



"The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse"

"Most of the old moles I know wish they had listened less to their fears and more to their dreams."

"The greatest illusion," said the mole, "is that life should be perfect."

— Charlie Mackesy



Dear Story Circle Sisters,

The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse is the title of my new treasure, a book I will keep forever. Written by Charlie Mackesy (charliemackesy.com) it's a book of the finest quality about non-judgment, about life and friendships, written as if it were a children's book, with few words and exquisite drawings.

As an old mole, just looking at the book cover makes me smile.

If you, like me, need to remember to listen more to your dreams, you might want to consider reviewing your books and/or your book

bucket list, and find one that brings warmth to your heart and a smile to that sweet face of yours.

I focused on this little moment of simple joy because I've needed a little joy. It's been a less-than-perfect good news/bad news kind of month for Story Circle. What would you like first?

Okay. Let's get the bad news over with. We hit a brick wall with our web designer and had to have a sit-down fix-it do-or-die kind of meeting. We've been waiting for about ten months for our beautiful new website and haven't gotten there yet. Boo hiss. I'm not even going to give you an "it's just around the corner" or "we can see a light at the end of the website tunnel" expected date. Let's simply be glad the meeting produced a plan, I didn't scream, and we are moving forward. Send good ju-ju just in case, would you?

Now for lots of good news!

There is no stopping us. We are, after all, a strong network of women writers. As I write this letter (it's early February):

- The 2020 online classes are up and running;
• The 2019 Sarton Awards Program has recently announced its shortlist of authors and those entries are in the final round of judging;
• The 2019 Real Women Write Annual Anthology is available on Amazon (woo hoo!); and
• The 2020 quarterly Journals are in full swing.

More good news for our future: Len Leatherwood, our vice president and online classes coordinator, is successfully bringing in a younger contingency of women for

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SARTON WOMEN'S BOOK AWARD STORY CIRCLE NETWORK

ANNOUNCING

the 2019 Sarton Shortlist!

Awarding women authors writing about women:

- Memoir
• Nonfiction
• Contemporary Fiction
• Historical Fiction

Find out more on page 4.

A Special LifeLines Women's Writing Weekend

Learn and grow with the renowned KATHLEEN ADAMS in Denver!

See details on page 5.

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us to mentor and to learn from. Len's pilot program "Our Future is Female" promotes the involvement of younger women and is an exciting expansion for our organization.

Finally, drum roll please, have you heard about our 2020 LifeLines Weekend in Denver featuring NYT best-selling author Kay Adams? You won't want to miss it (<https://storycirclelifelines.com>). See the article on page 5 for details.

At Story Circle Network, we believe in our dreams. We are the promoters and cultivators (Thanks, Teresa Lynn) of women finding their voices and believing their life stories matter. No matter how "ordinary" a woman may think her life feels, that woman, in the sharing of her story, can make a difference in her own life and the lives of others.

"I'm so small," said the mole.

"Yes," said the boy, "but you make a huge difference."

Do I make myself clear, sisters?

With hugs around the circle,  
*Jeanne Guy*  
SCN President

## CONFERENCE 2021!

As you know, it's been a year of change for Story Circle—and that includes our biannual conference, now shifted to odd-numbered years. The board is looking at San Antonio TX as the site for our 2021 gathering, and will be reviewing hotel bids at its next meeting. The date hasn't been selected yet, but it's likely to be in April or May. San Antonio is a fabulous city and the Texas Hill Country is extravagantly rich in wildflowers in the spring. **Watch for an announcement in the June *Journal*.**

In the meantime, we're accepting registrations for our **2020 LifeLines with Kathleen Adams**. (See the story on page 5.) Kathleen is a nationally acclaimed author and teacher, and you're sure to be inspired by her presentation. Join us for a women-only weekend that is bound to jumpstart your writing practice and help you focus on the things you most want to accomplish!

## Story Circle Network's Mission

*The Story Circle Network (SCN) is dedicated to helping women share the stories of their lives and to raising public awareness of the importance of women's personal histories. We carry out our mission through publications, websites, classes, workshops, writing and reading circles, and woman-focused programs. Our activities empower women to tell their stories, discover their identities through their stories and choose to be the authors of their own lives.*

### Story Circle Journal

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

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We welcome your letters, queries, and suggestions.

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

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

## Editor's Note

It's March, and once again Spring comes to the *Journal*! Things are budding and blooming, and bringing us a sense of fresh energy. Particularly visible in this edition (page 16) is the youthful energy that **Rachel Lock** brings to "Our Future is Female." She represents a new generation of writing women in SCN. Rachel wakes us up with her understanding of the need for resilience in the face of challenge.

Facing her own final challenge, SCN's beloved **Debra Winegarten** found a friend, **Judy Alter**, to take her last project to the finish line. On page 6, **Pat Bean** brings us Judy's journey with *The Second Battle of the Alamo*.

Continuing to grow is vital to all of us, especially as writers. SCN offers a range of learning opportunities, including our **Online Classes** (see page 9 for a current roster). Our **Herstories** blog offers posts by teachers about the storying process. In this issue, page 25, **Tina Games** provides suggestions for transformational journaling. And in our regular feature, "Writing Tips from Our Teachers," page 14, **Andrea Simon** from City College of New York leads us through the risky fascination of writing about our mothers.

There was lots of learning, and also lots of fun, at SCN's first international workshop in **Italy** last November,

taught by **Len Leatherwood**. You'll find a wrap-up on page 10, with a few examples of the eyes-open writing that resulted.

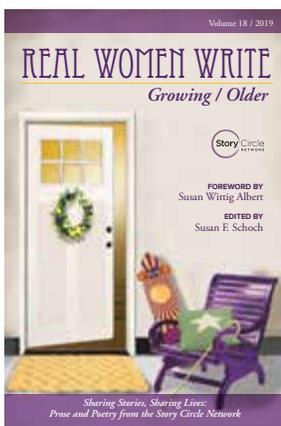
An important way to grow can be to share your work with fellow writers. SCN's Circles program offers that opportunity on-site or online. **Caroline Ziel** gives us an interview with **Jazz Kendrick**, facilitator of the enduring poetry e-Circle #4, on page 8.

And a *great* way to learn is at an SCN **LifeLines** women's writing weekend. On page 5, find out more about our special collaboration with **Kay Adams**, journaling expert extraordinaire, for an exciting **LifeLines in Denver** coming in May!

There is much more to discover in this *Journal*, including the stories and poems of our **True Words** section, beginning on page 18. Be sure to give yourself time to read and appreciate the work of your sister writers. And think about sharing your own life stories next time.

Wherever you may be, welcome to Spring at Story Circle Network!

Susan Schoch, Editor



## The Annual Anthology Grows Up!

In January, our own **Jo Virgil**, Austin poet and storyteller, was the Featured Speaker at the monthly "Thirsty Thursday Open Mic" event in Dripping Springs TX. These gatherings are free and open to the public, presenting local poets, musicians, songwriters and storytellers.

When the group saw that Jo had authored two stories published in *Real Women Write: Growing / Older*, our 2019 member anthology, they asked her to speak and to present her two stories to the audience. Jo was happy to oblige. The Thirsty Thursday announcement noted: "That collection of writings is described as responses 'to the profoundly significant period of growth that comes to us with the passing of time,' and it is available from Amazon."

For SCN, this was exciting evidence of an audience for this collection, and an affirmation that the material was ready for a larger platform. Yes, *RWW 2019* is a fundraiser for Story Circle, but more importantly it validates the significance of women's voices and their experiences. And it offers members a major publication opportunity.

We asked writers to submit work on a theme, *Growing / Older*. Their responses were fascinating, wide-ranging, creative and engaging. And book-worthy. We are still in need of reviews, social media exposure, and your help in enthusiastically spreading the word about this new publishing venture for SCN. Available in e-book or paperback, *Real Women Write: Growing / Older* is an anthology you'll want to share. Please do!

<https://www.amazon.com/Real-Women-Write-Growing-Sharing/dp/0979532957/>

Did you miss submitting in 2019? Entry for our 2020 issue will open on July 1.

# SCN Announces 2019 Sarton Women's Book Award Shortlist

Story Circle Network has proudly announced the 2019 Shortlist for the **Sarton Women's Book Awards™**.

This award program is named in honor of May Sarton, remembered for her many contributions to women's literature as a memoirist, novelist, and poet. The awards are given annually to women authors writing about women, in memoir, biography, and fiction published by small/independent presses. The competition is conducted in two rounds, with SCN members serving as first-round jurors. Professional librarians not affiliated with SCN select the winners and finalists. Our 2019 winners will be announced in April 2020.

This year's field of entries was the largest and strongest in the competition's history and all of the entries were distinguished in some important ways. We offer our congratulations to our shortlisted authors and their publishers for work well done. Our deeply-felt thanks go to the dedicated jurors who read and evaluated first-round submissions and to the judges who are currently reading the second round. We couldn't do this without you!

The Sarton 2020 cycle will open on June 15, 2020. You will find guidelines on our website: <http://www.storycircle.org/SartonLiteraryAward/guidelines.php>



## **Memoir**

*Notes from the Bottom of the World: A Life in Chile*, by Suzanne Adam

*Remembering Shanghai: A Memoir of Socialites, Scholars and Scoundrels*, by Isabel Sun Chao and Claire Chao

*Among the Maasai*, by Juliet Cutler

*When a Toy Dog Became a Wolf and the Moon Broke Curfew*, by Hendrika de Vries

*Where the Angels Lived*, by Margaret McMullan

## **Nonfiction**

*Voices from the Heartland, Vol. 2*, edited by Sara N. Beam, Emily Dial-Driver, Rilla Askew, and Juliet Evusa

*Black & Kiddo*, by Brenda Clem Black

*Esther Hobart Morris: The Unembellished Story of the Nation's First Female Judge*, by Kathryn Swim Cummings

*For Dear Life: Women's Decriminalization and Human Rights in Focus*, by Carol Jacobsen

*Forever Seeing New Beauties: The Forgotten Impressionist Mary Roger Williams, 1857-1907*, by Eve M. Kahn

## **Contemporary Fiction**

*The Patron Saint of Lost Girls*, by Maureen Aitken

*Love is a Rebellious Bird*, by Elayne Klasson

*The Greek Persuasion*, by Kimberly K. Robeson

## **Historical Fiction**

*The Swan Keeper*, by Milana Marsenich

*Shrug*, by Lisa Braver Moss

*What We Take for Truth*, by Deborah Nedelman

*Guesthouse for Ganesha*, by Judith Teitelman



# Get Ready for LifeLines 2020!

## “Doors of Perception”

A Story Circle Network Life-Writing Weekend  
with author, therapist, and teacher Kay Adams, LPC

May 29-31, 2020 • Denver CO

*Either you will go through this door  
or you will not go through....  
— Adrienne Rich*

Doors are openings and closings, entrances and exits, thresholds, interiors and exteriors. Doors represent passages, gateways, and protection. Doors provide change points in transitions. They can imprison or empower.

