



STORY CIRCLE JOURNAL

Vol. 21 No. 4, December 2017

The newsletter for women with stories to tell

SCN 2018 national conference: “Widening the Circle, Opening Our Hearts”

by Joyce Boatright

In choosing the theme “Widening the Circle, Opening Our Hearts,” Story Circle Network is focusing on helping *every* woman give voice to her personal story at the *Stories from the Heart IX* national conference. Story Circle Network has always been an organization that seeks women of all ethnicities, from age 20 to 100, from all walks of life, and this conference will celebrate that diversity. Member-only registration (a \$40 discount!) runs through Jan. 31. Use the form on page 30 or register online and pay by credit card.

This year the conference will run **July 20-22, 2018**. Once again it will be held in Austin, Texas, at the Wyndham Hotel.

The wildly popular **Linda Joy Myers**, president of the National Association of Memoir Writers, will open the conference with a stirring **keynote on Friday evening** (see an interview with her on page 8). In addition, **Lorraine (Bird) Mejia** will give us **Sunday’s luncheon keynote**. Lorraine is a popular instructor in SCN’s online classes, garnering kudos from novice and seasoned writers from coast to coast. More on Lorraine in the March 2018 Journal.

Two pre-conference workshops are planned. One has been confirmed, while the second will be selected from proposals received. **To propose a workshop or presentation, see guidelines on page 3.**

Debra L. Winegarten, known to her Story Circle sisters as “the Debster,” will present a **pre-conference workshop** on “How to Turn Your Book into a Schmoozing Delivery Device.” An award-winning author and publisher, she is descended from a Russian Jewish fruit peddler, who supported himself, his wife, and four daughters, buying bananas at the Dallas Farmers Market and driving his horse-and-buggy 28 miles due east to sell them in Forney, TX. Debra’s chutzpah is genetic, her book-selling skills legendary. Come learn how to “sell like the Debster.”

In addition to focused keynotes and pre-conference workshops, there will be an abundance of breakout sessions throughout the weekend. Divided into six categories, topics included are detailed on page 3.

Mark your calendars for **July 20-22, 2018**, and plan to join us for **Story Circle Network’s ninth national women’s writing conference**. Whether you are just beginning to explore the stories of your life, or you are a seasoned writer, you will find what you need for inspiration to carry you through the year. In the safety of the Story Circle, meet like-minded women, who listen with their hearts to the stories you share.



Linda Joy Myers, Friday evening keynote speaker



Lorraine Mejia, Sunday luncheon keynote



Debra Winegarten, pre-conference presenter

Reflections Essay Contest Winners

The SCN 2017 Reflections Essay Contest has named **Susan Flemr** of Des Moines as first place winner for her essay, “My Jewish Mother;” **Jeanne Guy** of Austin won second place for “When You Least Expect It;” and **Barbara Stark-Nemon** of Ann Arbor received third place honors for “Radical Love, Allies, and Stepping Back.” You can read their powerful entries beginning on page 4.

In This Issue

President’s Letter	2
2018 Conference: Call for Proposals	3
2018 Conference Contest: Hot Flashes	4
Reflections Essay Contest Winners	4
2018 Conference: Keynote Speaker	8
Writing Tips from Our Teachers	10
SCN Publication: Inside and Out	11
Member Spotlight: Jo Virgil	12
Member Interview: Penelope Starr	14
Sarton Update: Continued Growth	15
True Words from Real Women	16
New Members With Stories to Tell	25
Sarton Interview: Leslie Tall Manning	26
Circle Voices	28
Professional Directory	29
2018 Conference: Registration Form	30
SCN Registration Form	31

Letter From SCN's President



Dear SCN Sister--

Oh, my goodness, it's December already—and 2018 will be here before we know it! I'm excited about the activities SCN is planning for next year, and hope you'll join us in as many as possible.

- In July, we're holding our ninth biannual women's writing conference, "Widening the Circle, Opening Our Hearts." This year, we're celebrating diversities, because we know that *every* woman's story is *all* women's stories. Please note: Members get a \$40 discount, if you register by Jan. 15. Joyce Boatright, conference co-chair, tells you all about this not-to-miss event on page 1 of this issue.
- As this year ends, we're about to launch our latest book, *Inside and Out: Women's Truths, Women's Stories*, a gathering of members' writings from our annual anthologies. This exciting collection is under the editorial direction of Susan Schoch. Read all about it on page 11.
- Our Sarton Award program (now in its seventh year) honors outstanding books by women, for women, about women, published by small, independent presses or by the authors themselves. You can read a year-end report on page 15. This program has grown every year; in 2018, we're looking for an even greater expansion.
- Our women's book review site, the largest on the Internet, is looking ahead to its sixteenth year, thanks to the help of a great team of reviewers and editors. Check us out at www.StoryCircleBookReviews.org. This site was launched by Paula Yost and is directly funded by our members. We're very grateful to the nearly 100 women who chipped in to help us meet our \$4,200 goal!
- Our Circles program continues to expand under the loving guidance of Mary Jo Doig and Sonja Dalglish. Mary Jo works with community circles; Sonja works with SCN's online circles. Writings from these circles will be featured in each issue of our *Journal* in 2018. On page 28, you can enjoy the poetry Sonja has selected from our e-Circle 4.
- We're also looking forward to next year's *three* writing competitions. Congratulations to the winners of our 2017 "Reflections" featured on pages 4-6. Read the latest flash on our 2018 "Hot Flashes" competition on page 4. And stay tuned for news about our annual summer essay competition, in the March issue of the *Journal*. Our competitions—designed to give you more opportunities for publication—are under the able direction of Joyce Boatright.
- 2018 will also bring an opportunity to submit your work to our annual anthology, *Real Women Write*, edited by Susan Schoch. The 2017 anthology is in the works and will be in the mail before the end of the year. Watch for our coming announcement of the 2018 anthology.

I speak for our board of directors when I say that we're all very proud of SCN's accomplishments in 2017 and looking forward with an eager enthusiasm to 2018. We hope you can join us at the conference!

Wishing you the brightest of holiday seasons,

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.



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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What's Your Super Power?

Calling for 2018 conference presenters and proposals

Are you...

...a poet who loves to share creative ways to lure the Muse to join in lyrical repartee?

...a fiction writer that knows a great way to create tension in a cozy mystery?

...an expert researcher who can share techniques for discovering family roots?

Do you have the secret recipe for building an author platform?

Whether your gift is helping novice writers or seasoned pros or somewhere in-between, SCN is seeking proposals for the July 2018 conference. Six topic areas or categories have been identified for breakout sessions. They include:

- **Getting Personal:** journaling; writing from the heart/reaching deep; developing an authentic voice; family history
- **Craft Matters:** improving writing skills; learning to edit/proofread; revision; fiction fundamentals (characters, plot, setting, structure); hooking the reader
- **The Writing Life:** managing time; creating a writing practice; collaborating; critique groups; beta readers; blogging
- **Breaking into Publishing:** what first-timers need to know; crafting a pitch, proposal, query letter; looking for an agent; publishing paths (self/indie/traditional); writing as a business: record-keeping, business records, best freelancing practices
- **Marketing:** secrets of social media; creating a publicity campaign; guerilla marketing (low-cost, unconventional marketing); building an author platform
- **A Take-Home Workshop for Your Community:** presentations that teach interested attendees how to become life-writing teachers or facilitators in their own communities—sessions include ideas, course outlines, writing prompts, and other take-aways.

One-hour presentations can be either active workshops with writing opportunities or interactive, engaging lecture-style presentations. Presentation topics can include fiction, nonfiction, memoir, personal essay, poetry, dance, music, art, and more, as each relates to storytelling. Presenters may focus on novices, experienced writers, or all levels.

Deadline for proposals is the 15th of December 2017. Multiple proposals are welcomed. For guidelines and the proposal form, go to:

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

"We learn best to listen to our own voices if we are listening at the same time to other women—whose stories, for all our differences, turn out, if we listen well, to be our stories also."

—Barbara Deming

Story Circle Network's Mission

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

Seeking Hot Flashes (contest entries)



Hot Flashes is a contest that explores our 2018 national conference theme: **Widening the Circle, Opening our Hearts.**

Entries can be mostly/partly true or complete fiction, involving a woman (or a group of women) opening (or, heaven forbid, closing) her heart to influence some conflict in her life, her community, or possibly the wider world.

The contest is open to all Story Circle Network members in good standing. If you are not yet a member but plan to attend the 2018 conference, once your registration fee is paid, you will receive a link to use for entering with your conference confirmation.

Flash fiction is, by definition, a work of “extreme brevity,” while still offering character and plot development. An added strength is when a writer implies a larger story in her short piece. Examples include “twitterature” (140 characters), “dribble” (50 words), “drabble” (100 words) and “sudden fiction” (750 words). **Hot Flashes is limited to 600 words (although it can be shorter).**

Here is an opportunity to explore this newly popular short fiction form, and to share your work with a group of women committed to supporting and learning from each other.

Deadline for the contest is June 15. Winners will be notified by July 1, 2018. There is a **\$10 entry fee**, with a limit of one entry per woman. Judges will be made up of published authors who are members of Story Circle Network.

The first-prize winning story will be announced by our founder and president Susan Albert, at the Friday evening keynote, and the author, if in attendance, will be invited to read it at one of the luncheons, but this is not a requirement.

Our prizes: First Place: \$100, Second Place: \$50, Third Place: \$25.

Access the official rules and submission form here: <http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/hotflash.php>

Reflections Essay Contest – 2017 Winners

Congratulations to this year’s winning authors! The theme for 2017 was “Common Ground.” Participants were asked to recount an event or time when they encountered a person or group from whom they felt different, but then found common ground that made it possible to come to consensus or a workable solution.

Wonderful and thoughtful essays were submitted. Entrants wrote pensively about self-discovery and the bonds of community. Our judges, Joyce Boatright, Susan Schoch, and Pat LaPointe, expressed joy in the strong voices among entries that came in from across the United States. Thanks to all who entered, and kudos to our winners!

1st Place: My Jewish Mother By Susan Flemer – Des Moines IA

Dear Beatrice,

Swastikas on waving flags held high by young men with straight-armed salutes—these grotesque images marched across my television screen from Charlottesville, Virginia. My thoughts returned to December 1966 and your Chicago apartment. Once again I revisited the life-altering events of that night.

Prior to then, our history included your having taught me psychiatric nursing. Even though you were twenty-five years my senior, we were now colleagues and friends who spent time together socially.

That particular evening, we returned to your apartment following a chamber music concert. As I stood at your living room window and looked down over Lake Shore Drive, blowing snow rapidly accumulated and traffic snarled. We decided it would not be wise for me to travel to my apartment on the other side of the city.

You sent me off for a hot bath. As I walked into the bathroom, you called after me. “Say, my overgrown kid”—I was never offended by that nickname, as I heard genuine affection as you spoke it and knew you referred only to my six-foot height—“I have a love story to tell you. When you were a student nurse, I did not speak of these things. But, if you would allow me, now that we are friends, I would like to share it.”

As I soaked in the tub, I tried to imagine where and when there had been a love story. Had it been in Vienna before the war, in Israel before you came to the United States, or somewhere here in Chicago?

A large cup of steaming cocoa waited for me when I returned from my bath, and you insisted that I take the warmest afghan in which to curl up opposite you on the

couch. Wrapped in the afghan I snuggled into the corner. We didn't move from the couch for the next three hours.

I was eager to hear your love story, but waited, sipping my cocoa for a few minutes of uncomfortable silence. Finally, you began.

"My Max..."

Those two words hung in the air of the high-ceilinged room in that old apartment. Because the silence felt sacred, I did not speak. Your bright blue eyes glistened in the soft yellow light of the old wall sconces. You had released your braided red hair from its usual neat twist, and now you absentmindedly stroked the end of the thick braid that fell over the shoulder of your heavy chenille bathrobe.

"Sue," you began again, "telling you about my Max means telling you the whole story. I must start in Vienna." You paused, taking a slow sip of your cocoa. "This is not going to be a happy love story."

An involuntary tightness began in my throat, and I didn't know why. I pulled the afghan more tightly around me and sank further into the pillows.

