



What If?

What if, through the pain of seeing the way things are, we now have a new chance to get it right?

— Rhonda V. Magee, author of

*The Inner Work of Racial Justice:
Healing Ourselves and Transforming
Our Communities Through Mindfulness*

Dear Sisters,

This is my last presidential letter to you, my Story Circle Network sisters. My oh my, haven't the last two and a half years been challenging, both a time of deep concern as well as growth?

By the time you read this, the 2020 election will be over. Our world will be what it is. Our 2020 anthology will be finished and will have captured your responses to the world's pandemic condition through your essays and poems. Who knew this year's anthology, *Real Women Write: Living on COVID Time*, would be based on not weeks but long months, at this point, of an unparalleled conflagration of disease and political upheaval, with no known end in sight?

These have been historic and unsettling times, but is it possible that, as Rhonda Magee says, "...through the pain of seeing the way things are, we now have a new chance to get it right? What if this difficult time, this moment in which we seem more racially and culturally divided than ever, signifies not the beginning of the end but a profound opportunity for a new beginning?"

We've had many opportunities to listen more deeply to what matters in our lives and, as writers, we've put those concerns, fears, and hopes on the page and shared them with one another in sisterhood fashion. We share what we learn, and in turn, learn as much about ourselves as we do about others. Funny how that works.

Listen to what author, teacher, and SCN member Sherry Wachter has to say about finding her voice and using it during these uncertain and important times:

"What I'm loving about my class this term is that it follows a whole summer of helping various writers find their voices, and make themselves heard. It's been enormously rewarding, and the teaching feels like another facet of that. I can feel myself settling into a vision of myself as not just a storyteller in my own right, but as a conduit for helping others share their own stories. I'd always known storytelling was important to me, but I've finally realized that it's central to who I am--it's how I understand myself and the world, how I learn, how I pass on what I know. I feel that I know myself in a new and deeper way--that I have knowledge I can use to bring deeper meaning to the various parts of my life."

Susan Wittig Albert LifeWriting Competition 2020 Winners!

Joyce Boatright

1st place

"Waiting in Transition"

Marilea Rabasa

2nd place

"The Lessons of Solitude"

Lisa Braver Moss

3rd place co-winner

"How I Became a Radical,
an Engaged Jew, and a Writer"

Patricia Daly

3rd place co-winner

"Prison Pen Pal"

Find out more on page 6.

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Can you feel that? We are all writers, teachers, students, sharing our thoughts in an effort to see things as they are, to learn and grow, and make things better.

In the midst of the turmoil and chaos, Story Circle Network has been learning and growing, persevering so we can continue to support women writers and be a conduit for women to share their stories. I am proud to be in your midst, proud to support you and be supported by you.



And on that note, I HAVE GOOD NEWS!!! Officers for the coming term have been approved by the board and your new president is...drumroll, please...**Len Leatherwood!** Len has been serving most recently as our vice president, online classes coordinator, HerStories blog coordinator, and is our new Zoom aficionado. She also masterfully planned and oversaw our 2019 writing trip to Italy (a group of 48!) last November. I've known and worked with Len for a number of years and I can't think of anyone who would be a better choice to lead us forward at this critical juncture in

time. We need her strength, wisdom, talents, and her love of SCN to continue to grow the organization. She will need your active support and involvement as she transitions into this role (I'll be on an island somewhere with one of those umbrella drinks, toasting her, of course).

Amidst all the many things SCN offers to our growing membership—expanded online classes, publications, social media outreach, Sarton awards program, multiple contests, Story Circle Book Reviews site, and our writing circles, reading circle, and support groups—I am most proud of our new website, our new Zoom webinar adventure thanks to Len, and our new Social Justice Committee and Black Stories Matter initiative, birthed by the Black Lives Matter movement. Racial and social injustice will continue to call to us and we have committed to it, because mattering is crucial. If you have a moment, I recommend Googling “[Meklit The President Sang Amazing Grace.](#)”

It has been my greatest honor to serve as president of Story Circle Network, an organization that is so much a part of my life – and without question the reason I have the life I do. I could not (and would not) have agreed to the presidency had it not been for Susan Albert. She has been an extraordinary mentor and role model, a confidante, supporting me and holding my hand throughout my presidency. Her love and support in *all* areas of my life made me realize what a true friend and important lifeline she has been for me as a person and a writer. She has been there for the board, for all of you, because she believes in and is passionate about the critical need for women writing and telling their stories.

I am also grateful to those so invested in our organization that they would step up to the plate and go above and beyond to see Story Circle Network not only survive but thrive. Why have they done so? Because they know what Susan knows. You matter. Women's life stories matter, and SCN is committed to helping you tell yours.

From the bottom of my writing heart to yours,
Jeanne
Jeanne Guy, SCN President 2018-2020

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.

Editor: Susan Schoch
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This Month's Contributing Editors:

Susan Albert
Sonja Dalglish
Jeanne Guy
Linda Hoye
Len Leatherwood
Susan Schoch
Jo Virgil

The *Journal* is an important member benefit. We welcome your letters, queries, and suggestions.

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

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

Editor's Note

The challenges of this year keep coming, even as 2020 closes its chapter. As I write, the pandemic is surging and numbers are higher than we saw in the spring. Many of us now have stories of close encounters with the virus. It is our shared trouble this year, and this issue of the *Journal* couldn't ignore COVID-19.

There's info on two different **Coronavirus Journaling Projects** below. Also, details on this year's member anthology, ***Real Women Write: Living on COVID Time***, are on page 10. It's a moving and thought-provoking collection of prose and poetry, to be available this month on Amazon.

Our **True Words** section (page 18) shares some tales of COVID, too, though its focus, as always, is compelling personal writing, this quarter on the topic of **"I Thought I Knew."** (See the back page for future topics and deadlines.) And there's probably no better time than now to discover **Len Leatherwood's** particularly apt advice on combating negative thoughts. Check out **Writing Tips from Our Teachers**, page 16.

SCN has responded to more than the virus this year. In **"Where We Stand,"** page 4, **Sonja Dalglish** updates us on the efforts of the **Social Justice Workgroup**, spurred by SCN's recognition of racism and inequality. On page 4, the *Journal* is introducing **"Writing Women of Color"** to amplify their voices. **Story Circle Book Reviews** has increased attention to black authors such as **Keturah Kendrick**, as you can see on page 17. And our **Online Classes** are soliciting teachers of color. Class offerings for the **Winter Term** are on page 5.

Youthful writers, too, have much to teach us. On page 26, student **Alya Mehrtash** addresses the anti-Muslim atmosphere in her school and shows us the courage it takes to address prejudice.

Demonstrating another kind of courage, **Peggy Fountain**, our former Executive Director, gives us an update on making major life changes (page 9), and **Tina Games** tells us the story of her own transformational journey to publication (page 13).

Then, reminding us that writing has other rewards, we're pleased to announce the **winners** of our annual **Susan Wittig Albert LifeWriting Competition** on page 6, and to give you a chance to enjoy our first-place winner's excellent work.

Finally, **Jeanne Guy** has been a remarkable president for SCN, leading us through tremendous difficulties with kindness, creativity, and strength, and bringing us to a promising future. I'm personally grateful, and so glad that she will continue to be a force here. **Len Leatherwood** is just the person to follow Jeanne's tenure, an award-winning teacher full of energy for helping women writers and having a deep understanding of the SCN organization and its needs. Story Circle continues to be in good and capable hands. **Gratitude** to Jeanne, and **welcome** to Len! Our own example of a graceful transition of power!

Please note that Story Circle Network is a valuable resource, a generous community of writers and teachers, and a **nonprofit**. Please respond to our request for your **financial support** on page 17. Every contribution matters.

There's more in this issue for you to enjoy, and to encourage and support your writing. And ahead of us is a New Year, full of possibilities and hope. May it bring us what we need, and may our connections grow.

Keep well and keep writing,
Susan
Susan Schoch, Editor

Journaling Our Way Through Coronavirus

Story Circle Network has confirmed over the years that journaling is a healthful way to process stressful experiences. The pandemic certainly counts as stressful. Our friend, and founder of the Center for Journal Therapy, **Kay Adams**, offers resources and free participation in a special online format at **Love in the Time of Corona**. To find out more, simply sign up here: <https://journalversity.journaltherapy.com/courses/148/activities/3011>

Also, in case you missed it, there is an important opportunity to share our stories of this pandemic in an enduring national archive of our pandemic journals:

"As America's national institution for the promotion, interpretation, and celebration of women's history, the **National Women's History Museum** is committed to ensuring that women and girls' unique voices and experiences are not left out of the telling of the COVID-19 story. To this end, the NWHM is pleased to launch the **Women Writing History: A Coronavirus Journaling Project** and is asking women, girls, and gender non-binary individuals to participate in the simple act of recording their daily thoughts and personal experiences during this pandemic in order to document the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on women's lives."

All the information on participation is here: <https://www.womenshistory.org/journal-project>

We'd love to know that Story Circle is represented!

Where We Stand

An Update from the Social Justice Workgroup

by Sonja Dalglish

The past three months have continued to bring to the forefront issues of social justice for all people. In the United States, continued protests come to us via TV or news outlets. Other nations, such as the UK and France, have picked up the rallying cry that Black Lives Matter. Sometimes, I can feel overwhelmed at the immensity of establishing justice for all people, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, class (wealth), or nation of origin. However, as an American, I feel that justice for all is one of our core values and ideals.

