



## Unprecedented Times Call for Unprecedented Sisterhood *If There Was Ever a Time to Write...*



Dear SCN Sisters,

When I texted a friend asking how he’s handling the many faces of this pandemic, he responded, “I’m fine. It’s a strange time for us all. It’s a good time for writing.”

I texted back, “It’s always a good time for writing.”

If there was ever a time we needed to write ourselves “into wellness” this would be it. Things will never be the same because of COVID-19. It has been a time for each of us to go into an unexpected wilderness and experience feelings that run the gamut from fear, sadness, anger, and anxiety, to finding unanticipated blessings, joy, and even humor.

I am privileged. There’s no question in my mind about that. At the time of this writing (May 6, 2020), my architect-husband and I have been sheltered in place for eight weeks, have not killed each other, and consider this timeframe to have been a good “togetherness test” since he retired last week. We cannot (for health reasons) do our own grocery shopping, so food is delivered to our house, where we are safe, usually sane, and comfortable. We have all the electronics necessary to stay in touch with friends and family, we can take walks, and we enjoy each other’s company, although I didn’t let him cut my shaggy locks.

Regardless of my privileged situation and daily gratitudes, I’d be lying if I told you it’s been a smooth ride. It’s been difficult to maintain sanity some days, and the inherent trauma of the coronavirus has caused us to vacillate between fear/anxiety and peace/calm. The fact that I’m privileged has not precluded COVID-19 “depression” from knocking at my door, and I let the trauma get to me.

How did I get myself together again? It wasn’t with all the king’s horses and all the king’s men, that’s for sure (don’t even get me started). I found answers through writing and connection with my writing sisters.

I showed up at the page. I journaled. I cried. I wrote a poem about how awful I felt, and how guilty I felt for feeling awful. I got way too quiet. I ate too much. I got so desperate I worked on my manuscript.

I also stayed in touch with my writing sisters—a private group as well as my Story Circle connections. The online SCN roundtable/chat group, which keeps me grounded during normal times, has been an invaluable lifeline during this pandemic. SCN’s “Women’s Wise Words” emails, which arrive on Mondays, included pandemic-specific prompts which helped me write through my fears and find some much-needed self-compassion. I didn’t want to get stuck in the fear and anger COVID-19

*Continued on page 2*



SARTON WOMEN’S BOOK AWARD  
STORY CIRCLE NETWORK

ANNOUNCING  
the 2019 Sarton Winners!

Awarding women authors  
writing about women:

- Memoir
- Nonfiction
- Contemporary Fiction
- Historical Fiction

*Find out more on page 4.*

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brought up, and going inward helped me sit with those fears and allowed me room to process. All in all, we've been taking care of one another as needed. We've been there for one another.

We have, dear sisters, a responsibility to each other. Through the writing and sharing of our stories of vulnerability, we recognize we are in this together and can better relate to one another, to our world, and live accordingly.

These are unprecedented times. Write about them and share your stories. You're part of an unprecedented sisterhood. We are here for you. We are all Story Circle Network.

Hugs around the circle,

*Jeanne Guy*

SCN President

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## 2021 Stories From the Heart *Postponed*

COVID-19 has thrown a giant monkey wrench into all our lives—and into our 2021 conference, as well. Our planning had just gotten underway with some important commitments. Our site committee chairs, Paula Yost and Shawn LaTorre, had booked us into the historic Menger Hotel in San Antonio TX for May 14-16, 2021. Jane Friedman, a well-known and much admired writer and speaker, had agreed to be our keynoter. We were getting ready to solicit presentation proposals.

And then . . . well, you know.

With much regret, the Story Circle board of directors has decided to postpone the conference to the spring of 2022. With so much uncertainty about the prospect of a vaccine, the risks involved in air travel, and continuing concern about exposure to the novel coronavirus (especially in high-risk groups), it just doesn't seem prudent to plan for a conference in 2021. Like everyone else, we're hoping that there will be more clarity by the end of the year, when it's time to start planning all over again.

We'll miss seeing each one of you in 2021, and look forward eagerly to our 2022 Stories From the Heart!

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## Story Circle Network's Mission

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

### Story Circle Journal

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

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**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.

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## Editor's Note

And now we who are writing women and strange monsters  
 Still search our hearts to find the difficult answers,  
 Still hope that we may learn to lay our hands  
 More gently and more subtly on the burning sands.

– *May Sarton*

The namesake of our Sarton Women's Book Awards, May Sarton spoke eloquently in her journals about times of crisis, isolation, and illness. As we continue to write our ways through the current pandemic, it helps to let her inspire us again. The winners of the 2019 Sarton Awards, in keeping, are stories of strength, perseverance, and passion that would make May Sarton proud. See the announcement on page 4, and discover two of the winners' profiles by our own Pat Bean on pages 5 and 8.

Another inspiration is writing circle facilitator Ruth Crocker, whose path into a writing career was not direct, but taught her strong lessons. On page 10, Circles Coordinator Mary Jo Doig introduces us to Ruth. And Ruth shares writing by one of her circle's members, Elizabeth Ashcroft. These writers all exemplify the supportive women's network that is fundamental to Story Circle.

Also in this issue, longtime teacher Lynn Goodwin offers insight and instruction to help us grow as writers. See page 14 for a practical technique for building vivid characters. Or maybe you have your characters, but not the opportunity to spend time writing about them? Jonna Higgins-Freese may inspire you to action. She tells us (p. 16) about funding her writing project with a successful Kickstarter campaign.

Our Future Is Female highlights young writer Ruby Shapz, who is inspired by art. She tells us why on page 15 and describes her "unconventional gallery." Ruby might give you a new perspective on your own "personally curated beauties."

And there's much more, including blog posts from One Woman's Day (p. 12) and Telling HerStories (p. 13), and our True Words writers exploring the unexpectedly apropos topic of "Quiet Time." Obviously, this issue is full of "inspiration" from the President's letter to a new Board member's focus on social media. I hope you'll explore it with pleasure and find that the wisdom of May Sarton and your writing sisters helps to sustain you, as we move forward together across the burning sands.

Be well and keep writing,  
*Susan Schoch*  
 Editor

## Get Ready for Real Women Write 2020!

In the midst of the pandemic uncertainty, some things endure. Story Circle Network's annual anthology is one of those things.

Our mission to support women in writing about their lives, and to bring greater recognition to the importance of their experience, is more vital than ever. We know that **writing helps and heals us** in challenging times, and we want to encourage you to write through this viral moment (see page 7).

Our plan for the 2020 anthology is to use this unprecedented event fully. We want to explore the heights and depths of this period, from isolation to heroism and everything in between. To that end, the working title of the 2020 edition is *Real Women Write: Living on COVID Time*.

We hope you'll create a story, a remembrance, a poem, or an essay, to express what otherwise might go unsaid, the experience that is uniquely yours. Then, when **submissions open on July 1**, please share your COVID-19 life with us. The 2020 anthology will be published as an e-book and a paperback on Amazon. (If you haven't seen the terrific 2019 issue yet, go to <https://www.amazon.com/Real-Women-Write-Growing-Sharing/dp/0979532957/>.)

*Real Women Write* is a great publication opportunity exclusively for our members. So get started writing now. We'll send out the link to our **new submission form** as soon as it's available.



# 2019 Sarton Women's Book Awards Winners and Finalists

Story Circle Network is proud to announce the winners and finalists of the **2019 Sarton Awards**. You'll find them all listed here. This issue includes interviews with two of our winners on pages 5 and 8.

Given annually to women authors writing chiefly about women in memoir, biography, and fiction, Sarton award winners are published by small/independent publishers, university presses, and author-publishers. Guidelines for the 2020 competition <http://www.storycircle.org/SartonLiteraryAward/guidelines.php>.

"Announcing the Sarton winners is always exciting for us," says Jeanne Guy, SCN president. "Honoring outstanding women authors and their independently published books is a special privilege for SCN. Indie publishing requires courage, commitment, and a passionate belief in the importance of story. It allows writers to partner with others to write, design, produce, and market their books outside of the traditional routes. We are proud of our winners, who have met many challenges on their way to publication."

## MEMOIR

**Hendrika de Vries** – Santa Barbara CA

*When a Toy Dog Became a Wolf and the Moon Broke Curfew* – She Writes Press

### FINALISTS

- *Notes from the Bottom of the World: A Life in Chile*, by Suzanne Adam
- *Remembering Shanghai: A Memoir of Socialites, Scholars and Scoundrels*, by Isabel Sun Chao and Claire Chao
- *Among the Maasai*, by Juliet Cutler
- *Where the Angels Lived*, by Margaret McMullan

## CONTEMPORARY FICTION

**Kimberly K. Robeson** – Encino CA

*The Greek Persuasion* – She Writes Press

### FINALISTS

- *The Patron Saint of Lost Girls*, by Maureen Aitken
- *Love is a Rebellious Bird*, by Elayne Klasson

## HISTORICAL FICTION

**Deborah Nedelman** – Langley WA

*What We Take for Truth* – Adelaide Books

### FINALISTS

- *The Swan Keeper*, by Milana Marsenich
- *Shrug*, by Lisa Braver Moss
- *Guesthouse for Ganesha*, by Judith Teitelman

## NONFICTION

**Eve M. Kahn** – New York NY

*Forever Seeing New Beauties: The Forgotten Impressionist Mary Rogers Williams, 1857-1907* – Wesleyan University Press

### FINALISTS

- *Voices from the Heartland, Vol. 2*, edited by Sara N. Beam, Emily Dial-Driver, Rilla Askew, and Juliet Evusa
- *Black & Kiddo*, by Brenda Clem Black
- *Esther Hobart Morris: The Unembellished Story of the Nation's First Female Judge*, by Kathryn Swim Cummings
- *For Dear Life: Women's Decriminalization and Human Rights in Focus*, by Carol Jacobsen



2019 Sarton Winner: MEMOIR

## Introducing Hendrika de Vries

by Pat Bean

Photo courtesy of Ann MacNair Shaw

Hendrika de Vries, winner of Story Circle Network's Sarton Award for her memoir, *When a Toy Dog Became a Wolf and the Moon Broke Curfew*, grew up in Nazi-occupied Amsterdam. It was a time, she says, "when people who were deemed inferior were dragged off the streets to be slaughtered and one could get shot for listening to the radio."

Hendrika admits this story was waiting to be told all her life, but that she always felt it would be too self-indulgent to write. "I had survived to live a long successful life while so many others suffered torturous deaths in those brutal times."

The turning point came when she saw on her television the images of neo-Nazis marching in Charlottesville, Virginia, and watched the increase of hate crimes and the resurgence of racism. "Publishing my story no longer felt like a matter of choice, but an obligation, a duty to support our human dignity and soul."

