

Story Circle Journal

The newsletter for women with stories to tell...

Volume 3 Number 2

Story Circle Hosts A Gathering of Women™

On the last weekend in October, a group of about sixty women will gather at The Heart o'the Hills Conference Center in the Texas Hill Country for a weekend retreat of reverence, reflection, and renewal. The event will feature celebrated author Joan Borysenko and Elizabeth Lawrence. It is co-sponsored by the Story Circle Network and The Isis Institute of Women's Studies, an Austin-based organization that encourages women's spiritual and psychological growth. "As we meet the challenges of the world," says Catherine Cogburn, Story Circle board member and one of the organizers of the retreat, "we often become too busy to explore our stories or nurture our spirits. We hope that this weekend retreat will help us open to ourselves and to each other in ways that will release our creativity, compassion, and strength."

Joan Borysenko, Ph.D., is the best-selling author of *Minding the Body, Mending the Mind* and co-founder and former Director of the Mind-Body Clinic of the Harvard Medical School. Trained as both medical scientist and psychologist, Dr. Borysenko, moves comfortably between Western medicine (she has worked in cancer biology, behavioral medicine, and psychoneuro-immunology) and the great spiritual traditions of East and West. Her gifted work as a scientist, clinician, and teacher have placed her in the forefront of the mind/body revolution, and she has become a sought-after spokesperson for this new approach to wellness. She shares her pioneering work and wisdom with a gentle graciousness and humility.

Elizabeth Lawrence, M.A., is trained in Pastoral Counseling and certified in MariEl healing of memories. She has served as a hospital chaplain and a Pastoral Associate of a Catholic parish. She created "The Inner Connection," an organization that provides retreats, international "spiritual getaways," and training seminars for therapists, hospitals, and private corporations, as well as individuals interested in personal renewal.

The Heart o'the Hills Conference Center is located near Hunt, Texas, about 90 minutes from San Antonio and two hours from Austin. It is on the south fork of the beautiful Guadalupe River. Grounds and rooms will be open to participants beginning Friday morning so that participants can hike, canoe, swim, or nap before the conference begins at 7 p.m. Borysenko and Lawrence will lead the planned events of Friday evening, all day Saturday and Saturday evening, and Sunday morning. The retreat will conclude on Sunday at noon. Meals and accommodations are included in the cost of the retreat, which is \$375. The rooms are double occupancy. (Camping and dorm spaces have already been filled.) If you would like to attend, email storyo@io.com or call 512-454-9833 as soon as possible. Space is limited and the places are filling

*Stories are made of a gauze that is elastic.
You can almost see through it, so what is
beyond is tantalizing. You can't quite
make it out; and because the imagination
is always moving toward you, you yourself
are constantly stretching. Stories are the
way spirit is exercised.*
—Alice Walker

*Storytelling is at the heart of life...In
finding our own story, we assemble all
the parts of ourselves. Whatever kind of
mess we have made of it, we can
somehow see the totality of who we are
and recognize how our blunderings are
related. We can own what we did and
value who we are, not because of the
outcome but because of the
soul story that propelled us.*
—Marion Woodman

In This Issue

- A Gathering of Women....1*
- The Story Circle Network.....2*
- Variety: The Spice of Memoir....3*
- The Journaling Page....4*
- Remembering Me....5*
- Writing and Healing....6*
- Sisters and Sisterhood....7*
- True Words from Real Women....10*
- An Internet Chapter?....12*
- Books for the Journey...13*
- A Story Circle News RoundUp....14*
- Finding a Literary Agent...15*
- Readers Share Their Stories....16*

—continued on page 2

Story Circle Hosts Gathering—*from Page 1*

fast.

The Story Circle board is delighted to be able to co-sponsor this event with the Isis Institute, with which we have a close relationship. It demonstrates our commitment to exploring our stories, not just as autobiographical events but as resonant with spiritual meaning. We are all looking forward to participating in a weekend that will not only renew our spirits but help us to deepen our commitment to understanding the stories of our lives.

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
www.owlcircle.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!

Variety: The Spice of Memoir

Memoir is a wonderfully elastic form. It's like an empty suitcase, just waiting to be filled with almost anything. As you think about what you're going to include in your memoir, you don't have to limit yourself to telling stories, or even (on a deeper, more psychological level) to using life events to explore the meaning of your life. There are many other things you can include to bring variety, breadth, and depth to your personal story. Here are a dozen ideas to get you started. (You'll probably come up with others.)

1. *Favorite family sayings.* My grandmother's favorite saying—"Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or pass it on"—has become a kind of family mantra. It says a great deal about the kind of people we are.
2. *A family tree.* Whether you are writing a family history or telling your soul's story, it's helpful to know where you came from.
3. *Recipes.* Food (memorable holiday foods, favorite family dishes, recipes passed down from mother to daughter) holds special memories and meaning. Include recipes that show your family's ethnic or geographical history, your personal tastes, your travels.
4. *Maps.* You might want to include a small map of a beloved place, a map of your travels, a map of places you've lived.
5. *Quotations from your journal.* If you've kept a journal, you can include relevant snippets from it. Be sure and include the date, as well.
6. *Quotations you enjoy.* Some memoirists use quotations as sections headings, or as subjects to write about. Sometimes just the quotation by itself

says it all. Other things you might try: lines from popular songs, verses of hymn, favorite poetry. (If you publish your work for sale, you'll need to get permission.)

7. *A sketch.* You don't have to be a Rembrandt. A simple drawing of a flower, a piece of furniture, an item of jewelry, a remembered house—these can be wonderfully evocative.

8. *A humorous sketch.* Ilene Beckerman, the author of *Love, Loss, and What I Wore* has drawn and colored child-like pictures of her most memorable outfits to illustrate her memoir. The pictures lend a kind of poignant nostalgia to her story.

9. *Calligraphic headings.* Can you do calligraphy or some other decorative lettering? If so, you can use it for section or chapter titles, or to draw attention to something important. For that matter, you can handwrite your entire memoir, perhaps on handmade paper, in a beautifully bound book.

10. *Titles.* If you haven't titled your chapters and headings, do. The titles don't have to be clever, but aim for an interesting or memorable phrase that captures the spirit of the material

11. *Photos.* You can place a photo on each page and use it as the subject of your writing. Or you can assemble several photos in a montage. You can also use photos as chapter or section divisions.

12. *Newspaper clippings.* If you have a folder of old clippings tucked away in a drawer, pull them out and use them in appropriate places. You might want to photocopy them, to preserve the original.

