of your wife I read,
It seemed everyone around me was dropping dead.

You made my heart beat many years ago,
“Is it possible,” I wondered, “again I could glow?”

“I have nothing to lose,” I said to myself,
For I was feeling like a dusty item just left on a shelf.

You picked up the phone on the second ring,
Your baritone voice made my heart sing.

“Could we have lunch sometime?” I tentatively asked,
“For in your presence I would love to bask.”

“Breakfast would even be a delight,”
You responded in a voice so bright.

I said, “YES,” without missing a beat.
Seeing you again was such a treat.

AND THE TREAT CONTINUES!!!!!!

Progress

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I'm making progress.

I got up early enough to see the sunrise.

The room overlooks the bay, so the water slaps up against the bank.

I made coffee, opened the drapes and curled up in bed to sip.

The sun first turned the sky red, then pink.

Before I knew it, the sun had popped up above the horizon.

I glanced away to pull the blanket up and it seemed as if the sun had jumped up a whole inch.

Just that quickly, the sun had made progress across the sky.

Just as quickly, the clouds swallowed up the sun, leaving only a few rays behind.

Life is short. Enjoy every moment.

May you have lots of sunrises in your future.

Breaking Open

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Preparation for a trip opens curtains on who we are. I boast that I never pack. I open my suitcase on the floor and for a week drop items in – my underwear as I pass by my drawers, a brush or face cream from the bathroom. Soon all is packed to go; all ends tied up at home.

A self is revealed that rushes to keep control, keep hold, sometimes at a price, even while the trip that looms heralds breaking open the tidy, ordered self.

In the kitchen, I notice items in the fridge that need discarding. A glass Pyrex container, brushed by my hand, is sent flying too fast for any saving, yet slow enough for me to sense it slide, then stall at the shelf's edge, where my attempt to catch it only propels it faster to the concrete floor.

Before it even hits, I curse my reckless rushing, lament an added errand to run to the store for a replacement. Even for a second of non-acceptance, I consider a reversed trajectory, the container rebounding back to the known. Reality prevails and I bewail me the worrier, me the waster.

The next morning, I ponder my pending journey to a writing retreat where words are promised to well up from less linear spaces. Suddenly I see that the dish, caught by my energy, was so moved, its dream was wakened. It fairly flew over the moon in that wish to run away with the spoon. Now I heard in the tinkling crash, when the dish could no longer contain it, the music of change! It sings:

Rushing fiercely toward claiming

Our voices and heart,

Open to breaking at each journey's start.



Fresh Start with an Old Companion

Vicki Holmsten, Farmington NM
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When I was learning to play the violin, our canine family member, Flicka, would stand next to me and howl. My mother put me in a room and closed the door. Flicka leaned against the door and howled louder.

My patient and long-suffering family granted me the space to scratch and make terrible noises on my three-quarter size violin, and so I kept at it. In fact, I always found somewhere to pick up the violin. I played throughout college and then toted my violin to Africa with me for my two-year Peace Corps service. After that, there were chamber music groups and guitar players looking for fiddlers. After a few years, I landed in a town large enough to support an orchestra that took me in.

It was sad when I stopped playing ten years ago. Work pressure and the related evening/weekend time commitments made me close down the violin case. I reasoned it was my turn now to be an enthusiastic audience member.

Last winter, “pick up my violin” appeared on my list of New Year’s intentions. Putting an idea in writing has a powerful effect on me, so when I got the email inviting me back to the college orchestra, I said yes carefully: “Ok, but give me two weeks to get my fingers moving again.”

I opened the violin case and discovered the instrument had not cracked into pieces. It was hard to get the strings to hold the tune, and the first movements of the bow on the string would have made Flicka howl.

I stayed with it. I was happy to feel the burn on the fingertips of my left hand and see the purple indentations there. I was even happy to see the white rosin residue on my clothes. Little by little, the sound got better.

This was a homecoming for me. I reclaimed a place in the second violin section, the best seat in the house for any concert. I was back in the middle of the music, playing my long-time friend, the violin.

