



New Website, Women's Soccer, and Wisdom

by Jeanne Guy

So, where's the New Website?

Ah, yes, our new website. I'll get to that in a moment. First, a bit of wisdom.

WISDOM

I attended The New York Writer's Hotel Conference in June and my professor shared (among other things) something very wise: "It takes as long as it takes." He was referring to writing a memoir but it seems apropos to our new website.

WEBSITE

The website conversion/construction has been a massive undertaking to say the least and has suffered some delays (anybody ever do a home bathroom renovation? Yeah. You get what I'm talking about). The good news: I have every hope that we are back on track, though we are in no hurry to go online before it's ready. It'll take as long as it takes.

And here's why. Our website involves an incredible number of components: membership, online classes with professionals, the prestigious Sarton Book Awards, our major Book Reviews site, our conference and LifeLines retreat, writing and reading circles, online writers' support groups, several contests, opportunities to share your writing through numerous publications: the quarterly journals, our annual anthologies, and access to a directory of professionals. Anyone who has created a website understands the magnitude of our site – and to think we are a non-profit!

That said, we are hopeful (cross your fingers) that the new site will be live by the end of October/early November.

Know that there are SCN board sisters working their tails off to keep the wheels on in the interim. Hats off to Susan Albert, Teresa Lynn, Susan Schoch, Len Leatherwood, and Jo Virgil for special efforts.

They represent what Story Circle Network is all about. They are working for you to ensure that "our activities empower women to tell their stories, discover their identities through their stories, and choose to be the authors of their own lives." We are a veritable team of players who believe in the SCN mission. Which leads me to the United States Women's National Soccer Team.

Continued on page 2



SCN's Sarton Awards have attracted the attention of many fine writers, so the winners (and finalists) are especially talented, and have created wonderful books that you will want to read. Check out our list of winners and finalists on page 5.

As you might imagine, the winning authors are complex and interesting women, who have devoted themselves to their projects. In this issue, Pat Bean interviews Ellen Notbohm, winner of the Sarton Award in historical fiction for her novel based in a family secret, The River by Starlight. (See page 6.) Pat also introduces us to Mary Avery Kabrich, the Sarton winner for contemporary fiction. Her book, Once Upon a Time a Sparrow, is founded in her own struggles with dyslexia, and marks her triumph over that challenge. (Page 10.)

You won't want to miss these revealing interviews, or the books these authors have created!

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## WOMEN'S SOCCER

My husband and I were having Sunday morning coffee in bed (note: I was working diligently on this letter) when he shared a couple of videos of the latest women's soccer win against Ireland. We marveled at the US team's skill, depth, attitude, creativity, and integrity. We commented on how these attributes create a winning team.

It struck me that the women of Story Circle Network possess those very attributes. We are an organization that supports and promotes women and their stories, extending an open invitation to women of all ages to be the authors of their lives, practice their skills, and listen to their creativity.

This September's *Journal* is a fine representation of that support and encouragement. What might happen if you approached it with the intention of noting the ways it can affect and contribute to your life? Read it and let the magic begin.

Don't miss "The Places of Your Life" by Kathleen Paul (page 13) in the Tips from Our Teachers. This educational essay addresses place and time in our lifewriting with relevant and concrete examples.

And if you're looking for ways to continue your writing education, have we got a deal for you! We've listed our online fall classes in this issue (page 15). Len Leatherwood is the Online Classes Coordinator and provides us with support and inspiration from a team of great writing teachers.

We've broadened our outreach to a younger generation and are happy to be featuring Len's students' words of wisdom in Our Future is Female. Meet our next young author on page 12.

Linda Wisniewski's thought-provoking contribution to the Herstories blog is showcased on page 8. Did you know SCN has two blog venues you can send your pieces to for publication? Herstories and One Woman's Day are coordinated by Len and Kali Rourke respectively. Herstories has a focus on writing skills, while One Woman's Day brings us the individual experiences of writing women. And story after story in True Words (can you say more writing opportunities?) has been compiled by Jo Virgil for your reading pleasure.

Looking for help with your writing, editing, publishing projects? Check out our Professional Services Directory (page 26) for some elves and helpers who will lighten your tasks.

And there's more, as you'll see. The significance of all these programs and offerings is immense.

Story Circle Network: by, for, and about women. We care about you and your story. Let us hear from you. Your participation in our blogs and publications is vital to our mission.

As author Christina Baldwin said, "Write like heaven."

*Hugs around this amazing circle,*

*Jeanne*

P.S. Oh! And a big thanks to all of you who contributed to our Go Fund Me Campaign! The winner of the 5-year membership (for making a donation of \$50 or more) has been announced in this Journal. Congratulations!

## Story Circle Journal

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

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We welcome your letters, queries, and suggestions.

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 \$95 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.

## Thank You to Our Member Donors

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# A Sharing Circle

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

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



## Story Circle Network's GO FUND ME 2019

Results – and the Winner of a 5-year Membership

OH MY STARS ☆☆☆ THANK YOU!!!

We asked for your help and you gave it in spades. With your love and support, we raised \$4505 to help birth our new website!!!

There were 81 donations made and a long list of wonderful comments about how Story Circle Network has affected your lives. Linda Wisniewski, who was one of many who left a comment along with their donation, said, “Story Circle supports me on my journey to tell my story.”

We are here for you because our mission is to empower women to tell their stories, discover their identities through their stories, and choose to be the authors of their own lives. Lisa McGehee, another donor, wisely commented, “women's stories are vital to the health of the world.”

Every donation (or combination of donations) of \$50 or more was entered into a drawing for a free 5-year membership in Story Circle Network (a \$275.00 value). The lucky winner is **Lucy Arcand of Big Spring, TX. Congratulations, Lucy!**

Thanks to all of you who participated in making this campaign such a success. We love you!

*Jeanne Guy, SCN 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.*



## Bon Giorno, Scrittrici! SCN's Writing Women in Italy

Story Circle's first international travel and writing workshop is getting closer all the time! With 48 people participating in an excursion to the breathtaking Amalfi coast from November 2 – 10, we are not only expecting to do some amazing sightseeing but also plan to have a fabulous writing workshop. From our home base in beautiful Sorrento, Italy, we will explore Pompeii, the Isle of Capri, and the villages along the Amalfi Coast as well as the cities of Naples and Rome. We will also meet for a daily writing workshop led by SCN Online Classes

Coordinator and award-winning writing teacher, Len Leatherwood, who will guide participants in incorporating specific sensory details to add depth and texture to every form of their writing.

We will have lots of photos to share of this wonderful experience. Look for them in the March 2020 Journal. They may inspire you to consider participating in a *second* international trip and writing workshop that is in the planning stages for 2021. SCN is looking ahead!



**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.

## Oh, What a Difference You Make!

Currently about 15 members strong (this figure varies, of course), Story Circle Network's Board of Directors is a big part of our ability to enact SCN's mission. They are truly dedicated to empowering women to share their stories, and to raising awareness of the value of women's personal expression. To those ends, Board members donate many hours every month, some for their Board duties, and many for other volunteer activities, such as organizing conferences, managing our blogs, coordinating our online classes, writing and editing for our publications, etc., and this year, working through a major website and organizational renovation. SCN would not exist without them, and they have our deep gratitude.

You might be surprised to see these figures about our Board members' volunteer hours during the past 5 years. (Breakdown of tasks unavailable for 2014 and 2015.)

2018	1,843.85 total hours	1,187.35 (Board duties)	656.5 (Volunteer tasks)
2017	1,829.15	796.45 (B)	1,032.7 (V)
2016	2,597.5	1,104.4 (B)	1,493.1 (V)
2015	2,904.95		
2014	<u>2,048.4</u>		
	11,223.85 5-year total hours		

In January 2019, the valuation for nonprofit volunteer hours in this country was estimated at \$24.69/hour. By August 2019, the value had risen to \$25.43/hour. Using a value of \$22.00/hour as an average over these 5 years, the contributions of our Board members during that time are valued at roughly \$246,924.

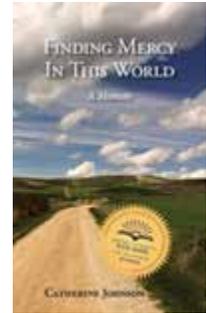
This generosity is emblematic of many women who participate in Story Circle. Our appreciation to everyone who gives her time to SCN. You are making a difference in women's lives!

# 2018 Sarton Winners

We're proud to remind you that our 2018 Sarton Award winners and finalists have authored books you will want to read. Be sure to check them out!

## MEMOIR

***Finding Mercy in This World*** – Catherine Johnson, Vashon WA  
(interviewed in *SCN Journal* Jun2019)

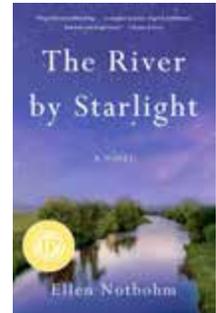


Finalists:

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

## HISTORICAL FICTION

***The River by Starlight*** – Ellen Notbohm, Portland OR  
(interviewed in [this issue](#) of *SCN Journal*)



Finalists:

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

## CONTEMPORARY FICTION

***Once Upon a Time a Sparrow*** – Mary Avery Kabrich, Seattle WA  
(interviewed in [this issue](#) of *SCN Journal*)



Finalists:

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

## YOUNG ADULT NONFICTION

***BJ Erickson: WASP Pilot*** – Sarah Rickman, Colorado Springs CO  
(interviewed in *SCN Journal* Jun2019)  
(no Finalists)



## NONFICTION

***The Once and Future Queen: Guinevere in Arthurian Legend*** –  
Nicole Evelina, Maryland Heights MO  
(look for an interview in *SCN Journal* Dec2019)

Finalists:

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





*Sarton Winner:*

## Meet Ellen Notbohm

by Pat Bean



Ellen Notbohm was the author of four award-winning books about autistic children before she wrote *The River by Starlight*, which won Story Circle Network's 2018 Sarton Award for historical fiction. Her four non-fiction books, including *Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew*, were inspired by the challenging moments Ellen endured raising two children on the autism/ADHD spectrum.

