



STORY CIRCLE JOURNAL

Vol. 23 No. 1, March 2019

The newsletter for women with stories to tell

Re-Visions

by Jeanne Guy
2018-2020 SCN President

We aspire to embody a strong, welcoming female organization that invites women of all ages to share their life stories, strength, and wisdom – in a safe environment. This is accomplished through everything from writing groups and workshops to conferences and contests, all that encourages women to write in whatever way allows them to capture and express their life stories.

— Jen Slaski-Halligan, *Honey Bee Branding – creating beloved brands from the inside out*

Re-Visions: an apt title for this exciting time for Story Circle Network, since we are UNDER CONSTRUCTION. I had no idea, truly I didn't, how much Story Circle offers and what it takes to run this organization. We now have an opportunity to shine a light on the magnitude of SCN via a **new website and logo** and to make its mission and true value known to women of all ages all over the world. We are poised to take the incredible foundation of the last twenty-two years and use our collective voices and wisdom to make a difference in many more lives, one woman at a time.

We are a sisterhood like none other.

Former board member **Danelle Sasser** shared a story with me about why she was glad she joined Story Circle Network in 2000. At a "Writing from Life" event, a two-day SCN workshop, a moment occurred that awakened Danelle to the need for inter-generational writing circles. Another woman, in her 80s, who had been a stewardess in the beginning of passenger air travel, read her story of having to wear a girdle, no matter how slender one was, while on the job.

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SCN Announces 2018 Sarton Women's Book Award Shortlist

Story Circle Network is proud to name the 2018 Shortlist for the Sarton Women's Book Awards. This award program is named in honor of May Sarton, who is remembered for her outstanding contributions to women's literature as a memoirist, novelist, and poet. The awards are given annually to women authors writing chiefly about women, in memoir, biography, and fiction published by small/independent presses and selected from works submitted. The judging is conducted in two rounds, with SCN members serving as first-round jurors. Professional librarians not affiliated with SCN select the winner and finalists. Our 2018 winners will be announced in April, 2019.

Congratulations! to all our shortlisted authors and their publishers. And a heartfelt **Thank You!** to the 26 dedicated jurors who read and evaluated first-round submissions, and to the dozen judges who are currently reading the second round. We couldn't do this without you!

Memoir

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
Finding Mercy in This World, by Catherine Johnson
Daughter in Retrograde: A Memoir, by Courtney Kersten
To Play Again: A Memoir of Musical Survival, by Carol Rosenberger

Nonfiction

The Once and Future Queen: Guinevere in Arthurian Legend, by Nicole Evelina
Anything that Burns You: A Portrait of Lola Ridge, Radical Poet, by Terese Svoboda

Contemporary Fiction

Gina in the Floating World: A Novel, by Belle Brett
Quarry, by Catherine Graham
Once Upon a Time a Sparrow, by Mary Avery Kabrich
When the Stars Sang, by Caren J. Werlinger

Historical Fiction

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

Young Adult Fiction/Nonfiction

BJ Erickson: WASP Pilot, by Sarah Rickman

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Letter From SCN's President



If you haven't picked up on the big news that we're "under construction," let me say it again loud and clear: WE'RE UNDER CONSTRUCTION! Story Circle Network is transitioning to a brand new website and logo, and it's not just a facelift. It is quite the undertaking to create the functionality required for the various offerings by SCN. There will be some "interruptions of service." Patience is required. More about all this on page 1 & 3 in the important "Re-Visions" article.

I am in awe once again of this organization as I look over the work done by **Susan Schoch**, putting the many pieces of the SCN puzzle together in print to create the March *Journal*. This quarterly publication represents our focus on promoting and supporting women and publishing their stories. The work that goes into each and every piece written here is for YOUR benefit. We want you to know we care about you and your story and offer you a number of opportunities to connect with other women, share your stories, and support one another in your writing efforts, because it matters.

We must find more ways to make our voices heard, and *Story Circle Journal* is just one example of SCN's providing an opportunity for you to do that.

Susan Albert, our president emerita, started this organization in 1997, twenty-two years ago. There's a big WOW right there. If you haven't seen the movie "The Wife" with Glenn Close, I recommend you do so and note what happens when a woman's voice is discounted. Susan paved the way for our collective voices via SCN and now it's up to all of us to continue that legacy. Why? Because we matter.

We are therefore excited to be rolling out a GoFundMe Campaign in March 2019, with a dollar-for-dollar challenge of \$25,000 based on a gift from an anonymous donor. More about that in the coming weeks!

Another important person in SCN has been **Peggy Fountain** (some of us may remember her as Peggy Moody). She retired December 31, 2018 after serving as our Executive Director for these many years. I'm sure she'll miss (not my daily dozen or so emails which all started with "help!") She became my website right arm (and left) from the time I joined the board and carried me through unknown waters over the years. Please see the special article/interview by **Pat Bean** on page 10-11.

"Our Future is Female" is a new addition to the *Journal*. We are excited to welcome the younger voices of SCN Vice President and writing instructor **Len Leatherwood's** students. Please see **Tiger Schenkman's** powerful essay on page 9.

Story Circle Journal

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

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 Susan Schoch
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We welcome your letters, queries, and suggestions.

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 \$90 Elsewhere

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

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

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Thank You to Our Member Donors

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A Sharing Circle

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

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



Continued from page 2

Len has also been busy overseeing the Online Classes (page 13) and our first-ever writing trip...in Italy! (page 8) Will wonders never cease?

We have over 30 women signed up for our exciting LifeLines weekend in beautiful Fredericksburg, Texas. **Susan Albert** will facilitate “Crafting and Publishing Compelling Stories” March 29-31. Sign up now. You won’t want to miss this opportunity to learn from the best of the best. See page 5 for details.

Board member and Circles Chair **Mary Jo Doig** has written a lovely tribute to longtime member **Jane Parsons**, who died January 5, 2019. If you attended the conferences in the early-mid 2000s, you may remember Jane. See page 15. Mary Jo also contributed an interview with **Rebecca Roberts**, founder of an historic on-site Circle in Austin, for this issue’s Circle Voices on page 6-7. Following it is a touching story by Circle member **Marian (Bunnie) Haigh**.

The prestigious Sarton Literary Awards Shortlist has been announced! Hats off to **Susan Albert** and **Paula Yost** and all the member-readers for their work to continue this important outreach. See page 1.

All this and more is compiled right here in the March *Story Circle Journal* – a wealth of contributions from a chorus of voices for your reading pleasure!

*Write on, ladies, write on,
Jeanne Guy
2018-2020 President*

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.

Re-Visions Continued from page 1

That story, told in circle, fed Danelle's need for interaction with wise women of all ages. While there was much more to the woman's story, it provided two things: wisdom and history from a previous generation, and it opened Danelle to value her own wisdom and story. SCN is where the deep stories of our lives are shared.

With Peggy Fountain's retirement and the need to update our website and logo, SCN created a Web Committee (HUGE thank-you's to **Susan Albert, Susan Schoch, Len Leatherwood, Teresa Lynn, Shawn LaTorre, and Leilani Rose** for joining me) to select and work with a new web design and management company. The firm we selected, **Austin Web and Design (AWD)**, is working hand-in-hand with us to create an awesome new website, easy on the eyes, and easy to navigate, offering us the ability to reach out to women of ALL ages who can join in this SCN sisterhood, sharing women's stories and promoting women's voices.

The new WordPress website built by AWD will allow us the ease and functionality of the WordPress system, built to our specifications, so we can easily participate in changes and updates, and will integrate our membership functions to easily work within it.

Rollout of the new WordPress website and logo is scheduled for a late April/May timeframe. Please note that during this interim period, there are a number of things affected: the Book Review Site, membership functionality, posting of members' publications, etc. We ask for your patience and your understanding.

The transition also impacted the release of our 2018 *Real Women Write* anthology, but it was worth the wait! Note that for the next issue, we'll be taking the annual anthology to a new level by self-publishing it and making it available on Amazon.

Speaking of women's voices, we have new voices in new positions. Member **Teresa Lynn** has been hired as our Administrator and web management person, handling all financial-related matters, membership, and the book review website. In addition, over the next month, I'll be turning over the point-person role with AWD to her (she's already my new right arm). She'll be responsible for basic maintenance of our new WordPress site. Others of us will also go through training

so there will be a backup system in place.

NOTE: We may have website maintenance opportunities for volunteers. Please contact Teresa (ftdlynn@gmail.com) if you have background and experience with WordPress and would be interested in volunteering in this manner.

Member **Jen Slaski-Halligan**, owner of *Honey Bee Branding – creating beloved brands from the inside out*, has contributed countless pro bono hours assisting with the creation of a new logo, which has been no small task. Her talents and approach to SCN's branding and logo have been invaluable.

New Member **Abby Morris**, a virtual whiz with background in Constant Contact (our email marketing service), has been hired to handle and manage all of SCN's e-letters, announcements, and reminders.

Member **Shawn LaTorre** has stepped into the position of Secretary/Treasurer on the board and we welcome her to this role. She replaces retiring longtime member **Penny Appleby**, who has filled more roles with SCN than I can count. We are incredibly grateful to her and love her dearly just because of who she is. She will remain a member and available for advice when needed.

We'd also like to welcome **Caroline Ziel** to the board! We're hoping to tap into her many talents and get her plugged into a role with Mary Jo relative to our important Circles work.

We have much to do over the coming months, ladies. The Web Committee will be spending countless hours determining what pages are carried forward from the old site and which are no longer necessary. The archived files will be available to us but there is much to be mapped out, such as the rewriting and editing of content for the new site, not to mention overseeing its functionality.

As you can imagine, this is a monumental undertaking, moving from a twenty-year-old site to a new one. We ask for your understanding and patience as we go through this enormous and exciting transformation.

With love and gratitude,
Jeanne Guy

You Are Awesome!