For this weekend, through the alchemy of women's circle and women's story, we will dive deeply into the metaphor of doors for our current beginnings, closures, thresholds, passages and visions.

What heartfelt desire wants to open? What feels locked to you?

What lies on the other side of an inviting passageway?

What is ready for closure and release?

*The wisdom of doors awaits you!*

<https://storycirclelifelines.com>

### About Kathleen (Kay) Adams, LPC

Kay is a best-selling author, speaker, psychotherapist and visionary. Her first book, *Journal to the Self*, is a classic that has helped define the field of journal therapy. Kay is a beloved teacher whose innovative work has helped hundreds of thousands of people heal, change and grow. Her presentation style is fluid, clinically grounded, dynamic, and engaging.

An award-winning and tireless advocate for the healing power of writing, in 2008, Kay started the online Therapeutic Writing Institute (TWI), globally acknowledged to be the premier source of education and training in therapeutic writing. Since 2002 she has been adjunct faculty at University of Denver's University College, teaching her signature course Writing & Healing. Kay has written 13 books on expressive writing, with *The Anxiety Management Journal* to be published September 2020.

### Facility: The Embassy Suites by Hilton Denver Stapleton

We will be gathering at this full-service, all-suite hotel, just ten miles from Denver International Airport, where there's plenty of space and all the amenities we need to make this a memorable and comfortable weekend. You will make your own reservation at our SCN rate. More information is on our conference website.

*Story Circle's LifeLines is a women-only weekend that will open you to new possibilities for your writing and for yourself as a writer, whether you're working in memoir, fiction, or poetry.*

*Come join Kay Adams and the Circle of women writers as we write together.*

Register for this special Story Circle Network  
LifeLines 2020 Life-Writing Weekend



Deb Winegarten



Judy Alter

# The Second Battle of the Alamo

A book by Judy Alter & Deb Winegarten

Interview with Judy Alter by Pat Bean

As Story Circle Network's beloved Debra Weingarten lay ill, she thought of the two strong women who saved Texas' famed Alamo from demolition. It was a story she had been researching for a book, and she didn't want to see it go unfinished.

So it was that Judy Alter, another SCN member, got an unexpected telephone call from a woman she had only met once but had immediately admired. "Deb had all the chutzpah I wished I had." As Judy recalls, the meeting took place when Debra and her wife, Cindy Huyser, were visiting Fort Worth. "I had been married to a Jewish man... and Debra was outspoken about her Jewish faith. We communicated about kosher food."

Judy was aware that Debra had a contract for the Alamo book. "It was a subject that really appealed to me." Not a surprise, since Judy's career focus had been on Texas and the American West. She worked for Texas Christian University Press for 30 years, 20 of those as Director. During her tenure, the history and literature of Texas and the American West became the focus of publications.

"It was a great job for me—I ran the press in the day, wrote in the evening, met lots of authors and publishers, and got to attend a variety of professional meetings and events." Which, she adds, is how she met SCN founder Susan Wittig Albert and became involved with the female writers' support organization called Story Circle Network.

Along the way Judy also gathered some honors, a few of which include two Spur Awards from Western Writers of America along with membership in their Hall of Fame; the Owen Wister Award for Lifetime Achievement; and two Western Heritage awards from the National Cowboy Museum and Hall of Fame. She was also on the Dallas Morning News' list of 100 Women who made their mark on Texas.

So, while the call from Debra might have been surprising to Judy, Debra must have known she had chosen the right woman to take over the Alamo book.

The call came when Debra was in the hospital. "It was a surprise because we didn't have a telephone kind of relationship." It was also difficult, Judy recalls, because "Debra's voice was no more than a whisper, and I'm hard of hearing."

Cindy remembers that Debra conceived of *The Second Battle of the Alamo* in 2012, after her draft biography of Clara Driscoll was rejected by the publisher. Using a chapter of the same name as her starting point, Debra refocused her research and writing, and in 2016 secured a contract for the manuscript with Globe Pequot (since acquired by Rowman and Littlefield), to be delivered in February of 2018.

"But life intervened," says Cindy.

During 2017, Debra's father was becoming increasingly frail, so she moved him to Austin and sold his house in Dallas. As the year progressed, it became increasingly clear that the manuscript would not be finished by the February 2018 deadline, so Debra secured a one-year extension to her contract.

Then, during the second week of July 2018, the aggressive cancer that would claim Debra's life was diagnosed. After notifying her editor that she would likely be unable to finish the book, Debra considered the options that remained. Through their Story Circle connection, she knew that Judy was qualified to finish the project, and might be able to do so by the publisher's deadline.

"So, she reached out to Judy with the proposal," Cindy continues. "Once Judy agreed the project was a good fit, Debra, Judy, and I collaborated to draft an outrageous request letter (proposing the switch) to Deb's editor at Pequot Globe. Much to our delight, the letter had worked its magic, and the editor secured permission to go forward with Judy as the author of the book. I sent Judy Debra's draft manuscript and research materials, and she was off and running."

Judy admits it took a while to sort everything out because the materials were not in any particular order and there were lots of photocopies with no attribution. “I had to do a lot of reading to familiarize myself with the story and then sort out the research.”

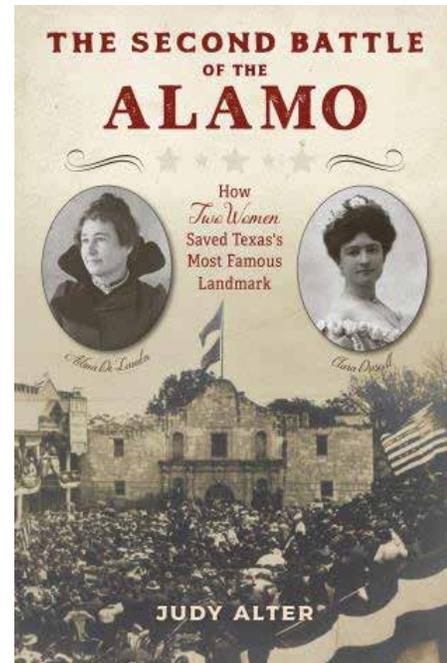
But Debra’s faith in Judy’s ability to finish her project was spot on. The launch of *The Second Battle of the Alamo* is planned by the publishers, Rowman and Littlefield, for March 7, at the Alamo Society’s annual meeting at San Antonio’s historic Menger Hotel, just across from the Alamo. Judy plans to attend the event with a few of her seven grandchildren. She feels she received much encouragement and support for the project from SCN, especially from Susan Albert.

The title page of the book reads: By Judy Alter based on the research of Debra Winegarten.

The story, as Judy tells it, is about Adina De Zavala, granddaughter of the only Mexican to sign the Texas Declaration of Independence, and Clara Driscoll, daughter of a rancher/banker. The pair saved the Alamo from destruction when developers coveted the prime piece of real estate.

“Adina had the passion for historical preservation; Clara had the money. But their visions of what the Alamo should look like were very different, and their cooperation soon turned to enmity. The book covers the actual fight to save the Alamo, along with profiles of their lives and their conflict, and the ongoing history of the shrine—there is controversy to this day—as well as movies, etc., that the battle inspired,” says Judy.

“As is clear in the book, I liked Adina a lot better than Clara. I admired her passion for preservation and her quirky independent ways that she carried late into a long life.”



A spin off from Judy’s work with Rowman and Littlefield on this story is that she is now working on a book about the Waggoner Three D Ranch for the publishing company. Her research shows the ranch is the largest under one fence in the nation, and the Waggoners lived on it for 167 years until its recent sale to a sports tycoon.

With *The Second Battle of the Alamo* entering the world, and her partnership with Debra completed, Judy says she has already sent her editor at Rowman and Littlefield a copy of the Waggoner manuscript, and is currently gathering photos for the book. Being Judy, she is also exploring ideas for a new project as well. We’ll stay tuned.



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>

“There is a true intimacy that can occur between a person who writes and a person who reads, a kind of mind meld, when the writer has done a good enough job to enable the reader to dream a version of the dream the writer has created in her own mind and put on the page.”

— Janet Benton



SCN's Circles offer women vital support for writing and sharing their prose and poetry. In this issue, Circles Program Liaison Caroline Ziel interviews long-time facilitator of **e-Circle #4, Jazz Kendrick**, who shares poems from her group. Interested in finding the right Circle for you? Go here:

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

## Circle Up with Jazz Kendrick of Austin, TX by Caroline Ziel

I'd like to introduce Jazz Kendrick to you. She is one of the longest serving facilitators of an SCN writing circle. We had a lovely visit through email, and she shared these thoughts.

*Carol: Good morning, Jazz! Thanks for agreeing to this interview. You've been a member of SCN for quite a long time. How did you find us?*

*Jazz: I'd been enjoying Susan Albert's China Bayles mysteries, and was surprised to learn that she was doing a reading at a "Story Circle Open House." I went, and she had us actually "write." The whole evening was so comfortable that I decided to join Story Circle Network. I began facilitating a local SCN Circle, and then joined the Board after retirement.*

*Have you always written poetry?*

No. I had begun writing prose memoir. Then I found poems that my mother wrote. I also joined a local poetry class to support my daughter, who was studying poetry in class. Eventually the poetry e-circle facilitator needed relief, and I jumped at the chance to take her place.

*How does poetry speak to you?*

I am drawn to poetry for its brevity and its ability to "net it out" with an emphasis on how I felt then, and how I feel now. I have grown as a writer and poet through numerous SCN classes and conferences. Subsequently I've published a book of poetry, "Significance," and have contributed to many of SCN's journals and anthologies. Several women in the group have published stand-alone books outside of Story Circle Network.

*What personal gifts do you receive from other women poets and writers?*

It's an honor to foster the sharing of life stories, and help women embark on their own personal blogs and their contributions to journals and anthologies. I continually collect

prompt ideas and enjoy releasing them into the circle to help women shape their own stories in poetry. In terms of challenges, those are infrequent. Mostly women struggle with some of the online processes.