The title of Hendrika's book is based on two of her experiences as a young girl, although today she also sees them as symbolic of the gathering of female strength in dark times. "When my father was taken to a POW labor camp in Germany, I was able to ask a German guard to hand my father a tiny stuffed toy dog that my dad and I had imagined as a fierce protective wolf in my bedtime storytelling times. At the end of the war, after two years of separation, my dad brought the flattened remains of the tiny toy dog back with him. Placing it in my hand, he said, 'The wolf. He saved my life.'

"The image of the moon breaking curfew comes from the experience of my mother and I attending a community church service to pray for peace on New Year's Eve, 1944-45, when the worst four months of the Hunger Winter lay just ahead of us. It happened to be a bitter cold, heavily overcast evening, and the sidewalks along the canals were icy. People who slipped could fall into the canals. We could not use flashlights, of course. We also had to be home before curfew to avoid being shot by Nazi patrols. As we left the church, a gigantic full moon broke through the cloud covers and lit up our path with such brilliance, it seemed almost like daylight."

Hendrika says her mother often spoke of that "miracle moon that showed us that the darkness of tyranny did not have the final word."

After the war, her family left the Netherlands for a new life in Australia. Eventually the author married, became a young mother and moved to Denver, Colorado, with her then-husband, and acquired a bachelor of arts degree.

For Hendrika, the death of her father, a move to Washington D.C., and a divorce, sent her on a spiritual quest that led to her immersion in the depth psychology of Carl Jung, and a master's degree in theological studies from Virginia Theological Seminary, where she graduated cum laude.

She then traveled to Greece in search of the mythical goddess before landing in Santa Barbara, California, where she earned a master's degree in psychology and settled into her life as therapist, teacher, and writer.

A Jungian-oriented marriage and family therapist for over thirty years, Hendrika has used dreams and intuitive imagination to facilitate recovery and healing of trauma, address life transitions, and empower women. While she has written many professional papers, *When a Toy Dog Became a Wolf and the Moon Broke Curfew* is her first book.

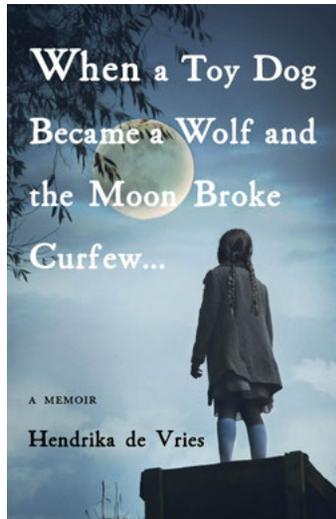
Hendrika has always considered herself more of a storyteller and lover of stories than a writer. "From the time that I was a little girl curled up on my father's lap, enchanted by his bedtime stories of fairy-tale heroes, heroines, and mythic far-away places where magical gods and goddesses could morph into animal shapes at will, I have always loved stories." She notes that one of her first jobs as a teenager was as a secretary in the newsroom of an Australian newspaper, "where the click-clack of the typewriters thrilled me with the thought of stories being made."

The Sarton winner says the best writing advice she was given was to let the child in her story have her own voice. But she recalls as she allowed that little girl to speak, she would at times be overwhelmed with tears.

Hendrika says the year 1951, which her family spent living in the Australian Bush and where her high school lessons came by correspondence, left a big impact on her growing awareness of the tragic consequences of ignorance, prejudice, and racism. But it was her parents, she adds, who were the biggest influence in her life.

“I grew up with our family sitting around the dinner table sharing news, opinions, ideas, books. Everything was open for discussion including religion and politics.”

Her mother hid a Jewish girl in their home and when betrayed, refused to give names of the Underground workers even when interrogated by Nazis at gunpoint. And her father had earth wisdom and gave her his gift of imagination and respect for the women in his life.



“I have also been fortunate to have had the influence of wise and caring women teachers as I pursued my education ... especially female writers such as Clarissa Pinkola Estés, who in *Women Who Run With the Wolves* explored the wild woman archetype and urged women to honor the wildness within themselves.”

She also studied with many scholars who taught the need for images of female power, strength, and wisdom on which young girls and women can model their own lives. Hendrika hopes her memoir, in its own small way, contributes to that mission. “I would like my readers to feel inspired and hopeful when they finish the last page of my memoir.... Tyranny does not have the last word.”

Hendrika, who continues to live in Santa Barbara with her husband, has two more books on her goal list. The first is about the Dutch immigrant girl who comes of age in Australia in the 1950s. The second is about landing in Denver for her then-husband’s career in the midst of the 1960s’ Women’s Liberation movement.

She treasures the Sarton Award, Hendrika confides, because it honors independent women’s voices, which have been silenced for too long. It is also, she points out, “an affirmation to older writers, especially women writers, not to let age deter you from writing your first book, or, in my case, to begin my second.”



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



## Welcome Back, Linda Hoye!

Story Circle Network is fortunate to welcome **Linda Hoye** back to the Board of Directors as our new **Social Media Coordinator**. If you are on Instagram, you’ve already seen her beautiful posts at [storycirclenetwork](https://www.instagram.com/storycirclenetwork), and she will be transforming our FaceBook page, as well. Please follow us there by liking the **Story Circle Network** page. Linda will also be working with Kalí Rourke, who manages the One Woman’s Day blog, and with Len Leatherwood, manager of the Telling HerStories blog, to create a coordinated social media presence.

An accomplished photographer, writer, and veteran blogger, Linda knows SCN well, as a longtime member and former board member. She led the Publications Workgroup, served SCBR as a reviewer and distribution editor, and was the initial creator of the OWD blog. We know our social media content will shine under her direction. And it’s wonderful to have her wisdom, skills, and energy once again applied to SCN.

Linda lives in British Columbia with her husband and their doted-upon Yorkshire Terrier, but will always be a Saskatchewan prairie girl. She is the author of *The Presence of Absence: A Story About Busyness, Brokenness, and Being Beloved* and *Two Hearts: An Adoptee’s Journey Through Grief to Gratitude*. Find her online at [www.lindahoye.com](http://www.lindahoye.com), where she ponders ordinary days and the thin places where faith intersects.

# Journaling in COVID-Time

by Susan Wittig Albert

For over seventy years, in various forms, my journal has been my life's companion. I began keeping a diary when I was a girl, made it my bestie when I was a teen, and turned it into my therapist during the challenging years when I was both a single mom and a grad student—and then a single mom and a young professional.

I've kept travel journals, project journals, illness/wellness journals, transition journals, bird-watching journals, gardening journals, and journals I've forgotten about. (I found one the other day that recorded a research trip to England's Lake District—what a pleasure to relive it while in lockdown, even those confusing round-about and fried tomatoes for breakfast.)

I've journaled on paper napkins and the backs of envelopes, in loose-leaf binders and leather-bound books, and on my beloved IBM Selectric, my first Apple IIc, a dozen PCs, and online. I've taught classes on journaling. I've written books about journaling. I've written books based on my journals.

But I've never appreciated my journal more than in these past COVID-19 months.

Where else could I spill out all my worries, my frustrations, my fears, my gut-wrenching terrors? Who else would have the patience to listen while I tried out first one plan and then the other—and then scrapped both for a third and a fourth and more? Where else could I record the surprising joys and unexpected rewards of social distancing? How else could I document the quiet dailiness of a life that is sheltered-in-place? If it weren't for my journal, I would remember only the large traumas—and even those would be blurred by later, larger griefs. If I didn't keep track of the pain, how could I remember it, examine it, learn from it? If I didn't record the small joys, they would evaporate like raindrops on leaves, here one minute then gone and forgotten forever.

And so, every day, I sit down with my journal, in its present incarnation on my computer. (In their eighty-first year, my

fingers type more comfortably than they hold a pen). I write about anything and everything that concerns me. The weather, the animals (my chickens, our elderly dog Molly, the cows, the birds), the seasonal changes here at Meadow Knoll, our place in the Texas Hill Country. About my current work-in-progress, about writing and publishing now that I've left my traditional publisher and created my own little publishing enterprise (with plenty of special COVID fears about that!) About my kids and their kids and *their* kids—each little family bravely facing up to its own COVID challenges. About managing life-during-COVID: getting groceries, seeing the doctor, taking the dog to the vet, getting the AC repaired, wishing for a haircut. About the what-ifs, and the who-made-this-happens, and the what-can-be-dones. About my political *rage*, which I refuse to air on the internet: too many trolls out there in the wild!

The other day, somebody asked me, *Who are you writing for?* I didn't even have to think about the answer: I'm writing for me, for myself, for the bemused and bewildered I who is trying to make sense of an upside-down-world, an Alice-behind-the-looking-glass world, where "normal" is a word nobody can define. I am indescribably grateful for my journal, for its daily comforting (and sometimes irritating) presence. I cannot imagine my life without it.

So here, SCN sister, is my advice to you. If you haven't journaled, begin. If you've journaled in the past, start again. If you're not sure how to do it, pick up a pen, find something to write on, and just start writing. If you can't think of something to write about, write about the room you're writing in, the day you're facing, the biggest worry you have, the thing that pleased you most yesterday. Choose a time, set a timer, and write until you hear the *ding*. Do it today. Do it tomorrow.

Do it for the rest of your life.

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## LifeLines and COVID-19

Sadly, our LifeLines weekend in May with **Kathleen (Kay) Adams** in Denver was **cancelled** because of the pandemic. We've made full refunds – if you haven't received yours, please contact us. Check <https://storycirclelifelines.com> for updates on future women's writing weekends.

Meanwhile, Kay's **Center for Journal Therapy** is addressing the current crisis by doing what they do: providing education

to make your journal writing a tool for healing, growth and change. Register for their free online pandemic resource here: <https://journalversity.journaltherapy.com/courses/148/>

This is a weekly curation of writing prompts, poems, free writing classes, essays, articles, artwork and more, all co-created by the worldwide journal writing community.



## 2019 Sarton Winner: HISTORICAL FICTION

# Introducing Deborah Nedelman

by Pat Bean

Ignoring the oft-given advice to write what you know, Deborah Nedelman chose to write about what she *wanted* to know. The result is that her book, *What We Take for Truth*, is Story Circle Network's Sarton Award winner for historical fiction, as well as being named one of the best books of 2019 by Kirkus Reviews. It's a book that pushed its author to take a look at the other side of her own environmental stances – and took years to complete.

Deborah's family moved from Cincinnati, Ohio to Beverly Hills, California when she was two. As she went through school with such classmates as Richard Dreyfus, she got caught up in Hollywood's value of good stories.

"I kept a diary from a young age and embellished it with fantasies of all sorts...I wrote maudlin poetry and short stories and was on the staff of the school literary magazine."

By the time Deborah left home to attend Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, she had accumulated a goodly body of work, which she carefully wrapped in a cardboard box and asked her mother to ship to her at school.