"An early childhood special educator who taught my son urged me to write a book. I blew her off for years — 'Sure! And I'll go out for the Olympic decathlon, too!'— until I finally came to that decision ... I'd seen a lot of articles about what moms want teachers to know, what teachers want parents to know, what doctors want dads to know, and so on. But I had never seen a piece that spoke to what an autistic child would want the adults around him to know ... I wrote an article, it caught on like wildfire and became a book, which is now 15 years old, in its third edition, and published in 22 languages."

The inspiration for *The River by Starlight*, according to Ellen, is also personal. "In our family tree, a woman I call Annie Rushton (not her real name) stood behind a century-old brick wall. I felt pulled to her, as a woman and a mother. It took years of painstaking research and a grain of luck to find out why the silence. Annie faced recurring postpartum psychosis at a time when neither medicine, the law, nor society understood it — or tolerated it."

Given the frontier-era stigma and ignorance surrounding women's mental health issues, not to mention the gender-biased laws of the day, Ellen says that what is now a treatable medical condition threatened to cost Annie nearly everything. "Maternal mental health is rarely in historical fiction. It's foremost a woman's story, but the male partner's perspective, with its profound grief and desperation, is a story even less told. Adam (the husband) is an equally riveting figure in a love story that extreme adversity did its best to destroy. The urgency of telling their story sustained me through the ten plus years of research and writing."

The permission to write Annie's story, she recalls, came from a simple question in a magazine. "Nothing in my nonfiction writing career prepared me for the notion that I could write a novel. But one day, sitting in some waiting room for some reason I can't recall, I picked up an *Oprah* magazine and saw the question: "What would you do if you knew you couldn't fail?"

She showed her answer to her husband. "He said, 'Well?' and I said I would write that book. It turns out that some of my favorite words from *The River by Starlight* aren't written by me, but from the Henry David Thoreau quote that opens Part Two of the book: "What people say you cannot do, you try and find that you can."

Ellen can't remember a time when she wasn't writing. "In high school, I journaled, and was on the speech and debate team, writing orations, expository pieces, extemporaneous talks, debate arguments, etc. In college, I worked at a public radio station, wrote radio news and a few documentaries, and all the usual college writing, as I majored in speech communication and studied literature and music history. After college, I worked for the local symphony and wrote liner notes for youth concerts. I moved on to working for 23 years in cable television, writing whatever was required, from program descriptions to trade articles to marketing materials, proposals and agreements," she recalls. "When I grew restless in my corporate career, I decided to jump feet-first into what I'd always loved: writing. May Sarton found many different ways to be a writer. I hope I'll always have that in common with her."

When asked who has been her biggest writing inspiration, Ellen replies: "I read widely, listen to writers and non-writers alike, seek out answers to questions as they come up, considering all of it but keeping only what I need ... As a writer, I'm definitely more pantsner than planner, following the path as it unfolds in front of me. I guess I'd blushingly have to say that the person who has most influenced me is Me."

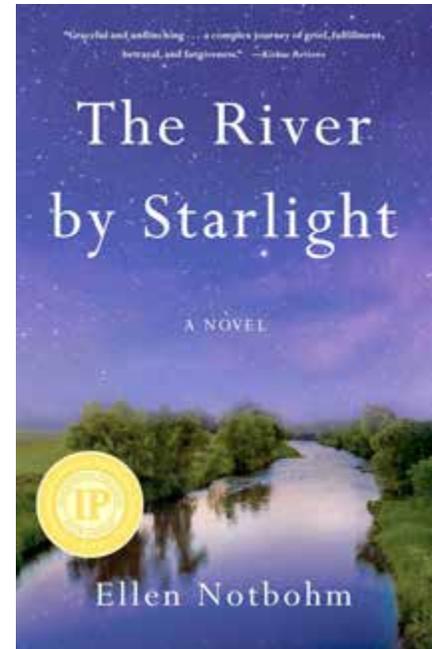
But she also notes that people of all ages and from all points in history who confront adversity and unfairness and who continue to embody love, humility, and generosity inspire her. “I never tire of telling their stories; it’s a gift to be entrusted with them and a privilege to shine light on them.”

“And of course, I’ve been inspired by many well-known authors, Ivan Doig, Eowyn Ivey, Wallace Stegner, and Nuala O’Falain, to name a few. But I also feel strongly that many remarkable writers don’t get the attention they deserve, so most of the books on my nightstand are from authors whose work I haven’t read before. This includes not only first-time authors, but many foreign authors, and classics I didn’t read in high school. This way I capture a wide swath of the human experience across time and culture.”

As to why she writes, Ellen tells me, “I write because I can, and because I want to, and because I value the connections it creates. I don’t have conventional writers’ goals, such as how many words to write per day, target date for publishing next book, or whatever. My goals are more amorphous, such as freeing myself from rules that don’t make sense, pushing myself to read more widely, listen and observe in new ways, look for ways I haven’t yet thought of to feed the muse. When I do those things, everything else flows from it.”

She wrote most of *The River by Starlight*, “over 200,000 words across numerous revisions, with pencils and spiral notebooks, propped up on a bed in the dark wee hours of the morning — and the stormier the weather outside, the better. The room with the pencils and notebooks is done in dark reds, and is only a few feet from my office, where I revise and edit, and conduct the business end of writing, but rarely create. The red tones of the writing room are suggestive to me of bloodlines, carrying a sense of history, a sense of the continuity of life.”

To Ellen, winning the Sarton Award means that “Annie has been heard and validated. That my recklessly attempting to write in a genre in which I had not a minute of training was the right thing to do, that standing by my book even when continuously told it was too long and the subject matter too tough was the very embodiment of that Thoreau quote. The achievement of winning the Sarton is both Annie’s and mine, intertwined across time. Being in the circle of May Sarton’s talent and reach and humanity is an honor that will never leave me.”



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



## Story Circle Network’s Online Writing Classes for Women — Fall 2019 —

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

Terilee Wunderman: Writing Stories from Nature

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

Tina Games: Capturing Your "Blue Moon" Life  
Mary Elizabeth Briscoe: Write to Heal

### **Poetry:**

Bird Mejia: Poetry for the Truly Terrified  
Kitty McCord: Found Poetry

### **Publishing:**

Marilyn Collins: Pitch Like a Pro

### **Writing Practice:**

Len Leatherwood: 20 Minutes a Day for 30 Days

### **Independent Study Program:**

B. Lynn Goodwin: Part 1 and Part 2

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



*From the Blogs:*

# Telling Herstories

## Whose Secret Is It? What I Wish I Hadn't Shared In My Memoir

by Linda C. Wisniewski

When my memoir was published, I didn't expect everyone in my family to like it. I had written about growing up with unhappy parents, in a depressed industrial town, in a punitive church school, and as part of a Polish working-class community looked down upon by many of our neighbors. That was a lot for me to push back against as I struggled to find my best life, and I knew some people might not share my perspective. I steeled myself for criticism.

But my cousin Angela's letter came as a complete surprise.

"Where did you get this information about my mother? And what does this have to with your childhood?" she wrote.

I didn't know I had exposed a family secret until I read those words. Angela's Aunt Lucille was my mother, a woman who believed the Church's promise that suffering would lead to everlasting life. I learned to suffer from her, and my memoir is about my lifelong struggle to create my own happiness. To show her self-centered pain, I used a story she told me when I was small:

"My mother said that soon after they returned [from their honeymoon], Dad walked in the door with a strange look on his face. 'My sister tried to kill herself,' he blurted. 'They don't know if she'll make it.' She had planned to run away with her married lover, but the man backed out at the last minute. In despair, Dad's sister took an overdose of pills. For weeks, her hold on life was tenuous. When she finally pulled through, the whole extended family was still reeling." (from *Off Kilter*)

I didn't use the name of my dad's sister, who was Angela's mother. But to my surprise and horror, her letter seemed to say she never knew her mother had been unfaithful to her dad. She was now in her seventies and I in my sixties. We weren't close but I still felt terrible.

The letter was otherwise kind and supportive. "I wish I had known what you were going through as a child," she wrote. "I would have helped you cope."

I felt bad for hurting her, but I also remembered Angela criticizing her own daughter-in-law for a suicide attempt. I hoped she'd now be more supportive, knowing what she knew.

I wrote back, apologizing for hurting her. I explained my purpose in including the story in my memoir was to illustrate my mother's bitterness. I wrote her twice but never got a response. At the next family gathering, she didn't come near me, and didn't make eye contact. It could have been worse. To my great relief, her husband gave me a big hug.

Another cousin was pretty harsh when I told her what happened. "It wasn't your secret to tell," she wrote in an email.

I didn't know it was a secret, and never suspected it could still hurt anyone. It happened in the 1930s and all the people had passed on long ago. Angela is in her eighties now, and I don't know if or when I'll ever see her again. We were never close. My mother told me she was a spoiled child. But I wonder now if that's true, along with the other stories she told me.

If I had it to do over, I'd leave that story out. Though I didn't use my aunt's name, the family who read my book knew who it was. My dad had only one sister. My hope is that they'll think twice about judging others after reading it.

No matter how careful we are to avoid hurting people with our writing, sometimes we make mistakes. Just like we do when we interact with people off the page. When we do, we can ask forgiveness. And we can also forgive ourselves. For writers, just like everyone else, are human. And that has to be okay.

(first published in *Brevity*: <https://brevity.wordpress.com/?s=Linda+C+Wisniewski>)



Linda C. Wisniewski lives in Bucks County, PA, where she teaches memoir writing and volunteers as a docent at the historic home of author Pearl S. Buck. Her memoir, *Off Kilter: A Woman's Journey to Peace With Scoliosis, Her Mother and Her Polish Heritage* has been published by Pearlsong Press.