A SPECIAL PLACE FOR WRITING

Lots of us would like to write our stories, but we find it hard to get started—and maybe even harder to keep the momentum going. Writers who have a comfortable, quiet, and inviting place to work are more likely to settle down and write.

Create a special writing place

Start by asking yourself what kind of space you would like to work in. Would you prefer to work indoors, or would you like to work in a favorite outdoor space? How about that empty corner of the bedroom? Or the upstairs guest room? Or the dining nook you hardly ever use? Whatever space you choose, be sure you can have the privacy you need. It's hard to write when the kids are roaring through the room!

Assemble your tools, equipment, resources.

The most important tool is your writing tool. Pen? Typewriter? Computer? Decide what you are going to use and where and how it best fits into your work space. What else will you need? Artists supplies? Bookshelves? Reference books? File cabinet? A good lamp.

Add your own unique touches.

Some writers work best in a spartan environment, with nothing around to distract them. Others like to look up from their work and see evocative, familiar, or beautiful things. Which kind of writer are you? Do you prefer music, candles, flowers, a rug, an extra chair—or would you like to strip down to the bare essentials, like a Zen nun?

Go there and get to work

The best writing space in the world won't help you create a single page until you go there and settle down to work. Good luck!

The Journaling Page . . .

Who's Taking Notes?

by Ann Kolakowski

Have you ever thought of recording the progress of one of life's important experiences in a journal? You might want to create one of these special-purpose journals to keep a record of a special journey, or a difficult period (perhaps an illness), or a special time of joy. In this brief interview with Susan Albert (written for the Internet website www.shesgotbaby.com) Ann Kolakowski encourages mothers-to-be to keep a journal of their pregnancies. We reprint it here with her permission. Ann is a free-lance writer who frequently writes about parenting. She is the Assistant Director of Gemini Ink, an independent literary center that offers classes, programs, and readings in San Antonio TX.

Pregnancy is truly an awesome time in a woman's life. While your body performs its genetic ballet, you might be feeling your best—enjoying such benefits as strong nails or enhanced cleavage (*sans* WonderBra). Maybe you feel sexy, more energetic than ever. Or maybe you're too nauseated even to sit in front of your computer and read this.

How *are* you feeling?—How many times have you been asked this question? Have you ever asked it of yourself? Your answers are worth recording in the form of a journal, says Susan Albert, founder of the Story Circle Network, a nonprofit organization “for women with stories to tell.”

Who will read your journal—Just you? Your child? Your partner? The reading public? (For an excellent example of a new-mom memoir, by the way, I highly recommend Anne Lamott's *Operating Instructions*). Your audience will affect what you write as well as the physical form your journal will take.

“A journal can be a wonderful gift from mother to child,” notes Albert, author of several books, including *Writing From Life: Telling Your Soul's Story*. “When a journal of this type is handwritten in a beautiful book, it becomes an heirloom. Even if I were writing for a child, though, I would have a consciousness for the future but be honest with myself in the present.”

Writing by hand is also recommended if you are dealing with highly emotional material, where the physical act of putting pen to paper can help you process your feelings, Albert says. Women with a lot to say often find it useful to journal directly on the computer because it allows them to write more quickly. Here are some tips to get you started:

Honor yourself. Make journaling part of your daily ritual—this is a gift you are giving to yourself! Even at those times when all you can manage to write is “I want to throw up,” you will be accurately recording your pregnancy and in some small

way claiming control over it. As with any habit you are trying to foster, set aside a special time and place to do it. Find a journaling buddy and encourage one another.

Write for at least 15 minutes each day (set a timer, or write to music), and give the habit 6 to 8 weeks to take hold. For first-time journalers who are reluctant to make a long-term commitment to the practice of journaling, the pregnancy journal holds appeal because it's time-bound. It doesn't have to be perfect, either. “Keep the English teacher off your shoulder,” laughs Albert. “Dress up spelling and grammar at a later time.”

No sacred cows. Anything's game, from what you're eating to what you're dreaming (literally and figuratively) to what you weigh. If you are unhappy about your pregnancy, and/or doubt your mothering skills, give yourself permission to write about that, too. (Keep in mind that this type of journal might not be one to share with your child—or maybe it will.) Even the most mundane details have their place, providing a helpful record for your health care provider or as a reference for future pregnancies.



Expecting Adam: *A True Story of Birth, Rebirth, and Everyday Magic is an example of a journal written by a mother, this one by the mother of a child who knew she was carrying a child with Down's Syndrome.*

Here are two examples of other “special purpose” journals. These books are designed to help you record your experience: A Bride's Journal: A Personal Diary of Plans, Hopes, and Dreams, by Susan Laubach and Don't Lose Your Memory: Writing the Journey Journal, by Susan Laubach

Remembering Me by Duffie Bart

We asked Duffie, a Story Circle member from Monterey CA, if we could share this excerpt with you. The original article appeared in the February 1999 issue of Science of Mind. We loved it because of its quiet, reflective voice and the compassion Duffie expressed toward her own younger, more self-conscious self.

As my life's journey takes me well into my sixties, I find my days are less busy. It is an odd feeling, having leisure time, when in the past my days were never long enough for all my tasks and activities. Lately I have begun to find myself sitting in the comfortable armchair in my bedroom, at first thinking of nothing in particular and, perhaps hours later, still sitting there, absorbed in a scene from the past, holding my attention like an interesting film clip. I become lost in it, and sometimes to my astonishment, my eyes fill with tears. As I give myself over to the scene I think to myself: "Please don't forget this; it is an important memory; it is telling you things about yourself and others that you haven't known until now."

One such incident took place four long decades ago when I was twenty-five. I am seated in a small Italian restaurant in midtown Manhattan with a man I hardly know. I had been introduced to him at the Brussels World's Fair, where I had an exciting job as a guide in the American Pavilion. He was a well-known photographer whose photographs were on exhibit in the Pavilion. Beyond our brief introduction, we had never had an actual conversation, and when he invited me to dine with him upon our return to New York, I was greatly surprised and flattered. I was footloose and fancy free, struggling to make a living

His eyes warm with understanding, perhaps realizing at last that he has invited a child to dinner.

in New York, unsure of myself, unsure of my future. He was perhaps forty-two, handsome in an endearing, ruffled, professorish kind of way. I did not stop to wonder why he wished to have dinner with me—why of all the people he might have called, he had chosen me. Instead, my imagination worked overtime: I would be charming and enticing. He

would wish to know me better, take me under his wing, and help me to find the right job that would lead to a successful, stunning career. He would become my friend, my mentor. I envisioned travel, glamorous friends, and a new captivating me. I dressed carefully, determined to impress him with my poise and sophistication.

