

Proudly Announcing the Winners of SCN's 2018 Sarton Women's Book Awards™



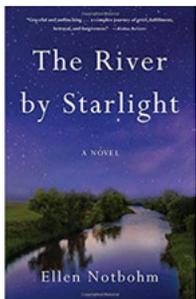
Memoir

Finding Mercy in This World *Catherine Johnson – Vashon WA



Contemporary Fiction Once Upon a Time a Sparrow Mary Avery Kabrich – Seattle WA

2019 LifeWriting Contest — CANCELLED — Disrupted by the reorganization of the SCN website, the annual Susan Wittig Albert LifeWriting Competition will not be held in 2019.

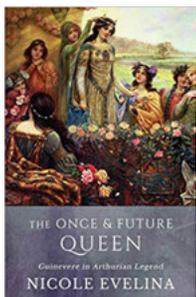


Historical Fiction The River by Starlight Ellen Notbohm – Portland OR



Young Adult Nonfiction B.J. Erickson: WASP Pilot *Sarah Byrn Rickman – Colorado Springs CO

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Nonfiction The Once and Future Queen: Guinevere in Arthurian Legend Nicole Evelina – Maryland Heights MO

*Profiled in this issue!

Letter From SCN's President



A Story About Sisterhood

Moment of Truth: I've been cranky. My husband and I have been in the middle of a move from Austin to Cedar Park and all that entails, while Story Circle Network is in the middle of an enormous website conversion and update. It feels like everything is upside down, needs immediate attention, and takes longer than expected.

Surrounded by the chaos, I let the pressures of the move, the needs of SCN, our Go Fund Me Campaign, my manuscript, and family issues lay me low. I fell into a dark hole filled with little stress demons. As author/mystic Parker Palmer said, "I seem to need to get lost before I can be found. I generally do my contemplation after the train wreck, not before." (*On The Brink of Everything*)

Ever have that happen to you?

Shawn LaTorre, our new secretary/treasurer, helped snap me out of it. She knew I was off-kilter (a kind description to say the least) and reached out to me. She voiced her concerns, opening a space for me to be vulnerable and share my low-ebb story before I wreaked more havoc with the board.

We need more Shawns. SCN is lucky and happy to have her as an important part of our organization. I consider Shawn and the people I work with on the board my saving grace. They've got my back. Thank God, because I don't know my back from my front these days.

While Shawn is learning the ropes and helping me stay afloat, Susan Albert has spent countless hours researching, purging and providing Austin Web and Design with the guts of critical pages they need to set up the new website. Teresa Lynn, our Administrator, has become a glue-like factor in so many ways I've lost count, and Len Leatherwood, our VP, is not only handling our online classes and inspiring the teachers to write pieces for our HerStories blog, she's also in charge of our November trip to Italy! I also want to give a shout-out to Abby Morris, who is skillfully handling our Constant Contact account and getting all of our important e-letters out with some semblance of (more) grace and ease.

All these connections of having each other's back, sharing our daily lives through our words, caring about one another, listening and being heard—why?

We are a sisterhood. Story Circle Network is all about us getting to know one another and ourselves by sharing our stories. We are each other's saving grace. Teresa passed along a quote from author Carrie Ryan that is pertinent here. "Who are we if not the stories we pass down? What happens when there's no one left to tell those stories? To hear them? Who will ever know that I existed?"

Story Circle Network will.

What's your story today? You have one, you know, and you're the only one who can tell it, write it, share it. I will listen. I will learn about you and about me in the telling of it.

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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.

Editor: Susan Schoch
journaleditor@storycircle.org
 Layout Editor: Robin Wittig

This Month's Contributing Editors:

Susan Albert
 Pat Bean
 Joyce Boatright
 Christine H. Boldt
 Mary Jo Doig
 Jeanne Guy
 Len Leatherwood
 Kali' Rourke
 Susan Schoch
 Jo Virgil

We welcome your letters, queries, and suggestions.

Story Circle Network
 723 W University Ave #300-234
 Georgetown, TX 78626

www.storycircle.org

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A Sharing Circle

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

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



Continued from page 2

Breathe and know that the sisterhood of SCN is here for you. Allow yourself the joy that comes from claiming your story. You matter, and you matter to Story Circle Network.

Do yourself a favor. Get a glass of something, put your feet up, and read this quarterly *Story Circle Journal* (kudos again to board member and editor Susan Schoch). I suspect you'll see your own life in the stories within these pages. What a gift! What a sisterhood!

*Jeanne Guy
2018-2020 President*

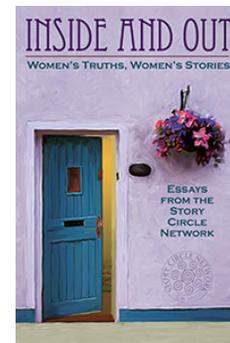
“Every moment happens twice: inside and outside,
and they are two different histories.”

—Zadie Smith from *White Teeth* (2000)

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

Give it as a gift. Pass it to a friend. Suggest it to your librarian. And be sure to check it out yourself:

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



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.

2018 Sartons Honor Excellence

Story Circle Network has announced the winners of its 2018 Sarton Women's Book Awards™. Winners and finalists are listed below, and also in this issue you'll enjoy profiles of two of the winners, Catherine Johnson and Sarah Byrn Rickman.

The award program is named in honor of May Sarton, who is remembered for her brilliant contributions to women's literature as a memoirist, novelist, and poet. Awards are given annually to women authors writing chiefly about women in memoir, biography, and fiction published in the United States and Canada and selected from works submitted. Sarton award winners are published by small/independent publishers, university presses, and author-publishers. Winners receive a cash award; winners and finalists receive a package of benefits. Guidelines for the 2019 competition are available on the SCN website.

"Announcing the Sarton winners is always exciting for us," says Jeanne Guy, SCN President. "Honoring outstanding women authors and their independently published books is a special privilege for SCN. Indie publishing requires courage, commitment, and a passionate belief in the importance of story. It allows writers to partner with others to write, design, produce, and market their books outside of the traditional routes. We are proud of our winners, who have met many challenges on their way to publication."

Memoir

Finding Mercy in This World – Catherine Johnson, Vashon WA

Finalists:

Not a Poster Child: Living Well with a Disability—A Memoir by Francine Falk-Allen
Redlined: A Memoir of Race, Change, and Fractured Community in 1960s Chicago by Linda Gartz
Saving Bobby: Heroes and Heroin in One Small Community by Renee Hodges
Daughter in Retrograde: A Memoir by Courtney Kersten
To Play Again: A Memoir of Musical Survival by Carol Rosenberger

Historical Fiction

The River by Starlight – Ellen Notbohm, Portland OR

Finalists:

Hidden Ones: A Veil of Memories by Marcia Fine
Celtic Knot: A Clara Swift Tale by Ann Shortell
The Passion of Marta by Caren Umbarger
The Mercy Seat by Elizabeth H. Winthrop

Contemporary Fiction

Once Upon a Time a Sparrow – Mary Avery Kabrich, Seattle WA

Finalists:

Gina in the Floating World: A Novel by Belle Brett
Quarry by Catherine Graham
When the Stars Sang by Caren J. Werlinger

Young Adult

BJ Erickson: WASP Pilot – Sarah Byrn Rickman, Colorado Springs CO

(No Finalists)

Nonfiction

The Once and Future Queen: Guinevere in Arthurian Legend – Nicole Evelina, Maryland Heights MO

Finalist:

Anything that Burns You: A Portrait of Lola Ridge, Radical Poet by Terese Svoboda



Notes from a Memory Keeper

Christine H. Boldt – Temple, TX

Before my grandmother died, I bought a memory book that my mother used, question-and-answer style, to coax Nana's stories from her. A year later, I spent a joyful week using my tape recorder to capture similar stories from my grandmother's younger sister.

When my mother's memory began to slip, I combined my own questions with prompts from that book to evoke her stories. As Mom answered, I recognized the process was important for more than capturing memories. It was also an opportunity for her to make sense of a life devoted to family, and to leave a legacy for her descendants. The memories we culled together were carefully bound, provided with a cover photo of her gentle face, and presented to children, grand- and great-grandchildren at her 90th birthday.

Three years later, in preparation for my Aunt Norma's milestone birthday, I began the process again. I conducted many interviews via phone calls. I also visited her and raided her photo albums. Pictures became prompts for additional memories and also illustrations. My aunt and her husband, with no children or older adults to care for, had lived lives of public service. When I prepared her book, I added related newspaper clippings and pictures. As my mother had, Norma proudly presented copies of her memoir to family members on her birthday.

In drawing out the stories of my relatives, I had given them the pleasures of recollection, opportunities to influence younger relatives, and the chance to ponder life's meaning in the company of people who loved them. When my aunt entered a nursing home, I suggested that her rare visitors read to her from her own story. I thought I had plumbed the depths of the benefits memoir could provide the aged. But I was wrong.

I displayed a copy of her memory book at the visitation when Norma passed away. Two of her caregivers from the residence spent a long time reading and commenting on the little book. "If only," they said, "we had read this while Norma was alive. We would have had so much to talk about with her." Norma had spent years in the home with few friends and no relatives nearby. What a precious experience it would have been to have the staff or other residents read and comment on her story. How could I have made that happen?

Since then, I have learned of a project in Australia called "Write of Passage," which invited student volunteers to interview nursing home residents one-on-one and record their memories. This program had a broader scope. Because it was presented as a project for all the residents, they became interested in learning about and discussing each other's stories, providing opportunities for interaction among themselves and the staff. In another endeavor, called "Write for You," offered at some nursing homes in the U.S., activities directors help residents create magazines which feature their memoirs.

Had either program been in place at Norma's nursing home, her caregivers would have had no reason to say, "If only..." Although I have run out of relatives to interview, I think it may be time for me to visit a nursing home and engage in some fresh conversations. Perhaps you would like to try it, too?



Christine Boldt, a retired librarian, was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Nigeria in the 1960s, and lived in Italy during the '70s. Her poetry has appeared in publications such as Christian Century, the Windhover, and Texas Poetry Calendar. Her collection "Missing, One Muse" won the 2018 ASPS Morris Memorial Chapbook Competition.