*More From the Blogs:*

# One Woman's Day

We women who write have each experienced the incredible feeling of becoming lost in a book. Sara Etgen-Baker takes us on a literary trip from her girlhood that was published in the One Woman's Day blog to popular acclaim. Find out how you can contribute to the blog at: <http://onewomansday.wordpress.com/about/>

by Kali' Rourke

## A Girl, A Bicycle, A Librarian, and a Magical Spell

by Sara Etgen-Baker

I often mounted my bicycle and sped down the street, my hair whipping back as I let my feet off the pedals and flew down the hill at a speed rivaling a cheetah. When I reached the point where the street curved, I slammed on the brakes, hoping the unevenly worn brake pads would bring me to a stop just as I neared the library's front entrance.

I dismounted and pushed open the library's heavy door, walked across the tiled chessboard floor, and tossed a penny in the fountain before climbing the stairs to the main hall, where I encountered Miss Talbot, the head librarian.

Miss Talbot was a decipherer of secret codes, master of index cards, maven of the Dewey Decimal System, and sorceress, all wrapped into one tiny human being. I truly believed she was a mind reader or, at the very least, part magician the way she could find whatever I was looking for—many times, before I asked.

"You're allowed to check out ten books at a time," she always said rather matter-of-factly.

"I'll take ten books home with me," I replied in an elated voice, signing the borrower's card inside each one.

"Return these by the due date."

"Yes, ma'am," I said reassuringly.

I can still feel their weight in my arms as I lugged them downstairs and heaved them into my bike's saddlebags. The books I checked out allowed me to

magically travel through time and contact the dead: Anne Frank, Louisa May Alcott, L. Frank Baum, and so many more.

On chilly winter nights, I accompanied Nancy Drew as she gathered clues and unraveled mysteries. On soft, promising, green spring days Emily Dickinson and Robert Frost taught me about the worthy art of poetry, giving me a sense of what is beautiful about the world. I also cherished those warm, lazy summer afternoons spent in the library escaping August's sultry heat and breathing in the stale, sun-warmed dust of a thousand stories. The library was the perfect place to go whenever I felt unhappy, bewildered, or undecided. Inside books, I found encouragement, comfort, answers, and guidance.

A great deal of who I became is based upon my visits to the quiet, unassuming library; lit up during winter darkness and open in the slashing rain, allowing a girl like me to experience actual magic. Each time I ventured inside and opened the cover of a book I wondered what I might find inside. Where would I go? Whom would I meet?

The stories I read were powerful, for they either sent me back in time or forward into the future and frequently transported me to other lands where I met ogres and talking rabbits. Some of my best friends I found between the covers of the books I checked out at the library using my simple library card. Even now when I enter a library and open a book, I fall under an enchanting spell, and I never want the spell to be broken.

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**Sara Etgen-Baker:** A teacher's unexpected whisper, "You've got writing talent," ignited Sara's writing desire. Sara ignored that whisper and pursued a different career but eventually, she rediscovered her inner writer and began writing. Her manuscripts have been published in anthologies and magazines including *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, *Guideposts*, *Times They Were A Changing*, and *Wisdom Has a Voice*.





*Sarton Winner:*

# Introducing Mary Avery Kabrich

by Pat Bean



“If you can’t read, you can’t write,” a teacher once told a young schoolgirl who suffered from severe dyslexia. That girl was Mary Avery Kabrich, who today is the recipient of Story Circle Network’s 2018 Sarton Award for contemporary fiction. In addition, her book, *Once Upon a Time a Sparrow*, is a bronze winner of an Independent Book Award (IPPY) and a silver winner of the Nautilus Book Award — among other recognitions.

Mary grew up in rural Minnesota, where the town school was a three-story brick building with primary grades on the first floor, middle grades on the second, and high school on the third. “I spent all of elementary school confused as to how everyone except me had figured out the mysterious process of reading. I recall teachers being exasperated by my inability to simply write my name,” she recalls. Even so, she knew early in her life that she wanted to be a writer. Yet after a teacher told her she would never be one, she buried that desire for many years.

Fortunately, in sixth grade, Mary was introduced to a “special teacher,” who would read the worksheets to her and transcribe her answers. “Suddenly, I, who failed everything, was getting the highest grades in class.” Her pride, however, was short-lived; classmates protested that her success was unfair because she was getting help from an extra teacher.

Mary continued to doubt her intelligence, even though she went on to earn a bachelor’s degree in education and spent the next 12 years “attempting to teach children who struggled to recall their ABCs how to unlock the code turning letters into sounds and words into meaning. I became a special education teacher not because I was inspired by one, but because I wanted to provide a better experience than I had for other children.”

But her own past continued to haunt her. She wanted answers. “Why did some children learn to read as effortlessly as a bird learns to fly, while others flap their wings until they almost break and still end up in a nosedive.” It took her a decade, but in search of those answers Mary earned a master’s degree, and then a doctorate in educational psychology from the University of Washington. Even then, and despite a successful career as a school psychologist, her past continued to haunt her. She fell into a bout of depression, and for the first time went to a therapist.

“I had completely sealed myself off from who I was growing up. I worried that if anyone knew, they would view me as not very smart, the way I viewed myself. My therapist helped me to re-establish a relationship with my nine-year-old self from a place of compassion and understanding instead of shame and embarrassment.

“Therapy changed me. Not only healing my relationship with who I was but also bringing to the forefront my deep desire to be a writer. Upon leaving therapy I knew I needed to give voice to this child I had long ago buried. Writing *Once Upon a Time a Sparrow* gave me the opportunity to tell my story with the positive outcome I never dreamed would be possible.”

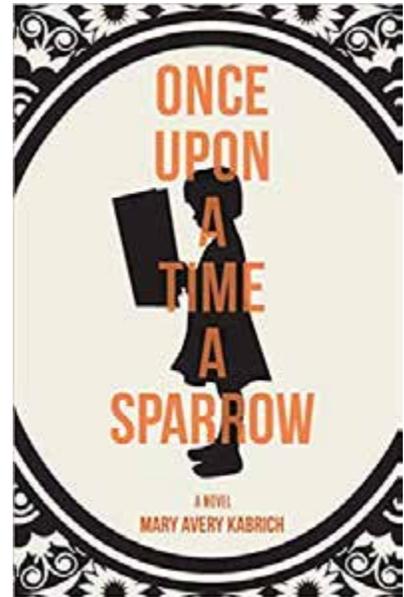
For Mary, the biggest challenge in writing the book was overcoming her lifelong feeling of not being intelligent enough. “This statement makes it sound easy. Truth was, I fell into despair each time I realized how inadequate my writing was. Yet, I knew in my heart this story needed to be told. Not just for me but for so many others who found themselves boxed in by a set of limiting beliefs. I kept thinking, if I can write a successful novel, then I could be an inspiration to others who also thought this impossible due to early challenges with literacy.”

Another challenge in writing the book, Mary believes, was that she was “quite closeted as a person who had been in special education. I was sure if anyone knew, they would view me as the impostor I often felt myself to be. Writing this story, I publicly come out as being dyslexic. And writing this freed me up to move on and claim myself as a writer.”

Mary says that when she made the decision to write her first book — she is now two chapters into her third book and is seeking representation for her second — she naively didn’t seek or receive advice. But she now has some advice for other writers. “Start by leaving the critic behind. Revel in the joy that welled up within you proclaiming that you have a story to tell. Gently tell the critic that there will be plenty of time to get his/her input; but for starters, allow yourself to explore free of judgment. Give yourself the opportunity to fall in love with all your characters just as you would a pouty beautiful three-year-old. Once you are thoroughly grounded in devotion for the story that wants to be birthed, then welcome the critic. However, make clear that the critic is completely under your rule — you get to set limits. The most important boundary is that the critic can only comment on the manuscript and not on you.”

Winning the Sarton Award, Mary acknowledges, helps to erase the deep sense of inadequacy that she has long struggled to overcome. “The certificate I received is framed in my hallway and the engraved plaque sits on a ledge in my kitchen. These are powerful reminders to my inner self that I am no longer the struggling reader/writer of my past.”

Mary, who currently divides her time between writing projects and working as a school psychologist in the Seattle Public Schools, donates 80 percent of the sales from *Once Upon a Time a Sparrow* toward providing specialized tutoring for low-income children with dyslexia. She believes public special education teachers are not always given adequate training, nor a low enough caseload to successfully address the needs of children who are identified with dyslexia. “Parents with means often utilize private tutoring,” notes this author/advocate. “Low income children with dyslexia are at great risk for dropping out of school.” Mary is a woman who is doing something about that.



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



“I write because it is dangerous, a bloody risk, like love, to form the words, to say the words, to touch the source, to be touched, to reveal how vulnerable we are, how transient. I write as though I am whispering in the ear of the one I love.”

— Terry Tempest Williams



## Our Future is Female!

**Alexa Nourafchan**, who hails from Los Angeles, CA, is currently a junior at the University of Pennsylvania, where she is majoring in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (PPE). She will be heading to Rome in the spring for a semester abroad, so that she can participate in an Italian immersion program. Alexa's essay won both a regional gold medal and a national silver medal from the Scholastic Artists and Writers contest, the oldest and most prestigious contest for young artists and writers in the United States. We are pleased to introduce you to this young author, and to welcome her as a new SCN member!

### On the Road Again

by Alexa Nourafchan

I slide down the railing in my new Abercrombie outfit, and my pink-checkered Vans glisten as the sunlight beams into the room. My father waltzes into the foyer, keys in hand; we are ready for our Wednesday breakfast before school.

My father and I have always been close. At our weekly breakfasts, we discuss the wonders of outer space, the aroma of fresh French baguettes, our love of Aretha Franklin's "I Say a Little Prayer." Our time together is my very own Breakfast at Tiffany's. Nothing bad can ever happen; it is where I feel safe.

We park across from Urth Caffé and I skip to the street corner, my pigtails swinging side-to-side. My dad takes my hand, and our eyes shift from left to right — no cars in sight. I take two strides into the crosswalk. *Boom*.

I am on the ground. Asphalt scrapes my raw skin. I scream, but no sound comes out; I cry, but no tears form. My father kneels beside me, yelling and pounding the pavement with his fist. My leg lies mangled, twisted out of form. Unfamiliar faces frame the sky. A grey-haired man cries above me. His black Ford-150 pick-up hovers in the intersection.