Hubby Home Alone, Part 1: Learning How to Rock

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“I just know I am going to be in your next story with a topic like ‘New Beginnings and Fresh Starts’,” my husband remarks with feigned resentment from the comfortable confines of my second-hand Lazy Boy rocker – the same rocker he refused to look at with me at a thrift store a year ago.

I glance over at him – easy for me to do these days, seated upright in his fashionable Macy’s model with its unforgiving wooden arms, which he has abandoned since retirement in favor of my bad-boy rescue one instead.

“I know you have all kinds of plans on what I should be doing in retirement,” he continues, on a roll now from his stationary position.

“I have no plans for you,” I respond. “After 35 years, you are free to do whatever you want to do, or not.”

“You say that, but you ask me every day what my plans are.”

Well, yes, guilty as charged. But when you’re the one left behind in the workforce, you do wonder about your

partner as you walk out the door. You wonder how long does it take him to actually get ready for the gym? Exactly how long do he and the dog stay in the living room reading and snoozing? And why is it that they sometimes only manage one walk for the day, and that one only after I get home and after I’ve made dinner?

But these are only minor considerations. I know that initially he eased into an eternal summer weekend mode. As an educator, I get that; I anticipated its arrival and really didn’t expect much else at first. But I also know my Type A husband will not be satisfied very long with that lifestyle or with himself, either. There are signs already: broccoli growing beside beans in my garden; closets cleared of work clothes; a renewed library card; an afternoon spent at the Fine Arts Museum, even though the gift of that membership is suspect at first.

And today, questions about logging into the blog site I created for him – aka Hubby Home Alone.

New beginnings sometimes take time to rock.



Storm After a Drought

Claire McCabe, Elkton MD
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My dog, brown as the grass, knows first.
Her nails click on the wooden floor,
punctuate my sleep and wake me.
She pants and paces.

Then it starts,
the gentle tapping of hope
with a drop here, there,
a soothing metronome of rain.

But she hears the threat intensify.
A distant growl from the sky
and screech of branch against pane
conspire to terrorize her.

With a boom, a river
rushes down the glass.
Like my dog, in fitful sleep,
I tremble as the storm increases.

Beads spray against the window.
I thrash and twist,
knot myself into dreams
that mimic the storm:

*A gaggle of runners flocks to my home,
feet pound my driveway, fists bang at my door.
We crouch in the cellar as winds hurl root, rock
and stone.*

*Water crashes through walls,
while the plumber bails with a teacup
and offers my doggy a drink.*

I wake to a world dripping
with the frantic exhaustion of love
too long waited for.
My dog rolls in the wet grass.

A New Beginning

Charlotte Wlodkowski, Allison Park PA
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As I walked into the room, I repeated, "You have to do this. Just sit and observe." At this point in my career, I was ready to make constructive changes.

Everyone greeted me with smiles. Marie handed me a name badge and directed me to a table. The room was full of laughter and conversation. People were going from table to table. Papers were being exchanged. Activity was everywhere.

This meeting was being conducted by secretaries, for secretaries. I was impressed by everyone who gave a report. Not only were they able to speak in front of a group, they also were responsible for creating the development of their committee activities. A professional speaker was invited to present an educational program that added value to membership. These women were an inspiration.

I was a member for less than a year when I raised my hand at the request for a volunteer. I thought the assignment would be easy, and a good way to introduce myself to other chapter members. My duty was to attend a meeting to gather details and bring information back to the members. But, once that duty was complete, I was asked to stand behind the podium and actually speak. My heart started beating rapidly, and my knees wobbled at just the thought of all eyes upon me. My words rambled so fast over my lips, I didn't know what they said. My head was lowered most of the time, reading, not stopping to emphasize a particular word or sentence, not stopping to take a breath, only glancing up to make sure some members were still in the audience. That experience was my initiation into the chapter.

I was captivated from the very beginning with the roll call to the good of the order. I had a lot to learn, and this was the association that would teach me. Since then, I have worked at several large corporations at the executive level. My calculated risk to venture into that meeting room was the best choice I made, both personally and professionally.