Max was a teenage buddy of your brother, Egon, in Vienna, you told me. They studied together in your home when life was good—before the Nazis. It wasn't long before Max was visiting your home to see you. You were only eighteen but the two of you talked of wedding plans for the future.

Your mother was a widow, and when things began to get too dangerous for Jews in Vienna, arrangements were made for you and your brother to escape to Israel. Max was upset, but he understood the two of you had to take advantage of an opportunity for safe transport. Max was also involved in getting himself and his family out of the country.

You talked about Max—the joy he brought to those dark times leading up to your departure, his wonderful smile and quick humor, his brilliance with mathematics and science. Although you and Egon made attempts to locate Max following the war, you never saw him again.

"Oh, Sue," you said. "There is more to my sad story. A few months after Egon and I left Vienna, my mother was taken off to a camp, to Auschwitz. She was killed there in 1942, when I was twenty-three. How could my brother and I have agreed to leave for Israel while my beloved mother would soon be marched off to a concentration camp where she would die?"

I watched tears stream down your face. I moved to sit beside you and held you. Every internal organ between my throat and my gut was tied in one gigantic knot. No afghan would have been heavy enough to stop your shivering. Or was it mine?

I could not imagine the horror of your remembrance. There were no words appropriate to speak to your grief, no words appropriate to express my sorrow.

"I have felt so guilty for going off to Israel and leaving my mother in Vienna," you said. "She wanted us safe. That was all she cared about. We wanted to please her and so we went." You repeated this over and over. Your tears soaked my shoulder.

A long silence followed, interrupted only by the harsh scraping sound of the snowplow as it traveled the street below.

Suddenly I blurted out. "I am German!"

You laughed, put on your heaviest Viennese accent, and shouted, "You think with a name like Valbracht I could think you were anything else, you silly woman?"

Then my tears came.

You reached for my cheek, turned my face toward you and looked directly into my eyes as you spoke. "Are you saying you feel responsible, Sue? Well, let me tell you something. You are not responsible. No one person can be responsible for the actions of another. So, wipe away those tears of German or Gentile responsibility. You didn't do it, and you never would have done it."

You spoke with increasing vehemence. "Our relationship has nothing to do with the Holocaust or the fact that you are German and Gentile, and I a Jew. Do you understand that, Sue?" She handed me a tissue. "You are Sue, first my student, then my overgrown kid, now my friend. Tonight, I needed my friend."

I learned that night, and in the years that followed, that the non-judgmental, unconditional love you generously shared with me as your young student, would continue to be shared with me as your friend.

It was beginning to get light when you pulled down the Murphy bed for me. As you headed off to your bedroom, you announced that in a few hours you would get fresh bagels, lox, and cream cheese from the deli. You would fix us some strong coffee with real cream. This breakfast would give us strength like nothing else could, you promised. Returning briefly to the living room, you tucked the covers around my shoulders, patted the top of my head and whispered, "Now sleep, my overgrown kid."



Member-only Registration
(a \$40 discount!)
runs through January 31.

Use the form on page 30 or register online and pay by credit card.

2nd Place: When You Least Expect It

By Jeanne Guy – Austin TX

I heaved another sigh as I turned off the radio and got out of the car. The oppressive hot Texas weather blasted me—and it was October. But climate change, according to what I had just heard from certain politicians, doesn't exist. The latest political news successfully squeezed the last possible ounce of compassion right out of my heart. Day after damn day, the barrage of inhumane decisions, mean-spirited tactics, lies, and arrogant bipartisan news, crushed my spirit and my belief that this country could ever dig out from under the current administration's loveless assault. We were on zero common ground.

"Let them all rot," I said under my breath as I grabbed my shopping bag and headed into Target for prescriptions and some last minute clothes I needed for an upcoming trip.

Still pondering the depressing broadcast, I mindlessly grabbed a couple of tops and tossed them into my cart. On a mission, I barreled down the main aisle to get to the pharmacy department. My eyes were laser-focused on my immediate path since making eye contact with other shoppers seemed senseless. What was the point? We were all doomed. The world was, as they say, going to hell in a handbasket.

Eyes on the floor as if I were scanning it for lost change, a tiny person—I'm guessing maybe 13-14 months old—came into my purview. This short passerby, albeit slowly, was heading in my direction, forcing eye contact. I slowed down my pace as he continued to toddle toward me. His pregnant mother passed me with her cart, and the dad was patiently waiting for the kiddo to follow the mom. Regardless of my rotten mood, the little fellow's enormous brown eyes invited a smile from my lips.

What was I to do? I said hi. Although he never spoke, he also never took his eyes off me. Dad said, "Hey Timmy, we need to catch up to mama."

"Well, Timmy," I said as I leaned down to tousle his shiny brown hair, "You sure are a cutie-pie. But I doubt if I'm doing anything you'd find fun this afternoon. Probably best to stick with your mom and dad."

I turned the corner, headed for the pharmacy and took one brief glance back at Timmy. He had momentarily looked up at dad, but was continuing to follow me. I stopped and stood still as he ambled over to me.

He slowly laid his cheek against my leg and gently hugged it.

Tears in my eyes, I looked up at his beaming father and admitted, "He just made my day. You have no idea.... Thanks."

Dad retrieved Timmy and walked over to his waiting wife. We three shared a smile.

What just happened? I didn't know the couple's religious beliefs, their political bent or upbringing. And they didn't know mine. At that moment, it wasn't relevant. That particular moment held a universal message.

A little love goes a long way.

When I least expected it, a small child, by a simple act of love, reminded me, like it or not, we are all connected. We are not helpless and things are not hopeless. Difficult as it may be, I needed to remain in community with those around me, and care about my community at large.

I am not helpless and things are not hopeless. Ask Timmy. Without uttering a word, he created the common ground we all need and reminded me to stay connected and care. He made a difference and in doing so made me want to do my part to make a difference.

Needless to say, I smiled at the pharmacy tech when I picked up the prescriptions.

3rd Place: Radical Love, Allies, and Stepping Back

By Barbara Stark-Nemon – Ann Arbor MI

In March of 2004, I included an insert in the invitations to my youngest son's bar mitzvah that I hadn't in his older brothers'. The brief note explained that as congregants and guests entered the synagogue on the Sabbath morning of this special day, they would encounter protesters picketing on the sidewalk carrying extremely offensive signs. (Israel: No Right to Exist, Zionism Enabled Nazism, and You Pray for Genocide.) The protest began because the congregation refused to remove the Israeli flag from the sanctuary where it stands with the American flag, or to allow the group's leader to speak to the entire congregation about his views that Israel has no right to exist, or to accede to the demand that members of the congregation denounce Israel and cease making financial contributions to organizations that support Israel. Our note apologized to our guests, and asked them, in keeping with the synagogue's recommendation, not to engage with the protesters in any way.

In March of 2013, I wrote the following to my children after the death of my father: "Although I typically go to services, I've found it lonelier to do that these days. The protesters have particularly horrible anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic signs. I go to services to mourn my Holocaust-surviving, open-minded, humanity-loving Jewish father, and have to confront hateful protesters, who apparently think the congregants at a synagogue in Ann

Arbor, Michigan, control what happens politically in Israel. Somehow their freedom of speech continues to trump my freedom to practice my religion free of harassment. It is extremely painful and dignity stripping. I understand their first amendment rights, and the synagogue's policy of not engaging them in order to deprive the protesters of a forum for public airing of their hateful messages, but at what cost?"

It is now 2017, and the picketers still set up their chairs and signs on the public right of way every Saturday, just when congregants come to the Sabbath service, forcing people in mourning, people celebrating an important life cycle event, or those who may simply want to pray and reflect in the comfort of their spiritual home, to traverse a gauntlet of hate. The Southern Poverty Law Center recently added this group to its annual listing of "active hate groups," for its Holocaust denial activities.

A daunting number of opportunities exist in our current fractious political climate to engage in the hard task of embracing our differences with others and reaching across political, racial, religious, ethnic and gender divides to find common ground. My experience of activism, leadership, teaching, parenting, and writing across half a century of adulthood, through a lot of history, coupled with my concern at the state of incivility and discord in the public domain, have led me to reconsider how my own actions need to change in the direction I want to see change elsewhere. And so, I have chosen to devote time to political efforts that align with my values (climate protection, non-partisan voting districts, women's rights, immigration reform). These efforts have caused me to study, and in some cases confront, opposing parties in public forums, and I've managed to maintain my civility in those efforts.

But lurking in the pit of unresolved challenges to advocate and take action on matters that mean much to me has been the heavy presence of those protestors, which continues to be deeply, personally painful. Where does my elder wisdom take me, once I've told myself variously to ignore, dismiss, acknowledge their right to their opinions, without letting it get to me personally. In 14 years, it hadn't gotten me far. Until...

I recently bumped into a friend who invited me to a panel presentation that four women's organizations put together, entitled "Promoting Civil Discourse and Building Bridges Between People of Different Viewpoints." Over the course of the evening, four presenters were able to provide me with a roadmap to managing my response to the protestors that many years of religious leaders, community leaders, city council resolutions and endless letters to editors, condemning the protests, had not accomplished.

Irene Butter, a survivor of the Holocaust, grandmother to two Israeli Jewish/Palestinian grandchildren, and founder of Zeitouna, a 16-year-old women's dialogue group of Jews and Palestinians, emphasized the choice to

refuse to be enemies. Through listening openly, suspending assumptions and avoiding having to "win" an argument, conversational partners can begin to stand in others' shoes.

Maria Ibarra-Frayre, a young social worker and advocate for immigration reform, who is herself undocumented, described how she moved beyond the emotional pain that dehumanizing responses to her situation caused her to feel. Citing "radical love," respect for herself and others, the reframing of statements or stepping back from intolerable communications, and most importantly, building relationships with allies, greatly eased her capacity to engage with people hostile to her situation and point of view. Recruiting allies to engage when feelings of oppression overwhelm a targeted person is a form of self-care and a "strategic act of trust." The purpose of radical love is to become more accepting, and kinder, rather than changing another's viewpoint. Finally, just because we feel deeply, that doesn't mean we are the right person to have a difficult conversation.

Sally Brush, mediation services coordinator for a local dispute resolution center, noted that three circumstances make the difference in how hard it is to have civil conversation: first, how strong your belief is, second, how deep your feelings are, and third, how close your relationship is to the person/people with whom you're attempting to communicate.

And so... how has this recent learning moved the needle toward embracing my differences with the protestors and finding common ground? First, and perhaps most importantly, participating in the Civil Discourse program allowed me to feel validated and accepted for my efforts to understand and cope with the years-long painful confrontation on Saturday mornings. I recognize that my belief that the picketers are entitled to their point of view about the horrors that Palestinians have suffered (I share that horror along with many other congregants at my synagogue), even if we disagree about the reasons or the opportunities to solve that problem, and certainly about the decision to harass my place of worship, is an example of how to begin refusing to make the protestors "the enemy." I realize that I have already recruited allies in joining a non-profit effort to donate money for each protestor that shows up each week, to Israel's national emergency first responders, a humanitarian organization that serves all victims of violence without regard to ethnicity or religion. Over 13 years, over \$200,000 has been donated. I have new ideas for how to recruit allies. This essay begins that process. Finally, I can acknowledge that the strength of my belief that hateful messages unfairly targeting people at their place of worship is counterproductive and unethical, and the depth of my feeling about this, and my closeness to the situation, perhaps make me an unsuitable candidate for a courageous conversation with any of the protestors at this time. I do now believe, however, that radical love may bring that conversation closer.



Linda Joy Myers to Deliver Keynote for 2018 Conference

by Joyce Boatright

Linda Joy Myers is legendary in the memoir-writing field. President and founder of the National Association of Memoir Writers, she will deliver the keynote speech on Friday night, July 20, to kick off our national conference, *Stories from the Heart IX*.

Linda Joy has written two memoirs. The award-winning *Don't Call Me Mother—A Daughter's Journey from Abandonment to Forgiveness* won the BAIPA Gold Medal award, and her latest book, *Song of the Plains: A Memoir of Family, Secrets, and Silence* was published in June 2017 to instant acclaim.

In addition, she is the author of three books on the craft of memoir writing: *The Power of Memoir—How to Write Your Healing Story*, *Journey of Memoir*, and *Becoming Whole*. She's also a co-author with Brooke Warner of two books: *Breaking Ground on Your Memoir* and *Magic of Memoir*. She offers private coaching for writers, and teaches ongoing new classes with Brooke Warner.