When I reach Cedars-Sinai, the trauma team cuts off my new outfit. "Stop it!" I snap, "That's my new shirt!" My prized possession is taken away in a single moment. I become X-rays, cat scans, blood pressure. I am a broken body in need of Elmer's glue and scotch tape. I awake shivering from the anesthesia. Incessant high and low beeps emanate from the machines surrounding me; an overwhelming antiseptic stench saturates the room. Staring down at my leg, I see an eerie skyline of spikes beneath the snow-white bed covers. I later learn this is an external fixator that is securing my reconstructed leg.

One year later, I still flinch at the sound of car engines. Hot tears sizzle down my cheeks when my mother helps me navigate through crosswalks. A bad taste infects my

mouth at the sight of my little brother playing with toy trucks. I find my pink Vans while cleaning out my closet. I grab the right shoe and force it onto my foot, as if it is Cinderella's precious glass slipper and I am the ugly stepsister. I stand in front of my full-length mirror, face wet, eyes damp. The scars on my leg gleam dull brown in the afternoon light.

Over time, I start noticing the detail in a butterfly's wing, the soft hazel tint of my father's eyes, the size of my shadow on the sidewalk. I eat more chocolate ice cream, watch Disney movies more often, and finally finish *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. I am almost back to normal. Many people have helped me along the way.

When I am fourteen, I become a volunteer at Teen Line, a teen-to-teen hotline, to do my part in giving back to others. From where I sit, I can see the Cedars-Sinai Emergency Department. The phone rings: it's Jamie, age 14, suicidal. The sound of sirens invades the room. Flashbacks from my accident flood my memory.

*I lie motionless on the ground.*

"Your life is worth so much, Jamie."

*My father's damp eyes stare into mine.*

"I care about you, Jamie."

*My mother holds me as I cry through my nightmares.*

"I am here for you, Jamie."

From my accident, I understand the fragility of life, the importance of perseverance, and the value of patience. I will not give up on Jamie or myself.

This past summer, I return to the crosswalk by Urth Caffé for the first time since that morning. My father takes my hand. We walk into the crosswalk. I stop halfway through. I feel a soft blanket of sunlight surround me. I pause, close my eyes, and take a deep breath in. I continue walking.



# Writing Tips from Our Teachers

As she does every quarter, **Len Leatherwood**, SCN's Online Classes Coordinator, provides us with support and inspiration from our great team of writing teachers. This essay by **Kathleen Paul** takes up place and time in lifewriting.

## The Places of Your Life by Kathleen Paul

Geography. Place. Location. Your town. My town. Our stories and memories are set in a specific time and place. That seems simple, doesn't it? But remembering the details—how a place smells, what the light looks like, whether there are sidewalks, even dates—can be a tricky business. Research shows that memories are so connected to deep brain patterns that siblings often have legitimately different memories of the same events. I've learned to expect that someone will read my story of life in the small town where I grew up, and say, "No, it wasn't like that."

When your story is set in a place with an identity and history all its own, verifiable facts, dates, and events, along with your specific memories, add both context and value. As readers, we love to recognize a place in real time. Think of the facts of place as the framework: they anchor your story in a time and place that can be verified, but they don't contradict your experience. Keep in mind, too, that while other people's lives overlapped with yours, theirs were different. Those differences mean the story you're writing is not *anyone's* story, but only yours.

In the larger picture, a personal story is often linked to a change in the bigger story of the place. The change could be economic, cultural, or social—any or all of those affect individuals and families, too. For instance, all over the West, Native American tribes are gaining wealth and influence, and their businesses are becoming the economic drivers of the area. This contrasts sharply with the years when the Native American population had no influence and no resources. If your story is set in a time and place where this change was taking place, then framing up the cultural and economic milieu can give important context to your personal story.

Research. Let's be honest: research is a great way to avoid actual writing, because there's no end to it! But, when you include details of a real place, in a real time, do check what you can—online resources are amazingly easy to use. If you're still in touch with someone who lives in the place, maybe they can help. Or visit, if you can. Does this mean you have to be perfect? Of course not. It does mean, though, if someone remembers that waitresses at The

Rainbow Café (a real place) have worn black aprons since 1934, and you mention they were red, you'll hear about it.

Sometimes too much information makes us overwhelmed. When writers who I work with get a little stuck, I find that making lists helps them step back and re-orient. If you run into the same kind of swirl, you might try something like making lists—and start with the basics, the 5 Ws: *Who? What? Where? When?* and, of course, *Why?* These simple questions can ground the writing process. The details you end up including in your final draft will also ground your reader in the reality of your story.

But the most important guideline is this: don't let the quest for accuracy get in your way. Write your story, select the details that give shape to your story in its time, or that better help you understand your story today. Remember, your memoir is not the same as a history of the town, the time, or even the family. Those are different stories, with different intentions. In some ways, writing a memoir lets you become a time traveler: from the *now*, you look back on the past, with fresh eyes, and with experience that you didn't have then. The places of your life have shaped your experience as surely as the people around you; one gift of memoir-writing is having space to explore that truth among the others.

*"I was not sorry for loving Charleston or for leaving it. Geography had made me who I was."*

— Sue Monk Kidd, *The Invention of Wings*

*"That thing we call a place is the intersection of many changing forces passing through, whirling around, mixing, dissolving, and exploding in a fixed location."*

— Rebecca Solnit, *The Encyclopedia of Trouble and Spaciousness*

*"The topography of literature, the fact in fiction, is one of my pleasures — I mean, where the living road enters the pages of a book, and you are able to stroll along both the real and imagined road."*

— Paul Theroux, *Ghost Train to the Eastern Star*

**Kathleen Paul** is a lifelong resident of the Pacific Northwest, whose travels took her to Middlebury College, Johns Hopkins University, and Oxford University for graduate degrees in both literature and creative writing. She taught literature and all kinds of writing, from freshman comp to advanced technical writing before a segue into leading big technology implementations for over twenty years. Now she works with writers, and people who want to write, in her practice as a Creative Depth Coach.





Be it online or onsite, our Writing Circles support women in sharing their prose and poetry. This month, SCN Board Member and Circles Program Liaison **Caroline Ziel** interviews Circle Facilitator **Judy Watkins**, who has over a decade of experience with the sisterhood of writing together. If you're not yet a member of a Circle, go here to find out more:

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

## It's Helpful to Share by Caroline Ziel

Greetings, Story Circle members! I'd like you to meet Judy Watkins, the current facilitator, muse, and mentor for online Writing Circle 6. And, Judy, good morning to you! Let's begin with you telling us about yourself.



Judy Watkins

*JW: I have been retired since I was 61 and last month celebrated my 79th birthday. I am a recent widow as my husband died in December. When I worked, I was an accountant for an electronics manufacturing company. In April I moved from my home to a town closer to where my daughter lives. Since then I*

*have been very active in the Adult Center here. Examples of what keeps me busy: line dancing, clogging, aerobics, memoir writing, crafts (knitting and crocheting), luncheons, and group trips. I am trying to become a member of my new community.*

CZ: Tell us, how and when did your relationship with SCN begin?

*JW: I started writing in Portland with Marie Buckley in about 2000. I was getting ready to retire and was looking for hobbies and a way to meet people. Marie belonged to SCN and introduced me to it. At that time Marie was holding meetings in a local bookstore. I never did transition from the bookstore. I moved from Portland and the bookstore to Myrtle, where I held meetings in my home every Monday for ten years. In April, I moved from Myrtle Creek to Canby and joined a group at the senior center here. The online Circles are in addition to my personal writing groups.*

CZ: When and how did you become aware of the Writing Circles?

*JW: I found out through the bookstore group. I have belonged to 3 Writing Circles because I was bored and I*

*had a lot to say. The only difference between the groups is the participation or lack thereof.*

CZ: Judy, what other SCN activities have you participated in through the years? (e.g., conference, book reviews)

*JW: None, except that I participated in at least 3 SCN writing groups through the years. Currently I am the facilitator for Group 6. I have also previously belonged to w-eircles 3 and 9.*

CZ: What are the basic guidelines of your Circle? How often do you give a prompt; do other members offer prompt ideas; and how do other members respond to a piece of writing?

*JW: As per e-circle guidelines, I offer a prompt once a month. If somebody else suggested a prompt, I would use it, but so far I have used my own. The prompts I use for Group 6 are prompts used in my community writing group that meets in my home. I get ideas in strange places, like books, magazines, things that pick up interest. Members in Circle 6 seem to write and respond well to others' writing.*

CZ: What guidelines have worked well through the years? Were there some that did not work so well?

*JW: I don't know about actual guidelines, but from experience I know that politics should be avoided. My prompts normally include some quotes that help to give ideas on how the prompt might be approached.*

CZ: And I wonder, Judy, is your Circle open to new members or is it closed?

*JW: We love new members and all who are interested in joining (and participating) are very welcome.*

CZ: What are the personal gifts of facilitating women life writers for you? And, conversely, the most challenging parts?

*JW: Sometimes finding a suitable idea to write about is hard. I love it when one is found that makes women want to write and share their experiences. Sharing life's issues seems to be therapeutic.*

CZ: Have you or any of your participants published their work?

JW: *I believe others in the group have been published. I have not tried, but over the years SCN has shared many of my stories in their publications.*

CZ: Do you have any moments of working with your Circle members that you will never forget?

JW: *Although I have not had that type of experience online, I have hosted writing groups in my home weekly for ten years and we have had many life-changing experiences.*

CZ: With your broad experience in facilitating, what sage advice would you give someone thinking about facilitating an online Circle? Or someone who is struggling to keep her Circle going?

JW: *It is important to encourage participation. Sometimes I will write a second story, share a poem, or something interesting I found about writing. This is to keep the circle busy and active.*

CZ: Is there anything else that you'd like to share with us?