*With your broad and deep experience moderating a circle, what advice would you give someone thinking about leading an e-circle?*

Facilitating a circle is a "practice" in that one keeps learning indefinitely. It involves tending to others as equals. I think of myself more as a leader than a facilitator. I'm guiding. Creativity is needed in finding prompts that will encourage women to WRITE! A prompt must be broad enough to appeal to many individuals, and be open to both positive and negative interpretations. The purpose of the prompt is to trigger memories and current concerns.

*What other qualities should a facilitator have?*

A facilitator must be open to a variety of opinions and model respect for all points of view—always by modeling, never by dictating. I am always eager to have discussions with other facilitators, and encourage anyone who's interested to "give it a go!"

*What are the basic guidelines for your circle?*

Our e-circle is basically like all e-circles, but we convey our life stories through poetry rather than prose. "Life" in this circle embraces imagination. What you visualize is part of your life. We are in a safe place, so poems do not need to be polished to perfection. We respond to the poet's voice and the poem's content. Other than explaining expectations and logistics, guidelines have not been an issue.

*Can women create their own prompts?*

Certainly. Also, I post a new prompt each month. As a facilitator, I provide the topics with various possible derivations. During the month each poem comes in individually as the



Jazz Kendrick

writer is moved. We do not critique wording, form, punctuation or spelling. We are a nurturing bunch of women primarily interested in content and essence.

*Is your Circle open to new members?*

The circle is always open to poets or poetic hopefuls from the SCN community. Membership fluctuates as life situations bring women in and out of the Circle. We hover around 8 consistent members, which is small enough for us to get to know each other.

*I know that the years I spent in your poetry circle really enriched me. Getting to know women through their poetry is a priceless experience. Speaking of which—do you have any poems that you would like to share?*

Sure! Here are two:

### **The Firekeeper** by Ariela Zucker 2020

The fire dancing in the woodstove,  
is a winter pleasure unlike any other.  
I am the fire-keeper, the master of the  
flames rising and subsiding, of the  
warmth dispersing, and engulfing.  
I look at a thin filament of smoke that  
stole away, curling. Chips of wood on the floor,  
my hands chapped and peeling, and a smell  
of the fire in the air. Ancient stories  
of humankind at the dawn of time rise up  
as phantoms from the embers.

### **Ripples** by Nancilynn Saylor 2018

Wash from waving dunes to undulating surf  
Whispering “come follow” ...  
Tracing ancient, ageless paths  
Across the empty beach.  
Under a silent silver sky,  
I stoop to scoop a single shell,  
The broken and the whole.  
The wind and sand polish my cheeks soft.  
Seventy years of living  
Smoothed to satin, again  
Baby-soft skin,  
Reborn of the wind ...  
Following timeless ripples to the sea.

## Keep Growing Your Writing Skills: SCN’s Online Classes

**2020 Spring Term (I)**  
**March 9 — May 4**

### **Memoir and Life Writing**

*Where Stories Begin*  
with Yes Cimcoz  
4 weeks, 3/21 – 4/18

### **Advanced Memoir Writing**

*Turning Memoir to Story: The Art of Memoir*  
with Marcia Meier  
8 weeks, 3/09 – 5/4

### **Journaling & Self-Discovery**

*Freeing the Writer Within*  
with Linda Steele  
6 weeks, 3/30 – 5/11

### **Essay Writing**

*The Lyric Essay: A Kind of Memoir*  
with Katherine McCord  
8 weeks, 3/09 – 5/4

### **Flash Writing**

*The Power of Writing Short:  
The Nuts & Bolts of Flash Fiction*  
with Len Leatherwood  
5 weeks, 3/30 – 5/4

### **Independent Study**

*One on One Mentoring*  
with B. Lynn Goodwin  
Section 1: 4 weeks, 3/09 – 4/6  
Section 2: 4 weeks, 4/6 – 5/4

**To find out more, go to:**

<http://www.storycircleonlineclasses.org>



# Italy Serves as Inspiration to Adventure-Loving Writers

by Joyce Boatright

What if Story Circle Network took a group of members to Europe? How about Italy?

Would enough members be interested? We weren't sure, to tell the truth. In our promotional material, we promised to refund the \$500 deposit if fewer than ten people registered.

We should not have worried. Nearly five times the required minimum number enthusiastically sent in payments. Forty-seven people flew in to Rome from all ends of the U.S., to sightsee and write about glorious Italy. Some of us even brought spouses, grown children, siblings, and adventurous friends.

We began with a brisk walking tour to the magnificent Coliseum and the Forum and fought sensory overload as our guide Antonio filled in the landscape with stories of Caesar and the might of the Roman Empire. We lunched in a piazza before boarding a private coach to travel to the coastal town of Sorrento, our home base for the next nine days.

Len Leatherwood, nationally recognized teacher and award-winning writer, served as host and writing instructor for the twenty women who signed up for the daily workshops. She encouraged participants to engage their senses in their daily assignments, and everyone obliged with “sense-sational” gusto. A salon was held on the last evening in Sorrento where workshop members gave readings that showed the depth and delight of the participants’ writing experiences. A small selection of those pieces follows this wrap-up.

SCN president Jeanne Guy recently reflected on her experience as

a participant in Len’s daily classes. “How can you be around Len and not fall in love with her and her zest for the writing life? I’ve been a journal-writing coach for over 25 years and yet in Len’s presence and with her ever-fresh approach to writing, I felt like I participated in a new method—a new way of experiencing things,” she said. “It was like tasting pizza for the very first time and having the flavors fill your mouth with happiness. The joy in the room was palpable as she created a safe place, in Italy no less, for all of us to freely and authentically write and share our stories.”

The trip highlights included memorable day excursions: Pompeii, the ancient Roman city frozen in time; the Isle of Capri with its upscale designer shopping and jaw-dropping views; Naples, including exquisite Posillio, Mergellina, the Piazza del Plebiscito.... Did I mention the continual sweet assault on our senses?

We bought limoncello by the case, gelato by the gallon, and pizza by the panful. Spec’s, Baskin Robbins, and Domino’s never crossed our minds as our taste buds exploded in joyous surrender to the flavors of southwestern Italy.

In addition to the seasoned members who enjoyed meeting one another face-to-face to write, travel and commiserate, new members joined the organization for this Italian adventure. The trip itself was priced at a non-profit rate and an additional \$500 Debra Winegarten scholarship was gifted to each woman who signed up. The bump in new members makes us think we may have hit on a serious recruiting strategy.

We’re busy this year planning an intense weekend retreat in Denver, and we have our national conference in 2021, but we’re looking for another European destination in 2022. Who wants to go to Rome? Assisi? Perugia? San Marino? Bologna?



*Len Leatherwood's masterful workshop encouraged participating writers to observe and enjoy the sensory experiences of Italy. The following is a very small taste of the work that resulted.*

## A Photograph on the Sea

by Jaime Schneider

Exploring the streets of Sorrento on a grey afternoon in November, our group stumbles across a hidden art gallery on the second floor of an old church building overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. The gallery features an exhibit of black and white film photographs from a prolific local artist. Fifty-plus pictures big and small tell the story of life in Italy: the old man standing proud in front of his family's bodega; the young child searching for seashells in a gently rolling sea; three teenage boys lustfully admiring the shape of a women's body from afar; all beautifully telling a story in their own way. But it was one small photo in particular, tucked away in the corner of the gallery, that reached out to me. Three elderly Italian women, lifelong friends, or perhaps sisters, sit in the foamy surf of the Mediterranean. Two in a one-piece swimsuit, the one in the middle in a bikini, shoulder straps brazenly pulled down to avoid unwanted tan lines. They cling to each other to avoid getting splashed as the surf rolls them over. Child-like giddiness shines through their sun-worn faces. Their laughter floats out of the photo, and I smile back at them. Their bodies tell the story of an Italian life well lived. A life as a mother, a wife, a sister, a best friend. Prosecco on sunny afternoons at the beach, homemade meals of rich pastas, bruschetta, risotto, gelato on hot summer days. All of the best parts of Italy that are wonderful for your soul, but not so kind to your waistline. Yet these women are completely comfortable in their own skin, glowing with the confidence of 70-plus years of life, soaking in the moment they find themselves in. They know exactly who they are and where they come from. There are no doubts in their minds that they have lived a beautiful life, and that they, too, are beautiful.

**Jaime Schneider** is an only child, raised in Colorado and Arizona. She studied journalism at Arizona State Univ. Jaime enjoys travel, cooking, yoga, reading, and dabbling in various creative endeavors. She lives in Nashville, TN.



## Thoughts on Italy

by Gwen McMath

“Fast-paced” comes to mind first for my trip to Italy. From the moment I landed at the airport in Rome, looking for my luggage then frantically looking for the rest of my group going to Sorrento, I felt rushed to find my connections before I would be left behind. Every day has been filled from morning till evening with sights to see, meals to enjoy, and people to watch. We have traveled by plane, bus, and boat. Time has whizzed by like a fast-forward film. Lots of walking, walking, walking—sightseeing soldiers on a quest to see and learn all about the lives of their enemies, except these lovely Italians are not foes but friends. Speaking of friends, we the travelers have become a community and a traveling troop. We look out for each other, have conversations over meals, and jokingly spur each other on to walk more and get with the program. There are singles, married couples, some who have brought their children, grandchildren, or their cousins. We are quite a clan of travelers. What unites us all? Perhaps the desire for learning and meeting new people is at the center? That is certainly part of it. Or perhaps it is a change of scenery to temporarily forget your life and obligations back home? That is important, too; it gives us life perspectives. But most of all, it is a journey to learn more about ourselves, to reflect on how we are spending our lives, to see if we are including things that have eternal significance, and are not just passing through this life with nothing to show for it.

**Gwen McMath** is a lifelong Texan, and a retired elementary and special ed teacher. She is finishing her first book, a memoir of her husband's grandfather, who is known for erecting the Flying Red Horse neon icon atop the Magnolia Building in Dallas. Most of her writing is family history and memoirs. A widow for the past decade, she teaches bible classes, belongs to two book clubs, and takes care of five grandchildren. She travels a lot, but has lived in Corpus Christi for over twenty years.

## Visiting David and Friends

by Janice Kvale

His hands are too big I thought, like paddles with fingers. Indeed they outsize his genitalia by far. Who could miss that! Gentle Midwestern soul that I am, I notice these things. Of course in marble, he is a bit pale. Nay, he is very pale, white and smooth. So smooth.

Alas, his companions in this long gallery are unfinished, large blocks of marble with rough edges that hint at body posture, charged emotions, unfortunate circumstances.

There is no sound attached to the art here. The *sh, sh, sh* of shoes brushing across the floor, soft hum and murmur as viewers whisper to each other.

