

Letter From The [New] President



Len Leatherwood

Dear SCN Sisters,

I am writing to you as your new president, a position I am honored to hold. However, I must admit I was, at first, reluctant to volunteer.

When our now former president Jeanne Guy called me back in September “just to chat,” I suspected a casual question might come up concerning my interest in stepping into her shoes. Of course, the idea of taking on such a huge job brought an immediate surge of apprehension. “Surely there’s someone with more time, talent, and experience that would be just perfect, yes?” Jeanne laughed. “Well, I’m not saying that a “perfect” person isn’t out there. But right here and right now, we’d love it if you’d help us out.” That conversation was followed by one in October and then November. (Jeanne is known for her persistence.)

Finally, I said what I knew I’d say from that first hello - “Yes, it would be my privilege.”

I officially started on December 1, and the past 2-1/2 months have been an eye-opener. I thought I knew a lot about Story Circle Network since I’ve been coordinating the Online Class program for the past five years. However, what I know now is that though I was knowledgeable about my little realm, I didn’t have a clue about the depth and breadth of offerings we have here at Story Circle Network, or the number of dedicated volunteers who bring these programs to all of us.

I had, of course, heard of the Sarton Awards, but didn’t actually understand the inner workings of that group whose members clearly love May Sarton as much as I do. However, I soon learned that under the guidance of Susan Albert, these women have for the past decade coordinated the reading and scoring of an impressive number of indie books written by women authors. Over three dozen SCN members serve as first-round jurors before the finalists are sent to a group of a dozen librarians for final judging. There isn’t just one overall Sarton prize, but rather a Sarton winner in contemporary fiction, historical fiction, memoir, and nonfiction. Plus, this year the Gilda Prize: “It’s Always Something,” has been added in honor of comedian Gilda Radner, for memoirs that not only make us think but also laugh. That behind-the-scenes workgroup is now responsible for bringing in one of the most profitable revenue streams for Story Circle Network. Go, team!

I have also had the chance to learn much more about the SCN Book Reviews, which began in 2002 with Paula Yost at the helm for 10 years before Peggy Fountain and Susan Albert continued the work until 2019. Over those years, Story Circle Network posted over 2100 reviews of indie books by women. After a hiatus, while the new website was being constructed, Teresa Lynn took up the mantle in June 2020. Since that time, 18 active reviewers have posted 86 new reviews plus 2 author interviews. They also launched a quarterly newsletter in February, 2021. Did you know that SCN Book Reviews are in the top one percent of reviewers on Goodreads? Have you visited that gorgeous part of our website? If not, you need to go over today. Not only will you find many books you’d love to read, but you’ll also see just how dedicated Teresa and her crew are at supporting indie books for, by, and about women.

Continued on page 2

Upcoming Webinars:

Looking and Sounding Your Best
on Zoom

With Susan Tweit

March 24, 4 p.m. PT

Two Paths, Fiction and Memoir:

Traveling the One

That’s Right for You

With Barbara Probst

& Julie Ryan McGue

April 21, 4 p.m. PT

7 Easy Steps to Boost Your Social
Media Marketing

With Jaime Schneider

May 19, 4 p.m. PT

More information on page 11

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I also certainly knew about the numerous publications at SCN. That is, after all, one of the primary reasons I was attracted to the organization back in 2008. I wanted to have a chance to be published, and a writing friend suggested I look into Story Circle Network. I began sending in my memoir pieces and, sure enough, before long I received the happy news that my work had been accepted. That was the beginning of the rest of my writing life—sending out work to many other publications after receiving the confidence boost from Story Circle Network. Since that time, I have watched our publications blossom under the steady hand of Susan Schoch, who has been leading our Publications Workgroup for a very long time with the help of Jo Virgil, who is the editor of True Words. Susan has been the editor of the quarterly *Journal*, the anthologies, and our newly reformulated newsletter, “The Flash.” Plus, she oversees both of our SCN blogs, which are being handled in a stellar fashion by editor Linda Hoyer. At this point, Susan Schoch has elected to scale back her responsibilities but will continue to edit our anthologies. After recovering from the shock that she will not always be around to handle EVERYTHING related to publications, we realized it was time to be gracious and thank Susan for her huge contribution. Currently, we are looking for an editor for “The Flash” and the SCN Journal. You’ll find details in this *Journal* issue. If you’re interested or know someone who would be wonderful, please let us know!

These are the biggies at Story Circle Network, not counting our national conference, which currently is on hold until after the pandemic. But we also have many other areas that are keeping SCN bubbling with activity. We have the newly formed Social Justice Committee, ongoing online classes, monthly webinars, a podcast coming in the near future, writing support groups, new Zoom plans for our e-circles, an online mini-conference next fall, and even an October 2022 trip to Italy for sightseeing and a writing workshop. We also are planning a mentoring program for youth of color to help these young women with their college essays. This is something you’ll be hearing much more about in the next few months. Many of these new ideas are coming as a result of our new Program Director, Liz Beaty. Her presence is adding youthful energy to SCN.

I hope you’ll consider how you can contribute to our growing organization through your talents. We need you to help in whatever way you can and would love to aid you in finding your right spot here at Story Circle Network. Your time and energy will help us to build our programs for the future while offering you the chance to develop loving connections with fellow writing sisters. Please feel free to contact Liz with your ideas. Her email: programs@storycircle.org.

Just as Jeanne said to me when I was apprehensive. “I’m not saying that person with more time, talent, and experience isn’t out there. But right here and right now, we’d love it if you’d help us out.” The bottom line is we need you.

Here’s to encouraging women to tell their stories!

Big hugs,
Len

Len Leatherwood
SCN President 2020-2021

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.

Guest Editor: Susan Albert
journaleditor@storycircle.org
Layout Editor: Robin Wittig

This Month’s Contributing Editors:

Susan Albert
Linda Hoyer
Len Leatherwood
Teresa Lynn
Jo Virgil
Caroline Ziel

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

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Membership Rates

One Year \$55 if receiving
online publications;
\$70 (US) if receiving *printed* publications
\$90 Canada & Mexico
\$95 Elsewhere
Foreign Memberships: Please pay by
International Postal Money Order.

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.

Work With SCN!

We are looking for outstanding candidates to apply to be Story Circle Network's next Periodicals Editor.

We are advertising this position internally before publishing it to external channels.

