



Story Circle Journal

Volume 2 Number 3, Summer 1998

The newsletter for women who have stories to tell...

A New Chapter in Our Story

Beginning this fall, the Story Circle Network will open a new chapter in its story: what we are calling (at least until we think of something better) the *Austin Circle Chapter* of the Story Circle Network. We'll be announcing an organizational meeting some time soon. We hope the new group will be getting underway—holding meetings, offering programs, recruiting members, and sponsoring Story Circles in the Austin metropolitan area—by early next year.

“Well, that’s all very interesting,” you may be saying, “But I live in Pittsburgh (or Lafayette IN or Boise ID). A new Story Circle chapter in Austin TX doesn’t have much to do with me.”

We beg to differ. We hope that our Austin chapter, the first local chapter in the country, will have a lot to do with women in Pittsburgh, or Lafayette or Boise, or wherever you are! We hope that its example will inspire you to open your own new chapter of the Story Circle Network. Wouldn't it be fun to get together with a group of like-minded women once a month to share stories, trade book titles, learn and practice new writing tricks, and celebrate the fact that we are women with tales to tell? Wouldn't it be wonderful to be able to create several local groups like the one Jean McGroarty describes on page 14 of this newsletter? And wouldn't you learn a great deal from classes and programs designed especially for women who want to share their experiences? Who knows—a new Story Circle chapter might just help you open a new chapter in your own life!

Over the next few issues of the *Journal*, we'll be keeping you posted on the progress of our new chapter. Once we've started meeting on a regular basis and members begin to tell their friends what an exciting group this is, we expect to grow . . . and grow . . . and grow! We are looking forward to a time when the chapter will sponsor a variety of activities for women with many different interests: small Circles where we can get together in one another's homes and share stories; critique groups for those of us who are interested in publishing our work; reading circles where we can explore women's published stories; lectures and workshops where we can learn more about life writing and story sharing; and social gatherings for members, friends, and families.

If these activities sound like something you would enjoy, stay tuned for further developments. If you live in the Austin TX area, you'll receive our postcard announcing an organizational meeting. (If you can't make the first meeting, we hope you'll be able to make the second, or the third.) If you live somewhere else, perhaps you would like to assemble a dozen friends who share your passion for women's stories and explore the possibility of forming your own Circle chapter. It will take individual initiative and energy to get started, but we'll share what we learn as we go along, and the rewards of our individual effort will be multiplied many-fold.

You'll also be hearing more about organizational details as time goes on: how chapters can be officially recognized and supported by the national organization, how chapter

If you think you can, you can. And if you think you can't, you're right.

—Mary Kay Ash

When I look into the future, it's so bright it burns my eyes.

—Oprah Winfrey



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dues will be handled, and how members will be enrolled at the local level. In addition, we will be developing a packet of program ideas that you can use to get a chapter started in your area.

While all of this planning activity is getting underway, we invite you to write and tell us of your interest in creating a local chapter in your area so we can keep you posted on developments. We hope to create an email network specifically for this purpose, as well as some sort of regular print update on chapter activities, planning and growth. We'd love to include you!

The Story Circle Network

The Story Circle Network—What is it and who are the members?

The Story Circle Network is made up of women who want to explore their lives by exploring their stories.

What can I gain from the Network?

You will receive the following publications, information, and opportunities. These things won't be available all at once—we're just getting started! But as our membership grows, our activities will expand. You'll get:

- ◇ **four issues** of the 16- to 22-page newsletter, *Story Circle Journal*, with ideas for writing additional chapters of your life story, plus poetry and brief personal essays from subscribers
- ◇ **the opportunity to submit your writing** to the newsletter and other Network publications
- ◇ **a network guide** that will allow you to directly contact members with interests and experiences similar to yours (forthcoming, as the Network grows and members send us their information)
- ◇ **a report on the activities of Story Circles** across the country, in each issue of the newsletter
- ◇ **book reviews and a resource guide** listing groups, teachers, and publications that are committed to helping women tell their stories (in each newsletter)

What can I contribute to the Network?

The Story Circle Network is built out of our shared experiences. To it, we hope you will bring yourself and your willingness to share your life and what you have learned from it. If you wish, you may contribute some of your writing (poetry, prose, book reviews—ask for a copy of our writer's guidelines). If you are a teacher or group leader, you are invited to calendar your related events.

We also hope that many of you will decide to participate by leading a Story Circle in your community. It isn't hard, and it's enormously rewarding. Won't you give it a try?

How do I become a member?

That's the easiest part! You automatically become a member of the Network when you subscribe to *Story Circle Journal*. Annual memberships are \$20 in the United States, \$26 in Canada and Mexico, and \$30 elsewhere. You will find a membership form at the back of this newsletter. Please join us and share your story.

*You're on the Net?
So are we!
Visit us at
www.storycircle.org*



Story Circle

STORY CIRCLE is a quarterly newsletter, published in February, May, August, and November. 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.

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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. Unless you send us your new address, we can't guarantee that you'll receive your newsletter!

Creating Your LifeLine

When you first begin writing your life story, one of the most important things you can do is to create a LifeLine—a listing, or calendar, of the most important things that have happened to you in your life.

What is a LifeLine?

Very simply, your LifeLine is a chronological listing of the most important events of your life, with the year and the month they occurred. As you work further with your LifeLine, you will be expanding it to include more information about the significant events and more of the minor events. But a simple list is best to start with. So take a sheet of paper and write “My LifeLine” at the top. On the right side, write a brief caption describing the important events. On the left, write the date. At this point, the year is sufficient. If you think of things out of order, that’s okay—just write them down. You can always go back and reorder your list.

Jean's LifeLine	
1935	I was born
1941	I entered 1st grade
1942	We moved to Norfolk
1944	Dad was killed
1947	Mom remarried
1948	We moved to Florida
1950	I started high school

provides readers with a useful chronological summary of the life story to come. Placed at the end, in an appendix and with page references, it can serve as a handy look-up guide.

—Use your LifeLine to review your life. We all go through a number of stages of growth in our lives: childhood and teen years, young womanhood, mature womanhood, and our senior years. (Women who work

with goddess patterns will recognize the triple goddesses, Diana-Demeter-Hecate.) Each of these stages offers its particular physical, psychological and social challenges. Each one requires us to learn some new and important lessons. Study your LifeLine to see how these life stages have appeared in your life. What events mark the boundaries of each stage? What was important to you in each period? What lessons did you learn? How did you grow?

How Your LifeLine Can Help

A written record of the events of your life will enable you to sort things out in your mind, to recollect important dates, and to create a brief outline of your life story. All by itself, without further expansion, it can become a valuable family document, because it shows important events, places, and dates.

Just as importantly, your LifeLine can also help you to understand more about yourself. As you work with it, writing things down and remembering what happened, you will understand more about what was going on in your mind and heart when you made the choices that shaped your future.

Using Your LifeLine

Once you’ve established your LifeLine, you can use it in many different ways. Here are some interesting ideas— you’ll probably think of many others.

—Use your LifeLine as a simple calendar of your life’s events. Placed at the beginning of your story, a LifeLine

—Use your LifeLine as an outline for your life story. For example, you might choose to write one chapter about each of the important events, telling what occurred, who was involved, why things happened the way they did, and what occurred afterward.

—Use your LifeLine to record important “outer-world” events. The twentieth-century world *is* a global village. None of us can fail to be affected by the events in other parts of our country and in the world—they are part of the context of our lives. You will realize more about yourself and offer more information to your reader if you include some of these global, national, or local events: for example, the Great Depression, Pearl Harbor, the Oakland Fire, or the Great Flood of 1995. Events like these leave their mark on our lives.

