



# STORY CIRCLE JOURNAL

Vol. 22 No. 4, Dec 2018

The newsletter for women with stories to tell

## Reflections Essay Winners

Judges have announced three winners of SCN’s 2018 Reflections Essay Contest. **V. J. Knutson** of London, Ontario, won first place with her essay, “Hoping to be Missed.”

“Fish Out of Water” by **Martha Slavin** of Danville, CA, and “Papayas, Mangoes and Arepa con Huevo” by **Maya Lazarus** of Caldwell, TX, were named second and third place, respectively. Enjoy all three winning essays starting on page 4 of this issue of the *Journal*.

The topic for the contest was *Leaving Home*, and contestants were asked to write expressive essays that described their experiences, which ranged from leaving home to finding home. Judges Joyce Boatright, Pat LaPointe, and Ariela Zucker thought the entries as unique as our members. “It was a pleasure judging this contest,” Boatright said.

## Story Circle Network Members will be writing in ITALY! November 2-10, 2019

Based in scenic Sorrento, gateway to the fabled Amalfi Coast, they will have adventures in Rome and Naples, too. Award-winning teacher and writer **Len Leatherwood** will be leading the group and teaching the workshop, using the "sense-sational" Italian experience as inspiration. Details of the upcoming trip are on page 25.



## LifeLines A Story Circle Weekend Writing Retreat

with *New York Times* best-selling author **Susan Wittig Albert**

### CRAFTING AND PUBLISHING COMPELLING STORIES

March 29-31, 2019

Fredericksburg Inn & Suites – Fredericksburg, TX



Read all the details on page 8 of this issue of the *Journal*.

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## Letter From SCN's President



Dear SCN Sisters—

Whoa! To put it mildly, Story Circle Network is UNDER CONSTRUCTION!

Major changes have created an opportunity like none other for SCN to “reinvent” itself to ignite its important mission and vision for women. We have a strong board of directors in place so we’re up to no good—I mean, up to the task.

I’ve always seen myself as a strong supporter—not a leader—of that which I believe in. Taking on the role of president of this valuable women’s organization is a challenging step for me. Recently, I facilitated a journal writing workshop for a group of twenty women and used this Brené Brown quote from her book, *Daring Greatly*:

*“A surefooted and confident mapmaker does not a swift traveler make. I stumble and fall, and I constantly find myself needing to change course. And even though I’m trying to follow a map that I’ve drawn, there are many times when frustration and self-doubt take over; and I wad up that map and shove it into the junk drawer in my kitchen. It’s not an easy journey, but for me it’s been worth every step.”*

My junk drawer may be overflowing but SCN and its future make every step worthwhile.

So what’s under construction?

I’m your new president. That, in and of itself, should scare you into helping in any and every way you can. Rest assured there is “a woman behind the curtain” and with her promise not to die, I agreed to take on this role. I hope you will join me in personally thanking **Susan Albert** for the creation of SCN. She birthed and helped it grow into the fine organization it is today. And she’s still going strong. Look for information about the spring LifeLines Retreat she’s facilitating in Fredericksburg, March 29-31, 2019.

**Peggy Fountain**, our Executive Director and web guru, has been with SCN since the beginning—over 20 years! She had the audacity to recently marry and move to Portugal and will be retiring from SCN at the end of the year. Without her brilliance over the years, we would not have been able to maintain the outreach of this organization, nor create and handle all the record-keeping and complicated maintenance and support associated with our various websites. Hats off to you, dear Peggy!

**New website, logo and message!** Because of Peggy’s skills, our websites have amazing and intricate functionality. But because of age, in order to update our look, our logo, and our message, and maintain new functionality, we’re going to start from scratch. A Web Manager position Request for Proposal (RFP) was released in mid-October. To date we have received an unbelievable 40+ requests for the RFP from which 18 were selected and asked to submit proposals by November 7. The Search Committee (**Susan Albert, Susan Schoch, Teresa Lynn, Len Leatherwood**) and I will be reviewing and assessing the proposals, interviewing a short list of firms and should have a decision ready for board approval by early December.

**Teresa Lynn**, a member since 2016 and new board member, has been hired to be our new Administrator effective November 1, handling the multiple administrative duties that Peggy used to handle. Teresa is a keeper.

*(President’s Letter continued on page 3)*

### Story Circle Journal

The quarterly newsletter of Story Circle Network, the Journal is 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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**Missed Issues:** We try to ensure that *Story Circle Journal* arrives in your mailbox four times a year. If you miss an issue, send us a note and we’ll mail you a replacement.

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## Thank You to Our Member Donors

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# A Sharing Circle

The generosity of our members benefits Story Circle Network every day. A very large *THANK YOU* to the women who help to sustain SCN by adding a donation to their membership. Learn more on our membership page:

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



## Story Circle Network's Mission

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

*(President's Letter continue from page 2)*

**Penny Appleby** will be stepping down as treasurer (one of the many roles she has played over the years) but I know where she lives and will be seeking her advice and wisdom often. Penny, we're so grateful.

Thanks to **Len Leatherwood** and her Italian-trip brainchild, 43 people will be traveling to Italy in November 2019 for a 9-day writing/travel experience. Can you believe it? It filled so fast it made Len's head spin. Story Circle has never done anything like this before so the excitement is palpable. Kudos, Len!

I was asked what my vision is for Story Circle Network. My hope is that by updating our look, our logo, and our message, we will be seen as *the* organization women want to join: the "go-to place" for women writers, wanna-be writers, women who want to express themselves, tell their stories, be heard, be guided, and encouraged to write.

In this time of transition and transformation, your support and help will be more important than ever.

By engaging and supporting women through a strong, vibrant platform, we can do our part to change the world, one woman at a time.

Are you ready? Let's do this.

*In it together,*

*Jeanne (pronounced G-Knee)*

Jeanne Guy, of Jeanne Guy Gatherings, is an author/writer/self-awareness writing coach. Visit her website: <https://www.jeanneguy.com>

Susan Wittig Albert is the founder and a past president of SCN. Visit her website: <http://susanalbert.com>

*1st Place***Hoping to be Missed**

V.J. Knutson – London, Ontario

The crunch of gravel under tires alerts me to the car's approach. Too late, I remember the rule about walking towards the traffic. Last week the neighbor lady chased away a man in a van trying to lure a young girl inside. I'm not afraid of strangers though, 'cause I'm tough. I can beat any boy on our block. Just like my Dad.

I glance to my right—the ground drops away steeply. About half a block up is a traffic light and vehicles are stopped there. I think about running, but the car stops ahead of me and the passenger door opens.

The driver is teenaged and has close-cropped curls and soft blue eyes. Impossibly dreamy eyelashes curtain those eyes and I recognize him as my sister's dreamboat boyfriend.

"Hi!" he says, as if nothing is out of the ordinary. "Where you headed?"

I have no answer for this, so just look down at my feet and kick at the loose stones.

"You're quite a distance from home."

"I can't go back!" I blurt out.

It's true. Ever since Mom broke her back lifting my baby sister, she's been in the hospital, and that means my oldest sister, Joanne is in charge. And she hates me.

"Didn't say you had to...but it's getting close to supper, and well, do you have any money on you?"

I don't.

"Might get dark soon, too," he adds. "Got any idea where you're going to spend the night?"

I shrug.

"Anywhere is better than home," I mumble.

Most days Joanne locks me out of the house. June is nice. She'll slip me a sleeve of crackers and a glass of Hi-C once in a while, but mostly she's afraid of Joanne, too. Besides, June has the baby to look after.

"Tell you what. How about you climb in and you and I can talk about it."

I hesitate, but can't deny he's made some good points. I hop into the passenger's seat and close the door.

"So, where to?"

Thing is, I hadn't thought this through. I just wanted to get away. Make them sorry for losing me. This is the farthest away from home I've ever been. I know that if I turn right at the traffic light and follow along that road, there is a pretty good toy store, and a library. I could hang out there during the day. I hadn't thought about the nights.

"Home, I guess."

He checks his mirrors and pulls a U-turn, back towards the house.

"Things tough at home?" he asks.

"Nobody cares about me."

"I bet that's not true."

"I'll bet it is!"

"I'll tell you what. When we get to the house, you hide behind the driver's seat and I'll act as if I haven't seen you. I'll bet they'll be in a tizzy wondering where you've got to."

"Okay...but, you can't tell them where I am. You have to let them come looking for me."

"Deal!"

I climb into the back seat as the house comes into view. The front door is open, but I don't see either of my sisters.

Bob parks the car, gives me a conspiratorial wink, and heads up to the porch, ringing the bell.

Joanne appears, all flirtatious and kissy-face and they disappear inside. I watch for a bit to see if they'll reappear, but they don't.

I wait...and wait...and...think that Dad should be coming home soon, and surely he'll notice I'm missing. But then I remember that Dad won't be coming home, because he'll be going up to visit Mom at the hospital on his supper break.

Sometimes Aunt Dee comes by, but she hates kids, especially me. Still, she's not quite as mean as Joanne. I sigh. There are no parents around to make my sister be nice.

The passenger door opens and Bob sticks his head in.

"You okay, Squirt?"

"Yeah, I'm okay. Have they asked about me yet?"

"Nope. Afraid not. Are you sure you don't just want to come in. Supper's almost ready."

"No way. I'm making a point, here."

He pats my head and disappears again. Bob's a good guy. I know I can trust him.

I wait some more, and then my stomach starts to rumble, and I think about how long I had locked myself in the bathroom earlier in the day, and how they didn't notice, and that likely they don't even know I'm out of the house now, and that I could die before they miss me, so I'd better go inside and at least eat something.

Bob catches me just inside the door and throws me over his shoulder, prodding my sides to make me squeal.

"Look what I found!" he says, making a big fuss.

"Where have you been?" Joanne scowls at me.

"Nowhere. Not that you'd care."

"You're filthy. Go wash your hands for dinner!"

June follows me to the bathroom, with the baby on her hip. She turns on the water to make sure it's not too hot. I run my hands under the flowing liquid and look at my tangled hair in the bathroom mirror.

Maybe seven is too young to run away, I think. Maybe next week, when I'm eight, I'll get it right. I just need to plan better.

## 2nd Place

# Fish Out of Water

Martha Slavin – Danville, CA

Since our move to Japan, I have started collecting fish. I have hung an indigo-dyed banner with a carp swimming through the current on a wall in our bedroom and attached two red and orange paper fish kites to the curtains in Theo's room. Two silver *koi* from Thailand "cavort" among various seashells on our coffee table, while several small Murano glass fish, a gift from Bill's employer, swim near a fish-shaped piece of porcelain Imari-ware on the counter in the bathroom. These fish symbolize our family's attempts to swim through a very different culture from our own.

We arrived in Tokyo in March, my husband Bill having been transferred to Japan. Theo, our nine-year old, entered Nishimachi International School, and I joined several women's organizations to find friends. At the end of the school year, Theo and I came home for a brief home leave. When we returned to Tokyo in the middle of August, I felt depressed at first. I was once again thrown into the water of an alien culture: cars drove on the opposite side of the street, I couldn't read most street signs, and waves of black-haired people walked hurriedly by me with no one touching each other yet without a polite "*Sumimasen*" (excuse me) when they cut in front of me. Small differences in the manner of doing things were what made living in a different culture a challenge.