A Memory Keeper's Checklist

- Can your interviewee tell her own story? Would the presence of a family member be helpful or a distraction?
- What are the interviewee's specific goals for this project?
- How much time is available to accomplish those goals?
- Where can your interview(s) comfortably take place?
- Do you have prompts (questions) that align with the project goal(s)?
- Are you flexible enough to take the side roads that an interview may reveal?
- Do you have a list of important dates in your interviewee's life, so you can set a pace that allows completion of her story in the time allotted?
- Will you have access to photos or other memorabilia to prompt memories and/or illustrate the finished project?
- What does the interviewee expect the final product to look like? (How many pages? Illustrated or not? How many copies?)
- Who will pay for necessary supplies and printing expenses?
- Can you accurately record the interviewee's words, catch the flavor of her speech? Do you need the backup of a recording device?
- Will you tell her story in first or third person?
- Are you prepared to support the interviewee when the discussion takes emotional turns?



Sarton Winner:
**Sarah Byrn
 Rickman:
 A Winner Who
 Markets Her Work**

by Susan Wittig Albert

Sarah Rickman won the **2018 Sarton Award for Young Adult Nonfiction** for her 2018 biography, *BJ Erickson: WASP Pilot*. [WASP is the acronym for Women's Airforce Service Pilots.] It is one of a series of related books about women pilots of the mid-twentieth century that Sarah has been working on for several years. You can see all of her books (including her 2016 Sarton winner, *Finding Dorothy Scott: Letters of a WASP Pilot*) on her website: <http://sarahbyrnrickman.com>. Recently, Sarah and Susan Albert exchanged emails on the subject of book marketing—necessary to a writer's success but often avoided. Here is their dialogue.

Susan: It's so difficult for an author to be noticed out there in book land. What are two or three of the most productive ways you've found for introducing your work to the world?

Sarah: Marketing is my big weakness. From the beginning, I've agonized over how to boost my books, and for a long time I wasn't proactive enough. First, there's that old thing we were taught not to do: brag on yourself. Well, to me it felt like that is what I'd be doing and I backed away.

I hated it. For years I've hoped to find someone who could help me, work with me, but until now, no luck. Now, I'm working with a marketing person who IS helping me and I'm paying her and it's worth it. She's got me blogging and I'm liking it. For years I wrote a weekly newspaper column and loved it. In fact, I missed it. The blog has brought that back. When my contracted three months with my marketing person are up, I'm going to ask her to keep me as a regular client. I've realized there are some things I simply have to pay for if I'm going to get my books truly out there. Other than that, I have done well going to aviation events to sell my books, joining in and being "one of the group."

Susan: Your books about women pilots seem to appeal to a certain kind of reader—what book marketers would call a "niche." Describe it for us.

Sarah: Aviation and women in aviation is a definite niche and it is a sizeable market. These people "get" the lingo, so I am talking to the choir and they buy my books. Men who are savvy in aviation like my books because my style is readable, I tell a good story and my information is accurate.

But in a larger sense, these remarkable women's stories are *not* aviation-focused; rather, they are universal. They show that women have broken barriers and succeeded in what happens to be aviation. And of course, flying *is* exciting and (let's face it) kinda sexy. That they did it is what matters! And that success is applicable across the board, in all fields. Now if I can just break into the schools and libraries that hold the key to success in books for today's young women and men, I will have gained another niche, a big one.

Susan: Which brings us to your recent transition. You've switched from writing for adults to writing for young people. Why? How has this changed the way you tell your stories? What changes has this required in promoting and marketing the books?

Sarah: *Why* is easy. I am moving into the young adult market because I want to expand my readership from adults to young adults and move out of the strictly aviation market. My stories are adventure stories. I think they'll appeal to kids who want to see themselves as adventuring into new worlds.

As to the *how*, I've curbed my instinct to give too much detail, particularly when it comes to numbers: airplane numbers, engine ID numbers, miles per hour, anything that has numbers connected. The same is true of

many other areas where I tend to bombard the reader with too much detail. I write increasingly tighter (which is good, right?) and pay attention to readability. I don't use a lot of adjectives and almost no adverbs.

I have continued to learn how to write through my whole career—and I'm still learning. One of the best books I've read on writing is William Zinsser's *On Writing Well*. It came out in the '70s, but I didn't stumble on to it until the early 2000s. What I'm learning about writing for young readers is helping me write better for adults, too.

Susan: You recently made a trip to Long Beach CA to share your books with young women. Tell us about that.

Sarah: This year's Women in Aviation conference was in Long Beach, the home of BJ Erickson, the subject of my Sarton-winning book. Her daughter located a donor (a fellow pilot and an admirer of her mother) who was willing to contribute the cost of 250 copies of my book, as a giveaway to every young girl attending the conference. My publisher, Filter Press, did a separate print run of 250 books, with a gold Sarton seal on the cover and the donor's business logo on the title page. At the Girls in Aviation luncheon, I showed my four-minute film clip featuring BJ Erickson, and the girls got their books. I loved it, and I think they did, too.

Susan: What a great way to attract new readers—and to introduce them to a woman whose achievements they can admire. Where else have you taken your books?

Sarah: In March, I was the featured speaker at The Harold C. Deutsch WWII History Round Table in St. Paul. I showed my 16-minute documentary film about BJ Erickson and four other WASP ferry pilots to an audience of 250 people. I sold the Erickson book as well as my *WASP of the Ferry Command*, which is a history of the women who ferried aircraft in WWII.

In April, I spoke at Literary Lubbock, a program sponsored by Texas Tech University Press. (They published my Sarton-winner, *Finding Dorothy Scott*, in 2016.) This was my choir. The Press sold 25 of my books that night! Also in April, I will sell books at the annual Mountain of Authors at the Colorado Springs Public Library. I feel as if I am finally "getting known" here at home.

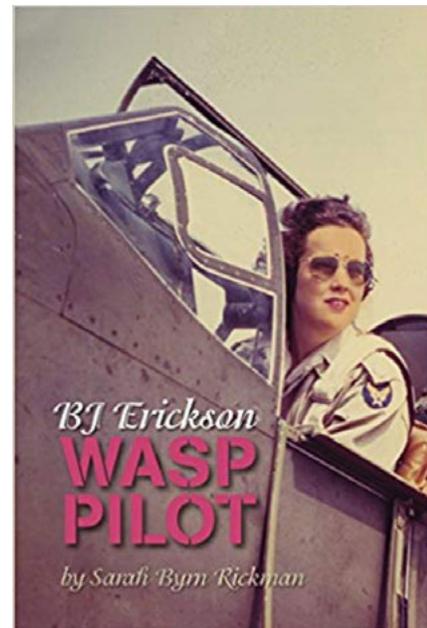
In May, I will appear at the WASP WWII Museum in Sweetwater TX. The event is a WASP Homecoming at the field where most of the women trained during WWII. There, I will launch my newest young adult book, *Nancy Love: WASP Pilot*.

But the most exciting event is in July, when I will give a program at the Ninety-Nines International

Conference in Dayton OH—a very big deal! (I am a member of the organization, which was founded in 1929 by Amelia Earhart and 98 other women pilots. This is our 90th year.) I will show my film and sell books in the Fly Market.

Susan: Sarah, that's an impressive marketing campaign. You have clearly been paying attention to opportunities to promote your work to your niche audience—and at the same time, broaden it. Thank you for sharing your experiences with us!

For more about Sarah's work as a writer, read Pat Bean's article in the June 2017 issue of the *Journal*, posted here: <http://www.storycirclebookreviews.org/interviews/rickman.shtml> Also visit Sarah's website at <http://sarahbyrnrickman.com/> and click on her new blog there.



“...I am reminded that a conscientious and conscious life means attending to the details that present themselves and then noting the next ones that reveal themselves and then the next, moving forward one step at a time. That applies to plain ole living in general and to writing in particular.”

— Len Leatherwood

SCN's LifeWriting Retreat Earns High Praise

by Joyce Boatright, photos by Teresa Lynn



Recently, thirty SCN members gathered in Fredericksburg, Texas, for a three-day retreat with award-winning author-publisher, Susan Wittig Albert. They were there to study and practice the craft of writing and explore current paths to publication. Their evaluations of the experience, and some snapshots, confirm a great outcome.

Participants were full of praise.

"I hope there will be other writing opportunities like this one. I thoroughly enjoyed this writing weekend."

"You all did a great job keeping things organized and on track."

The women on retreat were especially happy with having Susan as the facilitator.

"Susan was the perfect person for this retreat. There isn't anything about writing or publishing she doesn't know, and she is confident and generous enough to share."

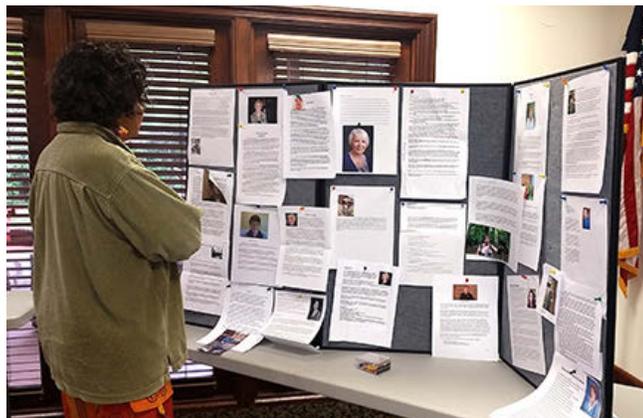
"I found the depth of experience that Susan shared with us invaluable, as well as the connection with other women who value writing. I liked hearing the difference between writing for men and for women, and about the various paths forward in publishing and finding an audience."

At least one evaluator was ready for more as she thought ahead to the next retreat:

"In listening to comments, sidebar discussions/exchanges, as well as questions that were raised by participants, it seems that there is an opportunity to have a similar workshop (in duration/scope/approach) focused solely on memoir, and a separate one focused on fiction. The crossover relationships and influences that the two genre share seemed to create some confusion for participants, and the chance to have a focused discussion would allow for (I think) a deeper dive during the question/answer periods."

Participants were asked to bring one-page bios and place them on a bulletin board for others to read. A quick perusal revealed that the women were mostly from Texas but also from across the country and came with diverse backgrounds and skill levels. The bios helped people connect.

"The board with personal resumes was very helpful for seeking out those whom I had taken classes with and/or attendees living near me."



