



SCN's 20/20 Vision: Exciting Times for Women's Stories

Dear Writing Sisters —

Picture me smiling as I've just returned from SCN's first international writing trip in Italy. Thanks to the brainchild and hard work of Len Leatherwood and Custom Europe, my husband and I joined 46 of our "closest friends" and toured the Amalfi coast after spending a day in Rome. Visits to Sorrento, Pompeii, Capri, and Naples with talented guides and expert bus drivers made it truly an amazing experience.

The travel and writing trip is just one of the many offerings of our growing twenty-two-year-old nonprofit. It is another of the ways we are busy expanding our vision for SCN.

And it has been a busy and challenging year for Story Circle Network, one that shone a light on our abilities, stamina, and mission – a year of perseverance, generosity, kindness, and tons of hard work to keep the SCN home fires burning. Growth is not always easy but SCN's vision is clear as we move into 2020.

Susan Albert has taken on the role of 2020-2021 programs chair, and has some exciting news for you about our next LifeLines retreat, which will be in Denver 2020! Teresa Lynn, in addition to her administrator responsibilities, has shifted into the membership chair role. A hand-in-glove move if I've ever seen one. Thanks, you two, for the power and energy you bring to these positions.

At the time of this writing (mid-November), we can see the light at the end of the website tunnel. We are soon to go live. The new and improved Story Circle Network website is just

around the bend – hallelujah! Once it goes live, we can focus on preparations for a 2021 conference. Thanks to Paula Yost, initial steps have already been taken regarding a new location. Stay tuned.

I cannot thank enough Susan Schoch, Len Leatherwood, Teresa Lynn, Shawn LaTorre, Abby Morris – and especially Susan Albert – for the hours they have spent to help create a new, inspirational, effective, and functional website for our organization. Also, a huge shout-out to members Jen Slaski-Halligan (see article on page 7), Leilani Rose, and Suzanne Mitchell, for behind-the-scenes assistance.

It is hard to express how complex our website needs are, what with our contests, the Sarton Awards program, the publication of our journals and the annual anthology, online classes, the SCN Book Review site – I could go on and on. But after months of planning, reviewing, experiencing setbacks, working through problems and concerns and working with the design firm, our new timetable to launch (after a thorough pre-launch testing process) will be in the December-January timeframe. The wait will be worth it so please be patient with us. We have so much to offer to you, to all women of all ages. We are here for you, and soon the new website will be unveiled and available to you as well.

"The most powerful evidence of SCN's transformative year in 2019 will be our new website," says Susan Schoch in her Editor's Note. She's right. Our hope is that this modernized, exciting SCN interface with the public will add to the depth and breadth of Story Circle's mission to empower



women to tell their stories and discover their identities through those stories.

We are Story Circle Network: where women become the authors of their lives.

Always remember: you matter. Your life matters. That's why we're committed to helping you tell your story.

*Holding hands around the circle,
Jeanne Guy, President*

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Editor's Note

Like most things Story Circle, the Journal is showing signs of change. Dividing so as to conquer, Jeanne Guy's President's Letter will now reflect the bigger picture for Story Circle, and this Editor's Note will highlight some of the issue's content.

We have an informative and fascinating edition, as always. For instance, the 2018 Sarton Award **winner for nonfiction, Nicole Evelina** turned her unanswered questions about the fabled Guinevere into a research project that produced three novels before becoming award-winning nonfiction. Our veteran interviewer, Pat Bean, brings us Nicole's story on page 12. And you'll find a **Sarton Update** on the current competition on page 27.

Susan Albert, our founder, is happily announcing a new **LifeLines** writing workshop for women, coming in 2020. See page 6 for details on what looks to be a promising and innovative collaboration.

In 2019, our annual anthology of member writings goes public! See page 5 for more on this expansion of our publication benefits for members. **Real Women Write: Sharing Stories, Sharing Lives**, has a great new look, and a surprisingly unpredictable subject: Growing / Older.

We're extending our reach and our impact, thanks to Shawn LaTorre and Natalie Weinstein and their work with the **Truth Be Told** project. Learn more on page 24 about this partnership to help women inmates.

The most powerful evidence of SCN's transformative year in 2019 will be our **new website**, not yet accessible as we go to press. This new SCN interface with the public will have 21st century functionality and we look forward to testing it out soon.

There is more to discover in this issue of the Story Circle Journal, including the stories and poems of our **True Words** section, beginning on page 14. Be sure to give yourself time to read and appreciate the work of your sister writers.

Happy Holidays! Hoping that you write your authentic story, and in this New Year, share it.

Susan Schoch, Editor

"The only way that we can live is if we grow. The only way that we can grow is if we change. The only way that we can change is if we learn. The only way we can learn is if we are exposed. And the only way that we can become exposed is if we throw ourselves out into the open. Do it. Throw yourself."

— C. JoyBell C.

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.

Story Circle Journal

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

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We welcome your letters, queries, and suggestions.

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Missed Issues: We try to ensure that *Story Circle Journal* arrives in your mailbox four times a year. If you miss an issue, send us a note and we'll mail you a replacement.

Change of address: If you move, please tell us.

THANK YOU!

Every donor to our **Go Fund Me** campaign is vital to SCN's work and each donation makes a difference. A **big** THANK YOU to each woman on this list for helping us build a new website and fulfill our mission of helping women write their stories.

Susan Albert	Barbara L. Miller
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Sharpen Your Skills: SCN's 2020 Winter Online Classes January 7 – March 3

Memoir and Life Writing:

Where Stories Begin
with Yes Cimcoz
4 weeks, Jan 7 – Feb 18

Journaling and Self-Discovery:

Capturing Your "Blue Moon" Life
with Tina Games
4 weeks, Jan 14 – Feb 11

Fiction:

Historical Fiction
with Ariela Zucker
6 weeks, Jan 21 – Mar 3

Flash Writing:

All About Flash Nonfiction
with Len Leatherwood
5 weeks, Jan 28 – Mar 3

Poetry:

Haiku for Health
with Cyndi Lloyd
6 weeks, Jan 14 – Feb 25

Publishing:

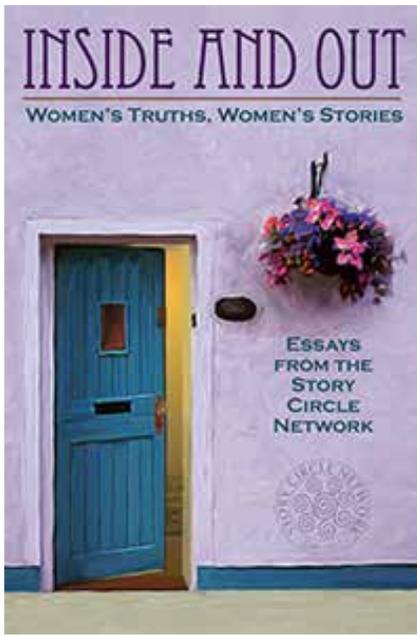
Pitch Like a Pro
with Marilyn Collins
4 weeks, Feb 4 – Mar 3

Independent Study:

One on One Mentoring
with B. Lynn Goodwin
Section 1, Jan 7 – Feb 3
Section 2, Feb 4 – Mar 3

To find out more, go to: <http://www.storycircleonlineclasses.org>





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

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

— Connie Spittler

Inside and Out is the most recent SCN book, a remarkable collection of our members' voices, drawn from our annual anthology, years 2009-2016. The following excerpt from the Editor's Note will give you some idea of the range in this beautiful volume.

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

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

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

Member Sherry Wachter provided us with design, formatting, and cover skills extraordinaire, and added tremendously to *Inside and Out*. And our founder, award-winning author Susan Wittig Albert, has written a powerful and compelling Foreword. We hope you give yourself the gift of reading these works by your sister writers. Or give that gift to a friend. Look for this fine collection here:

<https://www.amazon.com/Inside-Out-Womens-Stories-Network/dp/1981456260/>

"This is precisely the time when artists go to work. There is no time for despair, no place for self-pity, no need for silence, no room for fear. We speak, we write, we do language. That is how civilizations heal."

— Toni Morrison

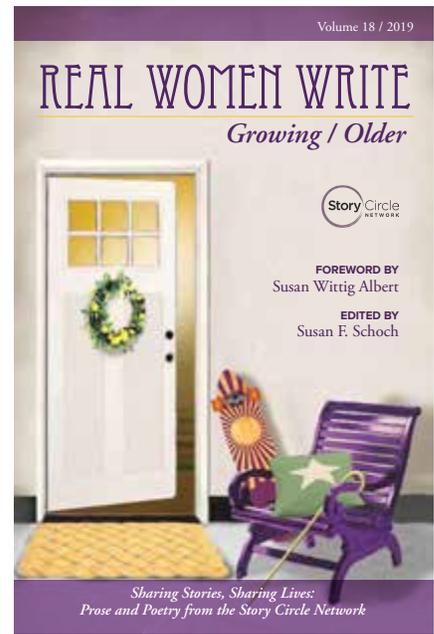
Real Women Write: Growing / Older Sharing Stories, Sharing Lives

Volume 18 of SCN's annual anthology, *Real Women Write 2019* will be published on Amazon this December. It's an edition of changes, from the topic, "Growing / Older," to the publication method. Such growth is exciting—if challenging—for us all!

Yet our mission and motivation are unchanged, and still vital. As Susan Wittig Albert notes in her Foreword to the book: "We need to tell our stories. We need to tell them so that the women who follow us will know what our lives were really like, and know that their mothers and grandmothers and great-grandmothers were more than just characters in men's tales, that we were dimensional, intentional persons with minds of our own, wills of our own, hopes of our own."

Those stories and hopes are what you will find in this collection of member writings. Susan Schoch, editor of this issue, affirms that "SCN's mission is consistently to help women grow through writing, and to generate greater awareness of the significance of women's lived experience and their creativity. In the diverse and meaningful works you will find here, that mission is again fulfilled."

Our beautiful cover, from Sherry Wachter, gives a hint of the engaging content in this issue. You can be sure we will send an email with further details when *Real Women Write 2019* is available, online or in paperback.