JW: *When I started writing, I believed that I had no memory of my early life and that in my adult life I had more problems and issues than anybody else in the world. Through writing and sharing I have discovered that all women have the same types of problems in their lives. I wasn't alone in my pain; other women share in their own ways. I am not an island. I am part of a sisterhood. I can share my life through my writing without fear of criticism of others. It is helpful to share.*

**Caroline Ziel** says: I have been a grateful member of SCN for at least 8 years, and was privileged to facilitate w-ecircle 6 for several of those years. I'm also a gardener, grandmother, social worker, and Quaker woman. I have grown exponentially in my ability to write, and in my Spirit, through my relationships with the beautiful women of Story Circle Network.



CZ: Judy, I want to thank you so much for your generosity in facilitating Writing Circles for SCN, and also for your kindness in participating in this interview. I for one, and I'm sure the rest of our membership, look forward to hearing more from you and sharing in your wisdom.

Judy Watkins selected a poem from her group to share: "I have chosen this poem as a good example of the thoughtful and caring women in Circle 6. They are very good at writing and responding to others."

### **I forgive myself**

To my children

I forgive myself, for not being a better mother,  
for talking so much, instead of listening,  
for cleaning, instead of enjoying the mess,  
for escaping with my own books, instead of reading  
more to you,

for thinking of my work days as my fun days, instead  
of my days home with you,

for wanting to be with my friends sometimes, instead  
of with you all the time,

for you feeling like I'm on Daddy's team, instead of  
yours.

I forgive myself, for not being a better mother.

And one day, when you are a parent, please forgive  
yourself, too.

April 30, 2019

by **Laura Goodell**, a wife and mother

## Story Circle Network's Online Writing Classes for Women

— Fall 2019 —

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

Terilee Wunderman: Writing Stories from Nature

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

Tina Games: Capturing Your "Blue Moon" Life

Mary Elizabeth Briscoe: Write to Heal

### **Poetry:**

Bird Mejia: Poetry for the Truly Terrified

Kitty McCord: Found Poetry

### **Publishing:**

Marilyn Collins: Pitch Like a Pro

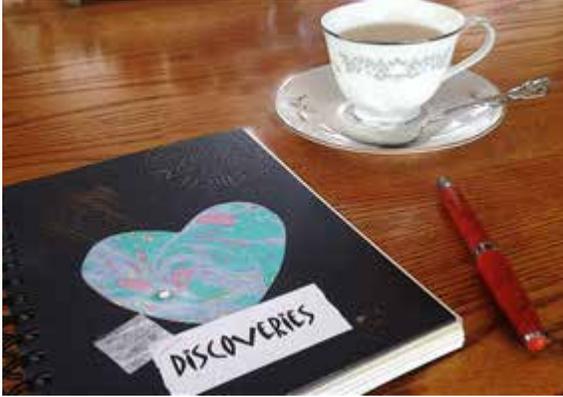
### **Writing Practice:**

Len Leatherwood: 20 Minutes a Day for 30 Days

### **Independent Study Program:**

B. Lynn Goodwin: Part 1 and Part 2

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



# True Words from Real Women

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

## From Polyester to Pashima: A Journey of Conscious Awareness

Cynthia F. Davidson – Hope Valley, RI

<http://cynthiafdavidson.com/>, [cynthiafdavidson@gmail.com](mailto:cynthiafdavidson@gmail.com)

It's easy to laugh at those still clad in pastel polyester, but I can remember being one of them. And how did I make the transition from those all too practical synthetics to the finely spun cashmere of Kashmir, the product of a *changthangi* goat?

We can also poke fun at those white women of a certain age, like me, in the West, who affect the drapery of damsels from the darker-skinned continent where these exquisite shawls are woven in smoky huts at heart-stopping elevations.

Once we discover the blessings of natural fibers, so light and soft, we move on from what made us itch and sweat but didn't require ironing. I can recall the drip-dry craze of convenience. How else would I have been able to travel so much for my work and explore the world? When you can't wash your own clothing in a hotel sink or a hostel, you're dependent upon the dry cleaner, and that takes too long.

Who else weaves these worlds together but the travelers? The mountain goats have clambered onto my shoulders, while their herders dream of what? Escaping to the America they might have glimpsed in the movies? Why do I assume this? Perhaps they are perfectly content where they are, culling the three-to-six ounces of fiber shed each spring by their four-leggeds, who must be combed—not sheared—to give up this undercoat bounty.

## What the Future Has in Store

Sarah Fine – Toronto, ON

e-circle 3, e-circle 4

If the future was a store  
 Would only  
 The rich and powerful  
 Shop there  
 While the poor and insignificant  
 Noses pressed against the window pane  
 Need wait for charity  
 And last minute sales  
 Or would the Golden Rule  
 Be the currency required  
 To buy into  
 A shiny new prospect  
 Where everyone  
 Has clean water to drink  
 Where borders  
 Become meeting places  
 Strangers turn to friends  
 I'm putting my faith  
 In kindness  
 Small ripples  
 Moving us away  
 From prejudice and fear  
 Guiding us through  
 The act of listening with respect  
 To our differences  
 Bringing us home to live together  
 Happy to share the future  
 Equally

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

## Bring in the Goat

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

A poor man living in a one-room house with his wife and children went to the Rabbi for advice, and the Rabbi said, “Take in all your animals.”

Three days later the man returned upset and angry. “Why did you give me this advice, Rabbi?” he cried. “I followed your advice, and things just got worse.”

“Oh,” smiled the Rabbi. “Now take out the goat.”

I should have remembered this story when we decided to add Kotz to our hectic life as motel owners.

Kotz, four months old, a Labrador retriever, is a bundle of happiness and constant activity. From six o’clock in the morning when he opens his eyes, he is ready to take on the world.

Everything, no matter how small, makes him happy. A green leaf, a twig, a lone flower still hanging to life in my flowerpot, or a new guest who steps on the deck—they all receive the same unbiased burst of joy. Jumping in the air, tail wagging, rolling on the ground for a belly rub—anything goes.

He loves to chew paper and cardboard boxes, and we spend our days trying to save documents and brochures before they turn into heaps of wet, chewed-up paper.

Our few quiet hours or an occasional favorite TV show, now spent on games—all have one thing in common: we throw, and he retrieves. Kotz is being endlessly entertained while we get bored and chewed up.

The cat watches the scenario from the top of the counter, and the look of scorn on her face is unmistakable.

“See,” she says, “I was not good enough.”

“Quiet sophistication replaced by this vulgarity.”

She makes a point of sitting in the dog’s running path so she can claim she was hurt. She messes with the dog’s food dish. She walks around sending gold arrows of hate, wishing he would disappear the same way he came.

Some days I wonder if I should repeat the “goat in the house” solution and bring in my four chickens pecking outside.

## I’m a Genius?

Lou Martindale – West Monroe, LA  
[Lmartin220@aol.com](mailto:Lmartin220@aol.com)

Whose brilliant idea was this? Many times, I have answered, “Mine.” Does that make me a genius?

The toaster plug would not come out of the receptacle. I needed something strong and thin to get between the plug and the receptacle. I took my thin, pointed, metal nail file to pry it out. Sparks flew. My hand tingled. The metal nail file melted. The plug stayed in the wall. Whose brilliant idea was that? Mine.

When cleaning the bathroom tub enclosure, I decided if bleach would clean mildew off the grout and ammonia would clean soap scum off the tile why not combine them to get the job done twice as fast. Coughing. Unable to breathe. Eyes burning. Gasping. Running from the bathroom, I decided that was not such a brilliant idea.

Living in a rural area of Florida, it is understood that you will encounter a snake or two. Sneaky Snake was slithering across my back yard. I know that snakes are beneficial to the environment, but in my environment the only good snake is a dead snake. I reached for my metal edger, aka snake killer, which looks something like a hoe, but the sharp, flat blade is straight down from the long handle. I took aim at the snake’s head. With all my might, I dealt a swift downward blow just behind his head. The head should have been severed from his body, right? Wrong! Florida’s soil is sand. The metal edger just drove the snake’s body down into the sand. Without so much as a mark on his skin, he wriggled from under the edger, and slithered away none the worse for the experience. I just hope I at least gave him a bad headache. That was not such a brilliant idea of mine either.

Given that my brilliant ideas have almost caused me bodily harm many times, in the interest of protecting my life and limbs maybe I should just stick to run of the mill ideas and leave the brilliant ideas to real geniuses.

Now that’s a brilliant idea.



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

## Mr. Goodbar

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

I grip the chains, scream and kick while Mama pulls me off my swing, telling me I have to go to the Winn-Dixie with her to buy groceries.

“Can I get a candy bar if I’m good?” I ask as she drags me to the car.

“The real question,” she tells me, “is can you be good?”

I think so. It’s too hot to be bad, and that swing fight was exhausting. We’re having those Dog Days of August.

At the checkout, I have trouble deciding between a Nestles Krisp and a Mr. Goodbar, my two favorites. I finally grab a Mr. Goodbar.

I nibble on it in the car, trying to make it last forever. By the time we get home, it’s a soft, melting mess, and I put it in the freezer. When I get my frozen candy bar and unwrap it, I start screaming.

“What in the world is wrong with you?” Mama asks me.

“Worms! It has worms all over it!” I screech.

“Oh, don’t be ridiculous,” she says, but when she looks at it, she sees what I see: At least 100 tiny, squiggly-wiggly white worms squirming out of the holes they ate in the peanuts.

“My goodness. I guess when they got cold they started crawling out of the peanuts.”

“Did I eat worms?” I shriek. “Are they in my stomach?”

“Fraid so,” she tells me, matter-of-factly, and starts laughing her head off.

Over the years I’ve wondered from time to time what the candy company would have paid in a lawsuit for “the mental torment of worm distress” suffered by a seven-year-old. Now living in the sun-happy climate of Southern California, I always put a Mr. Goodbar in the sun to soften and then into the freezer before eating it. So far, I haven’t found a single one harboring any million-dollar worms, but there’s always hope.