During the calendar quarter from 7/29-10/27/18, the 17 members of our SCN board of directors recorded donating 566.4 hours to Story Circle projects. Their gifts of time, energy, and experience are priceless. Nonetheless, *Independent Sector* (which publishes research important to nonprofit organizations) estimates the value of their volunteer time is **\$24.14** per hour. **Thanks to our board for donating the equivalent of \$13,672.90 in those three months!**

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



LifeLines 2019, with Susan Wittig Albert Crafting & Publishing Compelling Stories

March 29-31, 2019

Fredericksburg Inn & Suites

Fredericksburg, TX

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

In this jam-packed weekend women-only workshop, bestselling author-publisher Susan Wittig Albert will help you understand and practice the essential craft of narrative: characterization, conflict, narration/dramatization, story structure, setting, dialogue. She will also give you the resources you need to choose among the current available paths to publication. Bring your laptops, tablets, notebooks, and project ideas and plans. Come prepared to write, share, learn, and expand your writing horizons.

This LifeLines weekend will take place in Fredericksburg, Texas, in the heart of the Hill Country. The town is less than 80 minutes from Austin and San Antonio, so if you live out-of-state, you can fly into either city and rent a car. Spring is stunning in this part of Texas, so you're sure to enjoy the drive. Rich with the culture of German pioneers who settled the area over 160 years ago, Fredericksburg boasts spectacular art galleries, boutiques, antiques, award-winning Texas wineries, and acres of wildflowers.

———— *Schedule* ————

Friday, March 29:

3:00 pm: Check-in, Dutch-treat dinner at local restaurants

6:30-8:00 pm: Session I. Who we are and why we write

8:15 pm: Wine & cheese

Saturday, March 30:

6:00 - 8:30 am: Breakfast

8:45 - 10:15 am: Session 2. Real people: Creating engaging characters

10:45 - 11:45 am: Session 3. Characters and conflict

11:45 am - 2:15pm: Dutch treat lunch & free time

2:15 - 3:30 pm: Session 4. Structure: Building strong stories

3:50 -5:00 pm: Session 5. Real places: Creating intriguing settings

5:00 - 7:00 pm: Dutch treat dinner & free time

7:00 - 8:30 pm: Session 6. Real people talking: Crafting dialogue

Sunday, March 31:

6:00 - 8:45 am: Breakfast

9:00 - 10:30 am: Session 7. Changing landscapes in the publishing world

10:50-11:50 am: Session 8. Your paths to publication

12:00 pm: Check-out

Register here: <http://scnlifelines.org/> But hurry! Enrollment is limited.





Writing Circles, onsite or online, support women in sharing their prose and poetry. In this *Journal*, we spotlight a long-running onsite circle in Austin. Enjoy an interview with facilitator Rebecca Roberts by our Circles Coordinator, Mary Jo Doig, and a story from circle member Marian Haigh. For more about our Circles program, go to:

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

A Circles Interview: Inklings

by Mary Jo Doig

MJD: We welcome **Rebecca Roberts** of Austin, TX to our corner. Rebecca facilitates one of the original Austin Chapter writing circles formed about 1997.

Rebecca, each of us has a unique journey that brings us to Story Circle Network. How did you first connect with the young SCN back in the day and then become a writing circle facilitator?

RR: *One afternoon while working in my studio I got a call from friend Donna Remmert. Susan Wittig Albert had asked Donna to consider facilitating a writing circle using Susan's book, "Writing from Life." Donna asked if I was interested in being a part of this.*

"I have never written in my life," I answered. "I'd love to!" Thus Donna introduced me to SCN, and we evolved into a small, devoted Circle, meeting once a month for 8-9 years at Donna's home. When she moved to Colorado, I wanted to continue this writing practice, and I asked several friends to give it a try. Thirteen years later, two of those original members are still a part of our group, one of whom you'll meet following this interview.

Originally, INKlings met in a room in a local bank. When that became unavailable, we moved to meeting in my home. From the outset I included timed writings in the INKlings format. I had been introduced to them in local SCN workshops and loved the experience. When we wanted to name our group, INKlings was the result of delightful exploratory conversations. Slowly little snacks got introduced, and members volunteered to host. We graduated to potluck, and eventually decided that the host would choose the timed writing prompt and feed the group.

In truth, we have evolved into a social group that writes. We have grown to care about each other deeply through the stories we have shared. Everyone feels free to choose her own material for what she writes outside our monthly meetings. Occasionally someone will return to an earlier piece. Whatever the muse dictates! We have no rigid timing rules. With our current number of 7, each meeting seems to work out beautifully with some stories shorter, some longer. If someone is working on a long piece, they might read half one time, and half the next. Everyone is conscious of how the evening is evolving.

MJD: How did you gather the women who formed the INKlings?

RR: *I originally called friends. Over time others heard of our group through SCN. Members invited friends who were interested. Participants changed over the years. If someone left, we filled that space. We kept the group no larger than 8, in order to have time for all to share both their prompt piece and the longer work they brought from home. We all write personal essays reflecting thoughts, travels, life experiences, problems we are processing etc. Anything goes.*

We currently are a closed group. We feel 7 is a perfect number of participants for the time we have, and no one wants to leave the group! The deep friendships we have carved through story, and time spent together, are lovely. We are all expanded by each other's approaches and perceptions. Our group could best be described as having progressive hosts rather than facilitators. Timed writings are much more rewarding when someone else gives the prompt, so having revolving hosts gives each member a chance to experience both sides of this.

MJD: Have any of your participants continued on to publish memoir or other forms in any venue?

RR: *One member anticipates creating a handcrafted book illustrating her stories with her collage artwork. One lives part-time in another town and now writes a column for the paper there. Another attends multiple writing workshops and is probably our most dedicated writer. Her efforts may become a book one day. One other member plans to gather her travel stories.*

MJD: INKlings has evolved beyond the SCN umbrella. From your experience, what sage advice would you give someone thinking about starting a workshop or circle in her own community?

RR: *My best advice is grab some friends and just do it. I made a little set of ground rules to pass out at the first gathering, described what (my idea) of a timed writing was, and off we went. Sometimes I think the best and truest stories are the ones that first come bubbling out. Even if your group starts out small there are no rules. With*

apologies to the biblical Matthew, here is my feeling: where two or three are gathered in writing's name, there is writing in your midst!

Certainly, SCN can be a perfect partner here. Join, meet with others, and find many new friends you would never otherwise meet. Many are anxious to write, to form a new group, and some belong to more than one. SCN even furnishes members who wish to start a writing circle with a helpful guide.

MJD: Lastly, at SCN's first *Stories from the Heart National Conference* in 2002, you donated a ceramic door prize and I was the lucky recipient. Do you still create ceramics? Have other hobbies?

RR: *I am a professional potter, so yes, I am still a maker. However, although artists may never retire, I am now gratefully "off the road." I have a beautiful studio and*

continue to love working with clay, but no longer do wholesale or travel to retail shows. I participate in two small local shows, have work in a local gallery and have more time to travel, lunch with friends, read, go to the gym and other of life's pleasures.

I am grateful to INKlings for providing me with a deadline to write. Although I realize I would enjoy writing more and be much better at it if I developed a regular practice, I have not achieved this. I have no desire to publish, but I do relish showing up for something that challenges me.

In conclusion, readers, please know that Rebecca is happy to talk with any of us about her experiences with the INKlings. She can be reached at [rebecca at rebeccar.com](mailto:rebecca@rebeccar.com)

And now, we invite you to read a story by INKlings member, Marian Haigh.

Grampa

by Marian (Bunnie) Haigh

Dewey was a quiet man, never saying more than just enough words. His slightly curly, white hair was unruly on top and his hooked nose and hooded eyes could lead you to imagine a carved bird. Bunnie, when she thought of him, recalled his hands and the smell of Five Brothers Pipe Tobacco on his skin.

The history of his work was contained in his hands; coal miner, farmer, dairyman. Many fingers had been sacrificed to farm machinery: two middle digits on one hand and three fingers sliced diagonally from the other. Still, with crooked nubs Dewey could quickly yank a pigtail if Bunnie walked by in an unsuspecting, not paying attention kind of way. He would look at her with a deadpan expression when she whirled around. Bunnie kept a wary eye on him but she suspected he might like her.

No one in the family drank or swore profanely but Grampa was allowed a slight preference in these matters.

Walking through the pasture with him could elicit a sharp "Watch out for that cow shit!" A bad word that reduced Bunnie and her cousin Jan to hilarious giggles. It was possible to overhear Dewey say *goddamn* during grownup talk. Sometimes, at night, Gramma poured him a pungent drink into a small glass. She called it his "medicine."

Dewey was weathered from his life of farming and providing for a family during the Depression. His soft, blue denim shirt and overalls never went out of fashion. No yearly vacations, movies, or indoor bathroom figured in his lifestyle—just a weekly trip to town for groceries, the laundrymat, and coffee at Harry's Café.

Bunnie thought about the quiet evenings in the parlor of her grandparents' farmhouse. A large, black woodstove, an overstuffed blue velvet couch and chair, and the flickers from a small television set that blinked shadows and light over the countenance of a worn, silent man.



Marian Haigh is an original member of the INKlings, and a professional potter. Her story about her grandparents' farm, "The Chicken or the Egg," was selected for publication along with her grandmother's recipe for "Rich Egg Noodles" in *Kitchen Table Stories: A Story Circle Network Anthology of Stories and Recipes*.

Writing, the Sea, and Sorrento...

SCN's Newest Adventure!



Story Circle Network will be heading to Sorrento, Italy, November 2 - 10, 2019. Settled in a lovely hotel for seven full days, each day our group will take short trips to towns along the Amalfi Coast, as well as to Pompeii and Capri. SCN members will be gathering with family and friends to experience the sights, tastes, smells, and sounds of this famously beautiful coast. We'll also spend time with our Story Circle sisters to write and share our writing with one another.



