



STORY CIRCLE JOURNAL

Vol. 20 No. 3, September 2016

The newsletter for women with stories to tell

2015 LifeWriting Competition Winners

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

FIRST PRIZE! Place, by Dreama Love of Rocky Mount VA

Originally from the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, Dreama Plybon Love enjoyed living and working both in the Chicago, Illinois and Indianapolis, Indiana areas for most of her adult life. In 2015 she retired from her Extension Specialist position in Purdue University's Department of Human Development and Family Studies in West Lafayette, Indiana, and moved back home to Virginia to care for her aging parents. Dreama enjoys reading, writing, hiking and skydiving, and being "grandma" to her only granddaughter (so far!). Two of her favorite authors are C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien.

Following the Road to Lindi, by Sue Schuerman of Cedar Falls IA

Sue Schuerman has written hundreds of personal profiles over the past 25 years and more recently started writing personal histories. She is a certified Life Legacies Facilitator and is honored to share this beautiful ancient tradition with others. Sue also teaches memoir writing workshops. She has been published in various anthologies and other publications. For the past ten years, she has worked at the University of Northern Iowa Foundation as the Assistant Director of Development Communications. Sue is a co-director of the workshop and leads the local monthly Cedar Falls Christian Writers Group.

My Four Corners Story, by Victoria Holmsten of Farmington NM;

Vicki Holmsten retired in 2014 from teaching English at San Juan College in Farmington, New Mexico. In addition to teaching, she was founding director of the Bisti Writing Project, an affiliate site of the National Writing Project. Her poems and short nonfiction pieces have been published in *Pasatiempo*, *Century*, *New Mexico English Journal*, *Seen From Space*, *Perspectives*, and *The Spirit That Wants Me* anthology. Three autobiographical/opinion essays have appeared in *The Chicago Tribune* and *The Farmington Daily Times*. She is working on making the switch from teacher/writer to writer/teacher.

New Neighbors, by Jackie Newman of Austin TX

Jackie Newman moved to Texas 32 years ago. She lives on the side of a canyon that contains Bull Creek. "Our back yard is a huge green belt filled with many different animals and birds. Our house is high up above the creek, and we enjoy our 'wild' location although we are only blocks from 'civilization.'"

The writers responded to questions about place/environment: 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?

We know you will enjoy these stories as much as we do; read them on pages 4-8. Congratulations winners!

New! Personal Essay Contest: Reflections

Submissions accepted September 15 through October 15. See page 9 for details.

[http://www.storycircle.org/
Contests/reflections.php](http://www.storycircle.org/Contests/reflections.php)

Help SCN Support Women Authors

A new initiative to help SCN support women authors. See page 3 for details.

[https://www.gofundme.com/
scnbookreviews](https://www.gofundme.com/scnbookreviews)

Sarton Award Submissions Due Nov 16

See page 29 for details.

[http://www.storycircle.org/
SartonLiteraryAward/](http://www.storycircle.org/SartonLiteraryAward/)

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Letter From SCN's President



Dear SCN Sister—

One of my own personal delights in the work of the Story Circle Network is seeing the encouragement this organization offers to women who want to write for their own pleasure and personal growth. From its very beginning, SCN has stressed the importance of journaling and daily writing in many different ways.

For nearly 20 years now, for Internet Chapter members, Lee Ambrose and I have published weekly writing prompts—some of them compiled in SCN's book, *Starting Points: A Year of Writing Prompts* (available now as a Kindle download.) Beginning this year, for all members, we offer a weekly "Writers' Toolkit," assembled by SCN members Joyce Boatright and Pat LaPointe. It arrives in your in-box on Fridays, complete with writing prompts and writers' resources.

Writing for ourselves—for health, for self-exploration, for self-understanding—is important, yes! But writing for an audience is also an important part of our growth. That's why we set aside so many pages of every issue of our *Journal* for your writing. Over the years, I've heard from several women who've said, "My very first publication was in the SCN *Journal*. That gave me confidence as a writer." So if writing for an audience is one of your personal goals as a writer, "True Words by Real Women" (pp 18-28) is a wonderful place to start. Mary Jo Doig edited "True Words" for 13 years—an amazing contribution of energy and skill; Jo Virgil took on that important role earlier this year.

But the *Journal* isn't the only place for publication within SCN. You can also see your work published in *Real Women Write*, our annual anthology, now in its fifteenth year, edited by Susan Schoch. You can read about it in Susan's article on page 11. If you're looking for an audience for your work, submission to this year's *Real Women Write* should be at the top of your to-do list. Next year, we're planning to take the anthology a step further and turn it into a book that will be available both in print and ebook formats. That's something to look forward to, isn't it?

And SCN offers you yet another possibility for publication—as well as a cash award. Since 2004, we have offered a personal-essay competition. You can read the work of our 2016 winners on pages 4-8 of this *Journal*. And you can see the full list of *all* our winners over the years here: <http://www.storycircle.org/Contests/winners.shtml> This program has been so successful that, beginning this year, we've created a new personal-essay competition, opening September 15. You can read about it on page 9. Our writing competitions are coordinated by Pat LaPointe, Joyce Boatright, Susan Schoch, and Lynn Goodwin.

If you're looking to reach an even wider audience for your work, there are our blogs, which offer online publication to all our members. "One Woman's Day" (conceived and coordinated by Linda Hoye) gives you a chance to share the experience of an important day in your life. Read about it on page 16. You'll find our "Telling HerStories" blog online at this address: <https://storycircletnetwork.wordpress.com/> This blog (which I am currently coordinating) is written by SCN writers and teachers who want to share their passion for women's stories. Our topics include the art, craft, and publication of women's memoir, fiction, biography, poetry, drama, and more.

Of course, these possibilities for writing and sharing your work don't just happen. They are the product of our SCN sisters' creative energies, offered to you in the form of writing encouragement: writing prompts, invitations to write, "True Words," *Real Women Write*, "One Woman's Day," "Telling HerStories," and our competitions. Warm thanks to all the wonderful women who contribute their time and energy to these projects.

Here at Story Circle, we believe that the most important thing we can do for *you* is to encourage you to write often and regularly—and then give you the opportunity to see your work in print and online. **Your writing is the measure of our success as an organization**, whether you keep it to yourself in the pages of your journal and private archives, or share it with us and with the world. Whatever else you do, please keep writing!

With joy for your journey,
Susan

Susan Wittig Albert is the founder and current president of SCN. A NYT bestselling author, she writes mysteries, memoirs, and historical fiction. She lives in the Texas Hill Country.

"Everything in life is writable about if you have the outgoing guts to do it, and the imagination to improvise. The worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt." — Sylvia Plath, *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath*

Story Circle Journal

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

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We welcome your letters, queries, and suggestions.

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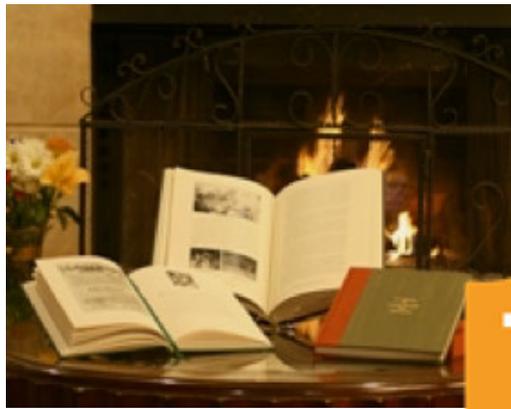
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Help Story Circle Support Women Authors!

StoryCircleBookReviews offers a unique review venue for women authors whose books may not be reviewed elsewhere. If you're looking for strong, insightful, well-written books by women of strength and courage, you'll find them at StoryCircleBookReviews.org. Established in 2001, with over 1900 reviews and a team of thirty-plus volunteer reviewers and editors, SCBR is the largest and most comprehensive women's review site on the Internet. Our excellence is respected by authors and publishers across the country. SCBR is among Goodreads top 1% of reviewers, and we have over 7500 "helpful" ratings on our Amazon reviews.

That's a big boost for women authors. And we do it all for free, every word of it!

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

But we need your help! The SCBR website, review posting, and eletter costs about \$420 a month, every month of the year. **\$5000 will allow us to continue reviewing women's books for 12 months.**

That's why we need you. If you love women's books and agree that women's voices must be heard, please chip in a few dollars on our GoFundMe page to keep us going and growing through 2015. Go here to help:

<https://www.gofundme.com/scnbookreviews>

Thank you!

P.S. Help spread the word about this campaign by telling your friends!

Place

by Dreama Love of Rocky Mount, VA

It takes less than a minute to view my place. It is one room with a small dresser, a full-sized bed, a desk, a couple of chairs and a wall closet. One half of the closet is a kaleidoscope of colors with all-season clothes; the other half is sanctuary to a treasured bookcase filled with books. A shorter bookcase fits snugly at the foot of my bed surrounded by a few cloth bins also weighted with books. A tiny two-drawer nightstand serves as home base for a small electric fan, a clock, and yet another stack of books.

For over a year, this room has been my personal space. In 2015 I sold my three-bedroom home, down-sized considerably, and moved back to my hometown to live with and care for my aging parents. After living in metropolitan cities for over 35 years, moving back to a small, rural town has in and of itself provided a new perspective on "place."

Instead of the sounds of cars and trucks speeding by on intersecting highways, each morning at 4 a.m. I am greeted by the sound of chirping birds—lots of them! Looking out my bedroom window at dawn, the outline of skyscrapers or streets of row houses and apartment buildings has been replaced with a glimpse of the deer family feeding on my mom's flowers or the white-tailed rabbits gleefully hopping toward the garden.

Man-made structures of steel and iron resting on cement and asphalt have been exchanged for the blue-green mountains of the Blue Ridge. They are swathed in lush trees and grasses and sprinkled with colorful flowers and bushes. There are no sounds of traffic or crowds, just an occasional neighbor waving as he passes by on a humming tractor or mower. I have been transported back in time to a simpler way of living.

The wider environment in my parents' home is where I conduct daily blood pressure checks and dole out medications, apply creams and gels, and put in eye drops or hearing aids. I also cook, clean, do laundry, and make phone calls or take car trips to doctors' offices, pharmacies, and grocery stores. I handle paperwork and mail and work around canes, walkers, and urinals.

Yes, I have given up much of my own personal space to accommodate the needs of my parents—my dad will be 91 in a week; my mom will be 89 next month. In some ways, this transition has been harder than I thought it would be. In other ways, it has given me the opportunity to see life through a more authentic lens—what really matters is now right in front of me every day—both physically and spiritually.

Getting back in touch with nature and a slower pace of living has been calming and centering. I enjoy majestic sunrises and sunsets. I relish feeling the wind and the

excitement of country thunder storms with thrashing trees, lightening blasts, and rain-streaked vegetation. Everything smells fresh and welcoming. Walking through thick-forested woods with the warm sun on my body gives me the sensation of entering another world.

I also appreciate if I'm running late to a doctor's appointment, there's a sympathetic smile waiting for me when I do arrive, and extra time given to do what is required. People here move in lingering rhythms; they talk to one another face-to-face as they sit in rocking chairs and lick ice cream cones from the local creamery. A more relaxed tempo has replaced my usual frantic race driven by pressure and stress. Surprisingly, a lot of work is accomplished in spite of the more tranquil pulse of life. I also value the simplifying freedom getting rid of my "stuff" has given me. I am learning the difference between necessity and preference.