Then I am stunned as David the statue becomes David the person. The young David massages the stone in his right hand and fingers the straps of the sling he will use to slay Goliath, the giant who seems nowhere in sight. I look around to see if anyone else notices this transformation. All are calm, but I know what I see. Before David pockets that stone into his sling, I slink out of striking range and quietly leave the situation for others to handle.

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Janice Keller Kvale is an Austin poet who is an avid traveler.

## The Cat, the Woman, and a Comment About a Man

by Jeanne Guy

What did I notice today? I'm in Italy. What's not to notice?

I keep thinking about the cat, the large golden-striped cat in the street, stretched out in a doorway near the cloister. I loved the way he appeared so unconcerned with

anything going on around him—his back legs and long tail draped down over the stoop he lay in, head held high, eyes closing periodically. He remained poised as I asked and he nodded permission to take his photo.

As a side note, I later noticed a man, a tall man with squeaky shoes in the cathedral—the “please-silenzio” cathedral. But what took me by surprise most of all was the woman; She Who Swam Solo in the water (cold I’m assuming) below the promenade in Sorrento. There was a sense of calm about her, ease in her movements, the simple strokes she took exemplifying such courage, in my opinion, to be swimming on a chilly November afternoon.

She created a moment for me, a picture of She Who Knows What She Chooses. It was as if I knew what was important to her. She who, like Mr. Golden Cat, cared not what others thought but rather remained focused on her own needs. So in love with the day, these two!

Ah! Of course. I see the connection now, one of being present not just to the moment but the moment created by and important to *them*. Now there’s a blog in the making, “The Contented Cat and the Solo Swimmer.” I find myself smiling as I write. What else I may have seen today has gone by the wayside. My notes, my photos—all have been pared down to these two. How could this be? Surely, I won’t get the always sought-after “A” for today’s assignment regarding observing, for noticing. But remarkably, I am content and do not care.

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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 to reframing the way you see yourself through reflective writing. Her memoir, *You'll Never Find Us*, the story of how her children were stolen from her and how she stole them back, will be published in 2021. Get to know Jeanne and read her sometimes irreverent [blog posts](#).





# Writing at a Writer's House

by Linda C. Wisniewski



On weekday afternoons from March to November, writers converge on a 50-acre farm in rural Pennsylvania to work on their memoirs. Since 2010, I have been lucky enough to be their guide in the very spot where Pulitzer and Nobel laureate Pearl S. Buck wrote most of her novels and other works after leaving her childhood home in China in 1935.

Our class meets inside her 1825 barn, now called the Cultural Center, where her family once kept Guernsey cows and hosted Boy Scout, Girl Scout, and 4-H meetings, parties for wounded soldiers during WWII, and even a temporary kindergarten for the overcrowded local school district. In a large high-ceilinged room that was once a basketball court for her children, my students write at tables with a view of well-tended gardens. Pearl Buck's portrait hangs larger than life above a stage at one end of the room.

Her legacy lives here, at Pearl S. Buck International, a nonprofit whose mission is intercultural education and humanitarian aid. In this room, I helped compose questions for a Taking Action tour of her stone farmhouse a few yards away. As a volunteer docent, I engage guests in conversation about her human rights work and its relevance today. I think she would be pleased with that, and also to see, 47 years after her death, men and women from their mid-30s to their 80s, writing at her home. Like my students, she wrote from her own life experience. And like their lives, it wasn't always pretty.

She wrote *The Good Earth* in China after almost losing her life in a nationalist uprising. Her daughter had the mental capacity of a preschooler until she died in her 70s. Her Reno divorce from her first husband, John Lossing Buck, and marriage on the same day to her publisher, Richard Walsh, was a scandal in 1935. Walsh died twenty-five years later,

after a stroke and seven years of resulting disability that required a private duty nurse in their home. She saw her biracial adopted daughters experience discrimination in the 1950s. Her first novel was rejected by many publishers, and even though her writing became extremely popular, it was criticized as simple and moralistic. When she won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1938, Robert Frost (who was nominated eight times and never won) remarked, "If she can get it, anybody can." William Faulkner wrote to a friend that he would rather not win it (he did) than be in the company of "Mrs. Chinahand Buck." In later life, her reputation suffered from romantic entanglements that would be tolerated with amusement in aging male celebrities.

She wasn't perfect, but she used her voice to advocate for others. I think she'd be pleased to see people gathered in her renovated barn to write their own struggles. People like Nam, a Korean American business owner, who tells of watching his wife and young children sleep through the night on the long plane flight to America as he wonders if he has done the right thing. And Daphne, a beautiful blond flight attendant who visited Hotel Rwanda and wondered if the young man giving her a tour had suffered through the genocide. People like Lee, who rode a train to Oak Ridge, Tennessee at the start of WWII to work on the Manhattan Project as a young engineer, not knowing what his top-secret assignment would be. And Karen, who watched her young husband die of AIDS while keeping the cause a secret.

On quiet afternoons in Pearl Buck's barn, I hear the scratch of my students' pens on paper and feel the energy of their stories buzzing in the air. I glance at her portrait on the wall and imagine her speaking. "Good job," she says. "Keep going."



**Linda C. Wisniewski** lives with her retired scientist husband and their rescue cat in Bucks County, PA. Her work has been published in numerous literary magazines both print and online. Her memoir, *Off Kilter*, was published by Pearlsong Press when she was 62, and her debut novel at age 73, *Where the Stork Flies*, is forthcoming from Sand Hill Review Press. Linda has been a member of SCN since 1999. She blogs at: <https://lindawis.com>. You can find out more about "Writing the Stories of Our Lives," Linda's 2020 series of nine classes for memoir writers, at this link: <https://lindawis.com/upcoming-events>.



# Writing Tips from Our Teachers

In every *Journal*, our Online Classes Coordinator, Len Leatherwood, brings us wisdom and support from an SCN teacher. This issue features instructor Andrea Simon, who touches on a perennial issue for women who write.

## Writing About Your Mom Without Guilt

by Andrea Simon

In the 1960s, there was a famous television commercial for Anacin pain reliever that featured an aproned female stirring a liquid-filled pot at the stovetop. After a hovering older woman suggested adding a little salt from a shaker (that she happened to have handy), the younger one screamed, “Mother, PLEASE, I’d rather do it myself!”

There were many reasons why this angry response struck a familiar note in the American zeitgeist, no more so than it captured the prevalent theme of mother/daughter resentment and independence sprouting from the nascent feminist movement. I was a member of a consciousness-raising group in the 1970s, and the most recurrent discussion topic was “How I’m like (or Unlike) My Mother.” We were a generation obsessed with our maternal ties, no matter how tightly they were pulled.

My mother, like her mother before her, was often outrageous and provocative. I spent a great deal of my youth either being embarrassed by her frank, outspoken behavior or overcome by her intelligence and beauty. And when I eventually became a writer of fiction and literary nonfiction, my sights were focused on my best subject: my not-always-willing mother. She too longed to be a writer, but financial pressures got in her way. Her pride in my work often conflicted with her own frustrated ambitions.

When I was trying to sell my first novel, she called me and said, “I just read the worst book.” I lay on my bed, preparing for a diatribe. Instead, my mother calmly said, “This book was so bad. I just can’t understand why yours isn’t published.”

It could have been worse. Novelist and critic Daphne Merkin wrote: “When I rushed home to impart the news that a piece of fiction I’d written had been accepted by *The New Yorker*, she [my mother] said, “Your nose looks big when you smile.”

As a teacher and member of a longtime writing group, I read many stories of familial dysfunction and, yes, function. After conducting an online course on “Writing

About Your Family” for the Story Circle Network (SCN), a Texas-based women’s group featuring writing and reading circles, I felt it was time to spotlight the mother/daughter relationship in earnest. When SCN asked me to teach a workshop at their national conference in the summer of 2018, I called it, “My Mother, My Muse — Writing About Your Mom Without Guilt.” I crossed my fingers that the more polite women from the South and Midwest would be as forthcoming as my New York cohorts—and that, frankly, someone would sign up.

Six brave women in their 50s and 60s ambled into the conference room and gathered around a circular linnen-skirted table, complete with their plastic water bottles, coffee mugs, and legal pads. I stood in front of a long rectangular table, topped by a cardboard-backed flip chart, the smallest one I could conceal in a canvas art case. At least, I consoled myself, I didn’t have to worry about the technical failure of a PowerPoint presentation. I could hide behind a photo of my mother and me on the cover of my flip chart, protecting myself from the wrath of feminine criticism.

I introduced the group to my mother with a few crazy anecdotes; the women laughed and nodded. I then handed out sheets, entitled “Fill in the Blank” with ten items, including: “I am most like my mother in \_\_\_” and “If I could speak to my mother now, I would tell her \_\_\_” and “One of the most embarrassing things my mother ever said or did was \_\_\_.”

I gave the group a ten-minute time limit, and within seconds, I heard groans. One Texan woman, yelled, “Oh, here we go.” The writers didn’t look up until I announced the time. Unfortunately, I didn’t save the worksheets; the women took them to complete at home. But I do recall one woman from Colorado who read her completed response to “I can never understand why my mother \_\_\_.” It was, “said she was sorry she had me.”

Wow, that was unexpected. This was not a therapy group, yet the answers were deep and primal. Sure, these

women often admired their moms, but their anger and resentments were simmering, desperate to find their way to the page. Now in a safe, nonjudgmental space, they could explore (without guilt) the writerly issues of emotional boundaries and the worth of personal truth.

The time flew by with the women responding to other exercises and recounting their mother/daughter experiences. With 20 minutes remaining, I gave them a sheet with six writing prompts. Afterwards, we only had five minutes to listen to a few paragraphs. One woman fashioned her mother's story in the first person as an autobiography. It was a life marked by sadness and regret. I was not the only one to hold back tears.

Three of the workshop women kept in touch. One shared her writing blog; another her success on a novel she introduced in our workshop. The third asked me to edit a piece she wrote about her mother that she was submitting to a magazine. Sometimes, only a short time is required to plant the seeds of connection.

The workshop taught me (or confirmed) many lessons. Women have similar desires and frustrations, no matter their age, stage, or geographical location. This is especially true of female writers who struggle with their sense of isolation, rejection, and need for acceptance — all foundational qualities emanating from the first relationship handed down through the female generational divide. As author Erica Jong said: "What use are all the struggles of your mother, your grandmother, your great-grandmother? Make no mistake, these ancestors are watching you. If you disappoint them, you disappoint yourself."