## Lessons Learned in Dallas

Jean Morciglio – Riverview, FL  
morcigj@gmail.com

I have never bought a grill before. That is my only excuse to the two teenage boys who are attempting to fit the Dyna-Glo 450 into the back of my Equinox, where it is wedged. The grill we just purchased is about four inches too tall, and well, you couldn’t fold it. This is my first week in Dallas after living in Michigan for most of my life; we needed a grill for the new house.

A man in golf shorts and a flowered shirt walks up.

“Not fitting,” he observes astutely. He walks around the vehicle as though there might be some answer someplace else in the car. Another man comes, and they start to wiggle the grill, turning it this way and that.

The two teens start cranking at the underside. I have visions of some important valve being hacked off, because these two boys can’t be more than 16 years old. I say, “Stop! We’ll just get it delivered.” But they all keep working at it.

Another man and woman come over to join the group, and I am thinking that never in Michigan would a group of people stop in a Home Depot parking lot and offer to help strangers who had been, quite frankly, stupid.

“Do you mind if I do something?” the woman asks. She is wearing a long flowing skirt and loose-fitting blouse with sandals. “I’m Sister Janet.” Then she takes my hand and the hand of the man next to her and starts to pray.

“Father, we ask for your assistance in this, for your help,” she says as the men and boys keep pushing at the grill.

And I’ll be damned if that grill didn’t just slide into the back of the Equinox.

After we thanked everyone (should I invite them over for a barbecue?) and we headed home, I realized, yes, it is good to get away from wherever you are from. I never dreamt I would find a group of strangers in a Home Depot parking lot in Dallas, Texas, who would pray a grill into my car.

## Snacks at the Pier

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

Head held high  
surveying his domain,  
Sea Hawk perches  
on top of flagpole  
at San Clemente Pier.

Swooping down  
with his slender legs  
and talons extended,

snatches fisherman’s catch  
as he reels in his line.

Gliding back to his perch  
he waits for  
his next enticing treat.

## Just Say No

Lucy Painter – Williamsburg, VA  
 Hokiegirl70@gmail.com  
 w-circle 8

The last political meeting dragged on. The noise level in the small room rose in proportion to the passion of those attending, voices cascading one over the other. I, too, thought I was one of the passionate, ready to go to work for local and state political candidates advocating for social justice. I did my research, wrote letters to the editors, made phone calls, attended meetings. I was a warrior.

The meeting entered its third hour, yet we were not halfway into the agenda. My rear-end was numb, my knees ached. I sighed, rolled my shoulders, and resisted a yawn. My body was telling me something, and on the drive home I knew what it was.

Over the past weeks, I had been journaling about choices—what to involve myself in? Volunteer work that made my feet hurt? Boring ladies' lunches with talk of ... nothing, really?

No. I discovered I have permission to say "no." No to whatever takes me away from the center of peace I find only in solitude. I know myself well enough to listen to my body. Those fidgets told me something; this was not the right place for me. Each of us has only so much energy and must decide where and when to spend it. I knew from my intense discomfort, more psychic than physical, that I had a decision to make—to say "no."

When I reached my driveway, I stopped before I entered the quiet warm house where my husband worked on his latest glass project, our two dogs his company for the evening. I watched the lights of a plane descend into the airport in Norfolk. No sound from its powerful engines reached me, only the sight of its slow graceful glide and tip of one wing as it banked into a turn. I followed its steady, powerful path, the pilot knowing just where it would go, and how. Now I know my own way—maybe not as steady, not as powerful—but my own.

## Serenity in Bend

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

An old fisherman  
 living along river bank  
 with the catch of his life  
 listens to trees  
 whispering in the breeze,  
 telling him,

he's not a stranger here.

## Umbrage

Christine H. Boldt – Temple, TX

It was scarcely more than you'd expect:  
 One person laughed and another left.  
 The one who'd laughed had felt a fool.  
 Had tried to defend with ridicule,  
 Had heard the sob, "You are too cruel."  
 Their tentative romance had been checked,  
 The fragile ties of empathy cleft.  
 The one who'd left was ashamed to say  
 That the laugh, on any other day,  
 Might have been reckoned a call to play.  
 Instead a relationship was wrecked.  
 Two hopeful romantics were left bereft.  
 Why is it that we are wound so tight,  
 Are peeved by even the slightest slights,  
 Though the price of pique is lonely nights?  
 It was scarcely more than you'd expect.  
 One person laughed and another left.

## Doubt

Karen DeFranco – Twinsburg, OH  
 Kdefranco500@gmail.com

I want to believe  
 you will always be the strong one.  
 You will always have my back,  
 accepting my train of thought  
 jumping the track.

I want to believe  
 our growing old together  
 isn't over.  
 That I won't end up  
 a caregiver.

Are there signs  
 I cannot read?  
 Hints I haven't taken?  
 So, I made a list  
 hoping it grows no longer.

## Oasis of Life

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

Robin red breast  
 plump as a down pillow,  
 dropped from a flowering bush  
 onto the sandy river bank,  
 chirping and fluttering her wings,  
 warning me  
 she has a nest.

## Heifer Project: A Brilliant Idea

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

World War II had finally ended. Europe had been decimated as a result. My mother wondered why she was bringing another child into the world during such strife. Being Conscientious Objectors and members of the Church of the Brethren, my parents wondered what they could do to bring healing to a war-torn world.

Another farmer and minister of the Church of the Brethren had witnessed children drinking powdered milk after the Spanish Civil War. His “brilliant idea” was for farmer members of the Church of the Brethren to donate heifers, which would then be shipped to war-torn Europe.

My parents, Olive and Roger Roop, got wind of this idea. They offered their farm to be where these heifers would gather as they awaited shipment to Germany and Poland. The “brilliant idea” was a done deal with a handshake. No legal papers were needed, as members of the Church of the Brethren believed their word was their bond.

Heifers began to arrive on our farm via all methods of transportation. Another “brilliant idea” was that when a family received a heifer (a female who has not yet had a calf), they had to agree to give her firstborn heifer to another family in need. The gift must be passed on to restore livestock lost during the war.

From 1944 to 1948, 3500 head of heifers were gathered at our farm and shipped to war-ravaged Europe. The “brilliant idea” has expanded, sending a variety of livestock to nations around the world, and is now known as HEIFER INTERNATIONAL, located in Little Rock, Arkansas. It has helped to lift 10 million people out of poverty since 1944.

## Who Are These People?

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

What will happen to your old photo albums when you are gone? Are there members of your family who care about people who have been gone for generations and that they know nothing about? Photos in albums are pretty much obsolete. Will somebody save them? Will they be shared with the extended family?

Have you considered introducing your past extended family to your children and future generations? I have recently gone through the albums, put some organization to them and then started to write. I wrote a short story of whatever I knew of each person. Where did they come from? Where did they live? What did they do for a living? How many children did they have?

How many older family members did you know? Do you have memories that you can share? These were real people with personalities and lives and you can tell your family about them. As the old saying goes: If there is a skeleton in the closet, make it dance. Along with the photos that you might choose to put in the book, is there a map of where they lived or came from? Is there history of why they might have come to this country?

My stories told the tales of aunts, uncles, grandparents and friends that my children never knew, but these people were turned into real characters in a real story. My stories, when done, were bound into small books that included selected photos needed to tell the story. The books were well received by the family. For me, it was a labor of love as I wrote and relived the many memories.

As far as the albums go, there were many duplicated photos and nobody will miss what they never see. Also, many more family members will see and enjoy the Story Book.

## Pay It Forward

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

He said “Pay it forward,” asking for my blue backpack

But what use will you give it, I asked

He whipped out his student ID.

He said “See, I’m studying to be a teacher, I’ll carry my books and papers.

When I’m done with it, I’ll pay it forward to another struggling student

I’ll pass it on to the children.”

Am I a ‘soft touch,’ a believer in second or third chances,

or am I a schmuck with a neon sign saying “SUCKER”?

A woman I gave my denim jacket to is now a friend. Over the four years I’ve volunteered at a food bank, I’ve watched as her disease progressed and savaged her muscles. She went from a cane to being totally wheelchair bound.

Backpack man may surprise me—who knows, maybe he will be a teacher or counselor

As long as he becomes self-sufficient

and pays it forward.

## Scathingly Brilliant Idea

Debra Dolan – Vancouver, BC  
Debradolani958@gmail.com

When I was young, I admired Haley Mills, the UK actress, who was in Disney movies such as *That Darn Cat*, *Parent Trap*, and *Pollyanna*—all of which I loved. Alone, in my bedroom, I would talk like her and dream of myself with short blonde curly hair and a perfect smile, acting those roles. In my mind, I was very talented and smart. I imagined that I, too, was brave, fearless, pretty, and spoke my own mind. Her characters were forever getting into predicaments that somehow looked disastrous and always, always had happy endings.

My favorite childhood film, which she starred in as Mary Clancy, a free-spirited rebellious teenager, with Rosalind Russell (*Mother Superior*) and June Harding (*Rachel Devery*), was *The Trouble with Angels*. I was nine years of age when it was released in 1966 and with my best chum, Janis Rawle, attended a matinee at the Penn Centre Shopping Centre in St. Catharines, Ontario. At the time, this was a significant adventure, given we were usually highly supervised.

Both of us were shocked at the ending, when Mary received “the call” her senior year, and upon graduation, remained at the college to begin her novitiate in the order. Neither of us saw *that* coming! As we headed home imitating the best line of the film, spoken several times in different ways—“I have a scathingly brilliant idea!”—we began to plan our own. No strangers to vivid imagination, we were ready for an escapade, knowing for certain it would involve leaving our boring restrictive parents yet remaining in school with our friends and beloved teachers. Destinations were limited.

During many hushed conversations, we plotted, researched, and created strategies for unforeseen challenges. Our date of execution was determined, goodbye notes written for mailing, and precious belongings packed with bank accounts withdrawn. We were going to live in our dream home, Simpsons-Sears store, where life’s offerings were free and plentiful. After successfully hiding in a circular clothing rack until closing, we were discovered sleeping together on an expensive mattress at 2:30 a.m., having consumed chocolate and wearing new pajamas. Who knew there were security guards?