Linda Joy writes widely about memoir writing, family, the importance of legacy, and the healing power of writing the truth. She is the ideal speaker to define the keynote for this conference, as underscored by her thoughtful answers in the following Q&A.

Q: What motivates you to help people write their life stories? What are the benefits to them AND what are the benefits to you?

When people ask me why I'm passionate about memoir writing, I tell them about my great-grandmother Blanche, who whispered her stories to me in a featherbed when I was eight years old. With her ordinary language and lisping tongue in the dark, her stories revealed pictures of her life as a little girl on farms in Iowa—the hard work of harvesting in the autumn, cooking on a wood cookstove, neighbor women serving as midwives for each other. I learned that if you understand someone's life, you can see inside them. You can understand them.

I never forgot that—I became a therapist whose business it is to get into people's business! Doing therapy and mentoring memoirists both mean I guide people to see how the puzzle pieces of their lives fit together, and how

those experiences shape their view of the world. I love the discovery process when I work with writers—and try to ask questions that move them deeper into their truth.

Memoir is deeply personal and therapeutic. It makes demands on you, it pushes you to dig deeply into the stories that are part of you, especially the pieces you'd rather leave behind. But within those hidden crevices of secrets and stories you find the key to the mystery of who you are and how you got here—a true gift of your story.

Q: How has memoir writing changed in the last decade?

I think there is more permission now than ever for women to express what is true. When I wrote my first book, which became *Don't Call Me Mother*, memoir was not a “thing.” It was for famous people or men like St. Augustine. I struggled with each true thing that I wrote. I was afraid to write a “book.” I had grown up, like many women, not thinking my experiences or my story was worth anything to anyone. But an inner urge demanded that I write the darn book, and yes, I was almost angry that it wouldn't leave me alone!

The permission to write memoir has been supported for more than two decades by writers like Mary Karr and Cheryl Strayed, and before that by writers like Maxine Hong Kingston and Maya Angelou. Now, there are many women memoir writers, from well-known writers to thousands of women who find creative ways to get their stories into the world. In the last ten years, around the time I started NAWM, memoir began to come out of the secret private story place where it seemed destined to stay, and those early memoirs were so popular that people flocked first to reading them and then, inspired by them, began to write their own. I think because of Facebook, Twitter, and other social media, there's much more tolerance for personal sharing, revealing what no one else has known about you. Still, creating something as permanent as a book, a testimony to your truth, is a big deal.

Q: The best teacher is experience. What did you learn (craft-wise) from writing Don't Call Me Mother that prepared you to write Song of the Plains?

It took me nearly 12 years to write my first memoir. During that time I took classes and struggled with my inner critic—that's what slowed me down—as I wrote and rewrote the story. During some of the writing, while my mother was still alive, I was struggling with the voice she would have had if she knew I was writing about her and our family: "Just shut up. It's no one's business. How dare you!"

Toward the end of the process, I learned to stand back and view my chapters as if someone else had written them—I became objective about what was on the page. Finding the words to tell your story for the first time, especially if the story includes talking about trauma, is a daunting project. I learned about creating significant plot points, shaping chapters, balancing dark and light, creating dialogue, and finding the poetry in the language that would make the book go beyond "what happened."

But I wanted to take all that storytelling from the point of view of a coming-of-age memoir to a new level in *Song of the Plains*. I wanted to have the reader experience the poetry of the Great Plains; I wanted readers to be willing to go with me into the archives of our family story to try to find the nuggets of insight and compassion that I believed were buried there. To find out, I had to write the book! I was able to be more objective from the beginning, and I had vanquished—most—of my inner critic. I was telling the story from the viewpoint of an elder with a long view of time and history, finally weaving together some of the loose threads from the coming-of-age story. I found the second book much easier to write!

Q: You are well known as an extremely talented storyteller. How important is the ability to weave a good story for the success of a memoir? How does someone develop that talent—or is it innate?

Wow, I am? That's nice to know! For some people, it seems to be innate. I'm thinking of Rick Bragg and Mary Karr and Frank McCourt and Maya Angelou, among others, but I can only talk about how it was for me. We learn so much by reading good literature, and I'm sure reading *Treasure Island* when I was eight must have helped, as did *David Copperfield* at age nine, and *Moby Dick* when I was in junior high. Memoir is a story and the BIG LESSONS for most people have to do with learning how to write scenes. Scenes deposit the reader into immediacy and, through the use of sensual details and slow weaving of your bodily experiences along with your thought, invite the reader to walk in your shoes. I love slowing down to imagine the movie in my mind of moments, and I just write them down. I also enjoy characterization of people in the story, and tried to paint a

picture of people I loved so readers could know them, too.

Q: What do you see as the hardest part of writing a memoir—both from working with others and from your own writing experience?

Digging into your memories and claiming your voice and your truth are the toughest parts of writing a memoir. It's ongoing, as memoir requires it from you all the way until "the End." I see writing a memoir as a process—finding the truths, investigating memories, and writing down the most important ones that are connected to the theme are themselves a lot of work. But we need to add to that the knowledge of craft, from writing scenes to understanding point of view, verb tenses, language, tone, and structure.

It's a lot to learn, but everyone can learn it. People ask me about "talent" and if writing can really be learned. Of course! Like any skill, you need to surrender to an apprenticeship period and be willing to write and learn, and write some more. Everyone gets better!

Q: What do you think is/are a writer's greatest fear/fears in writing her memoir? What strategies can she use to overcome this fear/these fears?

To be silenced, exposed, blamed, and told they are crazy—to mention a few! The tools to overcoming those fears are in your hands as a writer—they're as simple as pen and paper, or your computer. "Story as a way of knowledge" is a concept supported and validated by Dr. James Pennebaker's research, which repeatedly I've seen to be true. Even when we think we "know" the story, writing reveals what we don't know and asks us to keep digging. Like I said, your memoir makes its demands on you!

Q: Some say there are many layers to writing a memoir—like peeling the layers from an onion—and that it takes time and deep honesty to be authentic. Why do you think that is so?

We first put down on the page what we know that we know. That first layer needs to be written because it's what we can see most easily, it's the story we consciously carry. Something happens when you claim your experience with words, but I think this first layer creates a kind of alchemy that shifts how you see things. You will write and rewrite those scenes as you dig deeper into your truth. Since the revision, "re-seeing" process, continues as you write, the work and its relationship to you and your relationship to it will evolve.

When we're dedicated to exploring and examining our lives, our beliefs and characters, a natural unfolding and transformation will take place. It takes mindfulness and a willingness to allow this magic to happen.



Writing Short Helps You Write Deep

by Sheila Bender

As a poet and personal essayist, I relish the way images carry weight and meaning communicated directly through the five senses. According to an article I recently read, Benjamin Franklin, a prolific writer, devised a method by which he taught himself to write well. One instruction was: Convert to poetry and back again.

When we add constraints, a strategy of poetry, we find the deep story with a part of ourselves we can't always access when writing prose, prose that often contains a lot of exposition, extra words that don't need to be there because images bring the reader and the writer closer to the heart of the material.

"Lose your hands," Charles Chou explains, writing about this step of Franklin's, "and you shall learn to type with your feet." Give up words and the remaining words do more work for you.

Franklin wrote, "... I took some of the tales and turned them into verse; and, after a time, when I had pretty well forgotten the prose, turned them back again."

It is fun to look into older prose writing and impose a strict, short word limit for a new version. When we reduce say 2500 words to 500 – 700 words, we are forced to choose the strongest words and let the others go. We are forced to make time and space leaps via image rather than long transition phrases. We are forced to find the real evocation the piece is leaning toward and support that rather than what we think we wanted to say.

That is the gift poetry brings to those who choose as Franklin did to turn their prose into verse and come back to it later to turn it into a story. Compression, images, and sensitivity to sound and rhythm force what is not necessary



Len Leatherwood has been teaching writing privately to students for the past 17 years. Recipient of numerous state and national teaching awards from the Scholastic Artists and Writers Awards, she is a published author in flash fiction and memoir, and daily blogger at 20 Minutes a Day, found at lenleatherwood.wordpress.com.

Writing Tips from Our Teachers

As the coordinator of SCN's Online Classes Program, I am pleased to offer words of wisdom from our multi-talented online writing instructors. This new column will feature one of our illustrious instructors per journal issue. This will not only provide insight into the writing process but also allow you to get to know our wonderful faculty, one person at a time.

— Len Leatherwood

in a piece of prose to fall away and an author's writing becomes alive with immediacy.

Here is a piece I converted to poetry and back into short prose:

Grief's Moments

The moon is in partial eclipse. Where do I find the light of loved ones, those here and those already gone?

In a recent dream, I walked from my bedroom to the living room and outside the window saw a large coyote sitting in our deck rocking chair. The animal ran from the chair into our garden as I approached the window glass. When I decided to turn away, he came back.

My son at five or so told his dad to give him some elbow grease so he could do a good job helping his grandmother clean.

I've been in the garden today, pruning boysenberry vines. Sweet plumb berries, harsh thorns, green, green leaves.

The writing moves through the images I, the writer, recall during moments I am in grief. By the time I remember the words of a young one who didn't yet know what elbow grease meant but knew he wanted to work hard, I realize what might be necessary is not hard work but an *allowing in of life*, the bounty of Earth, to replenish me.

I am a believer in the power of practicing the conversion of prose to poetry and of converting that poetry back to prose (one can also always leave the poem to stand as a poem – just because we write something one way, doesn't mean we can't write it another way, too).

Sheila Bender is one of our longstanding online instructors in the Story Circle Network Online Classes Program. She is the founder and publisher of *Writing it Real*, a web community dedicated to helping those who write from personal experience. Her newest books include: *Writing Personal Essays: Sharing and Shaping Personal Experience*; *Writing in a Convertible*; *Sorrow's Words: Writing Exercises to Heal Grief*; *Creative Writing DeMystified*; the memoir *A New Theology: Turning to Poetry in a Time of Grief*; and the poetry collection *Behind Us the Way Grows Wider*.



Inside and Out: Women's Truths, Women's Stories

by Susan Schoch, editor

The globe moves to the magnificent hubbub of happiness, sadness, love, laughter, grieving, and anger, as women's words sing out, each story separate, yet each story connected by a mystical thread reaching back to ancient times.

— Connie Spittler

Inside and Out is our newest SCN book, a remarkable collection of our members' voices, drawn from our annual Anthology, years 2009-2016. We are excited to report that it is in the final stages of publication and will be available in December 2017. The following excerpt from the Editor's Note will give you some idea of what you can look forward to in this beautiful volume.

"... As current editor of the SCN Anthology, *Real Women Write: Sharing Our Stories, Sharing Our Lives*, I was honored to lead the SCN team responsible for selecting the verbal chorus found here: Susan Wittig Albert, Mary Jo Doig, Pat LaPointe, Jo Virgil, and Jude Walsh, all skilled authors and teachers. We had no rules; we were looking for words that called to us.

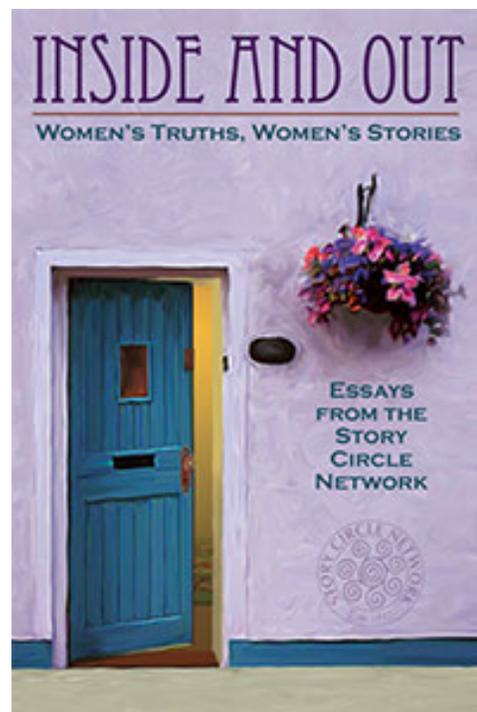
Reading through years of Anthologies, we found important stories, sweet stories, stories of tragedy, love, pain, passion, humor, and gratitude. We discovered essays that feel timeless, chronicles that recreate vanished times, and tales that every woman knows from the shared experience of being female. We found stories of every age, cast in places far and near. We found lyrical language, girlish language, and language that made us laugh. ...