Our organization is not only womaned by our American sisters in writing, but incorporates voices from around the globe. And, it seems to me that this idea that we all matter, that all our stories matter, is one that can be endorsed everywhere. There is much to be done to establish a better playing field for all our writers.

SCN has been paying attention. We've created a Bibliography on books, films, and podcasts on racism. The Austin SCN Book Group read a book, *The Inner Work of Racial Justice* by Rhonda V. Magee and invited the board to join them in the reading and discussion. We have embraced our goal of educating ourselves, and for many of us, we've achieved the goal of making ourselves thoroughly uncomfortable.

On our website, you will see 36 book reviews from the past three months, three of which are by Women of Color. This is short of our goal but we are paying attention. We hope to be increasing the raw number and percentage. There is an opportunity for someone among us to help by working to solicit more nominations to review.

Books have the potential to carry people into the minds and hearts of people foreign to us, opening new ways of thinking, and breaking down barriers in society and within ourselves. Our work in highlighting the lives of all women will change the way that history is written for the next generation. We lift up all women's stories.



Sonja Dalglish

Writing Women of Color

In September, our initial WWoC feature offered an introduction to the work of Pearl Cleage. We hope you were impressed by her work, and are ready to explore another remarkable author, and possibly discover writing that you might have otherwise missed.

One of our members, Penelope Starr, responded to the September issue this way:

“Thanks for the new column Writing Women of Color. It’s a great addition to the newsletter and to the entire organization. I would like to suggest an excellent book by an English woman of color, Bernardine Evaristo, *Girl, Woman, Other*.”

Indeed, *Girl, Woman, Other*, shortlisted for the 2019 Booker Prize, is a terrific recommendation. Thanks, Penelope!

The author is Anglo-Nigerian, described as one of Britain’s most celebrated writers of color, and has created a complex and hopeful look at the country, at least from an American viewpoint. With twelve(!) main characters, Evaristo is able to include a broad range of people, intersecting and exposing their differences, from age to race to sexuality to class, while managing to remind us of all that connects us, even now when so many things push us apart.

Sound interesting? Find out more about **Bernardine Evaristo** here: <https://bevaristo.com>

Girl, Woman, Other is currently available at libraries and bookstores, and on Amazon.

Please send us your comments, and your suggestions of other Writing Women of Color we might feature, especially younger authors that you believe deserve a wider audience. Write to us with “Writing Women of Color” in the subject line, and send to journaleditor@storycircle.org



Bernardine Evaristo

Call for Volunteers We Need YOU!

We're looking for volunteers to help with ongoing and upcoming projects. If you're available, please send an email indicating the area of your interest to storycircle@storycircle.org. Here are current possibilities:

Sarton Women's Book Award Jurors: Our Sarton Women's Book Awards program continues to grow! More entries in this unique and important program mean that we need more jurors to help us with the first-round evaluations. Each of our first-round panel of jurors reads and evaluates 3-6 books and submits her evaluations online.

Story Circle Contest Judge: Help us discover and honor SCN's best writers by serving as a judge in our writing contests.

Story Circle Facilitators: Spread SCN's message and mission by starting a Story Circle in your community. Our Circles Coordinator will be glad to answer your questions and help you get started.

Book Reviewers: We're looking for reviewers to help us get out the word on good books by, about, and for women. This popular site has been offline for some time so we are in the process of rebuilding our review team. We're especially looking for reviewers with an interest in books by/about women of color. Requirements: a love of reading women's books, writing competence, and a few spare hours a week for reading and writing. What you get in return: free books, published review clips for your portfolio, and the applause of grateful readers and authors. Such a deal!

Twitter Sisters: SCN has a presence on FaceBook and Instagram. But we're not yet there with Twitter. Are you a Twitter user? Interested in sharing Story Circle Network on that platform? We need you! We *want* you!

Want to help? Email us: storycircle@storycircle.org

Online Class Schedule for Winter 2021

Now is the perfect time to grow your writing skills via our online classes. We have great teachers!

Memoir & Life Writing

The Love of Everyday Things
Teresa Cutler-Broyles: 6 weeks, 1/18 - 2/29

Research and Write Your Family History
Sarah White: 4 weeks, 1/11 - 2/8

Journaling & Self Discovery

Using the Gifts of Winter as a Source
of Creative Exploration
Tina Games: 6 weeks, 1/11 - 2/22

Fiction

Incorporating Personal Experience into Fiction
Elise Schiller: 6 weeks, 1/11 - 2/19

Writing Better Through Reading

Learning to Use Literary Devices by Studying
Toni Morrison's Novel, *Beloved*
Len Leatherwood: 6 weeks, 1/25 - 3/5

Poetry

The Broadsheet/The Broadside
Katherine McCoy: 6 weeks, 1/25 - 2/19

Blogging

Blogging for Beginners
Amy Isaman: 4 weeks, 1/11 - 2/8

Independent Study

B. Lynn Goodwin
1st Class: 4 weeks, 1/11 - 2/8
2nd Class: 4 weeks, 2/8 - 3/5

For class descriptions and teacher information:
<https://www.storycircle.org/online-classes/>



Results Are In!

Congratulations To The Winners!

SCN is proud to announce the winners of our 2020 LifeWriting competition. The topic: Listening to Myself. We are grateful to the dozens of writers who submitted their work and to the jurors and judges who generously donated their time to evaluating the entries. Details of our 2021 competition will be announced in the March issue of the *Journal*.

2020 Susan Wittig Albert LifeWriting Competition

1st Place Winner

Waiting in Transition
by Joyce Boatright
Huntsville TX

2nd Place Winner

Lessons of Solitude
by Marilea Rabasa
Camano Island WA

3rd Place Co-Winner

How I Became a Radical, an Engaged Jew, and a Writer
by Lisa Braver Moss
Piedmont CA

3rd Place Co-Winner

Prison Pen Pal
by Patricia Daly
Largo FL

One prize of \$100, one prize of \$75, and two prizes of \$50 each are awarded.

Read the first-place story in this issue – and check out all the winning stories on SCN's website:

<https://www.storycircle.org/lifewriting-competition-winners/>

“I write entirely to find out what I’m thinking, what I’m looking at, what I see and what it means. What I want and what I fear.”

—Joan Didion

Waiting in Transition

1st Place Winner in the 2020 Susan Wittig Albert LifeWriting Competition

by Joyce Boatright

Wait is a four-letter word to one who has built her life on doing. And *trust* is an emotion unknown to one running hell-bent from the inaction.

My gut instinct has tried to warn me to slow down, but I've always soldiered through, ignoring its message—even at the cost of body parts. I had fibroid tumors escaping my uterus and attaching to the outside of my stomach, causing me to have a hysterectomy at age 35. I had ulcerative colitis for seven years before I finally had my colon removed at 45. I had breast cancer at 71 that resulted in surgery, followed by chemo and radiation treatments, depleting me of my get-up-and-go. Several weeks before the coronavirus shut down the US, I had an intestinal blockage that would not respond to nonsurgical methods, and I ended up in a four-hour emergency surgery for the removal of 18 inches of my small intestines. My hospital stay lasted a month. With all of that, I can tell you there are two inscriptions awaiting my tombstone. The first is, “She didn’t look sick.” (Everyone, including medical doctors, are amazed how put together I am on the outside.) And the second inscription is the comment my parents always said to me, no matter what I accomplished, “That’s great, Joyce; now what you need to do is...” That’s right—not even the pause of a period between congratulating me and telling me to keep going to the next accolade.

Waiting, the essence of trust, happens in that vast desert between endings and new beginnings. I’ve been lost in that desert at crucial turning points in my life, disoriented in despair and fearful of what would change. Each time, I’ve thought *surely I will die*. But miraculously, like the Jews receiving daily manna in their ancient desert walk, I can look at my wandering days of loss and see that strong, kind women

have held me up until I could find my footing again. They carried trust when I could not.

What’s more, I have discovered in that desert, my task is to let go of attitudes and beliefs that no longer serve me. The latter has been hard for me and that may be why I have had to be brought to my knees physically before I could readjust and adapt emotionally.

But no more.

In AA’s Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, there is a quote, “Pain is the touchstone for spiritual growth.” When I am emotionally or spiritually in pain, I know intuitively, in my gut, that change is coming.

Instead of soldiering through, risking another body part, I am learning to wait in the transition from an ending to a new beginning. As I wait, wandering in the desert, I am stripped of false or outdated ideas, attitudes, beliefs. Unfortunately—or fortunately—it takes time before I can see the blessings of letting go of my old ways and moving in the direction of my next progression of growth.

It is in the desert where I live the questions so foreign for a woman who was brought up to *do*, to *act*, to *accomplish*. As I face my 75th year on earth, I relent more readily to change, knowing from a lifetime of experience the cost of resistance and the blessing of surrender.

And I wait. More patiently now. Reflecting, imagining, and trusting.



Joyce Boatright is a storyteller, essayist, memoir writer, and workshop facilitator from Huntsville, Texas. She has been an active member of Story Circle Network since 2004. Her book, *Haikus for the Soul*, is scheduled for release in 2021.

“If you have a story to tell, the most important thing is the story, not the form you use to shape it.”

— Patricia Smith

Growing Stronger Every Day!