The Periodicals Editor reports to the Program Director and is responsible for the timely and successful publication of Story Circle Network's quarterly Journal and monthly Flash publications, as follows:

- Maintaining a calendar of tasks and deadlines
- Developing a plan for the content of each periodical (the Flash and the Journal)
- Submitting a draft of the plan for Executive Committee's review/approval and revising, as needed
- Gathering and editing contributed materials
- Creating content, as needed
- Working with the Layout Editor and the Website Administrator to complete the process of Journal publication
- Working with the Social Media Assistant to send out the Flash e-letter
- Creating promotional materials

For a more detailed job description and information about compensation, go here: <https://www.storycircle.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Periodicals-Editor-Job-Description.pdf>

To apply, please submit a brief resume of relevant experience (250 words max.) to programs@storycircle.org by March 19, 2021. Applications will be reviewed by a hiring committee.

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. Current possibilities:

• **Women's Book Award Jurors:** Our Women's Book Awards program (the Sarton and Gilda Awards) 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

Writing Women of Color

Kalisha Buckhanon's 2020 book, *Speaking of Summer: A Novel*, is not her first, and if you haven't discovered her yet, she's an author that deserves your attention.

Kalisha was born in Kankakee, Illinois, and attended the College at University of Chicago, The New School M.F.A. in Creative Writing program, and University of Chicago's English PhD program. She is a Pushcart Prize nominee, Illinois Arts Council Fellowship winner, and Phi Beta Kappa member.

She has short stories and essays in Fiction, Fiction International, Oxford American, Black Renaissance Noire, Kweli, Winter Tangerine Review, SheKnows, Crimereads, and many more publications.

Kalisha has written three more novels: *Solemn*; *Conception*; and *Upstate*. Her debut novel, *Upstate*, was among the first titles chosen for the National Book Foundation's "Literature for Justice" program, and is a school and library favorite for teens. *Conception* won a Friends of American Writers Award. Now she gives us a literary thriller founded in her recognized

expertise in true crime cases involving women. In *Speaking of Summer*, which is set in Harlem, a woman searches desperately for her missing twin sister, offering the author plenty of opportunity to explore that fabled community and teach us something "about what it means to survive as a woman in America," per Jesmyn Ward.



You can read more about Kalisha on her website: <https://www.kalisha.com>

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.



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

<p>Women of Monterey series - Spanish California, 1780</p> <p>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?</p> <p>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?</p>	<p>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?</p> <p>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.</p>
<p>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?</p> <p>This novel of hope and courage is inspired by true events.</p>	<p>An easy-to-understand guide to copyright, especially for authors.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>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...</p> <p>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?</p>



WOMEN'S
BOOK AWARDS

THE SARTON
THE GILDA

STORY CIRCLE NETWORK

Sarton 2020 Shortlist Announced

HISTORICAL FICTION

Child Bride, Jennifer Smith Turner
Copy Boy, Shelley Blanton-Shroud
Freedom Lessons, Eileen Harrison Sanchez
Her Sister's Tattoo, Ellen Meeropol

CONTEMPORARY FICTION

Hunting the Devil, Suanne Schafer
Luz, Debra Thomas
Queen of the Owls, Barbara Linn Probst
Sweet Jane, Joanne Kukanza
Tea by the Sea, Donna Hemans
The Best Part of Us, Sally Cole-Misch
Watermark, Elise Schiller

MEMOIR

When the Red Gates Opened: A Memoir of China's Reawakening, Dori Jones Yang
Ordinary Skin: Essays from Willow Springs, Amy Hale Auker
The Spiral Shell: A French Village Reveals Its Secrets of Jewish Resistance During WWII, Sandell Morse
Finding Venerable Mother: A Daughter's Spiritual Quest to Thailand, Cindy Rasicot
I Have Been Assigned the Single Bird: A Daughter's Memoir, Susan Cerulean
This Particular Happiness: A Childless Love Story, Jackie Shannon Hollis

NONFICTION

Behind the Kingdom's Veil: Inside the New Saudi Arabia, Susanne Koelbl
Seven Sisters and a Brother: Friendship, Resistance, and Untold Truths Behind Black Student Activism in the 1960s, Marilyn Allman Maye, Harold S. Buchanan, Jannette O. Domingo, Joyce Frisby Baynes, Marilyn Holifield, Myra E. Rose, Bridget Van Gronigen Warren, Aundrea White Kelley
Victory for the Vote: The Fight for Women's Suffrage and the Century that Followed, Doris Weatherford

The SCN board has approved a new prize, named for beloved comedian Gilda Radner. It will be granted to outstanding memoirs written with a comedic flair. This year's shortlist:

THE GILDA PRIZE: "It's Always Something"

Bad Tourist: Misadventures in Love and Travel, Suzanne Roberts
Brave(ISH): A Memoir of a Recovering Perfectionist, Margaret Davis Ghielmetti
The Girlfriend Mom: A Memoir, Dani Alpert

From the Blogs:

Telling HerStories

SCN's "Telling HerStories Blog" is written by women writers and teachers who want to share their passion for women's stories. Our topics include the art, craft, and publication of women's memoir, fiction, biography, poetry, drama, and more. HerStories is coordinated by Linda Hoye.

Endings as Prologue to New Beginnings

By Kathryn Haueisen

I could see my husband was depressed. I didn't realize I was the source of his unhappiness. We were adjusting to the empty-nest phase of life as our recently-married daughters were increasing the family at a rate of six babies in five years. Hoping counseling would help, I faithfully met my husband at the counselor's office every week, until he dropped out. I stayed and finally admitted defeat when the counselor asked, "Do you want to be married to someone who doesn't want to be married to you?"

No; but I so desperately wanted him to want to be married to me as much as I still wanted to be married to him. I journaled my way through the first couple of years, pouring out my shock, despair, disbelief, fury, and terror, worrying about what would become of me.

Then came a chance to housesit for friends for a few weeks. I had many empty hours to myself and a pile of journals. I wondered if I could write fiction after years of writing non-fiction. I wrote *Asunder*, a novel about starting again in middle age and discovered that I loved writing fiction. I wrote a happy ending and added a study guide about shifting attitudes toward marriage—and divorce—in the modern age. I searched for an agent and/or publisher. Finding neither, a friend who was self-publishing his own book, helped me publish *Asunder*. It got great reviews, but few sales. The remaining copies are in boxes in my garage. I'm searching for a place to donate them to help others reeling from a mid-life divorce.

The experience of writing a fictional account of becoming suddenly single again in mid-life opened new doors. It was good therapy to write it. I often felt helpless and cornered going through the divorce; but on the pages of the manuscript, I had control over what happened. I found a large sisterhood of women were also divorced. Many women, and a few men, resonated with the book. So did people whose spouses had died.