"A few weeks later, I came back to my dorm room and found a box full of wet ashes sitting in front of my door. I learned later that the box had traveled across the country on a train that caught fire somewhere in the Midwest." She recalls, "After I got over the shock, I took the whole thing as a sign that I wasn't destined to make writing my life's work."

Deborah decided to major in psychology instead of English. "It took almost 40 years," she says, "for me to return to fiction writing – but I learned a few things in the meantime."

After graduating from Bryn Mawr, Deborah earned a doctorate degree in clinical psychology from the University of Washington, got married, had children, and started a clinical practice in Everett, a lumber town north of Seattle that is currently famous for being the place where the first COVID-19 patient in the United States was diagnosed. It was here that she found her inspiration for *What We Take for Truth*.

"In the late 1980s and early '90s, I saw a number of men who were not typical psychotherapy clients. They were men who were far more comfortable out in the woods doing physical

work than they were sitting in a shrink's office talking about their feelings. But they were desperate," she remembers.

"This was the period of the spotted-owl controversy in the Pacific Northwest, and these were men who had worked as loggers and log-truck drivers all their lives. They had always believed that their work was essential and valued, but now they were being seen as the bad guys, even by their own children," says Deborah, who herself is a staunch environmentalist and member of the Sierra Club.

"But the perspective I heard from these clients opened my eyes to the other side of the story, and I really felt for them. This was the inspiration for my novel."

Although Deborah dabbled a little bit with writing over the years – she was one of several authors of *A Guide for Beginning Psychotherapists* published in 1977, and had several short stories published in journals, including *Literary Orphans*, *Concho River Review*, and *Writers Type* – the writing bug only truly hit her when she coauthored a book about older women's sexual desire, *Still Sexy After All the Years*. Published in 2005, shortly before she retired, the book's subject was one that Deborah had specialized in during more than 30 years as a psychologist.

Writing that book reminded her of how much she had enjoyed writing. "I realized that once I was retired from my work as a psychologist, I would be free to indulge in writing again."

Toward that goal, Deborah began taking writing courses, and eventually earned a master of fine arts degree in creative writing from the Northwest Institute of Literary Arts, a stand-alone writing program on Washington's Whidbey Island. While there, she decided to write a novel, not fully anticipating how long that journey would be.

"Writing *What We Take for Truth* took many years, and by the time it was completed and I held that book in my hands, I had no perspective on it at all. I had no idea whether it was a good read or a boring story. I'd lived with the characters for so long I couldn't tell whether their story would be compelling to anyone else; I just knew I cared about them," recalls Deborah.

“When I learned that *What We Take for Truth* had won the Sarton Award, I was beyond delighted. This award is a validation that this story that I’d lived inside and that had lived inside me for so long resonates with readers. What more can a writer want?”

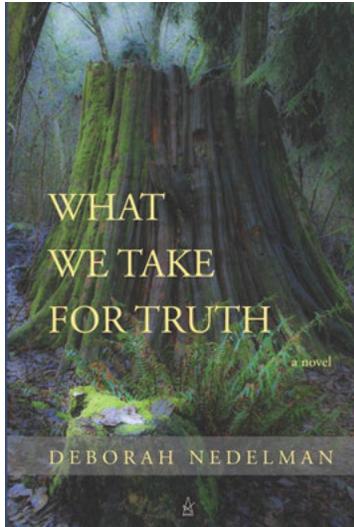
While *What We Take for Truth* was also honored by Kirkus Reviews and being named to its list of Best Books of 2019 was a huge thing, Deborah says,

“winning the Sarton Award, which is given by other women writers, is an honor of a different magnitude and means the world to me.”

The piece of writing advice that she values most is not to write what you know, but to write what you want to know.

“I am an Amherst Writers and Artists group leader and I run writing groups for writers of all levels of skill and experience. I also offer one-on-one coaching for writers who are looking for help with a manuscript or with establishing a writing practice,” Deborah offers. “What I tell them all is that writing isn’t just what you do when you put words on paper, writing is also what happens in your head as you explain the world to yourself.”

Deborah says she is working on a new novel that may be a continuation of *What We Take for Truth*. But then she adds, “Maybe not. We’ll see.” You can find out more at her website: <http://www.deborahnedelman.com>.



# Website Launch 2020

by Jeanne Guy, SCN President

Don’t get too excited but word on the street is that our new website is finished. Given the COVID-19 pandemic affecting the nation and our world, it’s nice to feel a little excitement, even if it is about a website, and this website in particular.

By “finished” I mean that the **designer/developer work is done**. Because of the time delay, Story Circle has pages to add, changes to make, material to update, and **miles to go** before we sleep, I mean, **before actual launch**. Sigh. Huge thanks for the expertise of Teresa Lynn, our administrator and web manager, and founder Susan Albert, for her knowledge about all things SCN, as they work diligently to move things toward completion.

I’ve repeatedly had to turn to the beauty of nature and its importance so I can maintain proper perspective. In spite of our website trials and tribulations, in spite of the pandemic, our Texas spring has been noteworthy. In a recent blog, Susan Albert said, “We’ve lived here at Meadow Knoll for over thirty years, and this has been the most beautiful spring I can remember.” <https://susanalbert.com/hunkering-down/>

The new website will also be easy on the eyes. The web committee (Teresa Lynn, Susan Albert, Susan Schoch, Len Leatherwood, Shawn LaTorre, returning board member Linda Hoye, and yours truly) completed hours of training and found the new website to be **both attractive and a highly functional and complex site** that we hope will provide our members and visitors a wonderful experience. There will be bugs, but with your patience, we’ll deal with them as they come up.

Once the final review of the site, both front and back ends, is complete, we’ll be getting information out to you, our members, with a launch date and instructions on how to use the new user-friendly membership/login. Cross your fingers, sisters. **We’re almost there!**



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

“Even in hard times, our stories help cement our values and strengthen our connections. Sharing them shows us the way forward.”

– Michelle Obama, 4-27-2020



Online or onsite, our Writing Circles support women in sharing their prose and poetry. In this issue, the chair of our Circles Program, **Mary Jo Doig**, introduces us to the facilitator of an onsite circle in Connecticut, and shares writing from a member of the group. If you're not yet a member of a Circle, go here to find out more:

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

## Meet Our Mystic Facilitator!

by Mary Jo Doig

Dear Readers,

Kindly join me in a warm welcome to **Ruth Crocker**, writing circle facilitator in her home town of Mystic, CT and author of the poignant and award-winning memoir, *Those Who Remain: Remembrance and Reunion After War*.

### Ruth describes her writing journey...

“Let your imagination go,” my high school English teacher would say, making writing fun and enlivening with assignments that were pure pleasure for me. “And read everything and anything.” I did.

I also grew up surrounded by family who told stories that sounded like legends or fairy tales. With my grandparents living with us, and my parents running a nursing home, we were a family with diverse religious leanings. My mother was a sometimes-practicing Episcopalian, her mother was a Jehovah's Witness, while my father attended a fundamentalist church with a big emphasis on music. Both my parents descended from Rogerene Quakers (with similar religious aspirations to Transcendentalists), so with all those legacies, stories abounded.

When I married at age nineteen and moved with my husband to Germany, letter writing was difficult. I didn't realize letters could be about just ordinary things. But when we returned to the U.S. and my husband went to Vietnam, I wrote to him every day, finding a “flow” in my writing. After his death, I found great comfort in putting words on a page and filled journals with thoughts. Yet this was a private experience; with my newly earned Ph.D. in Clinical Nutrition, my public life concerned only scientific writing.

I didn't think of myself as a writer until my son, from my second marriage, told me in the 1990s that I should write about my experience of losing my first husband in Vietnam. I realized I needed to write in a totally different way – as personal narrative. I started with short snippets of remembered dialogue and scenes that evolved into longer pieces. I attended local writing groups, and began to write/perform one-person plays.

By that time, I was full-time administering a 100-bed skilled



Ruth Crocker

nursing facility and caring for my mother, who had succumbed to dementia. After her death and my retirement, I decided to take my love for writing seriously and received an MFA from Bennington College in Creative Nonfiction. The essays about my first husband grew and evolved as I dug into that time of my life and how I survived.

Today, besides my beautiful two-year-old granddaughter, writing is the single most important focus of my life. Once I get in the chair and onto the page, the world opens up and reveals treasures that I'd forgotten – or didn't even know I

had. These days I'm working on an historical fiction novel based on many of those long-ago stories.

### Facilitating community writing circles...

After a workshop I presented three years ago, an attendee asked if I knew of a writing group. I said, “Let's start one!” and invited another acquaintance, who was working on a memoir. We started with three, word got around, three others approached us, we gradually grew to nine, and became the Mystic Writers.

The main criterion for joining is simply the desire/need to be in the company of others who value the writing process. We don't specify that you must write. However, each person has begun to produce writing. We meet monthly on the second Wednesday for two evening hours at a different member's house. Considered the “wrangler,” the host sends reminders about the meeting, offers snacks (which other members supplement), wine and other beverages, and keeps the group on task during the meeting.

Each author reads a paragraph of her work and we go around the group to offer comments. Members often provide written comments as well. Sometimes we will have two or three pieces to discuss – or a novel. Feedback on a piece requires the author submit to the group one-to-two weeks before the meeting; for a novel, submission is two-to-three months prior. We use our first hour responding to writing and the second hour to “check in” about our writing life.

### **The value and joys of writing circles...**

I feel writing circles are invaluable as harbors to check in with other women on the same journey to become better writers.

The Mystic Writers group feels successful to me – and very solid. We’ve grown to deeply appreciate each other. A joy of our group is that we seem to continue to love – even crave – getting together each month. Because we meet in each other’s home, we’ve also been able to enrich our bonds by sharing each other’s writing environments.

### **Publications by Mystic Writers...**

Four members have published work since we started. Two have completed novels, three are former journalists involved in freelance journalism, and another has completed a book-length memoir.

### **Building a community writing group...**

Start with just a few people. Find a structure that feels comfortable. Try to stick with a specific meeting date that everyone agrees on. Moving meeting times around seems to erode group cohesiveness. Meeting at each other’s homes and

having that person take charge of the meeting spreads leadership around the group. I find comfort in knowing that the group continues on if I am traveling.

### **A Mystic Writers winter tradition...**

Annually, we designate one meeting as strictly a party – a tradition we’ve named the “Yankee Book Swap.” We each choose a book from our personal bookshelf, wrap it up and write a book description on the wrapping – minus the name of the author or donor. As we’re enjoying holiday treats, our host reads the descriptions and each person chooses a book. After opening them and having more discussion, the donor is revealed, and sometimes people swap books. Everyone ends up with a book that a group member felt was worth sharing and is a great discovery for the new owner.

### **Kind thanks, Ruth, for your generous conversation!**

Ruth would welcome hearing from you at [ruthwcrocker@gmail.com](mailto:ruthwcrocker@gmail.com); through her website [www.ruthwcrocker.com](http://www.ruthwcrocker.com); or snail mail to Ruth W. Crocker, 28 Pearl Street, Mystic, CT 06355.