I picked him up at his Central Park West apartment and we took a taxi to the restaurant. He was friendly and courteous and I felt safe and trusting, which left me free to play, as best I could, the role of femme fatale.

This morning, once again in my comfortable chair, that evening returned. I watch this young person that was me so long ago, as though I am someone I do not know, and I am fascinated. I see her smiling, and I realize that she is doing her best to appear comfortable, to pretend that she always dines in fashionable restaurants in midtown Manhattan with handsome older men. She is engrossed in playing the role of sophisticated lady.

When my dinner date orders a martini, so do I. When he orders lobster Thermidor for his entree, so do I, even though I have no idea what it is. I hope I am being as debonair as he as I match the sips of my martini to his. The smile never leaves my lips, my eyes never leave his face, but I neither see nor hear my dinner companion; I am too absorbed in myself, too absorbed in playing my role, in being the person I believe he wants me to be. Suddenly my smile wavers. To my consternation, I have taken barely two sips of my watery-looking drink when my plate becomes a disconcerting blur, the room begins to spin, and I want nothing more than to lie on the floor and go to sleep. Our lobster has arrived and I summon every bit of willpower to keep my eyes open, to hear the words that are coming from his direction, and to dislodge a piece of stubborn lobster meat from its shell so that I might appease my whirling stomach. I tug and pull, a tiny fish fork in one hand, a clamp to hold the shell in the other, but the shell slips out of the clamp and flies from one end of the plate to the other, splattering red Marinara sauce as it goes. I am paralyzed with embarrassment as I fear for the white tablecloth and his tie.

I sit there silent, my head down, fighting desperately with my lobster, pretending to care about my dinner. At one point I glance up to see this dear man gazing at me serenely, his eyes warm with understanding, perhaps realizing at last that he has invited a child to dinner. Perhaps he even understands my longing to feel at home in this world of glamorous diners, this world of talented and affluent adults. I wanted nothing more than to feel that I too was one of them, that I too was admired, that indeed my existence mattered. But I am not one of them and all my pretending could not change that. What all my pretending did accomplish was to put an impenetrable barrier between my dinner companion and myself. And that is perhaps my greatest regret: that I missed an opportunity to get to know this gentleman—that I did not become his friend.

My heart is heavy with empathy for the young woman I was then.

As I sit in my chair, drawn back to this time, my heart is heavy with empathy for the young woman I was then. Only now, after remembering and writing down this scene from long ago, do I understand who she was: her fears and hopes, her needs and longings, her aspirations for her future. I think about this man who invited me to dinner and long for the opportunity to thank him for his kindness. For helping me to feel, however briefly and however prematurely, that perhaps I too have something to offer the world....

Writing and Healing

Life Writing as a Way to Wellness

In this regular column, we will be paying attention to the expanding body of knowledge about life writing as a way of improving our health. This column was written by Jane Barnes, a therapist who practices in San Diego CA. and has used life writing as a tool to help her clients improve their mental and physical well-being. We're looking for contributors to this column, so if you have a special interest in the topic of life writing and wellness and would like to be a guest columnist, please let us know.

Writing For Healing— A Checklist

—Choose a place to write where you feel comfortable and secure.

—Find a time when you can write undisturbed for 15-20 minutes each day

—Write about the questions of most importance in your life, things that bother you, something you're constantly turning over in your mind, a loss or pain you haven't shared with anyone else.

—Keep your pen moving (or your fingers moving over the keys). Don't stop to edit or change your work. What you're aiming for is a free flow of ideas and feelings.

—Let yourself be vulnerable, honest, courageous, open. If you fear for the privacy and security of what you've written, take suitable steps to protect and safeguard your work. If you're still afraid someone might read it, write it down, then dispose of it, perhaps in a ritual. Don't let the fear of discovery keep you from enjoying the health benefits of self-revelation!

—Balance your writing about traumas with writing about lighter subjects. Write about pleasurable events and your feelings of joy, delight, and gratitude.

Researchers are confirming what many of us have suspected for a long time—that regularly writing in a journal is more than just a great way to sort through our fears and phobias, our joys and sorrows. It's also an effective way to heal our emotional traumas, ease the symptoms of some physical illnesses, and develop better mind/body health.

Dr. James Pennebaker, on the faculty of the Psychology Department of the University of Texas, is the foremost (and also the first) to test the effect of writing on health. He and his associates divided the college students in their experiments into two large groups—those who wrote about a trivial topic and those who wrote about their life experiences—and instructed them to write in their journals for 15 minutes a day. Those who wrote about life experiences were divided into smaller groups and told to: a) write about events b) write about feelings and c) write about events and feelings. When the participants' health was assessed in a follow-up study, it was learned that writers in the group that explored both events and feelings were significantly healthier and had a more positive outlook. In other studies, Pennebaker measured brain wave activity in people who wrote about their life traumas, finding that both the right and left hemispheres were at work. Still other experiments revealed that this kind of writing improved the immune response, lowered blood pressure and heart rates, and reduced stress levels.

Recently, a study reported in the Journal of the American Medical Association showed that writing about difficult experiences can be of significant benefit for people who experience chronic illness. Researchers at the State University of New York asked patients with asthma or rheumatoid arthritis to follow one of two 20-minute daily writing regimes: some wrote about a stressful period in their lives; others casually jotted down their plans for the day. The participants were evaluated four months later. Half of the people who wrote about stressful events showed marked improvement, compared to only a quarter of the casual writers. Arthritis sufferers had a 28 percent decrease in the severity of their symptoms, while asthmatics had a 19 percent improvement in measurable lung functions. The researchers concluded that writing about trauma and difficult experience produced gains that went beyond anything that could be attributed to the standard medical care that all of the participants in the study had received.

Life writing is an important tool in helping us to create balanced, healthy lives. Exploring our doubts, fears, pain, and insecurity can be a way to heal the old wounds, repair our souls, and look to the future with confidence and creativity.

Another Chapter in Your Story . . .

Sisters and Sisterhood

Each issue, Susan Wittig Albert 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 her book **Writing From Life: Telling Your Soul's Story**, offering ideas and topics for your writing. 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 continuing to add new chapters. So look into your experience, pull out those memories, and open a new chapter in the story of your life.

Sister



I am one of those biologically sisterless women, and I have felt the loss all my life. As a child growing up, I envied my friends who had sisters—their easy camaraderie, their intimate sharing, even their jealousies and their antagonisms. As I grew older, I envied their connected life histories, the sense of being fully known by another woman, a peer, for an entire lifetime. Even now, when I have chosen a few sisters with whom to share important parts of my life, I'm sorry that I don't have a biological sister with whom I could share family memories. I wonder whether not having a sister has affected the way I relate to other women, has made it harder for me to have close friends, to be open and honest with another woman.