This article first appeared on the "Women Writers, Women[']s Books" website on January 2, 2020 at <http://booksbywomen.org/writing-about-your-mom-without-guilt/>



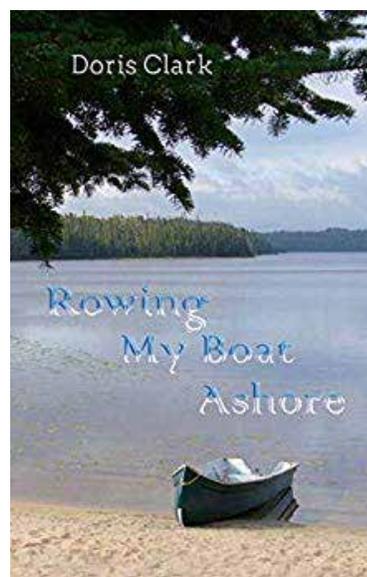
**Andrea Simon** is a writer and photographer living in New York City. She is the author of a memoir/history, *Basert: A Granddaughter's Holocaust Quest*, now in a paperback edition; an award-winning historical novel, *Esfir Is Alive*; and her new novel-in-stories, *Floating in the Neversink*. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the

City College of New York, where she has taught introductory writing and creative writing.



**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.



## A Member in the SPOTLIGHT

by Susan Wittig Albert

Doris Clark, SCN member and author of *Rowing My Boat Ashore*, was recently recognized by the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission in a lengthy article on the Commission's website. <https://www.carnegiehero.org/grieving-mother-thanks-hero/>

In 1993, Doris lost her 16-year-old son Michael when he was caught in the undertow at the foot of a dam on an Illinois river. She wrote her memoir as a way of moving past her devastating grief and sharing her feelings, as a mother, with her other two children. In the book, she devotes a chapter to John Stubner, the man who was severely injured—with long-lasting physical and cognitive repercussions—when he attempted to save Michael. The Carnegie Hero Fund recognized Stubner for his effort by awarding him the Carnegie Medal, given to those who risk their lives while attempting to save the lives of others.

In sharing the story of her son's life and death, Doris not only helped her and her children deal with Michael's loss, but helped the family of John Stubner, whom she met in the hospital. They quickly became friends. "We grieved together," Doris says. "I will always hold all of them dear to my heart."

The Carnegie Commission's recognition of Doris's book is yet another testimony to the healing power of shared story, and to the many ways, often unseen and unknown, that stories can bring us together and forge strong and continuing bonds.



## Our Future is Female!

**Rachel Lock** is a senior at Beacon High School in New York City. She's a member of a synchronized figure skating team, active in Young Judaea (a Jewish youth movement), and an avid reader. Some of her favorite authors include Charlotte Brönte, Sylvia Plath, and Dana Czapnik. Rachel estimates she's watched every episode of 'The Office' at least five times. We're delighted to introduce you to Rachel's wise and skilled writing, and to welcome her into Story Circle Network.

### Different, But Not Tragic Rachel Lock

As I step into the hospital room, fluorescent lights buzz overhead and the odor of illness permeates the area. But I am not bothered. All I'm focused on is showing the new volunteer how to persuade patients to come to the recreational therapy event. Later, while she and I are making guacamole for the kitschy Cinco de Mayo party, I mention that this spinal cord injury unit is the same one that my mom stayed in after her accident. "That's so tragic," she says. "No," I reply, "it's actually not tragic at all."

In my family, I'm the only non-disabled person. My little brother is autistic, my mom is paralyzed from the waist down, and my dad has a rare genetic condition that results in blisters on the soles of his feet. People assume that my life is solely comprised of tragedy and caretaking. They have no clue that, though my life does involve accommodations, overall I've been allowed to be a normal kid.

On a typical day, my family does a few things differently from other families but many things that are exactly the same. In the mornings, before my teenage brother's medicine kicks in, it takes both of my parents to wrangle him into getting ready for school. Once he's up and had breakfast, my mom takes him to our lobby and helps him do his homework while he waits for the bus. In the meantime, I, like every other teenager across America, hold onto every last second of sleep, causing me to have to rush out the door to get to school on time.

When I return home, I often dive into my parents' bed so my mom and I can watch an episode of *Say Yes To The Dress*. After my brother arrives home, my mom prepares

dinner and I start doing homework. When my dad gets home from work, he crumples into bed to rest his feet from the long and painful day of walking. After dinner, also like most teens, I'll continue to work on my homework until my brain feels like mush. When I open the door to say goodnight to my parents, I see my mom doing exercises to strengthen her arms so she can better push herself around in her wheelchair.

On any given day, our lives are pretty typical; it's only when we're doing something out of the ordinary, like going to a museum or out to eat, that our differences are really highlighted. When we're in a museum, I worry about where my dad will sit next. When we go out to a restaurant, we always call ahead to make sure there's a ramp for my mom. Also, if the wait is too long, then we have to find another place so that my dad isn't standing too much and my brother isn't too antsy.

As I'm talking to the newly disabled spinal cord injury patients (and that new volunteer) at the Cinco de Mayo party, I can't help but think of my mom. I see all of these people whose lives have changed drastically and I want to comfort them. I want to tell them that after living for seventeen years with my family, I've learned that even though there are events that are unfair and tragic, life can resume in a new way that's different but not terrible. As I go out into the world on my own as a college student, I'm sure to encounter the unexpected. Every time that I'm feeling lost or unsure of myself, I'll be able to draw from the deep well of experience that has come from my typical-yet atypical-life. I have only as far as the living room to look for exemplary examples of resilience.



# Tammy Delatorre: Winner!

Interview by Len Leatherwood

**Tammy Delatorre**, an SCN member, is a writer living in Los Angeles. She has won a number of prizes, most recently the Columbia Journal's fall 2019 nonfiction contest for her superlative piece entitled, "Mother and the Heart Stones." Here is the link: <http://columbiajournal.org/fall-2019-nonfiction-contest-winner/> We here at SCN are proud for Tammy, and wanted to learn more about her and her winning essay. So we asked some questions.

*Tell us a little about yourself and your writing.*

I obtained my MFA in creative writing from Antioch University, Los Angeles. My stories and essays can be found on my website: [www.tammydelatorre.com](http://www.tammydelatorre.com).

As a writer, I'm always striving to tell a beautiful story. I enjoy writing flash, short stories, poetry, essays, and memoir. I have a day job in public relations. In my leisure time, I enjoy hanging out by the sea. In previous lives, I've worked for a Nobel-prize-winning biochemist; I helped design, build, and race a solar car that won the World Solar Challenge in Australia; and I've danced the hula despite being teased for stiff hips.

*This year you won Columbia Journal's Fall Contest. Tell us a little about that essay and how it came to win.*

The essay, "Mother and the Heart Stones," is about how I chose to break up with my mother in order to continue to love her. She was a complicated figure in my life, who had been in and out of prison, and it was difficult to interact with her without her setting off all kinds of emotional triggers, ones she had been instrumental in putting there in the first place.

This is actually the fourth essay contest I've won. I feel fortunate to have had my writing recognized in this way. One of my mentors said professional writers get paid to write. I didn't want to give these beautiful essays up for free, but many literary venues don't pay, or they

pay very little. I felt contests might be a way for me to earn closer to what I thought the essays were worth, while at the same time refining my craft over the course of many initial rejections.

*Now, you've taken several classes from Story Circle Online over the years. What's been your strategy in taking classes and building up your writing portfolio?*

When I first had the inkling I wanted to write, I thought, wow, this has got to be the hardest thing anyone sets out to do – to say something in just the right way that it captures the sensual detail and emotions of a moment. It dawned on me that it was going to be a lifelong journey. I like having a beginner's mindset toward it, so I'm always learning. I like being exposed to the reading material teachers curate. And I enjoy interacting with other writers. They're my tribe. They think like me and have the same labor of love. I enjoy the community that's formed around Story Circle, and it has helped me to keep writing and keep challenging myself.

*Do you have any words of wisdom for other writers wanting to enter writing contests?*

Writing an essay that wins a contest is not an easy task, but it's not impossible either. I'd say don't be afraid to tackle the hard stuff – the topics and events that scare you. The journey to winning a contest can be long and paved with a lot of rejections, so choose a piece you believe in. And be sure to get feedback and encouragement along the way.

**Excerpt from "Mother and the Heart Stones":**

I'll be 46 soon. I live in Hermosa Beach and often walk with the man in my life down the long strip of sand, picking up shells and stones, stones good for skipping across the sea, stones good for sinking to the bottom of the ocean floor. *Let me fill my pockets and sink.*

A few weeks after one of our walks, I ask the man in my life if we have stones lying around the house somewhere. I know we had brought some up from the beach but didn't know where they had gone.

"I put some in a bucket, out on the balcony," he says.

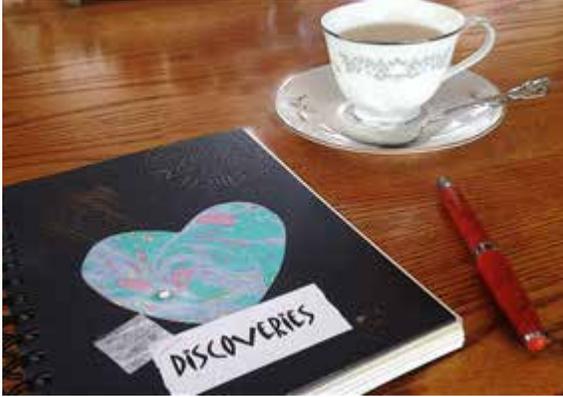
My mind immediately conjures the image of the stones of my youth back in Hawai'i: black and volcanic, worn smooth by the waves, the constant motion of the sea, the endless tumbling of stone upon stone, heart over heart.

"Be careful. There may be spiders," he adds, as I step outside.

I've seen the spiders he's warning me of, red brands on their backs, legs like the ends of pick axes.

On the balcony, I find it's not a bucket, but a clay pot for plants, and he's placed shells on top – tulip, conch, sand dollar and sea urchin. Gingerly, I move the shells so not to break them and finally unveil several stones underneath. They are damp and sandy, made of limestone and sandstone, nothing like the black basalt stones of my youth. I lay them out on the grated seat of a nearby chair. I dust off the sand clinging to their sides.