Inside and Out: Women's Truths, Women's Stories reflects the two vivid realities of women's lives—our inner and most sacred private world, and the outside world of all that teaches and needs us. With courage, each of these writing women transformed her experience into a narrative that expresses a truth we can recognize, giving voice to herself and giving us a chance to know her, the better to know all women. And each has allowed us to amplify her voice here. All of them have our great appreciation and admiration.

"...each story separate, yet each story connected..."

These true tales, our sisters' voices, connect us and can lead us forward. This has always been the gift of women's stories. We are grateful for that guiding hubbub, and pleased to offer a part of it here."

Member Sherry Wachter has provided us with design, formatting, and cover skills extraordinaire, and added tremendously to *Inside and Out*. And our president, award-winning author Susan Wittig Albert, has written a powerful and compelling Foreword. We look forward to sharing the book with you soon!



Susan Schoch has been a freelance writer and editor for nearly 30 years. She specializes in memoir and biography, most recently *The Clay Connection*, about ceramic artists Jim and Nan McKinnell, for the American Museum of Ceramic Art. A member of SCN since 2002, Susan is currently chair of the Publications workgroup, and editor of the SCN Journal and the annual Anthology. She is also a reviewer and editor at Story Circle Book Reviews. Susan is delighted to showcase our members' fine writing in all the SCN publications.



Spotlight on Jo Virgil

by Jude Walsh

Jo Virgil is the much-appreciated editor of the True Words section in our Journal. Jo writes essays, novels, short stories, and poetry. In addition to online and print magazines, her work has been featured in *First Timers and Old Timers (2012)* and *The Noble Generation Volume II: Stories of the American Experience (2004)*, the latter including a story she wrote about her dad. More of Jo's writing will be found in the 2017 SCN Anthology.

What is your SCN journey?

I joined Story Circle Network in 2005, but before that I worked with SCN while Community Outreach Manager for Barnes & Noble. I first heard about the organization when I met with Susan Wittig Albert to talk about her books. I was fascinated with this nonprofit, which encourages women to tell their stories. I have truly appreciated the opportunity to share my own stories via SCN and to now edit the True Words submissions for the quarterly SCN Journal. The stories and poems I get to read are so meaningful and touching. I am reminded of something Dr. Roy Busby, journalism professor at the University of North Texas, would often say, "Stories are what make us matter." So true.

And your personal life?

I have a Masters in Journalism from the University of North Texas. That education has taken me down several professional paths. I worked for a while for the Fort Worth *Star-Telegram* newspaper, then took the job in community relations for Barnes & Noble in the DFW area and then in Austin.

I was the Community Outreach Coordinator for the Texas Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities, networking with disability organizations and overseeing the annual Barbara Jordan Media Awards.

Since retiring, I've had time for my truest passions: writing, traveling, and exploring. My daughter lives with

her husband and my two precious grandkids in north Austin, and my son lives just south of Austin. I love hiking, reading, and learning. One of my mantras is "Be Curious."

What are your writing hopes and dreams? Other creative passions?

When I first started writing, getting published was my primary dream. Though I have been published, my current writing passion is capturing the story itself. If it eventually means I can share the story with others who appreciate it, that's a bonus. There is such deep meaning in being able to craft a story or poem that taps into the "real world" – something bigger than just day-to-day activities. It helps me understand life more, and if I can share that with others, then I hope my writing captures my thoughts in a way the reader can relate to.

My other passion is exploring nature – there is SO much we can learn just by paying attention to trees, flowers, creeks, clouds, rocks. My current work-in-progress is a book about the impact nature has on personality, "Rock, Water, Sky, Green."

I belong to several reading groups and gain insight when sharing thoughts on both fiction and nonfiction. I take classes at UT – I love learning new stuff. Oh, and astronomy! I go out to McDonald Observatory in West Texas at least once a year to view our amazing universe up in the night sky.



Jude Walsh, SCN Board Member and Past President, writes personal essay, memoir, and fiction. Her work has been published in numerous literary magazines and anthologies including the AWW Scholarship Collection, Story Circle anthologies, *The Magic of Memoir* (SheWrites Press 2106) and *Chicken Soup For the Soul: Inspiration for Teachers* (2017).

Across the Street from the Library

Jo Virgil – Austin, TX

If, one of these days, you read in the newspaper a funny little anecdote about an elderly woman asked to leave the local library because of her loud humming, read on to see if it's about me. If the woman was puffing out her cheeks and blasting forth a booming, wheezy, bass version of Amazing Grace, her eyes kind of glazed over as if she weren't all there, tell the authorities this story so they'll be lenient.

I have always loved libraries and books, and even though I have a notoriously bad memory, I vividly recall my first visit to the Odessa, Texas, Public Library. No doubt, if I were to visit the spot today, it would seem smaller and not quite as majestic as it did when I was six. But if the building is still there, it surely still has those broad concrete steps that lead to the grand entrance facing the street corner, the glass doors swinging heavily—and heavenly—open to reveal all sorts of hardcover treasures. If the building is still a library, I might bet that the woman sitting at the desk at the entrance smiles and says hello. If she does, it is NOT the same woman who was there fifty years ago. That woman looked like she'd rather I weren't there. Her job would have been easier if everyone had just stayed away, her face seemed to say. Still, I was willing to be ever so quiet and well behaved in return for the privilege of taking home an armful of books.

Looking back, I'm sure that the library was probably one-fourth the size of bookstores today, but at the time, it seemed like endless rows and rows of shelves, bajillions of books waiting to be taken home and cuddled. I did my best to make every one of those books feel loved. I might not have read them all, but I'm betting I at least tenderly touched the spine of each one.

The library was a place to quietly—ever so very quietly—pick out some books and leave. The real experience for me was hidden in the old stone church across the street from the library. I don't recall what type of church it was—only that it wasn't Baptist. In those days in Odessa, all churches were either Baptist or Not-Baptist.

My mother had dropped my sister and me off at the entrance to the library, promising to pick us up in one hour. My sister wasn't even fond of books, but for her it was a chance to get out of the house, even though she did have to take her pesky little sister. She hurried me along to pick out six books to take home and, once I had done that, she took my hand and led me outside, away from the austere librarian's gaze. Downtown Odessa wasn't a really hopping place, but across the street, at the big old church, was a sign, and a short line of people. Curious, my sister and I crossed over to see what was happening. We approached

cautiously, knowing that our Baptist souls could be snatched away in an instant if we weren't vigilant.

Once we saw the sign, we decided our souls were worth the risk. The music director, the hand-written poster announced, was there to give a short tour of the newly refurbished pipe organ. Now, even though I was young, I had some limited familiarity with pipes, and I knew what an organ was, but still, my brain wasn't quite able to piece those two together, so I stepped into the Not-Baptist church pretty much *tabula rasa*.

Once inside, gripping my big sister's hand tightly with one hand and my treasured books with the other, I had to blink a few times to get my eyes adjusted to the dim light. Then I started to understand why this mystery was called a pipe organ. Pipes rose from behind the keyboard, obscuring what in my church would have been the choir loft, or maybe the baptismal pool. I wasn't listening much to the director's spiel—I was in awe of the high ceilings, the polished metal of the organ's pipes, the faint smell of incense. I was already impressed, but when the man dramatically pulled on a rope that drew back heavy green curtains, I am sure that my little jaw must have dropped. The pipes that had been concealed behind the curtains rose in majesty all the way to what might have been Not-Baptist heaven. The pipes reflected the color of the stained glass windows in an eerie, surreal glow that made me wonder if I were dreaming.

But when the man flipped on the organ, and we heard a few wheezes and groans as it warmed up, I wondered whether it was safe. When my sister didn't scream and run, I figured we were probably okay, so I just gripped her hand a little more tightly and hugged my library books to my chest.

The man spoke for a few moments while the organ warmed up, and then he turned and began to play Amazing Grace, softly at first and then, jiggling his feet on some pedals, more loudly and with more bass. I honest-to-God (and one doesn't use that phrase lightly in a Not-Baptist church) felt every note from my toes to my chest. It was both frightening and enlightening. My young heart was experiencing things that young hearts have no words for. I was in awe.

I don't remember the rest of that day—whether we told our mother about our adventure, what my library books were about. But to this day, I cannot step inside a library without carrying with me the sound of that pipe organ. That juxtaposition, perhaps, is what continues to encourage my reverence for books.



An Interview with Penelope Starr

The Odyssey Lady

by Pat Bean

Penelope Starr is the perfect example of a person who knows how to make dreams and ideas come true. After attending Porchlight, a story-telling event in San Francisco, she was so moved about the sincerity of the tellers and how the audience was instantly drawn in and visibly moved, that she knew she had to create a similar experience in her hometown of Tucson. Odyssey Storytelling, which she founded to fulfill that goal, is today a monthly event in the Southern Arizona city, where six invited guests tell ten-minute personal themed stories to an audience.

“Over the last thirteen years, I have witnessed the growth of the art form, the transformation of the storytellers, and the appreciations of the audience,” says Penelope. Because she was so passionate about community storytelling, and wanted to spread the word, she was “driven,” she says, to write *The Radical Act of Community Storytelling: Empowering Voices in Uncensored Events*.

Undaunted that she had never written a book before, and might not have the skills to do so, she enrolled in the local community college and signed up for several creative non-fiction writing classes. She also connected with a supportive group of writers. “With their astute critiques,” says Penelope, “and encouragement, I kept revising until I felt that I had a book worthy of the subject.”

She calls the book a memoir with a twist of advocacy. It tells the story of how she created a storytelling series with no prior knowledge or experience, explains the benefits of community storytelling as told by the stories presented over thirteen years of shows, and includes forms, lists and reference materials.

“When it came time to get it published, I was extremely lucky to find a small press publisher, Parkhurst Brothers, who specializes in books about storytelling. Ted Parkhurst was enthusiastic about the concept and liked my writing so we came to an agreement.”

Penelope says she learned how to coordinate events in her college days. “It’s just something I’m good at. I like to visualize the big picture. But I also enjoy attending to details to make it all work together smoothly. It’s akin to planning and executing a writing project where focus needs to shift back and forth: what’s the purpose of this writing and how am I going to get it across. Both skillsets are needed to complete a project.”

Penelope believes it is a basic human need to be heard and seen for who we truly are. “Everyone’s unique,

personal story has intrinsic merit. Providing the opportunity to share stories is empowering to the storyteller and beneficial to the community. A few benefits include dispelling prejudice, promoting diversity, building bridges, connecting communities and individuals.”

At a recent writers’ luncheon in Tucson, Penelope told how even her own first impressions were changed on hearing the background of a storyteller whose appearance had, on first impression, pegged her as not someone to be taken seriously.

Penelope was born in New York City in 1945 and raised on Long Island. “My parents were artists, so my sister and I were always encouraged to be productive, creative and innovative. Adventures took me traveling for a few years after high school. Eventually I went to college as a 30-year-old single mother in the ‘70s.”

Penelope went on to earn a bachelor’s degree in human service and women’s studies, and while she didn’t pursue a career in these fields, she says her interest in social justice informed her life choices. “I was a fiber and visual artist for many years, until my attention turned to storytelling, performance and writing.”

Although *The Radical Act of Community Storytelling* is Penelope’s first book, she has long had an interest in writing.

“I remember writing in a pink, leather-covered diary with a heart shaped lock and tiny key when I was around eight years old ... I kept up the practice, and over the years I accumulated many boxes of notebooks going back to 1974. I recently reread a few early years, and was fascinated to learn who I was back then. I have been lucky to live through fascinating times and I love the idea of mining my own life for kernels of stories.”

After spending four years working on creative non-fiction, Penelope now wants to make stuff up, so she went back to community college, this time taking fiction-writing classes.