MORE TIPS & IDEAS FOR CREATING YOUR LIFELINE

Keep each entry short. You can always expand it later.

Use the first-person voice (I/we). Choose either the past or present verb tense and maintain it throughout. Decide whether you will use phrases or full sentences throughout.

If you can’t remember a date, write down the event and dig up the date later. For the dates of national and global events, try an almanac, the library, or the Web.

Extend your LifeLine to include important events in your parents’ and childrens’ lives—create a Family LifeLine that extends for several generations.

Your LifeLine is a valuable tool. Take plenty of time to develop and edit it. You can add and subtract items all you like—it’s **your** life. (In that sense, your LifeLine won’t be finished until you are!)

Develop a flexible format for your LifeLine that enables you to continue to edit it. A three-ring binder is handy—you can establish a section for the LifeLine and add pages as you need them. Or you might try 3x5” cards, with one entry on each card. Colored cards would enable you to extend and enlarge each entry. A computer, if you have one, makes these tasks much simpler. Any word-processing program will allow you to edit, enlarge, and extend your LifeLine indefinitely.

Well, almost!

The Journaling Page a guest column by **lisa shumicky**

So you've decided to keep a journal? Bet you've already discovered that the hardest thing is staying with it—in the same way (and for some of the same reasons) that it's hard to stay with a diet, an exercise program, daily yoga, and so on and so forth. We asked Lisa Shumicky, our journaling expert and one of the most dedicated journal-ists we know (she even edits a newsletter on journaling) to offer some suggestions for developing the journaling habit. Here are her ideas.

Discipline.

Webster ([Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary](#)) defines it (for our purposes) as “orderly or prescribed conduct or pattern of behavior)

Natalie Goldberg, the guru of freewriting, calls it “showing up at the page.” Susan asked me to consider this topic for this newsletter and these are some of my thoughts.

Coincidentally, just yesterday my neighbor said to my husband (who's addicted to his daily home-delivered *New York Times*), “I don't have TIME to read the newspaper” and I am still filled with disbelief. How can someone not have time to read a newspaper? Maybe not every single word, but definitely a scan, then stopping by articles of most interest. My feeling is that you make time for those things that you really want to do, and that applies to the Diary as well.

So make time for it—
Get up a few minutes earlier.
Stay up a few minutes later.
Take it with you to lunch
or anyplace else you suspect you'll have a few minutes.
Always keep a notebook handy.

Entries don't have to be long. In the “(W)rites of Summer” workshop series I've prepared and am presenting this July/August, I am discussing “simple” journal writing. Start with

1. What's on top?
- 2. What's New and Good?**
- 3. What was the best thing that happened today?**
- 4. What was the worst?*
5. Capture a moment from the day.
- 6. Consult Kay Adams' wonderful book Journal to the Self for more writing ideas.**

Entries don't have to be only your words either.

Cut an illustration out of a magazine and
glue it in your journal.

Make a sketch, no matter how amateurish, to represent your day.

Doodle a cartoon

Transcribe a quote or passage from a book you're reading.

Use stickers, magic markers, crayon!

Put in a movie stub or Polaroid

Make it fun!

Make a commitment to yourself to write a certain number of days
or pages per week. Stick with it. Reward yourself
when you do. Be playful with your rewards....

Set a timer for 10 minutes and write nonstop tick-by-tick.
Then stop and go back to the laundry, the weeding,
whatever. (If 10 minutes is too long, do it for 5.)

If "I have nothing to say" is the root of your lack of discipline, buy a
workshop that's fill-in-the-blank and work your way through it.

Try List Your Self by Ilene Segalove.

Joyce Chapman's Journaling for Joy workbook.

SARK's Journal & Playbook.

If
all
else
fails,
try again.

I guarantee that once you start a regular habit it will feel so
good that discipline won't be a problem....

lisa shumicky is a writer/librarian who coordinates the National Journal Network, a group of committed diarists who share between and among themselves. Annual membership is \$15 and includes a 20-30 page newsletter. For further information, write to lisa shumicky, 32 Fischer Avenue, Islip Terrace NY 11752.

Life with Father

by Susan Wittig Albert

Each issue, in these pages, Susan writes about life-writing. Her articles are designed to help you add chapters to your life story. They will usually take a form similar to the chapters of **Writing From Life**, offering ideas and topics for your writing, examples from the writing of other women, organizational suggestions, and ways to celebrate your creation. If you do all the exercises suggested here, you will have enough material to create one full chapter of your book—the story of your life, to which (we hope) you are

The truth is, in order to heal we need to tell our stories and have them witnessed. "All sorrows can be borne if we put them in a story or tell a story about them," said Isak Dinesen, a writer who had plenty of sorrow and told stories to bear it. The story itself becomes a vessel that holds us up, that sustains us, that allows us to order our jumbled experiences into meaning.

As I told my stories of fear, awakening, struggle, and transformation and had them received, heard, and validated by other women, I found healing. I also needed to hear other women's stories in order to see and embrace my own. Sometimes another woman's story becomes a mirror that shows me a self I haven't seen before. When I listen to her tell it, her experience quickens and clarifies my own. Her questions rouse mine... All this can happen even when our stories and our lives are very different.—Sue Monk Kidd

Writing Your Father's Life



As children and young girls, our lives are dominated by our father—our biological father, or the man who plays the father role in our lives. Even if we grew up in a fatherless household, the father's absence shaped our experience. In fact, psychologists tell us, this relationship is so significant that it can influence our relationships with men well into our adult years. When we tell our life story, our father will be a major character. So let's start this chapter by simply remembering who he was, writing a sketch of his life, as if we were our father's biographer. (If there were several father-figures in your early life, focus for now on the most influential one.)

Here are some questions and suggestions to help you reconstruct your father's life story. It would be most helpful if you wrote this section as factually as possible, focusing on events, dates, and people. Include what you know of his feelings about himself, but set aside your feelings about him for a later piece of writing.

1. What was your father's name? Where was he born and to whom? Describe his physical appearance, his mannerisms.
2. Reconstruct your father's *Lifeline* as completely you can, using the techniques described on page 3 of this newsletter. If there are gaps, do what you can to fill them by consulting with people who might remember what happened and when.
3. Where and in what kind of household did your father grow up? What do you know of his family and his childhood and adolescent years? What do you know of your paternal grandfather, either from your own experience or from family stories? How did your father relate to his mother and father? To his brothers and sisters? How was his life affected by World War I, by the Depression, by World War II?
4. What kind of education did your father have? How did he feel about his education? Did he travel? Had he served in the military? If so, what were his feelings about that part of his life? How did he earn his living? Did he like his work? What did he enjoy doing in his spare time? Did he experience any physical or psychological difficulties or chronic health problems?
5. Describe your father's relationship to your mother and to you (and your brothers and sisters, if you had any) while you were growing up. How much time did he spend with the family? How did he seem to feel about his family?
6. What has happened to your father since you left home? Briefly chronicle the rest of his life story.

When you have thought about these questions and jotted down as much as you can remember, try writing a number of pages about your father's life. Again, try

Your Feelings About Your Father

Fathers come in different shapes and sizes and with different capacities to experience and express father-love. Your father's early family experiences, his emotional and physical health, his relationship with your mother, his ability to find fulfilling work—all these elements played a role in his ability to be a "good" father to his children. They also played a role in your feelings for him, positive or negative. As you write the story of your life, it is important to be clear about how you felt and feel about your father—the first and most significant male in your life.