When I look down at the stones, they resemble the shape of a heart, but broken into pieces. Humpty fucking dumpty, we can't put this back together again. I leave them out on the patio chair to air dry. I'm not exactly sure why I wanted them, and so I leave them. And now I remember the stones are four, and my mother had four children, and we're all flung apart. There are four stones for the four chambers of the heart, but these stones are broken and scattered. She wanted them, but she left them. *Sink or swim.*



# True Words from Real Women

Edited by Jo Virgil, True Words is a selection of short lifewriting pieces by SCN members. The optional theme for this issue is “Building Bridges.” Future topics are listed on the back page. We want to read your writing, be it prose or poetry, so please submit your own True Words to the Journal. (Our coming new website will include an updated submission process. Watch for new guidelines.) [www.storycircle.org/members/frmjournalsubmission.php](http://www.storycircle.org/members/frmjournalsubmission.php)

## Building the Bridge to the Divine

Sharon Steenton – Cumming, GA  
sharon.steenton@yahoo.com

George, your Bridge of Stories contained  
the ugly, painful, broken parts of yourself  
The fire-breathing god of destruction  
haunted you with impossible, unshakable burdens  
Your tender youth was never touched  
with the presence of genuine inspiration.

Living under the Bridge of Loneliness  
you found the abandoned place of your soul  
In 2009 I offered to walk with you across the abyss  
on the invisible bridge that God held out for us  
You never took this treasure,  
this promise of salvation.

Your crumbling Shadow Bridge went nowhere  
as the shape of your heart twisted around  
the cracked spine of the concrete  
and your mind collapsed,  
disintegrating into the ruined beams of steel.

Did you hear the forlorn whistle of a train  
while standing on the burning Bridge of Last Hope?  
An eerie image of you in my mind captures a man  
stretching the boundaries of peace and torment,  
strength and deterioration, faith and failure.

The language of the river can sometimes be read  
in the bridges we build to pass over it  
What consciousness was revealed in the  
sickness and misery you lived? Your meaning  
to life’s secret shape illuminates all who  
stand beside you on the Living Bridge of Humanity.

## Bridges of Change

Connie Spittler – Omaha, NB  
conspittler@live.com

Love arrived without warning, tiptoed in without care  
over bridge, over river, down a long, winding path.  
Love comes in with changes, and then rearranges.  
There were years filled with sunlight and the garden patch grew.  
The green plants that blossomed, gave fruit and then dried,  
showed us ways that change happens as time dances by.  
Love moves like a river. We flow with its change.  
Seasons chased round the sun toward the next bridge ahead  
as kit became cat and cocoon became moth.  
When the seeds became weeds, a dark bridge loomed ahead  
bringing sorrow-edged change on a grey, cruel day.  
Not me nor my loved one, gentle man of my heart,  
Could escape his last venture that called him to go  
to the bridge o’er the river as the water flowed on.  
Now he stands past the bridge looking tall, looking back,  
finding ways to still hold me, enfold me in dreams,  
slipping into my thoughts, running deep through my days.  
There are bridges, more bridges still lying ahead.  
Winding paths yet to follow. Destinations unknown.  
Still love moves like a river. And I flow with its change.

## Restoration

L. Phillips Thune – Austin, TX [lphillipsthune@gmail.com](mailto:lphillipsthune@gmail.com)

Bridges connect  
Riverbank edge to riverbank edge;  
Ink-black crevasses and cracks in the earth’s expanding and  
contracting;  
Deep ancestral canyon walls of limestone, sandstone, and shale—red,  
gold, and brown;  
Gaps between one understanding and another;  
Empty spaces, eliminating fear of invisibility;  
Soul to mind to heart to action.

## Me & Lily

Cynthia Treglia – Austin, TX  
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I have been intimately involved with ten-year-old Lily from the moment she first stirred in her mother's womb with the intention of presenting herself to the world. I remember it like it was yesterday. It began with her initial entrance into this life, right in her parents' bedroom. Mom was acutely intent on each word emerging from the midwife's mouth; Daddy was on one side and I on the other, plying the midwife with olive oil to help our girl slide right into our hearts.

The first moments are surreal, as you don't really recognize the small, strange-looking life form coming into being. I could feel my heart swelling even as I struggled to identify exactly what I was seeing.

Then, slowly, the angel unfurled her wings, opened silent, holy eyes and tiny rosebud lips—and forever captured the hearts of those who beheld this sacred miracle.

That is my Lily and how we began our journey together. She and her parents lived in my home for her first year of existence, and she continues to spend overnights with her Tia, this auntie who loves her madly.

I remember one warm summer day when three-year-old Lily charmed me into letting her sit with me on the porch swing instead of taking her nap. I sang while Lily lay drowsily in my arms, legs dangling off my lap, her head resting gently over my heart. My girl's eyes fluttered a few times as I felt her little body winding down into a sweet slumber. I watched her sleep. Eyelashes resting above plump, pink cheeks, and damp curls forming against her forehead.

We had done this a hundred times, and I realized that this was a fleeting gift, one whose time was limited. So I scooped it up like so many little diamonds scattered on the earth. I continue to hold it close like a precious jewel, and I wear this necklace of Lily around my neck and over my heart to remember that moment and each and every one that we have been blessed with since.

## Standing on the Precipice

Sara Etgen-Baker – Anna, TX  
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In the blinding light of a hot August afternoon, I stood on the edge of a precipice, dangling my toes over the edge. Below me was the River of Time, its depth as clear as a mountain spring. I closed my eyes and felt its coolness scattering droplets in the air. I opened my eyes and glanced down. Its surface was serene and peaceful, but just beneath that surface were violent, swirling currents that would surely whisk me away. I shielded my eyes and looked into the distance. On the other side of the precipice was my future and a transformed, better version of myself. Behind me was my past and my weary, emotionally wounded, disillusioned, and troubled self. Ahead of me was no bridge, no visible means of connecting with a yet unknown and seemingly far-off but hopeful future.

I walked along the precipice, listening to the River for a while and partaking of its wisdom. Moving forward, it said, isn't always good, especially when there's a precipice ahead. Listen to your heart. Know when to step back. Know when to turn back. Sometimes moving backwards is moving forward. Despite my fatigue, I heeded the River's advice and turned around, journeying into my past—not in a nostalgic, escapism way but as a way of discovering my essence, my joy, and finding a renewed purpose.

I flipped through old photographs and scrapbooks, traveling back in time and rekindling memories of days gone by. Some memories were poignant while others were painful, filled with terrible things. I journaled my thoughts, impartially analyzing my past and feverishly searching for meaning and insights that would transform me. I wrote personal essays and memoir vignettes capturing the people, places, and events that shaped me.

And over the years, I've written hundreds and thousands of words, and those words became the foundation, beams, and structure that allowed me to build a bridge across the precipice of personal transformation and over the River of Time.



**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.

## Earth as Educator

Sue Schuerman – Cedar Falls, IA  
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“I haven’t had this much fun since kindergarten,” said a teenager from the correction facility. He eagerly dug holes and gently placed bulbs of daylilies in the dark, rich soil.

“Just wait until you see them flower later in the summer,” encouraged a local businessman as he sprinkled marigold seeds in a row next to the daylilies.

My goal as executive director of a developing botanic garden was to engage people of all ages in intimate communion with nature. Little did I realize what a narrow goal that was.

When I came aboard, several visionaries had already transformed 13 acres of farmland into a blossoming garden. With only five years in the making, the garden grew a few flowers and bushes, no trees. Members of the farm bureau dug their shovels into the ground and planted ginkgo, oaks, and maples—trees that would shade visitors long after the volunteers were gone.

A group of retirees from the telephone company poured cement for sidewalks and built raised beds for people with physical and mental disabilities. The Enabling Garden proved to be a safe and fun place for residents from nursing homes and rehabilitation centers.

It wasn’t long before groups of school children arrived to plant seeds and herb enthusiasts cleared a plot for an herb garden. Groups from a variety of faith traditions spent several days hoeing, weeding, and hauling rocks to form borders around flowerbeds. Local businesses sent teams out to water the beds and to mow the grounds.

An Ethnic Garden shaped like a wheel featured four spokes. Each spoke gave tribute to the diversity and multiculturalism of our area. The four spokes depicted food from our Bosnian, African American, Hispanic and Caucasian communities.

The mission to build the garden had transcended all thought of faith, ethnicity, abilities, or anything that might otherwise separate us. Two years later, we celebrated the opening of the Children’s Garden with a group of enthusiastic volunteers as diverse as the flowers and trees of the garden.

Mother Earth in all her wisdom was, and is, the bridge that connects us for a profound personal and cultural transformation.

## Wind in Her Hair

Mary Jo West – San Clemente, CA  
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I can’t wait to show my friend, Melanie, my new red Beetle convertible. When I arrive at her home, I honk. She opens the door and waves.

“Hey Mel, how about taking a ride with the top down?”

“Absolutely,” she says, as she puts on her pixie-styled wig. Chemo had robbed her of her long, lush hair, but not her sense of adventure.

I push the accelerator to the floor and the car surges. Suddenly, Melanie’s wig flies off her head and soars like a Frisbee over the back of the car. In the rearview mirror, I see a mop of curly, brown hair fluttering in the air, then landing in the middle of the street. I pull over to the side of the road and park. Dashing in between oncoming traffic, I scoop up her tousled wig and bring it back to the car.

“Here Mel—it’s dusty, but it’s still in one piece.”

She shakes it, fluffs it, and slides it back on her glistening bald head.

“Where do you want to go now?” I ask.

“Nordstrom’s.”

Watching her try on lipstick in the cosmetic department, I start to laugh. Neither of us had noticed her wig was on backward.

## Bridges of the Heart

Ariela Zucker – Auburn, ME

Once I saw an aqueduct in the desert,  
channeling water over an arid land.  
Where the water dripped over  
the concrete edge, green life formed  
into tiny miracles of life.

And it made me admire the power of  
small acts of kindness, that like the water,  
can sink into the dry ground and revive.

Caring words stronger than cement,  
can construct bridges from myriad  
airy strands. A web, delicate yet resilient.  
Cords that span over the years,  
will never be reduced to rubble.

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

## Unbuilt

Joan Connor – Kerrville, TX  
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You tried to restructure a bridge. You tore down the original bridge.

He did invite you to the wedding. He did call your mom with condolences when Dad died. Ten years later, Mom died, his maternal grandmother. There were no phone calls, no condolences.

\* \* \* \* \*

After the wedding I wrote The Letter. I was rejected for the final time by a son. How painful at the wedding when his stepmother gave him away. “He’s mine to give,” I wanted to cry out. “He’s mine.”

He was mine once. The darling baby with gangly long legs, a young boy with the most kissable face, a maturing man devoted to football and his dad.

Perhaps, the Beginning of the End was the Divorce.

Perhaps, the Beginning of the End was Divorce Poison.

Perhaps, the End of the End was The Letter.

Bridge building was attempted during those many years of rejection. The high school football games as I stood with other parents cheering the team to victory during the high-five lineup. The academy graduation where he would not come through the gate to say “Hi, Mom.”