Story Circle Network is a nonprofit, volunteer organization. With great leadership, we have become a nationally effective organization to support women telling their stories. Our **2021 officers** will keep us healthy and growing:

Len Leatherwood, President

Jeanne Guy, Vice President

Shawn LaTorre, Secretary/Treasurer

But we always need more help! We are very pleased to announce that three great volunteers have joined our Board of Directors. We'll give you a full introduction in March. For now, we welcome them with enthusiasm!

Cynthia Davidson – Hope Valley, Rhode Island
<https://cynthiadavidson.com>

B. Lynn Goodwin – Danville, California
<https://blynngoodwin.com>

Marilea Rabasa – Camano Island, Washington
<https://www.facebook.com/marilea.rabasa>

See all of our board members on our “About” page: <https://www.storycircle.org/about/>



An Exciting Step Forward

For over twenty years, Susan Wittig Albert, Story Circle’s founder, has been the hub of the Network, the person who knew all the parts and kept them moving together. Her success at growing SCN’s scope and membership—and her planning for an eventual well-earned retirement—has prompted the Board to recognize the need for a **Program Director**.

That role will include managing most of our current programs (except Publications and Book Reviews), and developing new ideas, assisting with marketing strategies and social media. Coordinating volunteers and working with committee chairs, the PD will also manage contests, webinars, retreats, conferences, Circles, and fundraising activities. The job will include reviewing and assessing existing programs and responsibilities, and working with the Board to develop a five-year plan. As Susan said, “SCN has a wonderful portfolio of programs. It deserves professional direction...”

Happily, we’ve found just the right person to initiate this challenging half-time position. Welcome to **Liz Beauty**, our new Program Director! Liz has seven years of experience working with/in nonprofit management. She understands coordinating teams of volunteers. With the heart for Story Circle’s mission, Liz also has the skills and youthful energy we need. She loves “looking for ways to improve systems through technology” and will make an able partner to our Administrator and in-house Web Manager, Teresa Lynn.

Liz will assume the position on December 1, and will bring us a New Year of fresh possibilities. We’re all rooting for 2021, and for Liz!

Catching Up with Peggy

by Susan Wittig Albert

I first met Peggy Fountain in 1997, in a Story Circle Reading Circle in Austin TX. At that time, SCN was hardly more than a hazy dream—something about women getting together in small circles to write the stories of their lives and share them with one another. Most of our little group didn't have email and didn't think we needed it. (The internet? What was that?)

But Peggy had a different idea. She had worked with IBM since the early 1980s and had a very clear vision of how computers and this thing called the internet could connect people, help them work together, and get things done. It could even be used to build an organization.

So it was with Peggy's help that SCN built a website and published its first quarterly *Journal*; carried out a major grant (the OWL program, 1999-2003); put on its first conference (2000) as well as a biennial conference in every even-numbered year through 2018; put on LifeLines Retreat programs in 1999 and every odd-numbered year through 2017; launched a book review site (2001); compiled annual anthologies of members' writing and the book *What Wildness is This* (2007); and launched the Online Class program, an editorial service, and the Sarton Women's Book Awards (2011-2012). That's an impressive record of activities and achievements—most of it only possible through Peggy's command of the internet.

But Peggy has always balanced her work with her life. While she was working with SCN, she was also raising a family. In 2014, when her three children (Chris, Megan, and Joey) had left the nest, she relocated from Austin to Estes Park CO, where she could be near the mountains she loved.

Then, in 2018, via the internet (of course!) Peggy reconnected with René Grootveld, a long-time acquaintance she had met in Dallas in 1984. She was working for IBM at the time and

René (who is Dutch) was there on a temporary assignment from IBM Amsterdam. They married in February 2018 and Peggy went to be with René in Vimeiro, Portugal. Vimeiro is a town on the coast about 45 minutes north of Lisbon.

Following her heart opened an entirely new chapter for Peggy. She left much of what was familiar behind, moved halfway around the world, lost her mother less than four months after her move, and then retired. One of those changes would be enough to recalibrate a life. All of them at once—well, Peggy is a brave woman, and René has been supportive.

Of course there have been challenges. "Learning the language" is the first one she mentions when she's asked. "I miss my kids, of course," she adds. "I've only seen them two or three times in the last few years. I miss my friends in America, too. And the American food—especially Tex-Mex!"

Since their marriage, Peggy and René have returned to America twice and traveled widely through Europe, with trips to France, Italy, and Holland. This year (2020) would have included another visit to the USA and visits with Peggy's children in Portugal, but Covid-19 has altered those plans.

It hasn't altered their plans for yet another big move, though. They are building a new house near Faro, in the Algarve, the southern-most region of Portugal, expecting to finish next spring. "I'm looking forward to a warmer, less windy climate," Peggy says, "and more English-speaking people."

And what do her children think about her new life? Peggy ponders a moment, then says, "They think I'm living the dream, following my heart around the world. They're just glad I found happiness."

We are, too!





Tranquility Press is a comprehensive publishing company, offering assistance from the first idea to the finished book. **Teresa Lynn**, the founder and manager, is also the administrator at Story Circle Network. Below are the 2019 releases for Tranquility Press. You can contact Teresa directly at ftdlynn@gmail.com and mention your affiliation with SCN for a 10% discount. Learn more at the website: <https://www.tranquilitypress.com>

Tranquility Press 2019 Releases



Seek a Safe Harbor
MERRY GARD
CHRIS SPAIN WALKER




Dawn's Light in Monterey
MERRY GARD
CHRIS SPAIN WALKER

Women of Monterey series - Spanish California, 1780

Book 1: An aristocratic lady and a Native American woman must each make their own way amidst the dangers of a new frontier. Will they find love among the rough men around them, or will a new terror end everything?


Book 2: Adopted sisters think they've found the men of their dreams – unaware that the men are hiding a powerful secret. How will the sisters recover from the betrayal to find love?



What's Up, Cody?
DORIS O'BRIEN
Illustrated by Sara Gustin

Life in Grayson's pasture is tough for Cody, a little cowbird. Now, there's a newcomer in the pasture - a bully who's picking on Cody. Will Cody ever feel safe in his pasture?


Children ages 6-8 will discover that being scared sometimes is natural, but can be overcome. They'll also learn practical techniques for coping with bullies.



DISPOSABLE SOULS
KATHA L. FULLER


When Zoey McFarland sees a young girl crying outside a new spa, she uncovers an evil hiding in plain sight. Then she's abducted, and Zoey discovers the fate of the victims is more sinister than anyone imagined. How will she find the strength to survive?

This novel of hope and courage is inspired by true events.



Understanding Copyright
Author's Edition
Teresa Lynn


An easy-to-understand guide to copyright, especially for authors.



TIMEGAME
BORRIS & PHILLY
LUCY HUNTER

Sixteen-year-old time-traveling twins Marcus and Samantha land in Philadelphia during America's first bank robbery. They agree to help accused blacksmith Pat Lyon prove his innocence, but it's a challenge when the police and bank officials are convinced he's guilty.

For ages 9 and up.




TRAVEL TALES
from the
PACIFIC NORTHWEST
Winnie Bowen



TRAVEL TALES
PASSPORT TO
EUROPE & RUSSIA
Winnie Bowen

Winnie Bowen has an insatiable appetite for exploring. From five-star hotels to pup tents on the beach and even a brothel, she's been there. Sampling local cuisine has led to some unique surprises. Opium ice cream? She'll try anything once. The adventures never end, and reading her two-book set of Travel Tales is a peek into the diaries of her well-traveled life.



THREADS OF RANIC
C. FAYRE

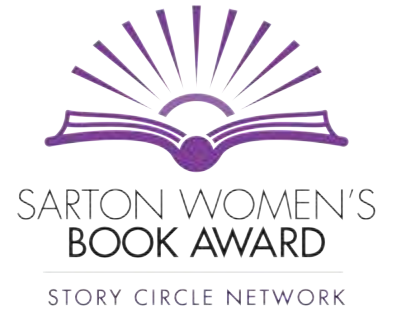
When Charlotte meets Elyian, a vampire king from planet Ranic, she must decide whether to leave all she knows to explore a new world with a complete stranger. Then she meets his father...

But the evil Havvol intends to take over both Ranic and Earth. When he discovers a secret about Charlotte, will Elyian and his father be able to set aside their own desires to stop Havvol from destroying not only the woman they both love, but also two entire worlds?

“Every word a woman writes changes the story of the world, revises the official version.”

—Carolyn See

2019 Sarton Winners and Finalists



We're proud to remind you that our **2019 Sarton Award winners and finalists** have authored books you will want to read. Be sure to check them out! And watch for our announcement of the 2020 winners in Spring 2021!

MEMOIR

Hendrika de Vries – Santa Barbara CA

When a Toy Dog Became a Wolf and the Moon Broke Curfew – She Writes Press
(interviewed in *SCN Journal* Jun2020)

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



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



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



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



A Member Appreciation Moment

Stephanie Raffelock? Who is Stephanie Raffelock?

by Jeanne Guy



My association with Story Circle Network has again enriched my life, as it led me to a new and wonderful friendship with author Stephanie Raffelock. Since joining SCN earlier this year, Stephanie has made two very substantial donations, one targeted for our Black Stories Matter initiative and one for our Story Circle Book Reviews site. We are indebted to and grateful for her generosity.

She is as delightful, insightful, wise, and funny as her book, *A Delightful Little Book on Aging*, published by She Writes Press. Her upcoming volume, *Creatrix Rising, Unlocking the Power of Midlife Women*, will be released in August of 2021.