Clouds of Joy

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Most days
they float above us
modestly covering our world.
Most days
I look up again and again,
watch billowy shapes re-form
into wispy whirls
or stretchy blankets.
Most days,
I am in absolute awe
at how they move about,
intent on creating our weather.



Halloween... A New Beginning?

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A divorce had left me bereft in the early 1970s. Whether a new beginning was even a possibility became an ever-present question in my mind for a myriad of reasons. The church frowned on a second marriage. No, it was not just a frown; it was an unpardonable sin. For some reason this just did not compute with me when all other misdeeds, mistakes, and sins were forgivable. Wasn't the message of Christ all about new beginnings?

I was now open to the possibility of being married again, but no rush. The rush had contributed to the demise of my first marriage, upon a lengthy reflection period.

Numerous long evenings were spent alone. An unexpected encounter in the grocery store with another single in the area led to an invitation to a Halloween party. Parents Without Partners were the sponsor and I had not attended one of their gatherings for months.

The evening initially appeared to be just be another one of those "woe is me" events, so I was getting ready to

flee. With that, a robust and rotund gentleman opened the door, waving a piece of paper and saying, "I just received a warning ticket! I told the police officer that I could not be speeding because the left door of my car rattled when I went over 50mph. I offered him my keys so he could try it out and see for himself."

I had to meet this person who could come up with such a brilliant method of talking his way out of a speeding ticket before the night was over, so I asked for a dance. We clicked!

He said, "Let's get out of here." I responded in the positive and told him to follow me to my house.

We connected viscerally on all levels. I learned that he and his first wife had been married on Halloween. His first wife's birthday was April 1, which was the anniversary of my first marriage.

Our marriage took place August 29, 1982, three years after that fateful meeting.

Snail's Pace

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Listen. What did you just hear?
Run that back in your head –
maybe run that back yet again.

Make a mental note: next time
listen a little slower – truly listen
to more than just the audible.

Little lapses between sounds
pregnant with possibilities –
each as potent as any syllable.

Listen with eyes wide open
to language beyond voice –
to intention behind expression.

Listen to Nature's symphonies –
elemental stirrings of the planet,
a single petal unfolding from bud.

Listen especially during silence,
for you will hear then the truth –
reflections from your inner depths.

Listen. At a snail's pace.

The Romance of the Catalpa Tree

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We were apartment hunting on a wet, grey, winter West Coast day in 1986 – our first home together after a year's courtship. Our budget was modest and our hopes high. Would it be possible to live urban with country flair? Would we be able to have a garden space or a balcony close to the sea?

Feeling quite discouraged after viewing several dank and dismal abodes available for rent that month, we were welcomed into a fifth floor apartment in Vancouver's West End. It was situated at the corner of Nelson Street and Gilford Avenue, near English Bay and the city's beloved historic Sylvia Hotel. It was love at first sight. Not for the hardwood floors and coved archways into the bedroom and kitchen, or the smiling elderly woman in the apartment across the lane watering plants at her window. It was because all we could see was a wall of green across the

stretch of the balcony which bordered the length of the space. It was simply beautiful and took our breath away simultaneously. We had entered into a romantic, quiet forest in the most densely populated neighborhood of the city. This most magnificent tree must have been 50 feet high and sprawled 30 feet in width. It had large, very distinct heart-shaped leaves. The leaves were entwined and enveloped the balcony, creating an amazing extension beyond the small square footage.

Without hesitation we signed a lease, dispersed of the need for curtains, strung white twinkling lights on the balcony railing, and embarked on an endearing year-long friendship with "our dear catalpa." That spring, white trumpet-shaped flowers blossomed, and many nights were spent during the summer in the shade of the blooms.

In God's Hands

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It was raining buckets the day my husband left. Bill left the front door open and rain came in. For weeks, his erratic behavior had put me on edge. I never knew what to expect when I walked through the door. Was he gone for good or would he be back before I had the floor mopped?

“Dear Lord, please help me. I don’t think I can go on another minute like this.”

I waited for something to happen. Nothing. I got down on my knees and began to clean up the mess.

“Mom, we’re hungry.” My children stood at the back door as though they were afraid to come in. Their father’s behavior confused them, too.