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The following author, Elizabeth Ashcroft, retired from working as a nurses’ aide in a local nursing home for almost 50 years. She joined an early group of Ruth’s to write about her experiences. You can contact Elizabeth at: PO Box 153, Old Mystic, CT 06372

## **Traveling after Dark**

by Elizabeth Ashcroft

People ask me what I do and when I say I work in a nursing home I always see a cloud pass in front of their eyes.

Those people who know the world of nursing homes can manage the idea of someone who works in one. Perhaps they have visited in the misty land of fragile skin and bones, the place where clothes look better on the hanger than on the body. Perhaps they had a parent or a grandparent in a “home” and even witnessed their decline and death.

My nursing home is a nice place. We think we are like a family, a home away from home – but really, we’re not. They know the

difference. Our home is clean and staff members try to smile and approach the residents in a caring way. But it’s still not “home.” Every day I hear residents ask, “Can I go home now?”

For those who will live in a nursing home for the rest of their life, it is a place to wind down to the finish line and give up the last fragments of strength before twilight overtakes their forward path. My job is to travel with them after dark and recognize the last glimmer of light as it goes out. After that, I open the window a crack for their soul to escape.

## **Home**

by Elizabeth Ashcroft

I want to go home.  
 Will you take me home?  
 This is no place like home.  
 Home is a nutshell tucked with love.  
 There is a favorite chair and smell.  
 Everything is small and comfortable.  
 The bed is just right.  
 Someone loved me there.  
 There is hope if I can go home.  
 I’ll find my memory and a time when my legs would carry me.  
 I can sing and have supper and feel my cat’s fur.  
 I’ll be safe if I go home.



From the Blogs:

# One Woman's Day

COVID-19 has been a game changer for everyone. Join our One Woman's Day contributor, **Sara Etgen-Baker**, as she shares the wisdom she has gained since the beginning of her quarantine journey in March 2020. Find out how you can contribute to the blog at:

<http://onewomansday.wordpress.com/about/>

by Kali' Rourke, OWD Coordinator

## Their Peculiar Ways

by Sara Etgen-Baker

"Wash your hands, little lady!"

"I already washed them a little while ago. Why should I wash them again?"

"You've touched countless things since then; your hands are dirty."

"But Grammy," I turned my hands over, closely examining them. "They don't look dirty!"

"Yes, they are! The kind of dirt I'm talking about is invisible; it rides on your hands and can make you sick. It can only be removed with soap and water. So go wash your hands!"

Invisible dirt riding on my hands? I hadn't heard of such a thing and didn't understand why I washed my hands more at Grammy's house than I did at home. Maybe she has more invisible dirt at her house, I reasoned. Grammy had many other peculiar ways, so I chalked up her handwashing practice as another one of them.

Before disinfecting wipes and hand sanitizer were available, Grammy took sheets of paper towel and a small can of disinfecting spray with her, stuffing it inside her rather commodious purse. While out and about, she used her spray, liberally coating the surface of restaurant tables, public phones, restroom doorknobs, then vigorously rubbing the area until the coating disappeared. I never questioned her ritual but found it odd and even a little embarrassing.

Even my mother had her own baffling ways. She didn't use her dishwasher because it cost too much to run. She never threw

away any empty plastic butter tubs. Instead, she washed them and stored them in a cabinet for putting leftovers in. Eventually, the cabinet became so full that when the cabinet door was opened, the tubs tumbled out onto the floor.

Bar soap was cheaper than body wash or liquid hand soap and was, therefore, Mother's preferred choice for washing one's hands and body. Anyone who's ever used bar soap knows that the bar gets smaller and smaller with each use. Eventually, all that remains is a balled-up, dirty, disfigured, and insignificant piece of soap that's annoyingly impossible to use. Mother habitually gathered up all these mutant miniature soaps and placed them in—you guessed it—the empty butter tubs. Once she'd collected enough tiny soap pieces, she chopped them up; placed them in a Styrofoam cup; filled it with water; and cooked it in the microwave for 30 seconds. After drying for a few days, wah-la! A new bar of soap.

So what's the point of rambling on about these women's peculiar ways? Grammy was 18 when the 1918 flu pandemic began and lost a cousin to the virus making her highly sensitized to the presence of unseen germs.

Mother grew up during the Great Depression and, out of necessity, learned to live prudently and waste nothing.

When the COVID19 pandemic struck, I suddenly had a new appreciation for what I thought were Grammy's over-the-top sanitizing habits. When store shelves emptied in the wake of the pandemic, I found myself understanding Mother's fear of not having, and respected her frugality.

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

## From the Blogs:

# Telling HerStories

Len Leatherwood, Coordinator of our Telling HerStories blog, recently posted this piece by author Linda Marie Steele, demonstrating how writing through trauma and change can lead to healing and sometimes unanticipated growth.

## Tending the Marsh

by Linda Maria Steele

I first put pen to paper and began to jot down thoughts about going through a divorce and moving into a new house near the great Sippewissett Marsh in Falmouth, MA in 2016. I started journaling because it helped me sort out the details of what happened and how my life was changing in ways that sometimes felt scary and were often unexpected. The writing was primarily therapeutic—a way to get what was swirling around in my head out and down on paper.

Even though I had already published my first book, a cookbook with related stories called “Meet Me in My Cape Cod Kitchen: Recipes for Seaside Living,” maintained a blog, taught writing classes, and published close to forty articles on topics ranging from food to home care, parenting and family, initially I was not quite ready to share such a personal story.

I did not know if I was ever going to publish my story about loss and transition, or how I could effectively transform daily journal entries into something meaningful that would appeal to readers. At the time, all I knew was that taking daily walks on the marsh and then coming home to jot down my impressions made me feel better.

Back then I would meet up with a friend for lunch, a fellow writer, who had just published her memoir. Every once in a while, we would bring recently written works to share with each other.

“Do you think I should turn this into a memoir?” I asked shyly over a burger and fries after Sharon read a selection.

“You definitely have something here,” she replied. “I think other women going through a divorce would relate to your story.”

I put what I had in my desk drawer where it stayed for over a year. I had other work to tend to and knew I needed a little more distance from the actual events.

I was laid off from a teaching position in August of 2017 due to low student enrollment and suddenly found myself with extra time on my hands. The following autumn I pulled out what I wrote to revise and organize entries. When my writing friend and I met for lunch again, I brought a rough draft along of what I had so far.

At that point, I did not feel I had written a memoir just yet and still was not sure I wanted to share it.

What I began to see were patterns emerging in my journal entries. I walked every day for a year. I wrote as soon as I got home so my memories were fresh and specific. I saw the herons on my walks often and started to feel a real affinity with the majestic birds. I felt deeply comforted by nature regardless of what I was feeling each day. The marsh remained the same day in and day out and yet it also changed moment to moment.

Around that same time, one of my poems, “Tending a Tender Heart,” was accepted to be read on NPR’s Poetry Sundays. Recording that poem and sharing it on NPR sparked the idea that rather than tell every single detail of the year after my divorce in a tell-all memoir from all of my journal entries, maybe I could take bits and pieces of the story and draft a narrative timeline around the events. Somehow a collection of poetry felt like a more comfortable way to tell my story than a tell-all memoir. With poetry, I could ground my story in specific images yet choose to share as much or little of my story as I wanted.

I started to see how I could write poems that offered a tiny slice of the bigger story by using nature imagery and simple language formed from my journal entries. The collection includes a reflection of the change in seasons that mirrors a change in my attitude. I experienced moments of profound grief that year, but I also experienced very real joy. I encountered miracles on my journey, which led to a poem simply called “Miracles.” I finally imagined my life beyond this current loss. And I learned more about what mattered most to me, and at the top of that list were my three children, reflected in the poem “Baby Birds.”

It felt right to put my story together in a series of poems. I decided to look at all of my journal entries and choose key moments, experiences and events, then draft poems that followed my year of daily walking. There were times that I simply trusted my intuition about how to organize them and move forward. On a walk one day, the title *Tending the Marsh* popped into my mind because I truly felt the more I walked and wrote, the more I felt the marsh was, in turn, tending to me. Other times, I asked writing friends to read and offer feedback.

Somewhere along the way, poetry more and more felt like a good fit for my story. It allowed me to make vivid observations

about my environment and my experience. But I didn't have to feel bogged down by all the specifics of a complex timeline, even though a story-like structure of that year from the loss to new beginnings eventually emerged from one poem to the next.

Poetry allowed me not only a way to create a way to name my experience, but also a way for me to grow and heal. I invite you to read the collection in one sitting and pay attention to the timeline that emerges from loss to eventual hope through its pages. I made sure to include a poem to reflect each season. One poem is called "That's How it is in the Summer" another "When Spring Arrives" and, of course, a poem called "Dead of Winter."

Recently a friend wrote and said, "Tending the Marsh is beautiful and calming. I have the sense of walking beside you

and seeing all the secrets of the marsh through your eyes." Another friend, who went through her own divorce a few years before, said after reading *Tending the Marsh* that she wished she'd had it to read the year after her own divorce because of the comfort it provided.

*Tending the Marsh* was published December 2018 and includes poems like "When Grief Visits," "Moonbeams," "New Beginnings," "Blessed" and "Autumn on the Marsh." It's available now on Amazon and in local bookstores. Please reach out to share your experience or story if you feel moved to do so. Even better you can sign up to take my class "Finding the Writer Within." I can also be reached through my website at [www.lindamariasteele.com](http://www.lindamariasteele.com).



## Writing Tips from Our Teachers

In every issue of the quarterly *Journal*, Len Leatherwood, our Online Classes Coordinator, brings us another nugget of writing wisdom and encouragement from one of our SCN teachers. This issue features **Lynn Goodwin**, helping us to create vivid characters.

### Speaking As Your Character by Lynn Goodwin

Want to get inside your character's head and body? Don't be shy. Instead, try this exercise. I first used it in the '70s and '80s, when I was working with actors. We'd have half doing it and the other half observing, and because you could always get compliments for concentration, everyone tried. The results were often wonderful.

**NOTE #1:** You may want to have a trusted writing partner or your phone read the sentence-starts to you. Remember to leave spaces so you can respond.

**NOTE #2:** Make sure the sentence-starts are up on your computer before you start so you don't break out of character to hunt for them.

**NOTE #3:** Before you begin this exercise, breathe in your character (whatever that means) and exhale any negativity. Breathe her in again, and stand up as your character. Begin walking as your character. How is her walk different from yours?

Is her posture straighter?

Are her steps weaker?

Does she feel more weighted down or lighter than you?

Observe differences as you walk, and see what feels different about being your character than being yourself (whatever that means).