Even addressing and closing an envelope for a letter home was not the same. The Japanese, because of their tradition of cleanliness, do not seal envelopes with a swipe of a wet tongue. Instead, a stick of glue or two-sided tape closes envelopes shut. I had to remind myself when we returned to Tokyo not to lick the envelopes. Being in a new culture was like that. The little details of life made the daily differences: sometimes fascinating, sometimes annoying, sometimes both.

The fifth-grade class at Theo's school, Nishimachi, made a class quilt each year to raise money for the school. Last year, the quilt illustrated a series of idioms found in America and Japan. One of the pieces showed a hammer rising to strike a nail. In the U.S., the idiom would be, "You hit the nail right on the head," which glorifies the individual's action. In Japan the expression, "A single nail must be pounded down," shows the importance of community. If an individual stands out, he/she must be brought back to the rest of the group. The Japanese way makes the individual unimportant—just the opposite of the American way.

The quote from Zen Buddhism, "After much preparation, there will be moments of brilliance," describes the Japanese way. The Heike and Genji stories from the centuries-ago imperial court in Kyoto tell the tales of the two original ruling military clans of Japan. Neither story has a dominant hero who triumphs over all, instead the tales cover generations with one clan losing to the other and then reversing their positions. The tales reflect, like water, the flow of life through generations with the individual an insignificant part of that pattern.

In the United States, we are always looking for new ideas, new ways to change what we have already. We honor the individual effort and we have been considered an innovative culture. In Japan they view innovation in a different way. They ask, "Why re-invent the wheel each time?" Instead the Japanese freely borrow from other cultures. They see something new, admire it, change it, and make it their own. Their original written language, Kanji, came from China; much of their art and architectural ideas originated in China, Korea, and India; their techniques and style of ceramics evolved from Korean and Chinese potters; and their religious beliefs have been shaped by ideas from India.

The Japanese put their own mark on ideas they borrow. The Japanese changed Buddhism from India to the way of Zen, which stresses simplicity. The Zen Buddhists tried to make their beliefs accessible to everyone; they made their ideas, such as *wabi sabi* (the impermanence of life), as simple as possible and part of everyday life. Traditional Japan, unlike other sophisticated cultures, rejected most furniture and decorative embellishment as unnecessary for a simple existence.

Water plays prominently in Japanese life, not only because Japan is an island nation, but because Shintoism (the original religion in Japan) and Buddhism both honor cleanliness. Before entering a temple or shrine, the Japanese wash their hands at a large stone sink and rinse their mouths out from the wooden cup provided. Hokusai and Hiroshige, print artists from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, used water and sea life prominently in their prints. Hokusai's wave print is the most famous example. Real carp swim in the moat surrounding the Imperial Palace in Tokyo as well as in the Isezu River near the most sacred area of Japan, the Ise Shrine. The carp or *koi* are considered lucky by the Japanese. The fish represent perseverance, strength of purpose, and determination to overcome obstacles.

As a foreigner, or *gaijin*, in Tokyo, I understood the symbolism of fish. I felt surrounded by a sea of cacophony. Not being able to communicate in Japanese became the most difficult part of living there. I missed the casual banter at a store. I took classes to help with simple conversations. I learned the difference between the three alphabets—*kanji*, *katakana*, and *hiragana*—and I began to recognize some of the more common *kanji* symbols that are printed on signage throughout Japan. When I entered a restaurant that I frequented, and the waitress stopped to ask, "*Genki desuka?*" (How are you?), I could reply, "*Genki desu*" (I'm fine). For a foreigner, whose language skills were minimal, that brief exchange and the smile that went with it, became a small moment to treasure.

Like the fish, my family found streams to live in: on the weekends, we wandered through the streets of Tokyo. I took cultural classes and joined an international women's group. Bill worked in the large, mostly Japanese section of his international company, instead of the Asian Pacific group where most of the expats worked. And Theo became immersed in Japanese culture and friends at his school. In doing so, we became less like fish out of water. Just as the Japanese borrowed from other cultures to create their own, we became borrowers of ideas from a place very different from our native country. We, like the Japanese, worked to make those borrowed ideas our own.

### 3rd Place

## Papayas, Mangoes and Arepa con Huevo

Maya Lazarus – Caldwell, TX

The heat hits me in waves as I step off the Avianca flight in Cartagena, my six-year-old son in tow. This is my first time here.

A divorced parent with a newly minted master's degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, I left New York to come to the Colombo-Americano because it's the only overseas school, among fifteen I applied to, that is offering me a contract, sight unseen, based on my credentials and references only.

Panic sets in. Where is the school director who agreed to meet me? Are there any other *gringos* around? What have I done? Am I crazy? Everything is different, yet colorful. Frightening, yet exciting. Will my son like this place? He'll have to go to school here and he doesn't speak Spanish. But I do, or at least I thought I did, yet I don't understand the way people are speaking. It's rapid. The words run together like a speeding train.

Finally, I find the school director. As we ride along the highway, we pass the calm, Caribbean Sea that looks inviting on this sweltering August day. The air tickles my nostrils with body sweat and the smell of *fritos*—fried snack foods—from street vendors.

I stay with the director for three weeks. Then find a room to rent. The first few months, are rough. I'm hanging precariously on the thought of going back. We have so much to get used to. My paycheck is so paltry I can't buy Diallo anything extra. I need to pay his school fees instead.

I rent a room from a Colombian teacher at the school. Our personalities clash after a month and I move again. I desperately want to find a steady home base for Diallo and a better school. I also wouldn't mind finding a rich, eligible bachelor, maybe a coffee baron or such. (It's only later that I find out there are no coffee barons on the coast. They live in the interior of the country.)

I learn that children are more adaptable than adults. Diallo speaks Spanish within four months and excels in school, learning to read, and finding friends. I, on the other hand, feel lonely for love. I don't miss my parents much; after all I'm 31. But I do miss a love interest I left back in New York, one who couldn't commit to a long-term relationship because he was already married. Being a single parent taxes my sanity and strength, and here I am in "another world" without a support system of family or friends.

Struggling to meet the demands of everyday living keeps me going. I don't want to give up, but I begin to realize what life on my own feels like. Until that move, I lived near my entire family—parents, two brothers, and a sister. They often babysat for me while I finished my

degree. This solo adventure challenges me to be more independent.

Teaching at the Colombo-Americano Cultural Center, a post-secondary school that offers English and business courses, is not hard. I have to get accustomed to the siesta time, the midday break when schools and businesses close for two or three hours. Diallo and I traverse the crowded downtown streets and the crush of people boarding jammed buses to get home. When the bus doors open, everyone pushes and shoves. Sometimes we wait for two or three buses because I refuse to join the fray.

I love *Costeño* food—tropical fruit, fried plantains, eggs enclosed in a fried corn batter called *arepa con huevo*, and coconut fried rice with raisins. Vegetables don't appear on any menu, which seems odd.

A charming young man introduces me to all this luscious food. He is the nephew of the teacher from whom I rent a room, and we become friends, then lovers almost immediately. That's why the teacher asks me to leave her home. He and I carry on our relationship, and soon move in together. We live a frugal life—Diallo, Roberto, and me—as Roberto doesn't have a job and I don't make much money. We call our tiny rented house, *El Nido de Amor* or The Love Nest—and stay there almost two years, managing through good times and bad. I abort a baby in a country where it's illegal. That was scary. I get pregnant again, intentionally this time, and marry Roberto in a civil ceremony. I plan to stay. I begin working at a university with better pay. Life is good...until I get pneumonia and fall into a depression during my third month of pregnancy. I find out from a book that it's culture shock, the kind that can hit you even after you are well established in a foreign country. As I drag myself to work, empty and forlorn, our child grows inside me. I start to miss my family, my country, my language.

I do not want to have our baby in Colombia. I want and need to go home. Where we will live and how I will deliver a baby without health insurance or money, I leave to faith, faith that I'm doing the right thing and it will all work out. And it did. Roberto, Diallo, and I leave Cartagena when I'm 8 months pregnant. I give birth to a petite but healthy girl, three weeks early.

Thirty-five years later, I'm married to the same man. We had our challenges, living in the States and the two times we moved back to Colombia, but we have stuck together like Velcro. We raised our daughter, who has a mental health condition, and weathered that storm, too.

Leaving home in 1981, thinking I would stay forever in Colombia, spoke to my belief in stability and longevity. My parents had a mostly stable life and marriage. I thought I would, too. But that's not how my life has played out, and I wouldn't want a different one. Challenges and changes are exciting. To me, they are the backbone of a well-lived life.



## An Interview With Reflections Essay Winner

# V.J. Knutson

by Joyce Boatright

*Permission to write, paint, and imagine are the gifts I gave myself when chronic illness hit - a fair exchange: being for doing. Relevance is an attitude. Humour essential.*

—V.J. Knutson

Like many of us, V. J. Knutson, winner of the 2018 Reflections Essay Contest, resisted writing memoir for “fear of hurting family members.” In time, however, she let two family members look at stories she’d written about her life in the family. She was gladdened that “after letting my mother and a sister read what I had written, they switched from resistance to approval.”

That kind of permission helped her to write her entry for the contest, a reflection of how she yearned for someone to care about her, to notice her among her siblings, and to show how much she mattered to the family. In the essay, she recounted leaving home at age 7 with the hopes that she’d be missed.

“I grew up in a time when the world eye was focused on human rights, especially those of women. People were standing up for what they believed in and it was empowering. At the same time, I was raised in a dysfunctional patriarchal model that employed oppression and abuse as a way of functioning,” she said. “The secrets in our home were not represented in the public sphere. In younger years, I didn’t dare write about what was happening, but I did find an outlet in journaling.”

She admits that her confidence in writing is still fragile. “The biggest thing that stops me now is myself. I want what I write about to not just inform—I want it to offer hope, make a difference. I wonder if I have that capacity, and feel as if I am waiting for my own enlightenment to strike me.” She still has trouble identifying her strengths as a writer, but adds, “I will say that maturity adds to authenticity in terms of voice. Daily practice helps also.”

V. J. begins each writing day with a cup of tea. She records her dreams from the previous night. After that, “I try to write until midday, and then set it aside till late

afternoon or early evening when I’ll resume. No particular rituals involved, just a need for peace and quiet.”

Her writing process is simple. “I gather thoughts. I might jot down ideas, or just carry them around with me, until they develop into more viable ideas. Typically, I don’t start writing until I know where I’m going with a piece. I am currently working on a memoir, and each chapter is outlined, so it’s just a matter of filling in the details and editing, editing, editing.”

In addition to writing memoir, V. J. is a blogger and a poet. “I’m an avid blogger. I started to blog in 2011 when I faced breast cancer. It was a gift to myself to honor my craft. Then in 2014, I was diagnosed with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis—a disease that left me bedridden. I was unable to tolerate much stimulation—sounds, scents, and even conversation were too much to bear. Without television or reading to distract me, my mind had lots of time to spin. Putting full sentences together was a challenge, so I turned to poetry. My original blog became an outlet for poetic expression. Then I started a second blog in which to express non-poetic sentiments. It has evolved as I’ve recovered strength. Writing within a community is incredible and has helped me navigate isolation.”

Asked what author would she choose as a dinner guest, V. J. responded, “The first author who comes to mind is Wally Lamb. I know that he works with women to help them write their stories. I would love to pick his brain to help me past my stumbling blocks.”