If you were fortunate enough to have a father who inspired love and admiration, you may not find it hard to write about your feelings. For stories written by women who experienced a healthy, loving father-daughter relationship, you can turn to our *True Words* section and read "One of the Good Guys," "My Real Father," and "Thinking About My Father." In these stories, we see fathers who took seriously their obligations to their daughters, providing them with strong guidance, secure, patient love, and support for their dreams and ambitions.

If, on the other hand, your father inspired such negative feelings as fear, anger, resentment, betrayal, or abandonment, you may not find this part easy to write. I know this first-hand, because my relationship with my father was a deeply troubled one. He was raised in a troubled upper-middle-class family that was plagued by intergenerational discord and rancor. He left home at 16 to escape a domineering mother, was the only child of four who did not go to college, had one business destroyed in the Crash of '29 and lost another during the Depression. He married three times: his mother had the first marriage annulled, his second wife divorced him, and the third was my mother, who stuck with him from their marriage in 1938 to his death in 1988. His work history, during my growing-up years, was erratic. He continued to be dominated by his mother, who frequently interfered in our family affairs. He drank intermittently. If he felt much love for Mother, my younger brother, and me, he wasn't able to express it, either during my childhood or in later years.

Of course, I didn't know my father's troubled personal history when I was a child, nor would it have made much sense to me if it had. Instead, I was caught in a tangle of terrible feelings. Like most daughters, I wanted desperately to please my father and earn his approval and when I could not, I thought the fault was with me. I feared his drinking bouts and his use of physical punishment. I felt that I was somehow responsible for some of the things he did. I adored him as a small child, but by the time I was 10, I had grown to mistrust and fear and even to hate him. I married at 18, to escape.

Writing my father's history, setting down his experiences and problems, helped me as a mid-life adult to make a great deal more sense out of our strained and difficult relationship. For me, it was the beginning of healing, because I could see more clearly what had happened to him and make some informed guesses about how those events and family relationships had damaged his real self. More, I could see that what he had done was not *my fault!* This was the

*My father was often angry
when I was most like him.*

—Lillian Hellman

*To be a successful father there's
one absolute rule: when you
have a kid, don't look at it for
the first two years.*

—Ernest Hemingway

*The life of the father has a
mysterious prestige: the hours
he spends at home, the room
where he works, the objects
he has around him, his
pursuits, his hobbies, have a
sacred character...he
incarnates the immense,
difficult and marvelous world
of adventure; he personifies
transcendence, he is God.*

—Simone de Beauvoir

*Mender of toys, leader of boys,
Changer of fuses, kisser of bruises,
Bless him, dear Lord.
Mover of couches, soother of ouches,
Pounder of nails, teller of tales,
Reward him, O Lord.
Hanger of screens, counselor of teens,
Fixer of bikes, chastiser of tykes,
Help him, O Lord.
Raker of leaves, cleaner of eaves,
Dryer of dishes, fulfiller of wishes...
Bless him, O Lord.
—Jo Ann Heidbreder*

*My father made it possible for me
to be successful as a lawyer and
judge. He gave me the freedom to
choose my direction and offered
(never imposed) his guidance and
experience. Even when I was a
small child, he asked me to think
through my choices and imagine
the consequences: what would
happen if I did this or chose that?
who would be hurt? who would
be helped? My father is my model
of a wise judge and a
compassionate human being:
insofar as I embody wisdom and
compassion, I am his
daughter. —Marilyn Rivers*

*In graduate school I found that I
was viewed first as a woman by
the men with whom I studied.
The nonacceptance of me as a
colleague was the catalyst that
made me begin to question
whether or not daughters could
ever be accepted in the house of
the fathers...I needed to learn
that I was not dependent on any
Father or father for my sense of
my own value as a person, as a
woman, as a scholar, as a
teacher.—Carol Christ*

final knowledge that freed me from his control and allowed me to release my anger at what I thought of as his betrayal.

Take a little time now to write about your feelings about your father, being as explicit and complete as you can in recalling your emotions. One way to go deep into this memory material is to write in the first person voice (the “I” voice) and in the present tense. Here is an example:

I’m seven. I’ve been waiting for weeks for our family vacation, a trip to Grandmother’s. Dad comes home from work and announces that he can’t go—his job is too important. I feel....

Writing in first person and in present tense puts us back into the feelings with a deep, emotional immediacy. On the other hand, if you have too much difficult emotional material to handle, you might want to go to third person, past tense:

She was seven. She had been waiting for weeks for her family vacation, a trip to her grandmother’s. Her Dad came home from work and announced that he couldn’t go—his job was too important. She felt....

It is important to uncover our father-feelings because the father-daughter relationship is a foundation for healthy relationships with other males in our lives. In my case, it wasn’t until I began to understand and deal with my fear and mistrust of my father that I could confront my own failed relationships. If you would like to know more about this process, you might want to read *The Wounded Woman: Healing the Father-Daughter Relationship*, by Linda Schierse Leonard.

Daughters of the Fathers

The phrase “Inner Child” is a familiar one these days. You know what it means, of course: the part of us who is still five years old and wants to play, to be loved, to be cradled, to be pampered. Well, if we have an Inner Child, it stands to reason that we also have an Inner Daughter—and an Inner Father. Author Sara Maitland writes about this phenomenon in an essay called “Two for the Price of One” about her biological father, a mild man who died of cancer.

This [father] is alive and well and rampaging inside me. He never goes away...he is never ill, never weakened, never leaves me alone. He lurks about under other names—God, Husband, Companion, and all those relationships made possible (which is nice) and impossibly difficult and conflicting because of the Father who is in and under and through them all. In my late teens I fled away from my father’s house; it has taken me a long time to realize that I carried with me the Father from whom I could not escape by escaping childhood, from whom I have not yet escaped, and from whom I have had, and still have, to wrest my loves, my voice, my feminism and my freedom. It is this Father that I have hated loving and loved hating.

Like Sara Maitland, I have an Inner Father. He often shows himself to me in

the likeness of my boss, my pastor, my doctor, and God, as well as in the guise of patriarchal institutions like the university, the church, the government, and so on. In fact, it is only recently (now that I have gone through menopause and declared myself, with pleasure, a Crone), that I feel free of his controlling influence. This is because (I suspect) my Inner Father has mellowed and become more gentle, more trustworthy— more like One of the Good Guys. A great deal of the credit for this is due to my journaling and memoir work.

You may want to do some writing about your own Inner Father. Here are some of the questions that helped me to uncover his real identity (a little like Dorothy's discovery of the real wizard of Oz behind the screen) and strip some of his pseudo-authority from him.

1. What is your Inner Father like? Is he untrustworthy, authoritarian, violent, tyrannical, despotic—or calm, gentle, strong, supportive, trustworthy? Does he have a name?
2. How have the men in your life—father, brothers, husbands, lovers, friends, bosses, teachers—mirrored your Inner Father? Choose two or three and explore your relationships. One helpful strategy: a dialogue between you and the Man in Your Life. Ask him to what extent you have projected your Inner Father on him, and whether he thinks the image fits. Ask him how he feels about being viewed as your Inner Father. How do *you* feel about it? How has your Inner Father affected your relationships with men?
3. How have the institutions in your life—the church, education, the government, the corporation—mirrored your Inner Father? Choose one or two and explore your relationships, using the same strategy outlined above. How has your Inner Father affected your relationships with these institutions?
4. How has your Inner Father supported your highest and best hopes for yourself? How has your Inner Father failed in his paternal obligation to you? You might try several dialogues with your Inner Father to help you understand more about this. What can you do to change your Inner Father's attitude and behaviors?