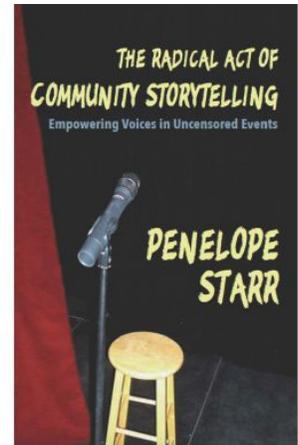
Penelope says she had an idea for a series of short stories based on interviews she had conducted for a proposed documentary film. “Now I am completely caught up in the project, and will spend NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month in November, during which participating writers produce a novel in one month) adding to the seven stories I already have. The characters are fictional, loosely based on the interviewees but, of course, they are all a part of me and my story,” she says.

In addition to her career as the “Odyssey Lady,” and a now a writer, Penelope has been a weaver, mixed media artist, social worker, community activist, citizen folklorist, and restorer of Navajo rugs. Currently she offers custom designed storytelling consultation for communities wanting to do a storytelling event, and conducts workshops, such as The Art and Craft of Personal Storytelling, Storytelling for Writers, and Tell It! Presentation Skills for Writers.

You can connect with Penelope on her web site at penelopestarr.com



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, 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.



Sarton Award Program Continues to Grow



SCN's Sarton Award Program, which began in 2011, is completing its sixth year, with more entries than ever before, according to Paula Yost and Susan Albert, who coordinate the program.

The Sarton Awards, named for memoirist, novelist, and poet May Sarton, recognize excellence in women's publishing (books by, for, and about women) in five categories:

- Memoir
- Nonfiction: Biography, Collective biography, Edited diaries, Scholarly studies of women's literature, Anthologies
- Contemporary Fiction
- Historical Fiction
- Young Adult and New Adult Fiction

Sarton awards are limited to books published by the authors or by small, independent presses and university presses. Given the new technologies and resources for publishing, distributing, and marketing books, that part of the publishing industry is seeing a remarkable expansion.

Still, “indie” books, as they are called, are not always recognized for their excellence. SCN's recognition of independently published women authors fills an important place in the publishing landscape.

Our 2017 competition closed on November 16 with a record-breaking number of books submitted for consideration, continuing the program's strong growth. Thirty-plus jurors (all members of Story Circle) read and evaluate the entries, using a detailed online rubric to guide their scoring in each of the five categories. Entries that rank high in each category are sent to a second-round panel of librarians (non-members) who make the final selections.

This year, we expect to finish the preliminary scoring and announce the long list (books competing in the final selection) in mid-January. The short list (finalists and winners) will be announced at the end of the second round of judging, in April.

Winning authors from the 2016 and 2017 competitions are invited to attend SCN's July 2018 conference, where you can meet them and hear readings from their books



True Words from Real Women

A selection of short pieces of lifewriting by our members, edited by Jo Virgil. Contribute your own True Words to the Journal. Future topics are listed on page 32 (the back page). This month's topic is: Lessons Learned.

Lesson in Friendship

Lois Halley, Westminster, MD
loishalley@comcast.net

Eventually I learned to love school, which was a short walk filled with adventure through the back alley in my small hometown. I loved to crunch the colorful leaves in autumn, and when it rained there were plenty of puddles to splash in. I could fill my pockets with fresh peaches when they fell from a neighbor's tree, and winter brought ample opportunities to toss snowballs.

Inside, the wonderful aroma of oiled wooden floors, blackboards, and chalk filled our nostrils. We learned the "3 R's" of reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic, as well as respect and responsibility.

On the first day of school, I was so full of anxiety that I could feel butterflies in my stomach. When I realized that my mother had left me there, I began to cry. Sitting across from me, a soft-spoken but friendly little girl named Joanie gave me an encouraging smile. We weren't allowed to talk in class, but her gentle blue eyes and big smile sent the butterflies away as Joanie became my first school friend.

We couldn't imagine the women's movement that would come, but in the fifth grade, when we had to choose a musical instrument to play in the school band, Joanie and I became the first female drummers in the school's history.

There were no school buses in our town in the 1940s and '50s, and Joanie had a long walk from the eastern end of town. Cold winter mornings brought her into my home to warm up in front of the coal stove in the kitchen before finishing the last lap up the alley.

Some memories stand out for each of us. Joanie recalls that at her wedding, I danced so much I had to take my shoes off and then wore out a pair of stockings.

Over the years, I remember that any time one of my loved ones passed away, Joanie was there with her now compassionate and caring smile.

The best lesson I learned in school was that of making friends, and 70 years later, that's what Joanie and I still are.

The Bad One

Emily Eckart, Lawrenceville, NJ
www.emilyeckart.com

Every day before first bell, my ninth-grade earth science teacher stood in the dim lobby of the high school, bellowing greetings at students as we shuffled in. Short and vigorous, with flinty blue eyes, he was considered one of the most intimidating teachers in school. I was unfazed by his supposedly difficult class. I memorized the difference between igneous and metamorphic rock with ease. Unlike most teachers, he recognized my boredom and loneliness. He was kind. He made encouraging comments about how things would get better after high school. He said I'd go on to do important things.

I thought the despair encroaching upon my heart was due to my surroundings. The teachers were dull, the classrooms dark; no one understood why I practiced French horn for hours each day or read books for fun. I cried often, thought about swallowing pills. Only later, when I moved elsewhere, did I realize the problem was me.

Depression wasn't talked about; good students were supposed to be polite and cheerful. But I was bad, and I wanted someone to know. So every morning, when the science teacher called my name and asked how I was, I was honest. I was bad. Every day was bad, bad, bad.

One day he got frustrated. "Of course you are, with a negative attitude like that," he said. He stopped talking to me. No more friendly smiles, no more uplifting statements. We never spoke again.

Years later, when I knew the truth about myself, I thought about going back. I'd explain that I couldn't help it. That a 14-year-old, looking into the abyss for the first time, didn't know what to do. I looked him up and found that he'd passed away young, from cancer. His obituary listed a prestigious teaching award.

Even now, in the company of others, I keep quiet. They don't want to hear my cynical take on things, my negative attitude. In any room of people, I know who I am. Not the nice one, the cheerful one, the one who people like. I'm the bad one. Always and forever bad.

Giver of Beautiful Words

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

When I began my writing journey, I didn't know how arduous it would be. Nor did I know the road would be a rocky, solitary one filled with tremendous highs and lows. I also didn't know the vulnerability I'd feel whenever I sat down to write. I most certainly didn't know the self-work and self-examination I'd need to do to become an effective writer. In fact, I knew very little at all.

Although enthusiastic, at one point I doubted my decision to write, wondering if I had the fortitude to consistently put words on paper. Occasionally I asked myself, "Does it matter to anyone that I write? Should it matter? Should I continue or not? What if no one reads anything I write? Should I concern myself with those questions or just be faithful to the journey and the course?"

Despite my doubts and concerns, I maintained that "if I write, the readers will come," and didn't concern myself too much with outcomes or recognition, choosing instead to trust in something bigger than me that was guiding me down the path I'd chosen.

Then when one of my stories, "May Baskets" was published, I reread it, remembering the childhood sadness I felt in having to give away all Mother's beautiful flowers. Her kind words soothed me: "I know you're disappointed, but flowers, like kindness, must be shared. Their beauty is not yours to keep."

At that moment, I realized that my words were similar to Mother's May basket flowers. If Mother were alive, she'd probably say, "Your words, like flowers, must be shared. Their beauty is not yours to keep." And for the first time I acknowledged that I'd been given a gift—the gift of words.

I'm humbled, for writing constantly teaches me lessons in the smallest and strangest ways. And one of the many lessons I've learned thus far from my writing journey is that writing is not about me at all. Rather, it's about the story, the sharing of words, and the message. And I'm grateful to be a writer—a giver of beautiful words.

Shadow Play

Marlene Samuels, Chicago, IL
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He'd gotten soft and lazy since we had moved to America—even more so after he bought his first new car ever. As a matter of convenience, my father took to driving to and from his tailoring shop. He further delighted himself by parking that Oldsmobile in front, never moving his sapphire beast until the day's end. He sat behind his sewing machine positioned in the picture-window, staring at it all day long. During warmer weather, my father could be seen out front—clean towel in hand, polishing the car until it shone like sapphires.

At 6:00 p.m., one brutally cold February of my senior year, I headed home from the Community Library. Meyer's Tailoring was four blocks away and on my route home, eight blocks further west. By the time I reached the shop, the sky was a moonless black. I crossed Oak Street, approaching the diminutive building that housed my father's business.

Since he drove, my father could leave work at 6:15 and arrive home, with just minutes to spare, for dinner my mother served at 6:30 sharp, no exceptions. I'd left the library hoping to catch him as he was locking up and to get a ride home.

In the darkness, light from the shop's back fitting room cast long shadows across the linoleum floor of the front workroom. As always, he'd turned off all the lights in preparation for heading home. But on this one frigid night, the single clip-lamp affixed to the fitting room he'd created with muslin sheets and curtain rods shone.

An arctic wind numbed my cheeks. I stood motionless on the sidewalk staring through the window. Street lamps reflected off his Oldsmobile still parked in front of Meyer's Tailoring. Gradually, I began to discern two silhouettes—intertwined figures swaying like carnival shadow puppets. I continued to watch, mesmerized until another ferocious wind broke my spell.

That night, I didn't wait for my father, didn't take a ride, but walked with quick, purposeful strides, downhill away from town. The wind was less biting as I approached home.

A Six-Pack of Panties and Jimmy Carter's Grin

Betsy Boyd, Maryville, TN
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As my friend Celeste and I settled into our room at Albany, Georgia's Best Western, a sinking feeling rose up from the pit of my stomach. I had forgotten to pack fresh underwear.

It is well-known in the Southeast that any Sunday that former President Jimmy Carter is home in Plains, he teaches his Adult Sunday School class. And, remarkably, the public is allowed to attend.

Of course, it is not as simple as showing up at 9:30 and walking into the church. To begin with, attendance is limited to 400, and attendance is first-come, first-served.

There was no way we were driving 367.2 miles from Knoxville to Plains to be in the presence of one of the world's most revered humanitarians and not be among the 400. Our plan was to get up at 4:30, grab coffee, bananas and Danish in the hotel lobby, and be on the road for the 45-minute drive to Plains by 5:00.

But I had the issue of no fresh panties to deal with. The seemingly simple solution of hitting Walmart after Saturday night supper at Texas Roadhouse turned out not to be so simple. We live in the age of a phenomenon which Alvin Toffler coined "over-choice." Confronted with the wall of options in the underwear aisle, I knew this would not be the quick in-and-out Walmart stop we had imagined. Would it be Fruit of the Loom, Hanes, or Jockey ... or the more exotic Just Intimates? Briefs, hipsters, bikinis or thongs? All cotton, cotton-spandex, nylon with cotton liner, lace? Tag or tag-less? Breathable, seamless, or no-muffin? Single pair? Six-pack? White, heathers, pastels, jewel tones? And once you've made all of those decisions, keep your fingers crossed that they have what you want in your size!

Our ten-minute Walmart drop in/drop out turned into the evening's entertainment. Celeste did some significant damage to her weekend budget in impulse buys waiting for me to make my selections.

I slept well that night knowing that I had a new pair of undies to wear to meet President Carter. But that little mission trip to Walmart reminded me of that admonition my mom—and most mothers, I guess—drummed into us as kids: Before you leave home, be sure you have clean underwear.

Mom's Life Lessons

Abby November, San Diego, CA
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Smile and praise him
Let him win in tennis
always defer to his movie choices
smile and praise him
Girls are not doctors
Be a teacher, maybe a nurse
Don't show off your brains
smile and praise him.
But my lobotomy took
I blow my own horn
He smiles and listens
I am my own person
I smile when saying No, you are wrong
I win at poker and tennis
I became a doctor

The Fox in the Neighborhood

Claire McCabe, Elkton, MD
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The fox, aaahh yes, the fox, nodded my neighbor,
a professor of great reputation,
after I claimed I'd seen a fox
out of place in our suburban tracts.
Indeed, his body of knowledge overshadowed mine.

But I had been in the presence of that fox.
I'd seen her at dawn
red, sleek, trotting
down my sidewalk.
She did not break her stride
did not even look my way
as I picked up my newspaper,
its content already trivial
compared to that glimpse
of perfect russet
that slipped in and out of my world
for one irreducible moment.