Feelings about the venue were mixed. Comments ran the gamut.

"Fredericksburg was lovely for a retreat."

"Fredericksburg was a very nice town, and seemed fitting for the style/approach of this workshop. It was challenging to get to for

people who came from away. We were also caught by surprise at the number of people in town and had not fully realized that Fredericksburg was a destination location for weddings, wine tours, and biker gatherings, as well as the wildflowers!”

“I thought Fredericksburg was shlocky and touristy. I was disappointed about that.”

The retreat included sessions on women’s identity and aspirations as writers, creating engaging characters and conflict, building strong stories structurally, creating intriguing settings, and crafting dialogue. Writing exercises were offered to complement these mini-lectures, along with lively discussions.

“I thought content, organization, and pacing were perfect. I appreciated getting lots of good information, having an opportunity to put it into practice, and the chance to reflect in small groups.”

“I didn’t expect such focused writing and found it very helpful.”

Overall, this writing retreat was a resounding success. SCN continues to provide an array of excellent learning experiences, and like the evaluators above, we anticipate more to come.



“Susan was the perfect person for this retreat. There isn’t anything about writing or publishing she doesn’t know, and she is confident and generous enough to share.”

“I hope there will be other writing opportunities like this one. I thoroughly enjoyed this writing weekend.”





Sarton Winner:

Catherine Johnson: A Winner's Journey

by Pat Bean

Catherine Johnson, whose book *Finding Mercy in This World* won Story Circle Network's 2018 Sarton Award for Memoir, says writing feels as necessary as air in her life. "I am always writing, at least in my head if not actually in some form or another. Whether it be a handwritten letter to a friend (my favorite kind of writing), messing with poetry, or working on a submission, such as a recent essay that has been accepted for a book about Joanna Macy being published by Shambhala Press later this year ... It's all writing, worthy of my best attention and craft."

Catherine grew up in Indianapolis, Indiana, the only child of devout Irish-Catholic parents, in a home where grace before meals, daily prayers, and mass before school were all part of daily life. But when it was time for her to attend college in 1973, all that, and her life, was changed by a tragic accident. At 18, she was the driver in an automobile accident in which a friend was killed. "I moved as far away as I could from the cornfields of Indiana and the Catholicism of my youth," she says.

The college she chose was Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, a perfect fit for her passion for wilderness travel. During those college years – not 4, but 8 – she worked for the North Carolina Outward Bound School. "It was the job of my dreams. When I wasn't instructing, I was traveling on my own via bicycle, canoe, and on foot," recalls Catherine. But while she has explored many of this country's mountains, deserts, canyons, lakes and rivers, Washington State has remained her chosen home.

"By the time I was in my mid-thirties, I knew that I loved working with people and that I was a gifted teacher. Eventually, I returned to school and received a graduate degree in counseling. However, I ended up teaching instead of practicing therapy. For 18 years, I taught graduate course work in counseling, organizational consulting and leadership."

Somewhere along the line, Catherine found love with the woman who is still at her side, 30 years later.

"When we fell in love, my wife had two small children. They are grown now and thriving. One is a world class rock climber, the other an equally talented surfer." Catherine and her wife live on Vashon Island in Puget Sound, where they farm 2 acres, growing enough food to feed themselves and even others.

"Once more, I live close to the land and spend more time outside than in. I have also returned to the practice of my Catholic faith," she notes. "In the end, I really believe there are only two questions. Was I loved? and did I love well? If I died tomorrow, I think my answer would be *yes*," says Catherine. "And hopefully, I will have many more years to continue to live more fully into the *yes*."

Catherine does not have much of an online marketing presence for her book, and that is by choice. "My days are full enough. While I am comfortable up in front of people, I am basically shy and introverted by nature. When I first started writing my memoir, it was due to the urging of my then writing mentor, Brenda Peterson. She had to convince me that I had a story to tell. Initially, I wrote as my own act of healing. As time progressed, I thought perhaps someone might find something of use or help in my story. In the end, I just wanted to write the most beautiful book that I could, trusting that the story would find its way into the right hands."

Catherine lived the book's story throughout her adult life, but it wasn't until 2001 that she began to write it. Her memoir details a personal journey through guilt, grief, and forgiveness to grace and the healing power of love. She finally completed the book in 2017. "Guess that makes it 16 years in the writing. Along the way I was developing as a writer, getting more proficient at the craft and more committed to the process. While I have had several personal essays appear in magazines and anthologies, as

well as a few poems in local publications, *Finding Mercy in This World* is my first book.

“After finishing my memoir – which is about the fragmentation of spirit that so often occurs in tragedy, and the journey to reclaim what was lost – I wanted to write something lighthearted, something that made me chuckle, a piece of fiction with wonderful and eccentric characters. I have started generating that material, but truthfully ... I am first and foremost a writer of nonfiction,” shares Catherine. “I am concerned about the crisis of nature and culture in which we live. I think I want to write fun fiction, but my soul wants me to write what is real.”

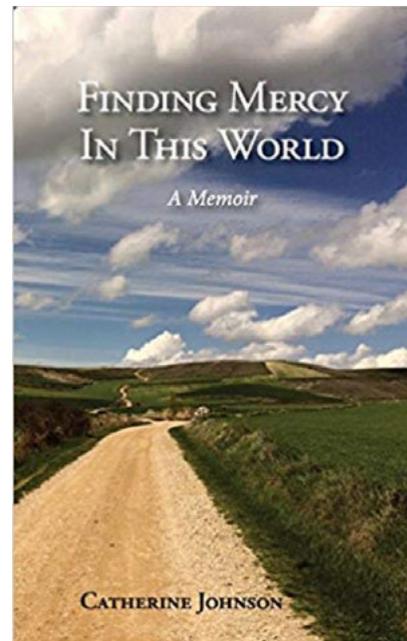
Catherine believes the best advice for writers is simply “Write. Make no excuses, do not whine or complain, or rearrange the furniture or the books on your shelf. Don’t give your inner critic the run of the house ... I know a young woman who has 3 children under the age of 7. She writes in fits and starts, on the backside of finger-painted papers, on coffee-shop napkins. She gets at most a few minutes here and there, and yet she has turned out some beautiful work.

“I also know writers who are more religious than monks. You know, seated at the desk at 7:00 a.m. every day, writing until noon. Me, I write when I can carve out a few hours to do so. It is only in the dark of winter, when the garden is at rest and rain falls endless and pervasive, that I get a daily writing routine going.” Catherine also tells us that since it took her 16 years to write a book, her other piece of writing advice would be to not give up. “Cultivate patience and faith, in yourself, and in your writing.”

For Catherine, the biggest surprise gift from writing the book is how it has been received by those portrayed in it. “I did everything I could to portray the actions of my characters as truly as I could, as memory would allow. I also worked hard to respect and explore all that I did not know about their experiences, motivations, thoughts and feelings. Every single person depicted in the book, with the exception of my parents, who are dead, has read it. As a result, old friendships, long dormant, have been

renewed. Healing conversations have finally happened, and people who I worried might be hurt or pained by it, were not. Everyone has been kind and supportive, and their response has humbled me greatly. I pushed a lot of people out of my life because of my pain, but it is as if they were always waiting for me to return.”

Catherine was surprised that her memoir won the Sarton award, and is truly honored by the recognition, but she also feels like the long shot Oscar winner who didn’t prepare an acceptance speech. “However, I can tell you a little story. When I was a freshman in college, I was just beginning to wonder if I might be gay, a lesbian. All the outward signs were there, but the thought terrified me. It was as if there were two voices arguing inside my head all the time. One saying: ‘I’m not like that.’ The other saying: ‘Oh yes you are.’ And then, there was me, and the question, Am I? A friend lent me her copy of *Mrs. Stevens Hears the Mermaids Singing* [by May Sarton]. I remember reading it and identifying with every character in the book. I also remember longing to have a life like Hillary Stevens; well, in my own way, I have. How could I not be delighted, bemused, and somewhat awed by winning the Sarton award? I have been listening to the mermaids all my life.”



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>



Our Future is Female!

Sophie Megaw attends Los Angeles County High School for the Arts, where she studies acting, directing, and filmmaking. She won a 2019 regional Gold Key Award for her essay, "The Other," in the Scholastic Artists and Writers contest, the oldest and most prestigious contest for youth in grades 7 - 12 in the United States. We're delighted to feature this young woman's insightful writing, and to welcome her as an SCN member!

The "Other" by Sophie Megaw

Growing up in Alabama as a child of British immigrants, I discovered very quickly what it feels like to be seen as "the other." Even though my pale complexion matched those of my classmates, I was still foreign. My Irish father and my Scottish mother left their homelands to escape the religious war in Northern Ireland, where they had settled after marriage. Ironically, they moved for my father's work from the UK to Alabama, which must have, on many levels, made the devil chuckle, particularly since my parents were avowed atheists.

Soon into my school career, I was ridiculed and ostracized after asking, "Who's the baby in the manger?" during a reading of the nativity scene. I will never forget the look of horror on my best friend's face when I told her, "My family doesn't believe in God." Also, I remember hugging my sister when she came home from school crying because somebody had hidden a Bible in her locker with a post-it note reading, "You should read this." I felt alone among my schoolmates and sad that my family's beliefs separated us from our community.

Our popularity was not bolstered by our being the only white family who visited the Civil Rights Museum every year on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. My father took my sister and me to downtown Birmingham against our neighbors' advice because my dad feared we would never learn in an Alabama public school the historical context of slavery and the oppression of the African-American people. I remember entering a room that was devoted to the lynchings instigated by the KKK and this shook me to my core. I have often wondered if the same people who told my father not to take my sister and me to the "bad part of town" understood what part they played in continuing systemic racism.

Although my family was miles away from home, we made friends with a Lebanese Catholic family, the Boackles, who were also outside the social norm. Every Sunday at a BBQ at their house, our moms sunbathed, the dads barbequed, and the kids played in the pool. This was the setting for most of my fondest childhood memories. "Uncle" Mark and "Aunt" Kimi were on the opposite side of the political spectrum from my family, but that didn't stop us from forming an unbreakable bond. We made a rule to never discuss politics or religion because it wasn't worth jeopardizing the lovely family we'd created together. The Boackles remain close to us even if they are 2,000 miles away because our families chose to accept rather than reject differences.