It took a long time, but I am now able to distinguish between my biological father and my Inner Father. A book that helped me is *The Heroine's Journey: Woman's Quest for Wholeness*, by Maureen Murdock. You might find Murdock's guidance helpful in your journey, as well.

Susan explores some of these same issues in her book *Work of Her Own: A Woman's Guide to Success off the Career Track*. You may obtain it for \$16 postpaid from Story Circle Network, PO Drawer M, Bertram TX 78605.

We bear the influences of our parents, but we are not fated to remain merely the products of our parents... There is within us as well the positive and creative aspects of the inner archetypal father which can compensate for many of the negative influences in our actual life histories.—
Lina Schierse Leonard

What we do to survive is often different from what we may need to do in order to live.—
Rachel Naomi Remen

Love doesn't just sit there like a stone; it has to be made, like bread, remade all the time, made new.—
—Ursula K. Le Guin

When I have forgiven myself and remembered who I am, I will bless everyone and everything I see.—
A Course in Miracles

Looking Ahead

Each issue of the *SCJ* is loosely organized around a particular theme. We urge you to submit your brief essays, poetry, and book reviews on these themes, as well as your favorite women's quotations. But we also invite your non-theme writing, so please share! Send for our Writers' Guidelines.

November, 1998—Soul Foods: Food, Cooking and Cooks We Remember (deadline 10/1/98)
February, 1999—The Path of the Artist: Creativity in our Lives (deadline 01/1/99)
May, 1999—Mother, Mother (deadline 01/4/99)

Especially for LifeWriting Teachers....

IceBreakers!

by Dianne Lodge-Peters

Dianne lives, writes, teaches workshops, and breaks the ice in Evergreen Alabama. Last month, we shared her article, "Telling Family Stories." This month, we're delighted to offer Dianne's advice for warming up a group of chilly writers. These exercises in

Sometimes—okay, often, or more times than I really want to count—getting a journaling workshop underway is a Titanic undertaking. Like an iceberg, only a small chunk is visible; the other fourth-fifths lie under the surface, ready to gash open your whole side. I'd come prepared to cajole people into reading from their journals, but I wasn't prepared for their saying they hadn't written anything at all, and showing me an iceberg's worth of cold, white, empty sheets.

Pretending I had no gas to flabber, I asked myself, "Where have I gone wrong?" Were they intimidated by the handout of prompts, probing questions, and directions a journal entry might take? Had I not explained, in glorious detail, that the handouts were not "assignments" but options to carry them through the workshop and even beyond? Had I failed to provide enough examples? How did I poke, pierce, drill, chip, splinter that titanic iceberg threatening to sink my workshopship?

FREEWRITING! Freewriting takes people where they need to go, sometimes whether or not they want to go there. So, here are my "limbering-up exercises" for freewriting, with thanks to Diane Ackerman and Judi Beach.

1. STOP! LOOK! SEE! (sight)

Take a pack of postcards, old Christmas or birthday cards, any cards with pictures—the more colorful and diverse the better. Each participant draws a card blindly and:

(a) In two minutes, list 2-3 things you see, even if it's an image within an image (eg. a face in the rock or flower or moon).

(b) Choose one of the items and "freewrite" for three minutes. Share, listeners jotting down a word or a short phrase that they liked by way of quick feedback to the writer. (That is, no critique as such.)

(c) Repeat as many times as needed.

2. SKIP AND HERBY'S JARS (smell)

Into clean spice jars put mixtures of various spices/herbs in vinegar, witch hazel, and water. (Do not use anything dangerous.) Each jar contains an "unknown," (but do code the jar so you can reveal the concoction later).

List 3-5 things the stuff in the jar smells like. Share.

One of my more successful mixtures was ground cloves in watered-down vanilla extract which produced, the sniffer said, a "perfume like rancid licorice." Other mixtures elicited "electrified cinnamon" and "wet rope with mocha."

3. HANDS DOWN (touch)

Take a blank sheet of paper and draw an outline of your hand with spread fingers on it.

(a) Fill in the outline with words that name everything you touched when you got up this morning.

(b) Fill in the following blank sentences using three of the above everythings: A towel (razor, faucet, etc.) feels like - - - - - . Share, with feedback.

(c) Given a word* written on a slip of paper you draw from a jar, write three lines about that item in three minutes. (Repeat four-five times, sharing with feedback.)

*words like *hair, fabric, wall-paneling, wallpaper, ash tray, slotted spoon, piece of jigsaw puzzle, pear, banana, peach, potato, table knife....*

4. BELL JARS AND PINK SLIPS (hearing)

Given the name of a noisemaker (*bell, siren, chime, doorknocker, whistle, rainstick, alarm clock*) written on folded pink slips of paper:

(a) Mimic the sound the noisemaker makes. That is, spell the sound so you have an "onomatopoeic" word such as *clank, ding, wheeze*.

(b) Associate. List the things that the noisemaker sounds like: *This bell sounds like an impatient duchess. The snapper sounds like a quietly delivered insult.*

5. YUMS AND SUPERNUMS (taste)

Pick a food such as candy, bread, soup (what kind?) and write a memory about it for 5-7 minutes.

In your journal, write what you can remember of your mother's (aunt's, uncle's etc) own personal recipe for (Check the real thing out later.) On what kind of occasion was this dish made? served? in a special bowl? What made this dish special? Take 10-15 minutes for this.

On the surface, these exercises are about using sensory detail in writing. Underneath, though, you can see that the limbering-up exercises are in a sequence, from least to most intimate, from outermost to innermost, from a few minutes to several, from throwaway slips or sheets of paper to the personal journal itself. It's the sequence that, I like to think, saved my workshopship from being sunk by an iceberg.

Books for the Journey

In each issue, we'll review one or more books that teach us something important about women's stories. Some will be related to the theme of the issue, others will simply be books we couldn't resist. If you have a favorite book you'd like others to know about, write for our Reviewers Guide.

Prairie Reunion, by Barbara J. Scot (Riverhead Books, 1995, ISBN 1-57322-582-7).

In the mid-'40s, Barbara Scot's father abandoned his wife and two children and ran off with another woman, leaving behind a mortgaged farm and a pile of debts. He committed suicide in 1950, but his wife Katherine continued to live in the small Iowa town and to attend the Presbyterian Church that was witness to her shame. Years later, Scot returns to the town, to her grandfather's house, and to the farm that her mother defended, to try to understand the truth. What compelled her mother to remain? What compelled her father to flee? What combination of church and land loyalty and family heritage created this singularly American tragedy? As she answers these questions, Scot also movingly discovers a real father: her uncle Jim, who kept her safe and taught her to love nature and the world. Scot's story reminds us that the truth is never simple, and that we are all woven into an intricate web that stretches back into time and deep into community and culture. If you're looking for a book to help you understand a father's abandonment and a mother's determination, this powerful story offers some important insights.



Leaving My

A Journey to Conscious Femininity, by Marion

Woodman, with Kate Danson, Mary Hamilton, Rita Greer Allen. (Shambala, 1993, ISBN 0-87773-896-3)

This book has been around for a while, but we can't think about fathers without thinking about how our relationships with the men in our lives are shaped by the patriarchal culture in which we live. **Leaving My Father's House** offers the personal journeys of three wise women, mapping for us the process of understanding and turning away from the constraints that we must transcend if we are to become individuals, both strong and feminine at the same time. Each woman takes a different journey toward her own truth, each defines herself in different ways as she creates her own house, her own space, her own personal time. Working with dreams, journals, spaces, art, and music, the three women show us how to see our lives and our surroundings as metaphors for the process of interior growth, and teach us to understand how important it is to leave our Father's house in order to build and furnish the home of our own spirits. This isn't an easy book—the narratives are dense and interwoven and the language is influenced by Woodman's Jungian perspective. But for those who want to explore the archetype of the Father's House and its crucial importance in our lives, this is a must-read book.