She has gotten good advice over the years to keep going. “The best advice is to write every day. I forget who said it, but I have adhered to it ever since. The second best advice is from my husband, who encourages me to keep trying, reminding me always to give others a chance to reject me instead of rejecting myself.”

---

*“I love Story Circle Network because when I was a beginning writer, I knew of no such organization. I found very few groups that would encourage any struggling writer, let alone a woman. A lot of the publications seemed to be bastions—castles!—with high walls constructed by men with no room for beginners, especially if they happened to be female and to not have advanced degrees. I ferociously admire Susan Wittig Albert for her own writing, but even more for the hard work she has done helping SCN and its writers learn to navigate the publishing world. And I feel that as a woman writer who has had modest success, part of my work is doing what I can to help other writers, particularly women, and particularly women who are older, and who may not have forty or fifty years of life ahead of them to develop their skills. Every single publication by a woman encourages other women we may never meet.”*

—Linda M. Hasselstrom, Windbreak House Writing Retreats



## LifeLines

### A Story Circle Weekend Writing Retreat

with *New York Times* best-selling author  
Susan Wittig Albert

#### CRAFTING AND PUBLISHING COMPELLING STORIES

March 29-31, 2019

Fredericksburg Inn & Suites – Fredericksburg, TX

#### About the Workshop

Every successful writer will tell you: craft matters. Craft really matters. Whether you're writing a true story or fiction, a compelling story isn't enough to engage readers. The way you tell the story is what pulls you in and keeps your reading.

In sessions 1-6 of this weekend workshop, author-publisher Susan Wittig Albert will help you understand and practice the essential craft of narrative: characterization, conflict, narration/dramatization, story structure, setting, dialogue. In sessions 7-8, you'll find out how to choose among the current available paths to publication.

Bring your laptops, tablets, notebooks, and project ideas and plans. Come prepared to write, share, learn, and expand your writing horizons.

#### About the Facilitator

As a writer, Susan Albert works in three genres, mystery, historical fiction, and memoir. Her mysteries include the China Bayles Herbal Mysteries and *The Darling Dahlias*, about a Southern garden club in the 1930s, as well as an eight-book series, the *Cottage Tales* of Beatrix Potter. She and her husband Bill also coauthored a 12-book series under the pseudonym of Robin Paige.

Her historical fiction includes *THE GENERAL'S WOMEN*, a wartime romance about Ike's love affair with Kay Summersby; *LOVING ELEANOR*, about the intimate friendship of Eleanor Roosevelt and Lorena Hickok; and *A WILDER ROSE*, about the mother-daughter team that produced the *Little House* books. *A WILDER ROSE* is currently under option for film. Her memoirs include: *TOGETHER, ALONE: A MEMOIR OF MARRIAGE AND PLACE*; and *AN EXTRAORDINARY YEAR OF ORDINARY DAYS*.

Susan has had extraordinary experience as an award-winning author, including fiction and nonfiction, writing with a partner and alone, going the traditional route and the nontraditional route. She knows the publishing field as only an insider can, and she is generous in sharing what she knows with others.

#### About the Retreat

Mark your calendar for the end of March, bring a writing buddy, and join us in the beautiful Texas Hill Country for SCN's popular women's weekend writing retreat.

The event will take place at the beautiful **Fredericksburg Inn & Suites** in Fredericksburg TX, in the heart of the Hill Country, less than 80 minutes from Austin and San Antonio. Rich with the culture of German pioneers who settled the area over 160 years ago, Fredericksburg boasts spectacular art galleries, boutiques, antiques, award-winning Texas wineries, and acres of wildflowers.

#### Registration for this amazing weekend retreat with SCN (Does not include your room):

SCN members: \$220.

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

Workshop Fee does NOT include your room. **You must call the Inn by February 28, 2019 to reserve your room** for the March retreat. Traditional rooms cost for single/double occupancy: \$179 per night on Friday and Saturday.

Call the Inn at 830-997-0202 and identify yourself as a Story Circle retreat participant to get the special rates.

Rooms and enrollment are limited, so register now. All the details you need are here: <http://scnlifelines.org/>



## In Memoriam

by Jeanne Guy

### A Tribute to Debra Winegarten 1957 — 2018

I was her best friend, or so I thought. I realized during her dying process that there were many in her world who were also referred to as best friends. I therefore deemed them good company.

Debra, Debbie, Devorah, M211, Debs, Debster—just a few of the names she was known by—died at the age of 60 on September 10, 2018, the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah. A Jewish friend said, “Rosh Hashanah is the day we are inscribed in the book of life. Debbie now has a front row seat.”

She was a front row kind of lady.

I think back to eight years earlier when I joined a critique group she was in. Didn't like her much at first: she didn't show up for the first two sessions yet she critiqued my work via email. How dare she.

We became fast friends anyhow. After she left the critique group years later to promote her work, we agreed to meet at my house once or twice a week to write. She always seemed to be so focused and productive, until I realized she was simultaneously taking pictures of my cats and posting them on Facebook.

She was the kind of friend who would bring a pot of homemade chicken soup whenever someone needed it. But after my surgery in June, she apologetically reneged on an offer to drop off some of her magical *mélange*. Based on a visit to an astute chiropractor followed by an MRI, she instead went to see an oncologist.

Her life and future plans with her devoted 20-year life's heart partner and wife, Cindy Huyser, were up-ended by a sudden and surprising diagnosis of an aggressive cancer. Two months later she was gone, but not to be forgotten.

Daughter of Alvin and Ruthe Winegarten, Debra followed in her famous mother's footsteps (an outspoken

pioneer in the fields of Texas women and Texas Jewish history) authoring a number of books, specializing in biography and poetry. Her work garnered many awards. One month before her diagnosis, she was awarded the Sarah Patton Stipend for non-fiction at The Writer's Hotel for her memoir-in-progress.

Her larger-than-life personality opened doors for fellow writers to emulate her enthusiasm for life. As an educator, flutist, and all-around rabble-rousing feminist who delighted in inspiring and challenging others, she was a public speaking pro, not because of any classes she attended, but because she was authentic, funny, outspoken, and thus inspirational.

She promoted her books like none other. While she was hospitalized, even her Rabbi, Neil Blumofe, said if you go visit Debbie be prepared to buy a book. She also gave away many a book to her caregivers, and continued to mark her journey through illness with kindness, courage and grace.

Debbie also founded Sociosights Press, providing the world with award-winning books, examples of

her mission: to publish books that transform society one story at a time, in accordance with the principles of *tikkun olam*. In Jewish teachings, it means any activity that improves the world in a harmonious way.

We are all called, Deb said, to repair or fix the world. The trick is to know your part. I think that's why she encouraged all her writing sisters to practice making “Outrageous Requests.” Sort of like doing something out of your comfort zone to strengthen your “courage” muscle and improve your ability to improve the world.

May we carry on her practices.





## An Interview With Sarton Award Winner

# Candice Shy Hooper

by Pat Bean

Hooper is a historian, writer, and member of advisory boards for President Lincoln's Cottage in D.C. and the Ulysses S. and Julia D. Grant Historical Home in Detroit. Her first book is a detailed and lively account of the overlooked role four women played in the Civil War. Using letters, memoirs, and her subjects' extensive wartime travel reports, Hooper's group biography of Jessie Frémont, Nelly McClellan, Ellen Sherman, and Julia Grant—each married to a Union Army General—shows how much these women influenced their spouses and, through them, the President and the nation.

Candice Shy Hooper, winner of the 2017 Sarton Award for her biography, *Lincoln's Generals' Wives: Four Women Who Influenced the Civil War*, spent much of her growing-up years on two small islands in the Pacific where her Navy father was stationed. She was born in Guam, and then lived for four years on Saipan with her parents and siblings. There was no television or radio, just books, and mountains, and beaches still littered with World War II detritus, including rusty tanks, and abandoned and littered Japanese military posts—and an occasional unexploded grenade.

“We staged plays to entertain our parents and competed to read the most books. It was a childhood like no other, including a trip to Japan aboard a U.S. Navy ship,” Candice recalls of those times.

Some might say it was an ideal beginning for a writer. But Candice only came to that activity as a primary focus in her life when she was in her 50s, after earning a bachelor's degree in journalism, a law degree, a career on Capitol Hill, first as an aide to Congressman Charlie Wilson (yes, the same man portrayed on the big screen by Tom Hanks in “Charlie Wilson's War”), and eventually the creation of her own lobbying firm in 2001.

Halfway through law school, Candice's interest in the energy industry led her to take a job with ENSERCH, an international energy and engineering company. After she launched a major sales/marketing effort for government contracts, she was elected a corporate vice-president. “I was the first woman vice president of that NYSE-listed company, and one of the very few women corporate officers in the energy/engineering industry at that time.”

But she says the best thing about that time was that “the girl from Guam met the kid from Sundance, Wyoming—Lindsay Hooper.” The two married in 1984 and today her husband is still her best friend and biggest supporter. She blames her late-blooming desire to be a writer on a book she read in 2003, and then couldn't find a place for on her crowded bookshelves—because she never gave away a book in her life.

“Rick Atkinson's 682-page *An Army at Dawn* led to my epiphany,” Candice remembers. “When I couldn't wedge it into my crowded bookshelves, I knew the time had come to organize my library. As I began pulling books from shelves...I was astonished to see how many were books of battles, leaders, fighting men, nations, and causes. That's how I discovered that military history had been my passion for years, and that's when I decided to pursue it.”

The first step she took was to go back to school, and in 2008, George Washington University awarded her a master's degree in history, with a concentration in military history.

“Going back to school at the age of 55 energized me,” Candice says.

While reading about the Civil War, she was struck by the symmetry of two sets of U.S. Army generals. “The first set, John Charles Fremont and George Brinton McClellan, were like meteors. They blazed at first sight...left chaos in their wake, then faded from view. The second set, William Tecumseh Sherman and Ulysses Grant, were like stars in the fading light of dusk. They were only dimly perceived, but their brilliance emerged as night fell. In the darkest hours of the night, they shone brightly enough to light a path home, and they endured.”

She then found herself wondering about the men's wives, and how these 19th-century women contributed to their husbands' careers. Over the past century and a half, a legion of historians had examined the minutia of the generals' lives, but none had focused on their wives, and their relationships with Abraham Lincoln. So the four women were who Candice decided to write about.

“The conscious inspiration was when I learned during my graduate studies that military wives had traveled to Washington to seek President Lincoln's help for their husbands during the Civil War. But soon, I also realized that the unconscious inspiration for this work was my mother, a Navy wife, who had followed her husband to far corners of the world to be by his side and to enable him to

be with his children as we grew up. They always say that the toughest job in the Navy is that of a Navy wife, and I believe that's true. My greatest regret was that my mother died the year before *Lincoln's Generals' Wives* was published. Although she knew that I was writing it, I would have loved if she could have held the book in her hands."

In the course of her research, Candice discovered symmetry in the wives' stories. "Jessie Benton Fremont and Mary Ellen McClellan both displayed the most conventional nineteenth-century wifely attribute—uncritical, worshipful endorsement of their husbands' every instinct. But their unquestioning support for their husbands proved disastrous to the generals and nearly so to the nation. They enabled their husbands to persist in their incompetence and delusion and to reject the advice and friendship of their commander in chief.

"The other set of wives, Ellen Ewing Sherman and Julia Dent Grant...did not hesitate to take issue with their husbands when they believed their actions to be wrong or their judgments ill-advised.... They intelligently supported their husband's best instincts—including trust in and admiration for Abraham Lincoln—and rebuffed their worst.