The experience taught me two lessons. I can write fiction. I recently published a historical novel about the Mayflower voyage and first encounters between Indigenous people and English settlers. I discovered there are many paths to publication. With sufficient time, patience, and persistence I can pull together a team to help me tell—and sell—my story.

Though I still regret the divorce, I am grateful that I was able to plow through the grief to write a book that helped me, and I believe others, recover. Writing *Asunder* gave me the confidence to write *Mayflower Chronicles: The Tale of Two Cultures*. This new book has sold more copies in a few months than *Asunder* sold over the past four years.

During the divorce, I felt like the best years of my life had ended. Researching and writing the current book has expanded my world in ways I never could have imagined.



Kathryn Haueisen is an author and retired Lutheran pastor. She combines her degree in journalism and her Master of Divinity degree to write about good people doing great things in the global village. She has published over 75 articles and resources in dozens of national and regional publications. The most recent of her six published books, *Mayflower Chronicles: The Tale of Two Cultures*, is her debut historical fiction. Kathy is currently teaching in SCN's Online Class Program: "Write and Sell Your Story in Short Spurts." <https://www.storycircle.org/class/write-and-sell-your-story-in-short-spurts/>. Her website: <https://howwisethen.com/>



From the Blogs:

One Woman's Day

This November 15, 2020 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/>

Gluten

By Suzy Beal

Its bubbles make me smile. Do you need a feeding? The sour smell tells me today's breads will be perfect. Today is Sunday, so it's bread day. I make sour dough loaves on Sunday for the entire family.

I have a physical and emotional attachment with the sour dough that comes from "feeding" it several times a week. When it comes out of the refrigerator, I talk to it, check for bubbles, and make sure it smells sour. It needs to come to room temperature before scooping out the sour dough and adding it to the flour, spices, and doing the kneading. It is tactile and satisfying using different flours and condiments. The bowls sit on the counter overnight, and then I bake them on Monday morning.

I've made bread since our girls were little over forty years ago. French bread with a crusty top to go with Friday night spaghetti and sandwich bread for their lunches was the usual fare. About four years ago, a friend gave me some sour dough starter and since then it has become the family favorite. I try different types from sun dried tomato with rosemary, curry powder with grainy mustard, dill, and rye flour with caraway seed.

Making bread is a way to send a message of love to my daughters and their families who all live nearby, but with

whom we can't visit, now. Something happens to me as I mix the ingredients and knead the bread. I know I'm passing on a tradition my mother started. I always went to school with homemade bread sandwiches, wishing for the balloon bread others had, but her cinnamon rolls fresh out of the oven at the end of the school day had us drooling.

Recently breadsticks are the family favorite. I coat some with Parmesan cheese, others with sea salt, some have rosemary in the dough and onion tops, some others.

I just received the Sunday orders by text: one loaf of caraway rye, one loaf of Kalamata olive, and a loaf of Basque Shepherders Bread—which isn't sour dough. That one is a request from my fifteen-year-old granddaughter. Tomorrow will be a busy day baking.

Now, in their 40s there is little I can do for our girls, but making bread every week is filling a need. The girls come by on Monday morning to pick up their bread with masks on. I set the bread out on a table on the deck where they can pick it up and wave. I feel lucky for this weekly link in the time of COVID. It doesn't take place of our hugs, but gluten is our glue.

Writer and budding poet Suzy Beal spent twenty-five years helping seniors put their stories to paper and this year just finished her own memoir. A portion of Suzy's memoir was published on truestorieswelltold.com. She writes personal essays and is currently studying poetry. Her work has appeared on truestorieswelltold.com, Story Circle Network, and Central Oregon Writer's Guild. She lives and writes from Bend, Oregon.



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.

Rhonda Del Bene

My Story: For 20+ years I was in the commercial real estate development business (mostly developing small shopping centers, from raw land to finished product, in California, Las Vegas and Arizona). Now, I am a perpetual student, studying Italian language and culture, with an emphasis on Italian literature. ... My writings are interspersed with passages from Italian poetry, literature and philosophy. I travel extensively, which greatly influences my writing, and have lived and studied in Paris (studying French language when I was 19) and in Florence, Italy (in 2016 and again in 2019), where I studied Italian and Political Science.... I look forward to the opportunities that being a member of the Story Circle Network affords me. *Buona scrittura!*

Storytelling Medium: Words, photos.

Suzy Beal – Bend, OR

My Story: Suzy...has been writing her memoir for five years and it is just finished. She studied poetry this past year and managed to write a poem a week for 60 weeks. She likes to write non-fiction essays and short stories from her life experiences. She also writes a letter a week to her granddaughter, which she doesn't mail. She has a binder full of letters to give her granddaughter when she graduates from college.

Storytelling Medium: Words.

Gail Reitenbach – Santa Fe, NM

My Story: *Optics: A Novel About Women and Work and Midlife Muddles* is Gail Reitenbach's debut novel. In an earlier brief but successful career as an English professor, she taught and published academic articles about novels. Later, she edited novels and nonfiction books. Writing novels, she's found, is both more difficult and more satisfying than her prior relationships with fictional narratives. ...Over a career that has taken her from academia to business, Gail has written and edited everything from tweets to books. She's been a marketing communications consultant, freelance writer and editor, and magazine editor. She's won a few awards along the way but takes greater satisfaction in knowing that readers have found value and pleasure in the work she's helped welcome into the world. Gail grew up in Canada and has lived in the U.S. Midwest, East, West, and Southwest. She loves mountains above all other landscapes. When she's not wrangling words, she clears her head by hiking or takes on an even bigger challenge: gardening near Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Storytelling Medium: Words.

Barbara Frandsen – Austin, TX

My Story: In 2020, I published *Dignity in Death*. This book shares: personal experiences, suggestions about what to say to help others, and ways to prepare for the certainty of one's own death. I am a life-long educator with experiences ranging from teaching pre-k children with multi-handicaps through pre-service teachers at St. Edward's University. The realization that I wanted to write came as a discovery after I wrote my first text for a college course I was teaching. What started out as an "I should do this" ended up

being enjoyable. After teaching special education and working with students of all ages, I consider myself as an advocate for all children. Those trapped by social justice issues feel especially important to me. My goal is to serve and I now realize that any uniqueness I have comes from living long enough to have collected many stories about people and their life situations.

Storytelling Medium: I enjoy working with words.

Denise Longo – Grasonville, MD

My Story: Palliative nurse practitioner. Mom. Partner. Friend. So many words, so many voices. Time to write it all down.

Storytelling Medium: Words, textiles, and photography.