"I was shaking. So I did have a father. Uncle Jim had tried to keep me safe. He taught me to pursue the lonely questions. Through him I had learned of nature and time. And I never even wrote to him after I left home. When my mother was dead and my grandmother was dead, I moved away, as far away as I could, and I didn't look back for a long time. Guilty anguish sliced through me. In one swift moment I had gone from child deprived to prodigal who had squandered an inheritance not even understood..."—Barbara J. Scot

Father's House:

"What does it feel like to leave your father's house? Or your father-husband's house? How does it feel to look into his eyes and see yourself as the betrayer of the one man who has always trusted you? How does it feel to leave the security of his love even if he never cared who you were? How does it feel to say no to a man to whom you have always said yes? ...And when you find yourself alone in your empty apartment, hearing voices inside you previously thought were outside, do you wonder if finding yourself is all it was cracked up to be? Can you be the person you have always denied?"

—Marion Woodhan

A Story Circle News Roundup

Good stories have the power to save us.... We can all make a difference by simply sharing our stories with real people in real times and places.—Mary Pipher

Story Circles come in all sizes, from an intimate and informal gathering of friends over coffee and notebooks to the larger, more formal organization of a class. Whether your group is large or small, we would love to hear from you. Drop us a note and tell us where you're located, what you are doing, and what you have learned from your Story Circle work. Please give a name, address, and phone number of a contact, so that others may get in touch. Remember: a story about your experience in a Story Circle will help someone else imagine herself in a Story Circle—perhaps one that she has created herself, with your example to guide her and your encouragement to inspire her! Also remember: Story Circles qualify for quantity discount on Writing From Life and free copies of The Story Circle Journal. Write to us for details.

*This update comes from **Jennifer Howdysshell**, who facilitates a journaling group in **Pekin, IL** and plans to teach an Advanced Journalkeeping course at Illinois Central College in the fall. You can write to her at 801 Catherine, Pekin 61554. About the journaling group, Jennifer says:*

For each monthly meeting, one member volunteers to be the 'leader.' She brings in writing topics, writing exercises, ideas for the group to work on together during the two hours of the meeting. This way, each woman gets to have a turn to focus on what interests her, to discuss it with the group, to lead the group in whatever way she chooses... Rotating leadership also gives each member more of a feeling of responsibility and ownership in the group. And it takes some of the pressure off me and allows me to participate as a member and not the "teacher."

*Jennifer reports that her own writing has been boosted by two of her writing partners. One of these is Story Circle member Lisa Shumicky (who writes our own Journaling column). "**Lisa and I take turns creating a 'writing agenda'** of freewrite words, question, topics, and readings to respond to. We work on it over the month, then mail the pages to each other at the end of the month. This is really working out to be a wonderful experience!" Another of Jennifer's writing partners is Story Circle member Barbara Karachalios, who was a member of Jennifer's group until she moved to Virginia. "**Barbara and I write letter pages** each month for each other—daily writing—and mail them about once a month or so, a big bundle of pages to read. We both save them up for a while until we have enough for a 'volume.' We then make covers and have the volume spiral-bound. Since both of us have computers and lots of graphics and desktop publishing, we end up creating beautiful little books for each other. So we are sharing our lives, and I think we are in fact closer now than we were when we lived in the same place!"*

Sandra McKinzie and her twin sister have started a new

*group in **Lafayette IN**. Sandra's address: 615 N 28th St, 47904.*

Our writing group, Writers Ink, spun from nine women who wanted to stay together after a creative writing class this winter. My sister and I are the leaders and seniors of the group. We use exercises from the books *How to Write Your Own Life Story* by Lois Daniel and *Writing From Life* by Susan Wittig Albert.



*Sandra doesn't say so, but we wonder whether the writing class she mentions is the Story Circle led by **Kathy Mayer**, also in **Lafayette IN**. Kathy is a published author whose book, **Together We Heal** was brought out by Ballentine in 1990. Kathy writes to let us know that she has already facilitated two circles and is planning a third. (You can contact her through PO Box 1135, Lafayette IN 47902) She holds ten-session Circles, with 15 women participating in each. Smaller, continuing Circles, she says, have formed from her earlier Circles. Circles giving birth to Circles—what a wonderful thought! Thank you, Kathy, for helping awaken the Circle idea in Lafayette!*



*The following letter came via e-mail from **Jean McGroarty**, in **Battle Ground IN** (also see Jean's story on page 16 . Don't we all wish we could join a group just like this one? Jean, we're so grateful to you for sharing this report with us. You remind us that one of the greatest joys of a Circle is the warmth and friendship that cradle our efforts to give birth to new and deeper understandings of ourselves as women.*

Our Story Circle started as a class offered at the local

community center by a wonderful woman who loves to write and wants to share her gift with others. There were fifteen of us, from many different backgrounds. At the end of this remarkable experience (only ten weeks!), four of us decided we'd like to continue writing and sharing.

We are so different! If it weren't for the good fortune of being able to work together in the Story Circle class, we probably wouldn't have come together. Sandy is a widow with two grown boys who teaches English in a small-town middle school Susan juggles a quarterly book-review newsletter with life on a farm, two kids and a husband. Jan is establishing herself as a free-lance writer, and also has a family to care for. I'm an educator, working with children and animals, chaffeurung three teenagers, trying to set aside moments with my husband, who works the night shift.

We met and became friends and sharers of childhood memories. We meet now twice a month at Sandy's home. We sip cool drinks in her living room and discuss books and ideas. We read our writings on the session's assigned topics and comment on images and turns of phrase. We do ten-minute timed writings triggered by a word or idea, and take the time to natter about personal things.

We all agree that these few hours have become a haven of serenity and good companionship for us. Our Story Circle is an important part of our lives and we truly miss each other when one of us can't attend. We have not considered opening our group to others yet—we've only been together a few months. Right now we are carefully nurturing this new growth in our lives and aren't ready to bring in new elements. This group is a gift that we all

continuously give to each other—and to ourselves!

Mary Jane Marks is the energetic secretary of our Story Circle board of directors and the creator of several different kinds of storying activities. She and a friend, Jane Basey, have started a new enterprise called WISDOM-link, in Austin TX. Their aim is to bring women together "with the idea of promoting collaboration, networking, and mentoring within the inter-generational community." Their first activity is a series of round-table lunches where women gather to share their stories. Because this group doesn't involve writing, Mary Jane and Jane call it "Conversations." (Now, isn't that easy? Who says we always have to write our stories!) Here is Mary Jane's description, from the brochure she shared..

"Conversation...sharing wisdom. What it is: *Conversation* is an opportunity to gather and participate in an hour or so of animated conversation with other gifted and interesting women. We plan to present a *Conversation* once each month and hope you will join us when you can. A schedule of dates and times and the list of speakers at the round table will be sent to you. We plan to introduce you to some very interesting women at various stages of maturity and wisdom. You may learn from them and they will learn from you."



Looking for Back Issues of the Story Circle Journal?

You've found them!

You can purchase these back issues for \$5.00 each postpaid. Each issue contains ideas for Story Circle activities, as well as Susan Albert's suggestions for writing another chapter in your life story, book reviews, writing ideas, true words from real women. Bring your collection up to date while these are still available! To order, check off the issue you want and mail with your check to Story Circle Network, PO Drawer M, Bertram TX 78605.