## Language

Lin Brummels – Winside, NE  
<https://llzranch.blog/>, [linbrummels1@yahoo.com](mailto:linbrummels1@yahoo.com)

Paris, city I haven’t visited, whose cathedral I didn’t see,  
people I don’t know, faced their city’s waterloo  
as they bade Notre Dame’s famed spire adieu.

The little French I recalled from my high school degree  
and four college classes failed me, but like an emcee,  
evoked ancient cries like, oh, mom Dieu and, sacrebleu,  
and stumbled over the important question, parley-vous  
Anglaise ? Fermer la bouche, bizarrely, stayed with me;

Madam often told our class to shut up and learn punctuation.  
Mon nom est Lin, translates my moniker, as flax, or linseed  
in French; being called a seed or a plant fits my behavior,  
whereas Linda, my birth name, doesn’t have a translation  
in French, but is bonito or beautiful in Spanish, indeed,  
a language I should learn to talk to my neighbors.

## Brilliant

Jan Marquart – Austin, TX  
<https://freethepen.wordpress.com/>,  
[jan\\_marquart@yahoo.com](mailto:jan_marquart@yahoo.com)

Wasn’t it brilliant  
of God  
to create words?

What are words  
but bits of truth  
vibrating darkness  
into hope  
emboldening  
the telling  
enabling  
a writer’s message.

Without words  
the soul’s truth  
would remain harbored  
within—  
sequestered into a life of solitude.

Words are the  
jewels of the soul  
we sometimes lay before swine  
tainting them with wanton desires.

What are words but  
tiny specks of verity strung together  
to crack open the sacredness of life  
for its deliciousness.

Wasn’t it brilliant of God?

## Suppose

Claire McCabe – Elkton, MD  
[cmccabe@udel.edu](mailto:cmccabe@udel.edu)

suppose there really is another shore  
where children are sacred

where songs of every color pierce the water  
more than air ever

suppose we could see the sun spill prisms  
sing deep to seahorses

we ride and rise in our shimmering cloaks  
a thousand pockets of air  
lifting floating until we find

that place where mothers hold all  
children not just their own but all  
until all until always

## A Scathingly Brilliant Idea

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

I've thought a lot about the old movie, *The Trouble With Angels*, a 1966 comedy set at St. Francis, a fictional all-girls Catholic boarding school. The movie boasted of an all-female cast that included Rosalind Russell playing the role of Mother Superior, who's constantly at odds with Mary Clancy (Hayley Mills) and Rachel Devery (June Harding). Even the director, Ida Lupino, was female—a rare feat for women in the mid-1960s.

The episodic story line followed the two disgruntled teenagers through their sophomore, junior, and senior high-school years. Mary was the rebellious, prankish instigator, who always said to Rachel, "I've got the most scathingly brilliant idea!" Throughout the movie, they pulled pranks on the sisters, repeatedly getting into trouble and turning the convent school upside down.

Mary also resented Mother Superior's authority and often puzzled over why any woman would choose the life of a nun. Over time, the sisters' examples of dedication, devotion, kindness, love, and generosity touched her, and she began seeing that their life was one of fulfillment, not deprivation. Mary received *the call* her senior year and, after graduation, remained at the school and began her novitiate in the order.

Although the convent-school setting seemed absurdly archaic to me in 1966, Mary's decision to become a nun at the end of the movie felt deeply satisfying. I wasn't Catholic, but the romance and solitude of the convent got to me, not to mention a young woman's commitment to faith and anything but a conventional life. As a budding young writer and a wannabe feminist, I'd been similarly *called* and felt the need for my own solitude and commitment to an unconventional life. Simply, I identified with the rebellious Mary.

The movie continues to be one of my all-time favorite guilty pleasures. It's like candy canes and macaroni and cheese. Yes, on the surface it seems dumb and dated, but it's also mildly subversive. Mary was a scathingly brilliant rebel who inspired my inner writer and emboldened the young feminist in me. She remains indelible, just as my own version of that rebel survives in me.

## Out With the Old — In With the New

Suzy Beal – Bend, OR  
Suzy.beal.46@gmail.com

The question isn't how long (in time) can you remember, but how long (in distance) can you remember? When you think of something while making your bed, can you still remember it when you head to the kitchen to write it down? Not I! No matter what I do—cross my fingers, tell myself to connect it to something—I arrive in the kitchen, pick up my pen and by the time I find a pad—Zap! It's gone. I used to be able to retrace my steps and remember, but lately these thoughts keep slipping through the net. Over these 73 years, the little things I've retained must represent overload to my poor sponge.

The big question for me now is how do I select from the material already stored, that which is important to keep and that which I can delete. I can't select delete and say "OK" like I do on my computer. I want room for important things today. You see, there are still new things I want to learn, hold on to, savor, and re-use.

The life of keeping sticky notes stuck to everything—two grocery list pads, lists in the bedroom, kitchen, TV room, notes on my car seat and even on my vitamin jar to remember something in the morning—is upon me. I used to laugh at Mom for all her notes stuck to everything. Sorry, Mom, you should see me now.

Maybe I should take this note-keeping one step further and write down every new word, new class, and new experience. Clutter my desk, not my mind.

The phone just rang in the kitchen and I went to answer it. It was my daughter. When we finished talking, instead of coming back to my computer I headed for the bedroom to finish making the bed, and I passed the computer room to see my essay in progress. I'd forgotten what I'd been doing before the phone call.

I no longer need to remember how to change diapers, so can't I let it go?

"Let your creativity be a river, not a destination and **you will know real satisfaction.**"

— Elizabeth Gilbert

## Slip Sliding Away, or What to Expect When Mom Cooks

Patricia LaPointe – Prospect Heights, IL  
<http://changesinlife.com/>, [grampat8@comcast.net](mailto:grampat8@comcast.net)

It could be Christmas or Easter or Thanksgiving, when Mom would make her famous fried chicken.

The process began several days before the holiday, when she would send Dad out for chicken breasts. No dark meat, heaven forbid! And not just any breasts, either. She wanted only “Dolly Parton” breasts, not “Twiggy” breasts. This often resulted in Dad going to several groceries until he found 24 breasts. My siblings and I referred to this as Dad’s boob hunt.

In later years, when Dad was no longer driving, I was his partner in the search. We’d check out the poultry in each store and quietly (we hoped) comment if the breasts were “Dolly enough.” Of course, Mom would make the final decision. Those she deemed too small were sent to the freezer, and out we went again.

Mom woke at dawn the day of the holiday. Three or four bowls of milk and eggs were filled with the “Dollies.” After a few hours, she would spread waxed paper, covered with seasoned bread crumbs, across the kitchen table, and after coating each breast, would neatly arrange them on the paper.

By the time the family members arrived the breasts were being fried. The house smelled like Colonel Sanders had moved in.

Mom’s kitchen was small, and she wasn’t the neatest cook. My sister and I were her assistants, helping to prepare everything else for our dinner. We would check in with each other before arriving.

“Are you wearing socks?” I’d ask.

“Wouldn’t go without them,” she’d reply.

Mom would fry the chicken in several pans. Oil would squirt everywhere. On the floor it added to the breadcrumbs that had fallen off the waxed paper. My sister and I skated around the kitchen on the slippery layer, creating what we called “breaded socks.” As Mom aged and became more careless in her preparation, there were actual footprints on the breadcrumb-oil “rug.”

Mom’s gone now. But we recount our tales of slipping and sliding and breaded socks at every holiday dinner.

## Flickerings

Pat Anthony – Fontana, KS  
<https://middlecreekcurrents.com/>, [metpvan@gmail.com](mailto:metpvan@gmail.com)  
e-Circle 4

Fanning the Flame

Dusting the laughing Buddha  
with Amish wood milk

its mahogany weight  
bends my hand toward the desk

of two grandmothers  
how the Maitreya’s corpulence glistens

I thumb his pearls of wisdom  
trace his wide smile

square up the temple bells  
with the pewter cowbell in the center

from the Minnesota women’s retreat  
where we worked the sled dogs

dust the back of the sea  
turtle my father carved

in walnut harvested from deadfalls  
on the river

polish the old water  
rings beneath elephant vases of bamboo

evoke Thomas Merton who embraced seven  
story mountains on his journey as a monk

logged his struggles between  
East and West, his winding path among

the many manifestations of the spirit-  
ual. Turtle swims in its blue patina

inside the brass bowl next to the incense  
burner, the green vase from India

on the Thai mats beside  
the Guadalupe candle from the local mall,

Somewhere prayer wheels spin, beads  
slip through fingers; here, flickering faith flares.

## A Brilliant Red Idea

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

High school was over and I had a brilliant idea.

I decided to put red highlights in my mousy brown hair. The auburn of Miss Clairol looked so much better. Big change is the main thing about brilliant ideas, in the British definition of the word, “brilliant” meaning “excellent.”

I bought a coloring kit from the drug store and my best friend helped me apply it. We waited the suggested 20 minutes then looked at my wet hair. “Nothing’s happening,” I said, and Maggie agreed. So we left it on longer. After another 40 minutes, my hair color was still the same.

“This isn’t working,” I said. “Let’s give up and rinse the goop out.” The water quickly ran clear. That should have been our first clue.

When my hair dried, it was carrot red. I was channeling Anne of Green Gables. My shiny red tresses were “brilliant” but more in the North American sense of “very bright.”

Luckily, I was going to University where no one knew me—other than the three high school boys in my carpool. I thought all my new friends would assume my hair was naturally red. And they did.

I remained a redhead until Christmas break when I tried to correct the two-tone hairdo from my summer dye job. Turning to Miss Clairol again, I chose a shade most like my original brown.

This time, I left it on for only 20 minutes, but it turned my reddish curls much darker than I expected. My new deep auburn hair, contrasted by the winter whiteness of my skin, made me appear as if I suffered from a scary disease. Diphtheria, I imagined, without knowing anything about diphtheria.

The boys in the car pool never said anything about my changing hair colors, but my college friends were surprised when I returned with the glory of my ginger days behind me.

I guess this is what happens when “brilliant” ideas run their course.