When our family moved to California, I was surrounded by people of different races, religions, gender identities, and sexual orientations. While I felt liberated, I recognized that my Alabama experience had helped me to develop a profound sensitivity to those categorized as "Other." As a result, I am passionate about fighting for the equality of People of Color, members of the LGBTQ community, and particularly Women of Color. I am aware of my white privilege and I use it to promote ideas of equality. For example, I am the only white person who regularly takes part in the Black Student Union at my school (which I was invited to attend my freshman year by my friend, the president). I am proud to stand in solidarity with all who are oppressed.

Growing up as "the other" in socially-repressed Alabama did not move me closer to becoming a bigot, but rather bolstered my desire to battle oppression in our society. Ironically, I feel lucky that I spent my formative years there; otherwise, I would not be the political activist I am today.



Writing Tips from Our Teachers

Every issue, Len Leatherwood, Coordinator of SCN Online Classes, brings us both encouragement and information from our stellar team of teachers. This essay is by B. Lynn Goodwin, and first appeared as a May 2019 Telling HerStories blog.

Making the Cut

by B. Lynn Goodwin

Ever wondered why your writing didn't make the cut in a writing contest? Although you have no control over the quality of other people's submissions, you can make yours as strong, professional, and accessible as possible. Here are some criteria that help me pick finalists for Writer Advice's Flash Contests. Though there is no formula, these clues may help.

- Tell a story that will engage readers because of its honesty, originality, and specifics.
- Leave room for me to care and to empathize.
- Avoid self-pity.
- Tell an original story.
- Or turn a familiar story into an original one.
- Make every word count.
- Use memorable, accessible language.
- Be specific, aka show – don't tell.
- Expand the meaning beyond your own life if you can.

I've included some short examples below and explained why I like them. Usually flash prose, whether fiction or memoir, will be outstanding because of its overall effect, but that effect comes from a series of moments that work. See why these worked for me:

"I have countless items of his I cannot discard – out of both love and respect: mugs, framed degrees, yearbooks, ties – even his old employee I.D. I've kept this collection close, as if throwing it away would somehow erase his existence."
—AW



Lynn Goodwin owns Writer Advice, www.writeradvice.com. Her recent memoir is *Never Too Late: From Wannabe to Wife at 62*. She's also written the award winning *You Want Me to Do WHAT? Journaling for Caregivers and Talent*. Her work has appeared in *Voices of Caregivers*, *Dramatics Magazine*, *The Sun*, *Good Housekeeping.com*, and more. Lynn is a reviewer and teacher at Story Circle Network, and an editor, writer and manuscript coach at Writer Advice.

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.



Loved the specifics and hers triggered thoughts of my own.

"My parents spoke their own language: a series of snorts, harrumphs and silences that communicated a deep-seated hatred that none of us children could translate." —DD
What a way to show an entire family dynamic in one sentence.

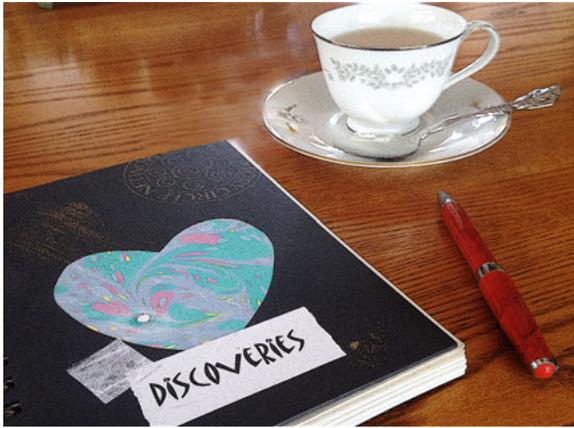
"Always in a suit, Mr. Knott has pin straight hair and an Adam's apple that bobbles when he talks." —JV
Love the description – especially "bobbles."

"Some of the letters melt away. Others fly into the air curling upward toward the blackboard." —VM
Shows a seizure described by the person experiencing it while she's in front of a class. Vivid!

"...tossing out worries like pieces of banged up, mismatched luggage." —SV
Love the spirit here.

"Her husband was a lawyer in a white-shoe practice on Charleston's tony Broad Street, she, a steel magnolia of the first magnitude and one of the highest-ranking people in our English Department. 'That man must think there are no women professors.'" —PC
I like her cause and the way this lifts the memoir from a personal story to one with larger overtones.

If any of this helps, I'll be happy to hear from you about what worked and why. Thanks!



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 **"Unanswered Questions."** 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. Expect new submission guidelines soon.)

Please Help Me, Oprah

Lou Martindale – West Monroe, LA

Since the beginning of time there have been millions of unanswered questions. How would a person choose which question to write about? Philosophical questions would take up too much space. Religious questions are too controversial. Political questions—we don't even want to go there. Family questions may cause dissension among the family members that lasts for years, if not generations. Health questions are certainly numerous. However, one question is foremost in my mind because it keeps rearing its ugly head. I don't know if it is the most important unanswered question, but for me it is a big one, and I know I am not alone. Many people—rich or poor, famous or not, male or female, young or old—don't seem to have the answer either. Among the most well known and documented is Oprah Winfrey, who has shared her struggles. What could I have in common with Oprah? Our common question is: "Why is it so hard once I've lost weight to keep it off?"

I can see you nodding your head and saying, "Oh yeah, that's a big one all right."

Many people have tried to answer that question, but it still remains unanswered for most of us. Doctors run tests to make sure it isn't a medical issue. Psychologists try to analyze you to see if it is all in your head. Nope, trust me—it's all on my hips. Lay people promote their theories and sell books and services. Companies develop systems and make millions selling food and dieting equipment. Health clubs sell memberships designed to "work it off and keep it off." But in spite of all of these various attempts, no one has come up with the answer and we continue to search.

Over my lifetime, just like Oprah, I have had success at losing weight many times, but somehow the weight just won't stay lost. Just like with Oprah, it finds me again. So, I'm begging Oprah to please hurry and find the answer of how to make it stay lost. I know she will share, and then it will be an answered question.

Unanswered Questions

Suzanne Adam – Santiago, Chile
<https://tarweedspirit.blogspot.com/>
 Suzanne.adam@gmail.com

A dear friend recently showed me a project she's preparing for her adult daughter—a journal called "Reflections from a Mother's Heart: A Family Legacy for Your Children." At the top of each page is a question or a prompt: Describe your mother in her best dress. Who was your favorite teacher? Share a memory of a grandparent or an older person you loved.

What rich terrain to explore.

As an only child, I longed for a brother or sister. Over the years, I wondered, but never asked my mother, why she didn't have more children. Why didn't I ask? We didn't talk about those things in our family, and now she is no longer here.

My Dutch grandfather left his homeland at the age of 12. I didn't think to ask him how it was to leave his family at that early age. Nor did I ask my grandmother why she and her two sisters emigrated from Scotland to America.

My two sons have not shown great interest in my younger life or in my family stories, yet I felt the need to write them down, and I have published two memoirs. My boys have copies. Have they read them? I doubt it, but I think one day, when their lives move at a slower pace, they may. Perhaps one of my grandchildren will read them years from now. What is important is that I've left them a record.

I don't think I have another memoir in me, yet only I hold the memories of special childless people who enriched my early years: Vivian Wall, my childhood ballet teacher; Johnny Mann, a funny, small, red-faced friend of my grandparents who spoke with a thick German accent and called me 'little princess'; wee Uncle Will, a Scotsman with twinkling eyes and a way with plants; Juan Carlos, my dear Cuban boyfriend, who died too young.

How little I knew about them.

Ten Years a Widow

Ann Haas – Mogadore, OH
nyjazzie@hotmail.com

How has this decade passed
So swiftly yet so slowly too
To consider the place where I can ask:
How has the scar tissue eased
On my heart and mind
And allowed the terrible wound
Of sudden, senseless death
To be healed?
Letting go has at times been a constant struggle
A torture at times to erase the memories
Of that terrible day
When in an instant
My life was changed forever
Replaced by the fallow fields
Of an unknown future that lay ahead
Still I know I inched ahead a little each day
Even though early days were often spent
Falling through the hours
Numb and in a brain fog
Sometimes searing anxiety and regret
My constant companions
But—
If not for the steadfast comfort
Of family and friends
And the grace shown to me
Through so many channels
I could not have moved through my grief
To reflect on the joys which now enrich my life
And honor the memories of the past
With the hope that my loved one is at peace

Momentary Enlightenment

Karen DeFranco – Twinsburg, OH
Kdefranco500@gmail.com

I grab a full laundry basket
and dash up the many stairs
in the old split level.

Sunlight streaming
through the front door
wraps me in serenity.

Suddenly,
I know all the answers.
The Universe makes sense.
All is in order.

As I reach the bedroom landing,
I am me again.

Questions I Hope I Will Never Have to Answer

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

There are moments in everyone's life when sorting and leaving behind becomes a necessity. Some days when I look at my home, I am consumed by panic. If the day comes, how am I going to deal with all that was collected throughout the years?

The other day I visited my friend, and she showed me with pride how she and her husband reduced what she called their "Footprint" by getting rid of most of their belongings and creating a bug-out bag. My friend has been planning for the coming of the Armageddon for quite some time now; when it'll happen, she is going to be ready, she says. All she will have to do is pick up her bag and head for the door.

Sadly, when I think of a bug-out bag, the images I see are different and haunting. I see my mother at 14, on the eve of World War II, packing her life, and with her parents, vacating her childhood home, never to be back. I think of my father, a bit older at the time, who chose his diaries packed in a beat-up leather bag that he carried with him, all through the war.

I try to imagine what is beyond my ability to comprehend. If I were in my mother's place, or my father's, what would I do? How will I overcome the crippling cold waves of panic and force myself to think, to make a choice that will cut sections of my life forever?

What to take and what to leave behind—questions that at times have to do with practicalities and material belonging, but just as often have to do with our non-materialistic possessions. Friendships that have gone stale; memories that weigh us down; treasured visuals of people and places. Things we used to believe in, and now we no longer do. Our dreams folded in a back pocket; that letter we will never write.

What to take and what to leave behind—a question I hope I will never be forced to answer.

