



STORY CIRCLE JOURNAL

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The newsletter for women with stories to tell

2018 National Conference: July 20-22

by Joyce Boatright

After the coldest winter in many people's memories, we are looking forward to a summer conference under the warm Texas sun in Austin. Scheduled for July 20-22, 2018, this will be the ninth national women's writing conference sponsored by Story Circle Network. **"Widening the Circle, Opening Our Hearts"** is the theme, focused on supporting women from all walks of life to give voice to their stories.

Opening the conference on Friday night, July 20, will be memoirist, author, therapist, and teacher **Linda Joy Myers**. The founder and president of the National Association of Memoir Writers, Linda Joy is an award-winning author in memoir, fiction, poetry, and nonfiction. Her keynote address, "What is Your True Name? Break the Silence, Write Your Story," promises to set the tone for a richly engaging conference.

The conference is expected to attract women at every skill level, from shy beginners to seasoned authors seeking to improve their skills. For the latter, a **pre-conference workshop** on Friday, "How to Turn Your Book into a Schmoozing Delivery Device," presented by author / publisher **Debra L. Winegarten**, will help published and soon-to-be published authors increase their marketing skills. Even authors who are being published by the larger book companies are finding they have to promote their books rather than depend on the publisher to do so.

Debra is a proven expert in this area and promises to bring strategies that will generate results in increasing your market share of sales.

If this is your first conference, don't worry that you will be lost in the crowd. Story Circle Network is an organization built on welcoming women and helping them to write the stories of their lives. Conference staff and SCN members are known for our friendly demeanor. We'll invite you to join us for coffee or dinner. We'll offer advice about which workshop you might enjoy. We'll ask you how we can make you feel at home. We might even ask and encourage you to get more involved, but we promise we'll only ask; we won't be pushy.

Breakout sessions are planned throughout the weekend. Categories for all levels of writers—beginner to advanced—include creating a writing practice, journaling, blogging, memoir writing, poetry, the business side of writing, and personal and book promotion techniques, to name a few. The conference, originally focused only on memoir, has expanded to include fiction, nonfiction, and other creative art forms related to storytelling. Through writing, reading, listening, and sharing, we'll discover how personal narrative is a healing art, and we'll learn how to gather the threads of our memories, so that we can weave our stories in ways that engage others.

Sunday's luncheon keynote speaker will be **Lorraine "Bird"**

Mejia. Learn more about her in the interview on page 4. Also at the luncheon, attending first place winners of the SCN Sarton Award will read passages from their award-winning books.

If you haven't registered yet, go to www.storycircle.org/Conference/ and register now. The conference hotel is the Wyndham Garden Austin. To get the conference rate (\$119/night plus tax, double occupancy), call the hotel directly (512-448-2444; **please be sure to say that you are with Story Circle Network!**) and make your reservations **no later than June 19, 2018**. Room rate includes complimentary airport shuttle service, parking, and high speed wireless internet.

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Letter From SCN's President



Dear SCN Sisters—

It's a bleak February morning here in the Texas Hill Country, but there are enough Story Circle activities in the works to brighten anyone's day!

The conference is still several months away, but the planning group is already hard at work. We're looking forward to Linda Joy Myers' Friday night keynote and Lorraine Mejia's Sunday keynote. Both are inspiring, inspiring speakers with important stories to tell. I know you'll want to hear them—and learn from them. You'll also want to meet our 2016 and 2017 Sarton winners, who will be offering workshops, participating in panel discussions, and reading from their work. We're offering our very popular coaching session on Friday morning, and pre-conference workshops on Friday afternoon. You will find plenty of networking opportunities, important takeaways from every workshop, and a wonderful gathering of awesome women. Come prepared for an energizing experience that will kickstart

your writing and keep you going all year!

But it isn't just the conference that's keeping us busy. The 2017 Sarton shortlist was announced recently, and our second round judges are doing their important work. We'll be learning about our winners in just a few weeks.

Meanwhile, SCN has just published its own new book—*Inside and Out*, a collection of work featured in our annual anthologies. You can read an interview with Sherry Wachter, the cover designer for the book, on pp. 8-9 in this issue. More publications are on the horizon: we are exploring the possibility of publishing our 2018 anthology, *Real Women Write*, as a book. Look for details in the next few months.

You'll enjoy meeting other SCN members in this *Journal*. Sandra Shackelford (pp. 13-14) tells us about her writing and publishing experiences, and Teresa Cutler-Broyles offers some important writing tips. And don't miss the intrepid writers who contribute to "True Words." These are the women who keep Story Circle moving and growing, as one of the few women's writing organizations in the country.

And speaking of moving, we have a joyful announcement to make! Peggy Fountain, who has been with SCN since its inception in 1997, recently married René Grootveld in a small ceremony in Estes Park, CO. Peggy will be making her home with René in Portugal, but thanks to the magic of the Internet, she will also be able to continue her work with SCN. I know that you join me in wishing Peggy and René every happiness as they begin this new adventure.

With joy for your journey,
Susan

Susan Wittig Albert
SCN President, 2018

You Are Awesome!

During the last calendar quarter, the 14 members of our SCN board of directors donated 470 hours to Story Circle projects. Their gifts of time, energy, and experience are priceless. But Independent Sector (which publishes research important to nonprofit organizations) estimates that the current value of volunteer time is \$24.14 per hour. **Thanks to our board for donating the equivalent of \$11,401.30 in the past three months!**

If you would like to join this awesomely energetic group of women, go here for details: <http://www.storycircle.org/board.shtml>



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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2017 Sarton Women's Book Award Shortlist

We're proud to announce the 2017 Shortlist for SCN's prestigious Sarton Women's Book Awards™. These annual awards are named for May Sarton, who is remembered for her outstanding contributions to women's literature as a memoirist, novelist, and poet. Each of these books is a strong contender to honor Sarton's legacy.

Books are listed (alphabetically) in five categories: Memoir, Nonfiction, Contemporary Fiction, Historical Fiction, and Young Adult Fiction. Five winners will be determined in a second round of judging and announced in April 2018.

Memoir

- *You Can't Buy Love Like That*, by Carol E. Anderson
- *Playing With Dynamite: A Memoir*, by Sharon Harrigan
- *Gathering From the Grassland*, by Linda M. Hasselstrom
- *Nowhere Else I Want to Be: A Memoir*, by Carol D. Marsh
- *I Know It In My Heart: Walking Through Grief With a Child*, by Mary E. Plouffe

Nonfiction

- *Lincoln's Generals' Wives: Four Women Who Influenced the Civil War*, by Candice Hooper
- *Love, Bill: Finding My Father Through Letters From World War II*, by Jan Krulick-Belin

Contemporary Fiction

- *This Is How It Begins: A Novel*, by Joan Dempsey
- *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, by Carole Giangrande
- *A Quiet Fear*, by Thia Keen
- *Venetian Blood: Murder in a Sensuous City*, by Christine Evelyn Volker

Historical Fiction

- *Dark Lady: A Novel of Emilia Bassano Lanyer*, by Charlene Ball
- *Eden: A Novel*, by Jeanne McWilliams Blasberg
- *Amah and the Silk-Winged Pigeons*, by Jocelyn Cullity
- *When It's Over*, by Barbara Ridley

Young Adult Fiction

- *The Tower*, by Lynn Yvonne Moon
- *Defiance on Indian Creek*, by Phyllis A. Still

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.



Mejia to Speak at Conference Close

by Joyce Boatright

Lorraine “Bird” Mejia will be speaking at the closing luncheon of our ninth Stories from the Heart conference, on Sunday, July 22. Her topic, for which she is uniquely qualified, will be “Our Heroine’s Journey—Using Our Diverse Voices to Empower the World.”

In Mejia’s words: “I am the daughter of an ‘illegal alien.’ My mother came to this country from Mexico with my *abuelitos* when she was only eleven years old. They were greeted with signs at the movie theater that said, “No Mexicans. No dogs.” I believe that whatever happened to my mother during her early years here left deep scars in her. She has never told us her true story. I believe she never will. Her voice was silenced. I grew up in Minnesota being ashamed of being Mexican. I was born in 1969, and back then Minnesota was mostly Scandinavian and German. All my early years I was asked, ‘What are you?’

“During my early twenties, it was African American and Native women who helped me embrace my ethnicity and dance in joy at who I am. In graduate school, while pursuing my MFA in Creative Writing, it was women poets of color who most spoke to me. Their stories were my stories. They lit up a fire within me that still roars.

“It is this fire, this pride in who I am, that drives me to empower other women. I believe it is part of my life purpose. Without the diverse voices in my life, I would have been silenced—like my mother. Without the diverse voices that live in my soul, I would not have accessed the light within myself. I would be unable to be a lighthouse to other women.”

An award-winning poet, Bird is the author of the poetry collection *Wild Woman at My Door*. Her poems have appeared in anthologies such as *Between the Heart and the Land/Entre el corazón y la tierra: Latina Poets of the Midwest* and in nationally-acclaimed literary journals like *Calyx*, *Willow Springs*, and *Inkwell*. She is currently working on her collection *Mexican in America*.

Recently she answered three questions regarding her identity and her hunger to teach others to write their stories:

Q: Where does the nickname Bird come from? (There must be a story here.)

An old friend used to call me Bird. In the early 90s I was really impacted by Seal’s song “Crazy” and the words, “In a world full of people only some want to fly. Isn’t that crazy?” I knew I wanted to be one of those people who flies. It took me 25 years to learn how, but what I learned in my life journey, and in the process of divorcing from a 24-year marriage, taught me to fly. It was a hard and painful journey. Yet, it made me strong. I now finally have my wings—and I’m soaring. The name Bird feels more like me than my actual name, so in 2017, I adopted it as my official nickname. I like how the name Bird Mejia sounds. I like how it feels.

Q: What drives you to help other women tell their stories? Why does it matter that women tell/share their stories?

The Spanish translation of the ancient Aztec word for poetry is *floricanto*, which means *flower* and *song*. Poetry is song. Every woman has her own song, her own story. I believe that art is for everyone. Everyone can write. Everyone can dance. Everyone can do art. The purpose of art is the pleasure it brings. I believe stories are healing. They heal us, and they heal others. I have seen women literally transform themselves through the telling of their stories—sometimes wonderful stories, sometimes awful stories.

Q: So many of your students sing your praises. What do you think makes you such an inspiring teacher/story-coach?

Ah, I have thought about this. I think it’s because I am really a mentor. I want to empower women to become the best versions of themselves. I want them to feel amazing—both about themselves and about their writing. So I do this. I empower them. I believe I help them see the power within themselves, through their writing. Just one empowered woman creates a ripple in the world. If I can be a part of impacting any of this, I am pleased.

Call for Conference Exhibitors

We have a limited number of tables available for exhibitors in a reserved "shopping area" for Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, July 20-22. **Application deadline is June 30, 2018.** Postmarks will be considered when assigning table location to accepted artists, so apply early!

Marketplace hours:

- Friday 9am-4pm and 5:30pm-7:30pm
- Saturday 8:30am-12pm and 2pm-6pm
- Sunday 8:30am-12pm

Fees: \$40 full (6' x 30") table / \$20 half (3' x 30") table

Acceptable exhibitor items include:

- Books authored (in whole or part) or published by exhibitor
- Artist-made paper, books, and cards
- Handcrafted items, such as jewelry, pottery, quilts, scarves, clothing, etc.
- Photographs and art works
- Music CDs produced or published by exhibitor

We review applications for acceptance as they are received. Space is limited, so you should apply early. When all spaces are filled, we will close the application process, but keep a waiting list in case of cancellations. Applications are complete only when payment has been received.