That's my story—what's yours? Let's explore.

Growing Up Sisters



If you've never had a biological sister, you might want to write (as I just did) about what it feels like to be sisterless. But if you've had the experience of having and being a sister, try writing a few sentences in response to these questions.

- ◇ Who were/are your sisters? How many? Names and ages?
- ◇ Describe each of your sisters, as you remember her in girlhood. What kind of person was she? What did she like, dislike, desire, fear, hope for?
- ◇ What kind of life did you and your sisters share as you were growing up? Where did you live? With whom? What are your memories of your life with your sisters?
- ◇ Birth order sometimes has a marked effect on the way children relate to one another. Was that true in your family? If you were younger or older than your sister/s, did the age difference seem to matter?
- ◇ What kind of relationship did you and your sisters have to your parents? Did your father or mother have favorites? If so, did it bother you?
- ◇ Sometimes sisters are competitive, sometimes protective. What was true for you? (You might want to read Erin Boyle's story about her sister Pattie, on page 10, for an idea about this.)
- ◇ Did you and your sisters fight? What about? How did you manage to make up? (Marcy Woolridge tells a funny story about this on page 10.) Did your

You could see the two sisters had passed through some unequivocal experience, which, though it might not interest others, had formed and indissolubly bound them. It was the gravity with which they sat, ate, talked and, you could practically say, laughed. It was whatever they exchanged, not looking at one another but making a pair....

—Shirley Hazzard

My sibling bond with my sisters is sometimes much like a wolf pack, for we are fiercely loyal and sometimes exclusive. But unlike that animal pack, there is no alpha male or female among us siblings; our roles are more about shifting sibling strategy than dominion. In my sister triangle, we play many roles with one another—from confidante to counselor, from parent surrogate to child. As the older sister it has taken me many years to wriggle out of my overly protective role, just as it has taken my younger sisters decades to successfully topple my assumed authority as eldest. We three sisters all have had to give up some of our natural power and surrender to one another's authority.

—Brenda Peterson

There was always a blurring between me and my sisters. Where did one sister end and the other begin? There were four of us. One was darkest, one the tallest, one the youngest, one the most nimble. There was one who could dance best, the one we thought prettiest, the one who knew most about the world, the one who made us laugh. There was always a sister around.—
Susan Minot

One

for we to be us
I, first, must be me
open thoughts ever-searching
for peaceful eternity . . .

for we to be us
you, too, must be you
loyal in heart
to thine own self be true . . .

for we to be us
one thing must be done
we must each be ourselves
for then we'll be one.

Sarah Elizabeth Durfor
Austin TX

Those of us with sisters know certain truths: Here is the person with whom we are as familiar as our fingertips and at the farthest poles of fathoming. She's the one in our lives who'll complete the sentence as we speak it, share the memories, the household language. Even when the relationship is tinged with rancor or rubbed by rivalry, the bedrock lies below. Once we were two portions of the whole that is a family.
—Catherine Calvert

fighters ever have any lasting effects?

- ◇ Did you share bedrooms? How did you divide your personal space? Do you remember a time when sharing was especially easy or difficult?
- ◇ Do you remember an occasion when your sister/s eased your way into the world (as Erin Boyle's sister Patty did)?
- ◇ Did you and your sister/s experience death as a child? How did that affect you?

Writing about growing up with your sisters might help you to better understand who you are now and why you sometimes react the way you do.

Grown Up Sisters

Most sisters share a childhood. (But some don't—you might have a story about a sister you didn't meet until you were both grown!) But childhood comes to an end, and sisters—at least in recent generations—create separate lives for themselves. Sometimes this separation is painful, sometimes it is liberating. If one sister is accustomed to living out a certain role, she can learn new things about herself by being forced to abandon that role and try on new ones. Yet this abandonment can feel like losing a vital piece of the self. How was it for you and your sisters? What were the life events that created the separations between or among you?

- ◇ How old were you when your sister (or your first sister) left home? How did it feel to be left behind? Or if you were the first, how did it feel to leave the nest and know that your sisters were still there, secure in the family, and you were the one out in the world?
- ◇ After you and your sister/s left home, how did you stay in touch? How often? How deeply? What was it like when you were out of touch? How did it feel to be connected again?
- ◇ Briefly, tell the story of your sister/s's life. Where did they go? What did they do?
- ◇ What is your relationship like now?
- ◇ Have there been any special events that mark your grown-up relationship with your sister/s?

Have you and your sister/s experienced death? How has that affected

My Chosen Sister, My Friend

If you've never had a sister (and even if you have), you may have had a friend who was as close to you as a sister—a chosen sister. A relationship like this is often as powerful, as connecting, as consoling as a biological sisterhood. In some ways, it's easier, because chosen sisters don't come into the relationship with the heavy baggage of years of complex interactions. At the same time, chosen sisters can't fall back on the lifelong bond of blood, or a history of talking through troubles. And often, the connections between chosen sisters are easier to break.

Still, these chosen sisterhoods are of vital importance to us as women, especially as we make our way into a professional work world that is dominated by men and by men's competitive behaviors. We are strengthened and comforted by the enclaves of sisterhood that we have found or created, and sometimes it is only the quiet harbor of another woman's understanding and nonjudgmental acceptance that keeps us safe and gives us the will to go on.

- ◇ Who have been your chosen sisters? What were they like, these women to whom you were drawn out of the many in your world?
- ◇ What did your chosen sisters give you? What did you give to them? How did your gifts enrich the other?
- ◇ What has been the history of your chosen sisterhoods? How did they begin? How did they end (if they did)?
- ◇ What lessons have you learned from your chosen sisters? What have they learned from you?

A Society of Sisters

One of the sad legacies of the past few centuries has been the isolation of women from one another. Things have changed in the last decade, but in many parts of our culture, women are often devalued when they come together in groups. (How many times have you heard the phrase "hen party"?) And yet, we are stronger when we are connected, when we actively work to recreate and reinvent the sister bond in our relationships with women. Story Circle is one of those "societies of sisters," designed and created to bring us together through the sisterhood of shared stories.

- ◇ What other societies of sisters do you belong to?
- ◇ What role have these associations played in your life? (On page 12, read Katherine Dillon's moving tribute to the sisterhood with whom she shares her prison life.)
- ◇ How has your story been changed by the women who shared your life with you—your society of sisters?

Sister love is what you don't have with anybody else. It is a love that does not compare with love for a child, mother, a friend. I share with my sisters a respect and such a strong feeling—if something happens to my sister, it happens to me.