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



Jo Virgil, True Words Editor, has been a Story Circle Network member for many years and recently accepted a position on the SCN Board (Publication and Program member) and to serve as editor for True Words. Jo has a Master's Degree in Journalism and has worked as a reporter, as a writing workshop teacher, as Community Relations Manager for Barnes & Noble, and as Community Outreach Coordinator for the Texas Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities. Writing and sharing stories are her passion.

December 10, 1958

Debra Dolan – Vancouver, BC
Debradolani1958@gmail.com

Consistent in its delivery, I experienced a “waking dream” for many years. It haunted me as I walked in wide-open spaces. Eventually, I shared the vision with others. My head was always smashed violently against the corner edge of a metal container. I would feel a grabbing at the back of my head, with sudden brutal, intrusive, cold, strong force, brought forward to an intense impact. Sounds of anguish in the distance. A flash of blinding light would follow, and then silence. I never felt pain during this two-to-three second experience, yet I had an overwhelming foreboding, seeing my face shattered, bruised, and bloody. As the years progressed, and the dream appeared frequently, personal fright was replaced with curiosity.

Eventually I arranged a one-on-one session on dreams with a Jungian analyst.

“What do you know of your birth?”

I froze; sudden understanding. “Forceps in 1958.”

She looked at me warmly, eyes tearing, hands outstretched. “You were present. It is a gift.”

What is astonishing is that I have never once had that disturbing vision since, even as I have attempted to will it to appear. My understanding of its meaning was answered in a most satisfactory way, and I now view this earliest memory with love and compassion. Afterward, I did research, revealing that in Canada in 1958, there was a whistleblower who exposed the amount of cruelty that existed in maternity wards across the country. Women were isolated, drugged and often unconscious. There was a high level of obstetrical intervention and women were often tied down throughout the length of their labor. It must have been a horrifying experience. At that time, fathers, friends, and family members were expressly excluded.

My mother never talked about my birth, or my father, other than to say that most women at that time were smoking and drinking up to the last minute of their pregnancy. I only know my father was significantly older than her and was an alcoholic, never holding a steady job. Once, she said that of her four children, she loved me the most because “you were the hardest to deliver.”

Will There Ever Be a Day?

Sara Etgen-Baker – Anna, TX
Sab_1529@yahoo.com

My students often asked me some of the craziest, unanswerable questions. How many hours are there in a mile? Is red square or round? Do fish get thirsty? Can you cry underwater? How do you write zeroes in Roman numerals? Why doesn't glue stick to the inside of the bottle? My young students were both baffled and intrigued by the unanswerable questions they posed me.

Likewise, we adults pose some pretty baffling, unanswerable questions:

Why are there exceptions to every rule? Exceptions make no sense to us, even though nothing comes with 100% predictability.

Is the universe finite or infinite? If we traveled to the outer edges of the universe, would we run smack dab into another universe? How could we tell? Would the other universe be a different color, operate with a different set of rules, or smell like almonds? How would we know?

Why does anything exist? Before there was something, there was nothing. And out of nothing, how did we get something? What existed before the big bang? Before creation? Before God?

Why does time exist? Time is the sound of a metronome ticking in our heads, the beating of our hearts, and the circadian cycles governing our lives. But much like fish that can't understand water because they're in it all the time, we have a very poor grasp of our most immersive of all substances: Time.

Why are humans so fallible? Of all the species on planet Earth, we're the least predictable, most destructive, and most consumptive. Yet, we're also the most curious, most aware, most innovative, and the most likely to waste countless hours playing video games.

Why is the future unknowable? Yes, a *known future* will strip us of our motivation, but understanding that consequence doesn't explain why the future isn't knowable.

So, will there ever be a day when all our unanswered questions are answered? I doubt so, for we humans need the mystery and intrigue of the unanswerable to keep us humble. Life itself, it seems, is an unanswered question, and we need the humility inherent in even that question.

Dedication

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

How brave my grandmother was in 1910, leaving her small village in southern Italy to come to America, a land of hope and opportunity.

Holding her six-month-old daughter and one suitcase, she waited with my grandfather to be processed at Ellis Island.

I never knew my grandmother; she died before I was born. If I could, I would ask her: Did she wonder if she would ever see her parents again? Was she frightened, not knowing the obstacles she faced? Did she give up her dreams to give her children a chance to have theirs?

Her descendants were taught that anything was possible if they pursued education, relied on their ingenuity, and worked hard.

I'm the proud recipient of the light she kindled. Her example lives with me every day, through the stories she told, the food she made, and the revered family traditions passed from one generation to the next.

Without her tenacity and courage, who and where would I be today?

Unanswered Questions

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

Every Sunday I attended Sunday School;
If you didn't you were some kind of fool.

There were the stories of Adam and Eve;
You didn't dare to disbelieve.

Who married Cain and Abel I asked?
My question seemed to be quite a task.

Would a God of love send folks to hell?
The answers were just too hard to sell.

I wanted desperately to believe;
Pat answers though seemed designed to deceive.

I explored my questions in therapy sessions;
Some would say they were confessions.

No question or story was ever rejected;
Surely then by God I was accepted.

Unanswered Questions

Judy Watkins – Myrtle Creek, OR
Judywa77@gmail.com
e-circle 3, e-circle 6

His life was ending; there was such a short time left and his mind was living in another time, another place. He repeated over and over, "I should not have gone; it was my fault; I should have tried harder." At the same time he kept asking me to get him "home" to San Diego. He folded his blankets, put them on his walker and tried to load them into the car. He was upset that I wasn't packing to take him home. He thought he was in a motel and he didn't know who I was. I tried to calm him by saying the roads were not passable and we would go as soon as we could.

I tried guessing at what was going on in his mind, but I didn't know. How is it that I could be married to him for 60 years and didn't know any of the details of his first marriage? I knew he had a wife and five children, but that was over years, I think, before I met him.

Why didn't I ask questions? Was I afraid of the answers? He said his prior life was none of my business—is that the truth? Shouldn't I have known something about it? Would it have made any difference to my life and the life we had together if I had known?

We had been married for ten years before I learned that he had five children, not just the two whose photos were on his dresser. Why was it a secret? Somehow he cut himself off from that family and he never visited or stayed in contact. Why?

He is gone now and it is too late to ask the questions, but maybe I could have made his passing easier if I had known what he was trying so hard to get back to.

Where Did I Come From?

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

All the talk about where babies come from! I know exactly where I came from. Daddy told me.

There was a war, and one day when he was marching, he opened his knapsack and there I was! I was hungry so he sat down, and we ate his K-rations. I've been with him ever since.

This is so much better than Susan's story. Her mama found her in a cabbage patch, and that makes no sense at all. Nobody around here grows cabbage. Everybody knows you get it at a grocery store.

What Could I Have Done?

Linda Phillips Thune – Austin, TX
lphillipsthune@gmail.com

What could I have done to keep you here? I would have loved for you to see the children of your sisters. They would have liked that, too. There are little boys and little girls—toddlers and babies—always ready for an auntie. An auntie who could teach them about hearing the world in a different way, with their eyes. You could have shown them the importance of taking time and being understood, of looking at what the wind has to say when it blows leaves down and around and, finally, to the ground. And feeling what someone is thinking when they are looking at ducks dipping their heads beneath the waterline and popping up again, shaking off the drops like bits of misplaced sunlight. And signing language with your hands would have been absorbed like the sound of their mothers, only it would be Auntie Annie's visual voice of play and of living.

What could I have done to make you stay? How could I have made you strong enough so no kind of pain would make you hurt yourself, no push make you fall, no lonely night make you cry? I longed for you to find that happiness you were always searching for. I would have given you a ranch in the Colorado mountains filled with horses and dogs and any lost hearts in need of restoration. I would have given you a true love to share your days in kindness and peaceful walks and laughter that cracked the air around the two of you, sweet and often. Rain and snow would only ever be gentle, so aspens and pines and columbines would grace the land around you in splendid gratitude.

What could I have done to have given you life a second time?

One More Hug

Madeline Sharples – Manhattan Beach, CA
<http://madelineshaples.com/>
madeline40@gmail.com

Maybe one more hug
was all that was needed
to keep him alive.
Instead I let him go
down that long hall
to his dark bedroom without it.
Instead I only kissed
his smooth cool cheek
not touching any part
of his body.
Instead we talked briefly
about nothing important—
just small talk really—
instead of the stuff
I needed to know to save him.
Instead we said goodnight.
Instead he left my room
and the next morning we found him dead.
Maybe, just maybe,
one more hug could have saved him.

They Knew

Pat LaPointe – Prospect Heights, IL
Grampat8@comcast.net

Is love blind, or was it just too hard to see clearly when caught in a whirlwind? If love is blind, it must also be deaf. Everyone said you weren't seeing clearly. You just knew it was they who could not see what your love was like. How could they know? How did they know?

How did they know before you that he never talked to you, only at you? You had been equals, or so it seemed. Why is it that you are now a nothing, at home with a child, while he is out fighting with the real world? Why have you suddenly become stupid and he a genius?

There was a time when there was no one in the world besides the two of you. Why aren't you enough for him now? He says he doesn't want to stagnate, to get into a rut. Does he really prefer those drunken barbarian friends over you? Did he really say you're boring and he can't imagine why he married you in the first place?

One morning you wake up and are surprised to find him in the bed beside you. He is out cold. You have no idea where he was last night or what time he stumbled in. You look closely at him. Who is this unshaven, sloppy man whose breath reeks of whiskey and stale cigarettes?

Leaving the bed, you see yourself in the mirror. At least you think it is you—a plump figure in an old t-shirt, with flabby thighs, sagging breasts and puffy eyes from crying? Where is that attractive young woman you were only yesterday? And why is that baby crying?

You cuddle your son. He smiles, and his cries change to playful gurgles. It makes you feel good. You begin to talk to the baby and realize that this is the only human you have talked to in days. Pieces begin to fall into place. This little person seems to be the only one who cares. He's not exciting, dashing or virile, but there is one thing for sure—he loves you.

So I Will Never Know

Kalí Rourke – Austin, TX – <https://kalipr.wordpress.com/>

My parents married far too young. She was nearly 17; he was 19 (a Navy man). When I was born nearly two years later, they were already divorcing.