Here are her responses to a few questions I posed. I bet you're going to like her as much as I do.

Give us a little background on you – previous work you've done, what you're doing now.

Once upon a time I was a troubled kid in a troubled home. Out on my own at seventeen without benefit of a high school diploma or a family safety net, I danced with drug addiction and other acting out. Grace guided me to return to school at thirty-five, earning a GED and a college diploma.

I worked in the entertainment industry for twenty years as a secretary. I left Los Angeles in 1989 to complete my education at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado. I met my husband that same year, a man who is my best friend, benefactor, and cheerleader.

Writing is a doorway for me into the examined life. Writing helps me to make sense of the world.

What do you love about your life?

Sweet, black tea; warm slippers; little girls on bicycles; dogs; neighbors who call out "how y'all doing;" clean sheets; living room dancing with my husband; close women friends; weeping that comes from caring; rain; winter fireplaces; small chipped cups; walking through the woods; butterflies and other small things...

What are your philanthropic ventures and why did you choose them?

My husband and I feel a strong pull to feed people. It's shameful that in such an abundant country people are still

food insecure or hungry. Food bank donations are part of our regular philanthropy. What feeds the heart, mind and soul needs nourishment, too. To that end, our giving extends to music and writing programs.

Tell us how you got involved with and helped SCN.

When I moved to Austin, I was encouraged by Brooke Warner of She Writes Press to get in touch with Jeanne Guy, the current president of SCN. Our first meeting over coffee was a deep and inspiring conversation covering everything from social justice to theology and feminism. Learning more about SCN, I fell in love with their mission of helping women to tell their stories. Run primarily on a labor of love, I thought they could use a little financial assistance to keep the vision going.

What do the Black Lives Matter movement and SCN's Black Stories Matter initiative mean to you?

When Black Lives Matter gained traction after the murder of George Floyd, I realized how sanitized my sense of American history was. I felt compelled to really start listening with an open heart to a story that was fraught with the worst sins of white people – slavery, judgment, marginalization, cruelty, and apathy. I'm still not sure how I can make a difference. I feel like a lot of it is about keeping my mouth shut and listening, while standing with the movement. I was heartened when SCN's mission reached out with Black Stories Matter. I dream of an America without racial prejudice or bias.

Do you have a story to tell relevant to BLM/BSM?

I only have one black friend. While I don't refer to her as my black friend, it saddens me that after sixty-eight years of living, my world is still pretty much a privileged white bubble. My friend, the Reverend Cynthia James, is a spiritual mentor and a guiding light for me. She has pushed me and inspired me to own my talents, skills and abilities.

Anything else you'd like to offer about your life, your path to where you are today?

Life is best when I mine the depths of my psyche for authenticity, when I work at nourishing a generous spirit, and when I allow myself to be humbled daily by the human struggle for goodness.



From the Blogs:

Telling HerStories

This blog is centered on the art, craft, and publication of women's writing. In a recent post, **Tina Games** shares the path to her book, and to developing your own authentic story. Find more posts here: <https://www.storycircle.org/category/herstories/>

Seeing Darkness in a Whole New Light

by Tina Games

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

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

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

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

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

So when I came to the point of writing my book, *Journaling by the Moonlight: A Mother's Path to Self-Discovery*, I wanted *creative mothers* to realize that every human transition

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

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

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

- WHO is this person? Do you really know her at her core? If you were to remove every label that she wears – mother, wife, partner, community leader, business owner, loyal friend, etc. – who is she?
- Pretend for a moment – that each of these labels is a blanket. Slowly remove each blanket, acknowledging the label it represents and set it aside. Continue doing this until you have no more labels except – SELF.
- Who is SELF? Take a moment to describe SELF from the inside out. How do you feel when you're not bombarded by what the world thinks you should be? What are your passions? What are your dreams? What makes you come alive? How does this person – from the inside out – want to show up in the world?

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

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

Tina M. Games is the author of *Journaling by the Moonlight: A Mother's Path to Self-Discovery*. As a certified creativity and life purpose coach, and a master retreat leader and certified journal writing facilitator. Through her signature coaching programs, based on the phases of the moon, Tina gently guides women from darkness into light as they create an authentic vision filled with purpose, passion, and creative expression. She lives on Cape Cod with her husband and their two teenagers. For more information about Tina's work, please visit her website: www.JournalingByTheMoonlight.com



New Members with Stories to Tell

When new members join, we ask them to tell us their stories. We appreciate them all, because they demonstrate the broad diversity of our members. Here is a small sampling of recent self-introductions.

Rebecca Manoogian – Fleetwood, PA

My Story: I am a retired teacher, enjoying my second half of life and finding that my creativity is at its highest. Recently widowed and remarried, I have been forced to change many things in my life. These changes have been a gift in many ways, opening me up to new possibilities and experiences. This group feels like another step into this adventure. I am attending a memoir writing class and am currently working on developing those stories that I hope to share, and possibly publish.

Storytelling Medium: I prefer words, but love to use textiles as well.

Kimberly Lee – Woodland Hills, CA

My Story: Attorney who left the practice of law to focus on motherhood, community work, and creative pursuits. Working on crafting a new career in writing and copyediting.

Storytelling Medium: Words.

Joan Enoch – Sequim, WA

My Story: I am an 80-year-old psychiatrist/psychoanalyst living now in Sequim, WA. I write poetry and short non-fiction pieces. I like to do Haibun Variations. I have facilitated many classes through lifelong learning groups in Florida and Arizona, mostly poetry classes. I would like to help in any way I can.

Storytelling Medium: Haibun Variations

Maximillia Muninzwa – Nairobi, Kenya

My Story: My interest in reading was nurtured early in primary school. In my twenties, I was ready to go full-time into creative writing and was sure I would be a published author soon enough. With a very supportive husband, nothing would stand in my way. But...while I was in my thirties, Steven died, leaving me with a young large family, a terminally ill and handicapped son among them, with massive education, medical, and utility bills to foot. So, taking care of my children became my first priority as I put all else on hold.

However, in-between, I ran a popular mid-week column with *The Standard*, one of the premier newspapers in Kenya, and did freelance editing and ran seminars to supplement my earnings. I also served as an editorial member and columnist of *The National Mirror* - a monthly magazine. Since 2019, I have been running the Women's Column (*From the Lenses of a Woman*) in *The New People* magazine. My efforts at completing my first novel are hampered for lack of private space and finances.

Joining the "sisterhood" circle of writers is the next best thing to happen to me in a looooooong time. I trust that we'll toast and drink to the success of SCN and mine as well, as I soar in my writing space.

Storytelling Medium: Words

Christina M. Wells – Annandale, VA

My Story: I'm a writer and a certified integral coach, and I worked for a number of years teaching college English before deciding to change careers. In fact, my pandemic-inspired decision was to focus primarily on writing since that's what I most want to contribute/do...though eventually I plan to focus on writing, coaching, and editing. I've published in literary magazines and anthologies, and currently I'm at work on a novel and on a memoir. I live with my wife and our furry children in Northern Virginia.

I'll soon add a website—it's in progress.

Storytelling Medium: Words

Maggie Smith – New Berlin, WI

<https://maggiesmithwriter.com>

My Story: My debut novel, *Truth and Other Lies*, is currently seeking an agent and/or publisher after my initial publisher closed its doors. I host the podcast *Hear Us Roar* for the Women's Fiction Writer's Association (58+ episodes), blog monthly about writing for Rocky Mountain Fiction Writers, serve on the board of the Chicago Writer's Association, and am the Managing Editor for their *The Write City Magazine*. My short story, "The Devil You Know," was published in the 2018 anthology *False Faces*.

Storytelling Medium: Novelist and blogger

Darlene Goetzman – Allegany, NY

My Story: It's taken me till my sixties to own—I am a writer. I live in southwestern New York State with my husband of thirty years, one cat, and, lucky for us—three grown children not too far away. I read, walk, kayak, bike, can, sew/quilt/craft, and write poetry, memoir, and essays. I also lead an online writing group called: Micro-Memoir Mondays.

Storytelling Medium: Words

Ronda Tamerlane – Sonora, CA

My Story: I retired from my private practice as a Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist this last June. Covid was the last push for me. I'm 74 and a Baby Boomer. I'd like to write about my experiences from dysfunctional family to Therapist. In addition, I'd like to reflect the historical and cultural shifts from growing up in the '50s to 2020.

Storytelling Medium: Words and I paint some.

“Write what should not be forgotten.”

—Isabel Allende



From the Blogs:

One Woman's Day

This September 21 post from the OWD blog was selected by **Linda Hoye**, our OWD Coordinator. She welcomes your submissions at: <https://www.storycircle.org/category/onewomans-day/>

Love Thy Neighbor by Letishia Watt

Standing at the checkout counter at Braum's with my fresh veggies for the evening and a small container of chocolate chip ice cream for dessert, the woman cashier placed the products in my recycle bag, turned to the register, and spoke in a solemn voice: "That's \$8.02."

I handed her a ten-dollar bill.

"Do you have two cents?" Her voice didn't change, only a toneless request.

Immediately, I dug around in my purse, then replied, "No." Taking in a casual breath, I added: "I have a penny." I proudly showed my penny as proof.

The young, pale woman stared through me, her face blank of all expression. How sad, I thought as I studied her face and lack of any kind of movement in her body gestures. At last, my fumbling fingers found a penny, then two pennies in my purse. I handed her the ten dollars and two pennies.