“Lord please help.” Silently I prayed for strength.

“Let me finish this,” I said to them. I continued to mop and my mind wandered. My husband lost his job; he couldn’t find another. He moved us into a small house on the lake. I couldn’t keep up. He bought things we couldn’t afford. Life on the lake seemed peaceful on the outside, but inside it was confusing.

Bill would get up at night to chase off imaginary prowlers. He became unable to even fix himself something

to eat. Then the worst happened: I lost my job. Bill insisted I look for work and he would keep our two children, ages three and five.

I began looking for work, but without success.

Coming in one day from job hunting, I noticed that the windows looked strange. The children did not come to meet me. Stepping on the porch, I could see into the living room. It was bare.

“Dear Lord help me.” I didn’t have the strength to push open the door. My footsteps made a hollow sound in empty rooms.

“Dear Lord, where are they?” Where had he taken them? I headed back to the car. A red pick-up drove up; it was my husband.

“Where are the children?” I began screaming.

“Guess what?” He rolled down the window and gave me a broad grin. “I have a job. Guess what I will be doing?”

“Where are the children?” I tried again.

“I took them to your mother.”

A Midnight Moment

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Midnight – a moment of time between – between one day ending and another beginning, between knowing and uncertainty, between confidence and fear. My midnight moment was one of wide-awake awareness that when morning came, the decision I had finally made would change the lives of everyone sleeping under our roof.

It had not been an easy decision to make. Its gestation period had taken nearly five years – much longer than the gestation period of an elephant. But then, to me, it was much bigger than a new-born elephant. This decision was huge, bigger than a whole herd of elephants. I had spent all of my life never even considering the possibility of such a decision. Even secret thoughts of doing it filled me with feelings of disgrace and severe anxiety. When you take on a herd of elephants, you put yourself in danger of being trampled.

There were many influences on my decision-making, not the least of which was basic survival. Could I make it on my own? Could I face my family’s expected disappointment

in me, the church’s possible sanction? Was my own commitment of 20 years of my life to be for nothing? Would alcoholism and unfaithfulness break us? Would this decision save us?

Just saying the word out loud was a struggle, but finally, in an unfamiliar choked whisper of a voice, I heard myself say the verboten word: “Divorce.” And in that midnight moment, with that word finally said out loud, for me, my marriage was truly over. Failed. Ruined. Irretrievable. Kaput.

In that midnight moment, and all the sleepless nights that had preceded it, I had become convinced that the cost of choosing not to make this decision would be spiritual suicide for our family. I had finally taken control of my fears and embraced the possibilities of what a new beginning could mean in growth and positive change for me and my children. In that midnight moment, even though I was still filled with doubt and fear, I chose a new life for all of us.

Nothing New Under the Sun?

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Ecclesiastes 1:9: “What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun.”

If Ecclesiastes is correct, why do I take so much delight in newness?

Hasn't the sun's light appeared in the east every day? Hadn't the ancient Korean temple gong I heard marking the new year rung 2,000 times already? Isn't the pine wood smell of our Christmas tree the same every year? Hasn't food cooked outdoors always tasted more delicious than the same food prepared in the kitchen? Haven't newborn babies always amazed their mothers by their presence outside of the womb?

Yes, those things have happened and will continue to happen. But wait! Each time I see, hear, smell, taste, or feel something familiar, it is a new experience, because I am constantly changing in the way I perceive and understand what is happening. When the sun rose yesterday, I wasn't the

same person as when I saw it this morning. Although thousands of Koreans had heard the temple bell ring for millennia, when the deep sound vibrated through my body, it linked me to those other listeners. Smelling the familiar pine sap when the tree was placed inside the house meant that this Christmas was happening – familiar, yet new, despite my 75 Christmases. This time, our grandchildren would be coming! The first gooey s'more I tasted at Girl Scout Camp as a youngster seemed different from the one I helped my daughter make when she was a Girl Scout. Our first child's perfect body in my arms was a wondrous miracle, and the second's warm weight when the doctor laid him on my stomach was a familiar joy, yet different because I had become more experienced at being a mother; I understood the significance of his birth for our whole family.