Our instructor is Len Leatherwood, Pushcart-nominated author, nationally honored writing teacher, and Coordinator of our Online Classes program. She will be leading the workshop using the "sense-sational" Italian landscape as a jumping-off point to infuse our memoir, poetry, or fiction with evocative sensory details. We happily anticipate this will result in some Amalfi-influenced pieces for the SCN Journal, allowing all of us to catch glimpses of a wonderful writing adventure.



This is Story Circle Network's first international trip and we are hopeful it will be a biennial event, giving our members the chance to visit many different countries, where they can be inspired to stretch and grow in their writing. This trip is **currently full** but you can sign up for the wait list if you like. Also, we will be announcing **our next big trip** in just a few months, so stay tuned! For more information, you can go to:

<https://www.writingandtravel.com/>



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



Our Future is Female!

Tiger Schenkman is a senior at North Hollywood H.S. Zoo Magnet. Her essay here won an honorable mention in the Western region (8 states) of the Scholastic Artists and Writers contest, the most prestigious contest for youth in the U.S. We're pleased to feature this young author's compelling writing, and to welcome her as an SCN member!

The Kiss

by Tiger Schenkman

I've always been behind my peers. In first grade, I spent all year pretending to read *Pirates Past Noon* because I didn't want to admit everyone was ahead of me. I couldn't even recognize the word "pirate"; I thought the book was about parrots. In third grade after everyone else had moved onto big kid bikes, I, too afraid of falling, still depended on training wheels. There's at least one thing, though, that came exactly on time, and that was my first kiss.

I'm 15, and my friend Amelia wants me to be in her photoshoot. She's let me know a month before, and I spend every moment leading up to the day full of fear. I don't look like a model, act like a model, dress like a model, so how can I *be* a model? Plus, I get nervous around pretty girls. What if the other models think I'm weird?

It's the day of the shoot. I want to call an Uber, but my dad insists on driving because "It's in a sketchy area." We pull up in our beaten down PT cruiser that my mom insisted they buy when I was born. It's filthy and I'm mortified. As I sprint away I hear him yell, "Have fun! Don't get murdered!" But those are not my priorities. Please God, just let me be cool. Amelia opens the door and I'm rushed to a friendly makeup artist, who informs me that I have the prettiest cheekbones she has ever seen. She's also willing to "fix" my eyebrows any time I want. I'm complimented, I guess.

The first model I meet is Bella. She's tall and rail thin, and I can't help but think about how fat my thighs look. Next to her is Maezee, who looks like Johnny Depp and Winona Ryder's love child. I wanna tell her I like her face, but we're interrupted. It's time to model. We spend the next hour pretending to chat, to dance, to make drinks. When

Amelia is satisfied, she announces, "For the last shot, I want two of you to kiss." Now, I've never kissed anyone before, but I can't think of a way of pretending to do THAT. Maezee raises her hand to volunteer, and I shoot my hand up too. Before I can comprehend what I've just done, Maezee and I are escorted somewhere with more privacy.

I'm sweating. My breath stinks. I'm about to vomit. I barely hear Amelia say, "Ok, go for it." I can, however, feel Maezee's hands cradle my face. And I can *definitely* feel her lips as they touch mine. She's kissing me and I'm kissing her. It's electric. It's inspiring. It's that inconvenient truth I've been avoiding because it's so much easier to deny these things than to accept them. And as suddenly as it starts, it's over. Maezee pulls away, chuckling, "Wait until my boyfriend sees this!" Ouch.

I'm back in the PT cruiser with Dad and we're heading home. "How'd it go?" he asks. "The models were nice," I say. He puts on music and I look out the window. This is when it really hits me, so powerful that I almost want to blurt, "I'm gay." But now isn't the time, so I just repeat it to myself.

I've had a couple of girlfriends since then. I'm out, I'm happy, I wear my heart and my pride on my sleeve because I'm privileged to be a lesbian in a time and place where that isn't a crime. I think about Maezee often in a wistful sort of way, but we haven't talked since that moment. How is she to know the landmark she represents to me? I doubt she even remembers that we kissed. To her, I'm probably just some girl she met once. Or, and this is definitely wishful thinking but a girl can dream, I'm just some model.



Chapters in Our Story

Peggy Fountain – All Good Things...

by Pat Bean

A love of reading, a favorite author, and a bit of spare time away from mothering, all coalesced to bring Peggy Fountain and Story Circle Network together.

The catalyst was a reading group in Austin, led by Susan Wittig Albert. Now writing from her new home in Portugal, Peggy (then Peggy Moody) says she had heard about the group and since her youngest child was in daycare when it met, and since it was being led by one of her favorite authors, she decided to check it out.

“I loved every minute of it,” Peggy recalls. “And Susan and I became friends.”

That was over 20 years ago, shortly after Susan created Story Circle Network and when Peggy was working for IBM in Austin. Raised in San Antonio, the third of four children, Peggy had attended the University of Texas for two years, then transferred to the University of North Texas where she graduated with a bachelor’s degree in computer science.

With such a background, it turned out to be more than friendship between Susan and Peggy. As an author, Susan wanted someone to manage her website and Story Circle needed a webmaster. Peggy was hired to do both.

“One thing led to another, and after a few years, the work for Susan, SCN, and a few other clients was enough to allow me to quit my job at IBM, which had become less and less fulfilling and enjoyable,” remembers Peggy, who then had three young children at home. Chris is now 32 and living in India, finishing up his work on a doctorate degree; Megan is 24 and living in the Denver area; and Joey, now 23, is also living in the Denver area.

“I learned how to read—or, as my mom used to tell people, I taught myself—at age four. I read all the time as a kid. My mom would take my sister and me to the public library every week during summers; we’d check out the maximum number of books allowed and be back the following week for ten more,” Peggy says. “Back then I read mysteries, biographies, novels—everything! That has continued throughout my life—I still read every day,

mostly novels and mysteries these days.”

Becoming a part of Story Circle, Peggy recognizes, “gained me a wonderful group of women friends, and I read dozens of great books I’d never have read otherwise, and became much more myself than I had been before. I found work of my own,” she says, noting that she’s referring to Susan’s nonfiction book, *Work of her Own*. “It was fulfilling work, creative work, and I was able to do it from home on my own schedule and timetable, allowing me to balance the needs of my family.”

During Peggy’s years with Story Circle, she created several websites and gave SCN an online presence that it needed. She used her programming background and experience at IBM to set up an online ordering system, as well as setting up enrollment processes for classes, workshops, and conferences, and submission procedures for contests and publications.

But as the saying goes, *all good things come to an end*, and so has Peggy’s work for SCN. Since marrying in 2018, and moving with her new husband, René, to Portugal, she has been easing out of her Story Circle work and enjoying a new life.

“Lordy, we’re going to miss her,” states SCN founder Susan, who notes that she was immediately impressed by Peggy’s skills when they first met more than twenty years ago. “SCN owes its online presence to her—and what you see when you visit the website isn’t the half of it. Peggy developed the processes by which we evaluate the Sarton awards and other contest entries, handled the book reviews, sent out emails, managed the conferences, conducted our board meetings—and much, much more. She has been an absolute treasure.”

SCN Vice-President Len Leatherwood, who worked closely with Peggy when Len assumed the role of Online Classes Coordinator, echoes Susan’s sentiments. “Peggy was a very patient teacher for me. She endured endless emails as I slowly learned the multiple online processes—and kindly reminded me when I forgot essential details. She was also right there at any time day or night to answer a question,” says Len. “I marveled at her ability to be on

call for not only me but all of us and was deeply impressed with her commitment. She was exactly the right person to make the inner workings of Story Circle Network function seamlessly. I miss her now and will continue to do so. She was a jewel in SCN's crown."

Publications Chair and Journal Editor Susan Schoch, in agreement, also remembers Peggy's remarkable ability to recall details from past projects and her ability to quickly come up with helpful files and links. "In working on SCN's latest book, *Inside and Out*, Peggy helped us set up a three-stage judging system with wonderful functionality. And for our annual anthology, the process she designed and grew for entering, reporting, and publicizing it has carried us through seventeen editions. Again and again, Peggy has created sites and systems for us, and she's done it with tremendous efficiency, yet she has been kind and patient with questions and lapses as the rest of us learned how to use them. I'm going to miss her help, and her humor."

Peggy, meanwhile, says what she will miss most about not working with SCN will be all the "wonderful women" of the Circle. But for now, she is happy in her new life with René across the ocean.

"Together we have made *his* home *OURS*, and I am enjoying every minute. We had a greenhouse built last summer and are now growing much of our own food—lots of vegetables and some fruit already! We've got over a dozen fruit trees—apple, peach, orange, lemon, pomegranate, fig, as well as quite a few grape vines. We are learning and experimenting with what will grow here—pretty much anything, as the climate is so warm.

"And we're cooking more these days, using our fresh produce. We swim at a nearby indoor pool and go on walks in the neighborhood or to the beach. We're about three

miles from it. There are a number of other expat couples in the area and we get together for dinners and parties with them frequently. That has helped me a lot, as I had a close group of friends in Colorado, and it was very hard to leave them. My kids love visiting, although I do miss being able to see them more than once or twice a year. We are starting an intensive Portuguese language class next week, so that we can hopefully communicate better with the people here in their own language."

Then Peggy adds, "We plan to live here forever."



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, Pepper. She blogs at <https://patbean.net>

Looking for Contributors...

Two SCN members, **Pat LaPointe** and **Marlene Samuels**, have designed a project to look at bullying/disempowerment of women by other women, *Relational Aggression in Females*. If you have experience with this, perhaps you will want to add your voice to this new anthology. Here is their call for submissions:

Seeking essays from women of all ages, races, and sexual orientations who have experienced bullying from other girls during their developmental years or who have been victims in their adulthood of aggressive, demeaning, or disempowering behavior from other women. The ideal essay will include observations about the emotional impact such experiences have had. Word limit: 1000. Visit www.changesinlife.com to submit your essay. Put **Anthology** in the title line and the title in the body of the essay. **Deadline for submissions is June 1, 2019.**



Writing Tips from Our Teachers

As in every Journal, Len Leatherwood, Coordinator of the SCN Online Classes program, brings us a lesson this spring from one of our talented instructors. Linda Maria Steele offers us “a few important writing truths or tips.”