Henrietta Bensussen – Santa Rose, CA

My Story: I've lived an interesting, multi-faceted life and write about it with a sense of humor and irony. B.A. degree in Biology; like to be out in nature, and to garden.

Storytelling Medium: Words

Lynn Ermann – New York, NY

My Story: I'm a New York City-based writer and developmental editor/coach. I was part of the SCNE team years ago. My own features and personal stories have appeared in national newspapers and magazines, including The New York Times. I also write flash fiction and graphic novel scripts.

Storytelling Medium: Words

Margaret Dubay Mikus – Lake Forest, IL

My Story: I was a molecular genetics research scientist and teacher (Ph.D. in microbiology) who healed from serious illnesses including multiple sclerosis and cancer using an integrative approach. For most of my life I thought I was not a creative person. After healing from MS, I began a poetic journal to "sing from the heart."

I am now a poet, singer, healer, storyteller, and photographer. ... It is my pleasure to support people in making positive life changes. And be nourished in return. I wrote my book, *As Easy as Breathing: Reclaiming Power for Healing and Transformation*, during my first journey through breast cancer. ... In 2013 I was honored as the Illinois Featured Author for the *Willow Review*. My third book, *Thrown Again into the Frazzle Machine: Poems of Grace, Hope, and Healing*, is a welcome lifeboat through life's hard times and a celebration of what brings us light in the darkness. ... In 2016, I began a video-poem series on YouTube reading [my] poems.... You can listen here:

<https://www.fullblooming.com/category/video-poem-series/>

Storytelling Medium: Poetic journal, photographs, essays

Sondra Brooks – Pittsboro, NC

My Story: I began my writing career in both erotic fiction and nonfiction. My fifth book, for which I was editor, was nonfiction. Four of my books have won awards. Three entries in the Memoir/Essay category were winners in the Writer's Digest Annual Competition. My memoir is nearing completion.

Storytelling Medium: Written words

GoFundMe Campaign a Success!

With big thanks to 47 donors, our winter 2020 Go Fund Me campaign added almost \$3500 to the coffers, which will go toward supporting Story Circle Book Reviews. \$2975 was received on the GoFundMe site; \$500 was received directly through our website. Those funds were double matched by a Story Circle supporter! You made it happen.

Story Circle Book Reviews (SCBR) offers such a unique review venue for women authors whose books may not be reviewed elsewhere. Established in 2001, with over 2100 reviews and a team of twenty-plus volunteer reviewers and editors, SCBR is the largest and most comprehensive women's review site on the internet. And we have been working hard to make it more inclusive.

In alignment with Black Lives Matter, Story Circle, through its creation of a Social Justice Workgroup, established Black Stories Matter (BSM) to do our part to raise awareness of Black women writers. We have committed to support them in telling their stories, and amplify their voices. Stories spark understanding and drive change. See our statement here (<https://www.storycircle.org/black-stories-matter/>)

As of November 2020, of the reviews posted, 9 of the 36 were reviews of books written by women of color. This 25% is one of the goals set by the Social Justice Workgroup. Thanks to those involved in outreach to make that happen.

Longtime member and active SCN volunteer Susan Schoch won the GFM drawing and has been awarded five years' membership in SCN.

Jeanne Guy, who coordinated the GFM campaign, says "I was hesitant to even have a GFM campaign this year, considering the crises we were and are facing. Your generosity blew me away. SCBR will continue to flourish because of your support. In solidarity, you supported women writers with your donations and we are humbled and grateful to you all."

Watch For Our Renewal Notice!

Your continued membership is important to us—and to you! Our new site is designed to send you three renewal reminders: a month before your annual membership expires, a few days before, and on the expiration date. To renew, all you have to do is go to <https://www.storycircle.org/registration/> Fill out the form under "Sign Up or Renew" (scroll on down for payment info), and click the purple "Continue" button. Now, isn't that easy?

A Sharing Circle

Story Circle could not exist without the generous contributions of its members and friends and the dedicated support of an active and energetic Board of Directors. A very warm *thank you* to those who believe in SCN's mission and work to nurture it. Learn how you can help: <https://www.storycircle.org/donate/>

Benefactors (\$1,000+)

Susan Albert
Stephanie Raffelock

Friends (\$150+)

Shawn LaTorre
Janice Kvale
Marlene Samuels
John Webber

Donors (\$100)

Joyce Boatright
Leia Francisco
Jennifer Slaski Halligan
Suzanne Mitchell
Kathleen Paul
Marilea Rabasa
Sarah Byrn Rickman
Rhonda Wiley-Jones

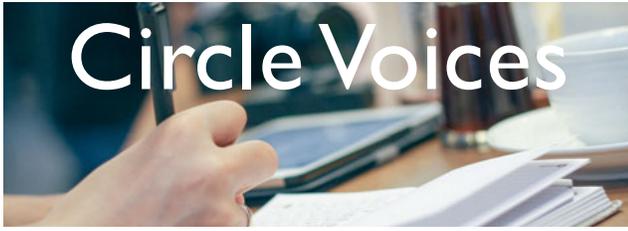
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In 2020, the members of the Story Circle Board of Directors donated 2,628 hours of their time to SCN. The national value of 2020 volunteer hours is calculated (by IndependentSector.org) at \$27.20/hr. Our board's contribution is valued at \$71,481.60. Thank you, thank you to an incredible team!



Online or onsite, our Writing Circles support women in sharing their prose and poetry. In this issue, the co-chair of our Circles Program, **Caroline Ziel**, interviews **Jumuna Advani**, both are members of SCN's eCricle #4. If you're not yet a member of a Circle, find out more here:

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

Caroline Ziel: Good afternoon, Jamuna. It's so nice of you to spend time with me today. I just finished two of your books: *Land of the Dancing Deer*, a book of poetry. You also wrote *The Letter: A Memoir*. I enjoyed both of them immensely. In your memoir, you tell us that you were born in India where you graduated with a nursing degree from Delhi..

Jamuna Advani: Yes. I was able to practice nursing until I was married and had children.

CZ: *Being a full time homemaker was the sign of the times here in the US also! And then you had several other careers, I understand.*

JA: I then became involved with social services and charity services when my children were in college. I moved to Canada in 1994, and then to the States in 1996. It was then that I became a cosmetologist until retirement in 2007.



CZ: *It was then that you began writing?*

JA: Yes. I saw an interview with Linda Joy Meyers about the healing effects of writing. I joined her classes locally, and through her learned about Story Circle Network. The rest is history!