Each day brings the opportunity to experience all five senses in ever changing ways. All I have to do is pay attention to what is new under the sun.

New Beginnings

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w-ecircle 10

In every life there are highs and lows, parts to be remembered and parts better forgotten. Who would have ever believed that the best part of my life would begin in 2008, when I was 68?

I was born in Montana, and until I was 19 I knew only small towns where people were known by everybody and were greeted by name when passing on the street. What a shock it was when we moved to a city where next-door neighbors never became acquainted or visited. People seemed suspicious of everybody and never spoke to strangers.

I spent a lifetime dreaming of the friendly, small-town existence, but there comes a time in life when the window of opportunity closes and a person has to learn to find peace and contentment in old age with the life that was given to them.

My husband always worked construction and needed to be where there was work. I had a good job, too, and moving was never a consideration.

God works in mysterious ways and sometimes through strange circumstances. We moved from the Portland, Oregon, area to Myrtle Creek in Southern Oregon in 2008. We had been living in a senior, independent living community in Portland and had sold our home two years prior, due to my husband's health issues. When he was 82, we purchased our very first brand-new home in a community of 3,000 people where people speak wherever we go. If I take a walk, people honk and wave. People visit while waiting in lines at the grocery store and gather at the many community events and churches.

Our little town sits in a small valley surrounded by hills and is considered the banana belt of the state. Wild turkeys and deer can be seen in or near our yard every day. This town, and this time of my life, answer the many years of what I thought were unanswered prayers. I know now that prayers are always answered, and sometimes the answer is “no.”

Even when the answer is “yes,” He works on His schedule, not on mine.

Ode to the Mango Tree

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Massive, shady tree,
your strong
thick branches
bear the weight
of a hundred years
of human suffering.
Your fruit
bestows the joys
of golden flesh.
Large flattened seed
a boat or a home
for tiny creatures.
Fibers that stick
between teeth,
delicate scent.
Unripe mango
sprinkled with salt
a tart delight.
I prefer
your mature fruit
to bury my mouth
in your succulent flesh,
sticky juice dripping
through my fingers.



New Beginnings

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Rounding a corner
on a familiar country road
things can change so quickly.
New construction
unexpectedly alters the landscape
disturbing the contour of the land
like all change –
yielding unpredictability.

High waters rise where drainage
once was planned
run off from a field
now deprived of century-old oaks and willowy pines
replaced with concrete slabs
smothering memories, squelching traditional livelihoods
displaced by newly fashioned sterile structures
for new families to build new memories within.

Turning corners, facing change
unexpected bumps and dips
unanticipated turns –
enough to make any driver wary
of just what experience
might be encountered
among new beginnings
just around the corner ahead.

Purgatory!

Letty Watt, Norman OK
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“Sisters.” Now that is a loaded word. We came from the same parents; we grew up in the same home; we loved the same pets. But then the similarities end.

This winter, nearly 40 years of collecting books, home decor, and mixed-matched clothes came crashing down on my younger sister. Two years ago, she opened her heart and home to a husband who needed a garage not filled to the brim with stuff and a closet. Next, they adopted a 14-year-old spirited young girl who needed a bedroom and closet space. And lastly, they’re opening their home to a young girl from Korea for the next 12 months, so one more bedroom and closet were needed.

Purgatory! The two of us teamed up, along with two daughters, on December 31 to empty my sister’s home of stuff. The first three days we dedicated to clothes and closets. She stacked 14 outfits she couldn’t live without, then we began the “sortations” closet by closet: one pile trash, one pile giveaways. I helped in the sorting by shaking my head NO and posing questions like “When did you wear

it last?” or “Really?” and then we rolled in laughter. Each day I packed my SUV with bulging white trash bags and boxes. On Day Four, gardening tools, home décor, and books disappeared. Three final days of more sorting, purging and deliveries to charities, and 40 years of valued stuff vanished.

It’s the stories we created that will last – not the books, not the clothes. “When did you last wear that faded pink gown from the 1971 Miss Oklahoma pageant?”