Importance of a Supportive Community for Writers

by Linda Maria Steele

I started teaching an in-person version of my new *Freeing the Writer Within* online course this week at Falmouth Community School in Falmouth, MA. A group of enthusiastic writers arrived at Room 115 of Lawrence School, at 6:00 on Wednesday evening.

I invited students to introduce themselves, tell a little bit about why they were taking this particular course at this time and the writing goals they imagined for themselves as our course progressed. It’s the same strategy I use when teaching my online course.

Irwin, a retired military and boat enthusiast, said he realized he needed to do something to get off the couch and get involved in his community. John said he published a few nonfiction articles many years before and had two ideas for a novel that he hoped my class might give him a jumpstart on. Gilda, a former student at the junior high school where we were meeting, and retired administrative assistant to the Falmouth school superintendent, said she always enjoyed writing but hadn’t written anything in a long time. She thought the class might inspire her to start writing again.

As I listened to each of the students explain why they were taking my writing class, a few important writing truths or tips occurred to me, which are relevant to all writers regardless of goals, experience, or talent.

As writers, we need to practice our craft. Just like a dancer must practice to improve, so must writers. We get



better as writers when we practice writing. Writing practice can take many shapes and forms, from journaling to more formal stories, poems, and prose.

As writers, we also need a sense of community and camaraderie. Writing is a singular and personal endeavor; as writers, we need a comfortable environment to share our writing and receive supportive and constructive feedback.

At the very least, it feels good to share our stories with others, and when we engage in a writing community or a writing class, we allow ourselves to be seen and heard.

We are all writers. We each have stories to tell about the events of our lives, and each of us is capable of writing them down. Some of us simply choose to practice writing our stories more than others—that’s where the help of a class comes in, because the support and practice provided allows you to grow as a writer.

After introductions at my *Freeing the Writer Within* class the other night, we read a brief narrative by Ray Bradbury called *Take Me Home*. It’s a vividly descriptive story that explains what inspired the author to write one of his novels, *The Martian Chronicles*. Bradbury described life as a kid with his grandfather and how that relationship influenced his writing. We ended class that first night with the students freewriting about a beloved memory or relationship from their own childhoods. Each student wrote a brief story that was interesting and thoughtful. We all commented that we learned so much more about one another from our freewrites than we did from our brief introductions. By showing up, getting involved, and writing a short piece, every writer there was able to grow just a little bit as a writer that first night.

As their instructor, I feel honored and grateful to be the one to hold the space for them to share and write down the stories they already hold within.

Linda Maria Steele is the author of *Tending the Marsh* and *Meet Me in My Cape Cod Kitchen: Recipes for Seaside Living*. She is offering her *Freeing the Writer Within* course online via Story Circle Network in the Spring semester.

Spring 2019 Writing Classes for Women

Memoir and Lifewriting:

Life Happens: Write Through it Using the Celtic Calendar as a Guide
(March 11-May 6, 2019)

Freeing the Writer Within
(March 25-May 6, 2019)

Journaling & Self-Discovery:

Gratitude Lists as a Means of Joy & Passion in our Lives
(March 11- April 8, 2019)

Journaling to Heal & Grow
(March 18-April 22, 2019)

Sharpening Skills:

Promoting Your Book: The Menu
(March 18-April 16, 2019)

Fiction:

Historical Fiction Close-To-Home
(March 25-May 6, 2019)

Essay Writing:

The How-To's of Essay Writing
(April 1-May 6, 2019)

Session 1: Independent Study Program:

March 11-April 8, 2019: Lynn Goodwin

Session 2: Independent Study Program:

April 8-May 6, 2019: Lynn Goodwin

Spring #2 2019:

Our next class schedule will be posted in mid-April. Classes will run May 13-July 8, 2019.

"Since the beginning of time, language has stretched and tweaked and wound itself like vines around the sweet reality of those who use it. This works both ways. Human beings shape the language. Then the language shapes them in turn."

—Beate Sigriddaughter (Spirit Rose in *The New Percival*)

How has 'The Power of Yes' shaped your life?

"*The Power of Yes* is the topic for the **2019 Susan Wittig Albert LifeWriting Competition**," announced Joyce Boatright, contest chair of this annual members-only opportunity. However, with redesign and revision of the SCN website in process, the date for **the contest has been delayed** for later in the year.

"The delay is caused by a need to reformat how entries are submitted," Joyce said. "We also use judges from across the country and they score the submissions electronically, so there are technical decisions to be made regarding that process as well."

For members who want to begin thinking about their entry, here is information on the 2019 topic:

The Power of Yes

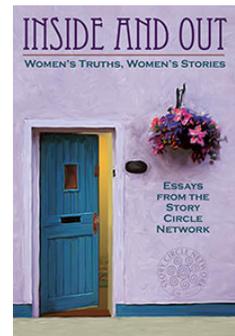
YES is a powerful word that can change the trajectory of our lives in significant ways. Write about a time you said *yes*, and how it changed your life and the lives of those around you. It could be *yes* to caring for aging parents, *yes* to a life-changing career choice, *yes* to fighting a life-threatening disease, or *yes* to standing up to bigotry. The possibilities are endless; the power is phenomenal. Speak your truth and share with us how your decision to say *yes* instead of *no* shaped—or reshaped—your life.

Open only to current SCN members, the maximum word count for an entry is 1,200 words. More information will be sent directly to members when the contest opens.

"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/>



StoryCircleBookReviews.org
Reviewed by Susan J. Tweit

SCN's Book Reviews

Featured Review

Ghost Walker: Tracking a Mountain Lion's Soul Through Science and Story

by Leslie Patten

While out for a hike near her cabin in the wild, high country east of Yellowstone National Park on a relatively balmy January day (20 degrees F, no wind), Leslie Patten sees tracks of a wild cat much larger than those of the bobcats she is used to following. "Immediately, without ever having seen them before," she writes, "I 'grokked' that these large prints must belong to a cougar."

She follows the tracks and finds that the big cat trekked to the edge of the precipice of the deep Clarks Fork Canyon, "paused, and looked over her vast domain." The tracks and the moment of awareness of mountain lion awakens something in Patten that gives her a new sense of the vastness of the world and the size of her place in it:

The prints took my breath away. Something deep inside me stood at attention, not afraid, but now much more alert, awed, as if the tracks were a sacrament. I was in the presence of a true predator, in fact, the perfect predator.

Puma concolor—cat of one color. The cat with the tawny coat that blends in perfectly with her surroundings is the quintessence of grace, speed, agility, and stealth... The quiet of the icy landscape penetrated my body, and

my mind was still. This cougar passed where I am standing.

Ghost Walker is a deep dive into science and culture and what makes mountain lions such awe-inspiring wild cats, a dive that takes in their ancestors, their current range and lives, and the challenges facing them in the modern West. What makes this book compelling is that Patten herself inhabits the story, her curiosity and thirst to understand another species driving the narrative forward.

Her writing is by turns poetic and reverential, as in the two passages above. It is also hard-nosed and realistic about the big cats and the people who study them through science or tracking and hunting them—which, Patten makes clear, is often another form of fascination with the majestic cats and their essential wildness.

Like the best of nature and science writing, *Ghost Walker* illuminates The Other, both another species—mountain lions—and people from differing cultures and world-views. As Patten brings what it means to be a mountain lion into sharper focus, she also gives insight into what it means to be human.

Ghost Walker is a wise book, a book to savor and return to again and again.

Leslie Patten has an extensive background in horticulture, along with a life-long interest in the natural world. She is the author of *The Wild Excellence: Notes from Untamed America*, and *BioCircuits: Amazing New Tools for Energy Health*, as well as several e-books on gardening. She presently lives in a small cabin in northwest Wyoming.

Susan J. Tweit is a plant biologist and the award-winning author of twelve books (including her memoir, *Walking Nature Home: A Life's Journey*, and *Colorado Scenic Byways*, winner of the Colorado Book Award), numerous magazine articles, and newspaper columns. Read her popular blog and learn about her books on her website: <http://www.susanjtweit.com/>



In Memoriam — Remembering Jane Parsons

When I think of Jane Parsons, it is the Saturday evening session of Open Mike at our Stories from the Heart Conference of 2010 that marches to the head of my memory parade. Several of us had gathered to read our stories and poems. Jane shared two of her humorous poems; Debra Dolan from Canada read a painful story about her mother; Austin's Rhonda McMahon read from her spiritual memoir; I, the Virginian, read what would become the epilogue in my memoir, *Patchwork: A Memoir of Love and Loss*. The person who followed me and closed out the evening was Pattie Burke of Austin, who read from her memoir, *Women and Pedagogy: Education Through Autobiographical Narrative*.

As the session ended and many began to leave the room, five of us gathered at the podium, wanting to talk more about the readings we'd given and heard. Pretty soon the room was empty except for Jane, Pattie, Debra, Rhonda, and me. In time, the room darkened as the day's events came to a close, yet we were nowhere near done with our conversation. The time transformed into what I came to term as a magic moment, as the bond that formed between us that night remains to the present day. Within a week, we named ourselves the OM Synchronicity Sisters, based upon the grace that brought us together that evening. Subsequently, we each contributed a perspective to a story for the *Journal* that summer about our experience. We emailed each other during the years, and planned to meet again at future conferences. Most of the time we were successful.

At Stories from the Heart in 2012, Pattie Burke told us she had been given a diagnosis of concern. Following that Open Mike event, she and I sat sipping red wine in the dark, empty hotel bar and talked long into the night. It was Pattie's last conference. We were four Synchronicity Sisters then, except that I have always continued to feel richly connected to Pattie.