When you feel comfortable in your character's body, sit in front of your computer as she would sit, pick a font and color that she would use, and complete the sentence starts below. Keep going when she (the character) wants to. Go to the next

sentence start when she's ready. The more you can become her physically, the more you will also be her mentally.

There are no wrong answers. You're just getting inside her head, writing what she is thinking.

My full name is...

I live at...

I live with...

I am happiest when...

I daydream about...

My mind...

If I had my way...

I don't understand why...

What I could do is...

Being scared makes me...

Sometimes I think that I...

I have a feeling that part of me...

A person's family...

No one could help so...

If I were in charge...

I get angry when...

People perceive me as...

I hate...

People wouldn't like it if...

I am afraid I...

I know...

I really am...

A person can't be happy unless...



**Lynn Goodwin** owns Writer Advice. She's written *Never Too Late: From Wannabe to Wife at 62* (memoir), *Talent* (YA) and *You Want Me to Do WHAT? Journaling for Caregivers* (self-help). *Never Too Late* and *Talent* are award winners. Shorter works have appeared in *Hip Mama*, *The Sun*, *Good Housekeeping.com*, *Purple Clover.com*, and *Flashquake*. She is a reviewer and teacher at Story Circle Network. Visit her website: <http://writeradvice.com> and her blog: <http://blynngoodwin.com>



## Our Future is Female!

**Ruby Shapz** lives in Los Angeles and is currently a sophomore at Santa Monica College. She loves writing and also has a deep passion for art history, an interest bolstered by world travel. Thanks to a father who is a visual effects producer and works internationally, Ruby and her family have visited many countries across the globe. As a result, she's had the chance to tour numerous art museums, and has seen in person the paintings featured in her textbooks. Her family's travels not only allowed her "to visit cultures where these amazing works were created, but also to experience a deeper connection to the art as well as the artist's perspective of his/her environment." Ruby will be attending UC Berkeley in Fall 2020 to continue her studies as an Art History major. We're delighted to welcome Ruby as a new member of Story Circle Network! (Email [ruby.shaps@gmail.com](mailto:ruby.shaps@gmail.com).)

### My Personal Art Gallery by Ruby Shapz

As an art history major, I am fascinated by great artists and appreciate their work. My room is my personal art gallery and an expression of my creativity. There, I surround myself with an odd assortment of uniquely procured *objets d'art*, which are extensions of my quirky personality.

I love 17<sup>th</sup> Century art, so I have placed my two needlepoints of Pinkie and Blue Boy, found at a garage sale, diagonally across from each other, with Blueboy gazing out of my window and Pinkie looking up to plush birds hanging in fabric cages procured from Anthropologie. Below them are two still lifes of flowers in mismatched golden frames that I bought from an old hotel going out of business. Directly above the middle of my headboard is an impressionist landscape painting of a field of sunflowers. I found it hiding behind a dresser downstairs and chose it to be the centerpiece of my room because it balances out all the needlepoints and introduces a new style and texture. Next to that is my last needlepoint, *The Milkmaid* by Vermeer,

which I had learned about in Art History II and purchased on eBay. The orthological lines converge just above the milkmaid's hand holding the pitcher as warm light pools in from the window. I have a smattering of other paintings around the room to complement these larger pieces.

As a fan of art, originality is very important to me, and I like knowing that my room cannot be replicated – it's one of a kind. All of these pieces were handmade by someone who shares my passion for art, which strengthens our unseen connection. I enjoy not only the self-contained images of each piece but also the story that I can tell with the way that I arrange and interpret the pieces as a collection.

The walls of my room express my unique aesthetic for design as well as my appreciation of fine art. I feel most comfortable when surrounded by personally curated beauty and I love my unconventional gallery.



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



## Crowdfunding With Kickstarter

Have a creative project? Need a little cash to get it off Ground Zero and kick it into high gear?

That was the dilemma of SCN member **Jonna Higgins-Freese**, who had an idea for a novel about an important woman—**Frances Perkins**, the “mother” of Social Security and the first woman Secretary of Labor—but no spare dollars to fund the necessary research. Jonna turned to Kickstarter, and turned her creative idea into a work-in-progress.

Let’s start with basics. Crowdfunding is a way to raise money, by asking (typically via the internet) for donations. Backers—people who are interested in supporting you—can invest in your project and receive “rewards” (however you define that). Kickstarter is one of a number of funding platforms where you can describe your project, set a funding goal, and invite people (family, friends, fans, the public) to pledge money to make the project happen.

Jonna called her Kickstarter project “Research for *Steadfast*, A Novel About Frances Perkins.” (You can see her project here: <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/jhf/research-for-steadfast-a-novel-of-frances-perkins/description>) Her tagline: *Frances Perkins may be the most important American woman most people have never heard of. Let's change that.*

Jonna set a goal of \$2,000 to fund research travel and raised \$2,187 from forty supporters. Here, she shares her experience.

**SCN:** What made you consider using Kickstarter?

**Jonna:** In the spring of 2019, I was finishing a writing project and wondering what was next, and decided it would be a novel about Frances Perkins. I dove into the secondary literature and quickly realized that I would need to do research in the archives in New York City and possibly Washington, DC. In the past, my writing research has always been within day-trip driving distance. This project would require airfare and hotel stays. I began thinking about how I could do the trip most efficiently and when it might work with my vacation and family responsibilities.

And then, as I had long expected and planned for, I got laid off. What a gift! However, I almost immediately realized that while I now had plenty of free time (at least from work responsibilities), it was not perhaps the best moment to spend several thousand dollars on a research trip. I thought that Frances had the kind of national significance that might cause folks to fund the project, so I talked with my friend Rich Dana. Rich had used Kickstarter for several campaigns for his zine, *Obsolete!* He shared his experience, reviewed drafts of the campaign as I put it together, and in the end when I was losing my courage and kept thinking of reasons not to do it, helpfully growled, “Just publish the damn thing.”

**SCN:** How did your decision to use Kickstarter shape your research?

**Jonna:** In a way I didn't expect, it gave me a community of interested supporters and cheerleaders. I've not been widely published, so writing has been something I do privately, mostly for my own entertainment. This made the commitment and the work very public in a way I found encouraging and helpful—

especially at those moments (which I find to be a regular part of the writing process) when I think “this project is too big; it can't be done; at least not by me.” When those thoughts came this time, I thought, “I've got to keep going for the backers.” I learned that it's good to build community at any stage of the writing process.

Also, as I was going through the Perkins' archives each day, in addition to whatever broad research questions and criteria I was considering, I watched for little items and tidbits I could share with backers in the updates I did every few days during the research trip. There were also unexpected logistics to plan. For example, one of the rewards was a postcard from the road. Turns out you can't always buy postcards just anywhere anymore, so I had to keep my eyes open for them and make sure I had lots of stamps. I did find a search-for-a-blue-mailbox website that was helpful, too.

**SCN:** Did your Kickstarter campaign meet your expectations?

**Jonna:** In terms of the funds raised, it absolutely did. I also raised substantial funds outside the campaign, from folks who for whatever reason just wanted to send a check.

I did find that the backers—there are 40 of them—are mostly friends and family. Even though Frances Perkins has national significance, only 6% of Americans know who she is. (I know this thanks to backer Jeff Pillartz of Russell Research, who kindly donated several national survey questions.) So neither Frances nor I had the kind of name recognition that could have taken the campaign viral, out of the circle of my family and friends. I felt a bit guilty about that, because I sometimes felt it was more like a disguised personal campaign (*please help me because I got laid off*) than a genuine project fund. That feeling

has passed as the backers are mostly genuinely interested in and curious about the subject and the project.

SCN: Some authors reward backers with the products of their creative work—a published book, a piece of music, an art print. You rewarded your backers with frequent updates on your research and writing—so far, you've offered 19 of these. How has that worked out?

Jonna: I did follow advice (mostly) to keep the rewards a part of the project. I was very clear that the rewards and the funding were about research for the book, not for publication (which was too far in the future). (Some authors offer a copy of their book to backers. Elly Blue's Kickstarter campaign is a good model for this; she always has the entire anthology ready to go before she launches her campaign, so the reward of the book itself comes just two-three weeks after the campaign ends). Many people have told me they like and appreciate the updates. Many more have never commented or responded to them at all, and one person told me "I don't need updates, I'd rather just have you spend your time writing." During the research trip itself (which was three weeks with a trip home in the middle for a job interview), I posted updates every few days. Since then, I post an update every 3-4 weeks, just to let folks know that I'm still working.

SCN: What would you do differently next time?

Jonna: I wonder whether there will be a next time. I think my friends and family were willing to support my eccentric hobby once, because they love me. I don't know that they'll do it

again. (My friend Rich Dana found that his first campaign was wildly successful; the second struggled to meet its goal.) My attempts to reach out beyond that circle (by offering very low-price curriculum materials as rewards to teachers; by reaching out to friends who are very interested in current progressive politics) did not gain traction.

On the other hand, the next one may be more of a collective project that would have more folks promoting it—and perhaps, therefore, draw on the support of a wider circle of family/friends even if the project itself doesn't get traction. I'm working on announcing the Householder's Union Prize for Speculative Art (writing, visual, film) that shows near-future visions of how we will have begun moving toward alternative futures that take advantage of the fact that there is enough for everyone and support governments and economies of, by, and for the people. If I get enough high-quality submissions, I'll do a Kickstarter along with the contributors for funding to support an anthology of the best entries. The model here would be something like what Elly Blue does for her feminist bicycle science fiction on Kickstarter—each person with an entry appearing in the anthology would presumably be willing to promote it among their circle of supporters.

SCN: Jonna, thank you for sharing your experiences and your insight—and best of luck with your Perkins project. In this COVID-19 era, we have even more reasons to be grateful to Frances Perkins for commitment to a program of Social Security and health insurance.

**Jonna Higgins-Freese** lives in Iowa City, IA, where she has a day job in academic technology. She moonlights as a writer; her current project is a novel about Frances Perkins. Her award-winning work has appeared in *Grist*, *The Attached Parent*, *The Examined Life*, and the *Wapsipinicon Almanac*.



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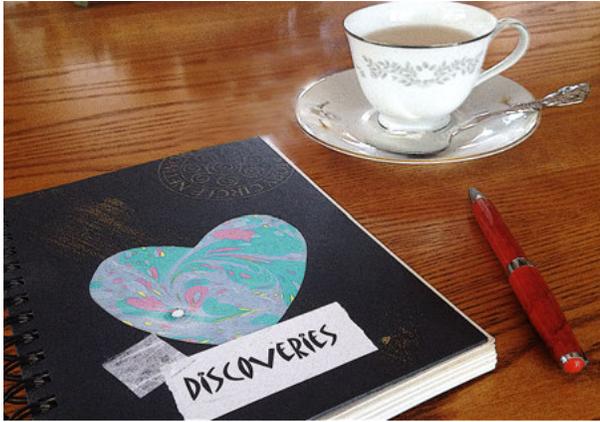
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**Teresa Lynn**, founder and manager of Tranquility Press, is also the administrator of Story Circle Network. If interested in any of the above services, contact her directly at [ftdlynn@gmail.com](mailto:ftdlynn@gmail.com) and mention your affiliation with SCN for a **10% DISCOUNT**.