—Linda Barrios

When the going gets tough, real women go to slumber parties.

*What shall we do without sisters?
How shall we know the intimacies
that only women can share with
women? Without sisters,
how can we be women?—*

Delores Shields

*When we lose our sisterhood skills
by trying to become more masculine,
it is like losing our homeland,
our native country and language.
We are much the lonelier for it. To
be in exile from ourselves and our
gifts as women, as sisters, is to be
banished from the very source that
gives us strength and hope.*

—Brenda Peterson

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, 1999—New Beginnings (deadline October 15, 1999)

February, 1999—Simple Pleasures (deadline January 15, 2000)

May, 1999—Grandmothers (deadline April 15, 2000)



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 contributions. We want to hear from you!

Bumps in the Night

Arriving home late, I slipped into the bedroom I shared with my twin sister, Sandy. It was my turn to have the car tomorrow night and I planned to go to the movies with Jane. I could hardly wait to show off the new car Sandy and I purchased together. Crawling into bed, I sensed that Sandy was awake.

"I need the car tomorrow night." Her announcement hit like a boxing jab.

"Can't have it. Jane and I are going to the movies. You know that!"

"It's *my* turn to have the car and I'm taking it!" Sandy punched her pillow hard, dismissing my claim.

"Are not!"

"Am too! You can just find another ride to the movies," she said defiantly. A silent struggle escalated for possession not only of the car, but also for a righteous share of the double bed and blankets. Furiously, I kicked my heel on her shin.

"Ow! That's it!" Quickly, Sandy grabbed my wrist and buried her nails deeply.

"Stop that! That hurts...ohhhh!" We kept thrashing, turning and twisting in the blankets as my pillow fell, causing the bedstand to teeter precariously. Something whumped on the floor and I knew it was my English book. Great! I'd lost my place and I had a test tomorrow. I'm gonna deck her good! Drawing back my hand, aiming for her jaw...

Dad's voice splintered the night as he shouted from his bedroom. "You girls had better settle down, or I'll have to come in there!" The threat hung suspended in the dark.

Releasing my wrist, Sandy burrowed back to her side of the bed. "Now you've done it. Hush or Dad will come in here!"

"Hey, it's your fault too!" She always blamed me, but both of us were intimidated by Dad's threat of punishment. A protective sisterly love prevailed and a reciprocal truce was immediately formed. It was humiliating to have Dad scold us.

Silence stalked the house. I relaxed, knowing that somehow Sandy and I would find a way to settle the car dispute and she would help me study for my English test tomorrow.

That was just the way it was with us.

Marcy Wooldridge
Lafayette IN

Patty

My oldest sister, Patricia, is only four years older than I. Despite this, she has always been an authority figure. When she was in kindergarten, the teacher had to send a note home about her. When it was Patricia's turn to be the teacher's helper, she was asked to assist in passing out the crayons. Patty's response was, "Isn't that your job?" When my mom went back to work, Patty

was in the eighth grade. She was placed in charge of cleaning the house and helping to care for my little sister and me. Patty had a sure-fire plan for behavior management. If Meghan and I were behaving, we were allowed to clean separate rooms. If we were picking on each other, we were punished by having to work together.

Patty has always been my teacher and my protector. She taught me how to use a sanitary belt and how to smoke my first cigarette. She explained all the dirty jokes I hadn't understood. When we were in grade school, there was a boy who bullied me. One day, Patty's class was passing mine on the stairs. She waited until that boy was across from her, reached out very calmly, and pushed him down the last few steps. She kept right on walking, never said a word, never even made eye contact with me. The boy never bothered me again.

Patty was also the leader with games. She taught me to play "Mother May I?" but I always thought that the name was "How Many Steps Before the Queen?" (Did the rules really include so many steps to be taken backward?) She also drew a wicked hopscotch. She said that since "7" was a "rest" number, you should be able to lie down comfortably in that area. That made it so big I couldn't jump over it. When I couldn't figure out how to talk in Pig Latin, she invented "Gibberish" so that we could talk together. She also developed a written code so we could send each other secret messages. When I was in high school, we bought season passes to the Broadway Theater League. We'd get all dressed up and watch the play from high up in the balcony. We'd use binoculars and pretend they were opera glasses. Afterwards, Patty would take me to a little restaurant with candle-lit tables and a jazz pianist. She'd order me a tequila sunrise or a brandy Alexander. She always drank Tanageray and tonic.

When we were kids, we weren't allowed to have much candy, but on the way home from the swimming pool, Patty and I would stop at Mr. Lugg's candy store and she'd buy us a bag of grape Turkish Taffy. We'd smuggle it into the house in our towels. She'd wake us up in the middle of the night to eat it. We'd open the screens in our bedroom and throw the wrappers out the window. My folks would think the neighbor kids were in the yard at night because there would be candy wrappers on the front lawn in the morning. One night, after my parents went to bed, Patty woke me up. We took the screen out of the window and just sat there whispering to each other so we wouldn't wake Meghan. We stayed up all night and watched the sun rise just so we could say we did it. We're older now, maids-of-honor at each other's weddings and godmothers to each other's kids. But no matter how much time has gone by, I still think of that morning when I see a sunrise.

Erin Boyle
Pittsburgh PA

A Personal Sisterhood

I am a biologically sisterless woman who created her own personal sisterhood when a sweet, dark-haired girl entered my second grade classroom. We instantly became friends and have linked our lives and hearts in intricate patterns over these last 42 years.

Perhaps it was serendipitous that the secret game we created as young girls was named "Sisters." We called it "S" for short; so diligent we were in protecting our secret. It was a game we would share with no one else. Not even our mothers were permitted knowledge of it.

"Sisters" was a game that metamorphosed on a daily basis. It changed with the curves of our thoughts, the trends of the day, the weather. The best season for "Sisters" was summer, for then strings of days unfurled before us. Not having been forced to go to summer camp, we owned the sun-kissed days cradled between June and September. Days when the maple trees dripped sticky pollen noses to adorn our faces, and our front lawns spat white clover flower that we turned into garlands to crown our heads. Days when we were awakened by the sweet smell of clipped grass and the laughter of birds.

One day we would meet to act out "The Six Fingered Glove Mystery," putting our own creative twists into the plot. Another day we were famous actresses; exactly who depended upon the favorite movie of the week. We filled the hours from sunrise to when the street lights went on with our imaginations, only interrupted by a quick bologna sandwich or a Saturday afternoon Shirley Temple movie. The only props we needed for our game were our vivid imaginations, the three evergreen trees grouped like sentinels in the corner of my parents' front yard, and the shed my father was building out back. How disappointed we were when the shed was completed and then filled with a lawn mower, shovels, and rakes. And we still mourn for the evergreens that were unmercifully cut down to make way for something I no longer can remember.