Similarly, I'm realizing how important books are to me. My parents criticize me bitterly for having so many, but I know I need them. I need to feel them close; to know I can reach out to them as long-time friends who give reassurance and solace through a poem or phrase. Or, I can delve into a new book to have a fresh adventure (perhaps I'll have to start stacking books beneath my bed?) Either way, I find books often ground me as I carry out my daily duties.

Although I have electronic books with Kindle and tablet and phone, it's not the same. Sometimes I must also hold them, smell them, and "feel" them in my hands and in my soul. Just touching a book somehow strengthens the core of my being and nourishes my imagination. They are my stability and inspiration—they become my "place" whenever I can steal away to read, usually in early morning or late evening.

It's not that I use books as a way to cope. Well, some books I do...like the caregiving book that gives me practical information on aging and dealing with Alzheimer's and such. But I find it's more that books are physical touchstones reminding me of the real life I'm living. They resonate in my heart in a way that is so beautiful, it hurts. Books mirror what I see in the human condition; that life is fleeting and full of joy and pain and learning how to reconcile these two bonds.

I witness daily reminders that we, as humans, are all terminal. But the joy of daily connection is real and vivid. Just a simple glance of appreciation from my father without words speaks volumes. My mom's questions—over and over the same ones—don't bother me much anymore. I am given the opportunity to answer each time as if it were the first—with either enthusiasm or understanding,

depending on what is needed. I have many chances to connect and show her she matters, even in this unwilling "place" she finds herself. In a similar way, books re-live and re-tell the joys and sorrows of life's connections.

My environment has totally and drastically changed, and yet I find I am more at peace with "place" now than at any other point in my life. Nothing is as it once was. Nonetheless, I am filled to the brim with joy and gratitude. I can't really explain it. It comes to me in quiet gentleness. Even as I write this, tears are falling because I feel so grateful for this season of time in my life.

"Place" is what I hold with me each moment of my day. It's like the Star Trek scene in which the crew

members must quickly transport off their exploding spaceship—they carry nothing with them but themselves and each other in that moment of time. And, yet that is all that is needed. Authentic "place" is not left behind or destroyed...it goes with them.

Now I understand that reality. It's a freedom...a distinct space in and of itself. As C. S. Lewis said, "There is no other day. All days are present now. This moment contains all moments." (The Great Divorce)

Here and now, I finally grasp the certainty that each fully lived moment is my true "place." And, it will never be left behind or destroyed, for it goes with me to eternity.

Following the Road to Lindi

by Sue Schuerman of Cedar Falls IA

I hear its enchanting melody swirling through the oaks. I feel the silvery moss entwine me in an inaudible tune, awakening me to unwanted memories. The verdant garden is a pied piper inviting me to follow the trail that connects one place to another, one time to another.

I am 10 years old and my sister, Lindi, is 7. Our family is visiting Cypress Gardens in Winter Haven, Florida. We are sitting in the crook of an old cypress tree. Its branch extends like a long arm waiting to embrace the next visitor. Sultry air works its magic, sets us in a dreamy mood.

"I'm going to be a Southern Belle when I grow up and work in Cypress Gardens," I inform my little sister.

"Me, too," Lindi agrees.

"My dress will have the biggest hoop of all. It will be mint green with a yellow sash and Chantilly lace," I muse.

"Mine will be pink with itty bitty pearls all over it, and I'll carry an umbrella to match," Lindi says.

"It is called a parasol," I correct her.

She sticks out her tongue and slides off the tree branch. "Race ya to the lake," she shouts.

Lindi darts off across the grassy knoll. I walk the beaten path of crushed shells and white sand. Thousand-year-old oaks festooned with vivid orange bromeliads decorate the garden path. The rich colors echo the warmth of the sun. I catch up with Lindi and my family just in time to watch the waterski show. If I don't become a Southern Belle, I could float across the lake on water skis, I think.

We did learn to ski, but not in Cypress Gardens. Trailing behind Grandpa's speedboat on our skis we felt the freedom of the open water, the wind whipping our hair in circles, the sun beating warm on our backs; our roots to the Sunshine State ran as deep as the ocean.

The story goes that Dick Pope Sr., the founder of Cypress Gardens, was born in the midst of a cyclone in Iowa. My family's story travels from the sandy soil of Florida to the rich, dark soil of Iowa where we experience savage winds of a very different cyclone.

I am 14. Lindi is 11. We stand on the front porch of Grannie and Grandpa's home embraced in farewell hugs. I cling to Grannie like a chameleon clings to a camellia bush. I bury my head in her chest and breathe in Tabu mingled with coffee and cream. I pretend not to notice the moving van in the driveway. The sickening-sweet scent of orange blossoms billows from the backyard orchard. The February of Florida's landscape brings the hope of spring and new beginnings. For me, it seems like an ending.

Iowa's February finds a homeless wind roaring through the naked trees, silencing even the chickadees. Lindi and I have been transplanted to Iowa in the middle of winter. We soon lose our Southern accents along with our bronze tans. Much to our surprise, we make friends and settle into a new life in this oceanless landscape.

I am 29. Lindi is 26. I watch my sister dance the two-step with her handsome cowboy to the tune of "All I Need is You" by Kenny Rogers and Dottie West. Promises of flower gardens and vegetable gardens, a barn full of horses, and as many dogs and cats as she wants is intoxicating to a young city girl. The newlyweds stand beneath the shade of a pin oak tree to pose for pictures. Lindi's smile is as warm as the June day. She looks like the Southern Belle she had dreamed of becoming years ago. Tiny pearls adorn her hooped white dress. She carries a parasol.

Two years later, my phone rings. "I'm not feeling so good," Lindi says. "I need you to come right away."

Now, what, I think impatiently and switch my baby to nurse on the other side. Another phone call—this time from her husband. "Lindi is on her way to the hospital." I don't ask why.

I had received many phone calls with slurred speech over the past year. The isolation of farm life became too much for a city girl. Alcohol became her sunshine.

I walk into the hospital room with a question on my face. "Pills," her husband says. "She took a bottle of sleeping pills."

I spend the night with Lindi in the hospital, but we only speak a few words. Why does Lindi need so much attention? I need to be with my baby. My breasts ache and my blouse is soaked. I ask if my husband can bring the baby to the hospital. "No," the nurse says, "but you can use a breast pump to relieve the pain."

April is a soft, gentle month in the prairie states. March winds have died down. Snowflakes may still fall, but they soon melt into the virgin grass.

I am 36. Lindi will forever be 33. What did my sister think about as she drove along the gravel road that fateful night? I can imagine the moon casting its golden glow on the silent cornfield. Rich mounds of black soil anticipating a spring planting of corn or soy beans. Did she gaze across the field to catch one last glimpse of her farm home, every window illuminating the dark night? Did the chilly evening breeze cause her to take that one last swallow of gin? Did it warm her throat, her body and finally numb her to a picturesque country night? Was the radio blaring Willie Nelson's "Living in the Promiseland"?

Florida's August is pregnant with humidity. Merry crickets chirp their summer songs. Dogs and cats and folks seek shady places under the massive live oaks—oaks that have stood the test of many seasons.

I am 63. I too, seek the shade of the mighty oak. I have accepted the call of the pied piper and followed his trail that led to another time, another place. Is it late summer? Early fall? How would I know without taking that first step?

My Four Corners Story

by Victoria Holmsten of Farmington NM

The first morning sunlight appears on the bluffs above the San Juan River south of town as I take my morning walks in the summertime. In the cool of the day as the sun is rising, the light makes patterns of shadows on those bluffs just as it did for the ancient people who lived here many centuries ago. They were the ancestors of the Pueblo people who populated this part of the world. They watched the sun on the same rock formations make its way up into the sky, and they watched the snow-cover on those bluffs in the wintertime as the clouds lifted from a storm. They knew the sky and its patterns. This is Chaco Canyon country. I imagine the stories of the people who lived here as I walk in the early morning light.

I love, and sometimes hate, this place I've called home for the past twenty-nine years. My community is the basin of the San Juan River in the northwest corner of New Mexico, known as the Four Corners. I lived in teacher housing in Shiprock on the Navajo Nation for a few months, the unincorporated town of Kirtland for five years, and the "metropolitan" area of the county—Farmington—for twenty four years. How I, the product of an extended Swedish-American family based in Illinois and Minnesota, ended up here is a long story, but here I have been planted for longer than I ever could have imagined. In spite of my quarrels with it, this place holds my heart and almost half of my life experience, and so as I contemplate moving on, I come to consider what it means to me.

My relationship to this place is complicated. The oil and gas industry and the huge coal-fired power plants have severe consequences for the environment. Most days we live under a haze that shows up on a photo from space as the methane hotspot of North America. On bad days, the outlines of Shiprock and the Sleeping Ute Mountain to our west are fuzzy. Even as I am tempted to harsh criticism, I must acknowledge this industry has provided jobs and an economic base for our community, including a large portion of my public college teacher salary. To keep me more honest, I must confess we own two cars, heat our house with natural gas, and use electricity. I cannot claim the innocence of an off-the-grid lifestyle—I depend on energy resources, too.

There is also the problem of water. The now infamous Gold King Mine spill in the mountains above Silverton, Colorado, dumped toxic chemicals into the Animas River. Those dramatic pictures of the poisoned orange river on the national news showed a river soon to reach our community water supply. This disaster will no doubt have long-lasting effects in this neighborhood. Our city managers promise our water is safe, but I buy treated water to drink at home.

Our local politicians are pro-energy, and down on environmental advocacy. This is a community of people who seem to believe mostly in guns, God, individual liberty, hard work, the energy extraction industry, fast food, and patriotism. Elsewhere, I am fairly moderate. Here I am

an outsider, a flaming liberal who did Peace Corps service, kept my last name when I got married, and spent too many years in graduate school. I hate the politics in this place even as I do not hate my friends and neighbors who disagree with me.

There is beauty in the remote. Here we have rivers, desert, mountains, wide open skies, deep history. The remoteness makes it difficult to consider staying here. Our closest family members are two hundred miles down the road in Albuquerque, and the larger portions of both extended families much farther away. Farmington has lost most commercial airline service, and even Durango, Colorado, an hour to the north and a treacherous drive during snowstorms, is losing accessibility to the outside world by air. No trains here beyond the ceremonial antique steam train connecting Durango to Silverton in the San Juan Mountains. This isolation pushes us to move on.

We've lived here a long time. It's not so easy to consider pulling up stakes. We have roots probably even deeper than we suspect—friends from work, church, community organizations. There are many people here I treasure but the truth is I've always felt like something of an outsider. Is it me or is it them? Politics? Or the small-town thing—you're not really from here, are you? The question has been posed to me in one form or another all the years we've been here. I wonder what it would take to stop the question.

What will I miss? Four Corners country is something distinct from any of the states it counts as territory. We have a regional identity based on our geography, our remoteness, and the people who live here. Like much else about this community it is complicated, but it is also something I celebrate.

In my moments of hating where I live, I remind myself

of my adolescent vow to get out of my very white, middle class hometown and find more of the world. I have succeeded beyond expectation—it is the diversity of people and ideas that makes this Four Corners so different, gives it its own culture. Diversity can and often does mean disagreement and discomfort, and we do have problems here.

Farmington's status as a town bordering the Navajo reservation brings difficulties inherent in a history of conflict and racism. I like to think many of us here are working it out together and things are improving. Many of my students, friends, colleagues, neighbors are Navajo. The diversity goes deeper. Over the years, I can claim a Hispanic Tai Chi teacher, a Jamaican doctor, a Navajo dental hygienist/neighbor, a Hindu close friend, and an African-American baseball-watching buddy. I have indeed moved beyond the boundaries of my hometown.