We will notify successful applicants as each application is approved. You may pay online or by check. Payment information can be found on the next page, after you submit the form. *(If you pay by check, we will hold your check until the exhibitor selection committee has reviewed your application. If it is not approved, we will return your check or refund your online payment.)*

A sheet of exhibitor guidelines, including a reminder of set-up times, exhibitor contact, tax information for out of state exhibitors, map, etc., will be sent to each accepted applicant.

For an application form, go to <http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/callforvendors.php>

Seeking Hot Flashes (contest entries)

HOT FLASH is a contest that explores our 2018 national conference theme: **Widening the Circle, Opening our Hearts**. Entries can be mostly/partly true or complete fiction, involving a woman (or a group of women) opening (or, heaven forbid, closing) her heart to influence some conflict in her life, her community, or possibly the wider world.

The contest is open to all Story Circle Network members in good standing, and all conference attendees, who will receive a link to use for entering with their conference confirmation.

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

Here is an opportunity to explore this newly popular short writing form, and to share your work with a group of

women committed to supporting and learning from each other.

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

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

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

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





From the Blogs:

One Woman's Day

by Linda Hoye



The stories we share on One Woman's Day are as unique as we are. It's an honour to provide this venue to share stories about those ordinary days that are, in reality, anything but, and the extraordinary adventures we go on that touch us and teach us. Recently,

Martha Slavin wrote about a new-to-her adventure called *Forest Bathing*. Find out how you can contribute to our One Woman's Day blog, at: <http://onewomansday.wordpress.com/about/>

Though I love trees, I was somewhat skeptical when at a writers' retreat recently, we were invited to go forest bathing. I'd first heard of the expression from one of our nieces, who lives in a large city and wanted to go tree bathing to reconnect with the natural world. Forest bathing or *Shinrin-yoku* became a Japanese practice in the 1980s, when Japan included the practice in a public health program. We all know how soothing being in nature can be, but somehow in our busy, concrete-laden world, we sometimes forget to walk on the grass and take a deep breath.

I'm intrigued by the idea that trees talk to each other. I am not someone who has sought mystical or spiritual relationship with trees, but I am thrilled by the science behind how trees communicate with each other. Research by Suzanne Simard at Yale shows that trees interact with fungi in the ground, and network with other trees in the neighborhood, by exchanging nutrients and information about the family of trees around them. There are even trees called Mother trees, the oldest tree of a species with the knowledge of the community of trees within its area.

I didn't expect much as we group of writers stood together at the top of a hill ready to forest bathe and to write about it. We stepped on the well-worn path leading

into a small wooded area. I find it hard to be mindful when I am not alone and conscious of others around me; but eventually I settled down and noticed the forest. I saw a tunnel formed by trees' branches bent low over the path to create a shelter. My eyes caught minute strands of spider webs connecting one tree to another. I only saw them because a slight breeze brought them to my attention as they floated in the air. I followed the fine lines from one tree to the next. Tiny spiders scurried along the lines to wrap up even smaller insects trapped in the webs. Birds, disturbed by our presence, chirped and flew from one perch to another. They wrested pine nuts from the cones attached to the branches and trunks of Bishop pines along the path. Flies or native bees swirled around me as I walked near them. Agitated, they darted from one tree to the next, and buzzed around my head.

When I returned to the path's beginning, the ground spongy beneath my shoes, I spotted a circle of young pines and sat inside the circle with my back against one pine. I pulled out my journal and wrote the word "Connections" while a breeze moved through the tops of the trees. I felt the tree shudder from the top all the way down to the roots of the tree, the vibrations thrumming through my back. I have never felt a tree move this way. I have never been so close to the heart of a tree.

Martha Slavin is an artist and writer. Her blog, *Postcards in the Air*, can be found each Friday at www.marthaslavin.blogspot.com She also writes poetry, memoir pieces, and essays. She creates handmade books, works in mixed media, watercolor, and letterpress. She lives with her husband and two cats in California.

WANTED: Conference Exhibitors

Have something of interest to sell to writers? We welcome exhibitors (including small publishers) who would like to sell books that they have written or published, paper products, print-related services, writing-related items, and hand-crafted items of interest to women. Fees for exhibitor tables are \$40 for full table (6' x 30") / \$20 half (3' x 30") table. See **guidelines and link to application on page 5.**

Sharing the Stories of *Inside and Out*

by Susan F. Schoch

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

Last December, with much excitement, SCN published a new book, *Inside and Out: Women's Truths, Women's Stories*. Every story in it seems to have that mystical thread that Connie Spittler mentions in her closing essay, "Women's Wisdom: The Paper Trail." There is some special quality that ties every essay in the book to our shared experience of being a woman in this world. Here's some project background from my Editor's Note:

"...giving voice to real women's lives is the fundamental mission at Story Circle Network.... Each edition of the SCN annual Anthology encourages our members to find their authentic stories and tell them in their own voices, producing an important record of women's remembered experiences. Since the first volume in 2002, SCN has created fifteen Anthologies, publishing a total of about 650 pieces.... This is a rich trove of women's writing, and called out for us to create a book from the bounty. To simplify the selection process, and clarify the result, this book is focused on lifewriting,

drawn from the eight most recent issues of the Anthology, 2009–2016. It was, nonetheless, a challenge to reduce the profusion to a manageable volume. The 76 pieces included here are works that stand out."

And they are works that deserve more readers. *Inside and Out* is filled with writing that is vibrant with telling, resonant with candor, reflecting "the two vivid realities of women's lives—our inner and most sacred private world, and the outside world of all that teaches and needs us." Lifewriting brings memory and voice together with a mysterious energy. You can feel that energy in this collection by the writing women of SCN. Let's amplify it!

I hope you will spread the word to family and friends, give us a review on Amazon, post the link to social media, or give copies as gifts, and help us to grow the readership for this beautiful book. If you haven't yet seen *Inside and Out*, don't wait.

Here's the website:

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



Pat Bean



Debra Dolan



Karen Buley



Penelope Starr



Deborah Bowers

Publication Joy!

Debra Dolan, author of the essay "An Imagined Phone Conversation," sent us this happy photograph. "My 10 copies arrived to Vancouver yesterday; what a beautiful book! I am so proud to be included with such fine writing. ... I so appreciate that SCN has given me the confidence / motivation to write."

Contributors Pat Bean, Deborah Bowers, Karen Buley, and Penelope Starr appear equally pleased to be a part of SCN's latest book, *Inside and Out: Women's Truths, Women's Stories*.

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





Story Circle Q&A: Sherry Wachter

You designed a beautiful cover for SCN’s anthology collection, *Inside and Out*. Please tell us about the process you used to create and develop it.

First, I had some detailed conversations with the SCN editorial team about what they had in mind.

I gathered elements that seemed to work together, built a collage out of them in Photoshop, then pushed the elements around, basically destroyed the image via a long and convoluted process, and then used the manual blend tool to “paint” the door, wall, and flowers. I sent it for feedback, used the same process to implement the editor’s revisions, then imported the PhotoShop file into InDesign to create the cover and do the typesetting.

How long have you been designing covers?

A little over fifteen years now. Counting my own book covers and those I’ve done for private authors and publishers I would guess somewhere between 50 and 100; I’ve lost track.

What do you like best about this process?

I love the mix of art and technology. I get to dig around in all sorts of resources, and then use them to create beautiful things that help sell books.

The book’s cover is the first thing readers encounter and is often the reason for their first interest in the book. When you’re working with an author on cover design, what’s the process like?

It’s very much a collaborative process. I talk to my authors. When I can, I like to get a sampling of the book itself, as well as a feel for the projected audience; it helps me in determining the tone the cover should take, what fonts I might use, how dark or light the ambience should be, and so forth. Ultimately, the process is a long conversation interspersed with emails asking, “What do you think? Where do we need to go from here?”

In addition to being a talented cover artist, you also do interior book design and layout. What’s most interesting to you about that work?

I think what I love most about designing books is that each book is a unique challenge. My job never gets old. I particularly love designing books for specialized audiences—there’s a challenge there that I find exciting. Designing books for older readers is very different from designing books for younger readers, and designing books for people with long attention spans is very different from designing for people who, for various reasons, are stressed, and need information to be brief and appealing.

What do authors need to know about working with a designer/layout person?

You don’t have to format your text file beyond chapter divisions, end-of-paragraph hard returns, and in-text italics. Just send a standard MLA- or APA-formatted manuscript—whichever your designer prefers.

Know that even if you’re convinced that your book’s done, it probably isn’t. When you see your first typeset proof, all sorts of things will jump out at you. Be grateful—it’s better to catch them at this point, rather than after the book comes off the press. Plan on at least three rounds of proofs. I build that into my estimates because I have never, ever, had a book that required less.

The new technologies have changed the publishing landscape dramatically over the past few years. How do you (as a publishing professional) manage to stay on top of this?

I ask questions. Most of the books I work on end up being printed by one of three or four printers I’ve dealt with for years (or decades). I try out new printing options with my own books, so I know what they offer clients. Unless a client specifically asks to work with an untried printer, I experiment with my own stuff.

What advice do you have for authors in this new environment?

Know your audience. I always advise my clients to consider who will purchase their book. Today’s diversity in printing and distribution options allows us to tailor a plan to really fit the book, the audience, and the budget.

Get estimates from several vendors. You’re looking for people and companies who are best for you, at rates that fit your budget—and that budget should be defined by how wide your potential audience is.

Know that you’ll need a team to do your book right—and that your team needs to have one captain. At a bare minimum, you’ll need a designer, an editor, a proofreader, and a printer. You need not be your own “team captain”—this might fall more naturally to your designer or your editor—but there really needs to be one person who, with input from you, manages all the production stuff, freeing you up to do the writing and editing you’ll need to do to finish your book.

What can you say to writers who plan to publish an ebook?

Designing for ebooks is completely different from designing for printed books. Because so many of my books include visual elements, I typically contact CreateSpace and pay them the \$80 or so that they charge to convert “picture

books." For me, it's absolutely worth it. I keep reading up on this, and I've got a book in the works to test my knowledge, but at this point I still use CreateSpace's conversion services for client books because they achieve a clean, reliable product most of the time. Just in case, I always double-check my ebook files before posting them.

As an author, you write under two names: Sherry Wachter (as we know you in SCN) and Bodie Parkhurst. What's behind this decision?

I use two names because sometimes I publish stories that my family and friends might find embarrassing. The pen name offers plausible deniability to those who might find exposure painful.

How do you manage this dual publishing personality? What's involved in creating and using a pseudonym? What's good about it? What's not so good?

I don't really manage it well at all. I suspect to do it right I should register my pen name and get a DBA license. In my case, I just started putting it on my books, and then registering the copyright under my real name. My pen name's pretty much just a fig leaf. The good thing about it is that it offers plausible deniability to my Nearest and Dearest. The bad thing is that sometimes I'd like to swank a little. That's hard to do if nobody knows about half of what I've written.

Of all your books (under both names) what's your favorite? Why? What did you learn from it?

My very favorite is probably my first children's book, *Building Something Better*. I love the story—it's about a woman and her car. When Betsy (the car) breaks down, Harriet decides that rather than just repairing Betsy, she'll make her into something much, much better. Harriet makes a trip to the junkyard and turns Betsy into something amazing. I also love the illustrations, which accidentally create a lovely metaphor for how creative problem solving changes us. I love it most of all because every once in a while I get an email from somebody whose life has broken down, so to speak. They've stumbled across Harriet and Betsy on my blog, and found comfort and hope in their story.

Of all your books, which was the most difficult to write/publish? Why? What did it teach you?