## No

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

I don’t know why I say yes  
when I should be saying no.  
This time I said yes  
to a consulting job to edit a document  
at the aerospace company  
I used to work for.

There I sit, three days a week,  
in a freezing windowless room  
huddled in an old sweater and wool socks,  
my eyes glued to the computer screen  
without a breather for hours at a time.  
My right index finger scrolls the mouse  
while I add or subtract a word or two  
to the written text, reorganize the outline,  
turn capitalized words into all lower case,  
and define acronyms.

It makes my eyes tear, my fingers numb,  
my back ache, my ankles swell, and for what?  
A pittance, a few extra bucks  
that I could very well do without.

Instead I could be with my muse  
at my desk at home  
Looking out to the trickling fountain in my yard,  
writing Charles Bukowski-like poems  
or doing what I need to be doing the most,  
writing my own book.  
Next time, my answer will be  
not just no, but a NO in all caps.

“I know the world is bruised and bleeding, and though it is important not to ignore its pain, it is also critical to refuse to succumb to its malevolence. Like failure, chaos contains information that can lead to knowledge – even wisdom. Like art.”

— Toni Morrison

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## Announcement: 2019 LifeWriting Contest

The annual Susan Wittig Albert LifeWriting Competition has been cancelled for 2019. A victim of website renovation delays, the contest will return in the spring of 2020 with a refreshed entry process.

# New Members with Stories to Tell

When new members join SCN, we ask them to tell us their stories. They are always intriguing, demonstrating the variety of writing interests of our members. Here are a few engaging introductions from earlier this year, revealing that diversity.

**Susan W. Leicher** – New York, NY (Jan 2019)

**My Story:** Born in the Bronx in the early 1950s to a Latina mother and an American-Jewish father, I've spent most of my life researching and producing policy papers on social justice (largely women-centered) issues for a range of nonprofits, foundations and government agencies. In my mid-sixties, as an empty-nester (with my husband) after having raised our two daughters and built a career, I was seized by the desire to write a novel that would reflect some of what I've learned about New York City's girls and women – as well as capture some of my own experience as a bi-cultural woman in the world's most multi-cultural city. I've never had more fun than I did while writing it!

**Book:** *Acts of Assumption* – which is not exactly a memoir, but which could not have been written without having lived my particular life.

**Storytelling Medium:** words and song

**Karen Price** – Port Austin, MI (Jan 2019)

**My Story:** I'm living my dream as a goat farmer on the tip of Michigan's thumb. My indulgent husband and I raise dairy and fiber goats. My two children are grown and on their own – I'm incredibly proud of them. I love to read and write, am a terrible ukulele player, and enjoy all manner of crafts.

**Storytelling Medium:** words, textiles, dolls

**Kelly McMichael** – Carbon, TX (Feb 2019)

**My Story:** I'm a middle-aged academic looking to reinvent myself, pursuing creativity in writing, cooking, and making art after years of teaching people American History.

**Book:** working on my first book-length memoir now

**Blog:** [www.kellydmc michael.com](http://www.kellydmc michael.com)

**Storytelling Medium:** I'm a maker – I write, make art, primarily in textiles, and cook. I'm a trained chef.

**Jeanne Charters** – Asheville, NC (Feb 2019)

**My Story:** I finally started writing columns and novels after retiring from my advertising agency, Charters Marketing. My first novel, *Shanty Gold*, part of a "Daughters of Ireland," trilogy was published in 2015. The second, published in March 2019, is *Lace Curtain*. A book I wrote a few years ago about Fake News in the TV industry will be published in August or September, 2019. Check out *Shanty Gold* on Facebook and at [jeannecharters.com](http://jeannecharters.com)

**Book:** *Shanty Gold*

**Blog:** [jeannecharters.com](http://jeannecharters.com)

**Storytelling Medium:** It's my own imagination – which is vivid.

**Lin Marshall Brummels** – Winside, NE (Mar 2019)

**My Story:** My work focuses on the connection between mental health, environment, and care for disenfranchised people. I write about family, neighbors, often overlooked rural places, and animals.

**Blog:** <https://wordpress.com/view/llzranch.blog>

**Facebook:** Lin Marshall Brummels

**Twitter:** @linbrummels

**Storytelling Medium:** poems, essays, and photos

**Katherine McCord** – Fulton, MD (Apr 2019)

**My Story:** I am a teacher for SCN! :)

**Books:** *My CIA* (winner of a Hoffer Legacy Award); *Run, Scream, Unbury, Save* (winner of the Autumn House Press Open Book Award in Creative Nonfiction)

**Storytelling Medium:** words: Literary Memoir, Creative Nonfiction

**Amber White** – San Clemente, CA (Apr 2019)

**My Story:** I am a wife and mother of two wonderful boys. I spent twenty years working as a juvenile probation officer and wrote a book about parenting based on my experiences. My latest book, *Free Bird: A Memoir*, is about the relationship I shared with my father, who was a drug addict. I hope that by sharing my story, I can help addicts and their loved ones heal.

**Blog:** *Free Bird: A Memoir*

**Storytelling Medium:** writing

**Mary Sheeran** – Bronx, NY (May 2019)

**My Story:** I have died on stage many times (as an opera singer) and have sung classical recitals and cabaret and acted in NY and regional theater. I've been writing professionally since high school. I have 3 novels published and a fourth will come out in January.

**Books:** *Banished From Memory*; *Quest of the Sleeping Princess*; *Who Have the Power: A Legend of the West*

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/mary.sheeran.5>

**Storytelling Medium:** Words (also singing)

**Michelle Cacho-Negrete** – Portland, ME (May 2019)

**My Story:** I was born in a ghetto to an immigrant single mother who believed in this country's promise, although my brother was killed and we lived below poverty. I was a single parent who eventually went to college and grad school on merit scholarships. I helped establish women's shelters, programs for violent men on probation, sliding scale therapy for survivors of physical/sexual abuse, raised two successful, feminist sons, wrote a book and worked with other women to develop a feminist speakers program to present in schools. I'm a retired social worker with at least 80 published pieces. My first book, *Stealing*, was published in 2019. I'm interested in everything and walking is my joy.

**Book:** *Stealing: Life in America*

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/michelle.cachonegrete>

**Storytelling Medium:** words

**Mary Rives** – Santa Fe, NM (Jun 2019)

**My Story:** One of my brightest passions is stories – writing them, sharing them, and helping others to write and share their stories. The gifts for both the storyteller and the people they reach are immeasurable and hold the ripe potential for healing and transformation. I've devoted my life to the path of service which now, after many years in social work, manifests through my story coaching and writing circle work at [www.healingstories.com](http://www.healingstories.com).

**Blog:** <https://thriveandshine.com/blog>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/ThriveandShine/>

**Storytelling Medium:** writing groups, workshops, sistership circles—words!

**Beth Ricanati** – Santa Monica, CA (July 2019)

**My Story:** I am a physician, author and mother. My memoir, *Braided: A Journey of a Thousand Challahs*, chronicles my journey to finding a way to be present in this crazy world of ours by making bread every Friday.

**Book:** *Braided: A Journey of A Thousand Challahs*

**Blog:** [www.housecallsforwellness.com](http://www.housecallsforwellness.com)

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/BethRicanatiAuthor/>

**Storytelling Medium:** Words!

## PROFESSIONAL DIRECTORY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

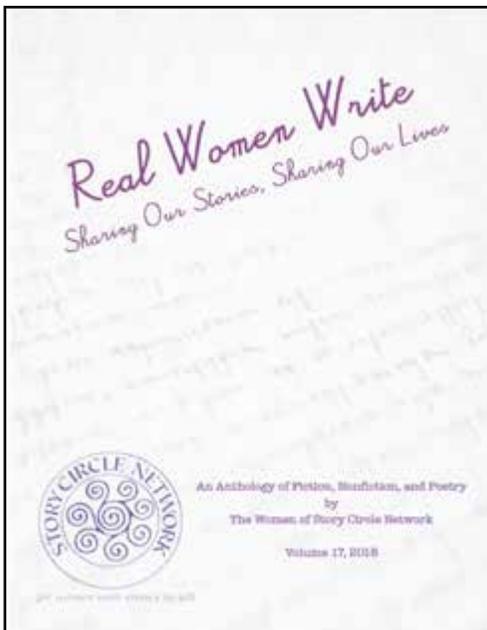
**Sarah Byrn Rickman**, of Colorado Springs, is a former journalist, a licensed Sport pilot, and the award-winning author of nine books about the Women Airforce Service Pilots of WWII. She holds a BA in English from Vanderbilt University and an MA in creative writing from Antioch University, McGregor. **Speaker, Freelancer** [www.sarahbyrnrickman.com](http://www.sarahbyrnrickman.com)

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

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*NOW is your time, RWW is the place!*

# Real Women Write: Sharing Our Stories, Sharing Our Lives



The SCN annual anthology of our members’ writing, *Real Women Write 2019*, is on track for exciting new digital publishing formats: print-on-demand and e-book, both via Amazon. This means the book will be easily available to friends and to the public, and will provide members with an enormously expanded audience!

**Submissions opened on August 1**, using an improvised system so that we can stay on schedule despite website project delays. We’re open for entries **until September 15** (there will be **no deadline extensions** this year). We’re hoping you’ll be eager to send us your fiction, nonfiction, or poetry.

Please **email us for submission information** at [storycircle@storycircle.org](mailto:storycircle@storycircle.org) and we’ll be happy to send you all the details, and to help you navigate our temporary entry process. It all happens with a few simple emails.

We’re looking forward to another great collection of our members’ voices, and to sharing that excellence with Amazon readers!

*Susan Schoch, Editor*

**Story Circle Network, Inc.**

723 W University Ave #300-234,

Georgetown TX 78626

**True Words from Real Women  
Looking Ahead**

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

- December 2019: Letting Go
- March 2020: Building Bridges
- June 2020: Quiet Time

Send us your story at this link:

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

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

**CONGRATULATIONS  
to Sara Etgen-Baker!**

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

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**2019 LifeWriting Contest  
— CANCELLED —**

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