Spinning on her toes, my sister replied, “Last year I ripped out the zipper and wore it at Halloween as Glenda the Good Witch.”

I ask you, how do you throw away such a gown?

We don’t need those clothes or books. They are not who we are. But the memories we shall own and carry in our hearts. Now there is space for more people and more love in my sister’s home: A fresh start for a loving family.

2016

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The first week of January, I finished my goals and writing plan for 2016. It really galls me to say this, but it is the same this year as it was for 2014, 2015, and years and years before that. The realization of this stopped me in my tracks. What is going on here? What is holding me back from doing what I love so much?

I woke early this morning with new insight into this frustrating problem. You see, I don't live alone as I thought; there are a couple of free-loader, nit-picking, frustrating, aggravating boarders residing here with me 24/7. Their names are Procrastination and Perfectionism, and I've no doubt they are here to stay, no matter how hard I try to get rid of them. They have had way too much negative input into my affairs, especially my writing opportunities. It must stop.

So here's my new 2016, revised, plan: As for Procrastination, I will use its positive side to keep me from starting too many things at once so I can focus on my writing, and from diving into projects without serious thought, and wherever else I can put it to good use. I'll call upon Perfectionism to help me do my very best work, but I won't let it cripple my progress as it has so often in the past. Good enough will have to be good enough.

Just for good measure, and to keep these two "P's" from using the worst of their bad habits on me in the future, I've asked for assistance from the good guys. Passion, Patience, Perseverance and Practice will be moving in to help me keep things in line.

2016 will be a New Beginning, a Fresh Start for all of us here together.

Winter Beginnings

Sarah Fine, Toronto ON
Sarahfine3@gmail.com
w-ecircle 3

There is something of the older woman
About winter
Falling across the land
Graceful, soft, relentless
There will be no changing winter's mind
Once she's begun piling snow, covering ground,
Silently arranging drifts
In some premeditated pattern
There is no calling winter back
After the first storm sweep
Has painted the landscape white
Burying last autumn's grass
Erasing last year's misdeeds
Giving a clean start to all who wish it
Winter invites us
To go outside
On a sun struck day
Breathe the cold crisp air of new beginnings
Lean into the wisdom of a gentle winter wind
And start anew
Offering us a fresh white page
A chance to write our stories and our poems
An opportunity to be
Graceful, soft, relentless.

Beginnings

Debra Dolan, Vancouver BC • Debradolan1958@gmail.com

Kate and I were 19, daring and adventurous. Sky-diving was something she always wanted to do. I hadn't given it much thought, having never flown, and just wanted to spend time her. She was not conventional and a far cry from my boring family. Being very secretive, each of us with our own money from summer waitressing, we enrolled in a sky-diving course at the airport. It was 1977, and although we were too young to vote or drink, we were of the age of consent for marriage, for enrolling into the Canadian Armed Forces, and for participating in this activity. Given the choices, we thought this was the least dangerous.

We told our mothers we were going to an afternoon matinee; the lying was part of the adventure. On the day of our jump, autumn was in all its glory. The surrounding countryside was breathtaking in a tremendous burst of reds and oranges. Leaves crackled as we walked to the aircraft in the open field; the sky was bright blue and cloudless. Our plane was assigned and we soon discovered that we were sharing this experience with six members of the Ottawa Roughriders, our national capital's professional football

team. Oh my god! Conridge Holloway and us! He was the first black man we ever met, and he held quite a reputation as a ladies' man in sporting circles. Kate and I were awestruck; he was gorgeous, our country's "Shaft," and he was funny and fun, sexy and gracious. His presence, along with all the other players, took us under their wings, and our own fear of flying left us at ground zero. We were, after all, brave independent women.

I was never terrified until the plane, at 5,000 feet, leaned with its hatch open, so close to the edge of our independent natures and so grounded by the security of the aircraft floor. Out we went, one by one. The air current grabbed at my breath and body. It was electrifying. In the sky at a distance were my comrades, soaring and screaming and laughing, as we trusted that life would not end on that day.

I have never forgotten that feeling of weightlessness and of sheer and utter freedom. Those nine minutes were the beginnings of shaping me. I think that because I did that, I can do anything.