Good On Paper. The book was hard to write because in some ways it's very dark, but in others it's really quite beautiful. Writing it has been a challenge, because more than any of my other books, this one draws from my own experiences. Getting the feel of those things right was both rewarding and challenging. Also, one of the

book's major plot lines deals with a touchy subject—child and spousal abuse. Dealing with those things honestly without tipping the scale into melodrama was something I'm still not certain I have right. The book also has multiple narrators, one of whom is unreliable in some pretty creepy ways. I'm planning to do some major rewriting on this book. I love it, but it's definitely high-maintenance.

You teach writing to college students. What are your aims in working with young writers? What's most rewarding about it?

My major aim is teaching them to think, to inform their thinking through exploring and integrating responsible sources, and to communicate their thoughts in clear, credible terms. I talk a lot about language, and given our current political climate, the importance of evaluating sources and using them ethically. I teach using writing "sequences," rather than stand-alone assignments. This offers us the opportunity to explore some facet of life or experience in depth.

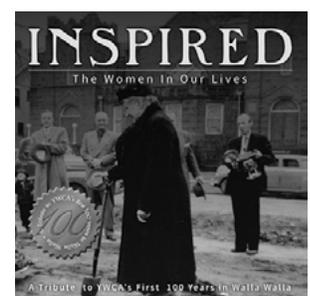
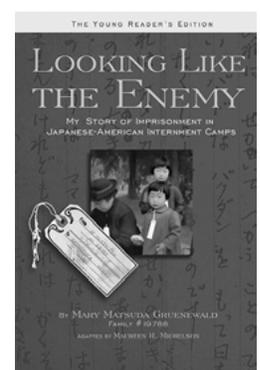
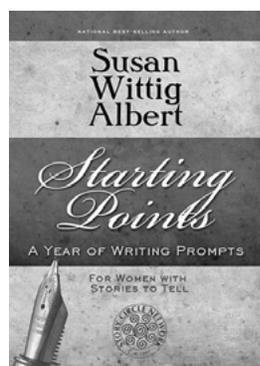
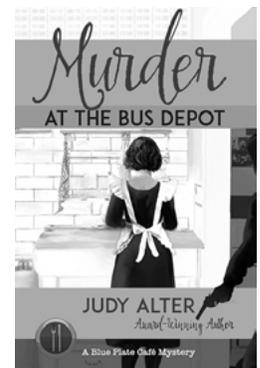
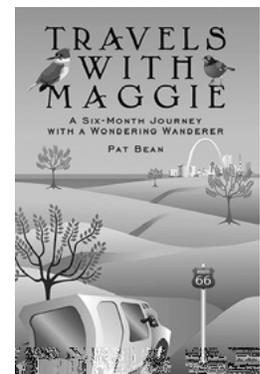
Writing can be lonely. At Story Circle, you belong to our WorkInProgress writers' online roundtable and contribute to it frequently. What other collaborative writing/publishing groups do you belong to? How/why are they important to you?

My writing "group" is more of a motley crew—my sister Sandy, my son Patrick, my friend Maureen, and my friend Shannon. I used to love to send my stuff to my friend Jan for her thoughts, but we've been hip-deep in publishing a book for the local YMCA this year, so I've restrained myself. When I'm writing, my group is there for me, but when I wear other hats, they breathe a sigh of relief and go on with their lives.

Looking ahead, how do you see yourself developing as a writer, an author (the two aren't always synonymous), a book designer/cover artist, and publisher? Which of these varied selves are most important to you? Why?

How do I see myself developing as a writer, an author, a book designer, and a publisher? I want to polish and hone my craft. I want to gain greater command over my writing and my art. I suspect I'll never be completely satisfied, but I want it to be better. I'd also like to become more marketable, which isn't always better, but sometimes is. I want to write, design, and illustrate beautiful, readable books beloved by millions. Or at least thousands.

Which is most important? I couldn't possibly say. For me, the areas are completely intertwined. When I write, I see pictures; when I see pictures, I write; when I design, I see how they work together; and when I publish, I share them with others. For me, it's a very organic process.





Forge Ahead

by Teresa Cutler-Broyles

Imagine you're beginning a new novel, short story, essay, or even a poem. You have an idea—a glimmer or perhaps a fully fleshed-out plot with stimulating characters, or something in between—so you open your notebook or sit down at your laptop with excitement, pick up pen or keyboard, and start to write.

The words flow. You soon have two or three, or more, pages. You take a quick break, thinking you'll be done in no time at this rate. With coffee—or wine—in hand, you sit back down and read what you've written.

An hour later you realize you've rewritten everything, and now you actually don't like it much. So you rewrite again ... and like it even less. Finally, the sun sets and you toss the notebook or close the laptop in disgust. You've got one page of more-or-less okay stuff, and you hope tomorrow will reawaken the joy you felt when you first sat down. You approach the task of writing the next day with trepidation, worried you won't ever finish (before you even really get started); you start hearing the voices tell you that 'real' writers don't work like this. You take a deep breath and open the story. You read it from the beginning ...

If this seems even slightly familiar, you're not alone. And the issue is not about you, your writing habits or abilities, your future goals, or whether or not you're a real writer. First, you are. Writing anything at all with intent makes you a real writer.

Secondly, many writers suffer to some degree or another from the mistake you made in the scenario above: just after you took your break, you reread what you'd written. Yes, it's hard to ignore the urge to go back, read what you've written, make sure it's perfect, or at least as good as you hoped. But there are practical reasons for resisting that urge. The most important is that if you worry too much about everything being perfect on the first go-around, you'll probably never finish. No story or poem will be perfect in its first draft form, so expecting that from the start is dooming the process.

Related to that is the fact that things inevitably change as you write. Whether you're an outline person or a seat-of-the-pants person, you'll discover that a character actually doesn't like his parents, or that the companion

Writing Tips from Our Teachers

As the coordinator of SCN's Online Classes Program, I am pleased to offer words of wisdom from our multi-talented online writing instructors. In each issue, we feature one of our illustrious instructors. This not only provides you with insight into the writing process, but also allows you to get to know our wonderful faculty, one woman at a time.

— Len Leatherwood

another character had gets killed. Maybe you'll realize on page 140 that your main character hates his job, or that he's in love with his best friend. Or, less dramatically, you'll realize the story actually takes place ten years earlier than you thought it did so you need to change the description of their clothes. In any of those cases, it's quite likely that much of what you might have agonized over and rewrote when you started will need to be changed again anyway, once you reach the end.

A truth about writing: stories have minds of their own. If you're one of those writers who doesn't believe that ... well, just wait. ☺ But even if you never have a story change on its own, you likely will make changes yourself on page 10 or 20 or 100 as you realize that something isn't working; again, this makes going back to change scenes or details inevitable anyway, so the rewrites at the beginning will have been wasted time.

Of course, you will have moments of revelation as you write when you realize changes are necessary. In those cases, make a note in red, put a star by it, or if on a computer use something that would never otherwise show up in the story, such as (??) so you can do a global search later, and change things in the second pass. Because once you finish your story, an edit / rewrite is inevitable anyway.

So ultimately, if I could tell writers one thing to do in order to successfully write a finished piece, I would say 'forge ahead.' Don't stop to rewrite—not the beginning, not the middle, not even the end. Trust the story. It will emerge a finished piece, and *then* you go back and fix it. Trust the process. Trust yourself.

Teresa Cutler-Broyles divides her time between Italy and Albuquerque, New Mexico. She is a visiting professor of creative nonfiction at the Umbra Institute in Perugia, Italy, teaches film and culture classes at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and is an instructor for a number of online universities. Her classes for Story Circle run the gamut from travel essays to hero's journey to the love of everyday things. Her book of travel essays – *A Dream That Keeps Returning*, her YA novel – *One Eyed Jack*, her historical novel – *Dante's Garden* set in 1570 Italy, as well as nonfiction chapters in books about dance, *Star Trek*, monsters, and Afghan children in film, are all available on Amazon. A new crime thriller series is coming soon—book one available by Feb 15—and her Elizabethan historical fiction will be available December 2018. Learn more at www.tlc-writingcoach.com or www.amazon.com/author/teresacutler-broyles

A Memoir Challenge

Collected by Judy Alter

The Gotham Writers Workshop issues an annual short memoir challenge, which was taken up (with a 16-17 word limit) by some members of our WorkInProgress roundtable. We thought you would enjoy the creativity and variety of these responses. You might even try this exercise yourself!

- Daughter, mother. Student, teacher, scholar: driven, driving. Stop. Yield. Writer, dreamer, in love with women's words. *Susan Wittig Albert*
- Little girl lost until midlife earthquake thrusts her underground to discover her truths and emerge transformed. *Mary Jo Doig*
- Married, finally, at 62, Lynn reinvented her stagnant self and became a productive, prolific, joyous writer/coach. *B. Lynn Goodwin*
- My journey from self-righteous hawk to seeking dove: learning how to learn and love after brainwashing. *Teresa Lynn*
- Spreading wings, fledging from security to the unknown in pursuit of life dreams, I reached them. *Teresa Lynn*
- Immersed in shame; wisdom and courage cultivated; secrets exposed in memoir; readers amazed and empathetic; freedom. *Linda Marshall*
- Secret police file misinterprets naïve American's escapades when, suspected of espionage, she teaches in East Germany. *Susan Morrison*
- I was unhappy, but out in my woods, singing in the trees, were joyful spring robins. *Marilea Rabasa*
- Wounded early and often, my Way went victim to warrior to Woman with skills: renaissance Jill. *Susan Schoch*
- Writing corporate videos catapulted me into the magic land of essay, fiction, poetry. A blessed, exhilarating ride. *Connie Spittler*
- I write through arthritis and family blindness, heart attack, cancer, lung surgeries. Essays and novels unfold. Healing. *Connie Spittler*
- Born to run, hike, laugh; fell hard for love, walked years hand-in-hand; walking solo now. *Susan J. Tweit*
- Depression parents, alcoholic dad, enabling mom; gave me their best; I married for love, divorced to survive, happy now. *Jude Walsh Whelley*

SCN Makes a Difference for Writers

Are you making use of this great member benefit?

February 2, 2018

To: Pat LaPointe

Subject: Weekend Writers' Toolkit

Just wanted to tell you how much I need and use the Writer's Toolkit. My writing group has dissolved and I live much too far out to join another. These newsletters have helped keep me focused and given me ideas for topics that relate to my purpose. Keep them coming.

Connie Katusak



Fun in the Future: a Story Circle Class in Italy!
Facilitated by Teresa Cutler-Broyles.
Details coming soon...

Uncertainty is Topic for 2018 LifeWriting Competition

“Creativity can be described as letting go of certainties.”

— Gail Sheehy

“If life were predictable it would cease to be life, and be without flavor.”

— Eleanor Roosevelt

“The mind loves to not know completely. Situations that are not familiar tune the system. To get smarter, do the unfamiliar.”

— Magaly Rodriguez Mossman

You are invited to enter SCN’s nineteenth annual lifewriting contest, for a chance to win a cash prize and be published in print and online. Named in honor of our founder and best-selling author, Susan Wittig Albert, the contest is open to all dues-paying SCN members. The only exceptions are LifeWriting Competition winners of the past three years: 2015, 2016, 2017.

The competition is **open for submissions May 1 – June 30, 2018.**

Topic: Uncertainty

How many times in your life have you been uncertain—*really* uncertain? What kinds of uncertainties did you experience? Financial? Professional? Romantic? Physical (as in health or illness)?

We invite you to think about one of these periods of uncertainty that stands out in your memory. Tell us about the kinds of innovative thinking and creativity that emerged in your life as a direct result of letting go of the certainties you cherished and that cushioned you and made

you feel secure. What did you learn from this period of uncertainty? How did you grow?