Life moved along, as it does. Debra endured a debilitating injury with a long recuperation and we didn't see her again. Yet she has kept connected with her stories published in the *Journal*, the *Real Women Write* anthology, and our "One Woman's Day" blog. And that has been so good.

Meanwhile, Jane, Rhonda, and I attended each conference until 2018. Then Rhonda had big changes in her life and Jane grew weaker with age. As we planned the conference last year, Jane's fervent wish to attend, alone would have been enough to propel her there. Yet, she no longer had the strength; in time, her daughter let us know that Jane—with her lovely smile, unique personality and presence, elegant style of dress—had passed on. We became three Synchronicity Sisters. Yet, as with Pattie, I feel Jane's nearness and camaraderie. The bonds we formed that long-ago night have not broken by transformation. And that is yet one more gift in my life from being part of Story Circle Network.

— Mary Jo Doig



True Words from Real Women

Presenting a selection of short pieces of lifewriting by our members, edited by Jo Virgil. This issue's topic is **"Mother Nature."** Future topics are listed on the back cover. Please contribute your own True Words to the Journal by using this link: <http://www.storycircle.org/members/frmjournalsubmission.php>

Without Jane Parsons

(Departed January 5, 2019: SCN member; photographer, artist, writer, friend)

Jazz Jaeschke Kendrick – Austin, TX
<https://stepsandpauses.wordpress.com/> •
sjazz@austin.rr.com • e-Circle 4

If I could chat with Jane
 she'd have much to tell me
 (always—thoughts, ideas plentiful)

And she'd listen, understanding
 my struggle with closing YE tasks,
 my delight with last night's sunset

Not many could grasp like Jane
 self-imposed rituals of a writer
 my printing, filing each poem

She'd nod at my progress
 transitioning into a 2019 binder
 optimistic this next chapter prolific

Jane has gone, the chats over
 though her laugh rings in my mind
 and I smile recalling her smiles

If I could chat with Jane
 I'd listen closely to innuendos
 then assure: I understand

Jane so loved stories—
 to tell them, write them, hear them
 —the sharing a gift treasured, comforting

as 2019 insists I step forward

What Kind of Mother

Pat Anthony – Fontana, KS
metpvan@gmail.com • e-Circle 4

What Kind of Mother

sends sleet to slide down, coat again
 and again icicles forming on slickened branch

matted limbs in the brush pile sinking
 beneath its weight the way shoulders

hunch at funerals when you don't know
 what to say your voice freezing in
 overheated rooms freighted with mortality

this afternoon clouds bulge with snow
 as birds gorge seed and suet, ride pampas grass

glean shatterings lost in pinging sleet percussing
 against the barn, snare and timpani then triangle

if nature is a mother today she is fierce and wild
 her hair unbound, her sash unloosed, her heavy cape
 billowing behind moaning wind, crackling cedars

yet come May she'll assume the disguise of a zephyr
 pirouette between spring storm and harsh drought

until you shrug your shoulders at her vagaries
 try to anticipate what bit of nature she'll bestow

wonder or wrath, freeze or thaw, rainbow or rain
 making your doubt kinship with this mother as
 icicles lengthen, limbs sag, the house goes dark.

Hideaway

Suzy Beal – Bend, OR
Suzy.beal46@gmail.com • e-Circle 9

I need time to be alone. I creep out the back of the house to avoid my siblings and head for the forest. The stillness surrounds me. The trees stretching for the light, alders with leaves that flicker silver and green, and spruce with needles so sharp they scratch me as I pass. Salmon berry and huckleberry bushes grow so close it makes the going difficult. Ferns litter the forest floor, their brown spores leaving smudge marks on my legs as I pass through them. The green of the hemlock is light and filmy, while the green of the pine trees is dark and scary. Tender and fragile, the new ferns unfurl in a transparent green. The sea-green moss under my feet grows on old stumps and fallen trees. Its carpet creeps over the rocks covering the rich brown soil. It is spongy and silent. In my imagination I am an Indian princess tip-toeing through the forest.

Today more serious thoughts are on my mind. I don't want to leave this sacred place. Ahead, I see daylight at the edge of the woods where the millpond meets the forest. Here, under the lacy branches of an enormous hemlock tree, I find comfort. The pungent odor of the seaweed and mud as the tide goes out tells me it will be a hot day.

Secure in this cool hiding place, I hear the kingfisher's cry as he dives into the pond. The blue heron stalks fish as he walks along the water's edge with mud up to his knees. I strip off huckleberries and fill my mouth with their delicate sweet tartness. We are leaving before the blackberries ripen.

I curl up and gaze through the hemlock branches to the sky. "Oh, hemlock tree, I will miss you. Will there be trees like you in this place called Mallorca where we are moving?"

Lulled to sleep by the sound of the wind in the trees, the Indian princess closes her eyes, listening to the water lapping the shore and the kingfisher's cry in the distance.

A Mount St. Helen's Memory

Pat Bean – Tucson, AZ
<https://patbean.net>, patbean@msn.com • w-Circle 6

Looking out at the gaping mouth of Mount St. Helens from a point once known as Coldwater Ridge triggered goose pimples on my arms. I knew that David Johnston—the first to report the volcano's eruption with the words "Vancouver! Vancouver! This is It!"—had been standing on this same ridge that deadly May 18, 1980, morning when the mountain exploded.

I also knew that those had been Johnston's last words. Although six miles away from the volcano, he had still been directly in its blast zone. Johnston was one of 57 people who lost their lives to the angry mountain. His body was never found, and the ridge I was standing atop had been renamed in his honor, as was the visitor center behind me.

It was a solemn moment for me as I pondered if the 30-year-old Johnston, a trained and enthusiastic volcanologist who knew the risks, would have thought his brief moment in destiny's grasp was worth his life. I wasn't sure. Could anybody ever be?

I do know, however, the great respect I have for Johnston and others who are unwilling to hold back living their lives to the fullest. And as I looked at nature's beauty surrounding me, and the verdant life that has returned to Mount St. Helens, I was also grateful that the fears I've overcome in my life have been less life-threatening.

Travel has as much to do with internal discovery as it has with seeing the world. New places, new sights, new experiences wash away stereotypes. Standing there on top of the ridge that day, surrounded by tree stumps whose tops were swept away with the mountain's roar and where a life was blinked out, touched my soul.

I still think, almost 10 years later, of that moment when I stood atop that ridge and was reminded how important it is to savor every moment because tomorrow may not come. Now entering eight decades of living on this beautiful planet, time has become doubly important, as is my thankfulness for all the years behind me.

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

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



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

Which Leaf Are You?

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

A retirement home is now my abode?
“When did this happen?” becomes my new ode.

Fall leaves of all colors are neatly raked in a pile;
Why, just months ago they emerged fresh and green,
As I watched them give birth I just had to smile.
“Enjoy them now,” for come autumn they will not be seen.

Another leaf was lying shriveled and dry,
Why, I recall when it waved in the wind
As though saying, “Look at me while I’m still spry,
‘Cause it won’t be long until I wind up in some bin.”

“Is the leaf no longer useful?” I ponder,
“No, it returns to the earth as compost.”
As I pause to consider the processes of life with awe and wonder,
So give life your best and most.

For the cycle of life is never ending;
We can choose to leave earth shriveling or glowing.
And in the process our bodies may even begin bending,
But the life force continues; and we keep growing.

Oh! Maybe another form we become
But never dead as we once were taught.
Next time a singer, writer, scientist and then some,
Life is never-ending and with new beginnings ever fraught.

Wildflower Harmony

Sarah Fine – Toronto, ON
e-Circle 3 • e-Circle 4

In my garden wildflowers bloom
Native to the soil random in design
Resilient beauty in the face of seasonal change
Not intentionally seeded or planted
A delicious mix of color and species
Living together as companions
They remind me of children
Each one unique and independent
Brave and eager for a chance to grow
Wanting not to be collected or confined
Blossoming joyfully in tough places
Bouncing back
And by my garden gate
This small blue bell
Reminds me of an old friend
How she fought to stay alive
Like that glorious bright bloom
Pushing its way
Through a crack
In the concrete path
Refusing to take no
For an answer
I bring out a kitchen chair
To sit among the wildflowers
And listen to the wisdom
Growing harmoniously
In my garden

Call for a Forest Kindergarten

Laura Goodell, M.D. – Austin, TX
Q46q46@yahoo.com

“Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything.”—Albert Einstein, who developed much of his theory of relativity in his mind while hiking in the Swiss Alps.

My three-year-old son Adam just started at one of the only forest preschools in Austin. Gaining popularity in Europe, and in a few places in the U.S., such as Hawaii and Oregon and Washington State, the theory is that children learn best about nature by being in nature. Except in very extreme weather, they spend almost their whole time outdoors.

My son and his new friends go with their teacher on hikes in the forest looking for beetles and ants. They dip their toes in the creek while watching the fish swim away.

When they are actually inside for a few minutes, they are in an 1800’s log cabin, where they examine the skins of bobcats and bears. They pet rabbits. They garden. They see chickens hatch.

They don’t sit down in a classroom practicing their ABC’s and 123’s. By focusing on creativity and imagination now, they will easily learn reading and math later.

At lunchtime, they eat outdoors at picnic tables and then run barefoot on the playground. By pick-up time, Adam is usually covered in mud.

Adam is so happy at his forest preschool. He says that he wants to stay in the forest forever.

I just hope that someone will start a forest kindergarten near our home so that Adam can continue to experience our wonderful world.

Not by spending his day sitting down quietly at circle time, but by being outside in nature.

Where he belongs.