Sarah Rickman Wins Combs-Gates Award

Sarah Byrn Rickman, our only two-time Sarton winner, has earned yet another outstanding honor: the Combs-Gates Award, which was recently presented (along with a \$20,000 cash prize) at a meeting of the National Business Aviation Association in Las Vegas, Nevada.

The award recognizes Sarah's two books for young readers, biographies of pilots Nancy Love and Barbara "BJ" Erickson. (The Erickson biography was a Sarton winner in 2018; her previous Sarton, in 2016, was *Finding Dorothy Scott: Letters of a WASP Pilot*.) The two women served as ferry pilots during World War II, ferrying a wide range of Army aircraft, including the four-engine B-17 bomber and all the WWII pursuit (fighter) aircraft. Sarah's books bring the crucially important work of these women pilots to audiences of adult and young readers, ensuring that their service will continue to be honored and giving girls who are interested in flying valuable models for their own achievements.

Sarah, who has degrees in English and Creative Writing from Vanderbilt and Antioch universities, worked as a reporter and columnist for *The Detroit News*, and later, as editor of a suburban newspaper. She has written nine books about the WASPs and is a pilot herself, flying vintage tailwheel aircraft. Her two Sarton winners are: *Finding Dorothy Scott: Letters of a WASP Pilot* (biography, 2016); and *BJ Erickson: WASP Pilot* (young adult nonfiction, 2018). Visit her website: <https://sarahbyrnrickman.com/>

SCN salutes a Sarton winner who—like the proud women she writes about—just keeps flying high.



LifeLines 2020

Join Kathleen Adams and Your SCN Friends in Denver!

It is the nature of the human psyche to move toward wholeness and growth; each of us holds at our core a deep desire to become “more of who we really are.” Your journal will serve as scribe throughout the journey of your life, obligingly recording your own uniquely forged path toward individuation.... Your journal will stand as a chronicle of your growth, your hopes, your fears, your dreams, your ambitions, your sorrows, your serendipities.

—Kathleen Adams, *Journal to the Self*

We are delighted to announce that psychotherapist and journaling teacher **Kathleen Adams** will lead SCN’s 2020 **LifeLines** weekend, to be held **May 29-May 31, 2020**, at the Embassy Suites Denver Stapleton.

Kay’s work in journaling and journal therapy—journaling for healing and self-understanding—has inspired many. She is the founder and director of the Center for Journal Therapy and its professional training division, the Therapeutic Writing Institute. Her landmark training and credentialing programs are recognized nationwide and she travels extensively throughout the US to bring this training to therapists in their own communities. She is recognized as an excellent teacher who makes a difference in people’s lives.

As many Story Circle members know, journaling is the foundation of any writing practice, whether we’re working on a specific project or using writing to explore our selves. Journaling brings us insight into our past and

present actions and beliefs, and helps us chart a clear path into our future. Every writer needs to be able to use this tool for better understanding our selves, as well as developing writing fluency. If you’re not journaling now, Kay will help you create and establish a practice that will enrich your life. If you’re already keeping a journal, she will help you use it to go deeper and to learn more about your many contradictory selves.

The Embassy Suites Denver Stapleton is a full-service all-suite hotel located just ten miles from Denver’s International Airport, with complimentary shuttle service to/from the airport. We are planning **an eventful, memorable weekend**, beginning on Friday evening and ending at Sunday noon.

Calendar the dates now, and watch your email inbox for more information and the registration form, coming right after the holidays!



Arrivederci, Italia!

A very fortunate group of SCN members has just said goodbye to beautiful Sorrento, on the west coast of Italy. They completed our first international writing workshop, organized and led by Len Leatherwood, SCN’s Vice President and Coordinator of Online Classes, and a gifted author and teacher. Look for Len to give us details and more photos of the experience in our March issue.

We hope to have news of future trips ahead. Meanwhile, you can be getting your passport and immunizations in order...



A Generous Heart

by Jeanne Baker Guy

“Sharing our stories creates the fabric of human connection, allowing us to be seen—to be *known*—and to not feel alone in the world.”

—Jen Slaski-Halligan

SCN member Jen Slaski-Halligan is an inspiring force to be reckoned with. With a 1999 degree from Stanford and almost twenty years in the corporate brand and marketing world, her support of SCN has been timely. Her talents lie in leadership, coaching, and creativity around marketing, campaigns, content, and events, but for me her real talent is her attitude about life and her desire to be of service to people. Gratefully, that desire has crossed paths with our needs.

Generous with her time and talents, she has, over the last ten months on a behind-the-scenes *gratis* basis, been instrumental in helping with our new logo and website. Why? She is also a writer, a journaler, and the whole idea of Story Circle Network intrigues her.

“I believe deeply in the mission and Susan Albert’s vision for SCN,” she says. “I believe you can be the author of your life. There is magic in using writing to do that, in capturing your thoughts in the written form. I’m excited about helping women tune in to that which is theirs to do, to craft the possibilities that empower them to claim how their story unfolds.”

Jen and I met in Austin 2008 at Seton Cove, a spirituality center, when she took a class I facilitated on reflective writing. I remember thinking, how could this young woman (young enough to be my daughter) carry so much “story” wisdom in her? Three months later, we attended and were by choice roommates at Kay Adam’s 2008 Journal Therapy Conference, where I taught a breakout journal-writing session. The conference featured, along with Kay, some of the great names in journal

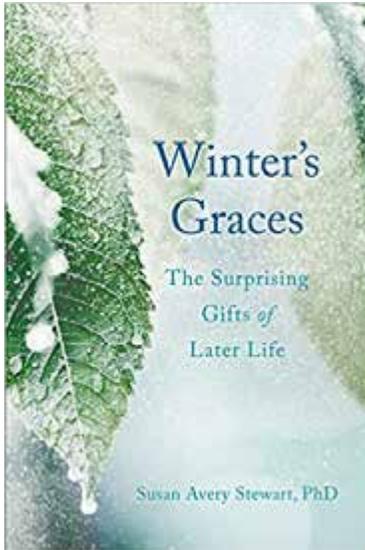
research and writing: my mentor Christina Baldwin, James Pennebaker, and Tristine Ranier. Jen, who’d been journaling for as long as she could remember, commented that she felt like she had found her tribe.

Daily journaling, along with the whole modality of narrative therapy, are healing practices for Jen. Regular vulnerability with others, making sure she acknowledges how life’s not perfect, how it’s been hard, allowing others to be where they are while she authentically discloses who she is—all are attributes of her wisdom rooted in story.

She believes that sharing our stories with each other is a special form of alchemy. “It creates the fabric of human connection, allowing us to be seen—to be *known*—and to not feel alone in the world.”

Part of Story Circle’s plan is to expand our ranks to embrace younger generations of women writers. Jen wants to help bridge the gap between younger and older—the younger generations to capture the stories of the older, honor and preserve them, learning from their wisdom to guide them on their way. “Each of us has a unique path but we are all pilgrims walking through life. The human condition is timeless, so no matter our age, talking about our paths lets us teach, comfort, and encourage each other along. Sharing our stories honors where we’ve been and who we’ve become, but also inspires the selves we have yet to be,” she says.

Jen, we thank you for your contributions to our organization and are glad to call you one of our own: you truly are a Story Circle Network Sister.



SCBR Featured Review

Story Circle Book Reviews – reviewing books by, for, and about women, has been on hiatus during our transition period to a new website. This review from earlier in the year is not only a heads-up about a good book, but also a reminder that SCBR will soon be back stronger than ever!

Winter's Graces: The Surprising Gifts of Later Life

by Susan Avery Stewart
She Writes Press, 2018

Reviewed by Trilla Pando

<http://www.storycirclebookreviews.org/reviews/wintersgraces.shtml>

A friend e-mailed a series of pictures—older people each looking into a train window seeing a reflection of themselves but a younger self. Touching, but after reading *Winter's Graces* I'd like to know what Susan Avery Stewart thinks of these shots. I suspect that she would prefer it if the person reflected were the exact person looking out. Likely both would have a contented countenance. Her advice to the backward-looking folks—embrace the now, look forward to the future, and don't ache for what's gone before. Stewart, who is embracing her own eighth decade, uses her memoir to encourage and lead others to reach this place.

Stewart's declared audience is women "in their fifties and sixties who are dreading what lies on the far side of midlife." When in her early fifties, a workshop leader observed that an experience she had shared with the group was "a wonderful crone story." What!?

Suddenly, she realized the inevitability of her own aging.

While those of in midlife may be the target audience, the author stresses that all ages, and both men and women will find much of value in later life. As a Crone past her own midlife—I can attest to that.

For the author's bio, or to read an excerpt, visit Susan Avery Stewart's website: <https://wintersgraces.com>

The journey she presents can be graceful as the name of the book implies. Using the ancient mythological notion of the Graces as patrons of various pleasures, Stewart offers eleven Graces of Winter, ranging from the pleasures of Creativity (my favorite) to Remembrance and Contentment. To counter too much Contentment, Necessary Fierceness also tells her story.

It is these stories from around the globe—from the Ozark Mountains to India to the Netherlands to Haiti and points between—that intrigue me. They bring the message from these wise crones that life can be full. Along with each story, Stewart offers reflections, many showing her own Jungian training and suggestions for enhancing the reader's own growth. As well, she shares her own journey through the transition: how both her research and her life are unfolding.

Is this book timely? The answer to that question is a clear and emphatic "Yes!" On this day, as I am writing this review, the *New York Times* observes that an Op-Ed article celebrating the "resilience and joie de vivre of older women" was among the most-emailed articles of the previous week.

A favorite reviewer at SCBR, with 117 reviews posted, **Trilla Pando** offers this glimpse of herself:

I live in my favorite city, Houston, where I write, volunteer at the Museum of Fine Arts, and enjoy all the fun a city offers. For years, in both Texas and Georgia, I wrote about food and memories in a weekly column "Stirring up memories." That remains my writing interest. Since 2000, when I joined Story Circle, I've been a contributing editor to the Story Circle Journal and a member of the board. In 2005, I became president for a two-year term. I particularly relish writing book reviews. I'm delighted to have become a SuperNova Reviewer for SCBR. Reviewing has made me both a more careful reader, as I seek to capture the essence of a book, and a more adventuresome one, as I enjoy the fun of sharing a new experience and books I might not otherwise have chosen.