# True Words from Real Women

Edited by **Jo Virgil**, True Words is a selection of short lifewriting pieces by SCN members. The optional theme for this issue is “**Quiet Time.**” Future topics are listed on the back page. We want to read your writing, be it prose or poetry, so please submit your own True Words to the *Journal*. Until our new website is open for entries, go to [www.storycircle.org/members/frmjournalsubmission.php](http://www.storycircle.org/members/frmjournalsubmission.php) or contact Jo for details at [truewords@storycircle.org](mailto:truewords@storycircle.org)

## Seeking Solitude

Patricia Roop Hollinger – Westminster, MD  
[woodscrone@gmail.com](mailto:woodscrone@gmail.com)

On my walk this morning, clouds are floating gently as they move from West to East in the clear blue skies overhead. Two young fawn are spotted under a neighbor’s tree, nibbling at the vegetation. Whirrrrrr, Buzzzzzz, of lawnmowers and weed whackers shatters the tranquility of this summer day.

### I SEEK SOLITUDE

A list of errands posted on the refrigerator door awaits me. There will be solitude in the sanctuary of my car. No radio or CDs to fill my mind with words eliciting tears or rapid heartbeats.

### I SEEK SOLITUDE

Of course, there will be solitude as I await blood work to determine my cholesterol levels. I’m very skeptical about the whole matter regarding cholesterol, but my M.D. deems it of importance to keep tabs. The scene is one of zombie-like bodies also awaiting the needle prick. “Sure are a lot of folks here this time of day,” a disgruntled husband says to his wife. “There are eggs in the refrigerator and you mix them with the pancake batter in the cupboard,” a mother shouts into her cell phone to a daughter who was asleep when she left home.

### I SEEK SOLITUDE

A much-needed haircut is when I can just sit back, close my eyes, and have some quiet. Every chair in the waiting area is filled with obese folks, as their layers of fat fall over the sides of the chairs. A TV at full volume is broadcasting the CNN news of the day about the approaching deadly Coronavirus. “There will be a 30-minute wait,” I am told.

### I SEEK SOLITUDE

I flee to my 18-acre wood lot, where a recently purchased hammock awaits me. The strong threads cradle my body as it relaxes against them. The trees overhead cover me as though I am in St. Patrick’s Cathedral. Birds provide the accompanying music that vibrates to the rhythms of slower breaths.

### SOLITUDE RESTORES MY SOUL



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

## Quiet Time Revelations

Marian McCaa Thomas – Leawood, KS  
mmccaat@kc.rr.com

- I'm working in the kitchen while our young sons play noisily in their room. Suddenly the sound of silence makes me wary, and I hurry to see what mischief they may be up to.
- Standing at the end of the pier which juts out over the lake, my father and I seem to be in outer space! The perfectly still water mirrors the myriad stars so they shine below us as well as above us, awesome in their cosmic sweep. In silence, we share the insignificance of our place in the universe as well as a sense that we are part of the whole.
- In the hospital's waiting room, anxiety is palpable as we sit tensely, wondering if the doctor will bring good news or bad. The quiet is alive with worry.
- A thousand people in the concert hall are enthralled as the string quartet brings the music to a very quiet conclusion. Instead of clapping, we sit without moving a muscle, sharing a moment of deep communication with the players, the composer and each other.
- I gaze at the birthday cards which have arrived in the mail, and suddenly realize that for the first time in my 71 years, there's nothing from my mother. She died five months ago, and the silence takes my breath away.
- In the moments of relaxation after the passion of sex, the familiarity of my husband's body brings shalom—total peace and well-being, balm for my body and soul.
- Snow has blanketed the city. A hush falls over me, as if a noisy baby is now quieted at her mother's breast, and all is well with the world.

## Uninterrupted Silence

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

There was a lot of noise and distraction in my world. Sometimes, the din was so loud and the interruptions so many and varied that I had difficulty tending to what I needed to do. My days were chaotic, packed with appointments, meetings, and overdue tasks. I believed “hard work pays off” but had taken the adage too far, arriving early, staying late, frequently skipping lunch, and never taking breaks. I was working hard but inefficiently, rushing through things, pushing myself to the point of mental and physical exhaustion, and making mistakes. Despite feeling frazzled and anxious, I continued working, believing that taking any time off was an unaffordable luxury.

In lieu of taking any extended time off, I snatched a few quiet moments here and there—closing my eyes and sitting alone in my car before entering the grocery store; staying in the shower longer than necessary; zoning out while doing laundry; daydreaming during staff meetings. The silence smoothed my soul, taking away my jagged edges. But part of me yearned for uninterrupted silence, for peace and quiet—a yearning more significant than those scattered minutes.

That yearning drove me to take a quiet day—a day of introspection, a day disconnected from everyone and everything. I enjoyed pattering about with nothing but uninterrupted silence for company. I did what I really loved—cleaning, gardening, and writing whatever ideas drifted by. That day was like a salve, a chance for the spinning of ideas and the carousel of duties to slow and occasionally stop. So, the next month and every month thereafter, I took another quiet day.

My quiet days were feathers without hurry, moving this way and that in the air, happy to change direction according to the wind. In each gifted moment, there was such freedom—an infinitely branching path with no paths at all. Within that liberty my mind wandered, content to wait for the path to show itself worthy of curiosity, introspection, and mindfulness.

I loved my quiet days—those calming, silence-filled, introspective moments filled with grace and spiritual renewal.

## Morning

Linda Hoye – Kamloops, BC  
<https://lindahoye.com/>, [linda.hoye@gmail.com](mailto:linda.hoye@gmail.com)

I rise first. Always. The dog and my husband sleep on while I pad to the kitchen. The light from the hydroponic garden on the countertop, where tiny tomatoes hang heavy on the vines, is already on. It welcomes me into the sanctuary.

With practiced steps, I carry out my morning routine. Pour soy milk into a glass, pop it into the microwave, and set the timer for 77 seconds. Check. Pop the pre-filled pod filled with ground coffee into the Keurig, set my favorite tall mug in place, and push the middle button. Check. Take warm soy milk out of the microwave, froth it, and pour it over the cup of brewed coffee. Check.

I take my warm mug into the den and curl up under a Sherpa blanket because it's still cool this early in the morning before the programmable thermostat sends a message to the furnace that it's time to warm things up.

I close my eyes and sip coffee, greeting the day. Offering thanks. Thinking about that thing that was on my mind when I went to bed last night—it's still there, in the pit of my stomach. I reach for my journal; I need to write through it to make sense of it.

I scribble and scratch, and things that were dim become clearer. Words and soy-milky frothy coffee never fail me. I reach for books, sacred texts, and words fill me with enough for this day.

Then there's a scratching at the door to the den I closed when I entered. The dog. She wants in on this morning routine too. So I rise, open the door, and she pads into the room, tail wagging, excited just to be alive. I think I could learn something from that. I lift her onto the sofa and we both settle in—me under the blanket, her on top.

Day begins, gentle and quiet.

## Perseverance

Mary Jo West – San Clemente, CA  
[mjwestsc@gmail.com](mailto:mjwestsc@gmail.com)

A shiny, black spider  
 the size of a small river stone  
 is wedged in the center of her web  
 extending from my  
 upstairs bedroom window  
 to a branch of  
 an adjacent ficus tree.

During the night,  
 gusty wind of  
 an impending storm  
 veers through the tree,  
 shaking its branches.

By early morning  
 I fear she's been  
 blown away, but  
 she's still there,  
 and her delicate,  
 silk-like web  
 is bigger than before.

Working methodically  
 moment to moment,  
 she persists in her  
 will to survive.

She may only have this day  
 or the next, but I'm  
 in wonder at her infallible  
 sense of knowing  
 what her life is meant to be.

## First Teddy

Jane Gragg Lewis – Laguna Niguel, CA  
[janelewis@gmail.com](mailto:janelewis@gmail.com)

Baby Bear lies in my dresser drawer, blue plaid bow around his neck. A blondie with ever-bright black eyes. The worn seams, small hole under his left arm and a few bald spots on the back of his head, along with his old-fashioned stiff design, betray his age, but he's still a handsome little guy.

Every time I open the drawer and see him, I think he deserves better, like a special spot on my bed, after so many years of faithful service. All those years he slept with me, let me clutch him, drip teardrops on him, drag him by an arm or leg. All the years he tolerated dressing up, having tea, riding in my tricycle basket up and down Carol Avenue, sitting at his desk in Teddy Bear School learning his ABCs and one, two, threes.

But here in the drawer, cuddled between Rosie Bear and Cubby Bear, he's been safe from all the years of dogs with voracious appetites for his kind.

I lift him from his place to explain it all, kiss his black-stitched nose, and put him back to wait for the next time the drawer opens and the light peeks in.

## Two Kayakers

Joan Connor – Coeur d’Alene, ID  
<https://joanconnor.wordpress.com/>  
[joanconnor6@gmail.com](mailto:joanconnor6@gmail.com)  
 e-Circle 9

two kayakers  
 fishing poles erect  
 paddles push  
 as another season  
 claims its catch  
 egret white wings  
 brushing  
 a sacred space  
 above the water  
 yet below the sky  
 a solitary coot  
 leaves its liquid path  
 a perfect V  
 we drink the peace of nature  
 six feet apart

## Reading the Newspaper in the Back Yard

Linda M. Hasselstrom – Hermosa, SD  
[LindaMHasselstrom@Windbreakhouse.com](mailto:LindaMHasselstrom@Windbreakhouse.com)

Two Marines die in mortar fire in Baghdad.  
 Four red tulips open in front of the house.  
 Searchers find the child dead—a green  
 plaster cast still cradles her broken arm.  
 Iris spears rise sharp above last year’s  
 dry curls. An earthquake shakes L.A.  
 Clematis shoots from sawdust  
 to climb the arbor’s trellised wall.  
 A soldier dies in a non-hostile incident.  
 Daffodils open beside the old cottonwood.  
 In Veracruz a gas leak kills six people.  
 Buds swell the twisted branches of a lilac.  
 A rebel bomb explodes in a crowd.  
 A Texas county’s first female sheriff  
 is also Hispanic, a lesbian, and a Democrat.

Blue bells bloom  
 on the same day  
 as last year.

## Hideaway

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

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

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

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

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

## A Wish

Patricia Dreyfus – Corona del Mar, CA  
<https://patriciadreyfus-writer.com/>

She sat at her desk; the house was quiet, everyone gone for the day. Her eyes focused on the computer screen. A rivulet of tears fell on the keyboard. She blinked, read it again. This is well done, she thought. After five years of practice, this is good.