Pluviophile

Debra Dolan – Vancouver, BC
Debradolani958@gmail.com

Guilty. I LOVE the rain, finding joy and peace of mind in every aspect of the droplets that fall from the sky, any time of year. Some days, in fact, when life overwhelms, I have been known to walk miles in search of it. Thirty years ago, upon discovering the Pacific NW and its record-breaking deluge, I knew there was no other place to live to enrich my soul in the natural world. It was quickly revealed that the only thing better than being outdoors on a showery day in Vancouver is being inside as it drizzles. I am full of rainy-day love, whether sitting by the window to watch its darkened enthralling delight as I glance-up from my book lounging in cozy clothes, or sleeping to the pitter-patter sounds against the awning as my imagination and restful slumber sink far into the unconscious.

The simplest way for me to interact with this necessity to nature and my well-being is to walk within it. My location in this beautiful damp coastal seaport, with easy proximity to forest, mountain and sea, allows the best diversity of sauntering in the rain. Strolling at the beach in thundering rains with raging winds and fierce ocean waves is awesomeness, whilst hiking in the surrounding rainforest, among the dense canopy of tree branches and leaves, is both meditative and soothing in its calmness. I love the lush moss and ferns of autumnal rains surrounding footpaths laden with fertile rich soil.

To truly enjoy the grandeur of a torrent, one must also protect against its power. There is a necessity to invest in the best waterproof apparel which is a must for the cold wintry rainfall that can infiltrate your bones, leaving you chilled for weeks. There is often a sea of umbrellas from October to April as you amble doing errands on city streets and, mostly, there is a code of etiquette among the locals about navigating in crowds. Even with all the lovely shops, I hate holding a broly, wanting my arms by my side encouraging briskness and full immersion in the elements.

My Drunken Fire

Brenda S. Baranowski – San Angelo, TX
brendasbaranowski@yahoo.com

Sunday night,
32 degrees on the outside patio
Of Fiddlestrings, our local bar.

Watching football,
Eating Nachos and Chili Cheese Fries
From Daddy's Food Truck.

Drinking the Specials,
A Rocket Mug with Ice Cold Beer
Dressed with a Lime, only \$2.75.

My husband and I, with
Another couple, our best friends.
Sitting, chatting and telling funny jokes.

Near my side of our square bar table
Were three Umbrella Heaters
Emitting the warmth our chilled bodies craved.

After three beers and a round of shots,
My husband leans in and says to me,
"I think your hair is on fire from the heater. Check it!"

Running to the restroom mirror,
I decided to slow down and walk to lessen the damage.
"What was it I was supposed to do? Stop, drop and roll?"
No, everybody will say: "That Old Lady is having a Seizure!"

The mirror showed little strands of hair
At the top of my ponytail, singed and frizzy,
Curling outward, with black specks of the now-shortened hair's ash.

I HAD BEEN ON FIRE!
Too Tippy to feel it or even notice,
Just to think, I might have Burned to Death!
Last words I would've heard before my death,
A joke about Trump that I didn't get.

The Well

Sallie Moffitt – Ovilla, TX

While hiking through a field of Black-eyed Susans, I found an abandoned well. I pushed aside the lanky stalks of yellow flowers and gazed into the brick enclosure. The water reflected the cumulus clouds above me, floating in the sapphire-blue sky. I dropped a pebble in the well and watched the rings ripple the water. Soon the water calmed and the mirrored surface returned.

This well was different from the one behind my childhood home—that well dried-up a few years before I was born. Looking away, I shook my head, wondering how many beers my father had to drink to have it overflowing with empty cans by the time I was born.

Separation

Claire Butler – Cincinnati, OH
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I contemplate the moon

I think about the one I left behind
Her beaming face full of hope
She searches the night sky and remembers me
In a southern hemisphere. Luminous peace fills her
Because she knows I'm looking there
Too—because that is what I had promised

I contemplate the constellations

I observe the archer, Sagitta, whose goose-feathered shafts
Take flight with Cupid's perfect aim
Toward a target willing to be claimed
In an eastern hemisphere separated by meridian lines.
Love knows no boundaries for like the air
We breathe—it is everywhere.

I contemplate the oceans

I watch the flow of the tides and understand their need
To be controlled by the moon, for by and by
They exist only for each other, one in the sky
One on land, separated by a million miles of cosmic dust
Yet in rhythm one with the other, for it was
God's first expression of tangible lust.

I contemplate myself

I feel the moon, the archer and the tide as they pierce
Their mark, which is my eye, my heart and my soul.
Their lusty needs I satisfy with my senses.
Oblivious to boundaries of separation
They search for me, the longed-for target.
I am not hiding—for I am the infant.

I contemplate the moon, the stars, the ocean and me.
We are one, as forever, we shall be.

Sunflower

Jane Gragg Lewis – Laguna Niguel, CA
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I met a flower today and thought of you.
She was a brown-eyed sunflower
with a glow around her face.
She shared her calm with all around her, and
I watched as she swayed and danced,
graceful in the soft summer breeze,
balanced on the end of her tall, slender stalk.
So at peace with who she is,
So confident in the charm of her unpretentious bloom.

I met a sunflower today and
she gave me a happy moment
because she made me think of you.

Starry, Starry Night

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December extinguished itself in a rush of howling
winds and pouring rain; January arrived, cold as frozen iron
with hard frosts and icy winds that stung my cheeks and bit
at my ungloved hands. Winter's sunless days, brutally cold
temperatures, and constant dreariness had broken my spirit.
Then one clear January evening, I opened my garage door,
stood on my driveway, and watched my breath mingle with
the crisp, frigid air.

I glanced up; stars filled the vast dark sky above me
like pale corn sewn into freshly-turned soil. The lyrics of
"Starry, Starry Night" played softly in my head. As the
lights twinkled and the unheard music played, I pondered.
Stars. What are they? Guardians of the galaxy? Blinking
fairy lights in the night sky? Fireflies burning brightly
against flowing black satin behind veiled layers of serene
clouds above my head? Or are they keepers of light and
heat?

I zipped up my jacket, tucked my numb fingers and
hands into my armpits, and felt the chilly winter wind tousle
my hair. Perhaps the stars are the promise of warmth and
life shining through winter's brittle cold, darkness—
symbols of hope scattered across the midnight velvet sky,
reminding me that spring's light and heat will eventually
emerge from winter's cold, dreary darkness.

Seeing Is Believing

Linda M. Hasselstrom – Hermosa, SD
<https://windbreakhouse.wordpress.com/>

Dusty green flows over pasture hills;
green gushes in the honeysuckle bush,
yellow blooms drift over buffalo grass.
I ride my rumbling four-wheeler along
the barbed fence, collect winter's shredded plastic,
crinkling its fake promises into my pocket.
Exhaust flavors my tongue. Snipe's shivery laugh
glides overhead, cascading on the wind
with the scents of sage and the bread
I baked. I kneaded seed-filled dough
until it pushed back under my fingers
like a feather pillow. Waterfalls of bird song
flood over me; oceans of perfume pour
over the grass.
Fog smudges it all.
Every sight blurs into mist behind
the cataracts growing on my eyes.
Across the hillside of my mind glide
seventy years of prairie views.

Abandoning Mother

V.J. Knutson – St. Marys, ON

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e-Circle 4

Day, no more than a sliver, casts a subtle glow on the path. A small bird tap-tapping on windowpane has awakened me, invited me out. I follow as it flits from tree to bush. We come to a stream, whose waters swirl in a nearby eddy, then rush over the rocks, merrily singing Earth's praises. Seventy-eight acres of untouched land surround me. Birch, oak, and willow among the giants that offer shelter. I have come on retreat.

This is not the first bird to rouse me in the early hours; it had been happening for days. I take it as an omen: be awake, pay attention.

I am not alone at the water's edge this crisp, cool spring morning. Although I cannot see her, I know her at once—an essence I have not felt since I was child. Mother Earth. I begin to cry.

“Why did you abandon me?” The words tumble, unexpectedly.

How long has it been since I'd felt her reassurance, the protective shield of her patient strength? As a child, locked out of home, she walked with me, whispered through the subtleties of the wind, and taught the rhythms of life.

“It was you who abandoned me.” The knowing hits like a punch to the stomach. I turned my back on her, adopted the ways of civilization—embracing education and busyness as a means to happiness, forgetting her promise of inner peace.

“Can you forgive me?” Waves of grief—a torrent of shame and guilt—accost me. How I have let those years of innocence slip away?

“There is nothing to forgive. I am here.”

The thing is, I tell myself, as day's light obliterates dawn's encounter, allergies keep me indoors, and as a mother of three, I spend my days chauffeuring. What time do I have for nature, for daydreaming?

I will not find her again, for many years, when sickness closes the door on life and forces me into desolation. It doesn't happen all at once, but gradually, over time, starting with a little bird's tap-tapping on windowpane, inviting me outside. Inside.

The Encounter

Bette Lafferty – Boerne, TX

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The evening sky was giving up her color as the members of St. John's Lutheran Church filed out of the sanctuary. The traditional Good Friday services had concluded in silence. My five-mile drive home continued peacefully until I turned the corner on the last stretch of highway leading to my apartment. In a split second, everything changed. A small herd of deer leaped out of the woods next to the road blocking the traffic. They zigzagged between the vehicles. Ten, perhaps twelve—I couldn't count them all as they traveled so fast. I slammed on the brakes. I sat stunned.

Unfortunately, one made contact with the front of my car. I could also hear others hitting the back of my trunk. I sat frozen, hands white-gripping the steering wheel while the deer leaning against my hood struggled to stay standing. Eventually, he collapsed onto the road. I could see him kicking and jerking.

“Lord, please don't let him die,” I cried.

He never took his eyes off of me and the iron horse that had felled him. It seemed like a lifetime until he lifted his traumatized body from the pavement. We continued to stare at each other. Thankfully, the deer stood on all fours and appeared to be only shaken from his ordeal. Traffic began to move by us on my left. The deer didn't move, nor did I.

“What do I do, Lord? He doesn't seem to be hurt, but he won't get off the road.”

A man in the car ahead of me had stopped and watched the drama play out. When all the traffic cleared the scene, he exited his vehicle and, waving his hands, caught the deer's attention. With little effort, the animal bolted back into the woods and disappeared.