From the Blogs:

One Woman's Day

Women are often hard on themselves. We can attempt to live up to unreasonable and unreachable standards, or as our talented new contributor, **Karen Price**, points out so lovingly, we can choose to look at things differently. All SCN members are welcome to contribute to the blog at: <http://onewomansday.wordpress.com/about/>

by Kali' Rourke

Embracing the Gift of Imperfection

by Karen Price – Port Austin, MI

Three hens live at our house – Cinnamon, Clove, and Pepper. The first two are friendly Buff Orpingtons and the latter is a Black Maran. The buffs lay the lighter brown eggs and the Maran lays what are known as chocolate eggs. Who wouldn't want a chicken that lays chocolate eggs? Now if I just had a goose that laid golden eggs, I'd be all set. Disclaimer: the shell is chocolate-colored, no actual chocolate was used in the making of this egg.

A sad little smaller-than-a-ping-pong-ball egg was Pepper's best effort. She hasn't given me another egg since then. I'm hopeful that she'll lay many more and perhaps more in line of the size that the other girls offer.

When my husband handed me that wee egg, I immediately felt for Pepper. I've had plenty of days when I've given everything I had, but all I have to show for my work is something tiny and feeble. I walked over to where Pepper was nesting and patted her back. "Thank you," I told her with sincere empathy. "I appreciate your egg today." I was very careful not to make fun of her or tell her there was anything wrong with her egg.

I was tender with her, as I would want someone to be tender with my efforts at creativity. Often, I will refrain

from creating anything, because I am afraid that my results will be less than stellar, that my efforts will be puny and even comical.

Well, sometimes my creations are puny and comical. I've made, cooked, and written things that went right into the trash. I once spent days weaving and crocheting a blanket that turned out to be extremely out of shape and just squee-hawed. But I kept it. I have it neatly folded and stored away because I learned so much in making it. "It could have been beautiful," I thought, "if I'd known more." But now I see the potential behind the puny effort.

It's taken me a long time to boldly go and make terrible things. It's part of making excellent creations. Of course, I've had to come to terms with the concept that when I'm learning, I have to plan on making something twice. Make, tear out, repeat. Or sometimes – make, laugh, toss, and recreate.

I'm going to go off and making some things today. I will remind myself that I embrace the gift of imperfection. Perhaps I'll make something really grand, maybe not. And as I allow myself that adventure, I want to pass it on to those I encounter as well.



Karen Price blogs regularly at <http://thebestoftimesfarm.blogspot.com>. This post originally appeared there and is published here with permission of the author. Karen says, "I am at a point in my life where I have everything I wanted and am doing just about everything I've ever dreamed of. We have our own little hobby farm with a little herd of goats. Life is to be celebrated and I'm celebrating!"



Writing Tips from Our Teachers

As in every Journal, **Len Leatherwood**, Coordinator of the SCN Online Classes program, brings us a lesson this winter from one of our talented instructors. It's a dark season, fit for inner work and writing that goes deep. **Mary-Elizabeth Briscoe** challenges and supports us in looking "into those dark places."

Write Into Healing by Mary-Elizabeth Briscoe

Staring into the dark abyss of long buried emotions can be paralyzing. First glances ignite a burning fear from the very depths of your being. You ask yourself, "Why would I want to rehash what I'm living through by writing about it? How could I dare peek into those emotionally charged places? Places I have carefully constructed to hold my painful emotions hidden safely from the light? And why on earth would I want to open up that pain? Again? Who in their right mind would consider such a thing let alone actually agree to do it?"

If you're looking to move beyond writing strictly from your head and including heart and soul into your work, or you simply want to heal neglected wounds, then you must answer those questions with the courage to step into the abyss and begin your healing journey. It is in that very space that transformational healing can occur.

As a psychotherapist and memoirist, I have had to find the strength to face those very questions, and have found both personally and professionally the powerful healing that can come from writing our truth. Research now supports this fact, showing that writing through traumatic,

difficult, challenging experiences enhances both emotional and physical well-being (Pennebaker and Smyth 2016). This type of expressive writing reduces stress, pain, boosts the immune system, and leads to an overall improved sense of well-being.

So, for those of you who need that added scientific push, there it is. The evidence is clear: expressive writing heals. We can't escape the pain, loss, change, confusion, fear, etc., that comes from living this life. Writing your truth gives voice to these experiences and offers a unique type of healing.

It's important, if you dare to take the challenge to delve into your painful places, to surround yourself with supportive friends, family, a mental health counselor, anyone who can hold you through your healing journey when and if you need them.

Maybe now is the time for you stand at the edge of your own abyss. Time to look into those dark places. When you're ready, take a deep cleansing breath and summon your courage. Now, pick up your pen, start writing and let your healing journey begin.



Mary-Elizabeth Briscoe, MA, LCMHC, is a licensed mental health intuitive counselor, and Reiki practitioner. She is a 2019 IPPY Silver Medalist for her debut memoir, *The First Signs of April*. She also co-authored *Anxiety Relief*. After spending a year living on the Dingle Peninsula in Ireland working on her next memoir, she has returned to live and write on Cape Cod. She is a regular contributor to "Cape Women Online" and "Sweatpants and Coffee" magazines. She teaches writing workshops on Cape Cod and in Vermont, as well as online with the Story Circle Network.



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



Our Future is Female!

Lona Tehrani is an undergraduate student at Brown University concentrating in Hispanic Studies. Although she is pursuing a humanities degree, ever since the age of three she has dreamt of becoming a pediatric physician. At Brown, she volunteers for Emergency Medical Services, is a leader for Brown Outdoor Leadership Training, and tutors for various groups on campus. Lona loves a good workout, hiking with her two dogs, baking sweet treats and spending time with her loved ones. We are delighted to introduce you to this young writer, and to welcome her as a new member of Story Circle Network!

Brother

by Lona Tehrani

I remember the exact moment when my brother's anxiety first crept up on us. I was fifteen, and we were seated on red bar stools, watching as our friend Titusun whipped out rolls of salmon tempura. Suddenly, my brother's face blanched and his expression changed. He struggled to breathe. I thought he was having an asthma attack, but this was different. After a few minutes it passed and we drove home.

Two weeks later, he experienced a similar attack at CVS. This time he ended up in the hospital for extensive tests. Within a short time, his condition worsened, forcing his admission into UCLA's psychiatric unit. My family watched in horror as my "normal" brother was soon diagnosed with anxiety, depression, and borderline personality disorder.

Since then, my brother has been repeatedly hospitalized, and we have even found him sprawled on the kitchen floor, overdosed. In other words, over four years, I have lost the brother I have always known and this new person—erratic and unpredictable—has taken his place.

How have I coped with this loss of my Irish twin, a boy who is only 360 days older than I am?

I wish I could say with grace. That would be a lie. The truth is I have been angry, sad, disappointed, frustrated. I still am. I want him to pick up where he was in that sushi bar and proceed as if nothing has happened. Unfortunately, I can now see that is not likely. Instead, I must meet him where he is and accept these new circumstances. I take deep breaths when he turns on me with angry words. I tell myself, "This is not about you."

What have I learned? Life and people can change in an instant. Biochemistry is powerful. Outcomes are unpredictable. Origins are perhaps unknowable. Trying to control others is futile. Mental illness is complicated.

And me? I am more compassionate, empathetic, better at allowing myself to feel my often-contradictory emotions, and humbled by the illness that has forced me to recognize my weakness, my strength, and my love, despite it all.

"Teaching is about taking things apart;
writing is about putting things together."

— Toni Morrison



Sarton Winner:

Introducing Nicole Evelina

by Pat Bean

The recently deceased Pulitzer Prize-winning author, Toni Morrison, told writers that if there was a book they really wanted to read, but it hadn't been written, then they should write it. Nicole Evelina did just that.

After writing three fictional books about Queen Guinevere, Nicole wrote a non-fiction book based on what had been written about Guinevere over the past thousand years. The resulting book, *The Once and Future Queen*, won Story Circle Network's 2018 Sarton Award in the non-fiction category.

Evelina says when she was researching her award-winning Guinevere trilogy, she had to go through hundreds of books, causing her to wish she could have found the information in a single book. "So, I wrote what I wanted to see on the shelf."

Nicole was born, raised, and still lives in St. Louis, Missouri. She went to Incarnate Word Academy, a Catholic all-girls high school that she credits with helping create the independent, creative feminist that she is today. "I wasn't born rich, so it took my parents, grandparents and great-aunt to afford to send me there for four years...I am forever grateful for their sacrifices."

"Being able to go to school during those awkward teenage years without the pressure of boys really helped me come into my own. I'm a huge proponent of single-sex education," she says. "By letting us girls develop in strength, self-esteem, and talent, the school made us into strong women. As the years went by, I came to realize not all women have this opportunity and it turned me into a passionate advocate of women's rights. I think that is why I write the stories of unknown, little-known, or forgotten women now."

The Sarton winner also credits her parents for their support. "They always valued my voice and my opinions and made sure I knew I could do anything I set my mind on."

Nicole studied international business in college because she wanted to travel the world, only picking up English as a second major when her advisor told her she

was a "really talented writer." But it was her final class in college, a public relations course, that set her on her professional career path. "I fell in love: there's a job where you get to tell people what to think! Perfect for a bossy little know-it-all like me. I ended up getting my master's in media communications, which is really a combination of public relations and marketing, and it's what I've done for my day job for the last 17 years. Let me tell you, a background in marketing really comes in handy as an author, especially one who is self-published."

Nicole never thought about where the books she devoured as a child came from. "I had no idea that being a writer was even a thing. But now that I think about it, as an only child, I grew up telling myself and my imaginary friends stories...So, I guess I was practicing all along without realizing it."