CZ: *What activities have you participated in for the last 13 years?*

JA: I have taken various classes through SCN, and attended the conferences in Austin whenever I could. Some of my short memoirs and poems were also published through SCN journals. Lorraine Meja edited my book of poetry, Shiela Bender edited the memoir. I also have a fourth book that was published in my own language, Manipuri. It's entitled "Nurse Hemabati" and is a combination of short stories and poems.

CZ: *What writers have most influenced both your poetry and memoir?*

JA: I have been a serious reader of novels and poetry since I was in high school. My favorite ones are Jane Austin's books such as *Pride and Prejudice*; Pearl S. Buck's *Good Earth*, *Sons*, and *The Mother*; and Hemingway's *Farewell to Arms*. For poetry, William Wordsworth's poems, especially "Daffodils."

CZ: *What have you valued most about SCN?*

JA. Classes by Matilda Butler, Sheila Bender, and Teresa Cutler made me brave enough to start writing my own life's journey. That is how *The Letter: A Memoir* came into print.

Caroline: Thank you for spending time with us on this cold rainy day!

SCN's Publications Archive: 1997 - 2021

Available to you online are both current and previous issues of *Story Circle Journal* and many years of our annual anthologies. This is a convenient and important member benefit. Was there an issue you missed? A special story you'd like to save or share? Download it for free. Our printable PDF format preserves the graphics and feel of the originals. Or simply browse our archive. You'll find that SCN's goals and women's stories retain their relevance!

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

Online Classes and Dates, Spring I - 2021

Memoir and Life Writing

Leaving Your Legacy: Writing Legacy Letters:
Thelma Zirkelbach, 3/15 - 4/5 - 3 weeks

Would I, Should I, Could I Write a Memoir? (Part I):
Cynthia Davidson, 3/15 - 4/12 - 4 weeks

What Lurks Behind: Finding the Emotional Story Behind the Events:
Rhonda Wiley-Jones, 3/15 - 5/11 - 4 weeks (every other week)

Journaling & Self Discovery

Processing the Good, the Bad, and the Overwhelm:
B Lynn Goodwin, 3/15 - 4/19 - 5 weeks

Heart of a Woman: Impassioned Writing to Heal and Forgive Trauma:
Marta Luzim, M.S., 3/15 - 4/12 - 4 weeks

Mindful Journaling for Memoir by Studying Phyllis Theroux's, The Journal Keeper:
Aimee Luna, 3/15 - 5/10 - 8 weeks

Non-Fiction

Write & Sell Your Story in spurts:
Kathy Haueisen, 3/15 - 4/26 - 6 weeks

Dive into Nonfiction:
Sarah White, 4/12 - 5/10 - 4 weeks

Writing Craft

A Good Book Isn't Written, It's Re-Written:
Maryann Miller, 4/5 - 5/3 - 4 weeks

Remember When I Was Little: Writing Children:
Lynn Ermann, 3/15 - 5/10 - 8 weeks

Poetry

The Broadsheet/ The Broadside:
Kitty McCord, 3/15 - 4/26 - 6 weeks

Independent Study

Part One:
B. Lynn Goodwin, 3/15 - 4/12, 4 weeks

Part Two:
B. Lynn Goodwin, 4/12 - 5/10, 4 weeks

Webinars

Susan Tweit: Looking and Sounding Your Best on Zoom

March 24, 4 p.m. PT

Participants will learn easy tricks and techniques to make their Zoom "studio" look polished, and to make them sound professional in Zoom meetings, conferences, and webinars.

Barbara Probst & Julie Ryan McGue: Two Paths, Fiction and Memoir: Traveling the One That's Right for You

April 21, 4 p.m. PT

When you have a story to tell that draws on your own experience, do you write it as a memoir or as fiction? The best memoirs read like fiction, and the best fiction feels as real and true as if it actually happened.

Jaime Schneider: 7 Easy Steps to Boost Your Social Media Marketing

May 19, 4 p.m. PT

Do you want to boost your social media presence, create more engaging content and find your brand's voice on social media? Marketing yourself on social media can seem overwhelming, but with some basic tools and a solid plan, it can be rewarding, exciting, and even fun!

A Story-Go-Round

We are pleased to introduce three new members of SCN's Board of Directors in this round-robin interview. Lynn Goodwin interviews Marilea Rabasa, who interviews Cynthia Davidson. Cynthia completes the circle by interviewing Lynn. Enjoy getting to know these fascinating and committed women.

Learn more about our Board of Directors on the "About" page of our website:
<https://www.storycircle.org/about/>

Interested in serving on the board? You'll find info there, too.

Finding and Doing What We Love

An Interview with Marilea C. Rabasa by B. Lynn Goodwin



Marilea C. Rabasa

According to new SCN board member Marilea C. Rabasa, "Our third act can be a time of tremendous growth and change, a final reckoning between us and all our possibilities. Time is not on our side, so we don't fritter it away as easily as when we were younger. Whether it's making that quilt we'd been planning for a decade, or writing that scintillating romance, or taking up bird-watching, just finding and doing what we love—well, is there a better way to spend our time?" Her philosophy and attitude are perfect for Story Circle Network.

Marilea is an award-winning author and teacher who lives on Camano Island in the State of Washington. I know her from SCN's WIP group and an interview I did with her about her second memoir, *Stepping Stones: A Memoir of Addiction, Loss, and Transformation* (She Writes Press 2020). Her essay, "Lessons in Solitude," was the second place winner in SCN's annual lifeWriting competition in November 2020. Her work has appeared in *Story Circle Journal* and in SCN's One Woman's Day blog, and was also selected for the *Real Women Write* anthology in both 2019 and 2020.

When I asked how she learned about Story Circle Network, she recalled, "My writing teacher and coach, Merimée Moffitt, told me about SCN back in 2013 when I was in her writing workshop on grief. She's from Albuquerque and has published both prose and poetry." Marilea joined us once she retired because she believed her writing could offer ideas and inspiration. "As much as I missed teaching and leaving my career so precipitously, I learned I could still do something of value that would be of service to others," she said. As someone who also left teaching, I can assure her she's found a good place to teach and share in new ways.

Asked what she liked most about SCN, she didn't limit herself. "The writing prompts in the *Journal*, the blogs, the contest. The Members in Print news, the occasional brags, contributing to our annual anthology. The way SCN lifts up and supports women writers in a world some of us might never belong to—a world full of best-selling authors and big stars—is a beautiful thing. Sisterhood, not just with writers but with women doing many different things, brings me joy."

Story Circle Network has improved her confidence. She says, "We all have a story to tell, and we all have value by connecting with each other through our stories." Though she mostly writes nonfiction, Marilea has also enjoyed writing humor, a little fiction, haiku and other kinds of poetry. Her writing demons are "indulging in too much summary and too much reflection." Her recommendation? "Just jump in, girl!"