"How these women influenced their husbands' military careers 150 years ago sheds new light on our understanding of the Civil War, and is a window into the timeless sacrifices and ingenuity of women in wartime throughout history," Candice summarizes. "Somehow, it seems, my whole life prepared me for this story."

Candice worked on the book for eight years before *Lincoln's Generals' Wives* was published by Kent State University Press. Those eight years were filled with lots of research and lots of writing. "But mostly lots of thinking about the women I'd decided to profile, and how best to present their stories to people who know a great deal about the Civil War and to those who don't."

She tells us the most important thing she learned during those eight years was how much a nonfiction writer relies on other people, a lesson evident in the lengthy list of acknowledgments listed in her book. "I recall that as a young girl I wanted to be a detective, then an archeologist, and later I wanted to be a teacher. In my senior year of college, I applied to the Naval Officer Candidate School, but my letter of acceptance was sent to the wrong address and didn't catch up to me until after the school year had started. That was just one of the many bits of serendipity, like meeting my husband through my work, and reading that book by Rick Atkinson, that have enabled me to do things I could never have aspired to or dreamed of doing."

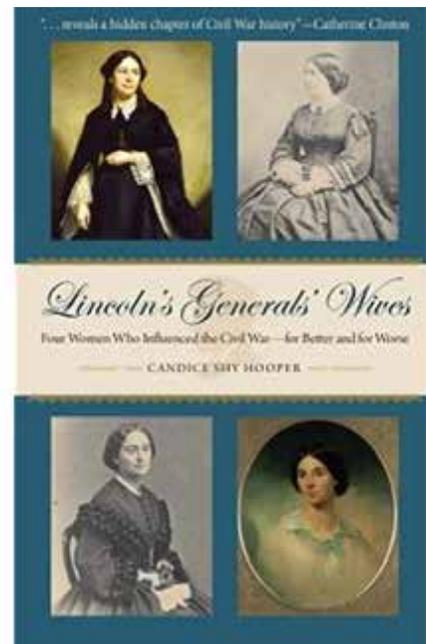
*Lincoln's Generals' Wives* is Candice's first book, although she has written articles that have been published in The New York Times and in the peer-reviewed Journal

for Military History. She has also written book reviews for several journals, and has had poems published, one of which won her an award. Candice belongs to poetry groups in Florida and Wyoming that, she says, "have helped me to look at the world in a whole new way."

On January 1, 2019, she plans to begin working on her next project, a book Candice believes will channel her father's military experience just as her Sarton-winning book channels her mother's experiences. "It's a topic in the history of the U.S. Navy that has been on my mind for more than a decade. I've been saving all sorts of articles and references about it over the past ten years, so I know that I'm compelled to write it at some point."

As for advice she would give other writers, she suggests they should never underestimate how much they will have to do themselves to get their book published—whether it's the research, writing, seeking publication, publicizing, or preparing for each book talk by focusing on the specific audience. She adds that it's also important to pat yourself on the back every time you reach a milestone, whether it's a well-written sentence or a major literary award.

"Like the Sarton Award! Celebrate yourself," advises our biography winner, Candice Shy Hooper.



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, and recently published her book about those years, *Travels with Maggie*. She is passionate about nature, birds, writing, art, family, reading and her new dog, Pepper.





# Writing Tips from Our Teachers

Every issue of the Journal brings us thoughtful advice on writing from one of the instructors in our Online Classes program, coordinated by Len Leatherwood. This issue's Tip offers fresh perspective on a familiar practice.

## The Power of Journaling

by B. Lynn Goodwin

Why should you take time from your busy day to journal? Because stories rise up out of journaling, and even if they don't, your story matters. No one can tell your story but you.

My book, *Never Too Late: From Wannabe to Wife at 62*, started with my journaling about the new relationship I found, on Craigslist of all places, in 2011. I wrote about my fears and needs as well as our daily adventures. Later, those entries triggered my memory and recaptured my feelings. By reading them I remembered how I felt then and how I feel now.

My advice? Write as often as you can. Add photos. One day your audience may be friends and family who live a very different life. What do you want them to know about you and the way you live? Answer that question and you have a reason to tell your story.

Don't worry about rules. Your journal: your rules.

Not sure how to start? There are two surefire ways: One is to start with a sensory image.

- I'm writing on my laptop and listening to the muted clicks of the black keys that glow from the light underneath.
- I'm at Starbuck's, listening to the snatches of conversation that whirl around me.
- Afternoon sunlight makes the leaves on the ivy outside my window look shiny.

The second surefire way to begin is with a sentence start:

- I want...
- I remember...
- What if...
- Today I feel...
- On the best day of my life...
- Love is...
- A year from now...

"A year from now..." made me stop and think. It helped me make a decision, even when I felt it was too soon.

Can you reuse a sentence start? Absolutely! As you do so you'll discover your change and growth.

As you're writing, trust your instincts. Trust yourself. Who do you want to be? How do you want the world to perceive you? What do you want the reader to know? Let those questions guide you. What is your message? How can your experience help others? Answers to these questions will guide you.

Read your journals over. Underline what you love. Write down any questions the journal brings up. These questions are guides for going deeper if you wish to pursue a subject.

Just do it, and soon you'll have your own list of journaling benefits to share with the world. Journaling changed my life; give it a chance to change yours.

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**B. Lynn Goodwin** has written *You Want Me to Do WHAT? Journaling for Caregivers*, and the award-winning novel *Talent*. Her memoir *Never Too Late: A 62-Year-Old Goes From Wannabe to Wife* was recently published by Koehler Press. Lynn is a reviewer for SCBR and an energetic teacher for SCN's Online Classes, as well as a manuscript coach at her site, [Writer Advice](http://WriterAdvice.com). [www.writeradvice.com](http://www.writeradvice.com) She loves working one-on-one, trouble-shooting, and helping writers find what works.





# Our Future is Female!

**Charlotte Daniels** is a senior at Marlborough School in Los Angeles. Her featured piece, "A Danischefsky in a Haystack," won a regional Gold Key award in the Scholastic Artists and Writers contest, the oldest and most prestigious writing contest for youth (grades 7-12) in the United States. We're delighted to spotlight her engaging writing here.

## A Danischefsky in a Haystack

by Charlotte Daniels

In the voice of my great-grandfather, Henry:

My brother Charlie and I were the Danischefsky brothers: two young Jewish boys in 1920s Europe growing up with our family on a noble's farm. Our home was the farm's golden fields of wheat, its worn grey barn, the thick vibrant forest bordering the meadow. Our family worked as loggers, so every afternoon my brother and I chopped down trees and carried the wood down to the river for the sawmill. We grew strong from our work and our hands suffered so many rough calluses, they soon resembled the bark of the trees we felled. We had to be careful not to publicly exhibit our strength for fear the Cossacks would snatch us away from our family. The Cossacks, expert horsemen in bloodthirsty uniforms, were known to force young Jewish boys into the Czar's army to serve as human shields on the front lines.

As years went by, Charlie and I became known as very good horsemen in our small town. Unfortunately, the Cossacks heard of us and began the search for the Danischefsky brothers throughout Minsk. As soon as my parents learned of their hunt and warned us, my brother and I made the plan to hide under a gigantic haystack on top of a broken-down cart behind the barn. Charlie insisted we hide at the bottom where the coldest and dankest hay lay, so if the Cossacks decided to look in our cart, they wouldn't plunge their knives right into our abdomens. After some debate about how we would manage to breathe through the thick, heavy forage, I finally agreed on the condition that we would cut out small holes at the bottom of the cart.

The night the Cossacks came, we were prepared. Three of the humorless giants rode onto our farm. We could hear the haunting hooves of the horses clattering on the road and the grating grunts of the men as they drew near. Their commander jumped off his horse a few feet away from the barn, startling my mother. I heard my sisters' worried cries and my father telling the commander that Charlie and I had left on horseback many days before. Father assured them he

had seen us ride away with his own eyes. The commander threatened him; his men would kill our entire family if they discovered he was lying. I suspected at that moment my father may have wished he had given us up rather than risk his family's future. I did, too. But the only thing we could do was pray they wouldn't find us.

The Cossack commander must have seen my father's nervous quiver because he took out his rifle, strapped a bayonet to it, then kicked open the barn door and stabbed at the stacks of hay inside. We were twenty feet away. There was no way of escaping and no point in surrendering. I still remember that desperate feeling of helplessness.

Our cart rattled as the Cossacks kicked open the back door of the barn. I could hear their thundering rage. They were now inches away from us. The wet haystack on top of us was surely their next target. My brother grabbed my hand and squeezed it. It was as if he were forgiving me for all the fights we had as siblings and thanking me for all of the happy memories we shared. We prepared ourselves for what was about to happen.

The commander jabbed his bayonet into the hay above us. Five inches more and it would have struck my heart. Two more stabs, but he didn't penetrate us. I could feel myself breathing again as he swore in frustration then moved on to another haystack. I was never more grateful for my brother's stubborn insistence and our arbitrary luck. As soon as the murderous giants were out of earshot, we pushed off the hay from on top of us and ran up to our parents. "We're not dead yet," I said. Even though relief shone on our family's faces, we all knew that my brother and I had to leave Minsk.

Soon after, Charlie and I made our way to America. One day, we sat in a movie theater and watched as the main character had only her angst to overcome in order to make her dreams come true. I imagined how easy life would be if angst were my only obstacle.



From the Blogs:

# One Woman's Day

by Kali' Rourke

Writing can be entertainment, education, and a therapeutic exercise all at once, and *One Woman's Day* contributor V.J. Knutson gave us insight into this highly personal process in a raw, truthful, and compelling piece that appeared recently. Find out how you can contribute to *One Woman's Day* blog at: <http://onewomansday.wordpress.com/about/>

## Trauma's Shadow is Rage

by V.J. Knutson

"...he had always been popular and happy and things had always worked out." (Holly LeCraw, *The Swimming Pool*)

I close the book, feeling the rage shifting just below my sternum. It's the second time this week that words have elicited this response. The first was an online post and the author had written something about how gently we come into this world—a man, of course, whose lack of birthing experience allowed him to think glibly about such beginnings—and I know otherwise.

Flesh tears from flesh.

Pain builds and peaks and in a bloodied push of exasperation life emerges.

I'm not discrediting the miraculous. Birth is miraculous. And in time, joy overshadows the trauma, and we conceive again. This, too, is a miracle.

Maybe it is all this talk of he said/she said dominating the news. Women daring to call out their abusers. The ensuing backlash.

I named my assailant. Included his address, and full details of the abduction. Then buried the memory, and self,

in a well so deep it wouldn't emerge for fourteen years, knife-edged fragments butchering my complacency. Memory works that way.

No charges were laid, no subsequent trial; the judgment occurred on the spot the day that they found me, missing overnight, in a state of shock. I had asked for it—my clothes, the unfortunate choice to attend a bar underage, the willingness to get in a stranger's car with friends. The defilement was my fault. How could I not bury it?

Happiness is desirable—no different for me—but I am also a realist/cynic; life does not unfold in candy-wrapped sweetness. It stumbles along, meets with obstacles, and demands that we look within. To say that someone has lived an unmarred existence, as suggested in the quotation above, is just laziness on the part of the author. This is not truth, so why write it?

Life commands character.

Real life, that is.

The rage subsides. I've said my piece. I turn the page.