Those were the girlhood days that matured into adolescence and its innate problems and mysteries. Then came college years, marriages and motherhood, and my divorce and remarriage. We shared them all, and many more, amid laughter and tears. Our adventures unwind behind us like the sidewalks we once traveled on our way

to school Before us like more adventures as we track the unknown trails of middle age, empty nests, and beyond...We have shared gains and losses, failures and triumphs, and a secret game that labels the bonds we made.

Every woman needs a sister. If she has none by birth, she can embark on a search for one. Our self-created personal sisterhood is the gift my friend and I give to each other, as well as to ourselves. We open it often, over cups of tea, bologna sandwiches, and Shirley Temple movies.

Renee Howard Cassese
Seaford NY

Decadence

Her hands were rubbing the scented oil into my back and along my thighs. I had been lying on the table for almost five minutes and I knew from experience that it would be another 10, if not 20 minutes before I would begin to relax. Soon Patty's fingers began their expert probing for the knotted muscles in my shoulders where I carry my worries and tension. As her sensitive hands began their kneading and massaging, I could feel the muscles pop as they gave way to the power in her hands.

We began to chat about relaxation and what we each do to lessen the stresses of our busy days. I started to giggle. "What got your funny bone activated?" she asked. I began to tell her about my idea of absolute, decadent relaxation:

"I drop myself into a tub of warm water, turn the tap until the tub water is steaming hot, the slide down into the water until my entire body is submerged. Then I reach over the edge of the tub and pick up a spoon and a container of Ben & Jerry's *Cherry Garcia* ice cream. I spoon it into my mouth, a slow bit at a time, until I've eaten the entire pint. By the time I've finished the ice cream, the bath water has cooled and I am ready to get out of the tub, relaxed and serene. *That* is decadence."

Patricia Jones
San Jose CA

(more on page 12)

<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 family, friends, or clients.</p>	<p>Join the Story Circle Network!</p> <p>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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More True Words from Real Women

My Devil's Drumbeat

Across the years I still recall
my sister one way best of all.

Ten minutes older didn't count a bit.

I grabbed quicker, and used my wit.

"You can do it better," my devil prodded me.

"Excel! Excel!" My brain charged with that plea.

I rode a faster pace, made better Angels in the Snow.

She made better flower dolls, and colored pictures to show.

In unison we cried, "Mom! Whose is the best?"

Wearily Mom replied, "Both. Now give me a rest!"

"You can do it better," my devil changed with glee.

"Get that edge on her! You'll be the best. You'll see."

I shared my Lion-Hearted Richard, and she married him!

She shared her time and needlecraft for my every whim.

Today we're Prime Time writing, once again competing

She writes long family tales . . . I spend my time deleting.

"Can't you do better?" my devil whines and groans.

"No! I'm quite content. Please leave me alone."

Sandra J. McKinzie
Lafayette IN 47904

Sisters and Sisterhood: Tearing Down Walls Behind Walls

My own sister has been estranged from me for many decades, especially since I came to prison.

However, within this barbed-wire community there exists a sisterhood among the many women here at the California Institute for Women. Together, we discover how unhealed we are; together we compare how the medical staff neglects us, while many of the general prison staff abuse us; together, we reminisce about how we were abused as children and suffered abuse as younger adults; and together, we conclude that we all need much inner healing to become whole people.

This sisterhood is available in our corporate religious activities, in our special interest groups, in our arts and crafts classes, in our sports and charitable activities, in our education classes, and on our jobs. This sisterhood is particularly found even more intimately in a few close friends, with whom we can feel safe, without fear of our real selves being rejected.

I have found a sisterhood that goes far beyond biological blood ties. These beautiful women have become my dearest friends, mentors, and alas, my "sisters" in this closed custodial community.

I still love my own sister, but I also love these women in prison, who by being there for me, have a sister's place in my heart that will never be forgotten.

Katherine S. Dillon
Frontera CA

A Story Circle Internet Chapter?

Those of you who are on the Internet know that it is a wonderful medium for interactive programs of all kinds. Intrigued by these possibilities and curious about the potential of the Internet for the Story Circle Network, the Board of Directors has been discussing the possibility of creating an Internet Chapter. We'd like to know what you think about this and whether you'd be interested in becoming a part of it.

Here is a quick sketch of the way the chapter might work. Women who have joined the Story Circle Network would also have the option of joining the Internet Chapter (perhaps for an additional \$10-\$12). The Internet Chapter would operate under bylaws substantially like those for other local chapters. (See the last issue for a copy of those bylaws, or check out the information on the Austin Chapter pages at www.storycircle.org. Chapter members would elect officers and hold meetings via email and a message board. The chapter would be responsible (with the support and guidance of the Board and our webmistress) for developing a variety of Internet activities. Among the possibilities are a message board, a chat room, author live chats, an on-line magazine, workshops,

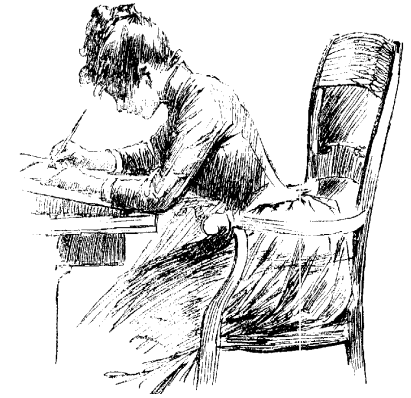
private critique groups, member profiles, an Ask A Pro section (agents/editors respond to questions), and information about courses, seminars, and workshops around the country.

Peggy Moody, a Board member and also our webmistress, is looking at possible Internet hosts. If you are interested in helping us get a chapter started and would like to contribute your ideas, experience and skills, please email her at pmoody@pobox.com and tell her about yourself. We don't have a timetable for the development of this chapter, but we'd like to start connecting with possible members as soon as we can so we can have their input into the chapter's development.

In addition to the Internet chapter, we are also planning to develop a Story Circle email newsletter. If you'd like to be on the mailing list, please send your email address to china@tstar.net. We'll send you an invitation to join the list through ListBot. When you respond to the ListBot invitation, you'll be on the list.

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. We welcome your reviews!



Writing as a Way of Healing, by Louise DeSalvo, Ph.D., HarperSanFrancisco, 1999.
Vertigo: A Memoir, by Louise DeSalvo, Ph.D. Plume, 1996.