I will miss a lot in this community—walking on the river trail through all seasons, hiking the trails in the Colorado mountains, small town parades and outdoor music festivals, knowing people in the grocery store, shopping at the Growers' Market on Saturday mornings in season. The San Juan Mountains to our north, Shiprock and Sleeping Ute to the west. Bisti Badlands to the south. Visiting Chaco Canyon, Mesa Verde, Aztec Ruins, Salmon Ruins—looking down to pottery shards and up to the sky to realize we are not the first peoples to live here.

This place has changed me. It has gifted me with a sense of rootedness in the landscape and as a member of a community. I have learned to listen, to tolerate, to be move back and forth between my insider and outsider roles. I have learned about who I am and where I come from. Even as I prepare to leave, I know this place will be a permanent part of my heart and soul. The story of this place will stay with me.

New Neighbors

by Jackie Newman of Austin TX

Early in February, my neighbor mentioned that a new family had moved into our neighborhood. I soon realized that they had moved into the house with the best view in the entire subdivision. How lucky were they!

Secretly, I was very glad because that house sat high above all the others in the canyon that lay behind us. I hoped I could watch the new occupants without their knowing it.

A few days later, after I fed my early-riser cat, Frankie, I went out on the screen porch in my bathrobe and slippers. It was just getting light as I looked toward "that" house. I could barely see two figures. They were up early, just like me. One of them was lying down and the other

was standing nearby.

Yes, I know, you are beginning to suspect that I'm some kind of peeping Tomisina, but the house I'm talking about is the abandoned Hawks' nest, located in a giant cottonwood tree, about 100 yards behind my porch.

The figures I could see on that very cold, early morning were much larger than hawks, but the light was still so dim I couldn't see clearly who they were. Within the hour, however, I was thrilled to discover a Great Horned Owl lounging on the nest, while its companion sat on the branch alongside.

Very excited, and now, wide awake, I quickly found my bird book and discovered that Great Horned Owls are

usually about 25 inches tall, weigh between five and six pounds, have talons powerful enough to press sixty pounds and a wing spread of four to five feet. Wow!

Over the next 10 weeks, these magnificent birds and I developed a more or less two-sided relationship. I watched them several times each day, standing out in the open, on the staircase at the rear of our house. And very much, out in the open, they went about their business in the nest. I knew they could see me, because I frequently saw their heads turn toward me and stare directly into my powerful binoculars with their huge black eyes. They were certainly not afraid of me.

And I was certainly hooked. It was not many days later when I saw a clump of gray, fuzzy looking material in the nest. At first it looked as if it were an unfortunate rabbit that one of the owls had caught.

However, it wasn't long, before I spotted a round, bald head with huge black eyes poking out between the larger owl's feet. As I began to see more and more of Baby, I noticed Mama and Papa were making more and more hunting trips to fill his insatiable appetite as he grew taller day by day.

I had not watched them for very many days before I realized that Mama was the larger of the two and had a less colorful coat than Papa's, whose feathers were quite smooth, almost "suave," in appearance. His face was more distinctly marked around his eyes, as well. And in contrast to Mama's softer, higher pitched hoot-hoot, followed by one or two longer hoots, Papa's bass voice echoed throughout the canyon with his evenly spaced hoot, hoot, hoot. Mama and Papa often talked with each other during the day, sometimes so softly, I struggled to hear them.

It was quite clear that they shared the care and feeding of Baby because each took turns sitting in the nest with him while the other hunted. Within six weeks, he had grown to more than half the size of the adults, with Papa's beautiful coat colors, although still with no sign of the tall, pointed head feathers that gave these birds their name. And Baby loved to cuddle with Mama while sitting beside her on the tree branch, where she often opened one of her giant wings and wrapped it around him.

By early April, Baby was getting quite large. He often opened his wings, but was not yet flapping them. One day, as I watched, a flock of five very noisy crows landed on the branch just above Baby, who appeared to be alone in the nest. They were all leaning downward and cawing in a

very threatening manner. As I helplessly watched, I became very fearful for his safety. Then, suddenly, I saw some movement on a lower branch, and Mama climbed into the nest. Baby hurried over to her and leaned tightly against her. The army of five, all dressed in black, chose not to fight Mama and flew away. I was so relieved to see that she was nearby, wearing her feathered camouflage.

By the second week in April, Mama and Papa began to gently suggest to Baby that it was time to prepare to leave the nest. Over several days, Mama gradually removed the nest, piece by piece. Luckily for Baby, the branch that held the nest was quite large, with a cozy spot for Baby to lean against and at every chance, Baby availed himself of this option. I also noticed that Papa was spending more time with him, gently prodding him to spread his wings by standing at the end of the branch and bobbing his head at Baby. Baby bobbed back to him and moved closer to Papa, while attempting to cuddle with him. But Papa did not want to cuddle and carefully poked under Baby's wings to suggest that he open them.

Within a few days of bobbing, Baby began to open his wings by himself, flapping them vigorously while standing still. One evening, as I watched, Papa was again doing the bobbing routine. Suddenly, Baby hopped the length of the branch to where Papa was standing, flapping his wings the entire way. I knew this signaled the time was near for his first flight and I was to be a lucky witness! The next day, while he stood huddled against the trunk, I could hear Mama and Papa hooting very softly below the tree. I couldn't see them, but Baby could. He was leaning and looking down from the only safe place he'd known up to now. Suddenly, in a leap of faith, he flew downward to where his folks were waiting. As they welcomed him with much hooting, I felt a tinge of sadness. My spying on the Great Horned Owls was nearly finished.

The next morning as Tim and I ate breakfast, Mama and Baby suddenly appeared in a cedar tree very close to our house. Mama watched us all day, while she cuddled with Baby, as if she were saying farewell. The next day Baby was gone and a few days later, one of these magnificent birds left a beautiful tail feather on my deck. I was unbelievably touched by this gift.

Although Baby matured and moved away, I still hear the parents talking every day. We named them Owliver and Owlivia. From my porch, each evening, I still hoot softly to them. And to my great joy, they answer me.

The path to our destination is not always a straight one. We go down the wrong road, we get lost, we turn back. Maybe it doesn't matter which road we embark on. Maybe what matters is that we embark.

— Barbara Hall

2017 LifeLines Planned for May 5-7

By Joyce Boatright

Mark your calendar for the first weekend in May and plan to attend LifeLines in the beautiful Texas Hill Country. May 5-7 are the dates for the popular writing retreat for women.

The event will take place in Fredericksburg, TX, dubbed the heart of the Hill Country. The town is less than 80 minutes from Austin and San Antonio, so out-of-town participants can choose to fly into either city and rent a car.

Rich with the culture of German pioneers who settled the area over 160 years ago, Fredericksburg boasts spectacular art galleries, boutiques, antiques, award-winning Texas wineries and acres of wildflowers.

The retreat is being held at the Fredericksburg Inn &



Suites, a tranquil respite on five secluded acres along Barons Creek.

Guestrooms have been completed refurbished and are designed for simplicity and comfort. Lodging includes free wireless Internet, 32-inch TVs, coffeemakers with Starbucks coffee and tea, mini refrigerators, microwaves and a choice of king-size bed or two queen-size beds in a room. Each guest also enjoys a full complimentary breakfast.

LifeLine's retreat facilitator is Jeanne Guy, a reflective-writing coach, author and seasoned workshop teacher. Known for her irreverent wit and entertaining style, Jeanne promises an engaging retreat where she will create a safe space for you to jump into your life and experience personal growth through writing.



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

Grab Your Pens, Boot Up Your Computers

By Pat LaPointe

SCN is proud to introduce Reflections, a new annual personal essay contest beginning in Fall, 2016

The topic for the 2016 contest is **Differences**.

We have much in common with our fellow human beings, yet there can be critical differences between us. Some are obvious; some stay hidden. As we go through life we are bound to meet many individuals that have religious beliefs unlike those we hold, or are of a different race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political bent, or upbringing.

In an essay of no more than 1200 words tell us about a time when you encountered someone or some group you felt was very different from you. Show how you discovered these differences and how they have shaped you

or have impacted your world view. What did you learn about yourself?

Submissions will be accepted from September 15th until October 15th.

The fee to enter is \$15.00

Winners will be notified in December, 2016. The top three essays will be given cash awards and publication in the March, 2017 Journal. For additional details and to submit your essay go to:

<http://www.storycircle.org/Contests/reflections.php>



An Interview with Sarton Winner Barbara Stark-Nemon

Trust Your Own Story

by Pat Bean

This is the second in a series of three interviews with the 2016 Sarton winners. Read Pat's interview with Jill Kandel in the June issue, and watch for her interview with Susan Marsh in December.

May Sarton, the poet and novelist who is the inspiration behind Story Circle Network's annual Sarton Award, was also an inspiration for author Barbara Stark-Nemon's book, *Even in Darkness*, the winner of the 2015 Sarton Award for historical fiction. The book tells the real life story of Holocaust survivor Klare Kohler.

Winning the award, Barbara said, "... truly made me feel I'd brought Klare's legacy to the world. *Even in Darkness* is the story of my heart, a love letter to a woman who truly inspired me. She (Kohler) did in her own life, and for me, what May Sarton wishes for us all in her 1971 poem, "Invocation to Kali.

Barbara then went on to quote the portions of Sarton's poem, written in 1971, which were meaningful to her:

*Gardeners of the spirit
Who know that without darkness
Nothing comes to birth
As without light
Nothing flowers*

Barbara was born and raised in and around Detroit, Michigan, during the era that saw the city change from a gutsy, vibrant auto town to a gutted city surrounded by affluent suburbs.

"My family members were well educated immigrants from Germany who escaped the Holocaust, and were very focused on education and the freedoms of American government and society," she says. As fulfillment of these family goals, Barbara graduated from the University of Michigan with a bachelor's degree in English literature and art history, and then went on to earn a master's degree in speech-language pathology.

"I had a very satisfying career working in schools teaching English and doing speech-language therapy with deaf and learning disabled kids. And I see my current career writing novels as an extension of my life-long interest in communication and story-telling."

Barbara says she was greatly influenced in deciding to become a writer by her grandfather, who was both an attorney and a master storyteller. "He literally trained my brother and sisters and me to notice the great stories around us. He then wanted us to tell these stories to him ... and to tell them well. He loved it when we did."

A second influence for her writing, Barbara says, was the work she did with children with communication problems. "To find ways to get stories to them, and to assist them in bringing their narratives to others, cemented my understanding of how important our stories are to everyone."

She also credits her writing group as being influential in her writing effort. But it was Klare Kohler herself who had the greatest impact on Barbara's decision of what, or in this case who, to write a book about. "I met Klare when I was four or five, and loved her immediately. I was fascinated by her early on, and grew to deeply love and respect her and the priest who became so important to her. Her life demonstrated the victory of love and devotion over loss and suffering. I wanted to tell her story and honor the complexity of the choices she and the priest had to make to create meaning out of horror."

But once Barbara decided she wanted to tell Klare Kohler's story, it would be many years before the book was finally finished, including 15 years of research that included voice, video and written interviews of many of the real people who were part of the story told in *Even in Darkness*. She traveled to Germany, Belgium, England,

Israel and the Czech Republic for her research and translated more than 100 letters from German to English. "I read a great many books about World War II in Europe," she says, "and researched at the Leo Baeck Institute in New York City, Holocaust Centers in Jerusalem, Detroit, and Washington D.C., and many libraries and archives in the United States and in Germany."