She put a paper over the keyboard, leaned back in her chair. Let the tears come. Why didn’t I begin this when I was younger? But then I couldn’t even articulate my needs. Wants are only coming into focus now. Wishes? Ha! Who had the luxury of wishes? Wishes are in fairy tales. Wishes are not regrets. But how I wish, oh Lord, how I wish I had been a writer sooner.

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

## Joyful Noise

Pat LaPointe – Prospect Heights, IL  
<http://www.changesinlife.com/>

“Please, God. Make them quit crying” was my prayer as one preemie twin would wail, and the other twin soon join her in her less than melodious sounds.

“Can’t you all quit yelling and fighting with each other for a minute?” was my plea the many times when my four girls were fighting. “I can’t even think.”

“Can’t you take turns talking? It just sounds like a bunch of noise when you all talk at once.”

These were the times when my children were growing up that I’d give anything for some quiet. If I knew then what I know now, I would have cherished those times.

The girls are all adults now with children of their own. It’s interesting that I could tolerate the grandkids yelling and their bursts of chattiness, giggles and roars of laughter when they were young.

But now, when all must be quiet, it hurts. I long to hug and kiss the grandchildren. Phone calls, texts, and the rare video visits are far from satisfying. And the quiet after these contacts is deafening.

And, for the first time in 40 years of marriage, my husband and I are together all day and night. What we thought would be an opportunity to share more thoughts and tasks, has not happened. We each go to our home office and work all day. Silence is broken by: “What do you want for dinner?” and “Did you feed the dog, turn down the heat, lock the doors?” Is it possible we’ve run out of things to say?

We can sanitize everything, wash our hands until they feel like sandpaper, and keep our social distance. But what we really want is sound—blissful sound.

## Speak Up!

Dorothy Ross – Davis, CA  
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When I was a little girl, I was expected to sit quietly and speak softly, to be seen and not heard. Now the experts on my Parkinson’s disease team are urging me to speak up.

I was surprised how much noise I made when the speech therapist told me to call out some numbers loud and strong. And bellowing her May-Me-My-Moe-Moo exercise, I felt like I was hollering at somebody, not just tuning my pipes. But with the microphone in front of my face and the monitor

## Indian Summer

Teri Liptak – Tyler, TX  
<http://rttlingcage.blogspot.com/>

A last gasp.  
 A sigh of change on the tidal winds.  
 Fading colors, gorged with sea-salt memories.  
 Windows sealed up, boardwalk deserted.  
 Time moving on,  
 a hollowness rings in my steps.  
 I watch the living seasons and rhythms of life  
 as the season’s tired blooms hang limp.  
 Their beauty faded.  
 Only to live in memory,  
 recalled another day.  
 The sunset catches my eye.  
 Amber light, aflame on the water.  
 A full harvest moon, soon to appear.  
 The sun, a dying ember,  
 lowers to kiss the silver-capped waves.  
 Waves murmur a familiar melody,  
 offering up summer’s last song.  
 I turn to go,  
 these earth feet connected to the sand.

## No Instructions

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

There are no instructions  
 For living through grief  
 No words for how to cry,  
 How to lay down and rest,  
 Or to consume a meal  
 After your son has killed himself.  
 Instead you just sit there  
 Arms folded around your chest  
 And rock back and forth,  
 Back and forth.  
 And there are no instructions  
 For what people should say  
 When they come to call.

lighting up when I mastered the long “aah” sound, I felt like Liza Doolittle. “By Jove, I’ve got it!”

All this effort to get comfortable using my lungs is very amusing to my husband. Bill spent his career supervising huge construction projects, shouting orders to make himself heard over the roar of heavy machinery. It wasn’t easy for him to moderate his booming voice off the job. For more than 50 years, I tried to be discreet while signaling Bill to turn down the volume. Now he gets to remind me to speak up.

## First Snow with My Mother

Ariela Zucker – Auburn, ME  
<https://paperdragonme.wordpress.com/>  
[ldplus4u@yahoo.com](mailto:ldplus4u@yahoo.com)

In her heavy winter coat,  
 now a bundle of wet wool.  
 Her black hair sprayed  
 with white crystals.  
 Holding me tight against her hip,  
 My mother's arms enveloping me.  
 Snowflakes swirling around us,  
 circles within circles, dancing  
 as they fall to the ground.  
 Our apartment building, in the back,  
 its lines veiled by nature's strokes.  
 A black and white faded picture,  
 found in an old album, of  
 my first year, my first snow.  
 Snowflakes dancing around us.  
 In the stillness, just us two.  
 The touch of her arms, imprinted  
 in my memory.

## Going Home

Linda M. Hasselstrom – Hermosa, SD  
[LindaMHasselstrom@Windbreakhouse.com](mailto:LindaMHasselstrom@Windbreakhouse.com)

Toothbrush, toothpaste,  
 shampoo, rinse. As I use  
 each one, it leaves  
 the spotlight on the bathroom shelf,  
 slips into the black bag.  
 Soap, lipstick. Lotion.  
 Finally the glass stage is empty,  
 nothing reflected but  
 that wrinkle between my eyebrows.  
 The mirror waits  
 for the woman who will spritz  
 my face away leave the reflection  
 clean and empty,  
 waiting for the next face to check in.  
 When I close the door behind me,  
 the pillows fluff themselves.  
 The room inhales.  
 The woman who cleans the mirror  
 never looks into it. She wipes  
 two dozen mirrors in a day,  
 reflects  
 in none of them.

## Pacific

Patricia Dreyfus – Corona del Mar, CA  
<https://patriciadreyfus-writer.com/>

The pale dawn reveals a world  
 concealed during the heat of day.  
 Salty scent of the sea  
 engulfs the mushroom-colored sand.  
 Palm trees stand sentry along the bluff,  
 green fronds like plumes on an honor guard.  
 Gulls caw in their circular flight  
 jealous of the pecking shore birds.  
 Brown pelicans glide in formation  
 skimming the water, bellies wet with spray.  
 Dolphins arch in the breaking waves,  
 craft scallop patterns in the white foam.  
 Sea lions lay on the harbor buoy, barking,  
 as the bell rings with the incoming tide.

## Mai and I

Christa Pandey – Austin, TX  
<https://karmawings.wordpress.com/>

What love could be expressed  
 in boiling water, such a simple act?  
 Before a ray of light would wake the rest,  
 she found her way into  
 the kitchen house, across the court,  
 her daily path for many years.  
 She kindled fire not for tea,  
 but drinking water first  
 to fill an earthen jar  
 for son and foreign bride,  
 now prone to waterborne disease.  
 How could I show my love for her,  
 where hugs and kisses  
 were an alien thought?  
 I watched her cooking,  
 though I dared not stir the pots,  
 non-Brahmin, I might spoil the meal  
 for those with narrow dietary zeal.  
 In washing, cleaning, knitting I  
 let skills be words I could not speak.  
 Her warm approving eyes  
 spoke words my soul could read.

## Asking

Margaret Dubay Mikus –  
 Lake Forest, IL  
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Standing still  
 on a small piece  
 of solid ground  
 buried land mines  
 all around  
 Now do you see  
 the difficulty?  
 And what would you  
 advise me?  
 Other than  
 in this moment  
 to keep breathing  
 deep into the belly?

## River Stroll

Mary Jo West – San Clemente, CA  
[mjwestsc@gmail.com](mailto:mjwestsc@gmail.com)

I feel a morning chill  
 despite bright sunlight  
 streaming through low clouds  
 piled on the horizon.  
 A Great Horned Owl  
 plump and cushy,  
 swoops down from  
 a Blue Spruce pine.  
 Broad, outstretched wings  
 wave slowly, silently  
 over river's gentle flow.  
 Her breast feathers  
 reflect soft, mosaic patterns  
 on the green tinged water.  
 For a moment,  
 her magical spirit  
 touches my soul.

## How Still It Is

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

It was the summer of my twelfth year when I first read *The Secret Garden*. I stood with Mary Lennox outside the locked-up secret garden. I was young and naive, hadn't lived much life, and didn't understand much about the human condition. So, like Mary, I wondered why someone would lock the door to something so beautiful and then bury the key.

A few pages later I accompanied Mary inside the secret garden feeling as she did. "How still it is!" she whispered. "How still!" Then she waited a moment and listened to the stillness.

"No wonder it is still," she whispered again. "I am the first person who has spoken in here for ten years."

She went from place to place, and dug and weeded, and enjoyed herself immensely.

"If I had a spade," she whispered, "I could make the earth nice and soft and dig up weeds. If I have seeds, I can make flowers grow and the garden won't be dead at all—it will come alive!"

I was filled with delightful wonderment as she awakened the hidden garden with the magic of digging, planting seeds, and making flowers grow. Although I didn't yet understand the powerful adult messages secretly hidden within the pages of Francis Burnett's book, from that day forward I aspired to be like Mary Lennox—a beautifully spirited person, who made her world a better place.

I recently re-read *The Secret Garden* and saw the adult messages cleverly disguised within a simple girl's story. I put the book down, aspiring to be the kind of writer Francis Burnett was. The book also gave me pause, for the adult message was clear: I'd locked away my beautiful uniqueness, my creativity and writing ability, and buried the key. But like Mary Lennox, I have a spade (my pen and computer); I can dig up the weeds (my fear and doubts); I have seeds (ideas). I can make flowers: my stories. Hopefully, like Francis Burnett, my words will make the world a better place.

## I Will Surrender

Ariela Zucker – Auburn, ME  
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Dear friend,  
When the fog rises from the ocean  
it is soundless and measured.  
The contour of trees blurs slowly,  
they disappear as if they were never there.  
No viable struggle can be seen.  
The tree just a few feet away from me  
is sliding back, and back some more  
now it is gone.

Do you remember how  
once it was the lone black strip of road,  
slicing the desert infinite emptiness.  
I remember the night's fog rolling,  
the fear of being taking over.  
But now I welcome the soft lines of objects,  
the hush that comes along.

I want the fog to roll over me,  
cover me with its white softness  
I will close my eyes  
I will surrender.

## Monks of the Mohave

Patricia Dreyfus –  
Corona del Mar, CA  
<https://patriciadreyfus-writer.com/>

They came seeking  
quiet, solitude,  
to hear the small  
still voice.

The murmur not found  
in lush earth  
in thunder, lightning,  
or temperate winds.

They came to listen.

In empty spaces,  
in wide horizon,  
in hot sands of day,  
in cold starry night.

They remain  
at work and prayer,  
while the winged air  
lifts and caresses  
body and soul.

Men and earth  
wait.

## Forbearance

Patricia Dreyfus –  
Corona del Mar, CA  
<https://patriciadreyfus-writer.com/>

Mid December,  
inside a clapboard prairie house  
a woman surveys the grey sky.  
She awaits her fourteenth birth.  
Last year, alone, she delivered  
her son, held him and wept.