I remained fixed on this woman's face as she placed the bill in the register and counted out my change. Still no expression and no life in her body.

I reached for the bills as she handed them to me. In a whisper, I asked: "May I give you a tip?"

She nodded. *I guess.*

I gave her the change back and a bill in my purse. She almost smiled as she stuffed the money in a tiny pocket in her jeans. My heart pounded with agony to see someone so empty.

In the car, I sat thinking about her. Had COVID caused such pain in her life or had her life been filled with pain, fear, anger? Probably all of those, my heart replied.

My stomach began to roll. I needed a malt, and here I sat in Braum's parking lot unable to move. A tear rolled down my face as I backed out of the parking lot begging my mind to think of something else. Please.

I heard our minister's words: "Love does no wrong to a neighbor."

This woman who haunted me needs hugs—kind, warm, sincere hugs. She needs love and assurance that she is a good person. She needs money, and probably stable food and shelter. She has needs that I have never experienced.

I walked in the house that day feeling blessed but with a hole in my heart. There will be another day for me to buy ice cream at Braum's. I will be alert to other's needs before I put my needs first. My air hugs will be in the form of thoughtful prayers for all women in her shoes. I will be a better person because everyone's life matters, and I can help. I will carry cash in my pocket and offer a kind word to whoever helps me.

And I will remember it is a small world and we are all neighbors.

Writing soothes **Letty Watt's** soul and clears her mind. She began writing a weekly blog over five years ago, with the purpose of building a repertoire of stories for telling aloud, but things changed. Now she writes because stories hidden in the recesses of her mind are begging to get out into the world. Check out her blog, **Literally Letty**, at <https://literallyletty.blogspot.com>



Writing Tips from Our Teachers

In each issue of the *Journal*, we bring you writing encouragement and techniques from one of our SCN teachers. This time, **Len Leatherwood** offers wisdom on a subject that's particularly apt in these stressful times.

A Method to Combat Those Negative Thoughts that Undermine Creativity

by Len Leatherwood

One of the challenges of writing is overcoming the negative self-talk that can paralyze creativity. Below are 25 different thoughts that often surface and a method that I've discovered that combats these negative messages.

Why I shouldn't write today:

1. I am boring and so is my life.
2. Why would anybody care about what I'm writing?
3. I am wasting my time. I will never make money doing this.
4. I have nothing to write about. I am blank.
5. I am not a good writer, why am I bothering?
6. My family is complaining that they need me, and I should be more attentive to them.
7. I am kidding myself that this makes any sense.
8. Other people's looks that read, "Oh my, who do you think you're kidding? You will only fail at this."
9. I would write, but I have so many other more important things that need my attention.
10. I am too lazy for this; this must be for other people not me.
11. If I were really a writer, this would all come so much easier. Real writers don't struggle as much as I do.
12. The world doesn't need another bad writer; I should do something else to make the world a better place.
13. If God had meant for me to be a writer, I'd have known so much earlier and gone to school for writing.
14. Nobody is reading anymore, anyway, so why am I bothering?
15. I will never be published. Have you seen the mess the publishing world is in these days?
16. I am revealing to others just how stupid I really am every time they read my work.
17. If it's not perfect, I shouldn't send it out...and it's never perfect.
18. If I were smart, I'd be reading. That's how you learn even about writing.

19. I am not smart enough, talented enough, disciplined enough, good enough to write anything worth reading.
20. Why can't I just relax and let this writing thing die?
21. People will judge me from my writing and maybe even use what I've written against me.
22. I will be just one more person who has failed at writing, or worse yet, keeps trying, making a fool of myself.
23. Life is too short for this angst. I need to let these writing goals go.
24. I'm sitting too much doing this writing, I need to stop this and do physical activities.
25. I am not ever going to make a real name for myself doing this. Maybe I need to focus on something else.

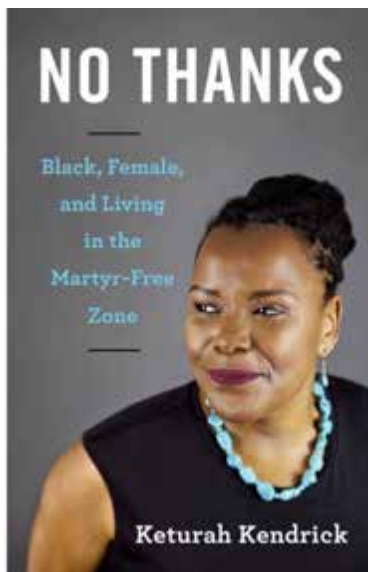
Ways to combat this negative self-talk? Set a timer, pick up your computer or notebook, and make a list of the negative messages you tell yourself. Then, as Dr. Daniel Amen suggests, combat those automatic negative thoughts (ANTS) by asking yourself if each is 100% true. Learn to fight negative self-talk by challenging those blanket claims. Defend yourself against all that negativity by coming up with the reasons why they are not 100% true. For example, to the claim, "My life is boring and nobody wants to read about it," I could say: "Is it true my life is 100% boring?" And I might write: "Well, no, I have a few interesting moments." Then the question might follow, "Is it possible that people like to read about everyday occurrences sometimes?" And my answer would be, "Well, yes, I like reading about ordinary life, I guess others do, too." Suddenly, that statement about my life being too boring to write about isn't as powerful anymore. Instead I might say, "It's true some people might find my life boring, but others may not." That makes me more inclined to write.

You can try this approach, too. It actually works.

In the meantime, you will be writing, as well as building your writing muscles. You will also be learning some positive approaches to healthier and happier living.



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.



Story Circle Book Reviews

On our new website, SCBR has a new look but plenty of familiar features, including Editor's Picks, Author Interviews, and some vintage reviews. We're adding new reviews steadily, and all the books are by, for, and about women, all published by independent or small presses. You're sure to find something special to read here:
<https://www.storycircle.org/book-review/>

Interested in reviewing for us? Details are here:
<https://www.storycircle.org/call-for-volunteers/>

In this issue of the *Journal*, we are featuring an excerpt of a recent Editor's Pick:

No Thanks: Black, Female, and Living in the Martyr-Free Zone

by Keturah Kendrick, reviewed by B. Lynn Goodwin

If your culture tells you that you want to be a wife and mother, whether you know it or not, would you follow their directions or follow your heart? *No Thanks: Black, Female, and Living in the Martyr-Free Zone* is Keturah Kendrick's story of defying conventions and expectations. We see her carving her own path, despite the advice she was given by others.

Kendrick always knew she didn't want to follow the dictates of her Southern Black sisters or her church. The more she processed society's expectations, the more she said, "No thanks." In the chapter titled "The S Word," Kendrick states, "I had forgotten how much people expected me to capitulate

to this universal narrative: women are expected to be mothers. So, when, after answering the usual 'Do you have children?' in the negative, the woman asked me why, I responded bluntly, 'Because I don't want them.'"

What she wanted was the freedom to travel and explore. Those dreams came true and she did it on her own as a proud single woman. Readers will applaud her for not bringing unwanted children into the world, marrying a man she didn't love, or buying into the beliefs of church women who told her that being a mother was a woman's role. Instead, she lived in the independent world she created for herself. ...

Read more: https://www.storycircle.org/book_review/no-thanks-black-female-and-living-in-the-martyr-free-zone/



B. Lynn Goodwin is the author of *Talent* and *Never Too Late*, and long-time editor and writing coach at *Writer Advice* (<https://writeradvice.com>). Learn more about Lynn here: <https://blynngoodwin.com/about/>

Join the Support for Women's Voices

Our Annual **GoFundMe** campaign is up and running, and we hope you'll help us, if you're able.

We're happy to say that thus far, we've raised \$2375 on the GFM site + \$500 direct donation to it on our site = \$2875, about **50%** of the goal of \$6000. But that other 50% is vital!

Make a donation of \$50 or more, and you'll be entered in a drawing for a **free 5-year membership**. We'll keep the GFM going until **December 20**, to give you plenty of time for a chance to win. And remember your year-end charitable giving! Story Circle Network is a nonprofit. We need you, and your donation is tax deductible.

Go to <https://gf.me/u/y362tb> to donate. This year's fund supports **Story Circle Book Reviews**, a unique review venue for independently published women authors. Women's voices matter!



True Words from Real Women

Edited by Jo Virgil, True Words is a quarterly selection of short lifewriting pieces by SCN members. For this issue, the optional theme is “I Thought I Knew.” See future topics and deadlines on the back page. Prose or poetry, your voice and the perspective you bring are welcome. Please submit your own True Words here:

<https://www.storycircle.org/journal-submissions/>

Sister Hawk

Betty McCreary – Austin TX

<https://naturalmusings.blog/>, bdownes211@aol.com
e-Circle 4

Wings outstretched
You swoop down into my yard
Sparking an explosion
Of scattering doves

Talons clasp the fence post,
You perch
Like a queen on her throne
Looking down at her kingdom

Dark eyes serious
Beak mean and ready
You are fierce

Yet, I want to touch your soft parts
To stroke each red chest feather
To run my palm
Along your sleek brown wings

I want to hold you close
And feel your heart beat
I don't want to tame you
But to know you

The Other Way 'Round

Suzy Beal – Bend OR

Suzy.beal.46@gmail.com

Eat less, exercise more,
Triple the vegetables, shun the sugar
I want it the other way 'round.