Marilea's advice to writers—especially nonfiction writers—is "Dig deep into your heart and expose yourself as honestly as possible. Till you see blood on the page." You can find out more on her website, www.recoveryofthespirit.com, and other links:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/marilea.rabasa>

Email: marilea.rabasa@gmail.com

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/marilea-rabasa>

Marilea loves sharing her life experiences, and I'm sure she will be a great asset on the SCN Board. I'm looking forward to working with her.

Off The Beaten Track

An Interview with Cynthia F. Davidson by Marilea C. Rabasa

A self-described American expatriate, Cynthia F. Davidson has lived and worked extensively overseas. Her writing life is a tremendously interesting mix of CBS News journalism in New York, two decades as a pioneer in the global management field, followed by managing a spiritual retreat center on an island in Narragansett Bay, Rhode Island. I'm struck by the variety of Cynthia's career choices, and the courage it took for her to leave her first husband and start over with her three children in midlife. I've taken that challenging journey myself.

While living in seclusion on the island of Chippaquasett, a miniscule community of 100 year-round residents, she learned about Story Circle Network. The authenticity and intimacy of our organization attracted her to our group, in her words, "women of substance." What a lovely compliment! Cynthia joined SCN a dozen years ago and has never missed a conference in all that time. Travelling from out of state—that reflects a strong commitment.

Cynthia's attraction to this organization very much reflects mine: being with other writing women "has truly galvanized me," she says. "The energy is contagious, collaborative, and not overly competitive." That kind of healthy reinforcement, in my mind, is a distinguishing trait of Story Circle Network. Most of us are writers on one level or another, both published and otherwise, and there is a strong consensus that we exist essentially to elevate and support one another in honing our writing skills and getting our voices heard.

Our members are offered numerous opportunities to display their writing in different formats and being in Story Circle Network has helped Cynthia keep her writing fires lit. Her writing journey is rich in its diversity. From her "writing for money life" in Manhattan, where she focused on writing about other people, Cynthia has moved into more personal commentary, memoir, and book reviews. Her latest piece, *From Polyester to Pashmina*, was recently published by SCN. Always an avid journal keeper, she has also published a whole volume of cross-cultural poetry, *Measuring Distances*.

Does she have any writing dragons or demons? "All those drafts drive me crazy," she says. Well, sounds like Cynthia knows what so many of us have learned: writing is rewriting. She used to fantasize that "a writer sits down and spins her tale on the first go." When she was writing under deadline, she didn't have much time for finesse. But nowadays, she says, she can take her time and revise.

Mysticism has also grounded and inspired Cynthia's writing. She conducts spiritual ceremonies for her community, sweat lodges and vision quests. Being in the company of others who



Cynthia F. Davidson

are curious, growing and developing, keeps her motivated and happy.

We're glad that Cynthia found her way to Story Circle Network and has invested her time in our organization. She and so many other women have been drawn to the simple but powerful idea that women find strength and connection by sharing their voices—one poem, one story, one memoir at a time.

She has an author website: <http://cynthiafdavidson.com/>
 Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/cynthia.f.davidson>
 Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/cynthiafdavidson/>
 LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/cynthia-f-davidson>
 and her Wisdom Wheel website:
<https://www.thewisdomwheel.com>

Her advice to writers will be available in a two-part course for SCN members and nonmembers this spring,

Would I, Could I, Should I Write A Memoir? "I created this online version of my in-person workshops to cover the questions would-be memoirists have about this genre, going from start to finish, to share what I wish someone had told me before I set out on this authoring adventure."

Cynthia credits the continued support and guidance at SCN with the publication of her first in a planned series of memoirs, *The Importance of Paris*, which won a 2019 IPPY Award. I can think of no better testament to the value of putting all kinds of women's voices together to help us explore the bonds that unite us.

Doing What You Love

An Interview with B. Lynn Goodwin by Cynthia F. Davidson



B. Lynn Goodwin

No circle of women storytellers would be complete without a wry, straight-shooting character like B. Lynn Goodwin. I liked her the instant we met, a decade ago, at a hotel in Austin during a Story Circle Network conference.

Since we share the middle name Lynn, this made it easy for me to remember her, and who could go wrong with a moniker as memorable as Goodwin? At the sales table that year, I purchased her first book, *You Want Me to Do WHAT? Journaling for Caregivers*, as a gift for a friend. On my flight home, I read it, appreciating how Lynn can turn a phrase and a tough situation into a win.

Lynn has a rare, double-barreled talent. Not only can she write award-winning prose of her own, which includes her book *Talent*, she also practices the magic of transforming the work of other writers into the good stuff readers love. *Talent* won a Literary Lightbox Award and a bronze medal in the Moonbeam Children's Book Awards, and was a Sarton Women's Book Award finalist. She'll be offering a sequel soon, *Ground Rules*. "One thing leads to another and that happens all the time here."

Always learning, Lynn says, "My current genres are memoir, flash fiction and YA." An inveterate journal keeper, "regularly since 1996," she's honed the art of reflection. "I also like to free write, and let my thoughts wander until I figure out what I want to write about."

After hearing about the consistently good results she's coaxed from others, I considered doing an Independent Study Class with her, but the dates didn't work out for us that time. By the next conference trip, I discovered she had a new book out, *Never Too Late: From Wannabe to Wife at 62*. It won a National Indie Excellence Award. When she introduced me to her Corpus Christi-born husband, I got the distinct impression, while shaking his hand, that his sense of humor may rival even hers. Wouldn't it be fun to be a fly on the wall in their home?

Lynn keeps up with the times, and the ceaselessly changing technologies, managing sites across many platforms, beyond the usual, like LinkedIn.

<https://www.writeradvice.com>
<https://writeradvice.com/books-by-lynn/>
<https://twitter.com/Lgood67334>
<https://www.facebook.com/blynn.goodwin>
<https://www.facebook.com/writeradvice/>
<https://www.instagram.com/blynnngoodwin/>

Her attitude is summed up in what she told me, "If you do what you love, you never work a day in your life. I love writing, editing, and helping writers. I love the respect that the women here have for our stories. Writing has taken me on a remarkable journey, and I'd be foolish if I didn't encourage you to read my books and follow me via my links."

In our Story Circle Network, we pay our dues in ways that transcend the monetary. And in this, too, Lynn has blazed a stellar trail by writing for Story Circle Book Reviews: almost forty reviews at last count. A stalwart, she's a true gift to her fellow writers. And who wouldn't want writing advice from a woman who has the moxie to meet a twice-married man on Craig's List and tie the knot for the first time—in her 60s?