Congratulations to Claire McCabe! She is the winner of a free 1-year extension to her membership. Claire was randomly selected from a pool of this issue's True Words authors and Circle Voices authors. A new incentive to get you writing and submitting, this chance for a free membership will be a regular feature of our quarterly Journal.

Learning in the Imperfect

Pat Anthony, Fontana, KS
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e-circle 4

What do we learn from those
deckled pages peeking from the
covers of Dickens' with the sketches
by Phiz, pressed against O. Henry's essays
impassioned pleas by Rachel Carson,
the tattered stacks of field guides, maps?

Did we take the blue highways of
William Least Heat Moon, buy the
slim book of poems after that
reading on the river front to cry
and rage, ache with discovery even
as we nodded, agreeing to agree that

someone needed to write down those
lessons for the rest of us to shelve in
sealed repositories, stack beside our beds?
Is what is written more valuable than
what we choose to read, the broadsheet
fluttering on an inner city wall as read

as the crumbling bundle of letters in
the green trunk? Learning in the imperfect,
then, the *ing* of stories come to life from which
we glean nuance, coded messages cast upon
the waters of the Nile and the Amazon to return
as raining wisdom on Africa, the bayou in

Mississippi, to slide down the face of the
Rockies,
to climb with the Sherpa. Lessons leaping from
pages, inciting, indicting, premise and argument
the learning an open invitation, a hand held out
from the heart, a telling to prove or disprove,
always imperfect, ongoing, no past tense, no
e(n)d.

Family Lessons

Judy Watkins, Myrtle Creek, OR
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w-circle 3, w-circle 6

Aging is something that can't be avoided. I watch as
the people around me grow older. Some get mellow,
while others seem to be on hold, waiting for something
to happen. They no longer live their lives; they just wait.

My grandmother was always old. She complained
that she wasn't well. She took pills to wake up each
morning and pills to put her to sleep at night. Through
the years she would tell family and friends that she was
dying and probably would not see them again. It took
her more than 90 years to accomplish her goal.

Grandma was the queen of guilt trips. No matter
how much attention she was given, it was never enough.
She complained that other women had more loving,
attentive children.

As my mother grew older she swore that she would
never be like her mother. She would never make her
children feel guilty or make demands. She proudly
purchased a nursing home policy and she swore when
the time was right she would move there on her own
before she told anybody about it. So many good
intentions, but the lessons learned from her mother were
too firmly ingrained.

My mother was selfish and demanding. She
believed the world rotated around her. Her retirement
had been full and rewarding. She was involved with
politics and several volunteer agencies. But she also
wanted more time and attention from her family. The
older she became the more demanding she became.

I don't want to repeat the errors of my mother and
grandmother. I don't want to allow myself to get into a
position where I have to depend on anybody, and
certainly not my children. I recognize our family is not
close and each year the distance grows. I have been
blessed with better health than either of my children. I
am not alone, my husband of 58 years is at my side and I
don't have the needs that my mother and grandmother
had. I can care for myself financially and God will take
care of me when my end is near.

Rest Stop

Mary Jo West, San Clemente, CA
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Sailing to Catalina Island, enjoying our solitude, we had a visit from some uninvited guests. A flock of tiny, yellow birds landed on our boat. Chirping and hopping all over our deck, they pecked at our chips and salsa. A few went into our galley below to find shade and more food. As though tame, they perched on our shoulders. When we picked them up and tossed them up in the air, they flew right back. For 20 minutes we watched their antics. Then, as suddenly as they arrived, they left, and continued on their journey.

True to Life

Ariela Zucker, Ellsworth, ME
e-circle 9, e-circle 4

From behind the reception desk of our mom-and-pop motel, I am an unbiased spectator of a parade of human follies and unexpected (often unexplained) acts. Whether logical or arbitrary, I still wonder—but each one, for me, is a lesson learned. So, let me share some of this vast range of knowledge with you.

1. It is never about the money.
2. People want what they want regardless.
3. Language is what separates us.
4. You cannot avoid the grumps.
5. Keep in mind: It is not you; it is them.
6. Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder.
7. Beware people with allergies.
8. Listen carefully to the cues, and you will not be surprised.
9. Never accept walk-ins after 10:00 p.m.
10. Sometimes it is wise to let someone go.
11. The customer is often wrong
12. But there is very little can you do about it.
13. Those who take way more than their rightful share never tip
14. Still not much you can do about it.
15. Even if you did not create the problem, it is still yours to solve.
16. Accountability is a rare commodity.
17. There is always a first.
18. Cannot fight ghosts from the past.
19. The internet never lies.
20. And in the end, life goes on.

Each one of the above twenty is a direct result of my personal experience dealing with my guests, yet I believe that, shortened and condensed to their mere essence, they can prove useful and save you, my readers, the time, effort and the pain that usually accompanied life lessons. Trust me, they are all true and tried via real life occurrences.

And if in a time of confusion, you will remember and act upon them, a heartfelt thank-you will be my reward.

Aging Goddesses

Madeline Sharples, Manhattan Beach, CA
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The crones—our mothers, grandmothers,
aunts, old friends, and teachers—
walk arm in arm in pairs,
each one supporting the other
on the old cobble-stoned streets.
They are squat, stout
with veiny legs and thick ankles,
their bare feet in flat sandals
showing jagged toenails
or clothed in thick hose
and wide oxfords.
Some move slowly, barely able to walk,
clutching each other for support.
They are perfectly coifed.
Their hair short and bleached
hides their age, but not too much.
They wear suits with skirts
always below their knees.
Jeans just don't do.
They talk as they walk, almost in a whisper
they solve the world's problems,
impart their age-old wisdom
or decide what they'll cook for dinner.
They wear their age as an example.
Softly, simply, elegantly they are our muse.
They don't hide but rejoice in their age.
They aren't alone as they walk.
They walk together
as we follow behind.

Wedding Night Lesson

Abby November, San Diego, CA
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On the eve of my wedding
Marriage is not 50-50 said my mom
it's not even 60-40
Sometimes it's not even fair.
Thanks a lot Mom ... depressing words.
I want my share down the middle!
Fair is fair, I screamed.
But when we swear to take each other in sickness and in
health,
for richer or poorer,
These are not promised future facts.
Will you be there when my limbs and brain are weak
Can I be there for you as your mind and eyes dim
Fair is fair: How childlike I was 50 years past.
Get it straight—Marriage Is Not fair.
Nor is Life.

A Gift of Time

Sarah Fine, Toronto, ON
e-circle 3, e-circle 4

An hour and a half late
And stuck behind a freight train
Outside of Edmonton
A gift of time
By a lake
On an August evening
Overcast and green
Train porters rush by
Too quickly to be questioned
By impatient passengers
Eager to get on with their lives
But this is the moment
And I have a book to read
A journal to write
In my youth
I flew by
Such moments
Analyzing the past
Worrying about the future
I try not to regret
What I might have missed
That was then
This is now
Today I buy a second cup of coffee
Settle in my seat beside the window
And enjoy
Being stuck behind a train
Outside of Edmonton

Transition

Mary Jo West, San Clemente, CA
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Ever faithful
for fifteen years
prolific buds of rose tree
bloomed outside
my kitchen window.

This year,
she didn't survive winter's
cold and heavy rains.
Soil and sacred ashes beneath
eroded away.

Like the roses,
her presence
has slipped away,
but her memory will never leave me.

Gracie

Mary Jo West, San Clemente, CA
mjwestsc@gmail.com

My calico cat
adopted from a shelter
curled up on my lap
like a living, velvet shawl,
comforts me with tender warmth

Fashioning Childhood Memories

Susan G. Weidener, Chester Springs, PA
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When I was a little girl, I walked to my elementary school along tree-lined sidewalks, past stone houses with big chimneys, tucked behind ancient arborvitae and oak trees. My pale brown hair pulled back in a barrette, I remember thinking I wasn't very pretty. "Pretty" was a word for the girls with the thick hair and upturned noses—not me, skinny and gangly, already the tallest girl in the class. Maybe then I began to build a shell to protect myself, not let other people see I cared.

Trees, flowers and plants flourished in my neighborhood. Monkey vines in the woods behind our house, black snakes and turtles in the creek—before development stripped every acre for profit—formed the woody montage of my childhood in the 1950s.

In the summer, I dug gobs of gray clay from the creek banks, molding them into little people with rounded balls for heads and torsos; squiggly, wormlike arms and legs. I dried my little people on newspaper in the sun, there in my own outdoor arts and crafts workshop, until Mother called me in for lunch, her rhubarb stew bubbling on the stovetop.

One October day our teacher, Miss Stafford, talked about leaves—a second grader's introduction to photosynthesis. I heard myself tell the class we had a sugar maple turning bright red in our backyard. Before I knew it, 16 or so children followed our teacher's lead from the elementary school, walking the sidewalks to my house, where a perfect turquoise sky framed the tree. I can still see my mother, her dark hair, the sunlight, Miss Stafford in her sturdy Oxfords. That moment remains vivid in my memory, a perfectly flawless, happy day.

We gathered gold and crimson leaves, took them back to school and fashioned clay ashtrays in the shape of those leaves. Mine looked like a mitten. I stained it bright aquamarine before firing it up in the kiln. My father kept that ashtray in his den by his books for years. I thought it ugly, not very good. Now I wish I'd saved it.

Riding Dirty

Laura Kolb, Marlin, TX

Have any of you ever tried driving with windows so dirty that it was hard to see? That is how I'd been driving through life. My belief windows were so dirty that I kept taking detours I didn't want to be on.

I believed it was okay to lie to those I love so I could get what I wanted. I believed it was okay to be away from my children because having fun was more important. I believed it was okay to take advantage of my friends; they wouldn't leave my side. I believed that going out drinking was okay, that I wasn't hurting anyone or anything. My belief windows were so dirty I didn't see the harm I was doing.

One day, those windows were so dirty I couldn't see anything but darkness. I had to clean them off a bit. Then I finally decided to clean them all the way. Miraculously, I can see clearly now. I can trade my negative beliefs for clean, positive ones.

Driving through life is so much easier now. I can avoid potholes and unwanted detours.

My lesson: I've learned that I can turn around for the better and that I can keep myself from "riding dirty."

Footprint

Mary Jo West
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Using a silver metal shaker
kept in my garden
I sprinkle white crystals
of sea salt
over the skin, and
take a long, slow bite,
as if it were an apple.

Luscious, deep red tomato
plucked from the vine,
with its yellowish white seeds
ooze all over my fingers
and blouse.

Placing a fresh basil leaf
on the last morsel,
I salt again.
In a flash, it's gone.

My splattered blouse
is the footprint
of a moment in my garden.

Lessons in Sea Glass

Nancilynn Saylor, Austin, TX
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e-circle 4, e-circle 6

She remembered, again, how he looked, long ago
as he stood on that Mexican beach.

Her outstretched arm
waved to her love.

He, only briefly, looked up from his book, as she
continued to frolic in the salty, summer
surf. She laughed like a blissful toddler at
play;

he could hear her delighted
squeals of joy over the sounds of
pounding waves.

Later, she stumbled back to him,
there on the water's edge.

Her face was gleaming, her
smile seemed to stretch all the way
from the shoreline
to the Sun.

Her dress, soaked, her red curls
damp and dripping down her neck; her pale, freckled
skin, a rosy shade of darkening pink.
She wore a look of pure magic.

Today, all these decades later,
she smiles again, looking
at those star-crossed lovers
in the pictures.
She sighs,
turning the page to
another memory.

Untaught

Abby November, San Diego, CA
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How can I say thanks for the lessons you taught?
No, I didn't heed them as a pig tailed brat
nor as a semi formed woman
half century past and learning survived.
But still deaf eyes and clouded ears cannot hear my thanks
From the simple lessons of always wearing clean underwear
"Just in case"
to always eating breakfast and saying nightly prayers.
The primal lesson Not taught to say I love you and thank you
were Not taught
before you vanished in the mist of my life

Nature's Lessons (Learned in Autumn)

Nancilynn Saylor, Austin, TX
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e-circle 4, e-circle 6

Under nature's watchful eye
Under Autumn's darkened sky
Flowers wither—soon to die

Leaves blow freely in the wind
From the Sycamores unpinned
Seasons colors yet undimmed

All too soon the landscape fades
Gone to rest, hot summer days
Winter favors softer shades.