The evening after his wedding, where he danced the mother/son dance with his stepmother, I wrote and mailed The Letter exposing my pain and my finality of seeking a relationship with him. The Letter spoke of love, my perceptions regarding his inability to love, and stated that I would no longer be available to ignore.

No more bridges ... No more roads leading to bridges ... No more crossroads where we could meet. I was rejected. He must have felt rejected.

His father then passed away. His stepmother with whom he had a falling out passed away.

\* \* \* \* \*

You send a Christmas card each year. His beautiful family, including grandchildren you haven’t met, live with horses and dogs on their acreage. Through the portals of Facebook, you wistfully observe their paths. You follow their moves throughout the country documenting a current address from whitepages.com.

Can bridges be built over thirty years of desolation, emotional pain, physical separation, unanswered prayers? You are asking ... and hoping.

## Passing the Baton, AKA Turkey Baster

Pat LaPointe – Prospect Heights, IL  
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Although we had many relatives who could easily have hosted a holiday meal, Mom insisted on having Thanksgiving. During my childhood and for many years after, our table was filled every year with turkey, mashed potatoes, mashed sweet potatoes, corn, fried chicken, stuffing, a pork roast, and—until we convinced her that the pilgrims were not Italian—lasagna.

When she was in her mid-70s, I finally convinced her to pass the baton and allow me to host the holiday. She saw my table with its turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, mashed sweet potatoes, corn and a pork roast, and did little to hide her disappointment. Years went by before she stopped asking: “Are you sure you have enough?”

Three years ago, one of my daughters took over Thanksgiving dinner preparation. She, as well as her three sisters, are best described as minimalists. Turkey and sweet potatoes served, no mashed potatoes or stuffing. Corn replaced by a large salad. No other meat. And absolutely no lasagna.

It’s a good thing Mom is no longer with us. The poor woman would surely have had a panic attack, worrying we might starve.

## Foundation

Jan Meyer – Cedar Park, TX  
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When we were young we built a bridge  
with everything we found.  
So hungry were we to connect our hearts, we forgot  
about solid ground.

Our bridge appeared quite strong  
And rarely needed repair.

We crossed it daily with little thought.  
Made subtle changes with distractions we bought,  
Ignoring our bedrock of air.

The crumbling began quite slowly,  
under pressure from fierce thunderous winds.

We possibly could have rebuilt it  
If only we’d still been friends.

## Letting Go

Betsy Boyd – Maryville, TN Bboyd2153@outlook.com

My favorite “Sex and the City” episode features Carrie stepping out of her comfort zone and trying something novel—learning how to fly from one aerial swing to be caught by a trapeze artist on another. It’s a daunting feat for a novice—hanging by the backs of her legs, swinging high above Manhattan, syncing her movement with the trajectory of the guy on the other swing, taking a leap of faith that the professional will catch her, and letting go. Hence a safety net!

Anyone who has a parent diagnosed with dementia knows how Carrie felt, hanging upside down, flying in unnatural space, afraid of what might come next and hoping, praying, for a rescue. The delusions that can result when the brain becomes scrambled can be mystifying to caregivers. My mom’s current obsession is a pair of glasses she believes she owned for two-and-a-half days, then lost. She describes them in detail and is on a mission to find them—except they don’t exist. She could only have purchased glasses if one of my siblings or I took her, and none of us has. But Mom cannot let go of her search for the phantom specs.

Baffled by this whole weird unreality of the “missing” glasses, my siblings and I fluctuate between playing along and trying to convince her that there are no missing glasses. Everywhere we take Mom, she inquires about them. We once made a list of places to look for them, thinking that once we checked off every location on the list, she would see that there are no missing glasses. Instead, she just thought of places to look where we had never been. Currently, we are reinforcing the fact that there are no glasses. That just angers and frustrates her, understandably. It is a delusion mysteriously emerging from a brain that is slowly but assuredly disintegrating.

Since she is not capable of letting go of the hunt for lost glasses, I’m letting go of my need to have my practical-minded mom back. So today, while we are at her geriatrist’s office, she’ll ask him if her glasses are there. And like Carrie’s fictional savior, he won’t be able to catch—or recapture—her logical mind. But his compassion and kindness will be her safety net.

## Only in a Small Town

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

It was eight o’clock in the evening on the day before Thanksgiving, and I was busy making stuffing, when I got a call from our local butcher’s wife.

“Hi, Mary Jo, this is Barbara. Did you forget something today?” she asked.

“No, don’t think so.” I paused for a moment. “Oh no! I

## Being DD in a DD World

Debra Dolan – Vancouver, BC debradolani958@gmail.com

I love being called “DD.” It is simple, sweet, easy to learn and remember, feels affectionate, and makes my heart sing with joy each and every time I hear it. There is an element of birdsong in its rhythm as these double-digit alphabet letters roll off the tongue. Friends have now adopted it and I hear it often. Being known as DD is now part of me.

I officially became one in 2017 when my partner’s daughter and husband were searching for names distinguishing the three grandmothers in their newborn’s life. Without ever having been a mother, I am now a granny—the great joy of being with my darling man. While he co-parented a daughter, who now has her own child, I was reading, writing, walking to my heart’s content; traveling; grieving fruitless love affairs, missed employment opportunities or an estranged family; and, quite frankly, doing exactly as I pleased for over 35 years. I knew not what I was missing—the deep pure intemperate love for a child.

I have become playful and silly—learning whimsical songs and dance moves, new games, and re-reading my own 1960s favorites while discovering new children’s authors. I am completely besotted with the honeyed magical curly-topped human being who calls me DD: “Good morning, DD.” “I love you, DD.” “I know, DD, I know.” “DD, watch me!”

Only when I became one myself did I come to discover that this acronym was also an abbreviation or slang word meaning very different things to different people at different stages in life and in different situations. The numerous meanings of DD can only be determined after understanding the context of how and why it is being used—banking, travel, love, Twitter, SnapChat, Instagram, and a darker sexual side on the intranet.

As the expression DD evolves into hundreds of new slang terms, abbreviations, or meanings in our ever-changing technological and social media surroundings, it is my hope that one day, perhaps when she herself is my age, she can remember her childhood fondly and say with every fiber of her being, “I was loved by my DD!”

forgot to pick up the turkey I ordered, and I’m having 20 people here for dinner tomorrow.”

“Don’t worry, I put your turkey in our refrigerator. We’re closed, but if you can come down now, I’ll wait for you.”

Only in a small town would this happen.

## The Encounter

Lucy Painter – Williamsburg, VA  
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I was on a last-minute errand to the grocery store three days before Christmas when I felt it—a shove from behind. Someone pushed against me, hard enough to let me know I was in the way. An impatient shopper, panicking about the holiday rush? Someone anxious to find the candy aisle where a sale on Hershey Kisses promised some afternoon sugar highs?

Avoiding the burly man in hunting clothes ahead, a scowl on his face, I planted my feet and turned around. Behind me sat a tiny woman in a power chair, one of those designed to enable customers who had trouble walking. Sometimes these chairs beeped when the rider backed up, but I had no warning.

A small, wizened face peeked out from the huge hat teetering on her head. Wisps of gray hair escaped. Dark eyes, clouded with cataracts, looked up at me. Was I going to scold her for almost toppling me over?

“Oh my, dear,” she said. “I’m so sorry, but I don’t know how to stop this thing. It just goes where it wants.”

There she sat, eyes wide with confusion, lost among the crowd of wailing infants and whining toddlers, exhausted parents, and harried clerks. No one paid any attention to her, including me, until her chair shoved into my rear end.

We looked into each other’s faces and began to laugh. Standing amid the shoppers, some shooting irritated glances at us, we laughed at the silliness of it all. A chair that goes where it wants, a store crowded with grouchy people who are supposed to be merry, and a tiny old lady navigating the sea swarming around her, invisible in that far-too-big chair.

We didn’t care if others stared. We had found each other in the madness, two more people in an overflowing store. And we had to laugh.

I walked home that afternoon with a light heart. Gone was the frustration that comes with the overblown holiday. Instead, two fellow humans shared a recognition of each other, a connection that, like her disobedient chair, goes where it wants.

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“Somehow, there’s an idea out there that “real” writers are inspired, and that the rough, spontaneous page is more effective than the revised, reworked, rethought, revisioned page. For me, editing is a process of discovery: there’s always more in the text than we know. It takes time to learn what else is there.”

— Susan Wittig Albert

## The Language of Touch

Carolyn G. Foland – Sacramento, CA  
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Touch conveys a meaning that can be hidden from what someone’s eyes or words convey.

Touch says “I love you” or “I want to hurt you.” Touch applies a soothing ointment, softens a tight muscle, stimulates desires or causes fear.

Touch can heal a child with a cleft palate or leave a bruise.

A touch brings us back from the brink of danger or pushes us into its path.

Sometimes touch is a warning. We feel someone withdraw even if they still hold us or their grip hurts as it holds. We absorb new tension without knowing why.

Touch can be violent, kind, calming, or joyful. We can hold sadness within our arms or give it away.

Touch is there when words fail, when all else is lost, when we are broken, or when we try to hide a cascade of emotions.

Touch quiets a baby, says goodbye, causes pain, or seizes unreturned pleasure. Touch releases carelessly or draws a loved one near.

Touch is never silent.

## Vespers

Nan Clarke – Raleigh, NC  
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Slowly, I sip the sunset  
 Blood orange, rinds of lemon slice across the sky,  
 Infused with milk blue remnants of the day  
 Breath of wind whispering the sweetness of the hour  
 Its feathery touch upon my skin  
 This day—well-lived; I, acutely present  
 Deeply aware of the pulse of life  
 That joins me with the universe

Slowly, I savor the honeyed warmth  
 Radiating from sand  
 Baked a glowing, golden brown from all day sun  
 My heart ignited by engulfing love  
 Powerful arms that cradle my soul  
 Passing me to the tender care of my great Unknown

Slowly, I inhale the salty sea  
 Pungent, sweet balm to the core of my being  
 I feel it move through me, expanding  
 Pushing upward, outward in a lingering sigh  
 Sliding me into the gray linen of day’s end  
 Becoming black, velvet night

## Woolworth's Lunch Counter

Jane Gragg Lewis – Laguna Niguel, CA  
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February 1960:

Daddy is finishing his over-easy eggs and looking at The Charlotte Observer.

"Hmmm. They stayed till closing," he says. I think he's talking to himself.

"Who stayed where till closing?" I ask him.

"In Greensboro. Four black students at A&T College sat down at the Woolworth's lunch counter. They didn't get served, of course, but they sat there till closing."