Black chin hairs and a snow-white crown,
hair thins and toenails thicken
I want it the other way 'round.

Walk 10,000 steps, couch potato,
poor eyesight, perfect 20/20
I want it the other way 'round.

Brittle bones, body of steel,
sieve for brains, quick wit
I want it the other way 'round.

Memory loss, thumb drive,
wrinkles, baby fat
I want it the other way 'round.

Patience, tenderness,
letting go, acceptance—
I've found my way 'round.

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

I Thought I Knew

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

I thought I knew how it would be to grow old. No, that's a lie. I wondered how it would be to reach the year 2000. It seemed so far away. I never thought about being old.

My Aunt Alma told me the most difficult thing I would ever do was grow old gracefully. She was 90 and wise when she mentioned this to me. I did think about it. I wasn't graceful when I was young, so how would I capture this state when I was old? But again, old seemed way, way off.

It says on my birth certificate that I was born October 17, 1940. I'm okay with that, I like my October birthday. What doesn't seem okay is that 2020 minus 1940 adds up to 80. This can't be right. I am healthy, thank God. I've had eighteen surgeries and six pregnancies, none of which were life-threatening.

The surgeries were mainly orthopedic. While many of my friends were redoing their face, I repaired knees, feet and fingers, and a melanoma. I try to concentrate on what I can do instead of what I can't. This is difficult because I'm really good at complaining. Since no one listens, I don't get much practice at it.

My children might feel at some point that I was life-threatening. The best advice I ever received about parenting was, "Do the best you can and hope they forgive you." So that's where I am now. All five are good people and contribute to this society. Our aim wasn't to make the world better for our children. It was to make better children for the world. They are better parents than we were, so that's a plus.

My Dad told me that people think having a good, healthy family is luck, but he knew it to be grace. I have eleven perfect, beautiful, bright grandchildren, who call me "Bubbles"—that is grace personified.

I thought I knew all the answers—now I'm not sure I know the questions.

Maybe I have grown in wisdom, age, and grace after all.

Facing the Truth

Patricia LaPointe – Prospect Heights IL
Grampat8@comcast.net

Is love blind or was it just too hard to see clearly when caught in a whirlwind? If love is blind, it must also be deaf. You were told, by all those that knew you both, that you weren't seeing the whole picture. You just knew it was they who could not see what your love was like. How could they know? How did they know?

How did they know before you that he never talked to you, only at you? When you met, you were equals, or so it seemed then. Why is it that you are now a nothing, at home with a child, while he is out fighting with the real world? Why too have you suddenly become stupid and he a genius?

There was a time when there was no one in the world besides the two of you. Why aren't you enough for him now? He says he doesn't want to stagnate, to get into a rut. Does he really prefer those drunken barbarian friends of his over you? Did he really tell you you're boring and he can't imagine why he married you in the first place?

Day and night, you pace the floors and go through the motions of living. You do the laundry, feed the baby, clean the house, eat far too much, and think. My God, how much you think! You wonder where did it go sour, when did the whirlwind stop? You wonder too, do I love him? Did I ever love him?

there's no almost about her

Tracie Nichols – Lansdale PA
 e-Circle 4

I've known her
 for twenty-five years.
 I thought I knew her.

but on this dreary
 almost rain almost morning
 when apathy and boredom
 seem almost expected
 she lifts hundred-year-old
 branch arms waving and
 gusting and defying expectations.

bursting almosts into
 half-hearted fragments.
 demanding this day give her
 one last wind salsa before winter sleep.



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.

The Mirror of Fate

Sharon Steenton – Cumming GA
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I didn't know that real life foreshadows itself, and that the mysteries locked up in time reveal themselves later in the Mirror of Fate.

I didn't know I would be looking into this Mirror now, two years after the suicide of my 36-year-old son. At the time of his death, I didn't know how cloak-and-dagger the riddle of time can be. I didn't realize what a mystery the foreshadowing of a person's life and death could become. I was completely blind to its nuance. Death is already written into the synopsis. We just don't grasp the end until it pulls us tight.

I wasn't even anticipating the arrival of these secrets until they revealed themselves to me recently.

Episode One: In 1990, when my nine-year-old son got eyeglasses, I noted oddly enough that the optometrist who examined his eyes felt cold, distant, soul-less.

Three years ago in 2017, the Mirror of Fate smoldered as I took my son once again to get glasses, but this time it was *his soul* that was barely hanging on by a thread.

Episode Two: Several times when I was a child living on Meandering Road, I witnessed a young man stumbling his way home. I felt him to be a lost soul.

I absorbed this haunting again when I saw my own adult son disheveled and lost, his mind disconnected from his body, walking haphazardly toward home.

Episode Three: In the year 2000 my son survived a horrendous car crash, his car ending upside down. The Mirror of Fate flashed brightly twenty years later when I found a photo of him standing beside his mangled vehicle alongside the road near the house where he would die in 2018.

This Mirror of Fate shared the existence of memories held close together, yet years apart. I didn't know the smoke screen of past, present, and future would shock and surprise.

I didn't know a homeless man could touch my heart so deeply.

I didn't know that homeless man would be my own son.

At the Water's Edge

Mary Jo West – San Clemente CA
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A young couple
with three little girls
spreads a blanket, chairs,
buckets and toys on the beach.

The children's father
sinks an umbrella
deep into the sand,

their mother opens a basket
filled with snacks and drinks,
then rubs sunscreen over
the girls' tender bodies.

At the water's edge
holding their children's hands,
their parents lift them high in the air
and swing their toes
across the soft, foamy surf.

Watching this scene
is a step back
into our own past,
remembering love and happiness
in the summer light.

Summers are fleeting by.
Where did the years go?

It doesn't matter what
has come before us or
what's beyond the horizon,

We're still here,
in the moment,
lingering at the water's edge,
feeling how lucky we are.

“Writing is a job, a talent, but it's also the place to go in
your head. It is the imaginary friend you drink your tea
with in the afternoon.”

—Ann Patchett

I Thought I Knew

Patricia Roop Hollinger – Westminister MD
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We were married on April 1, 1960. Might that have been a clue? After two hospitalizations for major depression, my college sweetheart ended our relationship. At the time I was devastated, but in time I clearly understood his concerns. During my recovery, I was introduced to a medical student who was a friend of my brother-in-law, also a medical student. Once again, I was enamored and in love. Many of our trysts occurred in hospital settings. But after an hour of waiting in the waiting room of Cleveland Metropolitan Hospital to have a brief interlude with him, I knew that wasn't how I imagined my married life—and he said it so well: “I am married to medicine.”

I was once again adrift, and made another attempt at the college experience. Still not sure what I wanted to be when I grew up. BUT—I did know that I wanted to be a mother. My younger sister was aware of my angst, so she and a school friend set me up on a date with the friend's brother. He was nice enough. His father was a minister and I felt it important that we shared similar Christian values. He also did not want to be drafted into the Vietnam war. He proposed marriage and I accepted.

I was not madly in love and my sexual attraction was minimal. But that was a good thing, according to my mother. So, surely this marriage had the ingredients to last.

Our first child was born in 1962, which fulfilled my desire to be a mother. I embraced this role with total abandon. Yet another reason for the marriage to last. The second child was born with multiple birth defects in 1965. I had to relinquish his care to a setting designed just to care for children with multiple birth defects. The marriage began to fracture, and ultimately ended in divorce in 1973. So much for what I THOUGHT I KNEW!

Sometimes a Question Has No Answer

Jane Gragg Lewis – Laguna Niguel CA
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Returning from my bike ride into the canyons, I retrace my path back to my car. I cross six lanes of busy, fast traffic at the pedestrian/bike/equestrian crosswalk, ride a short distance on a wide sidewalk, and then re-enter the regional park through a small gate that most people don't realize is there. Just as I leave the walkway and get onto the safe park road, a four-year-old boy zooms up to me on his scooter, blocks my path and says, “I like your blue bike!”

“Well, I like *your* green scooter!” I tell him.

His curious, innocent, blue eyes put a smile on my heart. He then tells me all about his scooter, how it lights up, and how the lights sparkle on him. His name is Thomas, and he points to his two younger brothers, both of whom are with their mother, trailing him by a short distance. I then learn about his pet lizard, the dog he can't have because his mother is allergic, the tree house in his yard, the school he can't go to right now because of the bad virus.

I'm sure his mother may be a bit anxious, so I tell him, “Let's hit the road and go back to your mom, okay?” As I push off, I turn a bit to watch him. In my peripheral vision, I see his mother's panic. Her hands fly up in fear beside her face, and a scream seems to be frozen in her throat despite the heat-wave temperatures. I stop and yell to him, “No! Don't go out there!” He's headed toward the gate and the rushing, unobservant traffic.

“Wait! Come back over here.” Thank goodness, he stops short of the gate and comes back. “You don't want to go out there,” I tell him. “It's dangerous. See all those cars? How very fast they're going? You're too smart to go out there, aren't you?”

“Yes,” he tells me with a confidence I admire. After a short, thoughtful pause, he looks up at me and asks, “So, why were *you* out there?”

Two Songs

Marilea C. Rabasa – Camano Island WA
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For 25 dollars, my mother bought a beautiful baby grand piano in 1955, and my siblings and I took piano lessons. I don't remember when my brother and sister stopped their lessons, but I kept at it for quite a few years.