Her best writing, Barbara reports, happens in the early morning, although she writes at all times of the



SARTON WOMEN'S
BOOK AWARD

STORY CIRCLE NETWORK

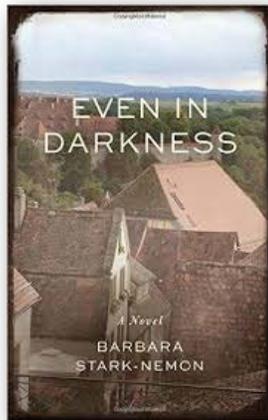


day and night. Her best writing days, meanwhile, take place in a house overlooking Lake Michigan. "I'm lucky to be able to go there, and also work in my study in Ann Arbor."

The most useful piece of writing advice given her, she says, is to trust her own story. She advises other writers to work on their stories until they find the form of the story they want to tell. "Don't settle for almost right. Write the story you can fight for and ask someone else to believe in. Rewrite it and get it edited. Put yourself through the refiner's fire."

This advice has certainly worked for Barbara. In addition to the Sarton Award, *Even in Darkness* is also a finalist in the International Book Awards and received a Gold IPPY in European Fiction from the Independent Publishers Association.

"You will be enriched and inspired by Barbara Stark-Nemon's *Even in Darkness*, a beautifully crafted, compelling novel based on events in the life of the author's own family, in which love triumphs over unspeakable horror. The author paints a vivid picture of her upper-middle-class German-Jewish characters and weaves their inner thoughts and feelings into the shocking reality of the historical events of the day. I recommend this book to readers of history and to all those moved by the strength and courage of the human spirit."



—Margaret Fuchs Singer,
author of *Legacy of a False Promise: A Daughter's Reckoning*



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

Real Women Write Sharing Our Stories, Sharing Our Lives

Now, if not sooner, is the time to submit your work to our annual anthology, *Real*

Women Write: Sharing Our Stories, Sharing Our Lives.

This year marks our 15th volume, and we want to celebrate by bringing you the best-ever collection of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and images from our members.

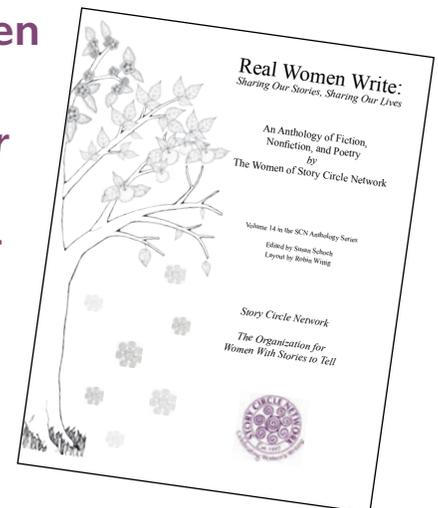
Real Women Write is a wonderful opportunity to share your creativity with the Story Circle community. By submitting work that means the most to you, the collection and our writing village will be enriched. And it's not too late. **We have extended the deadline for entries to September 15, 2016.** Publication will be in January, 2017.

We accept up to three submissions per member, on a subject of your choice. Each entry may be up to 1,000 words for prose or 40 lines for poetry. Send your entries to SCN via our **online submission form**. All the publication details are there. (You will need your members-only username and password. If you've forgotten that information, go to <http://www.storycircle.org/pwdprompt.php> and we'll send it to you.) Selection of work to be included is necessarily limited by space and editorial considerations.

If your SCN membership includes print publications, we will mail you a beautiful print edition of *Real Women Write*, designed by our own Robin Wittig. If you've chosen to receive the *Journal* and anthology online, we'll send you the link where you can read and print it.

By sharing our stories, we share our lives, a communication that is powerful, and important. In sending your entry to *Real Women Write*, you will be participating in this vital work. Don't hesitate!

Susan Schoch
Editor, 2016 SCN Anthology
**Real Women Write:
Sharing Our Stories, Sharing Our Lives**





Circles: The Heart of Story Circle Network

The Older Women's Legacy (OWL) Circle Memoir Project

by Mary Jo Doig, Chair, Writing Circles Work Group

*I am an old person who has experienced many things and I have much to talk about.
I will tell my talk, of the things I have done and the things that my parents and others have done.
But don't let the people I live with hear what I say.
~ Nisa, a woman of the Kalahari Desert*

The women in the Story Circle Network believe that it is vital that older women be specially encouraged to tell their stories before these valuable eyewitness tales are lost. The richest source for an accurate history of our world is its ordinary citizens, and the least documented stories have been the lives of women in our society.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

My heart has often ached to talk with my paternal grandmother, Josephine Daly, who left Ireland at age 18 and came alone to Ellis Island in the late 1800s. Family stories passed down say that she married my grandfather shortly after she was “fresh off the boat.” My father was thirteen when his mother died from an unrecorded disease that we think may have been cancer. Beyond these few facts, Josephine Daly is nearly a blank page in our family history. My grandfather soon re-married and little more was ever mentioned about Josephine after that. It didn't occur to me to ask my father about her until these later decades, when their stories had already traveled with them into eternity. What prompted Josephine to journey alone to a country where she knew no one? What was my father's childhood like? I wished she could give me clues that might explain why my father's life was so troubled. Now I can only guess.

Mine is but one variation of many similar stories that remind us all that lack of diaries and other documentation of our life stories leave big holes, unanswered questions, and a yearning in our hearts to know those stories.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE OWL WORKSHOPS

In its early days, SCN recognized the importance of assisting older women (60 and older) in telling and recording their stories. Our website describes this brief history of the OWL endeavor:

The Older Women's Legacy Circle Memoir Project

was a two-year project offering guided autobiography workshops for senior women. The project was funded by the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word and sponsored by the Story Circle Network, to carry out its mission of helping women everywhere share the stories of their lives.

The project funding allowed SCN to develop the facilitator's manual and workbook, to find and train facilitators, and offer nearly fifty workshops to over 500 women. Over a two-year period the materials were used, evaluated, and revised. Stories from each workshop were collected and published in booklet form and is being archived for the use of future historians. A larger collection of stories—*With Courage and Common Sense: Memoirs From the Older Women's Legacy Circles*—was published in 2003 by the University of Texas Press. Now that the grant-funded phase of the project has come to an end, both the facilitator's manual and workbook are being made available nationwide, along with other support activities offered by the SCN through this OWL-Circle website.

And what an impressive manual and workbook each is! The facilitator's manual we have today has been honed and refined through several revisions made during those early workshops.

THE OWL FACILITATOR'S MANUAL

This 14-page manual guides the teacher—whether novice or well-experienced—from start to finish. Thus, long before meeting your workshop participants, you have an extensive guide that takes you through each step of the nuts and bolts process:

- Workshop Location - possible community facilities to present the workshop (for example, a library, a church or synagogue, a senior citizen community center) and special considerations for each.
- Fees - will you charge a fee for the workshop? This is recommended due to copying and other costs, as well

as your time, but is not required. Ideas in this section will guide you in setting fee amounts.

- Advertising - where and how to advertise the workshop.
- What time of year is best for higher attendance?
- What is the optimal number of participants to include in the workshop for overall best benefits?
- How to assemble the charming participants' workbooks.
- OWL Circle Workshop graphics are included to use as you'd like for advertising and several other ways.
- Sample registration forms, attendance forms, workshop lists, marketing flyers, sample covers for participants' workbooks, and more are included.

Next, you'll find three pages of wise advice and hints developed by experienced facilitators, which include these and more:

- A list of materials to bring to each workshop
- Ideas for comfortably setting up the workshop space
- How to keep the group on track, time-wise and other-wise
- Considerations for women who may need encouragement
- Ways to build the group's relationship
- Communication methods to encourage participants to return each week
- A detailed sample evaluation form for the final workshop, to use as is or for ideas to develop your own, which provides valuable feedback for the facilitator
- How to create an OWL Memoir Book from participants stories
- Future pathways for women who want to continue the group beyond the five-week workshop.

The final section of the facilitator's manual contains suggested teaching plans and inspiring content for each of the five sessions. The broad themes for each respective session are: You and the People Who Shaped You; Memories; Love and Work; Sad Times, Happy Times; and Your Lessons and Your Teachings. They were designed particularly to connect with memories of "life experiences ... both unique to the individual woman and common to all women." A sidebar on each page is filled with powerful quotes by women about women. An example is the one at the end of this article.

THE OWL WORKBOOK

When you turn the next page, you'll leaf through a beautifully crafted 55-page participant workbook. The facilitator can either make and assemble copies of these pages into a 3-ring binder or purchase a workbook (very reasonably!) through SCN. The site link is here: <http://www.storycircle.org/owlcircle/workbook.shtml>. When you go to the website, you'll also find sample pages of both the

facilitator's guide as well as the workbook's entire Session One.

I enthusiastically encourage you to scroll through Session One. Note the wonderful prompt on page 10, "A Family Dinner." This is a page the participant can use, once she's filled it out, to write an early story in her workbook. Later on, she can also return to it several times as a resource for writing more stories about each person she invited to her table.

If you check out page 13, you'll find a graphic organizer that is so useful for preparing to write a story. There are several similar organizers throughout the workbook that not only help the writer gather facts for her story but also become a resource for her, as with the Family Dinner diagram, to return to many times to develop new stories.

As you'll see there also, you can purchase the manual and workbook pages for copying for \$25.00.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- An appendix follows the five OWL workshop sessions, and includes:
- Guidelines and sample ideas for creating a book of memoir stories written by class participants
- A recommended reading booklist for facilitators
- A recommended booklist for participants
- A booklist of current research and sources about the healing and other health benefits of telling our stories.

The relationships that form among the workshop women are lovely to behold. Whether they are telling their own stories or listening and honoring another woman's story, these moments become sacred gifts for participants and facilitator alike.

There are so many older women in our communities who would love it if we would let them know we are here. Let's assist them in writing their legacies so that no one in their families and friendship circles are left with aching hearts to know more of their life stories. The OWL facilitator guide and workbook help make it amazingly easy to do.

And one small request. If you decide to facilitate an OWL workshop, please let Peggy Moody (or me (doig.maryjo@gmail.com)) know so that we can add you to our online roster of facilitators.



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



Online Classes: Why Take a SCN Online Class?

by Len Leatherwood

Recently, a friend asked how my new Online Classes' Coordinator job was going with Story Circle Network. "It's wonderful," I said. "I've never met a more supportive group of women in my life. Honestly, I'm not sure why every woman everywhere isn't part of this great organization."

One might judge my statement as hyperbolic, but the truth is it's not. Why wouldn't every woman want the support, guidance, and friendship that is available at Story Circle Network? I suppose some women don't have the time or inclination for an in-person or Internet story circle, and many might believe they don't have the writing skill to be an active part of this supportive network. I can't argue with that small percentage of women who don't have an interest in storytelling, but as for those who feel uncomfortable with their writing level, I feel compelled to remind them that Story Circle Network is for all writers, whether just starting out or working as a writing professional. There is room for everyone. Of course, I might also add, if you want to enhance your writing skill, why not take advantage of our many affordable online classes that are designed to provide information for the novice, the expert and all those who fall somewhere in-between?

I have taught a variety of online classes for Story Circle Network over the past five years and I can speak from experience that our small classes offer women a unique opportunity not only to learn much about writing, but also the chance to get to know other women who are open, honest and excited about exploring their personal stories. These classes are a safe place to venture further into the world of writing and also to discover just how much you have in common with other women. I have been struck with the level of authenticity that occurs in these classes, and the lack of competition. Women are there to

learn more about themselves through their writing and this provides a bridge, one to another. The process becomes simple: women sharing with women the trials and joys of their lives.