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**V. J. Knutson** is a former educator, avid blogger, and grandmother. Also the first place winner of our 2018 Reflections essay contest. She and her husband are currently traveling cross-country in a 40-foot motor home. Originally from Ontario, Canada, V. J. hopes this journey will provide healing for her ME/CFS, or at the very least, inspire further creativity. Find her online at *One Woman's Quest*.

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**Kali' Rourke**, Coordinator of SCN's *One Woman's Day* blog, is a retired Mortgage Banker and Escrow Officer who is now a full-time volunteer and philanthropist in Austin. She is a Mentor and is a board member of BookSpring, which makes children's literacy its mission. She writes about the parallels between parenting and management, mentoring, personal stories, and living with Burning Mouth Syndrome, in her blogs: **Kali's Musings** and **A Burning Journey**.

# Taking SCN International!

## *Story Circle Network Members:*

We are happy to share that we are offering our first international writing workshop, to be held in the historic and beautiful country of **Italy, November 2-10, 2019**.

Our instructor is **Len Leatherwood**, Pushcart-nominated author, nationally honored writing teacher, and Coordinator of our Online Classes Program. She will be leading the workshop using the "sense-sational" Italian landscape as a jumping off point to infuse your memoir, poetry, or fiction with evocative sensory details. To keep costs low, Len has generously donated her time to host the trip and provide instruction.

Some highlights to anticipate:

- Private guided tour of Ancient Rome including the Coliseum, Forum, etc.
- Lodging in scenic Sorrento, the gateway to the Amalfi Coast
- Private guided tour of the Amalfi Coast
- Full day on the Isle of Capri with a guide and a round trip on the Bay of Naples on a hydrofoil
- Guided tour of Naples
- Guided tour of Pompeii
- Tastes of Sorrento guided tour: Buffalo cheese tasting, limoncello tasting, pizza tasting, etc.

This is a non-profit trip. SCN Members and their guests are automatically provided a \$500 **Debra Winegarten Scholarship**, making the cost only \$1,295, excluding airfare. Our response has already been extraordinary and we are now placing anyone who is interested on a waiting list. Story Circle Network members and their guests will be given priority. Men are invited for the trip; however, the writing workshop is women-only.

Here is the link to the website for complete information: <https://www.writingandtravel.com>

We hope this will be the beginning of a biennial international writing workshop for Story Circle Network. We are very pleased to offer this special benefit to all our SCN members and their guests.

*Happy travels!*

*Jeanne B. Guy, President  
Story Circle Network*



**Len Leatherwood**, Program Coordinator for SCN's Online Classes, has been teaching writing privately to students in Beverly Hills for the past 17 years. She has received numerous state and national teaching awards from the Scholastic Artists and Writers Contest. She is a daily blogger at 20 Minutes a Day, as well as a published writer of 'flash' fiction/memoir.



## Sharpen Your Skills: SCN's Winter Online Classes

January 7-March 4, 2019

### **Memoir and Life Writing:**

*Start Writing Your Family History* with Sarah White  
*The Not Sweet Woman* with Janelle Hardy  
*It Feels Like Home* with Ariela Zucker

### **Poetry:**

*Haiku for Health: How the Ancient Practice of Haiku  
Connects Mind, Body, and Spirit (Part A)*  
with Cyndi Lloyd  
*Found Poetry* with Kitty McCord

### **Journaling and Self Discovery:**

*Freeing the Writer Within* with Linda Steele  
*The Gifts of Fragmentary Writing to Create Lyrical Prose*  
with Sheila Bender

### **Sharpening Skills:**

*Editing Like a Pro* with B. Lynn Goodwin  
*Writing Short: Flash Fiction/Flash Memoir* with Len  
Leatherwood

### **Independent Study:**

*One on One Mentoring* with B. Lynn Goodwin



Writing Circles are a vital part of SCN's effort to encourage women to share their prose and poetry. In this issue, the *Journal's* focus shifts to on-site Circles, specifically two long-running Older Women's Legacy (OWL) Circles facilitated by Pat Flathouse. Enjoy an interview with Pat by our Circles Coordinator, Mary Jo Doig, followed by writings from Pat's Circle members.

## Proudly Introducing Pat Flathouse, Long-time OWL Enthusiast

by Mary Jo Doig

**MJD:** Pat, kindly tell us about yourself and your long relationship with SCN.

**PF:** *I was a fan of Susan Albert's and noticed something in one of her books about a writing group for women. I found that they met just ten minutes from my house in Austin, so I went. Immediately I felt at home and welcomed!*

*At a subsequent workshop I learned about the OWL writing circles to teach older women to write their stories. Intrigued, for the next four years, I was involved in organizing and implementing writing circles all over Austin. My current two groups are part of Continuing OWL groups—women who didn't want to quit once the formal OWL workshops ended. I still have members today who were part of the original OWL groups—about 15 years ago! Over the years new members have joined through word of mouth.*

What are your group guidelines?

*Both groups meet once a month for an hour and a half (more or less). One group meets at St. John Neumann Catholic Church in West Lake Hills. The other meets at Westminster Retirement Center. Both are open to new members, who are not limited to church or retirement center membership.*

*At St. John Neumann, the participants take turns bringing the writing prompt and that person usually facilitates the writing and sharing times. At Westminster, the members prefer I bring the writing prompt and facilitate the group. Also, the Westminster group likes to bring all kinds of snacks to munch on during our writing and sharing time. Our writing prompts used to focus on childhood memories but have moved on to encompass broader topics, from politics to aging issues and everything in between! In both groups, we begin with a prompt and a 20-minute writing. Then everyone shares—often amidst gales of laughter and sometimes tears. A shorter 10-minute writing with brief sharing follows to complete our time together.*

What organizational pieces have worked especially well through the years?

*I guess the #1 rule I have learned is: establish a meeting day and time and stick with it! One group always meets the first Tuesday of the month—same time, same place! I send an email reminder a few days beforehand. The other group changes their date at times and we always seem to lose people due to the changes. The reminder note is important to stay in touch with those who have not attended.*

Do your circles ever struggle with admitting new members?

*The members of one circle are very hesitant to admit new members, which becomes a problem when we lose members; the group size shrinks. My other group is always open to new members, which keeps it vibrant and full!*

What are the personal gifts of facilitating women life-writers?

*The personal gifts are the wonderful lifelong friendships I have made and loving the fact that I have people who don't want to miss a writing group session. One hospitalized lady asked to be dismissed a day early so she could prepare for her writing group a few days later. Also, it has been rewarding to see several women gain confidence and publish books based on their circle writings.*

Tell us more about publication.

*Several have self-published books based on their circle stories. One lady, the 16<sup>th</sup> child of Texas immigrant farmers, is completing her fourth book about her life adventures.*

When you think over your years of facilitation, what moments will you always remember?

*I will never forget one woman, the wife of a general and mother of 6 children, who joined my group and began writing her stories. She gave her children a notebook each Christmas of her stories from that year. After a number of years in my group, she died. At the funeral, the children placed a notebook of her stories beside her casket to tell the story of her life! I was moved to tears!!*

What advice would you give someone interested in

starting a workshop? Someone struggling to keep her circle going?

*I really like using the OWL format for my writing groups. The women always know what to expect. I've tried deviating from the "tried and true" format at times and the women's reactions were usually less than excited. They know what to expect and they respond well with the OWL format.*

*To someone struggling to keep a group going, I would say it might be time to either invite new people in or just let the group go.*

Are you available to talk with other facilitators?

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## Bonnie Carlin's Accident

Shannon Wibbels McDaniels –West Lake Hills, TX  
St. John Neumann Writing Group

Bonnie Carlin and her fraternal twin sister, Beth, were students at the College of St. Mary in Omaha in September of 1951. Stock car races were taking place in Omaha on September 30 and Bonnie had a date with her high school boyfriend, Jerry Carraher, from their hometown of Spalding, Nebraska, to attend. Bonnie and Beth were staying that weekend at the home of their cousin, Delores Gormley Ingham, where Jerry picked up Bonnie for their date.

There were no grandstands at the stock car races. People stood around parked cars to watch. Bonnie and Jerry had just switched from standing by one car to another when a race car flew into the crowd and killed Bonnie. Jerry suffered severe head injuries. This was September 30, 1951.

A priest from Omaha telephoned the Carlin home in Spalding, Nebraska, to notify Bonnie's family of the accident. Henry Carlin, Bonnie's father, answered the phone but could not make out what the priest was trying to say. Nella Dee Wibbels, my mother and Bonnie and Beth's sister, took the phone and took the shocking news Bonnie had been killed.

The Carlin home began to fill with people as the word got out in this town of 900. Nuns came. Doc Fox came and other townspeople. After everyone had left, Beth and Henry and Vera, her parents, lay down on the parents' bed, cried and hugged one another. They talked and agreed they were not going to blame Jerry Carraher for the accident because it was not his fault.

Bonnie was 20 when she was killed.

Jerry Carraher, whose head was wrapped in white bandages after the accident, eventually married. For many years he placed flowers on Bonnie's grave and served as an honorary pallbearer at Pete's, Bonnie's older brother's,

*"I'm always eager to talk about my writing groups!!"* (Contact: [pflat@icloud.com](mailto:pflat@icloud.com))

In closing, is there anything else you'd like to add?

*I am so grateful to SCN for involving me in the OWL program and starting me off on this path—it is a very important part of my life!!*

What an honor getting to know you and your deep commitment to OWL. Abundant thanks, Pat!

The pieces that follow were written by Pat's Circle members.

funeral in May of 2015. Jerry is 93 today and his license plate reads, "The Father of 9 Children."

Beth married a heart/lung surgeon, adopted two children, and has four grandchildren. She lives in Omaha and is 87 years old.

*"For everything under the sun there is a time and a season, a time to be born and a time to die..."* Ecclesiastes 3:1-2

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## LOVE

Ann Kriss –Austin, TX  
Westminster Writing Group

Loving is what most of us do most of the time if we can. What this means is that only love propels us into life and sustains us there.

Common sense—some say, not so common—is an ingredient of love, for love is eminently practical, as it feeds, clothes, teaches.

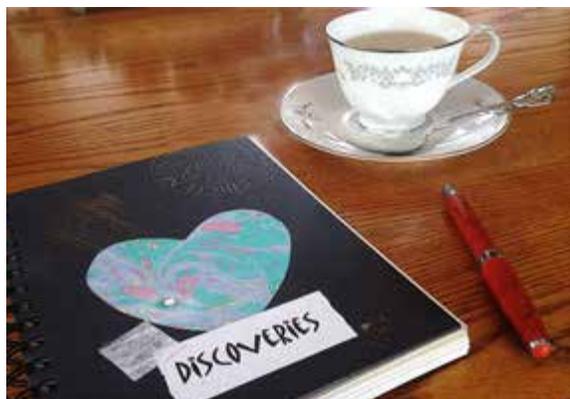
The source of love—what prompts it—is a mystery that even human awareness does not fathom, except it inevitably involves the sacrifice of a lesser good for one greater. For this reason, love is not addictive. Each action stands by itself, erupting sometimes out of tortured indecision, and deeply susceptible to influence.

There are many ways of love; the heart bursts wide open when presented with a choice. Loving is especially true when acting in a small thing unknown to the world, but replenishing the actor.