Awards: One prize of \$100, one prize of \$75, and two prizes of \$50 each. Winning stories will be published in a special section of the September *Story Circle Journal* and will be featured on SCN’s award-winning website. Upon the judges’ recommendations, other entries may be published in later issues of the *Journal* and in other SCN print and online publications.

Criteria and Judging: The judges look for entries that are fresh and original, tell a compelling story in a clear and authentic voice, are responsive to the topic, and have been polished *and* proofread for presentation in the competition. The most successful submissions are rich in evocative detail and avoid generalizations and abstractions. Entries will not be returned; evaluations will not be available. The judging team will be made up of Story Circle Facilitators and published authors.

For complete rules and an online submission link, go to: <http://www.storycircle.org/Contests>



In Memoriam: Mary Jane Marks

August 14, 1929 – December 22, 2017

On December 22, 2017, Mary Jane Marks, 88, said goodbye to this world. A long-time SCN member (1998-2014), Mary Jane was the guiding spirit in our Older Women’s Legacy program, organizing workshops, training facilitators, and helping with the development of our OWL manual.

Jeanne Guy (SCN Vice President) offers a personal memory. “I met Mary Jane in 1999 when I worked as an associate at Seton Cove, a spirituality center. She had retired by then, after having taught at the Texas School for the Deaf for 32 years. 32 years! We became friends when she took the Artist’s Way 14-week workshop I facilitated. What a hoot she was — she loved learning and kept that sparkle in her eye and that smile on her face until the day she died. A generous and kind woman, she always walked her talk.”

This quotation was included in the program at her memorial service: “I’m sure of one thing... It hurts to let go of anything beautiful. But something will come to take its place, something different, of course, but better. The future’s always better than we can possibly think it will be... We ought to live confidently. Because whatever’s ahead, it’s going to be better than we’ve had.” — *Diverging Roads*, by Rose Wilder Lane



SCN's writing and reading circles have always been the vibrant heartbeat of our dynamic organization. Circle Voices is a showcase for our circle members' writing. For this issue, we are pleased to introduce you to an energetic facilitator of two on-site writing circles in Wisconsin, and to feature work by two of the circle members.

— Mary Jo Doig, Circles Chair



Meet Sandra Shackelford

A Dedicated SCN Facilitator in Green Bay, WI

Sandra tells her story ...

I was shaped by intelligent, well-traveled, creative, and imperfect parents, who were dedicated to helping my four brothers and me to lead successful, fulfilling lives. Yet, in every life, history marks us, sometimes indelibly. Despite the Depression Era mark on my family as with so many others, my parents' courage contributed to the woman I am today. As did a life-changing journey I took at age sixteen.

I was a high school junior in 1957, when one of the nuns at my school encouraged me to go south to Greenwood, Mississippi. There I spent a sweltering summer living and working alongside a biracial group of women, breaking all the racist, Jim Crow laws at the time. By summer's end, I went home knowing exactly what I wanted to do with the rest of my life.

I returned to Greenwood and spent the next 11 years laboring in the fields poisoned by racial injustice, and doing what little I could to change that soul-and-hope-killing system. I started a weekly newspaper in the black community, which was firebombed by the Ku Klux Klan. I also began a kindergarten based on the Maria Montessori teaching method, worked with the city's youth, and assisted our nurse-midwife to deliver babies in the homes of disenfranchised residents.

Over those years, I learned by everyday example what Courage was in the face of violence and injustice, and was astonished by the many acts of bravery to confront those social ills. That experience shaped my heart and defined me, a woman more committed than ever to helping those trying to find meaning and value in their lives and a means by which to heal themselves.

Finding Story Circle Network ...

In 2006, I attended SCN's Stories from the Heart Conference in Austin. The moment I walked into the Wyndham's Butch Cassidy Room, I knew I'd found "family." So many women milled about, smiling and greeting each other warmly. This sorority of like-minded

sisters had stories to share. I hadn't begun to write mine yet, that story I'd kept pent up for years, but I, too, was anxious not just to record my story but, upon my return to Green Bay, to assist others in writing their stories.

Our first Women's Writing Circle gathered at a facility attached to a central-city grade school. We've evolved and today I facilitate two Circles, with many multi-year members. One group meets Monday afternoons at a local bookstore and another meets Thursday evenings at my home.

My workshops generally have eight members who meet weekly for six weeks, for 1½ - 2 hours. Sessions open with introductions, then prior to sharing her story, each writer describes any problems or situations that surrounded the writing of her story. Following her reading, participants positively comment and discuss the writing process. If there is time, I present information gleaned from my own obsessive need to learn more about the creative process, covering topics such as opening a story with a "hook," writing middles or backstory, and effective endings. We also explore beneath the story's surface, reflection, research, and more.

The gifts of facilitating women life-writers ...

Each week I am moved and humbled by the courage, commitment, and downright talent of the Women's Writing Circle's members. With each written piece, there is evidence of growth and development. Several members are writing or have written fiction and nonfiction books, while one member is an established poet.

I grow as a human being through the many expressions of kindness, respect, and kinship that develop among Circle participants. Their commitment to this finest of art forms has given me the permission and the courage I, too, need to reach for a deeper truth in my own work and life.

For me, two challenges of facilitating a Writing Circle are: 1) finding time to fit my writing into my full schedule, and 2) working positively and non-judgmentally with a variety of individuals with unique personalities, experiences, and points-of-view. I have learned that this requires openness and an accepting, ethical heart, and sometimes, as in the act of writing itself, establishing creative distance.

Publishing the group anthology ...

Our 2015 Women's Writing Circle's anthology, *Word for Word*, was a group effort that every Circle member pitched into, especially Lindsay Barber Christensen, who put the book into amazing form. The quality of the individuals' writing was so authentic, so real, so—well—good, we simply had to share their work with a larger, appreciative audience. And so, with generous help from community friends, our anthology became both possible and successful.

An unforgettable teaching moment ...

My 11 years in Mississippi working for human and civil rights, and witnessing so much injustice and violence, had torn open my heart and left me with something I didn't realize: post-traumatic stress. The acts of writing and art became the healing salves that helped me climb out of that pit of despair and gradually drew inhumanity's poison out of me. Because of my own experience, my own need, I recognized that "pit" in others.

I see the following image now just as then—this singular moment at the very beginning of establishing our first Women's Writing Circle. I walked into the building where many women were already seated and talking to each other. Another woman sat alone on a bench outside the room, her physical image a living metaphor for what my interior had been prior to my journey into writing my own heart out. The woman, her hood pulled over her head, hid inside her coat, her demeanor speaking of inner wounds not yet healed. Clasped in her right hand were a pencil and her journal.

I've learned over the years of facilitating Women's Writing Circles that we are the dot inside the symbolic circle that defines various growth periods in our lives, each with stories calling out to be told. Before getting to that point, many of us keep circling that dot of the fractured and fragmented "self." By writing fragments of our story, we gradually work our way out of that symbolic circle. Once outside we stand in the fresh air of "distance" and are able to look back and shape our life experience into story. What powerful, healing tales we each have to tell!

Thoughts about leading a writing circle ...

I am a sojourner, like others stepping onto the path to tell our stories. There are, of course, things to consider when starting a writing circle. Can you give the time necessary to commit to helping others draw their stories out in written form? It takes time, effort, research and reading, not to mention dedication, to expand and share your knowledge of the writing process.

Behind me are two floor-to-ceiling bookcases filled with binders containing information and ideas and lesson plans gleaned from what I've learned over the years. I am constantly reading and making notes on the writing process, condensing what I read and typing it up, using

what I learn as a guide that educates and enlightens me as I assist others to grow and refine their writing gifts. When a person has the commitment and the time to give this effort, I say, "Go for it! You and your own work will grow from this incredible experience."

For anyone struggling with life's daily foibles, maybe you need to listen to what your mind and body are telling you. Perhaps you need to take a time out and breathe, take time to focus on your own needs before committing and over-extending yourself to try and meet the writing needs of others. As my Kentucky-born father used to say, "Sis, you can't get blood out of a stone."

Sandra's Work in Progress: *Gingerbread Girl* is the working title for Sandra's memoir, the story of her years in Mississippi in the 1950s. We so look forward to reading that story, Sandra. Keep us posted!

The following life-story and life-poem are reprinted with permission from the authors, from the 2015 *Word for Word: An Anthology by Women's Writing Circle*, facilitated by Sandra Shackelford in Green Bay, WI.

My Mother's House

The House that Alzheimer's Built

Coming up the driveway with my son in tow, I could see my Mom hanging clothes. She was hard to miss! Mom's clothing consisted of a pair of nylons (complete with sprigs of pubic hair springing out here and there), and a bra—hooked on backwards.

"Mom, you don't have any clothes on!" She turned, looked at me and replied, "It's my yard. If people don't like what I wear, they don't have to look!"

"I'm going inside. It's just too hot out here." Mom followed.

My Mom loved to bake. Our kitchen was the gathering place. Over the past year, the burner covers had been smashed. After cleaning them, she had put them on backwards and, when they didn't fit, took a hammer and made them fit! The hand-written recipe cards of all our favorite family recipes were burned. We had talked about copying them some day and we think she burned them so we wouldn't find out that she could no longer read.

Enough of the kitchen! Let's move on to the rest of the house. That was where spiders and bugs crawled down the walls. Our fireplace became a frightful thing ... men lived in there when the fire was lit ... their hands grabbing at her. The soothing part of the room was the softness of her armchair. That is where she sat and often petted her sweet dog. There was no dog to be found, but her dog kept her calm.

“Did you know that I don’t take a shower anymore?”

“Why not, Mom? You love taking a nice warm shower.”

“Well, I just can’t. There are two ladies who live in the bathroom. Would you like to meet them?”

“I would love to.”

So ... up the stairs we went. Upon turning on the light, there they were? Two shadows of people ... our reflections in the bright white ceramic tile.

“I really don’t mind them living here, but they don’t pay rent and they are rude. They have yet to introduce themselves or at least say hello!”

On to the bedroom, where crocheted rugs, once made nice and flat ... now had heaps and mounds, accented by hand-sewing of old dress shields in the tops. My sister, who lived out of town, thought that if we paid more attention to Mom, she would be better. She spent an entire day helping her pick out an outfit for a family party.

“Just wait ‘til you see her tonight ... it will be great!”

When Mom arrived, she was wearing nylons, black socks, a pair of shorts and an inside out t-shirt.

“Hi, Mom. How was your day?”

“Awful! A bitchy lady was with me all day telling me what to do. I hated it!”

That afternoon I stood naked in the basement. Alongside me stood my mother, also naked. The water from the shower was just right. There were no strange ladies to peer at her.

“How long have I known you?” she asked.

“Well, Mom, I have known you since the day I was born.”

“Well, you seem to be a very nice person.”

“Thank you, Mom. I was raised by a very wonderful woman.”

“Well, you are a lucky one.”

We worked slowly ... I washed her hair and she washed mine. My tears went unnoticed. We had come full circle in this lifetime. I was thinking of how many baths she had given seven children in her life. The circle was complete.

My mom died after living with Alzheimer’s for fifteen years. It first showed itself to us when she was 60. My sister, Pat, who is 67, is already living in an assisted living facility.

My mother’s legacy goes on. After her death, my frugal dad took off her bracelet and is now using it for his dog’s ID tag. The bracelet reads: Hello. My name is Marian. I have Alzheimer’s. Please call this number for information.

My family has a long history of Alzheimer’s. My mother and seven of her siblings died from this disease. My dad has Alzheimer’s and my sister, who is 67, is no longer verbal and doesn’t know who I am.