I have had the wonderful opportunity as coordinator to better get to know the many instructors who bring their gifts to the SCN online classes. Without exception, I have found each to be empathetic, kind, generous and supportive. We have no one who wants to lay claim to the position of "strictest" or "most punitive" teacher. Each brings her unique talents to the class or classes she is offering and works hard to build a nurturing relationship with her students. The evaluation forms that are sent after every class are filled with comments such as, "I felt as if a master teacher/author/poet was guiding my learning," or "This class infused new life into my writing and sharpened my skills as a blogger." Just go to the Kudos page (<http://www.storycircleonlineclasses.org/kudos.php>) at the SCN Online Classes website and read what students say. I expect you'll be inspired.

So I am pleased to say that I couldn't be happier in my new job. I am encouraged to think big by our SCN president and founder, Susan Albert; supported in my programming efforts by our ever-efficient executive director, Peggy Moody; and guided every step by our firm-but-loving SCN board program chair, Joyce Boatright. I feel fortunate to have these women at my side; I am bolstered by their presence.

Please consider taking one of our online classes offered this fall. You can find a list of current classes at <http://www.storycircleonlineclasses.org/index.php>. We have quite a variety and I feel confident you'll have a wonderful experience in whatever class you choose.

Come join the fun.

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

Fall 2016 LifeWriting Classes for Women

Memoir and Lifewriting:

- **Writing Life in Letters**
(September 19-October 17, 2016)
- **Writing Your Hero's Journey**
(September 19-October 31, 2016)
- **The Story of Your Life**
(September 19-October 31, 2016)
- **Writing Your Family's History**
(September 19-November 14, 2016)

Journaling & Self-Discovery:

- **Reading and Writing from Anne Lamott's Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life**
(October 10-November 14, 2016)
- **Writing the Essence**
(September 19-October 31, 2016)
- **Crafting Your Spiritual Storyline**
(September 19-October 31, 2016)

Sharpening Skills:

- **Crafting Dialogue: Giving Your Characters a Voice**
(September 19-October 31, 2016)
- **Reading for Writers: Using Imitation to Explore Your Writing Style**
(October 3-November 14, 2016)
- **Give Us Your Tired, Your Poor: Finding Deeper Meaning Through Revision**
(October 3-November 7, 2016)
- **Writing Story Through People Watching**
(September 19-November 14, 2016)

Fiction:

- **The Power of Writing Short II: An Intermediate Class in 'Flash' Fiction/ Memoir**
(October 3-November 7, 2016)
- **Muscle Up the Gut of Your Story: How to Write the Novel**
(September 19-November 14, 2016)

Poetry:

- **Poetry for the Truly Terrified**
(September 19-October 24, 2016)
- **Sacred, Gratitude & Thanksgiving Poems**
(October 3-November 14, 2016)

Session 1:

Independent Study Program:

- **September 19-October 17, 2016:**
Lynn Goodwin

Session 2:

Independent Study Program:

- **October 17-November 14, 2016:**
Lynn Goodwin

Winter 2017:

Our next class schedule will be posted in mid-November at:
www.storycircleonlineclasses.org/index.php.

Classes will run January 9-March 6, 2017.

Shop On Amazon—Support SCN

Did you know that the many programs SCN offers—such as this publication, e-letters, our book review site, our many writing communities both online and in-person, the annual anthology *Real Women Write*, the OWL Project, and so many more—cannot operate solely on the annual dues we all pay?

One EASY way you can contribute is by making the purchases you are already making on Amazon.com through smile.amazon.com, and designating Story Circle Network as the recipient of the charitable contribution. For every eligible purchase you make on AmazonSmile, SCN will

receive 0.5% of the purchase price. It doesn't seem like much of a contribution at first, but it adds up—in 2016, SCN has already received \$436 in donations.

Just go to smile.amazon.com; the first time you visit you'll be asked to sign in with your Amazon password and then designate your charity. *It's that easy.*

amazonsmile
You shop. Amazon gives.



From the Blogs:

One Woman's Day

by Linda Hoye



At One Woman's Day blog we share stories about ordinary and extraordinary days in the lives of SCN members. Our life experiences are unique but we find connection through the power of story. Learn more here: <http://onewomansday.wordpress.com/about/>

Recently we were pleased to publish a piece about a day in Debra Dolan's life, by Debra Dolan.

Sitting at the back of the bus reading *The World Has Changed: Conversations with Alice Walker*, little did I know that my mine was about to in significant ways. I saw nothing and it all happened so quickly. Passengers informed after impact that my head hit hard against the exit barrier as the driver stopped suddenly to avert collision with a truck.

It is so difficult to explain "foggy brain" and the feeling of "not being right". It all started so slowly; the erosion piece-by-piece of a simple and uncomplicated life filled with interesting activities and people, Saturday morning breakfasts on "the drive" with friends, volunteering as Strata Council President, walking 185 stairs from the street entrance to the office doors upon arrival, noon hour jaunts in a vibrant downtown core, participating with my writing group and book club, attending weekly Weight Watchers meetings, date nights with my darling, and a dedicated 90 minute morning practice of reading and sharing thoughts in a trusted journal.

One by one, each week, something left my life until I realized that all my personal time was spent recovering from one day in the office till the next. Evenings and weekends were spent in seclusion due to the challenges of noise, irritability, crowds and light. I struggled to hide my diminished abilities and raw emotions. Once I could no longer work I had to surrender fully to acknowledging the situation. Acceptance took much longer. Today is the day I transition from sick leave to long-term disability benefits.



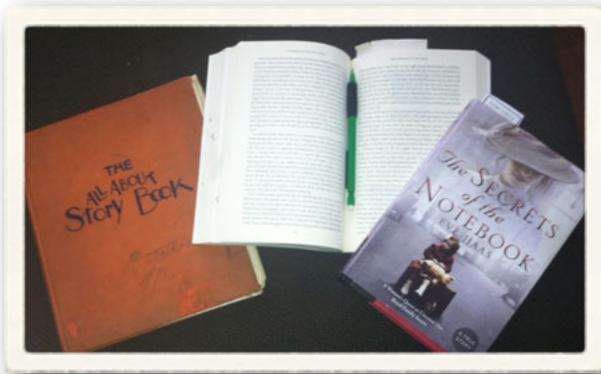
As I continue to recover from post-concussion syndrome and whiplash injuries, I find myself remaining on a retreat in my own home and neighbourhood. Unlike the many I have participated in where you search for mindfulness, and think of the present in appreciation, this one finds me journeying into mindlessness where it is best to remain empty-headed so not to provoke yet another headache.

Resting the brain in order for it to restore and heal is an extremely exhaustive task. I am encouraged to be in nature, meditate, take long hot baths, sit quiet in soft light while doing home-rehab program, all with the intention to gradually return cognitive, physical and social activities into routine. There is little joy as pain dominates. Concussions and their consequences are nasty business.

It is very difficult to have so much time and not the energy, focus or ability to engage in life's many offerings. I am learning once again that life is full of messy circumstances which encourage patience and understanding from us and others. In my personal haven I complete a ritual of silence, stillness and rehabilitation aimed at reconnecting to wellness. One of the most frustrating elements of concussion recovery is how fast the days pass when you do nothing and have nothing to show for them.

As the days drift you can't help but feel adrift. I feel worn out by living with an intense tension of not knowing when my beloved life will come back.

Debra Dolan lives on the west coast of Canada. She has maintained a private journal for over forty-five years and is an avid reader of women's memoir. This piece also appeared in the *Vancouver Globe and Mail*.



SCN's Book Reviews

Featured Review: *The Year of Living Virtuously (Weekends Off)*

by Teresa Jordan

StoryCircleBookReviews.org
Review by Susan J. Tweit

For her ninetieth birthday, Laberta Altermat bought herself black lingerie. My friend Greer told me this... as we drove to a gathering of a book club in Virgin, Utah, near Zion National Park. Greer also said that Laberta looked more like seventy than ninety.

Still, when we arrived, I didn't immediately take the vibrant woman on the couch to be Laberta. I heard her hearty laugh before I even entered the room. She had pure-white hair in a chic, asymmetrical cut and wore a tiger-striped sweater and a large, Picasso-inspired necklace. Her confidence of style endeared me, but I was most engaged by her flashing, mischievous eyes.

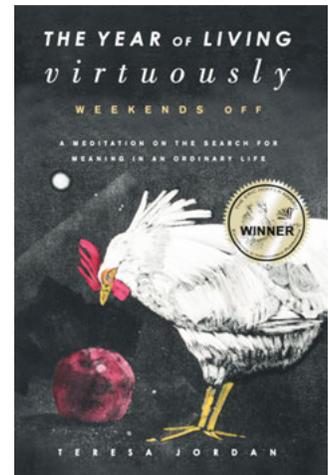
That vivid picture of Laberta Altermat opens the essay on love, one of 45 mostly short chapters in this personal book exploring virtue and vice in daily life. The book's subtitle sums up its aim: *A Meditation on the Search for Meaning in an Ordinary Life*. Teresa Jordan clearly knows how to tell a story and hook a reader. What keeps us reading is her wide-ranging, open and erudite mind—and where she takes the story and what she makes of it.

In other hands than Jordan's, living virtuously could make a dull book. But enhanced by her perspective and that of thinkers as disparate as Aristotle, Immanuel Kant and the actor Johnny Depp, along with Jordan's utter fascination with the world and our part in it, these meditations on love, stubbornness, trust, cleanliness, temperance, wrath, justice, forgiveness and the whole

range of human behavior are compulsively readable.

As Jordan explains in the introduction, the chapters originated as an online journal inspired, she writes, "by Benjamin Franklin's list of thirteen virtues and the seven deadly sins." In those blog posts, she "counterpois[ed] stories about how virtue and vice play out in ordinary life with the views of theologians, philosophers, ethicists, evolutionary biologists, and a whole range of scholars and scientists within the emerging field of consciousness studies." All well and good, but if there's a flaw in this engaging book, it comes from its genesis online: what works as a blog essay is not always effective in book format. Some of these essays could have used revision from blog-voice to book-voice.

Still, whether Jordan is comparing the lives and ideas of Benjamin Franklin and Ayn Rand in the chapter on Self-Reliance or talking about the names on cemetery headstones and "the mysterious lightness of being" that is gladness; whether she's considering cognitive behavior, philosophy, politics or horse-training, the ideas and stories in *The Year of Living Virtuously* will stick with readers long after the end of each chapter.



Teresa Jordan was raised on a cattle ranch in the Iron Mountain country of southeast Wyoming. She has written or edited seven books about Western Rural life, culture, and the environment, including *Riding the White Horse Home: A Western Family Album*. She and her husband, Hal Cannon, live in southern Utah.



Susan J. Tweit is the award-winning author of twelve books (including her memoir, *Walking Nature Home: A Life's Journey*, and *Colorado Scenic Byways*, winner of the Colorado Book Award), numerous magazine articles, and newspaper columns. Visit her website: <http://www.susanjtweit.com>



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 Missed Opportunities.

Dawn on the Rockies

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If my grandmother were alive, she would be 113 years old. She was born in Leeds, England, but immigrated to Toronto when she was under a year old. When she was seven, she accompanied her widowed mother to Vancouver, B.C. by train. Her mother had purchased a boarding house in Vancouver, sight unseen.

Near the end of her life, at the age of 99, my grandmother told me about that train trip in 1911. Up to then, she had known only city life.