I Am an Introvert

Patricia Roop Hollinger, Westminster, MD
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I went off to college more knowledge to gain;
No one told me there would also be pain.

I signed up for all the courses I could;
I was just doing what I thought I should.

Being a waitress helped pay the bills;
But then I began to take some pills.

There was never time for solitude;
Need for that seemed just plain rude.

I tried to adjust to being constantly busy;
But all it did was make me dizzy.

I wondered about my personality;
Maybe I had a different reality?

Then one day I found an expert;
Who told me I was an introvert.

So ... it was okay that I needed quiet time;
With that knowledge I am now sublime.

Driving with Dad

Sarah Fine, Toronto, ON
e-circle 3, e-circle 4

My Dad taught me how to drive a car. I was 15, living in the suburbs and burning to get a license. The bus system was limited and I thought I was too old to bicycle everywhere. In the 1960s, there was not the proliferation of driving schools there is today. Driving instruction was the kind of job a father took on at a time when most of the parenting was done by the stay at home mom.

Moreover, my Dad loved to drive. It was his job during the war and he drove across Canada regularly to visit his family. When he retired, he and his second wife bought a trailer and spent several years driving all over the States.

Before Dad would give me driving lessons, he upgraded the family car to a model with an automatic transmission, guessing (correctly) that the standard shift might be a challenge for me.

Once I got my Learner's Permit, we spent many hours driving around the neighborhood and practicing parallel parking at a nearby mall. In good weather, Dad would roll down his passenger side window and call out to people on the sidewalks "Look out—she's just learning."

I notice that nowadays driving schools have discrete signs on their vehicles to let people know a student driver is at the wheel. Maybe my father was ahead of his time. Or maybe he was bored and exercising his sense of humor. He is the guy who answered our home phone by saying "Kelly's Pool Hall; Kelly speaking," causing my friends to ask if I lived in a pool hall.

Learning to drive was apparently easy. I turned 16 and got my license. I am still proud today of my parallel parking. It wasn't that I got to borrow the car that often, but at least I could drive. And in my 20s, when I bought my first car, I was grateful to my father for teaching me the basics. It made learning how to drive a standard shift that much easier.



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Mirror to My Face

Debra Dolan, Vancouver, BC
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A journal is both a blessing and a curse, as memory is both complex and puzzling. Who is really me and who is the made-up version of me? As I reviewed nearly 50 years of writings, there were many-many-too-many-to-mention-many times when I had no idea of who I had written about, where I had been, and could not recall something I had written that I did and with whom. I am bewildered at just how much I had forgotten or misinterpreted. So many men and bad choices. Regret.

I was equally astonished at the amount of time waiting: for someone to love me; to be old enough to live independently; for someone to believe me; for someone to reach their potential or honor a commitment, return a phone call or respond to a letter. The amount of time I have spent waiting for my life to be different, waiting for the right job or opportunity or man, waiting for a friend to comfort me or someone to return to my life. As my friend Eileen once wrote in a letter, "Waiting is a fool's game, right?" Uh-huh.

My life has really been a series of new beginnings with incredible blessings, interesting people and activities. It has also contained much confusion, betrayal, soul-searching, sadness and hurt.

Not all of what I learned about myself was happiness and light. Many harsh realities were brought to surface; the current confusions and uncertainties are present, as well as each and every slight along the way—a tsunami of memories of all those conversations that could have been handled differently; bad bosses and missed promotions; the daddy wounds and the estranged mother; the abandoned friendships and dreams; the injury and debilitating fatigue; the discarded lovers and heartbreaking affair.

I was reminded of all the wonderful friends I have, people I have met and the global travels I have enjoyed. I realized how simple and uncomplicated my life is. I thought about how far I had already come, and how my divorce 25 years ago had been such a catalyst for change in my life.

Best Friend

Mary Jo West
San Clemente, CA
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Huddled in a box
with her siblings,
she was struggling to nurse.

A calico kitten,
brown, black orange
and white patches, covered
her sleek, short fur.

Visiting relatives
in West Virginia
we planned to leave
the next day
for home in D.C.

Using my sweetest
seven year old voice,
I begged my mother
to take her with me.

We left
early in the morning.

Wrapped in a small towel,
I cradled her in my arms
for the six hour trip over
the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Every two hours, I fed her
with a medicine dropper
a mixture of Carnation
milk and water.

We were best friends
for ten years.

Her name was Spotty.

Lemon Pie

Shelley Ann Thrasher, Tyler, TX
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<https://shelleythrasher.wordpress.com>

My mother held out
her lemon pie
hot from baking.

Meringue, light brown and white,
peaked into curls,
like her short hair.
Creamy filling—
perfect blend of sugar, eggs, water, juice—
yellow as the blouse she wore.
Crust light as her touch,
firm as her love.

Perhaps we said,
"Oh, Mama,
what are you
so proud of a silly pie?"
or barely glanced up from our books.

But somehow she dropped it.
Plate shattered,
pie splattered.
And that's the only time
I've ever seen
my mother cry.

Congratulations to Claire McCabe! She is the winner of a free 1-year extension to her membership. Claire was randomly selected from a pool of this issue's True Words authors and Circle Voices authors. A new incentive to get you writing and submitting, this chance for a free membership will be a regular feature of our quarterly Journal.

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.



New Members with Stories to Tell

When new members join, we ask them to tell us their stories. We love them all, for they demonstrate the variety of writing interests of our members. Here are a few we especially enjoyed and wanted to share with you.

Amy Hale Auker Prescott, AZ

My Story: I am a working ranch cowboy who writes and rides in Arizona where I am having a love affair with the rocks, water, wildlife, and stars here on this ranch where I love and work. Though originally from Texas where I was the wife of a working ranch cowboy, I have discovered a fresh true identity in midlife in the last nine years as I have moved into the work of growing food on untillable soil. And I write, always.

Memoirs: *Rightful Place; Ordinary Skin: Essays from Willow Springs*

Facebook: Amy Hale Auker

Twitter: Amy Hale Auker Author

Website: www.amyhaleauker.com

Lois Bezio Schenectady, NY

My Story: The only reader and lover of learning in a family of "pretty" women disinclined to learning. As an opsimath (love that word), writing became a therapeutic tool. I may be a cynical curmudgeon, too.

Betty Hafner Gaithersburg, MD

My Story: As a young girl, I had the sense that I wanted a "big" life, the definition of which has taken me decades to understand. The older I get, the happier I am, because I now allow myself to be the creative person I want to be in art, writing, dancing, and whatever way it shows up. The low point of my life was in my twenties, when I ceded to the 1960s pressure to marry and found myself in an abusive relationship.

Memoir: *Not Exactly Love: A Memoir*

Blog: <http://www.bettyhafner.com/blog/>

Facebook: Betty Hafner

Twitter: @BettyHafner

Jan Stover Greenville, IL

My Story: I'm a lover of words, a storyteller at heart, and an admirer of family heirlooms, traditions, and handed-down pearls of wisdom. I write for the joy and satisfaction it brings as a way of preserving moments and milestones,

lessons and legacies, the ordinary and the extraordinary. In addition to being a writer, I'm also a wife, mother, daughter, sister, businesswoman, editor and publisher – with the latter two titles providing me with the unique opportunity to share the passion of other writers with many welcoming readers.

Blog: owlcreekgazette.com

Facebook: Owl Creek Gazette

Twitter: @Jan Stover

Teresa Cutler-Broyles Albuquerque, NM

My Story: I'm a writer / educator / traveler, and I combine those three aspirations in my work and in my leisure time. Historical novels, creative non-fiction, and travel writing are my preferred endeavors (essentially anything that involves research), and my passions are history, architecture, archaeology, space-related science, teratology, cultural theory, film, and story. I teach film and culture classes at the University of New Mexico, and a writing and history class at the Umbra Institute in Perugia, Italy in the summers.

Memoirs: *A Dream that Keeps Returning: Travels in the Italian Sun; One Eyed Jack* (based on a number of horses and adventures of my childhood)

Blog: <http://www.tlc-travels.com/tlc-travels-italy-blog>

Twitter: @teresa.cutlerbroyles

Website: www.amazon.com/author/teresacutler-broyles

Mary Potter Kenyon Manchester, IA

My Story: I graduated from the University of Northern Iowa in 1985, and recently became a certified grief counselor. Librarian by day, writer, public speaker, and workshop presenter by night. I write non-fiction essays, articles and books.

Memoirs: *Coupon Crazy: The Science, the Savings, and the Stories Behind America's Extreme Obsession; Chemo-Therapist: How Cancer Cured a Marriage; Refined By Fire: A Journey of Grief and Grace; Mary & Me: A Lasting Link Through Ink*

Blog: <https://marypotterkenyon.wordpress.com/>

Facebook: Mary Potter Kenyon

Website: <http://marypotterkenyon.com>



An Interview with Sarton Award Winner

Leslie Tall Manning

by Pat Bean

“Don’t tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass.”

Anton Chekhov

Leslie Tall Manning, who won the 2016 Sarton Award for her young adult fiction book, *Upside Down in a Laura Ingalls Town*, was in college before the writing bug bit her. Needing a few elective credits, she took a play-writing class. She liked it so much that she then snuck into a novel-writing class without the proper prerequisites.

“The professor let me stay, and I was hooked,” Leslie says. “I started my first novel in that class in 1998, and completed it in 1999. That first book, which no editor has ever seen, opened the flood gates, and ideas have been pouring into my overtaxed brain ever since.”

Leslie was born in Baltimore, Maryland, but raised in a rural area of the state that was full of cornfields, dirt roads and more cows than people. She moved herself to California when she was 19, and put herself through college, earning a bachelor’s degree in theater arts from the University of Southern California, Long Beach.

Instead of an acting career, however, Leslie became an English teacher, a job she loved and found exciting. But fifteen years ago, she decided to focus on writing, and she and her husband moved to a tiny Norman Rockwell kind of town in eastern North Carolina.

“It was the best inspiration in the world for a writer,” she said. As for her theater arts major, Leslie says it taught her to speak with confidence in front of a crowd. “So even though I am not an actress today, I am grateful this was my major. Hopefully, I will get to use some of that training on future book tours and interviews.”

Upside Down in a Laura Ingalls Town is about a rebellious 16-year-old who participates in a television reality show that takes her back to 1861, and requires her to trade in her Victoria’s Secret bra for a rib-cracking corset, her comfy jeans for an ugly farm dress, and her private bathroom for an outhouse.

Leslie says she writes stories about ordinary people falling into extraordinary circumstances, and that while she doesn’t know exactly where the inspiration for *Upside Down* came from, it fits the pattern.

“Growing up in the country gave me an edge, since I could somewhat relate to the pioneer life. But I still did two years of intense research, including visiting a tonsorial parlor and watching cow-milking videos. And who doesn’t love the Laura Ingalls’ stories? She was a simple girl living an extraordinary life, even if she didn’t know it at the time. I deliberately gave the book a contemporary slant in order to gain readers outside the classroom setting.”

Although not all published, *Upside Down in a Laura Ingalls Town* is Leslie’s 12th book. How does she do it is the question -- and Leslie is happy to answer it.

“So many writers find that between their real job, kids, house, relationships and life in general, it is often hard to find the time not only to write, but to write well. That said, I quit teaching 15 years ago to pursue my career choice. I am an English tutor by night, which affords me some time and money to write,” she explains, then goes on to provide her weekly schedule.

“I am up at 7:30, hit the gym, then home for coffee clutch with my supportive hubby. I get in my office around 11 a.m. I do a little marketing, then start writing by noon. I write like a madwoman until 3 p.m., when I get ready for my students. I do this Monday through Thursday. Fridays, I get caught up on all my errands and household junk, and Saturdays and Sundays are mine to do whatever I please, sometimes pertaining to my books, sometimes not. I have had this schedule for years and it works for me. Without this schedule, chiseled in granite, I would not have had the time and energy to write 12 novels...nor would I have had the gumption to keep going. My daily mantra: butt in chair,” she says.

Leslie believes diligence, perseverance and belief in self pave the road to being a good writer. And she thinks of herself as the tortoise, and not the hare when it comes to reaching goals. “You not only have to work hard, and work smart, but work for a long, long time. Years. And maybe more years.”