- Vol. 1 No. 1, Passionate Attachments: A History of the Heart
- Vol. 1 No. 2, A Closet of Memories
- Vol. 1 No. 3, Telling the Soul's Story: Our Spiritual Journeys
- Vol. 1 No. 4, Gardens of the Imagination: Growing a Life
- Vol. 2 No. 1, Out of the Fire: From Devastation to New Growth
- Vol. 3 No 2, Minding Our Own Business: Writing about Work





True Words from Real Women

In this section of each Story Circle Journal, we publish your contributions of poetry and prose. Write for our Writers' Guidelines, limber up your ballpoint pen (or your typewriter or computer) and send in your submissions. We want to hear from you!

One of the Good Guys

My dad has always been one of the good guys. He believes in hard work, fair play, and happy endings. I remember sitting in a darkened theater with him and my sister, watching *Snow White*. When I got scared, Dad leaned over and told me to close my eyes. He said that he knew I wasn't afraid, but that the lights flashing from the screen might hurt my eyes. So while *Snow White* ran from the woodcutter, Dad described how she was running to the dwarfs who would be her friends.

Dad always prided himself on being self-sufficient and doing his share. He often worked long hours and missed family meals. When he'd get home, he'd just fix his own dinner. He still says he's going to learn to make oatmeal cookies some day. Since Mom didn't drive when we were kids, Dad always did the grocery shopping, complete with coupon holder. He also coordinated the clean-up after meals. When we were babies, Sunday was Mom's night out, with Dad in charge of bath and bed time. One day, Dad decided to iron his own clothes. Since that day, he has set up the ironing board in the living room and has ironed on Sunday afternoons while watching the ball games on television.

Dad has always tried to continue to grow and to expand his horizons. When I was in the eighth grade, he and Mom took a course in Transcendental Meditation. He then arranged for me and my sisters to receive the same instruction. While other fathers have gotten more closed-minded as they have grown older, Dad has become more open and accepting. He exercises daily and calls me with the latest information on vitamins and herbs.

Dad sold insurance with the same company for over thirty years, raising five daughters on commission sales. He wore a pocket protector which had the motto, "Plan your work. Work your plan." Now that we're older and so enlightened, he says, "Visualize. Then realize." I guess dad had it right all along. Now he says we just have to wait for Steven Spielberg to change the ending of *Old Yeller*.

Erin Philbin Boyle
Pittsburgh PA

My Real Father

I am seventeen years old and tucked into a hospital bed. The room is cave-dark and I feel safe and exhausted. I have drifted far, far away from my father since puberty.

I thought I could do without my birth control for once and promptly became pregnant. It will take ten years for me to find this out, but the reason I miscarried and nearly bled to death was from spending time in a hot tub. No escape now—this is one of the very worst things he can find out, worse than when he caught me smoking. Now he comes to this hospital room to face a daughter he's never known existed. He's always thought of me as that straight A student who once rummaged in the mountains of Nevada with him, his favorite of four children.

My sister relays the message: he demands that I be given more pain medication, and he volunteers to donate blood if I need it—his own blood, for a careless act of mine, for a daughter who ran in front of a speeding train. After this great charade, this great silence, here is a chunk of forgiving love so huge that I can't grasp it all. He loves me, enough to extract his own life and heart to save mine.

I met my real father that night.

Annie
Gatesville TX

My father. Dead

Life with father came to an abrupt end August 4, 1979, when he performed his last violent act: putting a gun in his mouth and pulling the trigger. I went to the funeral because I had to see for myself that he was really dead. Looking down at his body I expected to be able to see the cause of death, but I couldn't. There was no outward sign of his destructiveness. It was always that way. His wife and four children never showed signs of his cruel abuse. My father. Dead. I was supposed to feel grief, and I did, but not for the expected reasons. My six brothers sat in the front row, pallbearers. I looked at them and thought how proud a father could feel knowing he had six sons to bear him to his final resting place. Were you proud, Father?

Heather Young
Dallas TX

Life with Father

After my mother died, my father missed her terribly and lost much of his zest for life. He moved out of the large house in the small Virginia town where they had lived for nearly fifty years, into a tiny apartment on Main Street. In the corner of the front room was a hat rack, contributing to the makeshift, almost stage-set atmosphere of the living quarters. I half-expected a maid with a feather duster to make an appearance stage right. On each of my visits from the city where I lived, I cleaned out books, papers, and mementos from the house and brought them back to the apartment, in a vain attempt to make him feel more at home. One day I brought a box of letters and file copies from forty or more years ago. I thought he might like looking at them, but instead he put them aside unread. Late that night, from the next room, I heard him rustling through them and muttering softly, "None of this means anything without you here, Mary Hope." He didn't mention them again.

When I was eleven, I went to a summer camp. To prepare me for attacks of homesickness, Daddy told me that he had felt homesick his first year at camp, but had successfully used this strategy. From his upper bunk bed he was close to the unfinished rafters in the cabin. He named each one with a day and figured that when he had counted all the rafters three times, he would be ready to go home. After counting them for several nights, the homesickness diminished, and later he was having so much fun that he lost track of the count. This didn't work for me; I was still homesick at the end of my stay at camp. But "Count the rafters" became shorthand in our family for "Some things just have to be lived through and usually aren't as bad in the long run as we think they will be." Sometimes these last years I caught myself about to say "Count the rafters" to Daddy, only to realize how shallow it sounded. What was at the end of the rafters now was oblivion.

He lived four years after Mother died, rallying for brief periods, then losing ground to illness, increasing timidity, or obsessive worry. He moved to a retirement home in the city where my sister lived. Occasionally he invited my old friend Ann to the dining room for lunch. After he died of pneumonia, Ann wrote me about a vivid dream she had just had. She was driving out to see him, and along he came in the opposite direction, driving fast in an open sports car, wearing a sporty cap, looking happy. The fact that this would be entirely out of character for this reserved college professor didn't bother her, and it was oddly comforting to me. I pictured him picking up speed as he roared away from town, his spirits lifting as he went, and all his rafters counted.

Mary Faith Pankin
Arlington VA

Irish Spring

5:30. Time to keep an eye on the driveway, believing my watch will draw Dad home. Time to listen as he walks in the kitchen door, sets his lunch box on the counter and says "Hi" to Mom. Has he been drinking? Can she tell?

Time to close my book and leave my bedroom cocoon wallpapered in light blue flowers. Time to sit down for supper. To hope Dad can slice the meat without sliding it off the platter. To hop Mom won't purse her lips in silent disapproval. Time to chatter about school and Latin Club and Junior Achievement. Time to orchestrate a happy family meal.

Only it's St. Patrick's Day. And yes, my mother came from Ireland. And she cooked corned beef and cabbage tonight. And today she cried, thinking about her mother as the John Gary album on the stereo played, "Oh, is there something in you Irish?"

My chatter intensifies. If I keep the conversation fun, Dad will be fine and Mom will be happy.

Part of the way through the meal, Dad gets up from his end of the table. Oh, god, tonight of all nights, why can't he just sit there and eat? He walks past three kids sitting across the table from me. Stops at Mom's end. Her fork is in mid-air. She isn't pleading with him yet to sit back down. He reaches in his pocket, pulls out a bar of Irish Spring, a new hand soap on the market. Kisses her on the lips and says, "Happy St. Patrick's Day, Kate."

She smiles, "Oh, Lorry," the nickname we hear only when things are really good between them. She holds the bar of soap as if it were a diamond and kisses him. My thumb moves across the pipe cleaner shamrock pinned on my green corduroy jumper.