But it wasn't until college that she started writing anything that looked like a real story, and then it was just a way to use her imagination when she had nothing else to do—until September 14, 1999, when she finished reading *The Mists of Avalon*. "I loved that book – it seriously changed my life in several ways – but I hated Marion Zimmer Bradley's portrayal of Guinevere as a featherhead."

Nicole looked for other books about Guinevere and came across Parke Godwin's *Beloved Exile*, whose Guinevere was strong and intelligent. But his plot, she says, didn't jive right. This set her thinking about Guinevere's life before and after King Arthur and Lancelot. "There had to be more. That's when Guinevere came into my head and said she wanted me to tell her story...in a way no one else ever had. I went home that night and wrote the prologue to what would become my first published novel, *Daughter of Destiny*."

Nicole says she played with the book on and off for the next decade but it wasn't until 2007 or so, after she had read *Twilight*, that she started taking her writing seriously. For some reason, she says, *Twilight* inspired her as a writer. "I thought: Hey, if Stephanie Meyer can do this, so can I."

Her first book, *Daughter of Destiny*, was about three-fourths finished when Nicole finally started to realize she might have something publishable. It was about the same time self-publishing was beginning, and after coming close three times to getting a deal with a big publisher, that was the way she went. *Daughter of Destiny* was then quickly followed by two more Guinevere books, *Camelot's Queen* and *Mistress of Legend*.

In early 2015, she was writing her fourth book, *Madame Presidentess*, a historical fiction book about Victoria Woodhull, the first woman to run for president in the U.S. "I wanted the book to come out before the 2016 presidential election because even then I was pretty sure Hillary Clinton would get the nomination and the press opportunity would be tremendous."

Nicole first learned about Victoria Woodhull by seeing a picture of her with an alluring caption on Pinterest that said she was known by her detractors as Mrs. Satan. "I immediately had to know more," she recalls. "I mean, any woman called Mrs. Satan is someone I have to get to know." What she learned is that Woodhull was born in 1838 and was the first woman to run for U.S. president, and also the first woman to establish a brokerage firm on Wall Street.

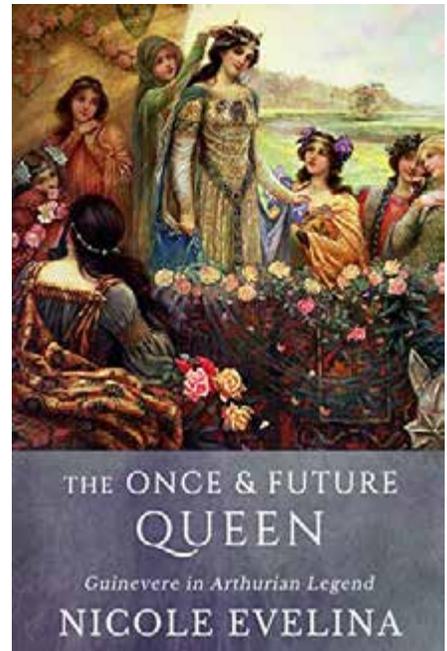
Nicole has also written a romance novel, *Been Searching for You*. "I really disliked romance books for a long time—until I realized what I really hated was the traditional bodice-ripper." What Nicole did was to write a romance for those 30s-plus single women like herself, who are still romantics at heart.

Meanwhile, her decision to write the non-fiction book, *The Once and Future Queen: Guinevere in Arthurian Legend*, began when she was asked to give a presentation on Guinevere for Women's History Month in 2017. Since Guinevere wasn't real, Nicole wondered what she would talk about. She decided to research how Guinevere had changed over time, and came up with 30,000 words of notes. With those notes, she created a Sarton winner.

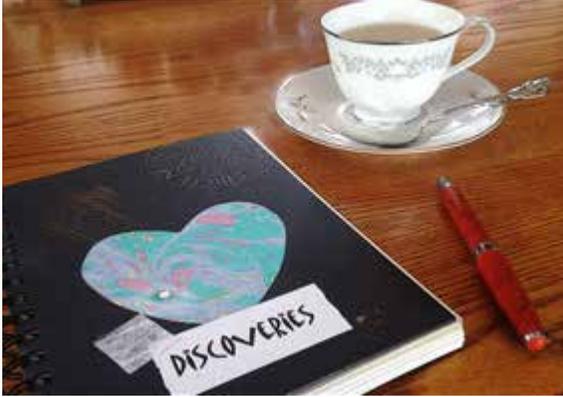
"The stories of women," says Nicole, "especially unknown or nearly forgotten women, are the focus of my writing, and to have my work recognized by an organization dedicated to women's writing is beyond amazing."

"In a world where we are constantly battling sexism and glass ceilings, it is a great joy to know I have a community of strong women with me, and that they are honoring books about women and the women who write them...And of course, The Sarton Award is a major award, so it certainly doesn't hurt my resume any."

As for the future, Nicole admits she has a "crazy-strong internal drive," and a list of over 50 books she is compelled to write. "I'm keenly aware of my own mortality and I have a deep fear of dying before I can fulfill my duty to these characters and people who have chosen me to tell their stories...I know others can do more, but as an author, that is what I am called to do. And I will keep doing it as fast as I can until my last breath."



Pat Bean is an SCN Board member, and a regular contributor to the Journal. A retired award-winning journalist, for nine years she traveled the country in a small RV with her canine companion, Maggie. Her book about that time is *Travels with Maggie*. Pat is passionate about nature, writing, art, family, and her new dog, Harley. She blogs at <https://patbean.net>



True Words from Real Women

A selection of short lifewriting pieces by SCN members, True Words is edited by Jo Virgil. This quarter's optional topic is **"A Brilliant Idea."** Future topics are found on the back page. Please contribute your own True Words to the Journal at www.storycircle.org/members/frmjournalsubmission.php (Our submission process will be changing, along with the SCN website. Watch for new guidelines.)

Letting Go

Linda D. Menicucci – Paradise, CA
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I am a master of letting go. At 70, you have to be. I have let go of so much—my parents, friends and family members who have died, my youth and beauty, the career I loved, my son and grandson as they grew and moved away, my pets who meant so much, and, of course, long term plans. And if these losses were not enough to make me a master of letting go, last year I lost the town and community that were so dear, where I lived for 18 years—a town called Paradise.

Faced with so much loss, I have decided that from now on I intend to hold on. I will hold on to the memories of all the people and things that I ever loved: how my love for my baby took my breath away; how my mother and my aunts kept me safe in our family; how my father would catch me in his arms and swing me in the air; how my friends filled my life with laughter and comfort; and how my grandson fills me with a joy and love that has no bounds.

I will hold on to the beauty of each new day, to a child's smile, to acts of kindness, to short-term plans fulfilled, to good neighbors who have reappeared in my life, to my garden, and to any joy I can give to others. And I will hold on to every moment I spend with my husband—my companion and love of 52 years.

And when it comes time to let go of this life, I want to take my cue from the flowers in my garden, which bloom and release their fragrance, live for their allotted time, and die, neither holding on nor letting go—simply being, in their beauty, what they were meant to be.

A Letter to My Daughters in College

Suzy Beal – Bend, OR
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You are familiar, I'm sure, with the saying "If you love someone, let them go." Well, there is no question of my loving you. I do.

You seem settled for this next fall term, even though you are struggling with the selection of classes. Your homes are secure, the financial part is in place, and you have the bus schedules worked out. You are in tune with your surroundings. Now, it is time for me to step back from your daily lives and let you go about being the independent, strong-willed young women you have become. I am not suggesting I don't want to be a part of your lives, because I do. Your sweet voices on the phone make my day complete, but it is important for me to start the process of letting go.

I don't want to run away and hide, leave you in the dark, or shut off communication or contact. In fact, I want us to feel and be separate women, while still in the same room. This will be much harder for me than for you. When I think of the void this will cause in my days, I want to say "No, not yet!" I am terrified of setting us on a path where you may choose not to confide or share your daily lives with me.

I hope this letter doesn't mean the end of anything, but the start of something new—more mature and better for us all. Honoring your spirits and mine, and giving us permission to *be* and *become* the women of our own destinies is my desire. I love and cherish you both.

CONGRATULATIONS to **Carol J. Wechsler Blatter!** Randomly selected from among this issue's True Words and Circle Voices authors, Carol is the winner of a free 1-year extension to her SCN membership. Submit your work and you might win, too!

Living Without Shoulds

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I continue to try and be aware of how often I use the word *should* in my vocabulary. When I pay attention to my self-talk, I notice there are a lot of *shoulds* accompanying any given statement. “I should lose weight.” “I should try harder.” “I should call...” These *shoulds* create a sense of not doing enough, not having enough, or not being enough. Our culture continually tells us that more is better. Each time I say “I should,” I am telling myself I am lacking in something.

I asked myself, “What would my life be like if I did away with all *shoulds*?” The first thing that came to my mind was freedom. I would be free of:

- worrying about what others think about me,
- attempting to meet unrealistic expectations of others or myself,
- doing it right the first time.

Writing these different ways of being felt wonderful. One might say we need those *shoulds* to keep us from hurting others or ourselves. I trust that most of us know right from wrong. We don’t need a *should* to tell us not to rob a store. The key, for me, is to not try to be what I am not. It is about accepting who I am and allowing myself to be different. Marlo Thomas wrote a book for children back in the 1970s, titled *Free to Be...You and Me*. This idea is as much for me, as an adult, as it is for children. When I am fully at ease with myself, I am free to be me—no need for *shoulds*.

I invite you to make a list of *shoulds* that seem to dominate your self-talk. Behind each *should* is a sense of lack. Allow yourself to look at what you fear if you don’t follow that *should*. Enjoy the journey—it is about coming home to your true self.

The Magic Slate

Sara Etgen-Baker – Anna, TX
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All day the sun hibernated in the gray clouds. In its absence, a winter wind had woven the corners of the kitchen window with tiny patterns of ice—four small frost spider webs. I stared at them, recalling the words my husband and I had exchanged before breakfast. It hadn’t been a big argument—just silly, angry words. But they had hurt nonetheless. Soup simmered on the stove, and I turned to give it a stir, replaying his last cutting remark before he’d left for work. Even now, something ugly inside me wanted to retaliate...insult for insult.