As this little town of Boerne explodes with growth, we are invading more and more of their territory. I pray this is my first and final highway encounter with these large beautiful creatures that call this Texas Hill Country home. Taking a deep breath, I released my brakes and headed to my apartment where, in checking my car, I found no damage had been inflicted. Tears welled up in my eyes. It truly had been a Good Friday.

Texas Haiku

Maya Lazarus – Caldwell, TX
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two grey hawks
atop a bare tree
consider the day's plan

cool autumn
among the leaves
possum's muddy prints

wildflowers bloom
a flattened beer can
hides an ants' nest

roadrunner
dashes across the road
always last minute

spider struggles
to lift her cargo
I too have my burdens

prickly white poppy
petals swing dance
without a partner

green hornworm
on underside of leaf
two tomato plants eaten

Cradled by Mother Nature

Len Leatherwood – Beverly Hills, CA
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I was a solitary little girl who loved to nestle in the space between the Nandina bushes and the white picket fence in our backyard; bare toes digging in the loose North Texas black soil; bare arms serving as racetracks for doodlebugs in exploration. My dog Bob was my constant companion. He was middle-sized, black and loyal, and I liked having his company out in those bushes. He was as happy out there as I was, often giving my dusty feet a quick lick with his pink tongue before settling down for a nap while I played.

I was a little girl who loved to climb trees, particularly the pecan tree right behind our house. I liked to pretend that the different limbs were rooms in my house—one the living room, another the kitchen, another the bedroom. I would climb from limb to limb and pretend that I had friends visiting, usually my two imaginary friends—Tommy Wizzums and Heidi—and we would talk, eat and play games while the hot Texas sun filtered through the green leaves.

I think of my childhood with these solitary moments because I was one of six kids, and my privacy was something that I treasured. I loved my brothers who were still all home—my sister was already off at college by the time I was seven—but four brothers and all their friends did not make for a quiet house. I had to find refuge from so many people.

I still love my quiet spaces. I have an orange grove now where I can go when in need of solitude. I love walking among those trees and looking up at the stars on a clear night. Some days I lie under an orange tree with my two dogs right next to me and look up at the sky through the leaves and the oranges. Sometimes one of my dogs gives my dusty feet a quick lick with her pink tongue. At that moment, I'm a solitary and happy little girl again, cradled by Mother Nature.

Looking for Mother Nature

Lou Martindale – West Monroe, LA

I sit here looking out my window at the dreary, brown, gloomy, sunless landscape. It makes me feel sad. I try not to focus on it and realize I have at least three more months of this to deal with. Gone are the days of sunshine, flowers, and green trees. Mother Nature has taken a vacation. Father Winter is here.

In Michigan, my birth state, the sun only shines 105 days a year on average. I never liked the COLD, dark, dreary, sunless days of winter. When I was 16, we moved to New Mexico. There was lots of sunshine, but the winters were still cold, and nothing grew in the desert without superhuman efforts to keep it alive. Eventually I arrived in Florida. The Sunshine State! With its 221 days of sunshine a year, it is aptly named.

Plants grew all year, no leaves falling off the trees and everything going dormant for months. I enjoyed being outside in nature, taking long walks on the beach or through the woods, observing the plants, flowers, and animals. I am positive Mother Nature calls Florida home.

After 40 years of living in Mother Nature's playground, I was aging. My daughter wanted me to move near her, so she could provide support in my old age. I pondered her suggestion for a couple of years. As I did, I noticed it was harder and harder to work in my large yard. The long walks were now shorter walks. Finally, I came to the conclusion she was right. Downsizing and a move must happen.

In June, I moved to Louisiana. The temperature turned brutally hot and stayed unbearably hot until November and then it turned cold and snowed. Where exactly was Mother Nature? Gone to Florida for an early vacation? So now I sit here looking outside at the landscape, void of green or flowers. It seems like I am back where I started 75 years ago, in a cold, dreary, sunless climate. I made my choice and now I have to live with it. What have I done?

Paradise Lost

Linda Menicucci – San Mateo, CA

Paradise, California, is a town in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Our home and many others are built on ridges overlooking the canyons and valleys below. Deer nibble the bushes under our windows. Squirrels chatter in trees and occasionally we see a fox, a rabbit or a quail family scamper by. Turkeys roam the streets. Hawks dip in the sky over the canyon behind our house. Once we stopped our car to let a mountain lion pass.

This is a small community; many people were born here, many have moved here to escape large cities. It is a place where life is slower, where children walk to school and people say hello to you in stores and markets. When you drive through the streets of our neighborhood, people wave. We were transplants from San Francisco and we've lived here for the past 18 years. It was as close to an earthly paradise as you can get.

All that changed on November 8, 2018, when a fire swept through the town of Paradise and destroyed most of the beauty and homes that surrounded us. Along with 50,000 people from three communities, we fled the fire through walls of flame that stopped traffic on the roads out. Thousands could have died; 86 did. In the end, 15,000 homes and businesses burned. 1,700 remain.

This has been a hard time; so many people have moved, so many homes destroyed, so much grief. We survived; somehow most of our neighborhood survived but the future remains uncertain.

Nature will come back. It has no option. Trees will regenerate, the animals will return, growth will begin anew. The canyons and ridges we love so much will never die. Like nature, my hope is that we who live here will also regenerate, rebuilding what has become so dear—our homes, our neighborhoods and our openness with one another. Time will tell and time, they say, is a healer.

Red Rock

Abby November – San Diego, CA
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I collect rocks from places I visit.
 All are displayed in my home, except the red one
 It's by nature, tortured by man.
 Sun baked, man-made horror dark stained
 Not particularly lovely, not smooth, prickly.
 In my hand it felt warm, needling my skin,
 my palm felt the vibrations of screams of pains
 too horrible a remainder of the era.
 it rests in a dark box
 lest it diminish the glow of the beautiful Scottish and Icelandic rocks.
 The red rock was found at the entrance to Auschwitz.
 Trod upon decades ago by the millions lost, including my ancestors—
 their tears and blood washing over its roughness—
 Never Again

The Vortex

Karen Roberts – Monkton, MD
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Our small group was shivering on the 50-yard line when she arrived. She caught us all by surprise.

Her name was Helena. Like a woman spying her lover in the adulterous clutches of another, she shrieked and overturned our portable chairs as we scrambled for shelter.

“Hey, wait for me,” I yelled at Spencer’s retreating backside. I ran in hot pursuit. An image from long ago popped into my head: a fiercely determined little girl driving a soccer ball down this field. The wind mimicked the roar from the sidelines as my sneakers retraced the familiar terrain.

I caught up with Spencer; we dashed between the goal posts together. My car was parked just ahead. Helena was closing in on us.

My squealing tires tattooed thick tread-marks into the pavement. Panting heavily, Spencer and I quickly steamed up the windows. I turned on the radio. A local meteorologist equated Storm Helena’s premature arrival as that of an annoying guest, showing up much earlier than the host expected.

“Channel 7 could blindfold a Capuchin monkey and let him throw darts at a spinning board to provide a more accurate weather forecast,” I grumbled.

Spencer enthusiastically wagged his prodigious Golden Retriever tail in agreement.

Hours later, safely ensconced in the den, the pelting rain transformed into fat snowflakes. I curled up on my chaise, several logs evenly burned in the fireplace. My companions included a paperback, a near-empty wine glass, and the bear-rug-impersonating dog, stretched out on the floor.

Helena howled, growled and cursed, bullying the power-grid. The lights flickered. Or maybe it was the flames in the fireplace. The smoky Malbec had made me sleepy. I was reminded of flickering candles on a birthday cake, of a childhood wish for a snowstorm and for school to be canceled.

The stillness of the morning awakened me. The fields were cloaked in a pristine white cape. A layer of ice encrusted the surface, sparkling like the opalescent buttons on my favorite childhood coat.

I shivered at Mother Nature’s mercurial temperament. Yesterday she was a jackal. Today she was a lamb.

Places of Thanks

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Smells and images: exhilarating, filling, haunting.

Before, After and Now.

Snippets of memories. What happened? What didn't? Who is to say?

Then. Buckets of sand, gulls cawing, shrieking wind and penetrating rain. Feet sink deep into cold, wet sand. Salty tide pools warmed by fading sun. Sand pushes through cracks between my toes, into my nails. I extract my toes from the sand and run to cold, crashing waves leaving icy shivers.

Rare rays that heat and surprise.

A sky awakens with wispy pinks, preparing our hearts for incoming rain

Stunted Pine trees hide creatures and forts of the past. Nature's imperfect perfection.

Future.

Giggles. Laughs. Shouts. Cries. Powder fresh soft elbows and knees. Creaking joints and silences. Absences.

Family and place.

Then. Fingers reach into Dixie cups, gritty ash rubbed between thumbs and forefingers. No longer. Simple gifts, tosses into welcoming dunes. Beyond tears. Going back. Gone forever.

Staring into colors fading and bursting, the impending darkness of a sunset. The end for now. Nothing else to imagine but the beauty of now.

Tomorrow there may be more buckets and sand between the toes. More sunsets. More ashes.

Or not.

Of Place.

Tricks of Mother Nature

Judy Watkins – Myrtle Creek, OR

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Did Mother Nature age my body? I am not ready. My mind wants to run and play. My eyes want to see to drive after dark.

Why does my mother follow me wherever I go? She doesn't talk to me, but I see her every time I pass a mirror. Is she grabbing me and holding me back? What else could be stopping me from moving as fast and freely as I always have?

I can't believe this is happening to me, yet my friends share my symptoms. They show that Mother Nature has

been messing with them too. Their movements have slowed, their hair has faded.

I should have guessed something was happening when my daughter said she was old enough to retire. How did that happen? The cute little girl with the curly blond hair is a grandmother. I watched it happen but I never realized that her aging had anything to do with me. I'm young. I'm vital. I have a rewarding life left to live. How did she get that old?