I have read a great many books on writing, and written a few myself. But ***Writing as a Way of Healing*** has gone straight to the top of my list of favorites, and I suspect that it will stay there for a very long time—perhaps for all time. But in the process of reading this book, I discovered I had to read the book that went before it, and now I want to tell you about both.

Louise DeSalvo has been teaching English and creative writing for nearly twenty years. The first in her working-class Italian family to graduate from college, she escaped a soul-deadening home life—a depressed mother, an angry father—by reading, going to the movies, and dating, dating, dating. It wasn't until the late 1980's, when she wrote a scholarly book about the impact of childhood sexual abuse on the life and work of Virginia Woolf that she began to come to terms with her own childhood traumas and the lingering shadows of her mother's death and her sister's suicide. She dealt with her pain, anxiety, and depression in a memoir called ***Vertigo*** (now available in paperback, published by Plume), in which she explored her own story. ***Vertigo*** isn't a pleasant book, or easy—it's about hidden pain and the depression and despair into which a woman can fall when she attempts to avoid self-knowledge. But it is a necessary book, for through it, DeSalvo learns that the process of life-writing is also the process of healing. What she discovered in ***Vertigo***, and what she subsequently put to use in her own teaching, is the subject and object of ***Writing As a Way of Healing***.

DeSalvo's section and chapter titles, by themselves, are helpful clues to the book's significance. The first section is called "Writing as a Way of Healing," and contains four chapters: Why Write, How Writing Can Help Us Heal, Writing as a Therapeutic Process, and Writing Pain, Writing Loss. Section Two is called "The Process/The Program," and has four chapters: The Healing Power of the Writing Process, Caring for Ourselves as We Write; and Stages of Growth I and II. The third section, "From Woundedness to Wholeness Through Writing" contains two chapters: Writing the Wounded Psyche and Writing the Wounded Body. The Epilogue is called "From Silence to Testimony." Each of the chapters contains suggestions for writing, examples (from such writers as Audre Lorde, Alice Walker, Jamaica Kincaid, Isabel Allende, Djuna Barnes), discussion, and ideas—lots of ideas, so many ideas that you'll find yourself wanting to stop reading and start writing (something that DeSalvo herself, no doubt, would applaud).

DeSalvo refers extensively to a favorite researcher of mine—Dr. James Pennebaker—whose book *Opening Up* has been an important influence on my own understanding of the healing power of the writing process. When we use writing to explore traumatic or anxiety-provoking events in detail, together with the feelings that arise from those events, the writing process can help us to understand more clearly, cope in a more balanced way, and even feel better physically. Seen from this point of view, life-writing becomes a lifetime project, as we unravel the meanings of events and explore our responses to them. When we commit ourselves to this very important lifelong project—recognizing that we don't write our story once and for all and forget it!—we commit ourselves to a lifetime of learning, growing and healing.—*Susan Albert*

*Writing has helped me heal.
 Writing has changed my life.
 Writing has saved my life.*
 —Louise DeSalvo

*I am the only one who can tell
 the story of my life
 and say what it means.*
 —Dorothy Allison

*The only way through pain...is to
 absorb, probe, understand exactly
 what it is and what it means. To
 close the door on pain is to miss
 the chance for growth...Nothing
 that happens to us, even the most
 terrible shock, is unusable, and
 everything has somehow to be
 built into the fabric of the
 personality.*
 —May Sarton

*Write it down, girl. Tell everyone
 how much it hurts. Sharing will
 make it easier to bear.*
 —Terri L. Jewell

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

*We're including a detailed report of the new Austin Chapter's activities, with the hope that it will inspire you to create a Story Circle chapter in your own area. All it takes is a dozen or so women who are committed to the idea that Mary Pipher expresses so well in the quotation above. We **can** make a difference by sharing our stories!*

News from the Austin Chapter. After several months of planning and organization, the Austin Chapter of the Story Circle Network is now a lively reality.

On June 6, nearly 50 women gathered to inaugurate the chapter in the Garden Room of the AGE Building in Austin. With Penny Appleby (National board member) convening the meeting, the group accepted the bylaws that were presented and voted for a slate of officers for the remainder of 1999. **Donna Remmert** was elected president, **Carolyn Cowan** treasurer, and **Jeanie Forsyth**, publicity chair. Susan Albert offered a workshop on journal writing called "Journaling with Our Many Selves," and participants shared their experiences with life-writing. They also signed up for the various activities that are planned for the Chapter, including Reading Circles where women read and discuss women's published stories (facilitated by Susan Albert); Writing Circles, where participants write and read their own stories (facilitated by Dayna Finet); and Story-Telling Cir-

cles, with a focus on oral story-sharing (facilitated by Judith Helburn). Each of these circles free.

The Chapter is planning a variety of other activities for the autumn. In conjunction with the National Board, it will host several programs in the on-going Be Our Guest series. These programs are designed to introduce the Story Circle Network to various communities of women within our larger Austin community:

- ◇ **July 20**, Judith Helburn presented an interesting workshop on story-telling for 25 participants
- ◇ **September 23**, Deb Hanus, of the Center for Spiritual Growth and Contemplative Life in San Antonio, will do a workshop called "Crossing the Threshold: Preparation for the New Millenium"
- ◇ **October 13**, Dr. Carol McKay will offer a program on Women's Autobiography
- ◇ **October 21**, Nancy Blue will present "Unplug the Christmas Machine: How to Put Joy Back in the Season."

Writing From Life

A Workshop for Women with Stories to Tell

October 8-9, 1999

co-sponsored by the Story Circle Network and
The Center for Spiritual Growth and the Contemplative Life
230 East Travis Street, San Antonio TX

Women are natural storytellers, sharing their experiences of work and love, children and challenge, bright hours and dark days. In this 10-hour workshop (Friday night and Saturday), you will learn why and how storytelling can be an important means of self-discovery, self-determination, and transformation. With the other women in this workshop, you will discover why personal narrative is a healing art, how our stories can be sacred acts, and how writing the story of our past helps us define a healthy future.

Presenters

Susan Wittig Albert, Ph.D.
Catherine Cogburn, M.A., L.P.C.
Dayna Finet, Ph.D.
Ann Gardner, Ph.D.

Life Writing for Publication

Finding a Literary Agent

by Dayna Finet

You're looking at all these people publishing their memoirs nowadays and you're thinking, "I could do that." So you write your life story, package it up, and send off this weighty manuscript to a prestigious New York publisher. There it reaches the desk of a sympathetic editor who finds the first few pages of your story so fascinating that she stays up all night to finish reading it. The next day, you get a call from the editor, offering to publish you and give you a great big advance.

Don't count on it.