My granddaughter plopped down on the floor with her Magic Slate, while I paced about getting dinner ready. She scribbled on the tablet, then in one quick, clean movement, swished the plastic page up, making the marks disappear.

Pausing to watch, I wished it could be as simple and easy as that to erase the wounding words and angry graffiti Bill and I had scribbled that morning. I didn’t know why it was so hard to forgive, why lifting the page and erasing the wrong from my mind, determining to no longer focus on it, required such a Herculean effort.

What was this need I had to be right? How important was it really to cling to my pride, when compared to the happiness of a clean page?

When my husband breezed in through the door on a wave of frigid air, he looked more uncertain than angry. “About this morning,” he began. “I’m sor—”

“I’m sorry, too!” I said. We stood in the kitchen hugging each other, the faint magical swish somewhere in the room.

I’m sorry. Two simple and magical words that allowed us to let go of our anger and our need to be right. How forgiving and free it is, saying *I’m sorry*.



Jo Virgil, True Words Editor, has been an SCN member since 2005, and currently serves on the Board (Publications Workgroup and Programs Committee). She has contributed as Editor of True Words in the quarterly SCN Journal since 2015. Jo has a Master Degree in Journalism and has worked as a reporter, a writing workshop teacher, Community Relations Manager for Barnes & Noble, and Community Outreach Coordinator for the Texas Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities. Writing and sharing stories are her passions.

The Elephant in the Room

Susan Flemr – Des Moines, IA
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I love elephants.

My mother said she awakened one morning when I was three years old to find me missing from my bed. Hearing unusual noise from the street outside our home, she rushed to the window, where she spied my pajama-clad self wandering between the legs of four elephants. They had been unloaded from a truck and were being watered from a fire hydrant on their way to the county fair in our Ohio town. Unnoticed by the animal caretakers, I was quickly removed from the herd by my terrorized mother. Perhaps that began my fascination with this humongous, lovely, and intelligent animal.

Like all of us who have temporary, or lifetime, obsessions with such things—elephants, owls, butterflies, pigs, cardinals, rocks, hedgehogs are just a few I have known others to have—I found the object of my obsession everywhere. And thinking that every elephant was meant for me to possess, I wanted to purchase every picture, sculpture, piece of jewelry, and informative book. Friends and family cooperated with my obsession and gifted me with elephants of all kinds. Each room and every shelf displayed my obsession. Elephants gave me a greater understanding of life as I learned of their devotion, their physical balance despite their size and weight, and their expression of emotion with real tears.

In my seventy-second year of life, my husband and I moved into a downsized senior apartment. I faced the need to let go of my elephants and they were distributed to family members. Perhaps without my knowing, they may have now journeyed to new destinations in thrift stores. I felt a bit self-righteous as I said farewell to my obsession.

Just the other day, while straightening a desk drawer, I came across a three-quarter-inch onyx carved elephant, picked out for me years ago by our first grandson, Ben. I held it for many minutes and then, while filled with guilty pleasure, tucked it right back in my desk drawer where it will remain indefinitely!

Facing Cancer

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“You have breast cancer.”

I shouldn't have been surprised. Statistically, one in eight women in the U.S. develop breast cancer. Both my maternal grandmother and mother were diagnosed and survived. No, I wasn't surprised, but I was scared. This was not a club in which I wanted membership.

My husband lost his former wife of 32 years to cancer. She had melanoma and the skin cancer took a year to take her down. He assured me we would fight this disease together and that we would win, just as my grandmother and mother had won. I did not realize, until the treatments were over, how stunned Ron was by the diagnosis. Only recently he admitted that he worried God might be so cruel as to tear two wives from him through this illness. He hid his anxiety from me and took over as caretaker, advocate, and saint-in-the-making.

A team of doctors—surgeon, radiologist, and oncologist—laid out a treatment plan. I put on a cheerful veneer, conjured a false bravado, and followed protocol. Diagnosed in the summer, I had surgery in August, began several months of chemo, followed by daily radiation for five weeks. The journey was excruciatingly tiring, but the doctors and nurses were caring and gentle.

Today, I am 18 months cancer-free and back into the fullness of life.

Unlike Natalie Goldberg, I did not journal my way through my cancer journey. I'd say I'm ashamed, as a memoirist, that I didn't chronicle my experience and emotions...but, I'm not. I believe we each have to honor our unique way of facing adversity, or we lose our authenticity and integrity. I chose to go into my cave, pulling my husband inside to hold me in the darkness, and to assure everyone I was doing well, no worries.

Truth is, there were worries. But I pushed them aside and let the strong woman inside me, whom I call Herself, rise and take care of business. As a survivor, I can reflect today on the seriousness of my disease. And immerse myself in gratitude. Literally wallow in it.

“If there's a book that you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it.”

— Toni Morrison

The Broken Rainbow

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After the flood,
I frantically searched the sky, looking
for that perfect rainbow,
that promise,
that vow,
that never again
would there be
that painful heartbreak and loss,
that inner destruction.

What I found instead,
dropped upon my kitchen floor,
was a broken rainbow,
a window prism, interrupted,
creating modern art.

I gazed in wonder
at a new way to see
hope and beauty in sorrow,
on this *yarzeit* for my son.

[*Yarzeit* is a Yiddish word meaning the
anniversary of a death.]

Burying Your Monster

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When your monster lies dying, your defenses crack.
As the flames of its throat become ashes
Sorrow slakes your thirst for attack.
And your poised, sharpened arrows arc downward
At the sight of its bent, bony back.

You once ached to encase it in boulders.
Crush its blows with your own roaring cries.
But on that first slow walk to your mother's sealed grave
You bring pebbles of remembrance,
Softened shoulders,
Moist eyes.

The Saga of Stephen

Patricia Roop Hollinger – Westminster, MD
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“He will die within the next couple of months.”

“Don’t be a martyr, Mrs. Bubel.”

These words from doctors were etched in my mind as I brought my second son, Stephen, home after his birth on August 17, 1965, with the diagnosis of Cytomegalic Inclusion Disease. Of course, I didn’t want to believe them. His birth weight of 4lb. 4oz. did not surprise me, as his older brother Michael only weighed 4lb. 4oz. at birth, and he was now a healthy three-year-old.

When we brought him home, I was quickly confronted with inconsolable screaming and bodily contortions that were not quelled with the usual motherly comforting. A good night’s sleep eluded me. As he screamed one morning, I shook him. Michael was witnessing a mother he did not recognize and he said, “Mommy, he just has a pain.” With that, I laid Stephen down, went to the phone, and called Dr. Dutton.

“Dr. Dutton,” I said, “I can’t do this anymore.” Thomas Hospital was recommended, where children with major birth defects were cared for.

Within days my husband and I prepared ourselves to take Stephen to this hospital. We took Michael along, for we wanted him to know where Stephen was going. I didn’t want him to be concerned that someday we might just drop him off somewhere. On the drive to the hospital, Michael leaned over the backseat of the car and asked me, “Mommy, Stephen will be able to play football with me, will he?”

“No, Michael. Stephen will not ever be playing football with you.”

Stephen, now at the age of 54, lives in a group home for the disabled in Maryland, where we now live. His hearing and vision are impaired. He has to be fed. He has to be diapered. He is unable to walk or talk. No one should ever have to let go of caring for their own child, but it was the best decision for Stephen and the family.

“It is what you don’t write that frequently gives
what you do write its power.”

— Toni Morrison

I Didn't Do It, and That's OK

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As I picked up my daily journal on a recent morning, I noted that it was 8:30 a.m. I then wrote, “It’s not yet 9:00 a.m. and I have walked my dog Scamp, made my bed, washed dishes, blogged, and read a chapter in Carole King’s memoir, *A Natural Woman*.”

I paused for a moment, then laughed as I continued writing. “It feels good to give myself credit for the things I’ve done instead of beating myself up for all the things on my to-do list that I haven’t done.”

All I can say is that at 80 years old, it’s about time.

Reading my journals of the past, I discovered that I was constantly abusing myself for not doing everything I planned or wanted to do, even though in the earlier journals, when I was a working mother, I found myself amazed that I had managed to do so much.

While I no longer beat myself up, my to-do lists are always longer than my attention span and energy can handle. I like it that way. It assures that I will never wake up and find myself with nothing to do.

But being okay with not accomplishing it all is a blessing that has only come with age. I like that even better.

Our Last Goodbye

Maya Lazarus – Caldwell, TX
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It has taken 30 years to commit to paper the pain of losing a child who wasn’t my own.

The day I left her at a lawyer’s office, it was a brutally cold January 4. We had slept together, my niece (on my husband’s side) and I, and she awoke saying she wanted to take—no, insisted on taking—her huge stuffed Mickey Mouse, in addition to her one suitcase. This four-year-old, smart as Einstein and 50 times as verbal, knew she was leaving me—not by either of our choices, but at her age it was hard for her to understand what that meant. In reality, we probably would not see each other again. I stuffed Mickey into a cardboard box, pushing his head down, wetting him with my tears.

I loved this adorable pixie, who I had raised for more than two years. I loved her as much as my own daughter, if not more. But I didn’t have custody, and since her father had gotten out of prison because he was dying, I had to let her go. Even after she told me something her father had done that involved sexual abuse and I had reported it to the authorities, I still had to let her go.

She and I hugged and cried. She smelled of milk from her morning breakfast. She begged me not to go. My stomach twisted into a knot. My chest tightened as I squeezed out one last sob. I let go of her, said “Goodbye. I love you so, so much,” and walked out.

Regret

Mary Jo West – San Clemente, CA
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When I was a teenager,
 I told you
 I didn’t want to be like you.

I felt angry
 you allowed my father
 to belittle
 and demoralize you,
 making me believe
 you were weak.

I didn’t understand
 how the death of your
 mother
 and callous abandonment
 by your father
 when you were five
 tormented you.