My own three children took lessons on that same piano. But they eventually lost interest, just as I did.

Curiously, though, I managed to keep two songs in my fingers for many years: Edward McDowell's “Scotch Poem” and Arthur Brown's “Improvisation and Melody.” What was I holding onto?

Then, out of sheer neglect by not oiling the wood at all, the baby grand quite literally fell apart when I tried to move it to another location.

Maybe that was my Higher Power's way of telling me to let go of those two songs.

And a lot of other things.

Thoughts on Being Duped

Sara Etgen-Baker – Anna TX
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Having the wool pulled over my eyes, being lied to, or taken advantage of—I thought I knew what *being duped* was—a con or an act of betrayal that throws a person off-kilter, twisting their reality, and making them question their perceptions about what's real and what isn't.

Being duped can be something small, like believing misleading labels on food products. A more extreme example is blindly accepting news reports that aren't what they seem. Even our popular culture is rife with characters who aren't what they seem: Walter White (*Breaking Bad*), Don Draper (*Mad Men*), and Francis Underwood (*House of Cards*). Thanks to Photoshop, the Internet, heavily scripted reality TV, websites, and social media, the lines between fiction and reality have blurred for all of us. In that sense, *being duped* even seems normal, having numbed us to our own self-deception.

I find it easy to lie to myself or dupe myself into believing something that isn't real. So I ponder: how often have I duped or deceived myself? Am I what I am, or am I like one of the automatons in *The Matrix*, having lost my ability to determine what's real and what isn't? Have I been duped, driven by something outside of my awareness and contaminated to the point that I'm out of touch with my own reality, never questioning the habits, traditions, and dogmatic beliefs that my family, society, and culture gave me?

I'd like to believe that I'm more like Neo, born inside the Matrix, but aware and capable of creating my own reality inside it. But am I nurturing a false identity and leading a double life? Or am I, like Carl Jung suggests, simply living in an illusionary world, meeting myself time and time again in a thousand different disguises along the path of life? You see—I thought I knew what *being duped* meant. Now, I'm not so sure. I need one of Morpheus' little red pills. That way I can free myself from the enslaving control of the illusionary world and escape into the *real* world once and for all.

I Don't Feel Sorry for You

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I saw a young man in a wheelchair today being helped along the sidewalk by a friend. He had hands but no arms. Yes, you read that correctly. Absolutely no arms. Just adult-sized hands attached to his shoulders. Jeans could not hide that his legs ended too soon, just below the knees, with no feet. All of it so *permanent*.

So much he did not have and never would, but still, he had the biggest, brightest smile on his handsome face. So bright it could warm the coldest of hearts.

So please don't whine and tell me your *temporary* problems. That you're tired of the Covid-19 pandemic. Tired of wearing a mask; it fogs up your sunglasses. Complaining that your son can't be in class for his senior year, your daughter missed prom. You can't go to pro sports games and cheer for your teams. You can't go out to eat at your favorite restaurant for your birthday. Can't go to a movie. You're upset because your friends complained that you invited 35 kids to your daughter's Sweet 16 party and over half took the virus home with them. Don't they understand that she'll be 16 only once? And let's not forget your canceled cruise. Your self-pity is endless.

Please. Don't bother me with all of your silliness because frankly, I *really* don't give a damn.

Friends to Inspire

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A friend spoke a truth: "It's a good thing we have art." During Sequester In Place (SIP), all my activities sometimes crash to a halt while I feast on despair. These are hard times. We all know it and try to find ways to move forward. I am glad I have art. I have a stack of work that I've done since February. I've tried new things and worked to perfect old techniques. I alternate between watercolor, which is always a challenge for me, and more comfortable creative experiments in mixed media.

I still consider myself a watercolor student. During SIP, I've taken some online watercolor classes that diverged from the style of my normal instructor. It was good to test myself with different techniques and to get back to basics. I tend to belabor in watercolor, continuing to work way past the time I need to stop and say I am done. I looked at the work of friends for inspiration.

Ruth, an artist friend, is also a long-time watercolorist. Before SIP, she and I used to spend Wednesdays together, sitting at the same long table for a watercolor class through the Walnut Creek Community Arts program. Ruth often paints animals. Her latest are a series of cats that she has donated as auction items for charity events. They are wonderfully full of character.

Charlene Gerrish, a friend from high school days, is a very accomplished watercolorist and has had several paintings selected for the *Women in Watercolor* competition this year. She paints still-lives, indoor scenes, portraits, and she plays with pouring paint on paper. Her work is something to aspire to, something that develops after much practice.

As I look at these two artists and others, I realize again the importance of art and culture in our lives. Without those thought-provoking ideas and beautiful moments, we would be wallowing in despair. I am glad I have art.

Bumbling Along

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We should have known not to leave newspapers piled in the garage; bumblebee nested in the papers like mice. I thought if I pulled the nest box out bees would fly away, but they stay, block my way.

Car is useless while bees live outside the door. I run sprinkler now and then, try to ruin nest to no avail. Bees carry soggy cardboard, rebuild.

Elephants in rhinestones fly in my dreams, search for home. I wake to rain tapping on the window, return to sleep, briefly forget about bumblebees, hope to see more festooned pachyderms.

Morning's wet, yet neighbor's irrigation drones, reminds me of the rhyme, *the rain in Spain falls mainly on the plain*. I hope to see Spain someday.

After drizzle ends, I poke wet nest in hopes bees are gone, but bumbles don't let rain chase them out. They swarm and chase me back inside.

Jamie, a biologist in bee gear, moves box, nest, and bees to a better location. I watch from afar; fear, like an elephant, sits on my shoulder as she moves bees, freeing me to travel again.

Friday's Child Is Loving and Giving

Merimée Moffitt – Albuquerque NM
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tiny fingers
 voluptuous lips
 yawning on day four
 a big stretch, a settle down
 into lap snug on mommy,
 her arms in her big stretch
 spread out and up
 with closed fists
 skin like a plucked-when-ripe
 golden peach
 If there is a goddess
 this baby is her mercy
 Who but a goddess could create
 such a gift?
 Wrapped in the softest cottons
 the quilts of comfort, she revels
 on her first days
 in her cup of protection
 the barriers of parents
 easing her into their world
 where every day is a first
 where she is one with them
 Her future of firsts will fill
 like baskets of cherries, red birds,
 blossom days and holidays
 first words, first steps
 all new, everyone, every thing, new
 and good and happy

Nothing Prepares You

Linda F. Piotrowski – Green Valley AZ
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I thought working as a healthcare chaplain for over thirty years would prepare me to face the impending death of my husband. I was wrong.

I thought sitting with, watching, witnessing, keeping vigil with hundreds of others as they attempted to ease their loved one's transition from this life to whatever comes next would help me with the knowledge I needed in order to help my husband. Nothing, nothing, prepared me for the final week of my husband's declining health and his death or the crushing grief and "what if's" that followed.

Reassurances from others, advice of his physicians, visits from the hospital chaplain and priests, calls from family and friends did nothing to ease the isolation and loneliness I experienced as I sat at the bedside, helpless to do anything that would alter the course of events taking place.

Forget the film versions of handholding while uttering reassurances of love and caring as the loved one quietly slips away. My husband's death was not a pretty one. His was filled with his delirium, violent thrashing about, and inability to recognize me or our daughter.

My request for palliative sedation eased his symptoms but rendered him in a near coma-like state. He appeared peaceful and no longer suffering. I was left with a sense of relief but feeling bereft of his company.

My daughter and I played his favorite music, spoke to him of happier times, prayed aloud and silently assured him of our love, and urged him to let go. The moment of his death came as the staff turned him in the bed. Expected, but unexpected!

In an instant, gone was my life partner of fifty years. The crushing reality of that loss set in only hours and days later. Other deaths had not prepared me for the utter sense of loneliness and grief that set in. As the months and now nearly two years have gone by, I am learning to live with my loss. I still second-guess myself. I still wish things were different. I still cry alone in the night. I look at his photo with longing.

Nothing, nothing, prepares you for the death of a life partner.

I Watched Movers Box Up a Life

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I watched movers box up a life today, a life I thought left me
 thirty-some years ago. I was wrong.

When our daughter and I cleaned out the refrigerator, we found
 a large pot filled with egusi stew, remnants of the last meal he
 cooked. I took the foot-long, hand-carved wooden spoon, scraped dry bits clinging to the sides
 of the silver pot. Scrubbing it clean,
 smells of memory flooded my nostrils—cayenne, bitter leaves.
 It took me ten minutes, ten memory-laden minutes. Even after
 scrubbed and dried, the pot's cayenne smell filled my nostrils, the
 distinct smell of West African food.

Our daughter and I found papers and photos, items her father
 kept all these years, detailed memories of our life together. I
 could barely look at them, throat constricting, tears welling
 in the eyes of this woman who never cries. Our daughter,
 dismayed, told me to go outside. I walked down the quiet
 street, brown leaves scattered from autumn, unraked, a strange
 street both urban and rural inside a city of nearly half a million
 residents. Is this where he walked, attempting to improve his
 health? Was I walking in his footsteps?

I watched movers box up a life today, a life I thought left me
 thirty-some years ago. I was wrong.

Absence

Mary Jo West – San Clemente CA
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Looking around the rooms
 of my Craftsman-style home,

I see walls lined with
 first edition books collected
 for over forty years

images of family, art
 and mementos from
 travels to Spain and Italy.