"I can close my eyes now," she said in her quavering old-lady voice, "and see the dawn rise on the Rocky Mountains as I pressed my nose to the train window. I had never seen a mountain before, and I didn't know what they were. So I woke my mother, but I was so excited all I could do was point out the window.

"Mother wasn't very happy with me for waking her up. She glanced out the window, and snapped, 'For goodness sake, it's just a mountain!' Then she went back to sleep.

"But you know," Grandma added, "I've lived a long time and travelled all over the world, but I've never seen anything as beautiful as the dawn coming up on the Rocky Mountains, framed in a train window. When I think of heaven, that's what I think of."

And when I think of my grandmother, that's who I see – an awestruck seven-year-old gazing at her first sight of a mountain, looking out of an old lady's eyes.

Choices

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I used to think I had missed my opportunity because of the choices I'd made in life. The choices didn't make me a bad person, but I needed to sit and ponder those choices.

When I was young, I remember telling myself and others that when I grew up, I would become an athletic coach. I ran cross country and played basketball and softball. I was good at everything I played.

However, I steered myself the wrong way and attempted to focus on cosmetology instead.

Now I realize that your vision of your life will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. If you look outside your heart, you may dream. But if you look inside, you awaken.

So I looked within and realized I had succeeded. I actually had accomplished something. I have children – two amazing children whom I can share words of wisdom with, such as "Speak it and soon you will see it" and "Be a leader and not a follower."

Still, I had to stop living through my children. Time has become my wisest counselor. I am close to 50 now, but I know that I will never be too old to become what I might be. I've learned from teachers, more from books, and most of all from my mistakes.

I've learned that I have a gift as a writer and that I'm an artist too. I produce amazing artwork. I've learned that you can be discouraged by failure or can find lessons in it.

I've given myself permission to go ahead and make more mistakes because that is where I may find the most opportunity.

I Won't Know Him

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Even though I know him, I won't know him.
I hear he's shrunk in size, down 20 pounds
from his usual husky physique
in just a few weeks.
I hear his speech is fuzzy,
like he's high on drugs,
but perhaps that's a good thing.
He was jovial and upbeat
when I saw him last,
contemplating knee surgery
and spending the last years of his life
in Florida with his grandkids.
Instead, his years of smoking
four or five packs a day
left his body rampant with cancer.
When I see him next
he'll be in a hospital bed
placed conveniently in his living room
in Queens, New York.
The taut white sheets, light cream coverlet,
and stack of extra-thick pillows
support and comfort his every move.
Alongside his bedpost
hangs the morphine drip
that he tweaks ever so slightly himself
to ease his pain.
When I see him tomorrow
this man whom I've known for 40 years
will be a stranger to me.
If only I had seen him two months ago.

Becca

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Satin black hair swings
"I'm a country girl"
Camo tee shirt and ball cap
"Trucks are for girls too"
She pulls on Tony Lamas
Five feet of independence
Hips swaying; arms swinging
She's out the door
Facing life on her terms.

Jimmy Carter McGill

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"Wow," I thought as I left the UT Veterinary School, cat-carrier in tow. Jimmy Carter McGill had just passed his behavioral evaluation, the final step to being approved as a therapy cat in the school's H.A.B.I.T. (Human-Animal Bond in Tennessee) program. "I'm SO glad I finally said yes to this little fella."

Jimmy, named after my favorite TV character and the former president, wandered through the woods into my friend's yard and parked himself, emaciated and shivering, on her stoop, insisting she let him in.

"Betsy, I think I have your cat," read Celeste's late-night text.

"No, you don't," I replied. Still raw from the death of my 17-year-old cat six weeks earlier, I was in no mood to accept a "replacement" for my sweet girl, whose absence was still achingly palpable.

Phoebe's passing threw her 18-year-old sister, Maggie, into a grief that manifested as Maggie's aversion to the litter box and loss of appetite.

Additionally, my brother was losing his battle with cancer. I had enough going on emotionally; the answer to Celeste's implied question was no.

Efforts to identify Jimmy's owners revealed no one was looking for him. My vet found no microchip. His broken heart spoke to mine, and I agreed to give him a home. Celeste was right; she did have my cat.

Months after I adopted JCM, both my brother and Maggie died, plunging me into a depth of grief I had never known before.

One Friday afternoon at the end of a trying week at work, I took Jimmy to my office so my coworkers could meet the new little man in my life, whose saga – and mine – they'd lived through with me. Their gleeful reactions reminded me how good bringing happiness to others feels.

Now Jimmy and I visit nursing facilities as a H.A.B.I.T. therapy team, where we entertain patients whose broken bodies are mending. It's a win-win-win: Jimmy has a home; the patients get a few moments of distraction; and bringing healing to Jimmy's life and theirs is slowly healing my heart, too.

I'm grateful this is one opportunity I did not miss.

My French Affair

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I meet him through an ad: Renault Dauphine, 1958, \$300, runs.

Renault is robin's-egg blue, compact and boxy. It is love at first sight. His driving petals are the size of silver dollars. The clutch is a few inches from the brake and the brake a few inches from the gas. Renault is designed for jockey-sized French men and petite French women. Dad disparagingly calls Renault a toy car. Of course, Dad's disapproval ignites my passion for the French Renault, and he is soon mine.

"What is that?" my high school classmates inquire.

"Renault Dauphine." I respond with a proper name, for I refuse to reduce Renault to a make and model. I desperately wish to purchase a black beret, but I spent all my money on Renault. First loves are challenging, and as the Midwestern fall transforms into a Midwestern winter, I quickly realize that Renault is not accustomed to such cold. There is no garage to keep him warm at night, and every morning I wonder whether he will awaken. He usually is a late sleeper and then I must walk to school in a mad dash. It is a tempestuous affair. I leave Renault at home on weekends. American cars have the advantage of seating six friends or more, so my friend Beth and her Fin Wonder provide our transport.

On one occasion I drive Renault to Beth's house. We listen to records in her basement, eating popcorn. I return to Renault who is too sleepy to awaken. Roy, Beth's father, walks over and tells me to get out of the car. I hesitate and Roy is impatient. I get out and Roy folds himself into the driver's seat, all six-feet and five-inches of him. Pinned under the dashboard, his knees are prisoners, and his size-12 shoes cannot depress one driving pedal without depressing them all. I think he may crash through Renault's floorboard.

I can no longer watch so I return inside to call Dad, who quickly arrives to perform some magic under the hood. Renault and I drive off, together again.

Opportunities Remembered

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Life slows down as we age, allowing the mind to wander, to think about the life we have known and things that might be left undone. When it comes time for my last words, my last thoughts, it will not be sadness for dreams that did not come true.

Life has been good to me. I am a simple person with low expectations, yet I have had big experiences that many people can only dream of. From my earliest memories I have always wanted more, but most often I didn't know, more of what? I watched for opportunities and I grabbed every one that came my way.

I was a stay-at-home mom until my children were teens. I had a late but fabulous career. I went to college as an adult and earned an MBA at age 48. Best yet, my employer paid for college. Heaven knows I would never have been able to go if that responsibility would have been mine.

We have lived on a farm with livestock and garden, then ten years on a houseboat on the Columbia River, followed by a home closer to my job. My senior years are being spent in my dream house in a town of 3,000 people and one stop light. This town is so much like the towns of my youth in Montana. I feel like I have gone home at last.

When I was in my 50s, we started traveling internationally; I never expected that in my life. We saw Australia, New Zealand, most of Europe, Canada, Alaska, Mexico, Costa Rica and so much more.

I've been married for 58 years, and through highs and lows we are here to support each other as our time winds down. We agree that we have left nothing undone. We have had adventures we never dreamed possible. We were blessed with a loving family. When this life is over, there will be no regrets. Every opportunity for growth and happiness was grabbed with joy and thankfulness.

My final words can only be "THANK YOU."

Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.

— Mark Twain

Ghosts of Old Things

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As I sat in my classroom one blustery winter evening, ghosts of old things crept into my consciousness, and I remembered a teacher's unexpected whisper, "You've got writing talent."

She'd ignited my writing desire, and I was instantly hooked on the notion of being a writer. So, I took every writing course available in high school and decided to attend college and major in creative writing and journalism.

"You'll never make a living as a writer," my mother declared when I announced my plans. It was 1970, and there was little evidence in the prevailing culture that women succeeded in the writing field. And no matter how much I explained the changing face of the culture into which I was graduating, my mother's staunch German determinism prevailed. Mother would have no part of my silly pipe dream. "Be practical."

And I was. I attended a small university, majored in education, and missed the opportunity to become a writer.

Time passed like a hand waving from a train. And despite my positive attitude and purposeful life,

occasionally I feared becoming old, and it was a very specific old age I feared – one which had nothing to do with the number of years since my birth. I feared the premature old age of missed opportunities. So, by my late 50s, a certain weariness settled over me, inaugurating nostalgia for what never was, the desire for what could have been, and regret over not being someone else.

Then, while meandering down the aisles of my local bookstore, by happenstance I picked up a book of quotes, opened it, and discovered these words by Anne Lamott: "Oh my God, what if you wake up some day, and you're 65 or 75, and you never got your memoir or novel written. It's going to break your heart. Don't let this happen."

I gasped, then hesitated. "No!" I stomped my foot. "No! I missed my opportunity once but not again! Now's the time."

Later that year I retired from teaching and reclaimed my passion, whatever the outcome – assured in the fact that at least I'd tried.

Missed Opportunity

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"Let's go swimming," a friend would say,
Not a chance for my lips would turn to gray.

The effort was made to take some lessons,
I forget now, but there were many sessions.

The teacher was patient and kind
I was just always the student behind.

She suggested, smiled and cajoled;
I was just not a student who was bold.

Floating was the best I could do,
Then I would sink if someone said, "boo."

Now I live in a swimming community
All the more aware of my missed opportunity.

Survival

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Across azure skies,
Eagle flies powerfully
Blazing a trajectory
Focused on its journey
Striving against sunlight's speed
Streaking past
fast-dispersing clouds
to test its wings.

In the scorching ground below,
A dappled rabbit scurries, hiding
Among wind-driven tumbleweeds.

While I flee indoors
Seeking my own survival,
relief with fabricated air,
Missing nature's magnificent
Display of fortitude.

Be Thou Mine Forever

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It began so long ago,
I was very young, you some older.
Seemed to make perfect sense.
There was no other course, in my mind.
Live together, have your child, grow old with you.

When did I discover you didn't need me?
When did I know I no longer needed you?
Except to blow the winter snow,
Carry fifty pounds of dog food,
Pop the blade in the spiralizer thingy ...

But those are feats of strength, not love,
Or are they?

The sparkle may be tarnished or gone,
The body may betray the heart's desires,
But there is no one else I would choose today
Whose laundry I willingly accept doing.
No one I wish to have at my breakfast table,
but you.

In the Hallways

Keturah Morgan
Lockhart TX

I enter school, head down. Dark, curly, brown hair covers up my face. I walk through the crowded hallways where people always tend to pick on me.

On this day, I happen to be wearing my favorite baggy, black T-shirt and tight, black leather pants. My hair is loose around my face. I wear black eyeshadow that sparkles when the light hits it. My lipstick is blood red.

People in the hallways point and whisper, calling me goth chick and other names that don't bear repeating.

Had anyone stopped laughing long enough to get to know me they would have realized that I was more than worthy. I was someone who had dreams. I was a person who loved to sing along with every song and never hit a wrong note. I was a loyal friend, ride-or-die to the very end.

These missed opportunities taught me that everyone is different, even the ones you would never speak to in the hallways on your way to lunch.