Through this terrible sadness we have learned to laugh.

— Kathy Hackbarth, *Women’s Writing Circle*, Green Bay, WI

Art Fair by Wheelchair

He who does not see God in the next person he meets, need look no further.

— Gandhi

With a child’s excitement, you wheeled through the crowd,
in a blue baseball cap, a wide, joyous smile.
You touched the woodcarvings, examined paintings,
talked with artists on that hot, sunny day.

Then you stopped at a photographer’s booth,
noticing the tall, dark man,
heavy dreadlocks halfway down his back,
wearing pink cotton pants, fuchsia sash.
Every movement had charismatic grace.
His name was Emerson.

His pictures drew you in, held you.
Then you began to cry.
You apologized, but tears continued
as you saw the world in tones of sepia,
vibrant blues, purples, reds,
children in rags, grizzled old men,
Buddhist monks, mothers holding babies.
They were from Thailand, Tibet, India, China,
places you would never see
except through the eyes of this young man
who captured the beauty of each human moment.

You took his large hands in yours
as you struggled to express your feelings.
He picked out a photograph of a man,
his bearded face lined with years,
captioned with a quote from Gandhi,
and placed it in your hands.

— Doris Bezio, *Women’s Writing Circle*, Green Bay, WI



True Words from Real Women

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

Rex

Cindy Winterspring – York, PA
winterspringfarm@icloud.com

I remember my grandma's house on Sunday mornings after church. Grandpa would argue baseball with my father in the parlor, their voices rising like the spirals of cigarette smoke that filled the room with gray fog. Grandma made coffee in the kitchen, and kept pace with mother gossiping about the relatives with their voices rising in an ever-escalating power and pitch. I withdrew from the commotion and stared at the pattern and palette of colors on the kitchen floor. That is, until I discovered Rex.

On the corner, at the end of the alley behind Grandma's house, was an old shed. There lived Rex. A thin chain with a ring on the end hung down from a small hole and when I reached out and pulled that ring, the door to my sanctuary with Rex would open.

Rex was a horse. Common to look at, not flashy or proud, but he was pure magic to me. His reddish brown fur was the color of cider. His large dark eyes comforted me. His kind and gentle spirit drew me in and my heart completely surrendered to his warmth—the silent language of love, trust, acceptance, and safety. No emotional barriers built or building.

My little feet just fit in the spaces between the rustic stall boards as I ascended those boards and slipped my leg over Rex's back. There I sat all alone with Rex. I loved the feel of his warm, soft, furry coat. Saturated in the satiny silence of those moments, I breathed in the fragrance of the horse and the barn, and savored the calm serenity of that little stable. I have no idea why that horse tolerated me; perhaps it was because he loved the loving just as much as I did.

Suddenly, my mother's voice shattered the silence, and I would pat Rex's side with my little leg urging him over to the stable wall, where I would slip off, scurry down the slatted boards and hurry back to Grandma's house—no one the wiser about my rendezvous with Rex in the silent stable sanctuary.

Notes from Within

Susan Lines – Gabriola, BC, Canada
Susan.lines@yahoo.ca, w-circle 8

Well, here I am. I have been living in this very different environment—different from the one I had been used to for the past four years—since April.

It is an independent/assisted living building, primarily for seniors. This means anyone older than 55, and with health issues. There always has been a sort of a stigma associated with this place, as being the place for the elderly demented—but it is just perfect for me (so far anyway). I guess I am demented just enough to fit in.

A loveseat-type of sofa—everything is small, therefore the space seems larger. Having lived on boats and in an RV for several years, I am used to a small space, and actually prefer it.

I'm gradually meeting people. There is Lauren across the hall, who has had a stroke. I think she is in her 50s. She looks like she has had a very rough life, poor soul.

I can hear just a murmur of voice, and the television right next-door. I can't make out the words, but just hear the drone of a voice. Years ago there was an advertisement—I think for shaving cream. The guy's looking in the mirror on the medicine chest. When he opens the door, he sees the other guy looking at him with surprise. I often wonder when I open the medicine cabinet door if I might see Jack.

The garden plot is my savior. Although the weather has been very hot and humid, I still have the garden, and it was surprisingly successful for a first time there. I have many bee-loving plants such as echinacea, lavender, thyme, oregano, and others. I'm letting them all flower, and it was a treat to see so many bees of all types getting nectar. We even had a rare bumblebee, according to Ted, who studies bees and who has a plot as well.

It is a place of peace and tranquility, as I come to understand and know the community in which I now live, and into which I am trying to blend.

Wisdom in an Orchard

Marilyn Ashbaugh – Edwardsburg, MI
Ashbaugh108@gmail.com

When word spread that a nearby orchard might be bulldozed in favor of an amusement park, my family decided to purchase it.

There we held an annual orchard party, complete with a big tent, comfort food catered by an Amish restaurant, and a fireworks display. Tables were set with my checkered tablecloths and non-disposable plates and silverware. It was these orchard party experiences that taught me the most about life.

Before the days of emails, I sent invitations inside hand-addressed envelopes, with an RSVP request. My most startling response came from Mary.

“Can I bring my ex-husband Tommy? That is, if we are still speaking?”

I said sure.

The evening of the party, Tommy staggers up from Mary’s car, reaches for two beers and guzzles them both. I have a large bowl of cut fruit out on the buffet with some small bowls next to it. Tommy carries the large bowl to his table and eats the fruit pieces with his hands. I look at Mary who is sitting next to him, but she looks away. I am shocked at both of them but am too busy preparing the other food to intervene. The bowl eventually makes it back to the buffet table but I notice everyone avoids it. I was composing in my mind what I would say to the two when they begin to yell at one another. Oh no, this was not going to be one of those parties and so I sternly tell Mary and Tommy to follow me. We walk the entire orchard at a brisk pace, Tommy makes snide remarks most of the way. By the end, we all are sweating and too tired to talk. Tommy makes a beeline for the beer but I tell him he is cut off. Tommy had room for one more crack—something about, “Who invited me anyway!”

Who invited me?

Even Mary realized it was time to leave and so they did. For future parties, I stick with the guest list and learn to say no. Coffee is the strongest drink served.

Almost

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

When I was young, I loved to pretend I could tap dance like Ginger Rogers. So when my daughter, Lisa, asked me to take tap dancing with her, I didn’t hesitate.

At our first class, the instructor taught us a few basic steps. Then she asked us to line up and take our turn dancing across the room.

“Oh, no, I’m not ready for that.”

The Secret Is Out

Madeline Sharples – Manhattan Beach CA
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Invasive sounds roar constantly between my ears, sometimes sounding like ocean waves, calm static hums, or the high-pitched whistle of an approaching train.

These sounds overshadow and divert music and voices meant to be heard.

I’ve lost touch with the sound of silence
Silence is over, caput.

This malady, called tinnitus,
is the first sign of my hearing problem.
There, I’ve said it. I’m hard of hearing.

I ask Google, why hard?

The answer: in early days, it described all kinds of difficulties: hard to learn, hard to sleep, hard to conceive.

I also Google for guidance on cures. Some say try: Ginkgo biloba, lipo-flavonoid, a special ear-ringing drop, though more of the oily goop flows out of my ears than remains.

Some advocate therapy craniosacral or neck and head massage.

Others say: keep my mouth open permanently just like a lipstick model or utter humming sounds from the back of my tongue and express long, deep, rolling sighs.

The truth is the whole list is a bunch of hooley. Nothing works. There’s no known cure. I have to learn to live with it and not to go stone deaf as my husband fears.

Lisa laughed. “Just think of it as exercise, Mom.”

As I was shuffling toward our teacher, I heard the word “Recital.” Chills ran down my spine. The air hung with the stillness of a heavy tapestry. My face got so hot, I thought I was going to burst into flames.

I sashayed past her, through the door and out to the parking lot. I took off those shoes, and they’ve been gathering dust ever since.

Losing Faith

Lois Halley – Westminister, MD
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The little boy was always sobbing when the priest brought him back to catechism class. His blonde hair was awry as he dried his blue eyes on the sleeves of his worn but clean shirt. I was eight years old and my heart went out to him.

Every week, the priest grabbed the child's arm and pulled him away for punishment. What had the boy done to cause the priest to become so angry that his normally pale cheeks grew red and his breath heavy?

At the altar, Priest #2 fell flat on his face during the service. He was dead drunk. Later in the rectory, he put his arm around my aunt and tried to peer down her blouse. She threatened to tell his wife, and he backed off. At bedtime, his 12-year-old daughter helped him up the stairs.

I was warned by another teen to never be alone with Priest #3. Unavoidably, I found myself in that very situation. He put his hand on my breast, bent me over backward, and tried to put his tongue in my mouth. He let go when I threatened to scream. I was 17.

Priest #4 asked the congregation, "How can a loving God allow 9/11 to happen?"

Wanting spiritual guidance, my hope rose. His answer: "It's God's punishment to homosexuals and women who have abortions."

At a parish meeting, I asked Priest #5 why women were not allowed to become priests or deacons. Several men and women shook their heads and shouted, "No!"

The priest responded to me: "That goes against the Bible." After the meeting, I was snubbed.

My roots run deep in this church where three generations of my family have worshipped. I love the life-size statues, the smell of incense, and the organ music. The antique crystal chandelier was donated by my grandfather.

I sent a heartfelt letter to our bishop, seeking his wisdom. He didn't bother to answer. I am at a spiritual fork in the road and do not know where to go with my faith.

A Fork in the Road

Patricia Roop Hollinger – Westminister, MD
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"So, file for divorce when our being separated for a year is up."

This was my pronouncement to my husband, who was now going on six months of being separated from the family.

After yet another evening with a couple from church, I announced vehemently that I no longer wanted to socialize with this couple. My intuition told me that something was amiss. This was confirmed when the next day we received a phone call from the husband of same couple.

"Could we come for a visit?" he requested.

Upon arrival, the husband confronted his wife and my husband with what appeared to be their romantic interest in each other. They did not deny this. It soon became evident that they were contemplating their own marriage. She knew my husband did not want to leave our son, Michael. So, she proposed that they would gain custody of our son on the basis that earlier in my life I had been hospitalized for major depression. I was enraged! At this point I wanted to go across the room and scratch her eyes out. My religious beliefs against using violence to settle scores thankfully kicked in. Otherwise, I may have been arrested for assault and battery.

After the departure of this couple, the state of our marriage was in shambles. I was raised in a church that shunned divorced people. He proposed that he live in our basement until he could figure out whether to stay in the marriage or leave.

"No, I will not do your laundry and cook your meals while you have your fling. So leave until you decide whether you are in or out of this marriage."

He left and lived in an apartment nearby, daily giving me very mixed messages as to whether or not he would return to the marriage. It was time for me to make the decision for him. Despite the fact that I was only earning \$3,000 annually as a secretary at the local high school, I had finally come to the fork in the road.

4 Haiku

Cyndi Lloyd – Riverton, UT

the pain
around my scapulae—
bristlecone pine

soil suckles
water to fill our cups
a haiku breath

edges of light
and shadows on the tree—
not taking sides

struck by my dog's tongue ...
a roly-poly has good
karma

If Not Now ... When?

Debra Dolan – Vancouver, BC, Canada
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It is 2018, the year in which I turn 60, and I am just noticing that I am rising from a long dark winter. For the first time in over two years, I intuit that my healing from a “sudden and significant” hit to the head has turned a corner and I am on the road to wellness. I am experiencing the slow incremental improvements to my mind and body that have allowed me to introduce a restorative yoga practice into my routine. I am witnessing the benefits of time and patience, advocacy, self-care, limiting life’s pleasures, and listening carefully to medical practitioners’ expertise in clearing a path for a hopeful future. I can see my old self before me, filled with energy and activity and kind enthusiasm, and I hope to fully embrace her acquaintance once again. This is the intersection of going forward and not back in recovery—the place where I trust when to rest and when to push myself, as I understand fully the benefits of both.