Kathy Mayer

Letter

Dear Dad,
Sorry I haven't written.
Haven't quite gotten
over our years together.
Four marriages, three kids, more
men than I can count
and I'm still learning how
to leave you.
Some time when you're not too busy,
when you can remember who I am,
drop me a line.
Your loving daughter,
Susan.

Susan Webber
Chicago IL

Thinking About My Father

If my father were alive today, we'd be planning a big celebration for his one hundredth birthday. But though he always said he'd like to live to be an "old man," cancer took him when he was fifty-eight.

My father—Joseph Aloysius Hannan, named for his father—was the middle child of an Irish family of seven. He had beautiful wavy red hair and a slight build, not very tall. He also had a wonderful Irish wit and a love of life. His mother, Mary O'Brien Hannan, died when he was fourteen. He, with the rest of the older children, helped take care of younger siblings while his father, who worked for the railroad, was away on trips out of town. He graduated from high school (which only provided the eleventh grade) in a class of twelve young men. He tried to join the army but was refused because of his age, so he spent six months in the Merchant Marines. By the time his Army enlistment was approved, WWI was over. Many years later he told me, grinning, that when the Germans heard he was coming, they quit—and I believed him.

When I was born, the family business was a confectionery store, but the business was lost in the Depression and Dad went to work in a steel mill. I never remember being poor or deprived of anything, because he never let us know how hard times were. When I was very small, he danced with me to the strains of "My Wonderful One," our favorite song. He took me for long walks along the banks of the Ohio River and taught me to skip stones across the water. At the beginning of WWII, Dad went to work for the Navy at Westinghouse and we moved to a bigger city. He managed to send all three of us to college.

Dad loved books and read a great deal. He introduced me to the Carnegie Library. When mother would be shopping in a department store, Daddy and I would browse in the bookstore. One summer when I was in high school I read a book every day. I am sure now that he worried about some of the books I read, but he never stopped me. He would just ask me questions to be sure I understood what I was reading. Each time I sign up for a continuing education class, I think how much he

would have enjoyed that opportunity.

When I moved away from home, coming to Texas to teach, Dad wrote to me every night, sitting at the big round kitchen table, typing on the portable typewriter he had bought for me the summer I had rheumatic fever. His letters were full of funny stories and quotations from our favorite poets and humorists, and I loved receiving them.

In 1954, he was visiting me when my brother introduced us both to the man I later married. My husband, who was also named Joe, was one of Dad's favorite people. He never directly influenced me to marry my Joe, but I think there was very subtle, gentle persuasion. He had a way of talking to my brothers and me so that whatever the outcome, it seemed like our own idea. When Dad died, I had been married for a year but had not yet had children. This is my one regret: that he never met his grandchildren. But they have inherited some of his attributes.

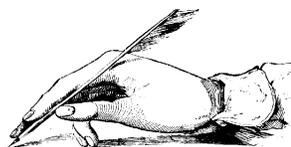
On his desk, Dad always kept a quotation from Mark Twain. "Live your life so that when you die even the undertaker will be sorry." And that saying was part of the eulogy given by his friend, the undertaker.

Mary Jane Marks
Austin TX

Out of the Darkness

I don't think I could have gotten any lower than I was in May of 1991. My mother had died suddenly the previous September, sending me into a dark and abiding depression, which in turned caused a drinking problem to bloom into acute alcoholism. I was unable to cope with my young children. The thought of working at my job bewildered me. I left the house only to go to work and maybe to the grocery store. And I ate. I weighed more than 250 pounds—only a guess, since I was afraid to get on the scale. I knew and recognized my problems, but felt helpless to do anything to remedy them. I wasn't

continued on page 17



Dear Pen Partner...

In this space, we will print (when we have it) information from women who are seeking an exchange of letters. Are you on e-mail? Include your e-mail address. Anybody want to volunteer to organize an e-Circle? Let's fill cyberspace with our stories!

sure I wanted to change a way of life I'd become accustomed to, even though I loathed myself for the lifestyle I embraced.

What I needed was a lightning bolt, one of those moments of clarity which would change everything. And that's what I got. One rainy night my husband Dave sat down with me and started to talk. He had tried to be supportive, to get the kids out when I needed to nap, to hold our world together while I tore it apart. That night he gave me what I needed, even though I didn't want it. He told me he would leave me if I didn't get my act together. He had spoken to my doctor and to a counselor. He reminded me of our early days together and told me it was up to me to change my life. He was my lightning bolt, the push I needed to walk away from a way of life.

It wasn't easy. I started seeing the counselor and stopped drinking. Gradually, my mind became clearer, not clouded with booze or sadness. I was irritable, so I took walks, worked in the garden, played solitaire, and tried to play with the kids. I took more walks, read more books, started to become a whole human being. In January, I joined Weight Watchers and began to eat with nutrition in mind. I began to feel confident and even to love myself. I kept on walking and finally, after 13 months, I had lost 100 pounds.

Obstacles kept trying to trip me, the biggest one being a lump in my left breast I discovered in November of 1992. I found it because I'd lost 85 pounds and could actually tell that something was amiss. It was cancer, and the doctor told me that if I hadn't lost the weight, I wouldn't have found it as early as I did. I went into surgery a little scared, but confident. After all, I'd beaten obesity, depression and alcoholism—this wasn't much different.

I just celebrated my fifth anniversary of cancer surgery. I'm looking forward to observing five years of weight loss and seven years of sobriety in 1998. I've been able to keep myself out of the depths through love—the love of my husband and children; the love of my mother, who still walks with me; and my own love for myself. The one most important thing I've learned from these experiences has been to love myself. When I do that simple thing, the hardest things become easy and the world looks bright.

Jean McGroarty
Battle Ground IN

My Ceremony of Self

This brief section is excerpted from a longer piece the writer is preparing for publication.

I had wanted the two gold rings for some time—gold lovers' knots representing commitment of souls. The funny thing about my strong attraction to the rings was that I had no mate or even a promising lover with whom to exchange the rings. I was ending a marriage of over twenty years. I had dated a little, but had found no relationship worthy of my commitment. I was also emotionally vulnerable. Though on one level I was a sophisticated adult woman, a professional, and a mom, on the other hand I hadn't dated or lived alone since my teens, and there was a scared adolescent inside of me who needed to really love and ground herself.

The idea to create a ceremony for my Self came from a SARK book, where the author describes "marrying herself" instead of moving on to yet another relationship. As soon as I read the words, I knew this was what I wanted to do. My ceremony was to be my formal recognition of my hard-wrought inner quest and the progress I had made. It was a grounding of my wholeness and an inventory of what I wanted now and in my future, with or without a mate.

I thought about it for months, sharing the idea with a few friends. One friend, a writer and life-questor who was separating from a long marriage, liked the idea and wanted to the same for her Self. We decided we would be witness to each other's commitments in a hot air balloon ride over the Texas hill country.

The idea of a ceremony in the air appealed to me. Lift and flight, a symbolic transcendence of spirit. So we each wrote our commitments, alone. I designed my ceremony and she shared in many of the same events, allowing for variation in our personal Self-commitments and the symbols of those promises. [*The flight took place on a day in October, when Katherine took a three roses—red, yellow, and purple—and a ceremonial bag filled with symbols of earth, air, fire, and water, and flew off to perform her ceremony high over the Highland Lakes*].

The vows I made that October day are printed on parchment paper and displayed on the personal table of honor I later created, together with various photos and objects meaningful to my deepest Self. I've since decided to have a renewal ceremony each year to commit my Self to the values, desires, aspirations, and dreams I hold highest. And daily, as I look down at the gold lovers' knot on my finger, I remember my promise to live these vows and continue to integrate all of my parts into a whole....