But, you went on,
 a survivor.

Coping with your
 insecurities
 tried my patience, but
 no one made me feel more
 loved
 than you.

I think of you now
 in complicated chords
 of love and pain,
 gratitude and compassion.

You were a woman of
 substance.

I wish you were here
 so I could love you,
 the way you deserved.

Seeking Nirvana

Shelley Thrasher – Tyler, TX
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Let water flow through your fingers.
 Let raindrops tap on your roof.
 Let sunrays warm your shoulders.
 Let chill wind chap your cheeks.

Watch a spider daily spin her web.
 Let a pomegranate crack, seep red.
 Let a gardenia’s scent engulf you.
 Let the hot sun freckle your hands.

Ain't

Jane Gragg Lewis – Laguna Niguel, CA
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I can hardly wait. There's only one more month before school starts, and I'll finally be a first-grader and get to ride the school bus.

"You have to stop saying 'ain't' before you start school," Mama orders.

"Why? I've always said 'ain't.' Everybody does."

"Well, believe me. Everybody else is going to stop saying it, too. I won't have you going to school sounding like a hick. A country bumpkin. White trash. You know better."

"What happens if I do say 'ain't' at school?" I ask.

"You'll never find out because you absolutely will not say it. I taught you better and don't want you embarrassing me. Do you want your teacher to think you're not smart?"

Of course I don't. So for the rest of August 'ain't' is erased from my words. It's easy except for "Ain't I?" That one is tricky.

Mama keeps telling me, "It's 'Aren't I?'"

"That sounds dumb. Nobody says, 'I are.'"

"If you think that sounds dumb, try saying, 'Amn't I?' Now that is what sounds dumb."

One day as I'm finishing lunch, the phone rings, and I can tell Mama's gonna be talkin' forever, 'cause it's Susan's mama. I start out the back door, and I hear her laugh and say—I really do—"Oh, my stars, Carol! Ain't that the truth!"

Out of the Mouths of Babes

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My adult granddaughter, Taylor, is developmentally delayed, but her wicked sense of humor always surprises me.

Recently, I took Taylor to Super Cuts for a haircut. I sat down to wait.

"Taylor, do you live in San Clemente?" the hairstylist asked.

"No," Taylor said in a blustery voice. "I'm visiting that little old lady sitting over there. She lives in a nursing home." Everyone in the shop started laughing.

"Well, Taylor, I may be a little old lady, but hanging out with you will keep me out of a nursing home."

How to Love a Rabbit

Marian Thomas – Leawood, KS
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Give it water every day
and watch its ears and nose—
they will tell you how it feels,
and what it wants to say.

Keep it warm and give it food,
it will lift your downcast mood.
When you're sad, just stroke its coat,
and let its softness mend your hurt.

When it dies, remember how
happily it lived with you!
You will miss it, but you'll know
it was loved, and loved you too.

[When my four-year-old granddaughter's pet rabbit died, I wrote this poem to comfort her.]

Letting Go and Dying

Judy Watkins – Canby, OR
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He asked me, "Am I dying?" What was I supposed to say? I told him the truth, and I promised to stay next to him until the end. He asked me how a person died. Do they stand, sit, or lie down? He wasn't afraid, only curious. He was 92, and healthy in actions and appearance until the final three days when he left me.

One day he no longer recognized me. He asked me who I was and how long did I plan to stay. He wondered which bar he met me in. I told him my name and he laughed that my last name was the same as his. "That is sure news to me" was his only reply.

In the next days, he was frantic to get back home to San Diego and his life before he met me 60 years ago. He folded clothes and blankets, put them on his walker and tried to take them to be packed into the car. I lied and said the roads were not good enough to travel and that we would go as soon as we could.

He often repeated, "It was all my fault, I shouldn't have gone. I should have tried harder." Long before I met him, he left his wife and five little children. When he walked away, he never looked back—at least I was never aware of it if he did.

All I can do now is pray that he made it to San Diego. I wish he could have said goodbye to me.

Three Stories of Mortality

Carol J. Wechsler Blatter – Tucson, AZ
Blatter.carol@gmail.com

Book of Life:

It's Yom Kippur, the Jewish holy day of atonement. 24 hours I fast, I pray. I ask God for forgiveness for my misdeeds where ego, arrogance, and ignorance have sent me on the wrong paths; where I've strayed from You, God, when I didn't help someone in need; when I wasn't sufficiently charitable; when I've wallowed in self-pity, manipulated others, extracted unnecessary sympathy from others. God, hear me begging You for another year of life. Please seal my name in the Book of Life.

When I Die:

When I die, I will be naked just as I was at my birth. Then I will be cleansed and dressed according to Jewish law in a thin white shroud. My shoulders will be covered with my prayer shawl (my tallit). I try not to think of what it will be like to die. I'm not brave. I'm not someone who embraces death. I'm scared. Will everything go dark? Will my soul leave me? Will I know when that happens? Death isn't a choice. We're all chosen.

No Such Place:

You land in St. Augustine, Florida. You de-plane, get your suitcase, go to the car rental, sign the contract. You ask the rental agent how to get to the Fountain of Youth. He looks at you wide-eyed. Then giggles. "Lady, there's no such place." But I read it in a Florida brochure. "Lady, it's a joke. It doesn't exist." You're devastated. You pictured yourself getting younger year by year, decade by decade, as you immersed yourself in these special waters. Now, instead, you berate yourself for believing the unbelievable. Youth will always elude you.

"We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives."

— Toni Morrison

Here's the Thing

Catherine Johnson – Vashon, WA
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Probably, I could like you again;
rediscover your charm, lost like a sock behind the dryer.
Remember your music, in minor key
opening the door of my heart.
Or how your crazy, silly, donkey antics
made me laugh, or bray along,
'til tears streamed from my eyes.

Searching through the book of years, I wonder
when the story shifted, the gears of our friendship grinding to a halt?

When did your charm flip like a switch
suddenly off,
your jokes become laced with scorn,
your music, a required attendance as proof of my devotion?

But, here's the thing:

I still love you.
Like a pebble in my shoe, I feel the nagging ache of what we've lost.
You cannot grieve what you have never loved.
And truthfully, I just want us to be easy again.

Sometimes it's necessary to shake the pebble from the shoe,
to claim I don't care,
in order to start walking slowly back.

Probably, it will happen.
Perhaps, it already is.

Not long ago, over dinner, I looked at you.
You smiled shyly back at me. And then,
I spotted that lost sock behind the dryer.

The next morning I started to sweep
all the hurtful lint between us
into a bin.

Conundrum

Abby November – San Diego, CA
abnova@earthlink.net

Abrupt, angry and impatient are you.
Why? What did I do? I ask In my mind and out of my mouth?
Instead of ranting: what in hell is going on?
or was it me???

Oy, what did I do? Is it pain, terror on the news? childhood woes redux.
Words like poisoned arrows pierce me, never to be removed,
Pinching and probing my soul.
Or are we 2 people in one body?
Fighting, pushing forward and backward, hurting and loving.
Or is it the plaques and tangles of your brain:
congesting like the LA freeway
taking the person I loved further...and further away??

Selling My Catskill Mountain Summer Home: A Letter

Susan Rudnick – Pleasantville, NY
<https://susanrudnick.com/>, susanrudnick4@gmail.com

Dear Cabin,

You have taught and given me so much these past 30 years. I want to express my gratitude for the gifts you have given me.

Here are a few:

You gave me the experience of deep solitude. Your log walls held me, while outside my bedroom window, leaves waving in the breeze cradled me and the wind chimes sang lullabies. I could just be here, unafraid to be alone. To be alone yet not feel alone. On Fox Hollow Road, I could laugh and sing and even scream as loudly as I wanted, write, dance, or spend hours watching an inchworm make its way across the deck.

You gave me the woods to wander and streams to follow. The magic of a hill of ferns that unspooled every spring for 30 years.

You gave me an ancient stone wall and a connection to hands that built it long ago.

You gave me a mama bird that nested on your beams. I became part of her dance as she watched me come and go from a distance, hovered until I was inside and she could fly to her nest the moment she could. And then—gift of all gifts—I watched as the last of three fledglings waited and waited, standing in the nest, until that sudden rush of winging away.

You gave me the full moon dipping through the skylight. Multitudes of stars, swimming holes, and the unending length of a summer afternoon.

You gave me a place for children to laugh and grow, where my daughter could throw rocks into a stream all afternoon.

You gave me birthday celebrations, sledding on New Year's Eve, making tea in the snow, being snowed in and playing hours of Monopoly.

Most importantly, you gave me a sacred space where people who love each other could love each other more.

A cathedral in forever-wild Panther Mountain forest.

A place we left, knowing we were coming back to you. A home of comfort and solace.

May the energy gathered here offer joy and peace to your next stewards.

Letting Go Is Complicated

V.J. Knutson – St. Marys, ON
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This confined life—
carefully construed—
ingrains order,
commands discipline.
I can free myself
from urbanity,
declare adventure
as prerogative, but
how long before
I release the need
for control, unburden
internal restraints,
let go, and open
to divine rhythms?
Doubt I possess
the trust required
to live with such
uncertainty.

[Previously published Dec 2, 2018, on my blog]

My Purse

Christine Ristaino – Scottdale, GA
cristai@emory.edu

My purse is barren. It no longer carries tampons or lipstick. It doesn't hold birth control, love notes, eyeliner, or perfume. I don't stick my hand deep to remove wrapped up dirty diapers I need to discard, or to slap on deodorant, or disinfect with hand wipes. I don't pull out small jars of bananas, peaches, or rice cereal. There are no report cards, checks for teacher gifts, tickets to the school play, Barbies, Legos. There aren't spaces for my daughter's drawings, my son's newest rock. I've taken out the children's photos. My purse is barren, utilitarian. It's small and compact. It holds an iPhone, a cylinder of Advil, credit cards, an ID, and a pack of gum. But my daughter's purse is full—full of tampons, makeup, enough blush to fill three of mine, and delightful smelling sprays. Sometimes I peek in, take a huge whiff, and feel dizzy with memory.