As this is taking place for me, I have learned that my estranged mother recently suffered a stroke, which severely limits her speech and mobility. Nine years ago, when she turned 70, she celebrated in grand style the fact that she was the first in a long line of past generations to reach that unattainable age. Early deaths may have had little to do with genetics for her parents, grandparents, and those before them, and more to do with the harsh conditions of their lives—famine, wars, and the severity of eastern European circumstances in the last centuries. Growing up with this knowledge had a huge psychological effect on me, and as a result, I was never one to delay or to think about when I am retired, or when I have more time and money, I will do such-and-such or see this-and-that.

I do not sit around with regret for what I have not done; however, emerging from the recuperative solitude of the past 27 months, I recognize it is now time to move to that smaller seaside walkable community.



CONGRATULATIONS to Mary Jo West! She is this quarter’s winner of a free 1-year extension to her SCN membership. Mary Jo was randomly selected from this issue’s True Words and Circle Voices authors. It’s great to know that she’ll continue to be a part of Story Circle.

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

One Spring Day

Teresa Sullivan – Santa Monica, CA
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One warm afternoon during spring break, I was sitting with my best friend, Anne, in the deserted courtyard of our junior high school, discussing how to spend the rest of our day.

Three boys walked slowly toward us, and as they neared, we could see that they were a bit older. Each had dark hair and wore jeans and a t-shirt. I didn’t recognize them. They sauntered toward us while we continued our conversation. When they approached, we all introduced ourselves. They were all holding bottles of Coca-Cola. One stood a bit ahead of the others. “What are you girls doing today?” he asked.

“Not much,” I responded. “How about you?”

“Not much. Just hanging around.”

We chatted a little more. The two other boys were quiet, nodding and smiling when their leader spoke.

“What grade are you in?”

“Eighth,” Anne replied.

The two background boys turned as though they were going to move on, but the first boy asked, “Hey, do you want to take a red?”

“What?” Anne asked.

He pulled a small foil packet from his front pocket. “These,” he said, as he unwrapped enough of the foil to expose four red capsules. “Reds.”

“I don’t know,” I said. I had heard of reds. Sleeping pills. I knew some of my friends had tried them, and I was curious.

“They make you feel good. Relaxed.”

The two boys who still hadn’t said much each took one, swallowing them with soda. The keeper of the pills held one out to me. Anne and I exchanged looks: “Should we?”

There were no clanging bells or blinking red lights warning me that I was standing at an intersection. No hint that turning right would take me to Mr. Hardin’s English class to diagram sentences and to first chair of the cello section in the school orchestra. There was no sign indicating that a left turn would take me down a winding, pot-holed road, although an often exciting one.

I turned left and took the capsule. It was a simple choice, like picking out my blouse that morning.

Clutter or Not

Connie Katusak – Burnet, TX
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Clutter is my bane. I am not a compulsive hoarder whose home spaces are packed with years of accumulated debris—I'm just not organized. Today you cannot pick up a home magazine that doesn't contain articles like "Clear the Clutter for Good," "Beautifully Organized," "Instant Organizing," and the newest addition to my repertoire of self-help, Marie Kondo's ideas on how to get rid of everything.

I look around my study—books, my old friends; magazines with articles I want to read; and recipes for things I will probably never make are piled in bookcases, on desks, chairs, and the floor. Boxes of photos I have digitized but are full of memories, so that when I open one, I am transported back in time. So many friends and family caught young and vibrant, laughing into the camera lens.

I'm sad. These things, so important and comforting to me, will probably end up in a used-book store or a Goodwill donation box. My children read books on their Kindles and search for recipes online. I pray the oldest photos, some over 100 years old—grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and "paisons"—will find their way to someone interested in genealogy. My written memories are a legacy of bygone years. This isn't clutter; it just needs organization.

I make lists and set the alarm on my phone—so many minutes for each chore. Ding, the alarm goes off and I've barely begun. I must move on to the next item. Always something more, always something left behind.

Intrusion

Mary Jo West – San Clemente, CA
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My friend and I arrive at the beach late in the afternoon. Sitting on our blankets, we watch looming waves diminish into soft, white foam.

In the distance I see a hazy, yellow image moving across the sand. It reminds me of a scene in the film, "Lawrence of Arabia," when the camel ambles across the desert moving in sync with the rays of the sun shimmering on the horizon.

As if he's on a mission, he comes closer and closer. He stops next to me. The Golden Retriever lifts his leg and pees on my straw purse.

"How does one grow up?" I asked a friend the other day. There was a slight pause; then she answered, "By thinking."

— May Sarton

A Child Picks a Path

Judy Watkins – Myrtle Creek, OR
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At what point does a child become a woman? When her body becomes mature enough to reproduce, is her mind ready to make the decisions that would affect lives forever?

A child that is sexually abused by her father when only three or four learns that sexual favors are the way to make people love them, and life is so empty without love. And that is how I found myself expecting a baby at age 15. I didn't want to tell my parents. I knew it would mean another beating with Dad's belt.

I married a man my sister knew. He was 21 and I didn't know his last name until I saw it on the marriage license. I had never dated him, but he wanted a wife and I needed an escape. He knew about the baby, but he insisted that he loved me and wanted to marry me. My new husband beat me, but I assumed all men beat their wives and children, as that was how I grew up. We were often hungry; he did not work.

We were married 5½ months before that child was born. As the months passed, we watched the changes in my body but we never talked about the baby. There were no preparations, no baby clothes, no anticipation. A baby was never discussed with friends or family.

What was I supposed to do? Who would help this desperate girl-child know what to do? One day at my doctor's office I cried and told him that I had no way to pay for the hospital or doctor expenses. I had no home for this baby to go to. In the doctor's office, again without advice or help, I arranged for him to find somebody to love and take care of my baby.

At 16-years-old, a desperately alone child-woman chose the path that would change lives forever.

Chance Encounter

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I was 22 when I started my Medical Technologist internship. My first assignment was to draw blood from patients for laboratory tests. Entering a patient's room, I saw three men huddling around an older man sitting in bed.

"Sir, I'm here to take blood. It'll just take a minute."

Dressed in a short hospital gown, he raised his knee so I could clearly see his pecker. My face turned red and I pretended not to hear his friends snicker.

When I finished drawing his blood, I smiled and said, "My goodness, all that fuss over a little thing like that."

Thor Wields His Thunderbolt

Connie Katusak – Burnet, TX
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Thunder crashes,
Lightning flashes
Across the sullen sky.
Rain and hail
Like bullets flail
The dusty dreary dirt.
Mother Earth drinks
Sustaining water sinks
Soaking the sleeping bounty.
Precious drops
Fertilize crops,
Giving life to dormant seeds.
Thor wields his thunderbolt.
Energy and nourishment float
On silver sheets to earth.

The Con

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What sweetness
there is
in the fragrance of your lovely flowers.

What brilliance
there is
in the gemlike clarity of your words.

But ...
I have been told
that bilious venom has the smell
of
Lilacs and Lavender.

Lost Shoe

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It's hard to walk away
with only one shoe.
No balance.
Unsteady.
Perspective lost.

Shall I find the other shoe?
Or just go barefoot?

Some Thoughts about Pathways

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

“Don't trust ways. They change. A means
flails about like a donkey's tail.” - Rumi, *Inshallah*

Some thoughts about pathways

Some ways begin with sparks and fireworks,
Others with the dull light of dawn
Shadows fleeting between the trees,
Birds chirping quietly in the twigs,
As the world yawns, extending its arms.
Softly as butterflies hardly making a mark,
We can glide like liquid, shape our bodies to match.
While we watch others sculpting their form,
Forceful and coarse like sandpaper on glass,
Leaving inscriptions for others to surpass.
Some journeys end, and they only just began;
Others last for eternity and never collapse.
Who's to say which kind exceeds the other,
A voyage to the end of the land,
Or merely a stroll up the street.

Retirement

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e-circle 4

Sought-out careers stagnate;
communication with colleagues
soaked with commitments—
underlying courtesy imposed.

We are doubly dependent—
mutual caregivers supporting
water treading, our authority
drowning in present obligations.

Past dwellings, connections
sopped with history, hold on—
leftover dregs, stale-dated—
their validity disappearing,

we are overcoming, debriefing,
navigating release, minimalizing,
plan to alter direction, trade
accommodations, rest willingly

have boarded sanctity—a timely
cubicle of release, slotting an exit,
having transformed belonging—
are wrung out, seeking drier ground.

Joy

Ardine Martinelli – Tacoma, WA
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I walk past joy
on the way to wherever.
My eyes do not see,
too busy doing.

I rest my mind,
breathe deeply,
and there she is
in all her glory:

New buds on the tree,
my cat's antics,
Friends' voices saying hello,
A symphony of birds singing
their delight.

Joy seeps in softly,
whispering.
I slow down
and pick up her scent.
Her wonder engulfs me.

Joy tiptoes on silent feet,
elusive,
only to the wandering mind.
So many possibilities
at my fingertips.

Wake-up, wake-up
she whispers.

My Life as a Hermit Crab

Sara Etgen-Baker – Anna, TX
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Retirement—time collapsed onto itself into a single focal point, and the franticness of my day-to-day life screeched to a grinding halt. Although I was finally free from the centrifugal force of life itself, I quickly became irritable and discontent. Then, while combing a nearby beach, I noticed a hermit crab searching for an empty shell in which to reside. By nature, hermit crabs are restless, nomadic creatures, who spend their lives in a seemingly irrational, continuous pursuit of a recently vacated, more commodious, and appropriate shell.

Although the hermit crab is extremely vulnerable to beach predators and death during its travel, it impulsively, blindly, and unquestioningly repeats the cycle. Seems crazy, right? Why not locate the roomiest, most comfortable shell on the beach and live safely in it for the duration of its life?

Yet during my lifetime, I'd developed a similar impulsive, irrational pattern—moving from one shell to another in search of meaning and purpose. I briefly dwelled in the shell of corporate stability but found it stifling and confining. So, I moved into the shell of an adventurous entrepreneur but found it risky and too unstructured. Then I hid in the shell of an idealistic intellectual but found it soulless and impractical. I later abandoned that shell moving into the shell of an impassioned educator but found it disheartening and unbearable. So I overcompensated, occupying the shell of an obsessive-compulsive addict, but found it empty and unfulfilling. Then I migrated into the shell of regret and rigidity, but found it heavy and cumbersome.

Weakened by its weight, I entered retirement hoping to discard that shell and lighten my burden. Then one day I happened upon a shell I'd mindlessly tossed aside as a teenager. I picked it up and held it to the light; it glistened in the warm sun and beckoned me in. I ventured inside, exploring its harmonious, balanced interior regions and found my authentic self. I'd unknowingly re-discovered the lightweight, flexible shell of a writer. Finally, I've found contentment, for I'm inhabiting a life rich with insight, soulful purpose, and creative expression.

Married? Maybe

Judy Watkins – Myrtle Creek, OR
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When we met I was 18, I was newly divorced, and I had a one-year-old baby. I had a job in a laundry and I was very much alone. He was 32 and divorced. I never knew any of the details of how long he was married or when he was divorced. He had photos of two children in his apartment.