Katherine Benbow
Austin TX

New & Renewing Members

We extend a very special welcome to the women who have joined our Network or renewed their membership in 1998. We're very glad to be a part of your story!

Alaska

Robin Wittig, Anchorage

Alabama

Diane S. Lodge-Peters, Evergreen

Arkansas

Catherine Crews, Dover
Lucy Lincoln Abraham, Little Rock

Arizona

Virginia Dixon, Tempe
Lizabeth Patrick, Tucson

California

Lana Gamble, Marina
Sharon McKinney, Crescent City
Alexandra Morgan, Orinda
Bobbie Mahoney, Tustin

Colorado

Dulany Woodward, Buena Vista

Connecticut

M. Wright, Collinsville

Illinois

Edwina Finet, Monticello
Lavona Johnson, Libertyville

Indiana

Kathy Mayer, Lafayette
Marcia Wooldridge, Lafayette

Kentucky

Judy Yates, Harrods Creek

Louisiana

Jodie Goens, Bossier City

Massachusetts

Mary Marks, Holbrook
Karen Cooley, Sandisfield
Gail Anne Godio, Sandisfield

Maryland

Tamara Zacharkis, Potomac

New Jersey

Dorothy E. Gangluff, Berlin
Blanch Jimmick-Usaitis, Long Branch

New York

Lisa Shumicky, Islip Terrace
Nancy Sutherland, Nye

Ohio

Lu Ann Rothbrust, Chagrin Falls
Denise M. Bell, Flat Rock
Candace Miller, Lima

Oklahoma

Sheryl Riggs, Broken Arrow

Pennsylvania

Erin Boyle, Pittsburgh
Lisa L. Chewning, Pittsburgh
Anne E. Tilson, Washington Crossing

Texas

Lisa Belli, Austin
Katherine Benbow, Austin
Dayna Finet, Austin
Patricia Fiske, Austin
Judith Helburn, Austin
Eula Rae McCown, Austin
Anne D. Robinson, Austin
Sharon Rowlett, Austin
Sarah Sibert, Del Valle
Leanne Pitts, Gatesville
Doris Luton, Granbury
Victoria Kneen, Houston
Laurel A. Smith, Houston
La Greta S. Reed, Salado
Mary Gail Nagai Jacobson, San Marcos
Pam Strobo, Somersville
Tricia Stephens, Southlake
Virginia Petter, West Columbia

Utah

Oleve Davis, Salt Lake City

Virginia

Karrie Bos, Blacksburg
Elisabeth Griffith, McLean

Washington

Jane V. Elliott, Shoreline
Jeannine Potter, Vancouver

Wisconsin

Marcia Grayson, Verona
Joanne Flemming, Menasha

Our Readers Share Their



Stories....

Patricia Fiske, Austin TX. Unwilling to follow my parents' path of poverty, I sought a more fulfilling life down the highway of education. After graduating from college, I detoured through New York for a few wild years, returning to Texas to teach, marry, and have children. Having lost my Self along the way, I took a fork in the road at age 68, where I have wrapped myself in Spirit and Creativity for the past four years.

LuAnn Rothbrust, Chagrin Falls OH. Writing is not the problem. I am an avid journaler. What I think is stalling me is the *fear* of seeing my stories in print! I'm an operating nurse...I'm about to turn 40 as well—my desire to write simply will not go away. I know there must be people in my area trying to write their stories....

Sandra McKinzie, Lafayette IN. Ten years ago I answered a postcard request to 'help a lady write her children's stories.' Silva suffered from MS and was unable to hold a pen, but her mind and imagination were on free-flight, and her

enthusiasm was contagious...I was hooked! I have taken Creative Writing classes where I learned of your magazine, and have since April '98 started a writing group, Writers Ink.

Anne K. Waldron, West Chester PA. Last year I graduated from West Chester University with a minor in women's studies and psychology; women's studies opened up a whole new world to me of women's perspectives and experience.... This year I have taken two graduate-level women's studies courses and am seeking an outlet for my energy and education that will benefit women. I am a wife, a mother of five grown children, and have six grandchildren. Even though I have worked as an administrative assistant for several years, for most of my working life I have been a mom, home administrator and volunteer.

Virginia Dixon, Tempe AZ. Raised in an unwanted situation, I realized at a very tender age that making my life better was my responsibility. I went on to be successful personally, academically, and professionally.

Today, I find myself adjusting to 'retirement,' surprised that adjustment is necessary, and seeking a new focus for my life.

Heather Young, Dallas TX. My request for a Pen Partner appeared in the last *Story Circle Journal*, and I am happy to say that I received a response from a lady in California, and we are enjoying corresponding with each other. So thank you for this opportunity. Also wanted to let you know that if you develop a Story Circle Network chapter in my area, I would love to volunteer to help. I have MacIntosh computer skills, and I'm pretty good at stuffing envelopes too!

Judith Helburn, Austin TX. After my childhood in which I played with fairies and spoke to the animals, there was a long silence. Now I teach Spiritual Eldering ® and everyone's favorite part is the 'Telling Our Tales.' Not only do I collect stories, but I listen to the trees, and clouds, as well as myself and other people, and write those stories too.

<p>This membership is a gift. My name and address:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Please send me _____ free copies of the <i>Story Circle</i> brochure to share with friends and clients.</p>	<p>Join the Story Circle Network! One year, USA \$20; Canada & Mexico, \$26; Elsewhere, \$30</p> <p>Here is my check for \$_____. I want to join the Story Circle Network and receive four issues of <i>The Story Circle Journal</i>.</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>City _____ State _____ Zip _____ - _____</p> <p>Foreign memberships: International Postal Money Order only please</p> <p>Mail to Story Circle Network, P.O. Drawer M, Bertram TX 78605</p>
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Story Circle Program Notes

September-October Activities

Austin TX

Be our guest on September 22, when Catherine Cogburn facilitates a workshop called “**Writing Into Joy.**” Journal writing with a specific purpose: to explore the experiences, thoughts, and feelings of the day in order to find joy and enlarge our capacity for grace. The exercises used in this workshop will increase our resilience and improve the “stress-immune” system. No charge, no preregistration, just come, share, learn, find joy. September 22, 7-9 p.m. Northwest Hills United Methodist Church, 7050 Village Center Dr., Austin TX 78731.

Join us on October 9-10, for our Story Circle workshop, **Writing From Life: Telling, Sharing, and Shaping Our Stories.** Together we will learn why and how storytelling can be an important means of self-discovery, self-determination, and transformation. Take home strategies, ideas, and techniques to help you write your life. Facilitators: Susan Wittig Albert and other Story Circle teachers. Northwest Hills United Methodist Church, 7050 Village Center Dr, Austin TX. Tuition: \$60. Enrollment limited. For brochure and registration information, write Story Circle Network, PO Drawer M, Bertram TX 78605, or phone 454-9833.

Explore women’s stories in our monthly mid-day Reading Circle. Join us during the lunch hour on the first Wednesday of the month as we read, discuss, and explore the lives of women of great heart and large spirit. You may enroll in this on-going group at any time for \$60 for six monthly meetings. Or sample before you enroll by attending a session (\$10) before you make a commitment. In the next few months, we will be reading and discussing books by Sandra Cisneros, Ruthie Bolton, Gretel Ehrlich, Natalie Goldberg, Nancy Ring, Eliza Thomas. The group meets most first Wednesdays from 11:15-1:15 at the AGE Building, 3701 Cedar, Austin TX. Facilitated by Susan

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