Rare even in nostalgic reflection, such a process of literary arrival has all but ceased to occur in the profit-driving publishing industry we know today. The business pressures that publishers face has resulted in the addition of another key player, the literary agent. Now more than ever, publication requires an agent's help. If you want to publish your life writing in the literary marketplace, you will do well to learn more about the place of literary agents in the publishing chain, and then do what it takes to find the right agent to represent you.

Why Do You Need a Literary Agent?

New authors today enter a publishing industry of unprecedented competitive pressure. Editors receive hundreds of manuscripts each week, every week. They must plow through the less-good ones quickly, but not so fast that they miss the gems—books with strong sales potential and (often if not always) some literary merit. Agents today act almost like editorial assistants, the first reviewers of new manuscripts and proposals. Editors so appreciate the weeding-out work that agents perform that most of them will not even read "unagented" material that they receive directly from authors.

Once a publisher has agreed to buy your work, a good literary agent will advocate for you in the complex process of contract negotiation. As technology revolutionizes our ideas of intellectual property, new publishing possibilities have arisen, and a good agent will not only protect your rights in these tricky areas but will get a better deal for you than you can get for yourself. And if you plan to continue writing, your agent can give you invaluable career-related advice and support.

Finding the Right Agent

To begin with, you should locate agents likely to have an interest in your work. Several reference sources can help. Published annually, *Literary Market Place* (Bowker) and the *Guide to Literary Agents* (Writer's Digest Books) offer the most comprehensive and timely agent listings. Jeff Herman's book *Writer's Guide to Book Editors, Publishers, and Literary Agents* (Prima) includes a smaller number of agents, but the listings provide more detail about agents' personal taste and professional style. You can find all of these sources in most good reference libraries. Take advantage of these sources, if you have access to them. Because the agenting profession is so highly personal, it will be to your advantage to learn as much about prospective agents as you can. You can start with some objective criteria:

- ◇ Agents who state their interest in memoir, biography, autobiography, and women's studies;
- ◇ Agents who list clients or projects in these areas;
- ◇ Agents who state their willingness to receive submissions from first-time authors;
- ◇ Agents affiliated with AAR (Association of Authors' Representatives);
- ◇ Agents who do *not* charge reading fees or who are affiliated with "book doctors"—free-lance editors who, for a fee, will edit your book before the agent agrees to submit to a publisher. Some legitimate agents have begun to charge modest reading fees, but most do not. Agents make their money from commissions on the sale of their clients' work.

Once you've determined which agents might be best suited to represent your work, it's time to write a query letter. And that will be our topic in the next issue.

Dayna Finet is a free-lance writer and editor with a special interest in memoir and life writing. She is a member of the Story Circle Board of Directors and co-director of the Owl Circle Project.

Breast Cancer Survivor?

If you are a breast cancer survivor and would like to participate in a writing project designed to help breast cancer survivors write about their experience, we would like to hear from you! The Story Circle Network is planning to create a life-writing workbook and workshop specifically for breast cancer survivors, and we would very much like to have your input. If you're interested, write to Catherine Cogburn, Story Circle Network, 3710 Cedar Street Box 11, Austin TX 78705.

Our Readers Share Their Stories....

Alexandra Roy of Killeen TX, says, "My past, which includes a 26-year marriage and a 1 1/2 year-marriage (both ending in divorce), my parents' deaths, and multiple geographical relocations, has taught me that I am a survivor and adventurer whose life journey has taken many unexpected turns that has always proved positive in some way or another. I am now in a transition phase of (?temporary?) retirement, working with my quarterhorse and exploring what I truly want to do with the rest of my life and where I want to do it.."

Carla Jones of Marlin TX is also searching for her true desires. "I have spent the past 20-plus years abusing my body and soul, allowing others to do the same. I want to find out what I'm capable of, what my passions are, what I truly like and dislike. I've been in my own personal prison and I'm ready to free myself. My past is giving me the power to seek the things that move my spirit. This is a new experience for me; exciting, yet frightening."

Pat Hall, Salt Lake City, has joined Story Circle to help her find a focus for her search. "I have been mulling over writing my life story for some time, but have not done anything about it except mull it over. I decided to join the Story Circle to give some structure to my amorphous thoughts and provide a place to start."

Lynn Mills, Indianapolis IN: "I have always considered myself a writer, although

most of my writing is actually editing a small church-related women's magazine. I am beginning to work with Susan Albert's book, *Writing From Life*, and am enjoying the self-discovery that happens along the way."

Renee Howard Cassese, of Seaford NY, reminds us that our stories continue to change as we learn more about ourselves: "I have evolved as a writer, a teacher, and a woman. I come closer to who I am every day, with each new story I write. When my story has ended, I will have achieved all my dreams; for until then I shall not write 'The End.'"

Audrey Galex, of Atlanta GA, is creating a livelihood from storytelling and story-recording! "I spend a lot of time in the kitchen these days—feeding my family and feeding my soul/spirit. My desk is piled with storytelling books for upcoming performances and with the stuff of a full life. I'm trying to balance being a mom, storyteller, and recorder of personal histories as co-founder of Roots and Wings Life Stories. (*Audrey, please keep us posted on your work. Many of our members will be inspired by what you are doing!—SA*)

Daisy M. Stanley is a member of the new Austin TX chapter and is creating a Story Circle for Alzheimer's patients. She writes: "I'm a visual artist with a block which writing seems to ease. I

know I have not only enjoyed the stories of others but gained great insight. I hope my stories, my life, will be interesting and helpful to others."

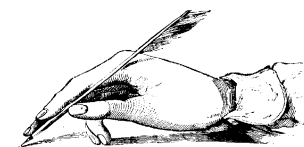
Barbara H. Hamry, of Puyallup WA, has an important and compelling story to tell: "My real-life story began 58 years ago; however, my re-life story began on May 23, 1991, at 9:15 a.m. when I learned I had breast cancer. Thus began my journey, my story—from diagnosis to hair loss, writing and publishing my book, and celebrating my 50th birthday—the gates of life opened before me. Encouraged with the knowledge that "I can," simply by glean- ing wisdom from the past, I move forward."

Barbara Greenland, Kemper TX: "The streams of my life have flowed through an isolated childhood in the country, a problematic mother, three marriages, two divorces, two wonderful children and a lovely granddaughter to the contented meadow where I now reside with my dear third husband Drew...My belief in the spirituality and oneness of nature and all of life has kept me alive and happy. I look forward to each day and what it will bring, knowing that when this lifetime is over, I can look back and say, 'At least it wasn't dull!'"

Story Circle Network
3710 Cedar St Box 11
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did not run read-
ers' stories in
May—add to Au-
gust