Stories my maternal grandmother told me years later as I began to realize that I had a “real” father out there were quite confusing. Even then, I could tell that his behavior was not that of a normal young man, but instead seemed to indicate that interpersonal relationships were difficult, if not impossible, for him to maintain. He was intelligent and focused but could disappear into whatever he was doing. He was also critical and opinionated.

I saw him when I was 15 and never saw him face-to-face again.

He had many wives. (I was told seven, but only found five in my genealogy research.) I discovered I had a younger half-sister when I was in my early 20s. He had no other children.

I met that half-sister, and she was convinced that if one or the other of us had been a boy that he would have stayed in our lives. Hmm ... I wondered, “Is there some sort of irony that his only children were girls and all six of his grandchildren are girls?”

I suspect that the autism spectrum or mental illness may have dogged him through his life. At 57, after his last divorce, something overcame him and he pipe-bombed a local grocery store in his small town, was arrested, and went to prison.

He ended his fractured life at 59 in a solitary prison cell and left nothing but questions. Why did he kill himself? Why was he estranged from his father before he committed his crime? Why did he cut himself off from his daughters and granddaughters so ruthlessly early in their lives? Why? Why? Why?

His brother and sisters never knew me at all, so there was no interest in communicating after his death. I doubt they would have the answers, to be frank, and so, just as I never really knew him, I will also never know why he did the things he did.

Unanswerable Questions

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

I don’t remember specific questions from my childhood, but I must have added requests in my nightly prayers on my birthday or before Christmas. I remember thinking as a child that G-d must be busy if he/she had to watch over every sparrow.

As a young woman, I asked my journals: When will I get married? Or will I get married? I wanted to know so I could make a plan. I was under the impression a woman’s life could only really begin after she was married.

In my twenties and thirties, the big question was: What is my purpose? Why am I here? By this time, I gave G-d a 50/50 chance of existing in some form or another. I also believed while he/she may have created us and our world, they no longer exerted any control, nor could they be held responsible for the sorry state of affairs both historical and present. It was up to us to fix all the problems. I found purpose in being of service.

And now the questions I ask, I ask of leaders and politicians, doctors and researchers, friends and philosophers. Death and the whys and wherefores of that stopping place have become a central theme for me. From the Muslims murdered at prayer in New Zealand to friends and family dying from cancer, I find myself feeling angry and sad, and in need of explanation.

But those are unanswerable questions. Rather than rail about senseless murders or try to understand why some people die way too young, I am learning to accept that for some questions there are no answers—at least no answers that make sense.

All I can do is take every opportunity to be kind each day and hope that small ripples of goodness will move us toward peace.

In the words of John Andrew Homer: “There’s no better exercise for the heart than reaching down and lifting people up.”

Unanswered Questions

Christine H. Boldt – Temple, TX

When my children ask me,

I don’t remember my teddy bear’s secret name,
if I ever had pink tights.

I don’t remember if my sisters told on me,
or who tucked me in at night.

When my friends talk,

I don’t remember having my first period,
who took me on my first date.

I don’t remember if I went to Senior Prom,
who slapped me when I came back late.

When my husband wonders,

I don’t remember why it was I got straight A’s,
what daydreams made me sigh.

I don’t remember how I became so perfect,
or why I never, ever, cry.

Is my lack of recollection just a quirk of my mindset?

Is it that I don’t remember, or have I made myself forget?

What Now?

Ardine Martinelli – Tacoma, WA
<https://listeningtomylife.blog/>, amart@nventure.com

At 76-years-old, I seem to have more questions than answers. What is my deepest yearning? How do I want to spend the next part of my life? Where am I being called? Yes, at 76, doors have closed, some by my doing, some due to my age, and some I've had no control over. Yet, new doors don't seem to be opening up. As a friend once said, "It's the corridor between the two that is the real b*tch."

My life has been filled with "doing." I have always been an active, task-oriented person. Filling my life with pushing through obstacles, pain, life, proving and achieving. When will enough be enough? Learning how to be at peace with the slower pace of my life is hard. I am still healthy and active. My slowing down seems to be more of a spiritual slowing down than a physical one. I have created within myself the struggle between "being" and "doing." "Doing" is a hard taskmaster.

What I do know to be true is that when I quit creating stories about "I should be doing more," the questioning stops. The trick for me is to remain present to each moment. When I am able to see the beautiful birds that grace my feeders, I am fully present with a smile. When I take time to see the beauty of the trees blossoming this spring and the flowers popping up, I am fully aware of the grace and beauty of my life. Maybe this fourth quarter of my life is about slowing down so I can show up. Learning how to let Spirit pull me, instead of feeling the need to push through. For me it is a practice of trusting that what I need comes my way. I just need to pay attention and be present.

Conversations with Dad

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

"Daddy, why don't we get an allowance?"
 "I don't believe in paying you to do your chores."
 "But, I want to buy a candy bar at the school canteen like my friends do."
 "Find a way to earn it."
 "But how? We live six miles from town. There is no way to earn money."
 No answer.
 I was horse crazy by age nine.
 "Dad, can I have a horse?"
 "When you've saved enough money to feed a horse for one year, we will get a horse."
 "How much does it take to feed a horse for one year?"
 No answer.
 Two years later, I asked, "Dad, is \$250.00 enough money to feed a horse for one year?"
 No answer, but that summer we built a barn.

We never discussed religion. Dad was an atheist. When we moved to Spain and I became engaged to a Spaniard, I took catechism lessons to understand the religion and hoped it might prepare me for the inevitable conversation with Dad.

Nurse's Journal, 1983

Lois Halley – Westminster, MD
loishalley@comcast.net

I cannot forget three patients with manic depression—euphoria at one pole and deep despair at the other. Merv convinces Bob that a microphone has been implanted in his back. We get there just in time to stop Bob from using a razor to cut open his friend's flesh to relieve him of the delusion. Later, a package arrives for Merv at the front desk. He has ordered a tuxedo to wear to his family meeting. It's what we remember when we hear he placed a gun in his mouth and pulled the trigger.

When Bob is transferred to the state hospital for long-term care, a limo arrives at the main entrance. He wants to go in style. Is this what he thinks when he hangs himself until dead?

Raven-haired beauty with almond eyes, gentle soul and bright mind: Why did you slice your throat from ear to ear? Did you fail to take the lithium, or did it fail you? Was there something more WE could have done?

Unanswered ...

[*Note: Names have been changed and situations altered to protect privacy.]

"If you marry in the Catholic Church, don't ask me to walk you down the aisle."
 "Don't worry, I won't, but can we discuss it?"
 "There is nothing to discuss!"
 "Dad, I know what I'm doing."
 "No, you don't, and nothing I can say will change your mind."
 "Or yours either! Why won't you give me any credit?"
 No answer.
 Dad never answered our questions because giving us an answer meant committing himself.
 I decided not to marry Juan, and I met Robert from my hometown in Oregon. We dated, then one day Dad said, "Come for a drive, I want to talk to you. I can arrange a trip to Japan for you with the local Chamber of Commerce."
 "I don't want to go to Japan."
 "It might give you a new perspective."
 "Why are you doing this? Do you want to separate me from Robert?"
 No answer.
 "Dad, I'm 23 years old. I'm done letting you try to steer me. Will you ever have respect for my choices?"
 He almost smiles, but it's more like a sneer.

Destiny's Push

Jan Marquart – Austin, TX
Jan_marquart@yahoo.com

Richard was 24 and married when I met him. I was 17, new in Miss Buckley's steno pool, right out of high school. He wore a black pinstriped suit, had a halo of red hair, freckles, a wide smile, slightly crooked front teeth, and glowing brown eyes. I'm going to marry him, I thought.

The next year, I was placed in his work station. He brought me gifts—a green silk scarf, a brass egg, my first panty hose. He took me to lunch, sometimes dinner. After work, he walked me to the train station through the dark streets of downtown Manhattan as we flirted, held hands, and occasionally kissed. I was a virgin; he was married. I didn't date married men.

A year later I changed jobs, he divorced his wife, and we continued meeting for lunch and had long phone calls. Three years later, I moved to California to go to college. He came out once a year to surf for a week, wrapping me in the intimacy that we denied ourselves in New York.

I had just begun living with someone when he knocked on my door. We jogged on the beach, had lunch, and dinner together with my boyfriend; he knew I wouldn't be intimate now. Then I didn't hear from him for about two years. Meanwhile, I left my relationship, got a master's degree, a job, saved money, and bought a townhouse.

A month into my new home, the phone rang. A soft, low, and seductive voice said, "Hi." I couldn't breathe. I waited.

"How come we never got married?" he asked.

"You never asked me," I said. The memory of him now bigger than the sky.

"Oh," he said.

Click.

It was a sharp moment that is still pierced into my soul.

My most poignant and single question: how could you have hung up on me?

"It's not about being perfect. It's not about where you get yourself in the end. There's power in allowing yourself to be known and heard, in owning your unique story, in using your authentic voice. And there's grace in being willing to know and hear others. This, for me, is how we become."

— Michelle Obama, *Becoming*

More Unanswered Questions

Jessica Heriot – Hendersonville, NC
Jheriot247@gmail.com

I had always thought my father ignored the incident. Thirty years later, I found out he hadn't. The event occurred in Scarsdale, a commutable suburb of New York City. In a burst of anger, I said, "I hated it there." My tone was sharp, blaming him for moving us to Scarsdale and staying for 11 years.

Dad looked hurt and bewildered. "Remember that time when the kids chased you and called you names?"

Stunned, I was certain he had swept the incident out the back screen door with the dust.

I had been playing with Gail in her backyard. Suddenly, a group of older boys from the neighborhood surrounded us and began screaming: "Dirty Jew, you'd better run 'cause we are going to sic the dog on you." A big terrier leapt toward me. I ran toward my house, the boys right behind me chanting "Jew, Jew. We are going to GET YOU." I crossed the bushes between our houses, and fell face down on the pebbles in the driveway. The boys stopped short at the bushes.

"You know what I did?" Dad asked.

"You did something?"

"I went to the kids' parents and told them that if that ever happened to my daughter again, I would call every newspaper and tell them what their children did," he said, his voice mimicking the toughness with which he confronted them.

"You did?"

"It didn't happen again, did it?"

"No."

Satisfied, he turned to gaze out the window.