Everyone else is up at the church.  
Its white steeple punctuates  
the landscape, pointing to salvation.  
Brown roof shelters God's people,  
walls cemented into the frozen earth  
restrict faith, family, life.

Mending rests on her knee.  
Her head falls against the rocker back.  
Outside, the land flows around her  
like a white sea, going away and away.  
The sea only an image in a book  
to the drowning woman.

## Moments of Wonder

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

A strange quietness surrounds me  
I lose myself within  
the oneness and beauty of the natural world

A Great Blue Heron  
lands on the deck  
of a sailboat docked  
in the harbor.

Standing tall and still  
he reminds me of a  
giant slate-blue flower  
with drooping petals.

Hunched over,  
he walks slowly,  
as if he were in deep thought.

Flapping his wings  
he takes flight,  
skimming the water  
looking for food.

His long, thin legs, like  
bent twigs  
trail behind him.

I watch him fly  
to the edge of the marina,  
then disappear behind the bough  
of a sycamore tree.

## Fly Fishing Lessons

Ann Haas – Mogadore, OH  
nyjazzie@hotmail.com

Me a frown-faced student, repeating the mantra:  
pick up,  
back cast,  
pause,  
forward cast,  
pause,  
lay down.

My attempts a tangled pool of fishing line in front of me.

Triumph when I get it right—  
satisfying my retirement goal to learn the art of fly fishing  
and enjoy the beauty where the fish reside.

Fly fishing as a metaphor:  
catch and release,  
seasons and weather.

Columns of insects emerge from their watery homes  
on the river bottom—  
Mayflies living only one day.

My guide says they have the best life—  
winged freedom as they emerge,  
sex,  
giving life to the next generation of mayflies,  
and sustaining the rhythm of river life as food for fish.

Beauty of the Huron River:  
running high due to rains,  
over unseen rocks and branches,  
water the color of molten caramel  
its current bouncing my fly over the ruffled water.

## Walking: The Changes

Linda M. Hasselstrom – Hermosa, SD  
LindaMHasselstrom@Windbreakhouse.com

The scrim of lacy ice beside the path  
is fragile as the seashore foam  
left behind the tide. The dogs  
race across the layered snow without  
regard for toenails skidding sharp  
on freshly fallen frost. They slip  
and tumble, right themselves and run again.  
I pause to watch and then I step  
off snow and onto grass at road-  
side's edge. It's years since I began to see  
old ladies taking smaller steps  
on snowy days. But when did I  
begin to think of falling more than of  
the beauty of this brittle ice?  
The grass is cushion to my feet,  
bends to every step. My spine is rattling  
in my body like a bag  
of dice. I square my shoulders and  
look up in time to see a shaft of light  
shooting up from these bronze hills:  
another day of life begins,  
and once more I give thanks for sunrise gold.

## Monument

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

Some see  
ochre rocks.  
One glance,  
they've seen it.  
Walk away,  
toss a drink cup,  
a gum wrapper.  
Some sit reverently  
watching shapes fold into each other,  
shapes sculpted by invisible hands  
over the millennia,  
watching light change  
the portrait of time  
minute by minute,  
hour by hour.  
A sacred place.

## Magnified

Madeline Sharples – Manhattan Beach, CA  
<http://madelinesharples.com>  
madeline40@gmail.com

I look in the magnifying mirror  
and study my face,  
turn my head from side to side,  
up and down.  
I scrutinize every pore,  
unwanted hair, imperfection.

Today, the bags under my eyes  
are puffy and crinkly,  
more so than a week ago.  
The crow's feet around  
my eyes particularly pronounced,  
the lines around my mouth  
deeper,  
the waddle under my chin  
droopier,  
the skin on my arms and legs  
rippling.  
The veins in my hands  
stick out.  
I bruise easily.  
And, I know the brown age spot  
on my right cheek  
wasn't there yesterday.

There's no way to stop the deluge.  
Perhaps it is time to relax,  
take some deep long breaths  
and quietly let me be.  
But will I?

# Life Writing Contest Coming Soon

The good news (as you can see in Jeanne Guy's update on page 9) is that we're well on the way toward the launch of the new website!

The bad news . . . well, those of us who work on the contests want to do a little more testing before we invite you to submit. So we're erring on the side of caution and announcing a delay of one or two months. Watch for our email announcing the contest opening, coming to your inbox soon.

But our delay doesn't mean that you have to wait to start writing! Our topic is "Listening to Myself." (Thanks, Jo Virgil, for putting this together!) Today would be a very good day to start thinking and writing.

## Listening to Myself

"Instinct is a marvelous thing. It can neither be explained nor ignored."

—*Agatha Christie*

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

—*Clarissa Pinkola Estés*

Has there been a time in your life when you thought you knew what you needed to do, but an inner voice kept telling you to go a different direction? Did you wind up "trusting your gut"? And if so, did your hindsight later validate your decision? If you didn't listen to your instinct, did you have regrets? How were you changed by the experience? Sometimes, listening to ourselves means being able to discern which of our several inner voices to listen to. How do you know which to trust?

The contest rules, briefly (an expanded version will appear on the website):

- Members only.
- There is a \$25 entry fee.
- To be eligible, your entry must be previously unpublished.
- Winners of previous competitions in 2017 and 2018 are not eligible.
- If you have internet access, you must submit your entry to us via the website. If you do not have access to a computer, mail your typed entry. If you do not have access to a typewriter, we will accept entries that are clearly handwritten in dark black ink.
- Each entry must be titled, and no longer than 1200 words.

We'll be in touch. Meanwhile, keep writing!

— The SCN Contest Team

# A Season to Learn: SCN's Online Classes

Our Spring II session starts on May 25 and ends on July 20th. There are many classes offered throughout the term, and there's no time like the present! Click on the class title below to find out more about individual classes. Or go to this link: <http://www.storycircleonlineclasses.org/index.php>

## Spring II Writing Classes for Women

### MEMOIR AND LIFEWRITING:

- Family Heirlooms: Passing Down the Stories (May 25-June 22, 2020)
- Research and Write Your Family History (June 8-July 20, 2020)

### JOURNALING & SELF-DISCOVERY:

- I Write, Therefore I Am (June 1-July 13, 2020)
- Using the Full Moon for Creative Inspiration (June 1-June 29, 2020)

### TRAVEL WRITING:

- The Call of Far Away Places: Writing your "Preparation" for the Hero's Journey (June 8-July 6, 2020)

### FLASH WRITING:

- An Experiment: Committing to Writing 20 Minutes a Day for 1 Month (June 22-July 20, 2020)

### POETRY:

- The Sestina: A Way To Find the Truth of Your Writing, Thereby Writing Well and Long (June 15-July 20, 2020)
- Haiku for Health: How to Mindfully Read Contemporary Haiku (May 25-June 22, 2020)

### SESSION 1: INDEPENDENT STUDY PROGRAM:

- May 25-June 22, 2020:  
Lynn Goodwin

### SESSION 2: INDEPENDENT STUDY PROGRAM:

- June 22-July 20, 2020:  
Lynn Goodwin

**SUMMER:** Our next class schedule will be posted in early June. Classes will run July 27-Sept 21, 2020.

 <p><input type="checkbox"/> This is a gift membership</p> <p>My name and address:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>My phone and e-mail:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<h2>Join the Story Circle Network!</h2> <p><b>Annual Membership if receiving printed, mailed publications:</b></p> <p>_____ Canada &amp; Mexico: \$90 (International MO)</p> <p>_____ International \$95 (International MO) <span style="float: right;">6/2020</span></p> <p>_____ Annual Membership (US) for receiving <i>printed</i> publications: \$70</p> <p>_____ Annual Membership (US) for receiving <i>online</i> publications only: \$55</p> <p>_____ Internet Writing or Reading eCircle Membership : \$20/yr (in addition to national dues)</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>City _____ State _____ Zip _____ - _____</p> <p>Phone _____</p> <p>Email _____ Amount enclosed _____</p> <p>Become a supporting member and help Story Circle Network grow. Check here:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$90 Friend    <input type="checkbox"/> \$150 Supporter    <input type="checkbox"/> \$250 Sustainer    <input type="checkbox"/> \$400+ Benefactor</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$125 Donor    <input type="checkbox"/> \$200 Contributor    <input type="checkbox"/> \$325 Patron    <input type="checkbox"/> \$125 Organizational Membership</p>	<p>Make your check to Story Circle Network 723 W University Ave #300-234 Georgetown, TX 78626</p>
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## For Members Only

We hope by now you've heard about all the valuable resources available to SCN members. But just as a reminder to make full use of your membership, here's a list of benefits to keep in mind.

### Story Circle Network Members may:

- Receive our quarterly 28-page *SCN Journal*, online and as a printable pdf download
- Receive print editions of the *Journal* by mail for a small additional membership fee
- Download free archived editions of the *Journal*
- Publish original writing in the *Journal's* True Words section
- Submit 3 free entries for SCN's annual anthology, *Real Women Write*, published on Amazon
- Download free archived editions of previous SCN anthologies
- Receive discounts on SCN's valuable workshops, retreats, conferences, and online classes
- Receive monthly member news in our Members' Flash e-letter
- Receive monthly public news of interest in our SCN Flash national e-letter
- Participate in one of SCN's three online writing-support groups
- Receive access to member-only content on our website
- Participate in SCN's annual Life Writing Competition
- Participate in SCN's annual Reflections essay contest
- Join a free online or onsite writing or reading Circle
- Circle members may receive special weekly writing prompts/women's wise words

The links below are still current and available to members for access to our *Journal* and anthology archives. Find the issue you missed, or that special article you wanted to save, and download it for free. Our printable pdf format preserves all the graphics and feel of the originals.

[http://www.storycircle.org/storycircle.org/journal/issues/issue\\_list.html](http://www.storycircle.org/storycircle.org/journal/issues/issue_list.html)  
[http://www.storycircle.org/storycircle.org/journal/anthology/issue\\_list.html](http://www.storycircle.org/storycircle.org/journal/anthology/issue_list.html)

**Story Circle Network, Inc.**

723 W University Ave #300-234,

Georgetown TX 78626

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*True Words from Real Women*  
**Looking Ahead**

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

- June 2020: Quiet Time (in this issue)
- September 2020: A Family Secret
- December 2020: I Thought I Knew
- March 2021: Looking in the Mirror

Send your stories or poetry to: [www.storycircle.org/members/frmjournalsubmission.php](http://www.storycircle.org/members/frmjournalsubmission.php)  
Or contact our TW editor for details at [truewords@storycircle.org](mailto:truewords@storycircle.org)

*Real Women Write:*  
*Living on COVID Time*

Volume 19 of SCN's annual anthology, *Real Women Write 2020*, will be published on Amazon this December. This is a great opportunity, and we hope every member participates. See more on page 7.

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