“It is what you don't write that frequently
gives what you do write its power.”

— Toni Morrison



Online or onsite, our Writing Circles support women in sharing their prose and poetry. In this issue, the chair of our Circles Program, **Mary Jo Doig**, introduces us to the facilitator of an enduring onsite circle in Indiana. If you're not yet a member of a Circle, go here to find out more: <http://www.storycircle.org/circlesprogram.shtml>

Meet Enid Cokinos of Carmel, IN by Mary Jo Doig

Kindly join me in a warm welcome to Enid Cokinos of the Circle City Circle. (Circle City is Indianapolis' nickname.) I'm pleased to share Enid's fascinating story and the origins of the CCC here, as well as a piece of each circle member's writing. I hope you will also visit their websites to see more of their books and projects. Now, let's start...

Enid's journey to writing, connecting with SCN, and branching out to playwriting. I've always been an avid reader and dreamed of one day writing a book. For years, my Inner Writer followed me, tapped my shoulder, and begged for attention, which I ignored until a mid-life birthday. At that point, I thought, "Well, if not now, when?" In 2014, I took a creative nonfiction class at the Indiana Writers Center (IWC) in Indianapolis. That's when the floodgates opened. That is also where I met the writers who, along with myself, formed our writing group – Circle City Circle.

I thank SCN for my first published works. I had been plugging away at several pieces, but nothing was getting published, and I was feeling down. My writing group suggested joining SCN and trying my hand at book reviews. Taking their advice and then seeing my words online seemed to break the logjam. I went on to have both a fiction and nonfiction piece published in SCN's anthologies. What a rewarding experience!

In 2014, while working on a screenplay, I was educating myself on formatting and content through online sources. Since I learn better in a classroom setting, I contacted the IWC, signed up for their foundational playwriting workshop, and was hooked. Since then, I've written several plays. You can learn about them on my website.

Circle City Circle's structure and sustained membership. Our circle is almost six years old. The creative nonfiction class where we met gave us a good start on getting to know each other. Our writing assignments took us into some sensitive life areas, so we formed a level of trust even before we became a circle.

Over the years, our group dynamics have changed. Initially, as we learned each other's writing passions and figured out the best way to work together, we shared the facilitator role. Now our meetings don't require boundaries

and rules. Sometimes, we bring in manuscript pages, plays or poems for critique and discussion, or we bounce around story ideas. Other times, we break from writing and talk about what is going on, personally and professionally. Every meeting has a different feel to it.

We know that writers must write every day to keep creativity blossoming, and if you can't think of anything to write about, then write about that! With a writing circle, developing trust and respect is paramount, but keeping up with the meeting schedule and engaging with all members is key. Even if you have no work to share, go to the meetings. The group supports and encourages. It is the dedicated act of meeting and engaging that keeps it alive and vibrant.

How to find a circle. Check with local writing programs, perhaps a nonprofit organization (for example, the Indiana Writers Center) or a college or university. Also, check with SCN for writers in your area that might be interested in starting a group or adding new members to an existing group.

The Gifts of Participating in a Writing Circle. We share a bond and friendship I could not have imagined when we first started as a writing group. Ours is a sisterhood formed of love and trust. We genuinely care about each other and our creative endeavors, and know we can always count on each other for support.

Whether fiction, nonfiction, poetry, or plays, each group member—like all writers—brings unique life experiences and observations to their work. I'm not sure it is possible to exclude personal experiences from our writing, which makes us vulnerable. Yet that is part of being a writer.

Final Thoughts. Several SCN members are published (some, many times over), but for those just starting down the creative writing path, don't be intimidated by others' success, instead look to them as motivation. Many accomplishments of the Circle City Circle's members came after our group's formation and happened, in part, due to mutual support and helpful critique from all. We are all better, more confident, and ultimately more successful due to this support.

Meet the Circle City Circle’s members and their writing. All have been published and enjoy a successful writing journey.

Marjie Giffin – poet and nonfiction writer

The Plunge (originally appeared in *Snapdragon*)

I am running out of time
but I’d like to slip down
the mossy steps
of my sister’s pier
and plunge headfirst
without hesitation
into the still-chilled June waters
of her pristine Northern lake
and push off the stony bottom
and float and float and float—
perhaps as far as Canada—
where wild geese, arching,
would flap down at me
as I churned my aging body forward
and they would circle, nodding,
bestowing their respect.

Judy M. Miller (writing as Sutton Bishop) – <https://www.authorsuttonbishop.com/>

Excerpt from *Afraid to Hope*, a steamy adventure-romance novel (releases Winter, 2020):

He clasped her hand firmly and stroked her palm softly with one of his fingers. All reason evaporated as electricity shot through her system again. Appalled by what he was doing and her reaction, she squeezed his hand harder, fighting like mad to get a hold of herself, calling on her training to slow her heart rate. “Dr. Jordaen,” she snapped, her voice cracking with irritation.

A cocky grin and a glimpse of his straight white teeth flashed again. He nodded perceptibly. “You’re strong. I like that. Since we’re going to be working together, don’t you think we can be on a first-name basis?”

Working together? Oh, no. She could not work with him. She would not. Natasha shook her head in disbelief and pulled her hand from his.

Bane leaned in, his smile open and confident. “You don’t want to work with me? Oh, Doctor, you might want to rethink that,” he encouraged, his voice teasing, sexy.

Kassie Ritman – <https://kassieritmanwrites.com/>

Excerpt from *Meridian Whispers* (releases Fall, 2019)

Another couple had an unhealthy and questionable attachment to a single pet, even after its passing. Regarded by neighbors as very lovely people, the pair nonetheless

got a little odd when their dog died. They so mourned for their beloved “Muffy” upon his passing that they had him cremated—an action unheard of at the time. Muffy stood vigil on the mantelpiece for months in the finest of funerary vases. But for his grieving owners, this presence just wasn’t enough. Their hearts ached to have their beloved pet with them again.

That is until one of them formulated a solution. A specialty artist from across the Pond who worked in cremains was contacted.

Yes.

Cremains.

The dear people hired a painter to come to the US and create a likeness of Muffy on a prominent wall in the house. The ashes were mixed with a binder, and an enormous sum of cash later, the pup cheered them with his fluffy grin whenever they entered the home.

Enid Cokinos – <https://enidcokinos.com/>

Excerpt from my nonfiction piece *From Under the Rubble* (originally appeared in *Flying Island*)

“‘X’ never, ever marks the spot.”

— Indiana Jones

Nearly two decades ago, I found myself in the East-West Bookstore in Mountain View, California. It wasn’t the New Age shop’s healing crystals, Buddha statues, fragrant incense, and CDs by chanting monks that called to me, but a single book: *The Artist’s Way* by Julia Cameron. The red and gold cover, with a drawing of a snow-capped mountain and a flock of Pterodactyls, begged me to pull it off its perch, promising to open my life to new experiences if I would only give it a chance. I marched to the register. I was ready to begin the search for my hidden artist.

Thank you, CCC members for sharing your pathway to a strong writing group!

Readers and facilitators, please know that Enid is happy to answer questions at enidcokinos@indy.rr.com.



A Community Partnership

by Shawn LaTorre and Natalie Weinstein

“Forgiveness means giving up all hope for a better past.”
— Lily Tomlin

A most unusual women's writing circle is meeting in Lockhart, Texas—inside a state prison. The group is atypical in many ways. Meeting weekly over the course of seventeen weeks, its participants often shift from beginning to end. But like other writing circles, the women who participate have compelling stories from the past; some are even willing to share their pain as part of the healing process.

Truth Be Told, an Austin-based nonprofit, was founded on the belief that healing for justice-involved women can take place through telling one's story in writing, engaging in expressive arts, learning life skills, and gaining self-care tools that might have been overlooked in the lives of these incarcerated women. The programs' statistics reveal that women truly do benefit by exploring deep truths about their lives in order to break the cycle of trauma. Its executive director, Katie Ford, oversees eight unique programs for justice-involved women. Staggering statistics such as:

- 75% of the women in prison have a history of child abuse
- 87% have experienced interpersonal violence
- 71% are mothers

make the 86.2% of women graduates of these programs who remain free three years after incarceration a remarkable accomplishment! (The national average for women prisoners after three years is approximately 60%.)

Thanks to Natalie Weinstein, a long time Story Circle Network (SCN) member, a unique partnership was built with Truth Be Told over the course of thirteen years. Women who attended and “graduated” from Truth Be Told's *Talk to Me* class were invited to attend Natalie's workshop. It was here that the women were introduced to SCN, asked to write on a given topic, and invited to submit writing for publication consideration. Women who submitted writing received a generous one-year membership to Story Circle Network.

According to Natalie, the roots of the SCN and TBT partnership go back much further than 2006 and are linked to three women: Mary Ann Reynolds, Nathalie Sorrell, and Carol Waid. SCN's Peggy Fountain was instrumental in coordinating the partnership, as was Mary Jo Doig, the long-time True Words by Real Women editor, and more recently, Jo Virgil, the current True Words editor for SCN's quarterly Journal.

Lockhart women writers have been prolific. Since 2007, from among over one hundred and twenty Lockhart writing circle participants, eighty-two stories have been published, thanks to Natalie's involvement and encouragement.

A reader of Story Circle's publications may guess that the writer is incarcerated because often a woman will write directly about her prison experiences or what brought her there. But entries also run the gamut from surviving a tornado to enjoying a state fair, from sitting by the side of a dying woman to going into labor at a convenience store. Natalie says that one of the True Words themes, “Quilting” back in 2012, turned out to be one of her favorites. Much to her surprise, not only did most of the women have personal experiences with quilts, but a memorable entry, “A Quilt of Comfort” by Colette Pratt, speaks of a simple gift box of fabric scraps from her grandmother. Sitting down to stitch some of the pieces together, a beautiful time capsule of memories is released by the writer. This piece was published in an SCN Journal, and we're reprinting it here for you.