Unanswered questions floated to the top. Did you and Mommy talk to me about the incident? Did they address my fear or comfort me? Questions I didn't ask. Why? Because I didn't want to make Dad feel guilty, stir up old hurts? Because I didn't want to spoil the moment?

Unable to wade into the muddy waters of emotions—to face my fear, hurt, or shame, to reassure or explain—Dad did what needed to be done. Yet his revelation crossed off another item from my list of unanswered questions and gave my father, a silent hero of that nasty incident, his due.

How Old Is 80?

Marian McCaa Thomas – Leawood, KS
mmccaat@kc.rr.com

“How old is 80?” When I was 30, my grandma was 84, and she seemed very, very old to me. She died ten years later, and although I too was ten years older, I certainly felt I was a long way from being 94! “How old is 80?” If your grandma lived to be 94 and your mother lived to be 99 and almost five months, as mine did, 80 looks pretty young. 94 plus five is 99; 99 plus five is 104. Now THAT sounds old, but maybe I’ll make it that far! If so, I have another 24 years to live, and they can be wonderful years.

When my son was six years old, he created a birthday card for me, but wasn’t sure about the numbers to put on the card. “Mommy,” he said, “are you going to be 37 or 73?” They were just numbers to him, and he wanted to put them in the right order! At the time, I thought, “73? That’s an eternity from now!” But eternity didn’t last very long, and all of a sudden I’ll be 80 in just two months. If I reverse the numbers, maybe I can recapture the liveliness, the curiosity, and the desire to learn that eight-year-olds possess!

“How old is 80?” If you ask me that question, I’ll leave it unanswered, and show you how young I feel by the way I live each day with liveliness, curiosity, and the desire to keep learning.

Hummingbirds

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

Hummingbirds
sipping sweet nectar
replenish their fuel for flight.

Tiny bodies hover,
suspended in air
pollinating flowers,
wings fluttering faster
than the eye can see.

Flying forwards, backwards,
flashes of iridescent
crimson or emerald breasts
catch the light.

They’re here,
they’re there,
they’re gone.

Where do they go?

Spring II, 2019 Story Circle Network’s Online Writing Classes for Women

Memoir and Lifewriting:

Opening the Door: Focusing Your Vision
(May 13 – June 24)

Turn Family Treasures into Lasting Stories
(June 3 – July 1)

Journaling & Self-Discovery:

The Gifts of Fragmentary Writing
(June 3 – July 8)

Using the Full Moon for Creative Inspiration
(June 10 – July 8)

Sharpening Skills:

21 Days to Your Daily Writing Practice
(May 20 – June 16)

Discover Your Story through Character Monologues
(May 20 – June 17)

Poetry:

Found Poetry
(May 27 – July 8)

Haiku for Health: How to Mindfully Read Contemporary
Haiku
(May 13 – June 10)

Session I – Independent Study Program:

B. Lynn Goodwin
(May 13 – June 10)

Session 2 – Independent Study Program:

B. Lynn Goodwin
(June 10 – July 8)

Note: Summer classes will be posted June 10th. Be looking for our e-mail. The summer class term begins July 15th.

<http://www.storycircleonlineclasses.org/index.php>

"Everybody is a story. When I was a child, people sat around kitchen tables and told thàeir stories. We don't do that so much anymore. Sitting around the table telling stories is not just a way of passing time. It is the way the wisdom gets passed along. The stuff that helps us to live a life worth remembering."

—Rachel Naomi Remen



From the Blogs:

One Woman's Day

by Kali' Rourke

Writing is art, therapy, the processing of emotions that we sometimes can't verbalize, and in special instances, it is a revelation to those who read it. Dede Montgomery revealed the emotions that can affect any child who is a caregiver to a parent in her powerful "gift of story," which was published in the One Woman's Day blog. Find out how you can contribute to the blog at: <http://onewomansday.wordpress.com/about/>

Even When You Call Me Mother

by Dede Montgomery

It was the moment she called me "mother." I was upset and blurted out, "Mom, I'm your daughter."

She hesitated, and then answered slowly. "Oh, yes."

Too quickly I butted in. "Mom, you know I'm your daughter."

I commanded, rather than asked, selfishly realizing, at 56, I still needed a mother.

"Yes, of course," she answered. "But a daughter shouldn't have to take care of her mother," she added, carefully.

Mom hasn't addressed me this way again. And yet, the exchange generated new fears for my brain to tease through. I thought I had reached all the milestones associated with my parents aging. But now, it is different.

I share time with Mom. She sometimes asks me about my day, but less often offers advice. I rarely tell her my problems. I read my blogs to her, and sometimes she helps me choose the right word. We sit together by our special rivers and at our favorite parks. I play music for her on my iPhone. We don't talk politics much. I am thankful for what we have.

I used to think I was like my mother. Then, later, I realized how much I was like my dad. Now, I see bits of myself from each of them and wonder who I may be like

as I age? Will I die quickly like Dad, with my mind clear, but my heart exhausted? Or will I outlive my cognition? And what might that bring to my daughters? But really, what does it matter today?

The sun is shining. I have a new book to write. We have problems in our world that we need to solve. I will get old someday, or not. I may die like my dad or like my mom or not like either of them. What I do know is, for today, I will be there for Mom. And for this moment, none of the rest of it matters.

What gifts do we share, late in life? The gift to sit in silence with the chirp of birds or whistling of the wind. The gift of story, those that happened, new ones that might have been. I sit with Mom, who taught me how to be strong and independent. Surreptitiously, I pick a sprig of lavender one day. She laughs when I hand it to her, as I learn I don't have to always follow all the rules. I'm learning from her that the time to leave behind regrets and accept what you bring to this world is sooner rather than later. To know that change is constant, and not all of it comfortable or happy. To look to a parent as a teacher, still, even if they call you Mom.

And what I will say when she asks again is, "No, Mom. I'm your daughter and helper. You are my teacher no matter what we pass through together. And you will always be my mother."

Dede Montgomery is a sixth-generation Oregonian, who writes about past and present Oregon in her blog, *Musings on Life in Oregon*, and in her 2017 memoir, *My Music Man*. Dede's first novel, *Beyond the Ripples*, will be released by *Bedazzled Ink* in 2019. Dede also works in research outreach and education at Oregon Health & Science University.



Writing Circles, onsite or online, support women in sharing their prose and poetry. This month our Circles Coordinator, Mary Jo Doig, acquaints us with Cheryl Warren, Facilitator of the onsite “Our Group,” which began as an Older Women’s Legacy (OWL) workshop. Following the interview is a story by Cheryl. For more about our Circles program, go here:

<http://www.storycircle.org/circlesprogram.shtml>

Introducing Cheryl Warren, Facilitator of “Our Group,” in Crozet, VA by Mary Jo Doig

This month I’m so pleased to acquaint you with Cheryl Warren, whom I met at the first meeting of an Older Women’s Legacy (OWL) women’s writing workshop. The year was 2016 and the place was at our gorgeous Crozet Library here in Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley.

MJD: Cheryl, kindly tell us a little about yourself.

CW: *Our writing group first met with Mary Jo in 2016 at the Crozet Library. The workshop consisted of seven women of all ages, but soon two of them dropped out. Presently we are a group of four members; one of our members recently passed away.*

I am 75 years old, divorced, have two grandsons; I am a Scorpio (born on Halloween!), love to travel, play mah jongg, and write journals of my trips and family experiences.

MJD: What sparked your interest in the OWL workshop publicity that moved you to sign up? Had you had any previous writing experience?

CW: *I want to pass on to my grandsons the story of my life. I never knew my grandparents or the lives they lived. My previous writing experience was writing a journal of some of the trips that I have taken. My goal is to see all fifty states and now I only have five left: North Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Mississippi, and Hawaii.*

MJD: What was it about the OWL workshop that made you want to continue on, as it came time to close?

CW: *It was such a good writing group and for some unknown reason we developed a special bond among us. We just knew we had to keep on writing together. We are always anxious to meet every two weeks and are disappointed if we have to cancel a meeting. Our bond has grown more and more, a special connection that is hard to explain.*

MJD: I was thrilled when you stepped forward to continue leadership of the workshop participants. What brought you to that decision? What has been the most challenging part and the easiest part of leadership? Do you have any other pieces of advice for a potential or new facilitator?

CW: *Every time we met, we could feel an energy in the room and we wanted to learn more about ourselves and about each other. Being the “leader” of the group is not hard; anyone can step up as long as you know your group and what everyone is comfortable with. Sometimes we get off track but getting back to*

our storytelling is my job. The most challenging part of leadership is setting the schedule and making sure the library has a room for us. The easiest part is writing what we are feeling and willing to share. My advice would be to enjoy yourself, be honest, and respect others. The rest will come naturally.

MJD: Does your circle have a name? When, where, and how long do you meet? Do you have an established schedule of activities you follow at each gathering? Do you use prompts for topics? If so, do you provide them or do other members? Many writing circles are open to new members, while others are closed, as yours is. What brought all of you to that decision?

CW: *The name we chose is “Our Group” because that is what it is – our own group. We used to meet at the Crozet Library every two weeks, but when we recently lost a member, we began meeting at the home of one of our other members. We felt more comfortable that way. We still meet every two weeks. We do not set a schedule of what to write, but sometimes it is uncanny that we all write about the same theme. That’s how close we are. We are a closed group because of the bond that we have together. To bring someone new into Our Group would be hard; we share some of the personal parts of our lives.*

MJD: As you consider your memories of the years you have all been together, what comes to mind? Is there a moment (or moments) you’ll never forget?

CW: *The first time we met I think each of us knew it was meant to be that we came together and that total strangers could feel close to each other. Each time we met that feeling grew. That first night we met, as we went around the room telling a brief story of who we were, one lady said, “I want to get to know you (she pointed at two of us) better. I feel as if I have known you before.”*

We have shared this feeling more than once at our meetings and feel the energy all around us. It is almost like a therapy group at times.

MJD: There are many reasons to write life stories: to record them as a legacy for future generations, to educate or preserve a way of life, to bring one’s life into clearer focus, to share family stories and recipes in a self-published booklet, and to heal, for starters. Has anyone in your circle sought to publish a story or poem? Created a small, informal book for friends or family? Or is thinking about a book or other extension of their writing?