We married when I was still 18 and we had a son when I was 20. I was a stay-at-home wife and mother. One day the mailman brought a letter that was addressed to him. I don't think I was being nosy, just young and uneducated in the ways of the world. I opened the letter and learned that he had five children, not two, and his wife had obtained a Mexican divorce a year after I married him. The letter was asking for child support.

I was in shock and I cried. What did this all mean? When I asked him about the letter, he became very angry. He told me this was none of my business and I should

not have opened the letter; my name was not on it. How could it not be my business? Was I legally married? Was my son legitimate? How in the world would we afford child support? He made \$2.00 an hour (it was 1960) and I didn't work.

I begged him to marry me again but he said in his eyes he was married and that was the end of the subject. This was decision time. Should I stay or should I go? The real question was, where would I go? Where does a young, uneducated girl with two babies to support go? We were living in Oregon and my family was in Montana. My parents were newly divorced and had moved on with their lives. They had no time or interest in helping me. Was there really a decision to be made at all? So life went on and for 58 years I have wondered if I am married. Does anybody really care?

Leap of Faith

(or How I Threw Away My
Cheat Sheet and Winged It)

Abby November – San Diego, CA

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I have been performing stand-up comedy since menopause (not the pause that refreshes). Honestly, about 20 years of blood, sweat, and Depends. As comics say, dying is easy, but comedy is hard. For the first 20 years I was Robocomic: got up, stiffly vomited my tight five- or ten-minute script, thanked the audience, and said “I’ve been Abby November, bye.” And run off stage as fast as possible with my set cues clutched tightly in my sweaty paw. I mean palm.

I sensed something amiss. My material was funny, but felt artificial, stilted and painful, because it was truly that of a robotic-like person. At a comedy competition, I met a Dutch comic, Raul Hennekke. As we schmoozed, he exclaimed: “You are so much funnier off-stage than behind a mic—just get up on stage with an opener and closer and be yourself, talk to the audience.”

Stand up does not have a fourth wall, as does theater. Comics do interact somewhat with the audience, but take control. Being partially deaf works well for me since I make up stuff that the audience is trying to tell me. Five years ago, I drank the comedy laid-back Kool-Aid, talked with the crowd, and actually have been in the zone, in the moment, which is a great feeling when it happens.

Goodbye, lined index cards. Hello: take a deep breath, look around, smile, and it’s show time.

To Go or Not To Go

Abby November – San Diego, CA

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To go or not to go? that is my question.

Do I leave the cocoon of my birth ... aka The Big Apple?

or follow the father of my children to the unknown environs of the Deep South?

After all Deliverance movie must have had basis in reality ... or not???

My DNA or eons of Jewish guilt urge ‘cleave to your man’

But my heart says, they talk funny and are blonde, blue-eyed belles.

But my kinder need their dad and may enjoy grits.

I need to decide ... I visited the campus ... ate the grits and the chicken.

Took a leap of faith, not having a job, a place or a cocoon,

Found that I hate grits, loved Southern Fried Chicken ... and even though I couldn’t understand the Southern accent, I survived.

Enough transplants shepherded me through the transition to a slower lifestyle, less stress, and down home friendliness;

However when invited to move further West to Austin, we both jumped on the moving van.

For over 25 years Texas was our home. We planted roots and flourished.

Not a Pastel Spring

Claire McCabe – Elkton, MD

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The skunk cabbage shouts its bulging-veined leaves from brown trenches. The stream roars like an engine over rocks.

Nature, done with winter’s white meditation, charges into sun-lavished days—explodes into life in a rush of force.

Like at your birth, when I first held you covered in blood, bruised from the passage. How you screamed at the insult of cold air.

Outside of the birthing room. a thousand dandelions, brave yellow-headed soldiers, marched across fields, reclaiming roadsides from inanimate winter.

God’s Gift

Duffie Bart – Santa Barbara, CA

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To find a kindred soul in life
A friend, a man, a caring wife

A soul that meets another soul
For me there is no greater goal.

No words are needed in this space
Just silence, an Amazing Grace.

The greatest gift, one I have known.
Have I received what I have sown?

Do I deserve this blessed state?
This deepest love that is my fate?

My gratitude is deep and true
I thank you God; I know it’s You.

In Search of the Elusive

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 e-circle 4

Between cups of coffee I search
 cupboards for anything I can find
 that's out of date, packets of pre-
 seasoned rice, nuts that never
 made it into braids and stollens,
 pestos spun only in a hasty reading
 of some long forgotten recipe.

It is a frantic seeking and I've not
 yet determined what I'm looking for
 on this day when ice coats the world.
 I open a last tin and find three sleeves
 of stale crackers I'll save to feed
 turtles in the spring but until then
 I open and shut, scramble again like

some crazed hen who's lost a chick,
 gone like an idea in the back of your
 mind that drives you to write seeking
 that elusive word to describe the moment
 when the equally elusive mockingbird held
 on to the slipper feeder and snatched
 a perfect bite while you ache with indecision.

Lost Love

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dead ...
 the earth hard with
 years
 of winters' frost.
 and then
 a stir
 so miniscule ...
 that being caught unaware
 by the tantalizing fingers
 of the
 buried shadow ...
 the snow melts ...
 but
 all that is left
 is a
 regurgitated void.

Starting Over

Jessica Heriot – Hendersonville, NC
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In 1968, I was a divorced woman and single mother, terrified of being alone, furious at my ex-husband for leaving me, and angry for having caused him to leave. Shorn of my identity as a wife (a role I clung to like a sloth to a branch), I felt like a displaced person. That's where I was when I found Women's Liberation in the winter of 1969. Though I had a part-time social work job—of only marginal interest—my identity was still rooted in the multiple roles of mother, wife, hostess, and creator of gourmet dinners. Pinned to the corner of a bulletin board at the Maryland School of Social Work was a small note announcing the next meeting of Baltimore Women's Liberation. The words leapt out, neon to my eyes. Furtively I wrote the information on the back of my hand.

On a rainy, bone-chilling February night in 1969, I knocked on the door. "Is this where the Women's"—lowering my voice—"Liberation meeting is?"

"No," said the woman who came to the door, baby in arms, "There's no meeting tonight, but I have some journals. Would you like to buy one?"

I went home with two issues of a magazine called "Women: A Journal of Liberation." The faces of two young women looked out from the cover. Under their faces "WOMEN" was written in large block letters, a clenched fist filling the center of the letter "O," mysterious and dangerous.

I didn't know on that February night that my life would never be the same. Feminism wove its way into my psyche, untangling a psychological conundrum, clarifying my relationships with my mother, father, and men in general, and informing every issue from orgasms to motherhood.

During the year following our breakup, I quit the deadly part-time job my husband had convinced me to take, and traded in the gas-guzzling Pontiac he had bought for me before he left. I moved from the house we had shared during the last sad months of our marriage, rented an apartment in a leafy neighborhood, and became a feminist.

Europe

Shelley Thrasher – Tyler, TX
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I used to be Poland:
 armies invaded at will,
 bloody corpses,
 charred barns on green plains.

I tried to be Switzerland:
 trains like clockwork,
 mothering mountains,
 cows munching clover.

But I've settled for France:
 graveyards with white crosses,
 ballet schools in each village,
 late-night talks in cafes.

Which Path to Take

Judy Watkins – Myrtle Creek, OR
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 e-circle 3, e-circle 6

People might call me a late bloomer, but at the same time few women born in 1940 had professional careers. My life was typical for the times—I married at 16, and 20 years later returned to school and searched for a career. My children were almost grown but my husband did not take the changed lifestyle easily.

After working and going to night-school for four years, I had earned an AA Degree from the local community college and my job had progressed to the point where I was earning more than my husband did on his construction job.

I was 40 when the surprise fork-in-the-road showed its ugly face. My husband informed me that “over-powering and successful women” left him cold. In other words, he no longer wanted to act as my husband, but he wanted to be the injured party. It was my fault, not his. He did not want to admit that his many years of alcoholism had left him impotent. He didn’t offer to leave me; he did not want other women; he enjoyed our lifestyle and he probably loved me in his own selfish way.

How did I feel? Are there words to describe the hurt and confusion that absorbed my mind and body? What was I supposed to do? Should I get a divorce? Heaven knows I didn’t want another man. Men my age were either paying child support or raising children. I’d been there and done that ... no, thank you! We didn’t have much property to show for our years together, but did I want to part with half of it and start over?

Decision time, and the decision was mine. I would continue our life together, but from this day forward I would be the center of everything, and my well-being would always come first. I would go on to earn an MBA, I would put all my energy into climbing the corporate ladder as far and fast as I could get there.

If he hung around under those conditions, that was fine. If he left—oh, well.

A Woman’s Ambition, Redefined

Judy Gruen – Los Angeles, CA
 jgruen@ca.rr.com, www.judygruen.com

On a beautiful spring day, I take my granddaughters, ages two and four, on a stroll. One pulls a red wagon; the other rides a tricycle, with frequent stops to balance on a garden wall, or dart into a Little Tikes house on a neighbor’s lawn. Molasses pours faster than we circle a single residential block.

Twenty-five years ago, on a similar stroll with their father, my eldest son, I’d have felt pressure to start dinner, pay bills, finish an article. Now I am, by choice, reprising my role as a multitasking mom into a multitasking Nana. After a 35-year writing career that includes publishing five books and more than 1,500 articles, I have reconsidered what it means to be “ambitious.”

When I became a mother, I left a good corporate job to put my family first and my writing second. This was a privilege I tried not to take for granted. I reassured myself while slinging spaghetti and mediating sibling rivalries that one day my four kids would grow up, move out, and I’d no longer have to steal time for writing.

Now that my time is more my own, my car is again fitted with a car seat, my pantry stocked with preschool treats, a kitchen drawer loaded with fat crayons and stickers.

Grandparenting is a precious opportunity that many of my peers wish they had. Today, young adults are marrying later than ever before—an average of 29 for men and 27 for women. They have fewer kids, and have them later in life. My husband and I are increasingly grateful that our children have chosen the traditional path, married young, and are having children. We are blessed to play the role of grandparents, here to spoil, to love, and to offer our acquired wisdom to our children’s children.

My two sets of grandparents played this role for me, helping me define my identity, religiously and professionally. So many things in life come full circle. I have the delightful blessing of passing this same gift down to their great-great-grandchildren.

“A writer is a person who cares what words mean, what they say, how they say it. Writers know words are their way towards truth and freedom, and so they use them with care, with thought, with fear, with delight. By using words well they strengthen their souls. Story-tellers and poets spend their lives learning that skill and art of using words well. And their words make the souls of their readers stronger, brighter, deeper.”

— Ursula K. Le Guin

Dead Ends and Surprise Beginnings

VJ Knutson – London, ON, Canada

English.knutson@gmail.com, <https://vjknutson.org>, <https://onewomansquest.org>
e-circle 4

The emails started arriving the morning after I presented at the regional conference—invites and accolades validating my life’s passion. Here I was at a critical juncture, poised to take my work to a new level, and only I knew it would never happen.

My hands hovered over the keyboard, mind searching for a way to express my regrets without conveying the darkness that was settling in. I had gone to the conference knowing it would be my last hurrah. There would be no encore presentation.

Sweat dampened my forehead. *Please, God, I begged, give me just enough time to finish things up here.*

Within days, I would be incapacitated, barely able to lift myself out of bed, brushing my teeth a monumental effort. Life had chosen a different path for me.

“How do I cope?” I asked the doctor, really wanting to say, “How do I reconcile who I am with what I’ve become?” But words, like movement, had lost their fluidity.

“Set a timer for yourself,” she replied. “Seven minutes for standing, fifteen for sitting. Stay away from television—it’s too much stimulation—and limit phone conversations. You may find it difficult to read, and if you listen to music, try to avoid lyrics. Visits should also be regulated. Myalgic Encephalomyelitis is characterized by exhaustion after exertion, and it is systemic.”