Family's collective history
 is embedded in the walls.

Mind lost in thought,
 wondering,

will it all be reduced to nothing
 but a faded memory
 when I'm gone?

Am I experiencing
 my own absence?

Seascape

Mary Jo West – San Clemente CA
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Early morning dank mist
 shrouds the buoyant grace
 of the sea.

Pale, afternoon sun
 whisks away the rolling fog,
 bright rays of sunlight
 dissolve in the incoming tide.

As the sun makes its
 final descent,
 horizon becomes the
 color of tomorrow's sky.

Under the face
 of a full moon
 a seal's raspy barking sound
 echoes up the canyon.

Betty Sue, Eyes of Blue

Jane Gragg Lewis – Laguna Niguel CA
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one last shout

Joan Connor – Kerrville, TX
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e-Circle 4

On a perfect summer day for riding our bikes, Charles and I fly down Toddville Road, wishing we had a speedometer.

“We have to be going at least a hundred miles an hour,” Charles yells. “Let’s go faster!”

The wind from our incredible speed keeps my hair out of my eyes, and I pedal as fast as possible, trying my best to keep up.

Charles comes to a sudden stop.

“What are you doing?” I ask. “I almost ran into you.”

I follow Charles’ gaze to the right, and then I understand. There she sits on her front porch steps holding a doll, of all things.

She’s our age, but doesn’t play with us. She’s wearing a fancy blue Sunday kind of dress and patent leather Mary Janes. Who could ride a bike in that outfit? And who in her right mind would *want* to wear that unless she had to go to church?

“Isn’t she pretty?” Charles asks me, a faraway look in his eyes.

“Sure,” I tell him. “Let’s go now.”

That’s what Mama always says about Betty Sue. “Such a pretty little girl. Skin like a Madame Alexander doll.”

Betty Sue, eyes of blue. Blue like a pretty lake. She has soft brown curls and is so frilly. Always playing with her dolls. Doesn’t she know dolls can’t do anything? They have such creepy eyes, like they have no souls. And they’re not easy to hug like soft Teddy bears.

“Let’s go, Charles. This is boring.”

“You go on ahead. I’ll catch up with you.” He begins to roll his bike across Betty Sue’s front yard.

I go home and let the screen door slam.

“What are you doing home?” Mama asks. “I thought you and Charles were riding bikes.”

“We were.”

“What happened? Didn’t expect to see you again till supper time.”

“Oh, Charles is looking at Betty Sue.”

Mama laughs. “Well, you may as well get used to that. She’s such a pretty little girl.”

what did i know
about sex to respond
a dapper martini drinker
i recall being conned

into a life of marriage
due to guilt and fear
i wish i would have stayed alone
i wish i would have veered

away from him and moved right on
to meet the man of my dreams
instead i settled for someone who
presented varied schemes

i’m older now and wiser we hope
the children are all grown
he’s dead and buried, well, not quite
his ashes he wanted blown

off the bridge of golden gate
poof! What a pleasure t’would be
no child wants to make the trip
his final demand to please

so he sits boxed and tactlessly pawned
as i shove him my daughter’s way
(i should have pushed him over the cliff
but then in prison i’d stay)

i’d like to think this choice of mine
should no more be spoken about
but here i am writing a poem
giving him one last shout

“And by the way, everything in life is writable about if you have the outgoing guts to do it, and the imagination to improvise. The worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt.”

—Sylvia Plath



Our Future is Female

We're pleased to introduce a new member of SCN, a young woman who seems destined to make a difference. **Alya Mehrtash** is a senior at Beverly Hills High School. Writing is one of her greatest joys, and she has spent the last four years in the BHHS journalism program. She is currently the co-editor-in-chief of the Beverly Media Group, with an editorial focus on the student-run online news publication, Beverly Highlights. Alya is also a soccer player and strong advocate for equal treatment of women soccer players. In fact, she is a strong proponent of social justice and hopes to one day be a civil rights attorney. We welcome Alya's voice!

Finding My Voice

by Alya Mehrtash

"Do you hate Jews?"

I was asked this question on my first day of school in Beverly Hills at age 12, when a classmate discovered I was Muslim. She looked innocent in her beige jacket, the soft breeze blowing her blonde hair.

I stood, shell-shocked. "What? Of course not!"

"I just thought since you're Muslim you would."

I'd never had an encounter like that, but, to my displeasure, it was one that I would soon get used to.

Before returning to the U.S., I lived in Singapore for eight years. There, I was a part of a diverse learning community at Singapore American School. After an enriching week of Temple Tours, I sat on the bus, tired from visiting mosques, synagogues, churches, and Hindu temples. My social studies teacher, Mrs. Miller, reminded us, "We all love each other no matter what. Olivia is Christian, Alya is Muslim, Oliver is Jewish, but we're all human. Never forget that." I never have.

When I returned to LA, I was not prepared to process the prejudice that I faced in my new community. In seventh grade, a boy behind me made an inaccurate joke about ISIS committing 9/11. When he was corrected, he said "Al Qaeda, ISIS, doesn't matter. They're all Muslims."

I glared at him. "Those are *extremists*."

"I'm just saying, you don't see *my* people doing anything like that."

"Ever heard of the KKK?"

All of this worsened when Donald Trump became President. After several months of watching him spew hatred from his bully pulpit, my ten-year-old brother asked, "Are we going to be deported for being Muslim?" The fear in his eyes motivated me to attend the protests at LAX airport following Executive Order 13769, more commonly referred to as the "Muslim Ban."

Two years and many hurtful jokes later, I was sauntering by the boys' locker room on the way to soccer practice when I heard

the chanting of "Allah Akbar," a mimicked sound of an explosion and subsequent roaring laughter. My cheeks grew hot. I felt beaten down, ashamed and angry—angry at myself for feeling embarrassed about my religion, which had always been a source of family pride. I hurried onto the field, where I felt safe among my friends and coaches.

Soon after, I was talking with a friend when I had an epiphany: I was happy to fight alongside strangers at the LAX protests, but I was intimidated at my own school to call out prejudice among my peers. This realization propelled me to recognize I could no longer be silent. I immediately contacted the editors of my school news publication and received approval to write an opinion piece on religious insensitivity on our campus.

I pounded out my thoughts and feelings, then researched facts to add strength to my argument. Pushing back my fears, I did not allow them to dictate one word. After hours of turning my thoughts into coherent sentences, I pressed publish. I felt both nervous and relieved.

I soon received a text from Sam. "Hey, I just read your article. Can we talk?"


Despite being one of my closest friends, Sam, a devout Jew, had made Islamophobic jokes both to his friends and to me.

My hands were shaking when I called him. "What's up?"

"Alya, I'm so sorry. I never realized how much my words hurt you. I promise I'm going to work on it and stop anything like that from happening again."

"I appreciate it, Sam."

As the now editor-in-chief, I am still most proud of that opinion piece and the positive response it generated. I feel gratified to know that Sam and many of my peers learned something and wanted to change because of my words. More importantly, I overcame my trepidation and spoke up for myself and all those who are unable to defend themselves. I now understand just how crucial my voice truly is.

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<https://www.storycircle.org/publications/archives/>

Real Women Write: Living on COVID Time

Are you ready? Volume 19 of SCN's annual member anthology, *Real Women Write*, will be published on Amazon this December in ebook and paperback. Needless to say, with all the piled-on challenges of this year, our topic – **Living on COVID Time** – has turned out to be a broader subject than any of us might have imagined.

With 80 pieces by 52 authors, this is an important record, not covering every event or challenge, but creating a powerful and beautiful collage of the individual and common experiences of our community of women writers.

We're proud and pleased to have a Foreword by **Brooke Warner**, publisher of She Writes Press, to clarify the context and impact of these writings. Her description and challenge are on the mark:

"In this collection of writings, a diverse group of women considers what living in this way means. Their stories

showcase a range of reactions to living on COVID time, which include grappling with illness and fear and death, with heartbreak and isolation, with the coexistence of ugliness and beauty. In these pages, you may see yourself. You will surely be moved by the many perspectives and considerations and experiences in this collection. You'll hit highs and lows, which is the very reason we read in the first place—to be transported into others' lives, and in so doing, drink in the rich mixture that is life on planet Earth.

... Let the words you read in this collection inspire you—to write and to be more prolific, to never abandon your heartfelt impulse to create on your own terms, and also to listen, to be an ally, and to enter into others' experiences with an open heart."

Keep an eye on our website, and on your email. You can be sure we will let you know as soon as *Real Women Write: Living on COVID Time* is available!

Story Circle Network, Inc.

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Georgetown TX 78626

True Words from Real Women — Looking Ahead —

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

December 2020: I Thought I Knew (in this issue)

March 2021: Looking in the Mirror (Deadline Jan 15, 2021)

June 2021: The Final Say (Deadline April 15, 2021)

September 2021: Learning to Listen (Deadline July 15, 2021)

Submit your stories or poetry to:

<https://www.storycircle.org/journal-submission/>

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Ready to get more involved with SCN? We're always looking for volunteers to help with upcoming and ongoing projects. Not sure what you'd like to do? You'll find an array of important ways to participate here:

<https://www.storycircle.org/call-for-volunteers/>

Please email us at storycircle@storycircle.org with **Volunteer** in the subject line. We need *your* support.

36 SCN members shared their stories with us for this issue.

Thank you!

CONGRATULATIONS to Martha Slavin !

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