CW: *No one has expressed a desire to publish any of her works, at least for now. For the most part we are capturing our past and holding it for future generations. Some of the poems we've written are so beautiful, we think that maybe one day they will be published.*

MJD: There are so many ways to organize a circle. Each one, I've found, is unique. Some circles structure opening with a brief catch-up time with each other before starting to write, others share snacks and beverages, do timed writings, along with sharing their story and hearing positive comments from other members. A few I've known occasionally gather outside of circle time to socialize or sightsee or attend community events relative to their interest. Have you tried any of these or other ways to organize your gatherings?

CW: *Since the passing of one of our members, we have begun meeting at the home of a member. This way we can talk and laugh loud if we feel like it. Sometimes now we share a bottle of wine along with cheese and crackers as we each read our*

Below is a story from Our Group. The members are still mourning the recent passing of one of their writing sisters, so they asked Cheryl if she would share one of her own stories for this interview. Below is her timeless story about the kitchen table.

The Kitchen Table by Cheryl Warren



One of the most important features of a home is the kitchen table. We come together as a family for our meals. It's the place that draws family and friends together when they come to visit and where many issues are discussed and decided. Homework is done there while Mom prepares the evening meal. Sometimes we play games or cards there. This is where family stories are relived. There you can sit alone for peace and solitude and just enjoy the early morning with a cup of coffee before the rest of the house starts to stir. We plan our daily lives there. We pay bills there. Friendships start there. Laughter and tears are shed there. Birthday parties with cake and ice cream happen there. Sometimes you have to add an extra extension to the table to accommodate more people.

When I was a child living on our farm, the main meal was supper. But if we had company, it was dinner because it sounded more formal. Supper or dinner – it was the same. Our entire family was seated at the table. Dad or Mom said grace and then we ate a big meal. Farm life is hard work with early hours and many chores to do. So, at supper we relaxed and talked about what we did during the day. When we had finished our meal, we continued to sit and Dad would whistle a song. He was such a good whistler. He taught us how to whistle, but I could never complete a whole song. If we had company, sometimes just the adults stayed at the table and my brothers and I were not allowed to stay. Were they telling jokes or secrets or were they discussing family matters? Family matters were not discussed while we were around.

Sometimes now I wish they had talked about my grandparents and told their history and lifestyle. I never knew any of my grandparents. They had died either before I was born or shortly after.

stories. We are more relaxed in this setting. Yet it is true that each group is different and each can work out what's best for them.

MJD: What have been the personal gifts for you of facilitating your women lifewriters?

CW: *I think the personal gift I bring to this group is the ability to help each woman feel comfortable and trusted, and never judged.*

MJD: A final question. Do you have one or more moments that you will never forget?

CW: *Each time we meet is special to us. We are there for each other in times of happiness and sorrow. We listen and learn. What a group we have! My family also knows how much it means to me and sometimes they are envious of the friendship we share*

It wasn't until both my parents had passed away that my brothers and I would sit at my older brother's kitchen table and tell stories and memories of Mom and Dad, and sometimes stories about each of us. It was amazing to hear my brothers tell about some of their memories. Funny, I didn't remember those stories happening the way they told them. I guess it's because we each remember different things about a particular event. But it was a good feeling to talk and listen about our family. When I was married, my husband and I would visit my older brother and his wife. Guess where we ended up? Yep! The kitchen table. We discussed some argumentative topics. We told funny stories. We debated politics – mainly heated discussions – religion, and, of course, some gossip. Doesn't everyone gossip?

Then there was a time when my three brothers, their wives and children, and I were in town at the same time and we decided we needed a bigger table so we went to a local restaurant. We even invited Dorothy and her husband, Junior, to join us. Dorothy had been considered part of our family because she helped take care of us when we were kids. She even told us some of her memories raising us. We laughed so much that our stomachs hurt.

In February of 2016, my sister-in-law passed away. The family came to the house prior to her service and later after the service. Thank goodness because there was so much food to eat. I happened to look at the kitchen table and all the young cousins were sitting around the table and telling stories and memories. I guess the younger generation is now at the kitchen table. What a pleasant sight that was. I hope they continue to get together and share memories.

PROFESSIONAL DIRECTORY

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Marty Ambrose is an author and English professor who has published five novels with Thomas & Mercer; more recently, she has published a historical mystery for Severn House. Marty lives in SVV Florida, holds a BA and MPhil in English, and teaches in the MFA program of SNHU. **Author** www.martyambrose.com

Jeanne Charters, former VP of Marketing for Viacom TV and owner of an award-winning advertising agency, Charters Marketing, is author of two historical novels: *Shanty Gold* (2015); *Lace Curtain* (2019). In August 2019, her publisher, Rogue Phoenix Press, will also publish *Yellow*, a "fake-news" novel related to her years in television. She is presently setting up reading/signings for *Lace Curtain*. **Speaker, Author** www.jeannecharters.com

Marilyn H. Collins. Author of local/regional history books, magazine articles, and writing guides. CHS Publishing Step-by-Step Writing Guides include: a workbook-style approach to writing memoir, family history, local/regional history, and marketing (e-books). She owns CHS Publishing and works with other writers to answer concept questions through editing their final copy. **Speaker, Coach, Editor** www.marilyncollins.com, hsycl@cox.net

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 BA 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> and <http://www.thewritingwell.org>

Patricia Eagle. A story gatherer, Patricia maintains an unyielding commitment to excavating and acknowledging what is resilient about her life and the lives of others. In addition to her first book, *Being Mean—A Memoir of Sexual Abuse and Survival*, she has stories in four southwestern anthologies. She lives in Colorado. **Author, Speaker** www.patriciaeagle.com

MaryAnn Easley is an independent publisher and award-winning author/educator. She teaches Story Structure in Fiction & Memoir and Creative Journaling. Based in Southern California with graduate degrees in English and Writing, she will consider memoir/poetry manuscripts and offers professional cooperative publishing options, salons, events, launches, and consultation through Windflower Press. **Author, Speaker, Publisher** maryanneasley@yahoo.com (subject line: "Windflower"). Call/text 949-285-3831.

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 writing sample (no charge) through Writer Advice. **Editor, Coach, Freelancer** <http://www.writeradvice.com>

Judith Grout lives and writes in Glendale AZ. She is experienced in clinical laboratory science procedures such as chemistry, hematology, and microbiology. She publishes a quarterly newsletter "Finding Your Invisible Villain." It explores the world of lethal microbes that could add an interesting plot twist to any story. Her writing includes freelancing to fiction. **Author, Speaker, Freelancer** www.judithgrout.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>

Maryglenn McCombs is an independent book publicist who has worked in the publishing industry for over 25 years. She has represented books from major publishers, small presses, independent presses, and self-published authors. A Southern Kentucky native, Maryglenn lives in Nashville TN and holds a BA in English from Vanderbilt University. **Marketing Services, Freelancer** www.maryglenn.com ; maryglenn@maryglenn.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 PhD 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 PhD 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** morcigj@gmail.com.

Sarah Byrn Rickman, of Colorado Springs, 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 BA in English from Vanderbilt University and an MA in creative writing from Antioch University, McGregor. **Speaker, Freelancer** www.sarahbyrnrickman.com

Barbara Stark-Nemon has written the award-winning novels *Even in Darkness* and *Hard Cider*. She has degrees from the University of Michigan in English, Art History, and Communication Disorders. Barbara writes novels, essays, and short stories. She lives, writes, swims, cycles, gardens and does fiber art in Ann Arbor and Northport MI. **Author, Speaker, Teacher** www.barbarastarknemon.com

Also Professional Members: Cheryl Bazzoui, Joy Davis

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SCN Publications: 2019 Changes of Note

by Susan Schoch, chair
Publications Work Group

This edition of *Story Circle Journal* will likely be the last of an era. By our next issue, in September, we anticipate a new banner on the *Journal*, with our new logo and look, and you will find this quarterly newsletter on a new website, or by paying a little more, you'll receive a print copy in the mail. These are just some of the changes you might notice as SCN grows its digital functionality and reaches for a broader audience. This growth is exciting, and also challenging.

The Publications Work Group hopes, of course, to keep all the best parts of SCN's many publications and processes. Yet we recognize the need to update and to streamline how we accomplish our Publications mission. As the *Journal* goes to press, all the details haven't been determined because the new website is not yet up and running, but you can anticipate these upcoming changes:

- The annual SCN anthology, *Real Women Write: Sharing Our Stories, Sharing Our Lives*, will be published in 2019 for public consumption, using the Amazon/Kindle platform. Filled with member writings, as always, *RWW 2019* will have a tremendously expanded audience by using this digital publishing platform. SCN will no longer print *RWW*. Instead, it will be available at a reasonable cost in paperback format from Amazon, or as an e-book. We also expect to have a downloadable pdf available to members via the website.
- The additional membership fee that is designated for receiving print publications will now cover four mailed copies of the *Journal*. To meet costs, that added fee will be increased to \$15 on all new and renewing memberships.
- Submission processes and guidelines for our publications will be revised. Details will be forthcoming for the *RWW 2019* anthology, the True Words section of the *Journal*, and the various publication contests. The current complexities of processing submissions and judging entries forced us to cancel the annual Susan Wittig Albert LifeWriting Competition for 2019. For the same reason, the *RWW 2019* anthology entry process may be delayed.
- We have a new Coordinator for the Telling HerStories blog, Len Leatherwood. Wearing many hats, Len is also the Coordinator of our Online Classes, and as such, is in the right position to find teachers and professionals who can offer the writing and publishing information that blog is meant to provide. Hooray for Len!

The Work Group will keep communications open with members as this transition year goes on. Watch for our e-mails, as we become a stronger and more vibrant SCN!

Story Circle Network, Inc.

723 W University Ave #300-234,

Georgetown TX 78626

True Words from Real Women

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:

- September 2019: A Brilliant Idea
- December 2019: Letting Go
- March 2020: Building Bridges

Send us your story at this link:

www.storycircle.org/members/frmjournalsubmission.php

(Note: Our submission process will be changing, along with the SCN website. Expect new submission guidelines soon.)

CONGRATULATIONS to Karen DeFranco!

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

2019 LifeWriting Contest — CANCELLED —

The Susan Wittig Albert LifeWriting Competition will not be held in 2019. The contest will reopen in 2020.