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To see an OWL workbook and/or read part of the facilitators manual, go here: <http://www.storycircle.org/owlcircle/workbook.shtml>

For a poignant story about a member in one of Pat's circles, go here: <http://www.storycircle.org/owlcircle/austin/mildred.shtml>



# True Words from Real Women

A selection of short pieces of lifewriting by our members, edited by Jo Virgil. This month's topic is **"Words of Wisdom."** Future topics are listed on the back page. Please contribute your own True Words to the Journal by using this link:

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

## Make Dreams Come True

Ellen Fountain – Tucson, AZ  
elf@fountainstudio.com

"Per aspera ad astra"—the words my high school Latin teacher wrote in my yearbook my senior year. At the time, I had no idea how true a statement that would be for me.

I had already survived my Mom leaving us when I was 10, and my Dad remarrying just before I started high school at 14, but our blended family was still dysfunctional, and I was more than ready to graduate and get away from home. The one dream I'd always had, to be an artist, seemed a little closer to coming true. My high school had no art program, but I'd been accepted at UC Berkeley, and was looking forward to my first real art instruction.

I'd gone to work at 16, working part-time, weekends, and summers in shops on Bainbridge Island, saving money for college. My Dad had promised to match whatever I saved, and I was determined to have enough for my first year. After that, I thought I could get part-time work and maybe even a scholarship. I'd graduated second in my high school class, and I was a good student.

When it got close to the time I was to leave for California, I told Daddy what I'd saved, and asked him if he would put the matching funds in my checking account. He looked at me, shook his head, and then said, "Why should I spend money on college for a girl who's just going to get married and have kids?"

The money I'd saved lasted less than a year. I dropped out, returned to the Pacific Northwest, got a job, went back to California, got another job, got married, and eventually ended up in Tucson. I finally finished my BFA degree in studio art, and then a Masters in art education at the University of Arizona. I paid my college costs myself, though a big chunk was covered through scholarships. I made my own dream come true, and it wasn't easy.

My Latin teacher was right—"Through hardship to the stars."

## Bucket List

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

I've led a blessed life and there's nothing I still want or need to do. But there were things in the past.

After reading *The Alexandria Quartet*, I wanted to see Egypt. It was easier back then. When I thought I was Irish and learned my great-grandparents came to Canada from Sligo, I wanted to go there. I was beguiled by the green and craggy shore.

Then I found out the family actually came from Scotland and ended up in Ireland because they backed the wrong king. So I thought a trip to Scotland would be grand.

But no one in the family was available to go and that made me realize I'd rather spend time at home than travel to distant places. I had many amazing trips when I was younger, but now it feels too far away from family and too costly to the environment.

In 2012, when I was diagnosed with cancer, more time to live became the only bucket list I had. I wanted time to be with my husband and our children, to be as much a part of their narrative arc as possible. I didn't think about being around for weddings and grandchildren, though the stories I told myself to fall asleep were full of happy marriages and lively offspring.

Time—it was enough to be here for that day or that week and eventually that year. When I went through a second bout of treatment two years later, I became even more focused on the "Be Here Now" philosophy I'd tried to embrace in the '60s, without really understanding it the way I do now, in my 60s.

Carpe Diem (Seize the Day) has become Carpe Momentum. Now, when I think of bucket lists and what I want to do before I die, I think "more of the same please"—more of those ordinary days at home, more time to read and write, more chances to be with family and friends.

Just time—that would be the first and last thing on my list.

## The Wishing Dream

Madeline Sharples – Manhattan Beach, CA  
<http://madelinesharples.com>, [madeline40@gmail.com](mailto:madeline40@gmail.com)

I startled and opened my eyes wide in disbelief  
 There was Paul standing by my bed  
 calm, quiet, his lips turned up in  
 the little smile I remembered so well.  
 I reached up to touch him,  
 his pale skin cool, dry and very much alive.  
 Mom, look I'm back, I've come back.  
 I really didn't mean to leave forever.  
 And as he spoke the tears  
 poured from my eyes.  
 I cried for all the days, months, years  
 I'd missed him, mourned him, looked for him.  
 How I scoured the faces of all the  
 young men who passed by.  
 The ones with buzzed blonde hair,  
 beautiful blue eyes fringed in black lashes.  
 How I listened for his music  
 every time I heard a jazz piano tune  
 in a bar, on the radio, on a CD.  
 How I remembered him everywhere I went:  
 under the pier in Manhattan Beach,  
 on the wide red-tile stoop outside Starbucks,  
 in a dingy piano bar on Avenue A  
 on New York's lower East side,  
 in the kitchen chomping on some almonds,  
 in his room where his jazz records still stand  
 in neat ordered rows on the shelf.  
 I got up and went to him,  
 giving him a welcoming hug,  
 never wanting to let him go again.

## Dreams Can Come True

Judy Watkins – Myrtle Creek, OR  
[Judywa77@gmail.com](mailto:Judywa77@gmail.com)  
 e-circle 3, e-circle 6, e-circle 9

Small Town, Montana was my home until I married and moved to CITY, Oregon at age 19. The city was a shock to me. People could be neighbors for years without ever knowing each other's names or visiting in their homes. Speaking to strangers on the street was a no-no. My world became full of strangers in a foreign land.

I wanted to go home almost as soon as I arrived, but if that couldn't happen, I dreamed of moving to a small town where people were greeted by their first names as they walked down the street.

My husband worked construction, and for our first twenty years I was a stay-at-home wife and mother. We had to live where work was plentiful, and in rainy Oregon, that meant cities. Also, my dream was never his dream; he was from City, California.

My dream never faded, but by the time we were at retirement age, I knew the window of opportunity had passed me by. I cried as I let go of the dream and moved on with life as I knew it.

We have all heard that God answers prayers, but often on His timeline, not on ours. And so it was for me.

My husband was 82 years old and in poor health when quite by accident we discovered Small Town in Southern Oregon (3,000 people). Would we be crazy to leave our kids and grandkids more than four hours away? I held my breath, I shed my silent tears. Would he be willing to make such a drastic change to our lifestyle at this time of our lives? Were we too old to buy another house?

For the past ten years I have walked our streets and called people by their names, or at least have spoken to them if I didn't know their name. I am part of the community and belong to, and participate in, everything it offers. My dream has come true...I am home!

CONGRATULATIONS to **Janice Kvale**, this quarter's winner of a free 1-year extension to her SCN membership. Janice was randomly selected from a pool of this issue's True Words and Circles authors. It's wonderful to know that she'll continue to be a part of Story Circle.

A reminder to submit your own work to True Words and your writing circle. Sharing your writing is an empowering experience—and you might win a year of membership, too!



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.

## The Chosen

Ariela Zucker – Auburn, ME  
<https://paperdragonme.wordpress.com/>,  
 ldplus4u@yahoo.com

All my life, cats chose me. They came from the street, hands of strangers dropped them in the yard, and some were born unnoticed under a bush. The circumstances might have been varied, but the end results were similar. A new cat, or cats, would join the existing herd. I kept hoping that one day I'd get to choose my own cat.

And then Meir, my white, blue-eyed cat (abandoned as a kitten), died of sudden liver disease, and I said to my husband, "This is it. The next cat will be chosen by me, and I want a Ragdoll."

Ragdolls are a distinctive breed. They are big, long-haired cats with big blue eyes and a variety of colors. Their name refers to a unique phenomenon in which, when picked up, they go limp in your arms. They are smart and loving cats with mild temperament, who will follow you around the house like a faithful puppy dog.

Five months later, Sheleg joined our household.

White, with a touch of orange at the tip of her ears and tail, soft like a heap of feathers, huge blue eyes and the mannerism of a princess who, not by choice, came to live with the commoners.

I loved her.

She was my cat, she sat next to me, slept next to me, and in the early morning hours when I couldn't sleep and I would click on my computer, she curled into a ball of sweetness, and her melodious purr helped me write.

Last October, Sheleg died from an illness that seems to attack mostly Ragdolls. For the four months that she was sick, I refused to believe that she was dying and that there was nothing I could do for her. But the facts were undeniable, as in front of my eyes she lost weight and became lethargic and moody.

We spent the last nights together sitting in the living room. She wouldn't sleep, and I hoped that my presence gave her comfort.

Now I am waiting. The next cat will have to choose me; it seems to work better that way.

## Tiptoe If You Must

Sara Etgen-Baker – Anna, TX  
 Sab\_1529@yahoo.com

I was 15 when my first story came to me. I remember that miraculous feeling of loosening my grip on my pen and letting it wander about on the page until the story found an entrance. Each word tugged another one along until I wrote one sentence, then more sentences, and then pages. I lost myself in the story that yearned to be told; and I loved creating imaginary characters and a fictional world and making it seem real. To get into the flow and create something from nothing—well, there was no other feeling quite like it, and I dreamed of being a novelist like Pearl Buck.

But in 1969, girls weren't encouraged to pursue dreams and impractical careers like being a writer. "Dreams are all well and good but be realistic," Mother insisted. "Find a practical way to use your writing skill and love for words."

So, at 18, I buried my dream and did what practical girls do. I enrolled in a nearby college, majored in English, graduated, and contentedly taught English for 30+ years,

encouraging my students to love words, to write boldly, and to read with a purpose. I edited textbooks and wrote curriculum and felt creative and purposeful. Life progressed; but at the end of each day, I knew I was working with someone else's words and ideas—not mine.

Dreams are strange creatures, though, and can't be ignored forever. Mine was no different. Soon it gnawed at my soul making me restless, irritable, and discontent. I had to make a change. My husband encouraged me, and I took the first step, enrolling in an online writing course and writing my first memoir. The response from editors and readers was unexpected and overwhelming. So, I took the next step in reclaiming my teenage dream—I quit teaching. I now write memoirs and personal narratives, and a novel is in progress.

My advice on dreams? What matters most is to begin. Sometimes the smallest step in the right direction ends up being the biggest step of your life. Tiptoe if you must. But take the step.

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## The Bell

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

I'm up early on Christmas  
 everyone is sleeping

I feel around in the dark  
 to mute the sound of  
 a brass bell attached  
 to my parents' back door.

Touching the imprint  
 grooved into the wood,  
 I realize it has sustained  
 the thrust of this bell  
 thousands of times,  
 welcoming family and friends  
 for over thirty years.

Entering this door,  
 so many have been touched,  
 even changed by  
 this warm, loving home  
 of my parents.

thank you bell  
 for reminding me.

## First Bike (Finding My Balance)

Jane Gragg Lewis – Laguna Niguel, CA  
janeglewis@gmail.com

Daddy's running behind me, holding the seat, helping me balance.

"Training wheels are for sissies! You don't need those things," he assures me.

I got a brand new, shiny blue Schwinn bike for my fifth birthday. Daddy says I have to practice riding across the front yard. If I can ride my bike over the grass and bumps, I'll be fine anywhere I take it.

Again and again, promising he won't let go, he holds the seat till I wobble out of control and almost fall off.

"Whew! Okay, Janey, one more time and then I need a break," he puffs. "Pedal fast and look where you're going. It's easier to balance that way."

As I'm furiously pedaling across the yard again, I feel a newfound freedom. This is everything I had hoped it would be. I can imagine how great I look, flying past the crepe myrtles. When I turn my head to look back at Daddy, wanting to see his proud smile, he isn't there. He's on the other side of the yard.

I crash hard, screaming, "You promised you wouldn't turn loose! You promised!"

He holds his hands up in that what's-your-problem kind of way and says, "You didn't need me anymore! You were riding your bike all by yourself!"