Let me leave you with Lynn's Eight Pithy Ideas for aspiring writers:

- No one can tell your story but you.
- Begin anywhere.
- Write regularly.
- Send your judgment gremlins out to play on the freeway.
- Don't expect perfection on a first draft.
- Find an editor you trust.
- Enjoy the journey.
- Don't quit before the miracle happens.



Writing Tips from Our Teachers

In each issue of the *Journal*, we bring you writing encouragement and techniques from one of our SCN teachers. In this issue **Elise Schiller** offers advice on overcoming “writer’s block.”

Is “Writer’s Block” Just a Matter of Time Management?

By Elise Schiller

People are always talking about “writer’s block” but few define it or have a solution to the malady. I’m not even sure it exists, but if it does, I think it might have something to do with time.

People whose schedules are bursting with day jobs, kids, volunteer work, housework and more, rightfully claim to have very little time to write. My experience is that yes, a schedule like that, which I had for thirty years, leaves you very little time, yet can also force you to be meticulously organized. If you want to get something on the page, you have to schedule time for writing, and it has to happen almost every day. If you manage to do this only once a week, you will stare at the screen, nervous about wasting your precious hour, grasping for where to begin. But if you do it every day, what you are writing will be percolating through your day (and often your dreams) so that when you sit down to write you will be productive. And making time for a writing group, even if it’s only monthly, creates accountability to others, a powerful

motivator. During those thirty years, I didn’t succeed in publishing a novel but I did manage to write two, one of which, after much revision, got out into the world.

Then there is the opposite situation, too much time. You retire, or begin to work part-time, and think you have all the time in the world to write. Except—wait! Now you can reorganize the kitchen cabinets, plant that vegetable garden you always wanted, go to the gym every day, and begin digitizing all those photos sitting in shoeboxes. And there you are, at ten p.m., satisfied with the day’s accomplishments but frustrated that you didn’t write anything. Ah, the muse didn’t come today.

Nonsense. The muse will come when you make the difficult commitment to begin. And since there is now so much time, work on *two* projects, so that when you’re momentarily stuck with your fiction, you can turn to the blog.

In either case, the solution is just to position your bum in the chair every day and write.



Elise Schiller is the award-winning author of a memoir, a novel, and articles, essays, and short stories. She is currently working on a novel due to be completed in 2021 and maintains an active website where she blogs about Philadelphia, the overdose crisis, family history, books, education, and more. After a thirty-year career in education and family services in Philadelphia, she retired in 2015 to write full time. She has taught numerous courses in literature and writing at several universities and colleges and teaches writing classes at Story Circle Network. She is an active volunteer and advocate around substance use policy and treatment and serves on several boards and advisory committees in Philadelphia. www.eliseschiller.com



Our Future is Female

Tess Elghanian is a senior at Beverly Hills High School where she has been a volunteer at NormanAid, whose mandate is to care for, support, and provide students with a safe and confidential place to improve their mental health and well-being. Actively focused on health and wellness, she plans to explore Nutrition Science as a possible career path in college. She also loves writing, playing the piano and spending time with her family and friends.

Looking Beyond the Moment

By Tess Elghanian

You might say that when I started high school I was the usual American teenage girl, worried about my appearance and how I compared to the other girls. I can't even deny that's the truth. I was focused more on following the norms of how a girl "should" look than learning how to create a passion for something bigger. I was immersed in societal expectations and felt insecure about who I was and how I looked. I am proud to say that three years later, I am no longer that girl. I am healthy, happy, and ready to embark on my college career. I have a quote from Antoine de Saint-Exupery, which has made all the difference.

When I read for the first time, "If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the men to gather wood . . . Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea," I realized that my negative self-image was not serving me well. Instead, I recognized that if I thought more about what aspects I could change to feel better in my own skin (inner and outer), I could freely set off in a positive direction and ultimately achieve good health, happiness and confidence.

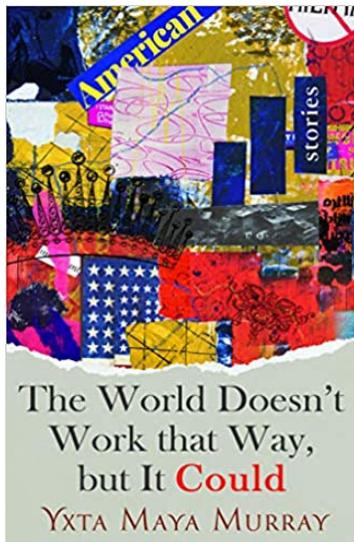
The first thing to go were those horrible spinning classes I went to begrudgingly with my friends. Even though I loved my friends, those aromatic candles, the lights that lowered when the exhilarating dance music went up and the instructor's "You can reach that mountaintop! Go for it!" I didn't love riding a stationary bike indoors while sweat poured down my face. And the second thing I tossed out were those strict diets I had put myself on that included such boring meals that I dreaded when it was time to eat.

What was it then that shifted me from being that worker de Saint-Exupery described as not being able to see beyond the

mundane job of building the ship to someone who yearned for adventures on the vast blue sea? Well, it was a series of realizations.

It was the day I realized that I loved biking outside in nature surrounded by fresh, crisp air and that I could do that for hours, feeling content and refreshed when I arrived back home. It was the day I realized that carbs and sugar were not the enemies, but rather the type of carbs and sugars I was consuming. Sour patch kids versus fresh strawberries, for example. It was the day I understood that being healthy was so much more important than being thin. And that healthy meant a happy Tess, inside and out. It was definitely the day that I sat down and asked myself, "What can I do to make myself feel good, look better, be more confident, and be happier?" That's the day I jotted down a few things that I knew could make a difference: cook my own healthy meals, smile at myself every day in the mirror when I brushed my teeth, drink much more water, and not eat too late at night. I knew this would take time and would not happen quickly, but I was determined to take this process day by day. Three years later, I am thirty pounds lighter with glowing skin and shining hair.

I've realized that to be free of society's shallow expectations and be true to my inner self, I must first spark positivity within my day-to-day life, be more appreciative and grateful for what I have, and build a friendship with myself. I also now understand the value of living a proactive versus a reactive life. The bottom line is that I have shifted from being that hyper-focused wood-gatherer and instead have felt the allure of vibrancy and good health.



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/>

Here is a recent review.