I don't want to admit it, but that older woman in the mirror is not my mother. I really don't want to talk about it.

Don't Name the Wildlife

Ellen Fountain – Tucson, AZ Ellen892@comcast.net

If you spend any time outdoors, off the pavement, and into the wild, you will understand when I say Mother Nature can be cruel.

For a large chunk of my life, I have watched wildlife, sometimes a little too up close and personal. I've seen quail peck to death a mockingbird that got too close to their nest. I've seen a pack rat constricted to death by another gopher snake, and a lizard thrashed to mush by a roadrunner. I've seen a hawk catch a pigeon, and then decapitate it and eat the heart out of its chest. Shocking to see, but those critters were all strangers to me, and my policy with wildlife has always been to observe, not interfere. But ...

I glance out my window one day and see a half-grown rabbit hopping wobbly across the driveway, dragging one horribly injured back leg behind him, still bloody. I have no idea how it was injured—by car or predator—but I thought to myself at the time that that rabbit would not make it through the night. I was wrong. There it was, week after week, dragging the now healed but useless leg behind him—but the rabbit we named Gimp was very much alive. It lived at least two years more, and even found a mate (I think), as they dined together in our fenced-in back yard on the vegetable trimmings I put out. And then one evening, Gimp wasn't there, and pretty soon the other rabbit was gone as well.

A curved-billed thrasher was another disabled resident in our yard for several years. We named him Stump, because, well, he had no tail. The tail feathers eventually grew back, but crooked and very short, and yet he learned to fly. Not well, but well enough that he (or maybe it was a she) found a mate, and raised babies in a nasty jumping cholla cactus summer after summer.

I've stopped naming wildlife. Mother Nature doesn't, and the cycle of life she imposes on all living things is immutable. One of these years it will be my turn to "disappear," and that's just as it should be.

Miracle at Glacier Bay

Letty Watt – Norman, OK
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With our eyes glancing and gazing at mountainous peaks, the Grand Pacific Glacier came into view. Gray misty clouds covered the sun and blue skies that had awakened us early that morning, so now our sky became one with the snow covered peaks and glaciers. I wondered how we could so easily feel alone with these vast lands and ocean around us.

On the deck of the cruise ship, we came face to face with the glacier that towered 24 stories high with jagged and daggered iced crevices. Suddenly, we heard a thunder booming sound. The water rings showed circles where the ice had fallen.

The next few minutes the great ice wall continued to break and shatter into the Glacier Bay. Margerie was calving and we were her witnesses. Thunder roaring and echoing tingled my senses as the gray misty breeze crossed over my shoulders.

Then out of the misty skies my head and heart felt a new voice, one I'd not heard in many years. "Isn't that amazing? Finally. I always wanted to see a glacier and feel the cold of Alaska, and now I'm watching this beautiful moment with my daughter."

"Mother?" my voice whispered. I turned away from the glacier and searched the deck and the skies. "Mother?" My voice quivered with my heart beat. I stood frozen in time.

"Oh, mother," I cried, as warm tears welled in my eyes, "I wish you could be here now. I wish you could see this. Why did you leave me? I've missed you every day."

"I'm here now. I'm watching this only because you brought me in your heart. I couldn't be happier to share this moment with you."

My mother, whose sudden death from sepsis saved her granddaughter's life and reunited a family, was with me.

"Yes, mother," I gazed toward the heavens, "I am like you and your mother. I love to travel. Thank you for giving me this zeal for life."

God Bless ...

The Healer

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Two summers ago, I went to a prayer and healing service. The healer, an ex-Marine from the British Royal Navy, almost died from his wounds and had become a priest. He wore a large silver and turquoise crucifix around his neck. Everyone had come for his famous healing powers.

A woman sitting next to me said she had heard that the exertion of healing had taken its toll; he had many physical ailments, she said, brought on "by the devil" who fights to stop the healing power of Christ, as represented in this man.

He went around the room and asked what we wanted him to heal. The majority said they wanted to rid their lives of anxiety. The stress of life was too much. The healer spoke about believing in Christ, in the Risen Lord who has done the suffering for us.

"You can't nail yourself to the cross. It's impossible," he said, putting out his arms and demonstrating how no one can use his hands to nail himself. The trick, he said, is not to let others nail you to the cross or let your emotions do the work. Be gentle with yourself, he said, have fun.

When he got to me, I told him about an upper molar extraction. I said the anxiety of being a woman alone often overcame me. The hole in my gum wouldn't close.

He placed some oily balm from a small glass vial on his fingertips, rubbed it on my forehead and then held his right hand to the left side of my face. I could feel his hand quivering. I noticed the sweat soaking through his shirt, under his armpits. "What does Christ say about being anxious?"

I shook my head. I didn't know.

The healer looked into my eyes and said, "Don't be."

I Wonder

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Their nests remain
 in the corner of the
 portal where they
 built them last year.

I study the beauty of the
 nest's architecture
 and wonder
 if the birds this year
 are the same as last,
 searching for their
 home.

I wonder—

Are these the parents
 returning or are these
 their children wanting to
 sleep in their first beds?

[Published in *Light, a Book of Poems*]

In the Moment in Bend

Mary Jo West – San Clemente, CA
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I take deep, slow breaths
 of clear, clean air
 sharp with the fragrance of pines,

billowing, pewter clouds
 drift across an
 end of summer sky,

clouds indented
 by pine tree, reflect
 on the river, blurred
 by glow of the sun,

Mallard ducks bobbing
 heads into the water,
 tails straight, up,
 feed on moss green grass,

flickering aspen leaves
 the color of golden coins,
 whisper in the breeze,

gentle current of river
 flowing between wooded shores
 disappears as it meanders
 to its final destination,
 the sea.

My presence here
 has no more consequence
 than leaves floating
 in the water.

I'm only an observer
 of simple perfection
 of a perfect day.

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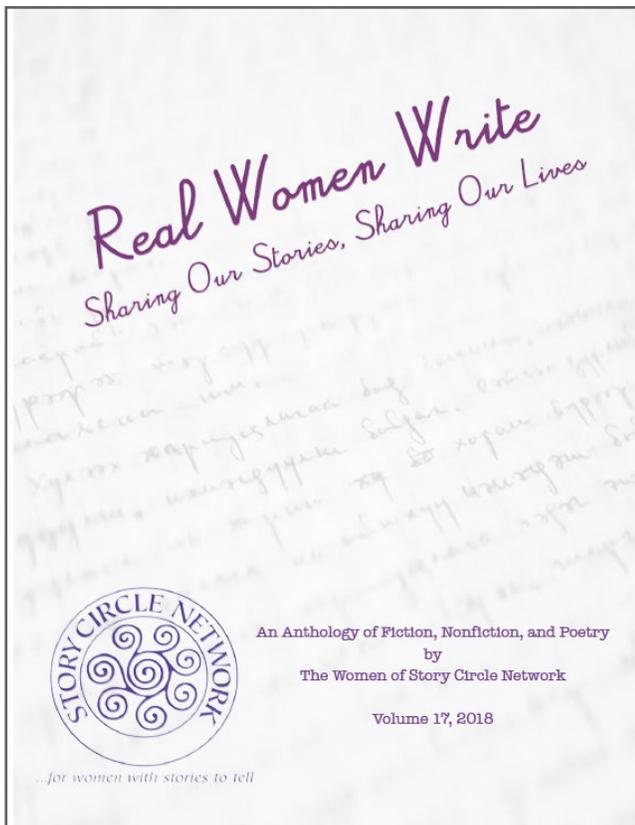
Krista Nerestant is the owner of Self-ish Lifestyle where she serves as a certified NLP Life Coach and hypnotist while demystifying the world of spirit as a spiritual medium and teacher. She hosts SelfCareTuesdays.com; her book, *The Hidden Gifts of Trauma*, is set to publish in 2020. Author, Teacher, Speaker www.selfcaretuesdays.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, Michigan. Author, Speaker, Teacher www.barbarastarknemon.com

"I know of no single formula for success. But over the years I have observed that some attributes of leadership are universal and are often about finding ways of encouraging people to combine their efforts, their talents, their insights, their enthusiasm and their inspiration to work together."

—Queen Elizabeth II

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It Was Worth the Wait!

Our 2018 annual members-only anthology, *Real Women Write: Sharing Our Stories, Sharing Our Lives, Volume 17*, is now available online, and if you have a PRINT membership, it should have already reached your mailbox. *RWW* is a beautiful volume of powerful writing by your SCN sisters. As Kathleen M. Rodgers responded, “I’ve almost devoured the entire anthology in one sitting. Each selection offers me new insight and helps me gain perspective on my own life as a woman and writer.”

We know you're also going to enjoy our newest edition. *Volume 17* of *Real Women Write* includes a great range of voices and stories, all of which reveal the diversity of our members' experiences and their creativity. Perhaps you will see your own work included! Or if you're new to SCN, we hope you'll be inspired to enter for 2019!

Let this issue motivate you, and then take advantage of a great publication opportunity by entering your poetry, fiction, or nonfiction, when **submissions open for Volume 18 on July 1, 2019**. We will keep you informed and connected as that date gets closer, but it's not too early to start writing...

Story Circle Network, Inc.

723 W University Ave #300-234,

Georgetown TX 78626

True Words

Tell us your story! We're always looking for writing that is rich in evocative detail, showing the struggles, challenges, and resolutions of real women living real lives. Submit your work here:

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

Use these topics, or write on a subject of your choice, for upcoming issues of the Journal:

- June, 2019: Unanswered Questions
- September, 2019: A Brilliant Idea
- December, 2019: Letting Go

Don't Miss It!
LifeLines 2019, with Susan Wittig Albert

Crafting and Publishing Compelling Stories

March 29-31, 2019
Fredericksburg Inn & Suites
Fredericksburg, TX

Check page 5 for the details and schedule of this unique learning opportunity. Register here: <http://scnlifelines.org/> But hurry! Enrollment is limited.

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