There haven't been any Lockhart writing submissions for the past two years, due to personal circumstances that have kept Natalie from leading the workshop, but SCN hopes to rekindle its commitment to the powerful work being done by Truth Be Told and Katie Ford. Story Circle honors Natalie Weinstein and her years of commitment working with Truth Be Told. Though details are not yet worked out, SCN will re-ignite the torch to share writing between these two incredible non-profits and make sure these women's voices are heard once again. *Stay tuned!*



TBT supporters Carol Waid, Natalie Weinstein, and Nathalie Sorrell.

A Quilt of Comfort

by Colette Pratt

When I opened the box, all I saw were scraps of material. Old clothes and curtains. Sheets and table cloths. A bunch of rags that had lost their shape and usefulness.

I started picking through the pile and recognized the remnants of my first party dress. My granny made it for me when I was five years old. My cake had been German chocolate; the ice cream buttered pecan. I smiled at the memory of baby dolls and candles.

As I continued to search through the box, I saw my granny's favorite duster. A thin cotton housedress she wore on warm summer evenings as she sat under the carport, shelling peas. It was our special time, when she would tell stories that always started with the phrase, "When I was your age...."

Deeper in the box was the holiday table cloth that graced the dinner table for many family gatherings, a set of curtains I'd gotten the first time I'd been allowed to decorate my room the way I wanted, and a slipcover that had been used to protect the living room couch from sticky, chocolate-covered fingers.

With every item I removed, I saw more of my past, reminding me of times when life was simple and carefree. As I sat at my grandmother's sewing machine, I pieced together the fabric of my life, one square at a time, remembering the past and embracing the love only my memories can give.

I fashioned a quilt of comfort, with the knowledge that these were more than mere scraps. They were a treasure trove of my past, taking the shape of a future I would share with my grandchildren—the way my granny had shared herself with me.



Shawn Marie LaTorre, board member for SCN, is a long-time educator, blogger, and Midwestern family gal. If she is not sailing the Great Lakes with her husband, she might be found in her garden, kitchen, quilting, or riding the mean streets of Austin on her road bike. You can catch up with her travels at: <http://www.Ceruleanseasons.wordpress.com>

“If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else.”

— Toni Morrison

Recognition for Truth Be Told

Recently, **Truth Be Told** was acknowledged for its work, in the *Washington Post Magazine's* special issue exploring prisons in America. Lauren Johnson, a graduate of the TBT program and now a prisoner advocate, was featured in the *Post's* article entitled “Can We Build a Better Women’s Prison?”

Truth Be Told deserves this national recognition, for it has long been dedicated to the needs of incarcerated women. Executive Director Katie Ford says: “We aim to position Truth Be Told and the women we serve as thought leaders in the larger conversation about mass incarceration and the need for criminal justice transformation — particularly when it comes to women in the system. After all, Truth Be Told has been proximate to the issue and ‘in the trenches’ with justice-involved women for almost 20 years. We have a lot to say on the matter.”

Ford, a recipient of the Target Storytellers Award, adds this: “Over the past two years, our graduates have served on panel discussions at state conferences, marched at the Capitol for women's dignity bills, and served as featured speakers before rooms filled with seasoned judges and lawyers and aspiring university students. Our graduates are sharing their stories to help people understand the unique risk factors that lead women into the criminal justice system and to effect positive change. The same personal narrative that once emotionally imprisoned them — kept them locked up in shame — has become their superpower.”

Here at Story Circle, we are proud of Truth Be Told, of our own 12-year association with the program, and our publication of over 80 TBT stories in the Journal. The women who are raising their voices and daring to make themselves heard deserve our heartfelt gratitude.

— Susan Wittig Albert
SCN Founder, President Emerita

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES DIRECTORY

SCN's membership includes those who are skilled in writing, editing, marketing, publishing, speaking, teaching, and Internet design. Use this directory to find the help you're looking for. Those who are listed as teachers also serve as coaches and mentors; their expertise is listed in order of importance.

Jeanne Charters lives in Asheville, North Carolina, with husband, Matt Restivo, therapy dog, Bucky, and puppy, Archie. A former VP of Viacom Television and President of Charters Marketing, she has published three novels. SHANTY GOLD and LACE CURTAIN are parts of an Irish trilogy. YELLOW is an expose of Fake News observed at local TV stations. **Author** <https://jeannecharters.com>

Joy Ross Davis has been writing professionally since 2013. An Alabama native, she spent her adult career as a college professor. To date, she's written seven novels, three of which have won outstanding achievement awards. She conducts workshops in and out of state for colleges and writing groups. **Author, Speaker, Teacher** www.joyrossdavis.com

Jacqueline Devine is an editor, photojournalist, public speaker, and memoirist. She has edited, illustrated, and published corporate brochures, personal memoirs, and children's books. Jackie received her bachelor's degree and Masters of Marketing Communications from Webster University in St. Louis, MO. **Author, Editor** www.jackiedevine.com

Patricia Dreyfus is an award winning poet and author. She has directed critique groups and edited writing for twenty years. She holds a B.A. from California State University, Long Beach and has studied writing at the University of California, Irvine. She lives in Corona del Mar, CA. **Editor, Freelancer** <http://www.patriciadreyfus-writer.com> <http://www.thewritingwell.org>

Cynthia Giachino (aka Thia Keen). Cynthia's interest in writing began with journaling while in high school. At age 62, she published her biographical novel, *A Quiet Fear*. She has always felt compelled to bring awareness to society through public speaking and writing about the difficult subjects of sexual and emotional abuse, family dysfunctions, and PTSD. **Teacher, Speaker, Author** www.thiakeen.com; Facebook: Thia Keen.

B. Lynn Goodwin has been an award-winning writer, editor, and manuscript coach since the 1990s. Try a sample of her work in her SCN Independent Study Class or submit a 500-word sample (no charge) through Writer Advice. **Editor, Coach, Freelancer** <http://www.writeradvice.com>

Jeanne Guy of Jeanne Guy Gatherings is an author, speaker, and self-awareness writing coach/workshop facilitator. She is co-author of *Seeing Me*, a guide for reframing the way you see yourself through reflective writing. Her memoir will be published in 2020. Get to know Jeanne and read her sometimes-irreverent blog posts. **Teacher, Speaker, Author** www.jeanneguy.com

Juliana Lightle has worked in Human Resources and as an administrator for Dennison College. She co-authored *Sexual Harassment in the Workplace: A Guide to Prevention*, a manual for corporate managers, and *On the Rim of Wonder*, a memoir in poetry. She teaches senior English in the Panhandle of Texas. **Teacher, Speaker, Author** <http://www.julianalightle.com>

Debbie L. Miller has been freelance writing since 1990. A Cleveland native and professional writer with a background in comedy and theater, she lives in Brooklyn, NY, where she's taught English as a Second Language. She's a produced playwright, memoirist, award-winning humor writer, and teacher for Story Circle Network. **Author, Teacher, Freelancer** www.DebbieLMiller.com

Jean P. Moore is an award-winning novelist and poet. Her latest novel, *Tilda's Promise*, was released in September 2018. Holding a Ph.D. in English literature, Jean is an experienced teacher and lecturer. She also facilitates book group discussions. Jean divides her time between Greenwich, CT, and Tyringham, MA. **Author, Speaker, Teacher** www.jeanpmoore.com

Jean Morciglio is an instructor, author, and facilitator with over 35 years of experience in higher education. Her Ph.D. is from MSU. Courses/Facilitations: Guided Autobiography, Learning Now, Strategic Planning, National Issues Forums, and Community-Based Planning. She believes in the power of narrative to change lives and lives in Riverview, FL. **Teacher, Author, Freelancer** morcigi@gmail.com.

Sarah Byrn Rickman, Colorado Springs, CO, is a former journalist, a licensed Sport pilot, and the award-winning author of nine books about the Women Airforce Service Pilots of WWII. She holds a B.A. in English from Vanderbilt University and an M.A. in creative writing from Antioch University, McGregor. **Speaker, Freelancer** www.sarahbyrnrickman.com

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Sarton Update

Submissions to the current Sarton Awards cycle will be closed by the time you read this. But we are happy to report that 2019 has been a banner year, with submissions in all categories at their highest level since we began the program in 2011.

The Sarton Awards are given annually to women authors writing about women. The awards are limited to submissions published by independent small publishers, university presses, and author-publishers (self-publishing authors). This year, awards are given in four categories: memoir; contemporary fiction; historical fiction; and nonfiction (biography, edited diaries, scholarly studies of women's literature).

The large number of submissions this year is something of a surprise. We decided not to advertise because we weren't sure whether the new website would be available in time. As things turned out, the website wasn't available. But our former webmistress, Peggy Fountain, now living in Portugal,

came to the rescue. She updated our software so we could use the existing system for evaluating the books. Thanks, Peggy, for helping us out!

Thanks also to our dedicated team of 36 first-round SCN Sarton jurors, each of whom reads and evaluates at least three books. Still hard at work, the team will be finished by the end of December. If you're curious, you can see the rubrics (the scoring guides) that we use on this page of our website: http://storycircle.org/SartonLiteraryAward/rubric_list.php

In January, we will announce the Sarton shortlist and our team of judges (librarians, not affiliated with SCN) will go to work making the final selections. Winners will be announced in late March or early April. And we will begin gearing up for the 2020 cycle and another successful year.

Paula Stallings Yost
Susan Wittig Albert
Sarton Award Coordinators



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**True Words from Real Women
Looking Ahead**

TW is always looking for lifewriting that is rich in evocative detail, showing the struggles, challenges, and resolutions of real women living real lives. Upcoming [optional] topics for exploration:

December 2019:	Letting Go (in this issue)
March 2020:	Building Bridges
June 2020:	Quiet Time
September 2020:	A Family Secret

Send us your story at this link:
www.storycircle.org/members/frmjournalsubmission.php

**CONGRATULATIONS
to Carol J. Wechsler Blatter!**

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

***Real Women Write: Growing / Older
Sharing Stories, Sharing Lives***

Volume 18 of SCN's annual anthology, *Real Women Write 2019* will be published on Amazon this December. You won't want to miss it! See more about this big change on page 5.