The purpose of life is to live it, to taste experience to the utmost, to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experience.

— Eleanor Roosevelt

When I Was Popular

Mary Tello, Lockhart TX

Are we staying this time? I'm 13 years old, in junior high, and I actually fit in.

I'm taking gym, home ec and macramé. I try out for drill team and make it. I join choir and jazz band. I play volleyball. I go to school dances and share makeup in the girls' bathroom.

My boyfriend is in high school and drives a new Monte Carlo. We go to the skating rink on Friday nights. I have my first kiss. I practice dance routines in the front yard while listening to the transistor radio and watching my brothers play.

Life is so good.

And then Mom says, "Pack up. We're moving!"

I say, "But Mom, I'm finally part of something. I fit in. I have friends. I'm gonna be someone."

That was the year I was popular. It was all taken away as we drove to Texas and had to start over yet again. Only this time I chose to detach. I did not get involved because I knew deep inside that these opportunities would come crashing down again.

Life went on. I started over many times.

Years later, I found myself saying the same thing to my boys that my mom said to me. I think of the opportunities they lost because of me, and I try to forgive myself. But guess what? They still love me. And I realize that popularity is nothing compared with love.

And I Wonder

Laura Kolb
Lockhart TX

It was my first year in high school, and one day I saw him.

Tall, thin. Dark hair, blue eyes. I think I tripped. But it didn't matter. He was a senior who would never notice me.

Then he was gone and the world seemed so drab without his face and sparkling eyes.

I was finally a senior myself. My mom came home one day and told me I had a crush at the grocery store. Curious, I went to the store. It was him. He asked me out on a date. I think I tripped again. We went to see a movie – *When a Man Loves a Woman*. At the end, we were holding hands and crying.

I wanted to hold his hand forever. Mine felt just right in his. We went on several dates until I moved away in June before starting college, which I didn't even finish.

To this day, whenever I see him, I feel a spark. And I wonder: Could his hand have been the one I could have held forever?

First Fawns

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Two fawns
approach, tentative,
from a copse.
I freeze, they bolt,
Spots explode that way and this,
then disappear into
a thicket of saplings
briars and spruce.

Yesterday, I leapt like them,
played hide and seek,
learned to bolt
from danger.

That evening
the fawns emerge
with watchful does.
Caught in their maternal sights,
I stop breathing.
The four vanish
into the woods'
dark embrace.

I retreat to my cabin.
Grateful for one more season,
I pour a whiskey
and remember my mother's face.

I Remember ... A Royal Affair

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I remember the day that Princes Charles married Lady Diana. It was a brilliant day in July, 1981, and I was with my new flat-mates in Bondi Junction, a suburb of Sydney, Australia. We had not been to bed, given we were all working evening restaurant shifts, serving the tourists at Kings Cross and the harbor until early morning. Our plan was to gather at 4:00 a.m. to watch the pageantry and ceremony in England at real time, so far away.

I remember being happy with anticipation. I remember feeling independent, strong and healthy at 25 years of age. I remember drinking champagne in crystal flutes and eating strawberries dipped in chocolate fondue with Jonathan and Nicky. I remember sharing that our delicacies reminded me of my mother with friends who gathered each year of my childhood for "breakfast of champions." They spent the weekend watching men's and women's Wimbledon Finals, also in England, also so far from my Canadian home and memories.

I remember when an adorably nervous Diana mixed up the order of Charles's many middle names during the vows as cameras rolled, millions watched, 3,500 attended and the Archbishop of Canterbury presided. She fumbled and we collectively gasped. Imagine the world watching you. Imagine the world knowing that you had been chosen for this role after many had been introduced, vetted, discarded: a virgin and a breeder; someone to be quiet, docile and bear sons; an heir and a spare to continue the lineage.

I remember that we all knew even then that Charles was in love with Camilla, whom he met in 1970. I remember how Diana looked frightened and alone as she waved from the Britannia, with the prince by her side, as the ship left shore for their honeymoon and her destiny. I remember when she birthed William and Harry and, years later, shared on national TV, "There were three of us in that marriage."

I remember what I was doing the morning she died in a tunnel in Paris. I remember the day Charles married Camilla after a 30-year love affair.

I always wanted a happy ending... Now I've learned, the hard way, that some poems don't rhyme, and some stories don't have a clear beginning, middle and end. Life is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it without knowing what's going to happen next. Delicious ambiguity.

— Gilda Radner



Represent Modern American Family ... Woman Power!

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My daughter's mobile screen shows the image of the goddess Durga with her children and pets. One day, one of my daughter's colleagues from the side isle asked curiously, "Who is this lady with ten hands, holding a long spear targeted to a muscle-man with a huge moustache?"

"This is the goddess of our biggest festival in West Bengal. The goddess comes once a year for only five days in the autumn to her mother's house with all her children and pets."

"Why does she have ten hands, with weapons in each hand like a terrorist?"

My daughter jokingly replied, "Perhaps to protect and control the two beautiful young daughters and two young boys. She comes alone from Kailas of the Himalayas, struggling and killing demons and overcoming all obstacles with courage and bravery. Actually, she is the symbol of 'woman-power.' She has to manage home and family, both."

"Is she single or a widow?"

"No, no!" my daughter laughed.

"Then, who is her husband?"

"Lord Shiva."

"What does he do?"

"Nothing! He has no responsibility for the family. He takes ganja (marijuana) with his pals, dances and roams half-naked all day with a snake around his neck."

"Oh!" her colleague thoughtfully murmured, then said, "That sounds very similar to modern-day drama, too."

Both laughed together!

Texas Weather Report

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They say if you don't like the weather in Texas, wait a spell and it will change. Unfortunately, the change in recent memory has gone from bad to worse.

According to national news reports, the double-digit inch rains in Texas last summer qualified as a 500-year flood event. Only trouble, we suffered two 500-year floods within a month of each other! The first flood cost Houston and the region \$5 billion in damages.

People in apartments climbed on the rooftops to escape the rising water. They carried babies in their arms and waited for rescue that was slow coming. Television cameras from helicopters showed cattle and horses swimming for higher ground and finding none.

I watched in horror as the 24-hour news feed showed vehicles being submerged and swept away, of homes being swamped by rising water, of tornadoes tearing away roof tops and yes, of accounts of people and pets being stranded and found drowned.

I was in a small town 90 miles north of Houston during the second flood. The weatherman reported 10 inches of rain and 60-plus mph wind gusts. Local officials set up a shelter for folks, but livestock had to survive on their own since the animal shelter was full.

There was a power outage around 10 p.m. at one of the state prison farms. A brawl broke out between prisoners and guards after inmates refused to return to their darkened cells when the emergency generator malfunctioned. When the lights came on again, three had to be taken to the hospital.

The weather eventually changed. The rains stopped. But then came hell-on-wheels summer heat, and Texas wildfires ravaged the land.

Is this the new norm? There's no way to predict – unless we believe the scientists who are warning of climate change caused by humanity's misuse of the environment.

Can we stop raping our surroundings of its resources and reclaim the balance of nature? That's a hard choice for Texas, a state that worships oil and gas production to the detriment of everything else.

But I think we've been warned: Mother Nature is getting pissed.

Youthful Blindness

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This is a sad tale. I have wanted to write it for a long, long time.

This sad tale began in 1969. I graduated from UC Berkeley and we bought our first home. Before I graduated, I committed to getting a master's degree. No sooner had I done this than my husband learned that the small company he worked for required him to move to Maryland. There was a recession in the country, and businesses had to conserve resources. He went; I stayed, completed my master's degree and sold the house.

I knew before I finished my master's degree that I wanted to continue my studies and get a PhD. After arriving in Maryland, I began work at a USDA laboratory. In the fall, I started my graduate studies, but I didn't fit in. Oh, how I missed UC Berkeley. At the end of the year, I changed departments. I studied for my orals and passed them. But I had no interest in my research project. I had no support from my advisor. After four years, I stopped my studies and went to work. The PhD remained incomplete. Still is. In one study by the PhD Completion Project, Council of Graduate Schools, 55 percent of women did not complete their PhDs. Though the statistic boggles my mind, it offers me little comfort.

Looking back, what were my options? I could have stayed at UC Berkeley. I could have done research at the USDA laboratory. I could have done research in the department where I taught the first year. I could have written up my meager research results. I couldn't see then the opportunities that were staring me in the face. My youth and inexperience blinded me.

My daughter did not make my mistake. She finished her PhD. Would my life have been different if I had? Of course. Better? Probably not.

No matter. I will always regret my youthful blindness.

Light

Marjorie Setzer
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How often I say, "I need light,"
 Then journey from room to room
 Switching dim to bright
 To read, to see,
 To change my mood.
 A magic antidote is at my fingertips.

Emily Dickinson was right ...
 "There is a certain slant of light."
 It happens often, you know,
 Depending on the time of day,
 The season, the angle of Sun to Earth.
 Nature's cycles make a difference.

Noon ... Shade is at a minimum.
 The shadows Sun creates
 Are scarce of length
 Yet ever stretching beyond the present
 As time passes.
 Same scene ... subtle differences.

Sun directs moving shadows gently
 Over familiar backgrounds.
 Monet knew ... how light affects the landscape
 Depending on the time of day
 Capturing on canvas
 Temporal and seasonal changes.

It made sense to me one afternoon,
 Four o'clock perhaps, as dimmer rays
 Filtered through the window pane ...
 A palette of softer colors transformed
 A dreary living room before my very eyes.
 A perfect blend of time and light.

My Shining Star

M.P.
 Lockhart TX

I am sitting here at Lockhart Prison, wearing the same thing I do every day: white shirt, white pants, white socks, blue shoes. I am doing the same thing day after day, sitting around and thinking how much I will miss my shining star on her special day.

I will miss my youngest daughter, my mini-me, graduating from high school. I will miss watching her take that walk of accomplishment across the stage with her head

held so high and feeling so proud of herself. She will be marking the biggest accomplishment of her life so far, and I will miss it.

I am also missing the chance of picking out the perfect dress for her to wear and of helping her prepare for senior pictures. I am missing the opportunity of seeing my baby shine like a star and starting her grown-up life.

My shining star, how I love her.

I Have a Lovely Family

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I have a lovely family,
just not the one I want.
No doubt they feel the same.

All the planning, cooking, work
couldn't make it wonderful.
Thought we'd be close and
talk of things we don't.

Other things are more important,
even when away from home,
(a home, no matter how big, has no room for me).

All I wanted was time –
to talk, play, cuddle, listen.
I want them in a bubble,
no intrusions, nothing to diminish.

I thought I was ready.
I know some fault is mine.
I love them, all the same.

While the girls are great,
I could use a little more respect,
a little more attention.

Little guy is like me, trying to be heard.
Mom is lovely, if unsharing.
Dad is the boy I raised, yet different, more distant,
doesn't know the year I've had, what I love or what I need.

I have a lovely family,
just not the one I want.
No doubt they feel the same.

In Real Time

Maya Lazarus
Caldwell TX
deblazarus@yahoo.com

My imagination is buried somewhere in the lower mantle
of my mind, under the crust of life's practicalities.
I live on the top crust – pizza crust, apple pie crust,
graham cracker crust. Not those crusts!!
Shopping lists, what's for dinner,
when to do the laundry, feed the dogs, write my poems,
read the next good book, crochet a rug, watch a video.
When I retired, my imagination retired too.
Not a single fantasy of late. Dry, lackluster times.
My daughter can go off into a delightful reverie lasting hours.
I'm stuck with real times in a dystopian world.