My Ironing Companion

Arlene Howard, Rancho Mirage CA
 arlene@alum.calberkeley.org
 w-ecircle 9

In 1963, a few months after we married, I bought an ironing board. I needed to do the weekly ironing; two baskets overflowing with clean but wrinkled clothes needed attention. Not really wanting to do this task, I thought, “Maybe I’ll watch TV while I iron.”

A black-and-white console sat unused in our office. Since there was no cable or Netflix or Amazon Prime or DVD or even videotape in those days of long ago, I started flipping channels. It didn’t take long, as there were only four channels. I stopped on Channel 9, KQED, broadcasting from San Francisco. A cooking show caught my attention. The lady chef was making Quiche Lorraine. A cheese pie? Why, I had never heard of such a thing! I loved to cook; I loved to eat. I made it. Absolutely delicious, though I needed to practice making pie crusts.

“Hey, maybe this weekly ironing project might be fun,” I said to my husband. Soon I was sending a dime each week to KQED for a copy of the recipe. My ironing got done, thanks to Julia Child.

My mom had always encouraged me to cook. “You cook. I’ll clean up,” she would say. As I ironed, Julia taught me how to make French onion soup, coquilles St. Jacques, charlotte Malakoff, croissants, beef Wellington and a cheese soufflé. For Christmas, 1963, my husband gave me a copy of *The Art of French Cooking*. Two years later we splurged, \$25 each, and enrolled in two of Julia Child’s classes at the San Francisco Museum of Art. What a thrill to see Julia and have her sign my book!

Julia’s books have been my cooking companions for 52 years; they are my daughter’s, too. Quiche Lorraine is a diet staple. Now whole milk replaces the cream, but it is still delicious. Though I no longer iron, I am glad I had ironing to do in 1963. It started me on my life-long adventure in French cooking. Julia is also in my garden; three Julia Child golden yellow roses bloom outside my kitchen window.

As Julia said at the end of each show, “Bon Appétit.”

Ode to the Guayaba

Maya Lazarus, Caldwell TX
 deblazarus@yahoo.com,
 www.mayalazarus.com

Spanish vowels
 exude
 special tenderness,
 perfectly suited
 for the delicate,
 pink flesh nestled
 in ripe yellow skin.
 Early morning
 at the Colombian farm,
 drawn outside
 by the aroma –
 sweet, but not cloying,
 we search for fallen guava
 before the birds come.
 Some fruit has a peck or two,
 but no matter.
 Strained flesh
 blended with milk
 conjures pink sunsets
 dipping into the horizon.

Online Writers’ Roundtables

For SCN members looking for support and encouragement with their writing, we offer three Online Writers’ Roundtables, designed to connect writers at different levels of experience.

- LifeWriters is for startup writers who are looking for encouragement and help in developing a consistent, focused writing practice..
- Writer2Writer is an intermediate group for writers who are working on defined writing projects in any genre.
- WorkInProgress is for writers who have either been published or are working on specific projects aimed at near-term publication.

For more details and to join a group, go to:

[http://www.storycircle.org/
WritersRoundtables.shtml](http://www.storycircle.org/WritersRoundtables.shtml)

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Pat LaPointe

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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/frmjoints.php

Brief Bios of SCN's Professional Members

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

B. Lynn Goodwin owns 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 of Jeanne Guy Gatherings is an 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**

Mary Jarvis is a librarian, quilter, and author currently living and working in the Panhandle of Texas. **Author**

Kay Kendall writes 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**

Khadijah Lacina is a 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**

Pat LaPointe worked primarily with women in her career as a psychotherapist, conducting 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. **Author, Editor, Teacher**

Juliana Lightle's career experiences include college administrator, corporate manager, author, horse breeder and trainer, and educator. She currently teaches high school English, writes, sings, and wanders the world. **Author**

Sallie Moffitt is an 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**

Category Listings

Authors: Susan Albert, B. Lynn Goodwin, Mary Jarvis, Kay Kendall, Pat LaPointe, Juliana Lightle, Sallie Moffitt