I want to laugh and celebrate, too, but I just have to yell one last time, "You broke your promise!"

He helps me pick up my bike, and I look up at him, my eyes asking for his help again.

He shakes his head. "Nope. You're on your own, Janey."

"If Mama hears you call me Janey, she's gonna be so mad at you! You know she hates that."

"Well, she's inside and can't hear me, can she?" he says, and he gives me that smile that must have made Mama fall in love with him so long ago.

"Look! You made me scrape my knee."

"Uh-huh. Won't be the last time," he tells me. "Now hop back on."

I fix my pedals the way Daddy showed me, sit on my seat, and push hard with my right foot. My take-off wobbles, but Daddy's right.

I really can do this all by myself.

## From Where I Sit

Linda Menicucci – Paradise, CA

From where I sit,  
On the covered porch of my house,  
On top of the ridge,  
I can see the manzanita and pine trees  
That fill the small valley below.

From where I sit,  
I can see the years of my life before me—  
The teen who stuffed envelopes for JFK;  
The college student who opposed the Vietnam War;  
The young mother lost and afraid.

From where I sit,  
I can see the years  
Of running, crawling and being dragged  
Through the life I lived,  
Until I found my strength; walked forward unafraid.

From where I sit,  
I can see  
The rights that were wronged,  
The wrongs that were righted,  
And I was a part of it.

From where I sit,  
I can see the woman I am today,  
Seventy,  
And finally,  
Happy.

## Taylor Being Taylor

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

I asked my daughter, Diana, what Taylor wanted to be for Halloween.

My granddaughter has autism, high functioning and unpredictable. Sometimes, if she's tired, fearful, or something interrupts her routine, her acting out is so intense, it's like an erupting afternoon thunderstorm.

Diana told Taylor she'd like to help her pick out a costume.

"It's okay Mom—I've got it," Taylor said. "I'm going to be an angel."

"Well, if you're going to be an angel, you'll have to act like one and be on your best behavior."

"Mom, I can't do that. I'm just trying to be brave."

## A Dream: Better Late Than Ever

Patricia Roop Hollinger – Westminister, MD  
woodscrone@gmail.com

I found myself faced with divorce

I really had no other choice.

What to do now with my life?  
First, I just wanted to avoid any strife.

Maybe I should go back to school?  
Why! That thought was really cool!

Return to college at my age?  
By graduation I would be a sage.

Then, I met this man at a Halloween party  
He intrigued me even if he was a bit tardy.

As we dated I shared my dream  
His approval caused me to beam.

So! Get your Masters while you are at it,  
This pursuit you must never quit.

I couldn't believe I was hearing this—  
Pursuing my dream became pure bliss.

## Anticipating the Next Event

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

I never thought I would be old  
yet here I am, a lot of silver  
threaded with the gold  
a generous lot of skin  
wrinkled, blotched and flaking

I forget names, mainly...  
mild cognitive dysfunction  
says my daughter, the doctor  
I have a closet of assistive devices  
that I have needed at times

I know what is next yet  
that knowledge is academic  
it can be actualized  
only once, I think

when I get to heaven  
(define that as you wish)  
I will be hobbling, blind  
and probably at the wrong door

## A Dream Come True

Kit Dalton – Martinez, CA  
Mudlark10@sonic.net

I've always admired vocal harmony, but, like many "couldn't-carry-a-tune-in-a-bucket" friends, I was long reluctant to sing in any form. With one exception—whenever I accompanied my grandmother to church in Underhill, VT, I happily sang the hymns of Morning Prayer service.

Part-singing, however, remained out of reach, a tormenting dream. Then, in adulthood, I was exposed to Irish music—fiddle tunes, and then traditional songs like "Kathleen Mavourneen." Masters of the idiom were gaining popularity outside of Ireland and would occasionally pass through town on tour.

So it was that, following a relationship breakup, it occurred to me to revisit Ireland to enjoy its musical and physical charms. A friend's bet that I'd never do it clinched my decision. I'd visit Dublin and tour the countryside on a motorbike. A friend taught me to manage a two-wheeled motor vehicle on his massive Honda; another friend referred me to a hotel in Dublin, near the well-known Irish music venue, O'Donahue's. My airplane ticket (and my renewed driver's license) in hand, I arrived at Logan Airport on the appointed eve, and off we went.

The merrymaking of the "returned Yanks" onboard left me near-sleepless, but I must've dozed; I came to with the morning sun glistening down on the Shannon River Delta and surrounding hills.

In Dublin, O'Donahue's outshone its reputation. One night, there were ballads; another featured four men singing harmony on, most notably, the blacksmith anthem, "Twankidillo." The singing, though glorious, left me vexed. How DID they do that?

For years I wondered. Finally, after pinching pennies and begging my family for leave, I went to music camp. What a feast! There were lessons in singing, harmony-singing, instrument-playing.

More practice and some newfound natural ability helped me to move forward. One day, after I'd established myself in Coastal California, one member of our band started a song. Another member added an alto line, and I slithered in-between with a third voice. Brilliant! So THIS was how they did it.

## The Elusive College Degree

Lou Martindale – West Monroe, LA

I always dreamed of a college education. However, after high school graduation I went to work as a telephone operator. It was a good job and the pay and benefits were good for a woman in the 1960s, but deep down I really wanted to go to college. The reason I didn't was involved, but in retrospect I blame myself for not having the strength of character to make it happen.

Eventually I got married and had two wonderful daughters. I was happy being a wife and mother, but even though I was now out of the workforce, I still felt like I should have pursued college. Many of my peers had college degrees and I felt inferior.

After moving to Alexandria, Louisiana, I was feeling lonely and useless. My youngest daughter was in high school and busy with friends and activities. My husband was busy with his new job. I was in a strange town with no friends, and a family that needed me less and less. One morning, a public service announcement on the radio caught my attention. The local college, Louisiana State University at Alexandria, was having an orientation for "non-traditional" students on Friday—"non-traditional" meaning older students. What did I have to lose? I sure didn't have anything else to occupy my time.

I went to the meeting. Within a week, I took the SAT, completed my registration, and was sitting in my first college class! As I walked across the campus after class, a feeling of contentment washed over me. It was where I had wanted to be all of my adult life. I felt at home.

Two years later, we moved again. I didn't waste any time transferring to the University of South Florida. Ten years later, I graduated magna cum laude with a degree in business administration and a minor in economics. It took 12 long years to complete my degree, but I knew what I wanted and I forged ahead. I worked hard, persevered, and in the end, my dream of a college education came true.

## In This Town Where I Grew Up

Susan G. Weidener – Chester Springs, PA  
<http://www.susanweidener.com/>, [sgweidener@comcast.net](mailto:sgweidener@comcast.net)

In the town where I grew up, I am in a coffee shop, killing time before a writers' meeting starts at the bookstore up the street. The coffee shop is next to the movie theater. I went to matinees there as a young girl. Some things come full circle—being back here in this town sipping a cappuccino, remembering *The Day the Earth Stood Still*.

Fifty years is a long time, although in the scheme of things just a whisper on the wind. I look down at my open notebook and see a short story I'm writing about a woman whose dreams are paradoxically less interesting than her life.

After days of rain, it's finally sunny. "We should go home so I can clean the pool," I hear the man at the next table say to his wife. I wonder what it's like to go home with someone. Someone I want to clean the swimming pool with, someone to make love to, or read to in bed.

This town makes me feel like I'm gazing into a lake, watching the ripples of my life ease from the shoreline toward a vast horizon where the final destination waits. What it is, I don't know, but I'm sure it has something to do with writing. I left this town with dreams of writing the Great American Novel.

Up the street is the Presbyterian church where on a June day, John and I married. I worked for a small newspaper then—a newspaper long out of business, the building now a brewpub. When we first met, he said to me, "You're a good writer." I fell in love with John, not because he said that, but because of who he was...and who I might become with him by my side.

Outside, young women stroll by, the vision of summer in short, colorful dresses and high cork-heeled sandals. I'm here—still writing, 50 years later, still in this town where I grew up. Some things come full circle.

## Still Me

Abby November – San Diego, CA

Wishes and dreams of winning the trophy:  
of the applause, laughter and cheers.  
It's the dream of every comedian: acceptance, prizes, screams of crowd.  
Flying high in the moment: without chemistry—I'm in the Zone!  
We are one in the light. They Love me.  
I won the Ruby Chalice, the golden slipper, the big event.  
I got the brass ring of comedy.  
But Nothing changes; I am still me:  
wrinkles, sags and achy joints.

## Children's Theater

Suzy Beal – Bend, OR  
Suzy.beal46@gmail.com

Actors on a stage  
Being other than they are  
Children trying on adulthood  
Dreams of stardom in their eyes  
Exhibit heartfelt emotions  
Finding themselves, losing themselves  
Gather their lines  
Harvest their strength  
Imitate reality  
Jump off the edge into the unknown  
Knock on wood—break a leg  
Learn timing  
Manage repertoire  
Never losing the moment  
On stage  
Playing the part  
“Quiet”  
Rehearsal night  
Stage fright  
Thespians in the making  
Utter chaos at opening  
Voices strong  
Waiting for cue  
Xed out the fears  
Yield to trust  
Zen arrives...with the applause

## Rocketso Zome

Kathi Kouguell – New York, NY  
kathikouguell@gmail.com

I studied in another town for two weeks  
I painted—waxed fabrics—designed  
And learned patience in my work

You were at music conference  
and called one evening to tell me you needed to get away and would be  
gone for perhaps four or five days  
You were vague about the destination  
I understood

My heart ached and my stomach cramped  
My wonderful time there became clouded and I hated you for spoiling it  
for me  
And hated me for allowing you to do that to me  
I obsessed and my sadness turned to desperation

When S. called to chat  
she mentioned that you had called her  
He's crazy, she said, and I asked why  
She said your conversation had been quite irrational

I could not continue to speak of you  
And instead asked her all about her life in the city  
We talked and shared stories for the next hour

She nourished me  
unknowingly  
and I loved her so much

## Life Is But a Dream?

Sara Etgen-Baker – Anna, TX  
Sab\_1529@yahoo.com

Life is but a dream? This question came to me while Bill and I were paddling our way down the Brazos River. We'd pushed off early that spring morning into a silky mist rising off the river. The water, nearly invisible beneath the vapor, moved in silence except for a trickle at the bow. The river was soft, flowing endlessly, tirelessly, effortlessly as it wended its way between the banks that were the new vivid green only springtime brings. And in the post-dawn light, the water didn't sparkle like it does at noon; instead, it was mellow like a Monet painting.

I could hear, and just barely feel, the wind whispering through the trees. Silver carp and river trout darted under our canoe. Up ahead, a heron waited—a living statue, poised on one leg, patient as the breeze, patient as the river itself. Neither of us spoke as we paddled through willow thickets, open water, and floating rafts of water lilies. I soon lost myself in the scenery and tranquility and stopped rowing.

“Keep rowing,” my husband said in a low-pitched voice.

“Oops! Sorry, River Man, I lost myself in the moment.”

I dug my paddle into the water, unable to resist singing, “Row, row, row your boat gently down the stream. Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, life is but a dream.” I laughed, recalling I often sang those silly children's lyrics with Father whenever he rowed his boat across a lake searching for a perfect place to cast his fishing line.