My already slumped body felt like collapsing onto the floor.

“Is there anything I can do?”

She took my phone and downloaded a relaxation app. “This will help; try it a couple of times a day.”

Then, as an afterthought, she added: “If you write, you might be able to do that.”

And in that moment, the clouds parted and the glorious irony struck me: I’d finally have time to write.



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.

Control

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

After discovering shared interests, Ava and Doris gravitated to each other. They enjoyed lively and intelligent conversation—at first. As they got to know each other, fissures, like those cracks in the earth after a drought, began appearing.

As Ava and Doris sipped herbal tea on Doris’s terrace, Ava, a widow, lamented unsuccessful attempts at Internet dating. “A lot of losers,” she sighed.

Doris insisted she would eventually meet a nice man.

“I have a friend who met her husband on the Internet. She was about to give up when the last man who contacted her turned out to be the one. Now they’re on a cruise. A nice man.”

In subtle ways, Doris made Ava feel inadequate, discounting her experiences. It’s a form of control, she thought. And not the first time, either.

“I love success stories,” Ava said, hiding her anger. “Maybe you ought to give dating a whirl.”

“I’m happy being alone. I’m not good around people,” Doris said.

Doris’s marriage had lasted less than two years, although Ava suspected Doris had deeply loved one man—and it wasn’t her ex-husband.

The afternoon sunlight cast shadows across potted white rhododendron on the terrace. Doris poured more tea and turned the conversation to Victoria, her younger sister. “I’ve decided I’ll never contact Victoria again. She doesn’t care about me anyway. Besides, everything was always about her. Mother and Daddy babied her. Gave her everything she wanted. And she treated David like dirt.”

A successful businessman, David attended Mass regularly, just as Doris. Both grew up in Irish families. He gave Doris a job; confided his unhappy marriage to Victoria. Although he had been dead five years, Doris often spoke of him, wanted to write his life story as a tribute.

“Why?” Ava truly wanted to know. “Was David unfaithful to Victoria?”

“Of course not.” Doris eyed Ava suspiciously. “I don’t intend to have this conversation with you.”

Why share if you don’t trust a friend enough to answer an innocent question? Ava felt dismissed. The next time Doris emailed or phoned about getting together, she wouldn’t reply.

New Members with Stories to Tell

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

Beth Breedlove – Menlo Park, CA

My Story: Ever since I was a young girl, I have been an admirer and follower of women writers and artists, including Jill Ker Conway, Emma Goldman, Susan Wittig Albert, Georgia O'Keefe and so many more, and longed to be an artist myself, but did not consider myself worthy. I am a late bloomer to the creative life of painting, writing, as well as teaching expressive arts, having discovered the healing power of creative expression during a time of illness five years ago. I love connecting with like-minded women in living and sharing the artistic life!

Twitter: Beth Breedlove

Joan Lieberman – Boulder, CO

My Story: Born a full-blooded Gentile in Utah, I have never lived further east than Boulder, Colorado. While a life-long diarist, all my published writing was in conjunction with my professional work as a management consultant. As a finalist for the Bakeless Literary Prize, I was a scholar at the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference in 1999. There Carol Houck Smith of W.W. Norton encouraged me to turn my submission into an autobiography, which I finished on my 75th birthday, because it was on my husband's bucket list.

Memoir(s): Optimal Distance, A Divided Life, Part One; Optimal Distance, A Divided Life, Part Two

Blog: www.OptimalDistance.com under "Author's Journal"

Facebook: Joan Carol Lieberman

Lisa Check – Frederick, MD

My Story: I am a seeker of meaning and understanding and connection. I am a maker of color and textiles and yarn. I am a writer for shepherds and crafters and myself.

Blog: www.flyinggoatfarm.com

Twitter: @lisa.check

Nicole Evelina – Maryland Heights, MO

My Story: My mission is to rescue little-known women from being lost in the pages of history. While other writers may choose to write about the famous, I tell the stories of those who are in danger of being forgotten so that their memories may live on for at least another generation. I also tell the female point of view when it is the male who has gotten more attention in history (i.e. Guinevere to King Arthur).

Blog: <http://nicoleevelina.com/blog>

Facebook: Nicole Evelina

Twitter: @nicoleevelina

Teri Liptak – Tyler, TX

My Story: After struggling with depression, I turned to writing to find my voice and process my feelings. It offered connection to others when I felt the most alone. Now, writing is one of my greatest joys in life.

Blog: <http://rttlingcage.blogspot.com/>

Facebook: Teri Liptak

Twitter: @Rattling the Cage

Liza Trevino – Dallas, TX

My Story: Liza Trevino hails from Texas, spending many of her formative years on the I-35 corridor of San Antonio, Austin, and Dallas. In pursuit of adventure and a USC film school PhD, Liza moved to Los Angeles where she amassed numerous low-level Hollywood assistant and script girl gigs. Dr. Trevino now lives in Texas, complains about the heat, loves the BBQ and the Alamo Drafthouse, and spends her free time writing badass Latina characters.

Blog: <https://lizatrevino.com/>

Facebook: Liza Trevino

Twitter: @LizaTrevinoPhD

PROFESSIONAL DIRECTORY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



2018 Story Circle Network

Stories From The Heart Conference Presentations

We are so proud to present the following preliminary listing of workshops/lectures for Stories from the Heart IX on July 20-22, 2018 in Austin, TX. The presenters are strong, the tracks are relevant to the present times, and they cover crucial aspects of writing and sharing our stories, to shaping them into books, publication, and marketing. If unforeseen changes should occur, we will immediately make those changes online, where you can always find the most-up-to-date program schedule at <http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/>

STORIES FROM THE HEART IX

Widening the Circle, Opening Our Hearts

Conference Presentations

PRE-CONFERENCE (July 20):

1. The Joys of Writing Flash Fiction and Flash Memoir – Len Leatherwood
2. Marketing & Promoting Strategies that Increase Book Sales – Debra Winegarten

GETTING PERSONAL:

1. Breaking Silence: Revealing Truth, Releasing Secrets, and Finding Your True Voice – Linda Joy Myers
2. Don't Cut Off Your Nose to Spite Your Face: The ReStory Guide to Writing – Jeanne Guy
3. Shaping Family Stories into Compelling Stories – Annette Gendler
4. Wild Woman at My Door: Reconnecting to Authentic Self – Bird Mejia
5. Life Happens: Write Through It – Mary Elizabeth Briscoe

CRAFT MATTERS:

1. Writing Emotional Truth: Engaging Readers through the Power of Your Words – Mary Fillmore, Virginia Simpson
2. My Mother, My Muse: Writing About Your Mom Without Guilt – Andrea Simon
3. Getting Started: Shaping Your Writing Voice – Sandra Shackelford
4. Power of Personality – Cinda Brooks
5. Polishing your Stories – B. Lynn Goodwin

BREAKING INTO PUBLISHING / MARKETING:

1. The How-To's to Successful Blogging – Len Leatherwood
2. Self-Publishing Panel
3. The Story Within You – Teresa Lynn
4. Building Your Platform – Susan Wittig Albert
5. Sarton Winner's Panel – Susan Wittig Albert

THE WRITING LIFE:

1. Prune & Bloom: How to create space for what matters most – Jan Halligan
2. Writing Advice from the Trenches – Leslie Tall Manning
3. Getting Unstuck – B. Lynn Goodwin
4. Write Your Travels - Inside and Out – Mary Fillmore

TAKE HOME WORKSHOPS:

1. Facilitating Stories from Amazing Lives – Joyce Boatright
2. Gathering Women's Writing: How to Create an Anthology (Panel) – Susan Wittig Albert
3. Let the Circle Be Unbroken – Sandra Shackelford
4. Give a Hoot for Your Community OWLs (Older Women's Legacies) – Mary Jo Doig

OTHER:

Shakti Naam Yoga Class – Bird Mejia

Stories from the Heart IX Registration Form

Send this form with your check to:
Conference Registration, Story Circle Network
PO Box 1616, Bertram TX 78605
To register online and use your credit card, go to
www.storycircle.org/Conference/frmregister.php

Name _____

Street Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Email _____ Phone _____

Current Member of Story Circle? yes no

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

What is included in my full registration fees?

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

What is not included in my full registration fees?

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

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

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

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

Refund Policy: Cancellations are accepted until June 20, 2018, and are subject to a cancellation fee of \$50 for a full conference registration or \$25 for a one-day registration. No refunds after June 20, 2018. Note: If you cancel past our refund deadline, and you were registered for Saturday and Sunday or the full conference, you will receive a two-year extension of your National membership.

 <p><input type="checkbox"/> This membership is a gift.</p>	<h2>Join the Story Circle Network!</h2> <p>Annual Membership if receiving printed, mailed publications:</p> <p>_____ Canada & Mexico: \$85 (International MO)</p> <p>_____ International \$90 (International MO) 3/2018</p> <p>_____ USA: \$65</p> <p>_____ Annual Membership for ALL locations receiving <i>online</i> publications only: \$55</p> <p>_____ Internet Writing or Reading eCircle Membership : \$20/yr (in addition to national dues)</p>	
	<p>Make your check to Story Circle Network PO Box 1616 Bertram, TX 78605</p>	
<p>My name and address:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Name _____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>City _____ State _____ Zip _____ - _____</p> <p>Phone _____</p>	
<p>My phone and e-mail:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Email _____ Amount enclosed _____</p> <p>Become a supporting member and help Story Circle Network grow. Check here:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$90 Friend <input type="checkbox"/> \$150 Supporter <input type="checkbox"/> \$250 Sustainer <input type="checkbox"/> \$400+ Benefactor</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$125 Donor <input type="checkbox"/> \$200 Contributor <input type="checkbox"/> \$325 Patron <input type="checkbox"/> \$125 Organizational Membership</p>	

Top 10 Reasons to Register NOW for the 2018 Conference



10. *Save money: **Early Bird discount** for SCN members only*
<http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/frmregister.php> (Oops...you missed this one; ended on Jan 31)
9. *Beat the crowd: **Book your room** stay at the conference hotel*
<http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/lodging.php>
8. *Connect with old friends: Schedule time to **meet your buddies** and see the awesome Austin sights*
7. **Volunteer:** *Greet newcomers and make new friends with like-minded women*
6. *Share your expertise: Make a **proposal to present** at the conference*
<http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/proposal/>
5. *Sell your creative wares and books: **Purchase a display table** in the exhibitors' area*
<http://www.storycircle.org/Conference/callforvendors.php>
4. *Avoid the rush: Make early flight plans and get the **best airfare rates***
3. *Get inspired: Rub elbows with **Sarton Book Award winners***
2. *Coaching opportunity: Sign up for a **coaching session** with an expert in her field*
1. *Reward yourself: **You deserve it!***

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

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True Words

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

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

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

- June, 2018: A True Friend (deadline April 15)
- September, 2018: Words of Wisdom (deadline July 15)
- December, 2018: Dreams Can Come True (deadline October 15)

CONGRATULATIONS to Mary Jo West! She is this quarter's winner of a free 1-year extension to her SCN membership. Mary Jo was randomly selected from this issue's True Words and Circle Voices authors. It's great to know that she'll continue to be a part of Story Circle.

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



Save The Date

July 20-22, 2018

SCN's biannual women's writing conference is scheduled for July 20-22, 2018, in Austin, TX. The Wyndham Hotel, site of the last five conferences, will again host the event. Room rates will be \$109/double occupancy. The SCN board decided to move the conference from spring to summer to avoid a room rate increase.



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

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