Leslie says she loves writing both adult and young adult novels, “and play writing, and screenplay writing, and hopefully one day a musical. But there aren’t enough hours in the day to do it all ... I am a slave to all the adult and teenage characters in my head, and they fight for visibility ... When I am not writing, I am thinking about writing.”

Writer’s block is something Leslie has never had, and she admits she doesn’t know why. “It’s a blessing and a curse. At least 10 new story ideas come to me each week ... The voices want to be heard, and I am the conduit. The day they stop vying for attention is the day I switch to another career.”

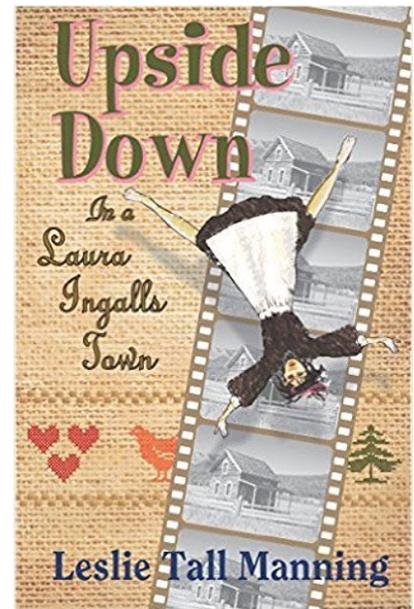
Meanwhile, Leslie does find time for things besides writing and her tutoring job. She decorates her Victorian home, hangs with friends and hubby, hits the gym, sails on the river, and travels when she can.

“Always,” she says, “with a book in my backpack ... I am not a reader who finds an author she likes and then devours everything he or she has written. I dabble when I read, as well as when I write. My tastes vary according to my mood ... I inhale gobs of classics with students I tutor, and at night before bed I read for fun. But there are a handful of books that changed me in some way or another: *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*, *Dandelion Wine*, *Chew on This*, *Outliers*, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, *The Giving Tree*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Speak*, *The Fault in our Stars*, *Out of the Dust*, *Too See Every Bird on Earth*, anything by Doctor Seuss ... OMG! I could be here all day.”

Winning the Sarton Award, says Leslie, is one of those defining moments that can change one’s life. “Not only do I use the award to pick myself up when my confidence is shaky, but also to show others that my writing is worthy of readers. There are a lot of writing competitions out there, but I chose to enter the Story Circle Network competition because it supports women specifically, and the winners from past years show such amazing talent. I feel honored to be in such a revered company of women.”

As for the best writing advice she has received over the years, Leslie says, it came from a quote by playwright Anton Chekhov, who said: “Don’t tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass.”

“All of my writing teachers and mentors kept saying ‘show not tell’ when it came to writing, but it was a concept I had difficult with. Then I found this quote, and it clicked!”



I love writing about human beings who at first feel the need to depend on another, but soon learn to depend on themselves. My stories' endings aren't always what you'd expect them to be, but then again, neither is real life!

~leslietallmanning.com



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.



Circle Voices

We warmly welcome you to our newly revised SCN Circles page!

SCN's writing and reading circles have always been the vibrant heartbeat of our dynamic organization. Now we have brought together our online reading/writing circles (e-circles) and our on-site face-to-face community reading/writing circles beneath the new umbrella that we're calling the Circles Program. Here, on the "Circle Voices" page, we will be showcasing our circle members' writing.

For this issue, Sonja Dalglisch, Internet Circles Coordinator, has selected two poems by members of e-circle 4, Pat Anthony and Sarah Fine. In the March *Journal*, we will publish a story by a community circle member. If you facilitate a circle, watch our newsletter's Circles column for more information.

We are so pleased to have this space to share ever more members' life stories with you.

Mary Jo Doig, Circles Chair

On the Other Side There's Light

Pat Anthony

There is the deep breath, diving
to the center of the flower
sliding down the pollen laden
tube and glimpsing the sky
disappearing overhead

There is the ache of loss for
something you didn't know
had perished, but an absence
tells you it's gone and you
begin to search like an ant

who's lost sight of the line marching
into the woods. It eclipses everything
unless you take your fist and shove
it down (although it's like punching
a balloon, the ever springing back

of it defying gravity and fist) but you
punch away, grab stamens and pull
yourself out of the deceptive nectar
listen for the scratch of leaf to find
the back of the ant line and resume

your place in the salvific routine of
how you arm yourself to fight day after
day to defeat this depression, pry open
your heart and refuse to darken, cook,
clean, write, sew, and do it all again, again.

Eclipse of a Best Friend

Sara Fine

The world got a little dimmer
When Margaret died
The smile that could light up a room
Her warmth like a hug
That would envelop you
When life got disappointing

That smile greeted me
When I was the new girl
Moved in Grade 11
To a new house
And a new school
In a suburb far from everyone I knew

Margaret was my friend
She'd been new in Grade 10
And because we'd both skipped a year
We were younger than our classmates
Awkward, less sophisticated, late bloomers

We lived close to each other
And in each other's pockets
We walked to school
Before Walkmans and I-pods
Singing popular songs
Slightly off key

We had sleepovers
And watched scary movies together
Made matching green dresses
Because she knew how to sew
Double dated
Told each other secrets
Trusted each other completely

She was always there for me
I was always there for her
Best friends

Margaret would have been 70 today
We would have laughed about getting old
Remembered that Paul Simon song:
"Old friends sat on the park bench like book ends
How terribly strange to be 70..."
And laughed about it together

She'd say as she has said before:
"I don't feel any different
Than I did
When we were 15
Except I'm no longer
As interested in the boys"

Margaret was my best friend
And now
Almost 4 years later
Without her
The world feels
A little dimmer

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

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

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

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

Lynn Goodwin: Owner of 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: mej Jarvis@suddenlink.net **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

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**

Donna Marie Miller: Author of *The Broken Spoke: Austin's Legendary Honky-Tonk*, published in April, 2017. Her articles have appeared in several magazines including: *Elmore*, *Creative Screenwriting*, *American Rhythm*, *Austin Food*, *Austin Fusion*, *Austin Monthly*, *Fiddler*, and *The Alternate Root*. donnamariemiller2013@gmail.com
Author

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. salliemoffitt@yahoo.com **Author, Freelancer**

Krista Nerestant: A psychic/medium, NLP Life Coach, and Qi Healer, she hosts a biweekly podcast, is a board member of Save the Essex, Motivational Speaker and member of Latina Surge, MFONJ, Writers Circle and MWG. Currently she is writing a book titled Survival Mode — Child abuse, traumas and how I healed by tapping into the sixth senses. krista@self-ishlifestyle.com **Author, Speaker, Teacher**

Amber Starfire: Well published, she offers comprehensive editing services for fiction and nonfiction works. She also provides publishing services, including print and ebook formatting and limited cover design. Amber has developed a series of online classes and coaching techniques to help people deepen their writing practice and make their way toward publishing. amber@writingthroughlife.com.
Author, Editor, Teacher

Judy Watters: Writes memoir and creative non-fiction, and taught high school English for many years. She now devotes her time to writing, the teaching of writing, and helping new authors navigate publishing through her company, Franklin Scribes, publishers. She leads a women's legacy writing group and an authors' critique group. sheermemoirs@gmail.com. **Author, Freelancer, Publisher**

Stories from the Heart IX Registration Form

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

Name _____

Street Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

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Current Member of Story Circle? yes no

Registration Type		Members-Only Registration (through 1/31/18)	Regular Registration (2/1/18 - 6/20/18) member/non-member	Late Registration (after 6/20/18) member/non-member	Amt Due
<input type="checkbox"/> Full Registration (Fri keynote / Sat / Sun)		\$325	\$365/\$420	\$405/\$460	
Partial Registration (please check all that apply):	<input type="checkbox"/> Friday (Keynote/ dessert reception)	\$35	\$40	\$45	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Saturday only (includes lunch)	\$166	\$195/\$220	\$224/\$249	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Saturday lunch only	\$35	\$40	**	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Sunday only (includes lunch)	\$122	\$130/\$155	\$138/\$163	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Sunday lunch only	\$35	\$40	**	
Friday Pre-Conference Workshop (Not included in full registration: optional, extra charge.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Noon-1:45 pm session: Debra Winegarten	\$30 each	\$40 each	\$50 each	
	<input type="checkbox"/> 2-3:45 pm session: Susan Wittig Albert				
Saturday/Sunday lunch preference: <input type="checkbox"/> chicken <input type="checkbox"/> vegetarian				Total due:	

What is included in my full registration fees?

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

What is not included in my full registration fees?

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

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

* Non-Members who choose to join SCN prior to the end of the conference on Sunday, July 22, 2018 will have a portion of their registration fee applied toward a one-year membership: those who registered for the full conference—or Sat & Sun—can pay an additional \$10; one-day attendees can pay an additional \$35.

** You MUST register for lunches by 6/20/2018! Registrations for these events will NOT be accepted at the door.

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

 <p><input type="checkbox"/> This membership is a gift.</p> <p>My name and address:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <p>My phone and e-mail:</p> <hr/> <hr/>	<h2 style="text-align: center;">Join the Story Circle Network!</h2> <p>Annual Membership if receiving printed, mailed publications:</p> <p>_____ Canada & Mexico: \$85 (International MO)</p> <p>_____ International \$90 (International MO) 12/17</p> <p>_____ USA: \$65</p> <p>_____ Annual Membership for ALL locations receiving <i>online</i> publications only: \$55</p> <p>_____ Internet Writing or Reading eCircle Membership : \$20/yr (in addition to national dues)</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>City _____ State _____ Zip _____ - _____</p> <p>Phone _____</p> <p>Email _____ Amount enclosed _____</p> <p>Become a supporting member and help Story Circle Network grow. Check here:</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$90 Friend</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$150 Supporter</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$250 Sustainer</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$400+ Benefactor</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$125 Donor</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$200 Contributor</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$325 Patron</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$125 Organizational Membership</td> </tr> </table>	<input type="checkbox"/> \$90 Friend	<input type="checkbox"/> \$150 Supporter	<input type="checkbox"/> \$250 Sustainer	<input type="checkbox"/> \$400+ Benefactor	<input type="checkbox"/> \$125 Donor	<input type="checkbox"/> \$200 Contributor	<input type="checkbox"/> \$325 Patron	<input type="checkbox"/> \$125 Organizational Membership	<p style="text-align: center;">Make your check to Story Circle Network PO Box 1670 Estes Park, CO 80517-1670</p>
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Top 10 Reasons to Register NOW for the 2018 Conference



10. *Save money: **Early Bird discount** for SCN members only*
<http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/frmregister.php>
9. *Beat the crowd: **Book your room** stay at the conference hotel*
<http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/lodging.php>
8. *Connect with old friends: Schedule time to **meet your buddies** and see the awesome Austin sights*
7. **Volunteer:** *Greet newcomers and make new friends with like-minded women*
6. *Share your expertise: Make a **proposal to present** at the conference*
<http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/proposal/>
5. *Sell your creative wares and books: **Purchase a display table** in the exhibitors' area*
<http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/callforvendors.php>
4. *Avoid the rush: Make early flight plans and get the **best airfare rates***
3. *Get inspired: Rub elbows with **Sarton Book Award winners***
2. *Coaching opportunity: Sign up for a **coaching session** with an expert in her field*
1. *Reward yourself: **You deserve it!***
<http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/>

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True Words

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

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

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

- March, 2018: A Fork in the Road (deadline January 15)
- June, 2018: A True Friend (deadline April 15)



Save The Date

July 19-22, 2018

SCN's biannual women's writing conference is scheduled for July 19-22, 2018, in Austin, TX. The Wyndham Hotel, site of the last five conferences, will again host the event. Room rates will be \$109/double occupancy. The SCN board decided to move the conference from spring to summer to avoid a room rate increase.



Member-only Registration
(a \$40 discount!) runs through January 31.

Use the form on page 30 or register online
and pay by credit card.

Congratulations to Claire McCabe! She is the winner of a free 1-year extension to her membership. Claire was randomly selected from a pool of this issue's True Words authors and Circle Voices authors. A new incentive to get you writing and submitting, this chance for a free membership will be a regular feature of our quarterly Journal.