What If

Nancilynn Saylor, Austin TX
<https://nancilynn.wordpress.com>
e-circle 3, e-circle 4, e-circle 6

She stands in front of a closet
Of "what ifs"
Only opened now
To tuck away another memory.
The space is nearly bursting with "if onlys"
"I wonders" and
a few subtle contemplations.
Speculation where those might
have taken her
is now
just that,
nothing more ...
Men she did not marry,
Children they did not share,
A few dreams and destinations promised,
that somehow went nowhere.
Some tainted goodbyes,
Some chance hellos –
Opportunities missed where she
Might have said "yes,"
Or much more likely, "no."

Thank You for Zola!

Mary Olivia Patiño
San Antonio TX
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<http://writingpatino.wordpress.com>

Lord God, Creator Blest
We praise your Name!
You created the heavens,
The earth, the sea,
And all creatures in-between.

You blessed us with Zola
And Callie, our neighbor's sweetest cat,
Whom Zola delighted to chase.
Thank you, Lord, for not letting Zola catch up to her.
For now, they play in heaven – the best of friends!

If Zola could talk, she would say:
"Thank you, family and friends.
You took me on awesome walks
You opened your hearts
When Mary was away."
"Thank you, compassionate friends
For giving me a resting place."

Then, she would say:
"Thank you, Mary, for loving me."

Ghost Ride

Mary Devries, Hutchinson KS
flossieanna@gmail.com, <http://marydevries3.blogspot.com>
w-ecircle 6

Harvest was over, but the farm was still busy. Irrigation had to be checked daily and livestock checked and fed. As a farm wife, my days were filled with laundry, cooking meals for my husband and his hired hands, canning vegetables for the winter. That changed with a phone call late one July afternoon.

My mother's voice shook as she asked me to come. My father was in the hospital and only had hours. Galvanized by the message I sprang into action. I found a sitter for the girls, caught a hired hand in the driveway and sent a message to my husband. I threw clothes in a suitcase and gassed up the car. Almost as an afterthought, I checked to see what cash I had. It came to about thirty dollars, which would have to do since the bank was closed and ATMs had not arrived in our small town. In less than hour, I was on the road.

Choosing the shortest route gave me miles through town-less plains. As I drove, memories played in my mind:

Dad coming home from his salesman's route and taking me to Saturday matinees; his cigars, his fedora, the countless white shirts that Mom washed and starched and I ironed; they were all there. His bigness, both in the physical sense and in his character, filled the car. I could almost smell his Old Spice aftershave and hear his booming laugh. The hours passed. As I parked in their yard, the car's fuel gauge showed empty.

The next morning Mom and I went to his room. He was so still, so quiet. Leaning over him I said, "I am here." Nothing changed. He gave no sign that he knew me.

Mom and I sat in chairs in the room. I was sure I had missed the opportunity to say goodbye. Then he turned his head toward me and raised his hand. He was gone. I still believe he knew. The opportunity was not lost.

Lost

Mary Devries, Hutchinson KS
flossieanna@gmail.com,
<http://marydevries3.blogspot.com>, w-ecircle 6

He knew he was different, and when he told us, it hurt. How could we have a son that liked men? It meant no grandchildren around our table, as he was our only son. We never said "You are not our son," but he felt it, so he left our conservative Kansas home and went east.

Years passed. He would call and we would talk, though his father talked less than I. We exchanged presents on birthdays and Christmas but we did not know about his life. His father seemed not to care about that, but I wanted to know. Was he happy? Did he have love in his life? Had he found a safe, accepting place in society?

One time his father asked me to call to ask him to visit. I did, but there was no answer. So I texted him. He replied: "Mom, Dad. Thanks. There is someone I want you to meet, but I just got a job as a bartender, and it will be a month or so before we can come to Kansas. Can't wait to be part of the family again. Love you."

For the next month there were texts and pictures of a handsome man called Xavier. Our son was happy. It came through in his texts and his calls. We were so glad that we had turned away from our prejudice and had our son in our life again.

Last he texted: "Mommy, Daddy. There is a man here with a gun. I am behind the bar. X is with me. We are scared. I lov"

We knew. No need for an official call. The opportunity to be a family united was gone, and so were they.

Nest in the Grass

Janice Kvale
Austin TX
janicekvale@yahoo.com
w-circle 6, r-circle 1

Pick up sticks, lay them straight
lawnmower and I have a date

A small nest in too-tall grass
hidden from any prying glance

My intent to mow, needed and good
but now I wonder if I should

Since I am loath mow this down
I commit this patch to weedy ground

Tiny eggs, brown speckles on blue
nestle together, there are just two

I want to know whose nest this is
So I consult a birder's list

complete with photos of tiny bird
lovely birdsong that I heard

It's a modest song sparrow that brings
heart-warming joy whenever it sings

My Haunted Heart

Barbara Smythe
La Verne CA
blsmythe@earthlink.net

Love

Pure and eternal
Valued immeasurably
Like a most precious jewel
What if I had not concealed it?

Fear

Stealthy and unreasonable
Distorting deliberately
Like being lost in a house of mirrors
What if I had found my way out?

Secrets

Lovely and lethal
Invented nobly
Like an impenetrable shield
What if they had been shattered in time?

Insight

Humbling and haunting
Recognized belatedly
Like the useless regrets of the guilty
What if I had said yes?

Truth

Brave and free
Admired ardently
Like the soaring of an eagle
What if I had not been afraid to fly?

We don't see things as they are. We see them as we are.
— Anais Nin



Jo Virgil, True Words Editor, has been a Story Circle Network member for many years and recently accepted a position on the SCN Board (Publication and Program member) and to serve as editor for True Words. Jo has a Master's Degree in Journalism and has worked as a reporter, as a writing workshop teacher, as Community Relations Manager for Barnes

& Noble, and as Community Outreach Coordinator for the Texas Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities. Writing and sharing stories are her passion.

Language Barrier

Janice Kvale
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w-circle 6, r-circle 1

At age ten, I decided to learn German because my grandfather came from Germany. I thought a German-English dictionary was key to learning German. With my dictionary, I wrote a letter to my grandfather, signing it Leiben, which is German for "Love." My grandfather did not write back. My parents assured me he appreciated my effort.

The only language offered in my small rural high school was Latin, but conversational Latin was not part of our study. We just conjugated verbs: amo, amas, amat, et cetera.

A few years later, I learned there were night classes at a local high school where I lived. I enrolled in a French class since it was considered the "universal language," if only by the French. I convinced a friend to take French with me. My classmates were around high school age and most had failed French earlier or were drop-outs trying to finish a diploma in night school. My friend dropped out after a few weeks. I hung in for almost the whole year but found the progress slow. I knew the days of the week and not much else. I could not speak French.

In Texas, I organized a Beginning Spanish class at my workplace. About 15 colleagues signed up. The native speaker came to us from a known language school. "Español es facil (Spanish is easy)!" she insisted. The class ended, the participants disbanded.

Encouraged that I now had a base in Spanish, I did the night school stint again. But when the next class was to be all-Spanish conversation, I felt embarrassed that fluency had passed me by. I dropped out again.

A Mexican woman who spoke no English has tidied my home biweekly for five years. Her bilingual daughter manages her mother's business. I remembered enough Spanish to tell Nicola, "Limpia aqui, por favor. (Clean here, please)"

Using an electronic translation site, I communicated in Spanish orally or in writing. One day, as Nicola was leaving she said, "I'll be back in two weeks."

While I was unsuccessful in becoming fluent in Spanish, Nicola acquired English.

The Sarton Women's Book Awards™

The Sarton Women's Book Awards™ are sponsored by the Story Circle Network, an international nonprofit association of women writers. Awards are presented annually in five categories. Lesbian entries are welcome in all categories.

- Memoir
- Biography
- Contemporary fiction
- Historical fiction
- Young Adult and New Adult fiction

The award 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.

[http://www.storycircle.org/
SartonLiteraryAward/](http://www.storycircle.org/SartonLiteraryAward/)

*Entry Deadline: November 16,
2016*



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.

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

New SCN Professional Membership Category

By Pat LaPointe

Have you written a book? Do you offer editing, coaching, copyediting, research, writing workshops, retreats, or conferences? Do you own a writing-related or publishing business?

If so, SCN is offering you an exciting new way to spread the word about your writing-related services. In January, you will be able to upgrade, renew at, or join in our new Professional Membership category.

The Professional Membership comes with a package of advertising opportunities and a listing in our new Professional Directory. Your listing, photo, and bio will be featured on your own personal page, as well as on the pages that list authors, editors, freelancers, ghostwriters, speakers, teachers/coaches, marketing services, publishing services, and web services.

You can choose from four different Professional Membership packages, depending on your needs.

- \$99.00. Listing in our Professional Directory for 12 months online and in 4 issues of the *Journal*
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Click on the join/renew link on the SCN website and upgrade your current membership to a Professional Membership.

PROFESSIONAL DIRECTORY

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

Brief Bios of SCN's Professional Members

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

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

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

Leia Francisco: Coach specializing in life and career transitions. Teach people how to use writing as a tool for navigating, apply therapeutic writing techniques, and facilitate transitions writing groups. Author of *Writing Through Transitions* and Board Certified Coach. Email: lfrancisco@stx.rr.com **Author**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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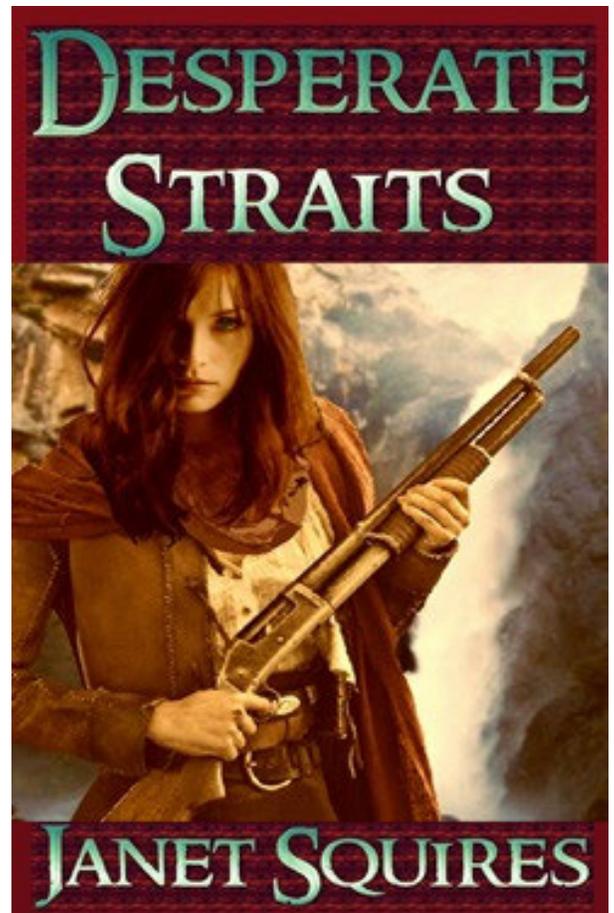
Sarah Ryan's hope for a new life in the Arizona Territory is shattered in an instant by gunfire. Suddenly, she has to rebuild an uncertain future with her orphaned nephew, Will, and take on the challenges of a cattle ranch.

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

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

About the author:

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



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Looking Ahead

True Words:

We're always looking for stories rich in evocative detail, showing the struggles, challenges, and resolutions of real people living real lives. We prefer that you submit your work directly to the website at:

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Future Topics and deadlines for upcoming Journals:

- December, 2016 (due October 15)—Tall Tales and Little Lies



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

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