But I'm no longer that child and must ponder the adult question hidden beneath those lyrics. Is the outer world where I live nothing but a dream? Many sacred schools of spiritual philosophy teach that the reality we live is mere illusion and nothing but a dream—the dream created over a lifetime of conditioning, misinterpretation, and misperception.

Whether real or not, the world is nothing but my perception of it. So, I awaken from this dream, committed to stripping away the layers of illusion and discovering the truth of who and what I really am.

**Linda Menicucci** is a member from Paradise, CA, where a terrible wildfire struck down most of the town in November. Her poem appears in True Words this issue, p. 21. Jo Virgil, our TW editor, contacted her to check on her safety. Linda agreed that we could share her response.

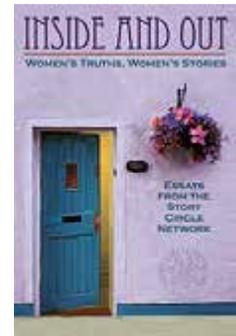
*"Thank you, Jo for caring about us. It has been a difficult time.... My husband and I are all right. We had a frightening drive out of Paradise, fire on both sides of the road and all traffic stopped. I tried to call 911 over and over and finally got through. I told her thousands of us were going to die on Skyway. Then the phone disconnected. My husband told me to call our son and say goodbye but there was no longer cell service. ... Somehow we got out and are now living in San Mateo.... Unbelievably, our home and about 15 others on our street survived but who knows when we can return or what we will find. ... I wrote the poem one week before the fire. It is a bittersweet memory of a moment when I was, finally, happy.... Linda"*

If anyone wants to donate directly, Linda is collecting gift cards to distribute to about 200 members of the American Association of University Women and the Ridge Quilters Guild in Paradise. Of the 45 AAUW members, 42 lost their homes. There is no number yet for Guild members. Send gift cards to Linda Menicucci, PO Box 1789, San Mateo, CA 94401.

"Every moment happens twice: inside and outside, and they are two different histories."

—Zadie Smith from *White Teeth* (2000)

***Inside and Out: Women's Truths, Women's Stories*** is Story Circle's newest book, and one you don't want to miss. This collection of personal essays by 76 member-writers tells those inner and outer histories in a remarkable array of voices, selected from our annual SCN anthologies, 2009 – 2016.



Give it as a gift. Pass it to a friend. Suggest it to your librarian. And be sure to check it out yourself: <http://www.storycircle.org/InsideAndOut/>

## In Memoriam

by B. Lynn Goodwin

### Marge Morith Setzer

January 29, 1938 — June 11, 2018

At the end of May in 2018, this was one of my comments to Marge Setzer, an Independent Study student, "The tone of this is much warmer and friendlier than Rob's story above. Would you be able to make that as immediate as this is?" In the accompanying e-mail I wrote, "We are in the polish and perfection stage. This is really good. Much clearer and easier to follow."

Two years earlier I was sending comments like "Another specific detail here, but you spent a lot of time on the first page standing in line, which is not active. You could cut some of that and move this up," and "GOOD! I can see this sentence."

In two years, Marge went from recording events to sharing the story of the Morith family's survival. We'd work intensely for four weeks and she had tons of material for revisions. When she was done, she'd return for more.

As we worked together, Marge became a friend. She shared letters from her brothers who served during World War II, and I soon realized exactly where she got her writing style. She came from a literal and precise family. I often imagined her grandkids, wide-eyed and laughing, as they bonded over family they met through their grandmother. Although they were supposed to be her prime audience, she'd started asking me about magazines that would publish her stories. She was thinking of herself as an author.

Two weeks into Independent Study last May, she told me she was in a lot of pain from sciatica and was on her way to the doctor. I understood. Because of my own sciatic

nerve pain I knew what she was going through. She promised to return to her writing as soon as possible.

Ten days later I heard from her son. Complications arose and she passed away peacefully. I was stunned. She'd asked him to finish the manuscript, and I offered to help.

What else was there to do for this kind, warm, generous, appreciative woman, who had been growing in leaps and bounds? She was a pleasure to work with, and I miss her.

Marge was proud to see her work published in the 2017 edition of Story Circle's annual anthology, *Real Women Write*. Here's a taste. The entire piece is here: <http://www.storycircle.org/journal/anthology/Anthology2017.pdf>

### Zip-Lining

Marge Setzer – Peoria AZ

Scary—above the canopy—attached only to a cable—this is crazy! I'm seventy-six years old. Why take the risk at my age? Good question.

I wondered, *why not? Not every grandmother can say she has zip-lined above the rain forest in Costa Rica. What could possibly happen? Hundreds of people have done this. My hero, Auntie Mame, would have done it. I can handle this...and it'll be something to tell the grandkids about.*

After signing up for the adventure, my tour group was told to wear jeans or long pants for the event. When someone asked why, the answer was, "You'll find out." ...

# 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](http://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](http://www.SusanAlbert.com) **Author, Speaker**

**Marty Ambrose:** Fiction author who has written for Avalon Books, Kensington, and Thomas & Mercer. Her latest historical mystery, *Claire's Last Secret*, was released by Severn House in early fall, 2018. Marty also is an adjunct faculty member in the Southern New Hampshire University MFA Program. [martyrose57@riseup.net](mailto:martyrose57@riseup.net) **Author**

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**Patricia A. Dreyfus:** Patricia Dreyfus was born in the previous century, near the center of the North American Continent, in Harvey, North Dakota. She has lived in California since she was three years old and is "of" that Golden State. Today she lives in Corona del Mar, California, with her first and favorite husband, Gary. <http://patriciadreyfus-writer.com> **Author, Editor, Teacher**

**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](mailto:authormaryanneasley@gmail.com) **Author, Publisher, Speaker**

**Lynn Goodwin:** Owner of **Writer Advice** and **B. Lynn Goodwin: Editor/Coach**. She's drafting a memoir, has published a self-help book and a YA, and has numerous short pieces online and in print. [lgood67334@comcast.net](mailto:lgood67334@comcast.net) **Editor, Reviewer, Writing Coach, Interviewer, Mentor.**

**Judith Grout:** Lives and writes in Glendale, Arizona. She graduated from the University of Minnesota in Laboratory Science and worked many years in healthcare. Now retired, she attended creative writing classes and researched the years spanning the Great Depression and Second World War in order to write this fictional account of her Mother-in-law's actual journey across America in 1939. Her next work is a linked story collection. [j-grout@cox.net](mailto:j-grout@cox.net) **Author, Speaker**

**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](http://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](http://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](mailto: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](http://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**

**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](mailto:salliemoffitt@yahoo.com) **Author, Freelancer**

**Jean P. Moore:** Born in Brooklyn, New York, and grew up in Miami, Florida, her publications include primarily fiction and poetry. Her first novel, *Water on the Moon*, won the 2015 Independent Publisher Book Award for contemporary fiction. Her new novel, *Tilda's Promise*, was published in September 2018. [jeanmoore@verizon.net](mailto:jeanmoore@verizon.net) **Author, Speaker, Teacher**

**Amber Starfire:** Amber Lea Starfire is an author, editor, and creative writing teacher whose passion is helping others tell their stories. Her website (below) is a dynamic education resource focusing on legacy, memoir, journaling, and personal essay writing. There, you will find community and online learning support to achieve your writing goals. <http://writingthroughlife.com> **Author, Editor, Teacher**

**Barbara Stark-Nemon:** Barbara Stark-Nemon lives, writes, does fiber arts, swims and cycles in Ann Arbor and Northport, MI. She is the author of the novels *Even in Darkness* (historical fiction) and *Hard Cider*, (contemporary women's fiction). She has taught English, led writing workshops, and been a speech and language therapist. [bstarknemon@gmail.com](mailto:bstarknemon@gmail.com) **Author, Speaker, Teacher**

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## Stories from the Heart IX – Basking in the Glow

### — Conference Evaluations —

by Joyce Boatright, Conference Co-Chair

Despite the sweltering heat of the 2018 Texas summer, 62 women attended our ninth national women’s writing conference, and sent in glowing comments to the evaluations team.

Except for several suggestions for improving the food—and when do you ever meet 62 women’s dietary expectations?—members had few criticisms. Among the suggestions for improvement, some thought we should charge a fee for the Coaching Sessions. Several admitted they signed up for coaching but didn’t show up for the session. The suggestion of a nominal fee was made as a strategy to motivate people to honor their time commitment to the coaches, who volunteer their time.

Compliments were many. Participants felt people were friendly, the atmosphere warm and inviting. First time participants were brought into the fold; seasoned attendees enjoyed the open and noncompetitive environment.

Both Susan Albert and Len Leatherwood were praised for their pre-conference workshops in publishing and flash fiction/flash memoir, respectively. The keynote speaker, Linda Joy Myers, received excellent comments as well: “mesmerizing,” “inspiring,” “thoughtful.”

Saturday’s lunch program included readings from Sarton prize winners. In addition to hearing those compelling excerpts, participants also had the opportunity to attend panel discussions where the authors spoke about their individual pathways to publication and how their vision for their book kept them focused.

Sunday’s lunch program brought more accolades. People loved Bird Mejia’s presentation. One admirer said, “Bird was very inspirational and vulnerable. Only wish she

hadn't been tethered to a corded mic so she could fly more freely.” And while one participant thought Bird might lack the ability to relate to women in the audience who were much older than she, others thought she was a breath of freshness.

Workshops, scheduled throughout the weekend, drew a variety of comments. The mixed reviews seemed to reflect each participant’s background/level of experience. A couple of people thought more fiction would be beneficial. Having said that, most of the respondents favored the variety that was offered.

Overall level of satisfaction with the conference was satisfactory. Almost every comment was complimentary. People who come to this conference have often said they thought it was the best conference ever. This year’s participants especially liked the intimacy of the gathering, smaller than in years past.

So what lies ahead for 2020? The overwhelming majority of participants would like Austin to remain the conference city. However, this may be because most were from Texas. Several suggested a different venue in Austin—something closer to the “Austin experience.” Other places mentioned more than once: Dallas and Denver. The SCN Board will take these comments under advisement while they wrestle with identifying a conference site for 2020.

And while 62 women showed up in July, they overwhelmingly suggested April as a far better month to designate for the convention.

Visit <http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/wrapup/handouts/> to view handouts from several of the fantastic workshops.

**Story Circle Network, Inc.**  
**PO Box 1616**  
**Bertram, TX 78605**

## Looking Ahead...

Sharing your story is an important part of claiming your voice. And your SCN writing sisters make a supportive and interested audience. We want to hear the evocative details, the characters, and the challenges/resolutions that make up your very real lives. So please, submit your work here:

[http://www.storycircle.org/members/  
frmjournalsubmission.php](http://www.storycircle.org/members/frmjournalsubmission.php)

Write on these topics, or choose your own, for upcoming issues of the Journal:

- March, 2019: Mother Nature (deadline Jan 15)
- June, 2019: Unanswered Questions (deadline April 15)
- September, 2019: A Brilliant Idea (deadline July 15)

## *LifeLines: A Story Circle Weekend Writing Retreat*

*with New York Times best-selling author  
Susan Wittig Albert*

**March 29-31, 2019**

*Fredericksburg Inn & Suites – Fredericksburg, TX*  
**See page 8 for details on this special event.**

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CONGRATULATIONS to *Janice Kvale!*  
Randomly selected from among this issue's True Words and Circles authors, she is the winner of a free 1-year extension to her SCN membership. Submit your work and you might win, too!