Editors (content, manuscript, copyediting, proofreading): B. Lynn Goodwin

Freelancers: Khadijah Lacina, Sallie Moffitt

Marketing Services: Khadijah Lacina

Speakers: Susan Albert

Teachers / Coaches / Mentors: B. Lynn Goodwin, Jeanne Guy, Pat LaPointe

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Stories from the Heart VIII Registration Form

Send this form with your check to:
Conference Registration, Story Circle Network
PO Box 1670, Estes Park, CO 80517-1670
To register online and use your credit card, go to
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Current Member of Story Circle? yes no

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<input type="checkbox"/> Full Registration (Fri keynote / Sat / Sun)		\$325	\$365/\$420	\$405/\$460	
Partial Registration (please check all that apply):	<input type="checkbox"/> Friday (Keynote/ dessert reception)	\$35	\$40	\$45	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Saturday only (includes lunch)	\$166	\$195/\$220	\$224/\$249	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Saturday lunch only	\$35	\$40	**	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Sunday only (includes lunch)	\$122	\$130/\$155	\$138/\$163	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Sunday lunch only	\$35	\$40	**	
Friday Pre-Conference Workshop (Not included in full registration: optional, extra charge.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Noon-1:45 pm session	\$30 each	\$40 each	\$50 each	
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Saturday/Sunday lunch preference: <input type="checkbox"/> chicken <input type="checkbox"/> vegetarian				Total due:	

What is included in my full registration fees?

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

What is not included in my full registration fees?

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

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

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

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

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

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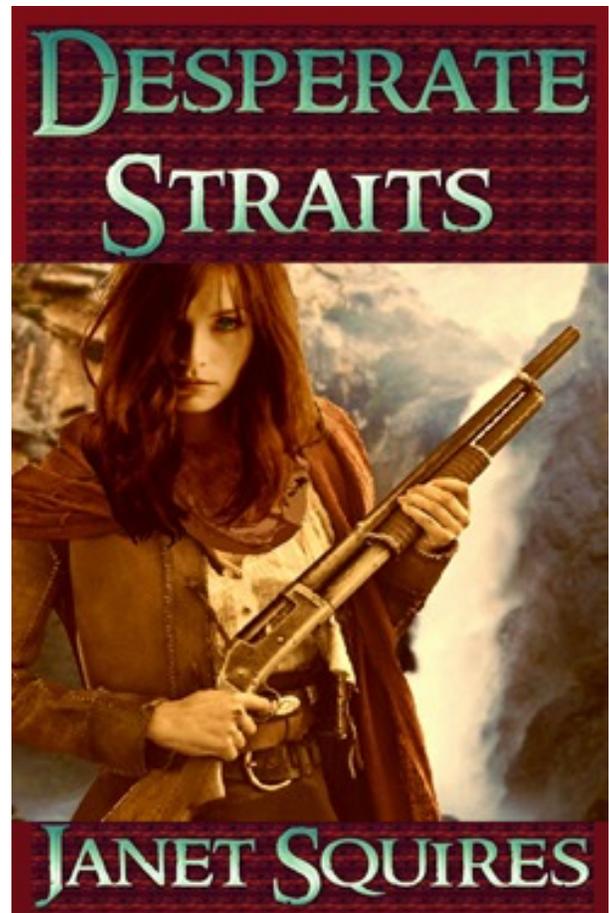
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L.T.'s and Sarah's loyalty to Will catapults them into a life for which neither one is prepared. And when L.T. and Sarah defy Sheriff Grant Simpson, they trigger a cataclysm of retaliation that escalates into kidnapping and murder. L.T. and Sarah are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

True Words:

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Future Topics and deadlines for upcoming Journals:

- June, 2016 (due April 15)—Travel Tales
- September, 2016 (due July 15)—Missed Opportunities
- December, 2016 (due October 15)—Tall Tales and Little Lies

Stories from the Heart VIII

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

This issue is PACKED with information and articles about the 2016 conference in Austin. See pages 1-8 for all the info. The "old-fashioned paper" registration form is on page 30. You can also register online TODAY at:

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



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.