"Why?" I ask.

"It's a civil rights thing. A peaceful sit-in. They want the right to eat there and other places."

Daddy doesn't understand my question. I remember my days of Mama dragging me downtown to go shopping and eating turkey and dressing for lunch at Woolworth's. But now I'm almost 14, and my tastes are more sophisticated. These days I much prefer burgers and BBQ at BBQ King, pizza at the Italian Kitchen, or hot dogs at Howard Johnson's.

"No, Daddy," I tell him. "That's not what I mean. I know all that. What I don't understand is this: Why in the world would they want to eat at Woolworth's?"

## Miraculous Bridge

Marian McCaa Thomas – Leawood, KS  
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We teachers were planning lessons for our Vacation Bible School's four- and five-year-olds on the theme "Jesus's Miracles."

One teacher asked, "Do you think we should include the story about Jairus's daughter? It might upset the children, since the little girl dies."

"I think it'll be OK," I said, "because the children know that sometimes pets die, or grandparents die. They won't be shocked by death."

I created a simple tune, got out my guitar, and sang the story to the children, verse after verse. They listened with rapt attention. They loved the ending, when Jairus's daughter was brought back to life by Jesus.

A week later, Jimmy, one of the five-year-olds, was playing outside with a friend. They were swinging golf clubs "borrowed" from his father. Jimmy's friend misjudged his swing, and hit Jimmy hard in the back of his head, just above his neck. Jimmy dropped to the ground, unconscious.

His family was gathered around his hospital bed the next day, praying and hoping that Jimmy would come out of the coma. His grandmother had been one of the teachers planning lessons for Vacation Bible School, and she was part of this anxious group. Slowly Jimmy's eyelids fluttered, eyes opening wide as he looked around at each of them. He smiled and exclaimed, "I'm just like Jairus's daughter!"

Everyone but his grandma was mystified by these words, so she explained why he had said them. When she told me what had happened, we agreed that the Bible's words had come alive for Jimmy in the most amazing way. I was glad we had decided to share that particular story with the children, and was reminded of the book I had studied in my high school Sunday School class, *The Bible Speaks to You*, by Robert McAfee Brown. Surely the Bible's words span different circumstances, cultures and centuries, a bridge inviting us to go across.

Jimmy had crossed that miraculous bridge.

## Passing Friends

Karen DeFranco – Twinsburg, OH  
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He buries his wife today,  
this glorious, sun-filled  
blue sky, summer day.  
Will he remember it that way?

We are dog-walking friends:  
he with two small shelties  
me, with my scruffy mix.  
We converse on sidewalks.

He is always smiling  
very pleasant and cordial  
but I do not know him  
beyond the surface chat.

She was always housebound.  
Never having laid eyes on her  
I thought about asking,  
could I meet her, visit her.

She likes dogs, I like dogs ...  
But he seems very private  
And I never asked.  
And now she is gone.

I want to ask him up to the porch,  
for a glass of wine in neutral space  
away from where he was caregiver,  
where life's rhythm is upended.

Could he tell me about their lives  
about his love and struggles  
about long term grief, and relief,  
and just maybe, start to heal.



## From the Blogs: Telling Herstories

### Seeing Darkness in a Whole New Light

by Tina M. Games

My transformational work with creative mothers and spiritual artists came out of my own experience of connecting with the moon during a really dark period in my life. Shortly after the birth of my first child, and after making some fairly significant life changes at the same time, I fell into depression – a place that felt so foreign to me, a place where I felt like I had fallen into a black hole with no way out.

It was during this time, a period that spanned over two years, that I had disconnected from everything that made me happy. Because my son suffered from chronic illnesses related to serious colds and severe ear infections, I made a very difficult choice to give up a successful career in order to care for my son full-time. I hadn't realized until this experience how much of my identity was tied into my chosen path of work. Without it, I felt very lost and very unhappy.

No one understood the pain I felt – except my mother. She was the one person I could speak to without censoring myself – and she became my confidante from that point on.

I also found myself falling back on a great passion of mine – journal writing. And as a mom of a baby who did not have a normal sleep schedule, I found myself exhausted and emotional much of the time. So night after night, after I'd get my son settled and after my husband went to bed, I'd grab my journal and retreat to my favorite chair – beside a big bay window where I caught a glimpse of the moon. It was the moon that taught me the meaning of transition. I'd watch this beautiful lunar goddess, night after night, move in and out of her various phases. And before long, I began to connect her phases with my own emotional tides.

I noticed that the moon always began in darkness and gradually, she'd move into full light – and cycle back around again. And I noticed the contrast between dark and light – the darkness of the night sky against the beautiful full moonlight. I started connecting to this – as if I was being divinely guided through my own transitions of dark and light. I began to notice the ebbs and flows of my emotions. There were good days and bad days.

So when I came to the point of writing my book, *Journaling by the Moonlight: A Mother's Path to Self-*

*Discovery*, I wanted creative mothers to realize that every human transition begins in darkness and gradually moves into light, where we get a glimpse of what is possible. And then we retreat, to ponder the many ways we can manifest these possibilities into reality. This requires deep work, where we step into our own truth and into our own power – and where we can emerge in the most authentic way possible.

This is what I call the **Blue Moon** phase – when we finally realize that we are here on this planet to be WHO we are, to put our personal thumbprint on the world in the most truthful, most authentic, most unique way possible – being divinely guided on our own purposeful path.

As creative individuals, we have the power to create great change in the world through our artistic endeavors. And this change has the most impact when we begin with ourselves – looking in the mirror and honoring the person who is staring back.

- WHO is this person? Do you really know her at her core? If you were to remove every label that she wears – mother, wife, partner, community leader, business owner, loyal friend, etc. – who is she?

- Pretend for a moment – that each of these labels is a blanket. Slowly remove each blanket, acknowledging the label it represents and set it aside. Continue doing this until you have no more labels except – SELF.

- Who is SELF? Take a moment to describe SELF from the inside out. How do you feel when you're not bombarded by what the world thinks you should be? What are your passions? What are your dreams? What makes you come alive? How does this person – from the inside out – want to show up in the world?

These are great questions to ponder in your journal, allowing yourself to answer them – truthfully and completely.

When we start chipping away at the exterior labels, what do we look like on the inside? What is our “diamond in the rough?” Once we discover this, we've connected with our authentic self. And it's from this place where purposeful, powerful, and magical masterpieces are created.



**Tina M. Games** is the author of *Journaling by the Moonlight: A Mother's Path to Self-Discovery*. As a certified creativity and life purpose coach, a master retreat leader and certified journal writing facilitator, she is the “Moonlight Muse” for women who want to tap into the “full moon within” and claim their authentic self, both personally and professionally. Tina lives on Cape Cod in Massachusetts with her husband and their two teenagers. Learn more at: <http://www.themoonlightmuse.com>

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 <p><input type="checkbox"/> This is a gift membership</p> <p>My name and address:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <p>My phone and e-mail:</p> <hr/> <hr/>	<h2>Join the Story Circle Network!</h2> <p><b>Annual Membership if receiving printed, mailed publications:</b></p> <p>_____ Canada &amp; Mexico: \$90 (International MO)</p> <p>_____ International \$95 (International MO) <span style="float: right;">3/2020</span></p> <p>_____ Annual Membership (US) for receiving <i>printed</i> publications: \$70</p> <p>_____ Annual Membership (US) for receiving <i>online</i> publications only: \$55</p> <p>_____ Internet Writing or Reading eCircle Membership : \$20/yr (in addition to national dues)</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>City _____ State _____ Zip _____ - _____</p> <p>Phone _____</p> <p>Email _____ Amount enclosed _____</p> <p>Become a supporting member and help Story Circle Network grow. Check here:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$90 Friend    <input type="checkbox"/> \$150 Supporter    <input type="checkbox"/> \$250 Sustainer    <input type="checkbox"/> \$400+ Benefactor</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$125 Donor    <input type="checkbox"/> \$200 Contributor    <input type="checkbox"/> \$325 Patron    <input type="checkbox"/> \$125 Organizational Membership</p>	<p>Make your check to Story Circle Network 723 W University Ave #300-234 Georgetown, TX 78626</p>
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# The Susan Wittig Albert LifeWriting Competition

**OPEN SEPTEMBER – OCTOBER, 2020**

SCN is pleased to announce the return of our lifewriting competition. The **twentieth** annual contest, named in honor of our founder, best-selling author Susan Wittig Albert, will once again recognize the powerful significance of women's lived experiences and the value of writing about them. We invite you to think about your entry now!

### **Topic: *Listening to Myself***

“Instinct is a marvelous thing. It can neither be explained nor ignored.”  
— Agatha Christie

“Practice listening to your intuition, your inner voice; ask questions; be curious; see what you see; hear what you hear; and then act upon what you know to be true. These intuitive powers were given to your soul at birth.”  
— Clarissa Pinkola Estés

“... if I stop to think about it in an abstract sense, I feel very daunted. I just try to enter into the story and feel my way through it. It's a very murky, intuitive way of going about it.”  
— Jhumpa Lahiri

Has there been a time in your life when you thought you knew what you needed to do, but your instinct kept telling you to go a different direction? Did you wind up “trusting your gut”? And if so, did your hindsight later validate your decision? If you didn't listen to your instinct, did you have regrets? In 1200 words or less, please share your story with your sister writers. This is how we grow.

Rules, awards, and entry information are here: <http://www.storycircle.org/Contests/index.php>

## Story Circle Network, Inc.

723 W University Ave #300-234,

Georgetown TX 78626



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## You Are Awesome!

During 2019, the 14 members of our SCN Board of Directors donated a whopping total of **1,530** hours to Story Circle projects. Their gifts of time, energy, and experience are priceless. Independent Sector (which publishes research important to nonprofit organizations) estimates that the current value of volunteer time is **\$25.43** per hour. **A big *Thank You* to our Board for donating the equivalent of \$38,908 in the past year!**

If you're ready to help SCN grow into the future, please consider joining this awesome group of women. Details are here: <http://www.storycircle.org/members/boardservice.shtml>

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### True Words from Real Women Looking Ahead

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

June 2020: **Quiet Time** (Due April 15)

September 2020: **A Family Secret** (Due July 15)

December 2020: **I Thought I Knew** (Due Oct 15)

Send us your life stories and poems:

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

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### CONGRATULATIONS to Marian McCaa Thomas!

Randomly selected from among this issue's True Words and Circle Voices authors, Marian 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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### A Special LifeLines Women's Writing Weekend

Learn and grow with the renowned  
KATHLEEN ADAMS in Denver!  
See details on page 5.