The World Doesn't Work That Way, but It Could by Yxta Maya Murray, reviewed by Tracie Nichols

The World Doesn't Work That Way, but It Could by Yxta Maya Murray is a collection of fourteen stories based on recent social and political events. It is also a force of nature. This book began by disrupting my usual measured approach to reading a book for review and kept right on rattling my assumptions through the last line of the eponymous final story.

Usually when I read a book with an eye to writing a review, I read from my "observer mind." I pause, make notes, and copy quotes. Not with this book, though. All efforts at a measured approach collapsed as I fell into each story, captured by perspectives that were both unexpected and intriguing, almost demanding I step outside what I thought I knew and walk for a while in these people's shoes.

For example, in her story "Zero Tolerance," Murray imagines, with sharp-edged prose, the experiences of a senior corrections officer at the Dilley Detention Center in Texas. A powerful monologue written as a series of responses to questions, this is one of three stories in the collection that looks at the U.S. immigration policy of separating migrant children from their families at the border April through June 2018. The other two, "Option 3" and "The Hierarchy," look at what might have been the experience of an attorney, a father, asked to write the memorandum supporting family separation,

and what might be the impact on the future life and relationships of one of the separated children.

In "Acid Reign," a foray into the EPA under Scott Pruitt, Murray's primary character struggles with complex, warring feelings. She needs to stay employed, but knows from firsthand experience that science doesn't support the policies she's being asked to put into place. Staying, leaving—neither presents a solution. In the last paragraphs of the story, she rationalizes her continued compliance with phrases like, "Being a bad person, though, is different than just doing one's job in a socially approved way with the endorsement of high government officials..."

Murray's writing honestly and directly exposes ongoing human behaviors we rarely talk about. A quote from the slipcover notes, "These brilliantly conceived and beautifully written stories are troubling yet irresistible mirrors of our time." This is true. Yet the fallibilities revealed, like the capacity to go numb in the face of violence and moral ambiguity, run deeper and wider across our history. The stories in this collection are a mirror of troubling human capacities and choices repeated throughout human civilization, making this book the kind of courageous, intelligent writing we need more of these days.



The reviewer: Tracie Nichols, M.A. is a poet exploring human and wild nature through words, making sense of a world that feels both intriguing and often overwhelming. She regularly contributes to *KindOverMatter.com* and *Journey of the Heart: Women's Spiritual Poetry Project*. So far, her work has appeared in three anthologies of women's poetry. Tracie lives under rustling trees in southeastern Pennsylvania with her husband, a very determined ginger tabby cat, Strider, and, for an unexpected moment, her three adult children.



The author: Yxta Maya Murray is an art critic, author, and law professor at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles. She has won a Whiting Writer's Award and an Art Writer's Grant. She was a finalist for the American Society of Magazine Editors Fiction Award in 2019. She is the author of *Locas*, *What It Takes to Get to Vegas*, and other books, and her work has also been published in *Artforum*, *Aperture*, *Ploughshares*, *Conjunction*, *Georgia Review*, *Guernica*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, and other magazines.



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 “Looking in the Mirror.” 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/>

In My Head

Ariela Zucker
Ellsworth, ME

<https://paperdragonme.wordpress.com/>
ldplus4u@yahoo.com

She does not stop talking,
the woman who lives in my head,
from morning till night,
her voice, vexing and grating, in my mind.

She wants to know, why—
She interrogates me on, how—
She likes to discuss, when—
but in the end she gets stuck on what if.

She insists that it is for my own good,
but we both know this is a lie.
She keeps bringing up “the truth,”
as if she was there at the time.

Her capricious moods keep me alert,
I cannot ever lay off my guard,
on the lookout day and night,
for her next ingenious camouflage.

This woman who lives in my head,
the other day I caught her glimpse.
In the bathroom mirror’s bright lights,
her image looked unerringly like mine.

An Image of Time

Sharon Steenton
Cumming, GA

Sharon.steenton@yahoo.com

Looking into the mirror
I recognize the sacred space
My soul currently inhabits.
My amnesia of past lives makes today
A miracle, while my yesterdays overflow
With living stories, and tomorrow’s
Silence awaits my awakening.

I serve the One by making
Experience a living memory.
I cannot taste the feast of the
Eternal just yet, but I accept its
Invitation to celebrate the
Ingenious plot twists of my own life.

The journey I must complete
Fulfills the infinite possibilities of
Soul commitment and realization.
I am thoroughly immersed in the
Eternal Now, and its Holy treasure
Of Broken time.

Looking into the mirror
I carry both focused minutes and
Disappearing hours. I hold the
Rhythm of days, and I move in
Time’s sequence of years.
Someday the image I see in the
Mirror will be reversed and
My sacred stories will be served as gold.

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

The Mirror of Time

Sara Eigen-Baker
Anna, TX
Sab_1529@yahoo.com

I sat at Mother's dressing table. It was just as she'd left it, complete with her simple beautifying paraphernalia—her hairbrush, red lipstick, rouge, bottle of her favorite perfume, and her hand-held vanity mirror. The mirror had that patina of age about it. The handle was covered with fingerprints, and the surface of the glass was splotted black in places

I ran my fingers over its smooth French ivory handle, remembering when it adorned Granny's vanity table, amazed at how long it had survived. The mirror was my grandfather's birthday gift to her on Granny's thirtieth birthday, weeks before the 1929 Stock Market Crash and the imminent Depression. The mirror traveled with her when she and Granddad trekked across the Kansas prairie, seeking a better future in Missouri. Granny packed it in her suitcase whenever she traveled by train; it accompanied her when she took a family summer vacation to Mexico—a trip that would be her final journey.

Although Granny's personal belongings were off limits, I occasionally snuck into her bedroom, picked up her mirror, pretended to apply her red lipstick, and stared at my reflection, hoping that I'd one day be as attractive as she was. When I grew older, I frequently sat next to Mother on her dressing table bench, watching her as she held Granny's mirror in her left hand while applying rouge and lipstick with her right. Although ordinary, Mother was stunning like Granny. Something radiated from within that rendered them both beautiful. I sometimes gazed at my own reflection, my eyes roaming critically from one feature to another. "Will I ever be beautiful like you and Granny?" I asked.

"Of course you will," Mother said. "Beauty comes from within and from the love a woman gives to her ideas and the creative ways she expresses her soul."

I picked up the mirror from Mother's dressing table and stared into it. Behind my own reflection is the reflection of her and my grandmother, two generations of women, each of whom embodied beauty and, in countless ways, shaped me into the beautiful person I became.

Channeling Anne

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When I was young, I used to believe that Anne Frank had been a distant relative. After all, when I looked in the mirror, or at the women in my life, I saw her. We all had similar thick brunette hair, strong facial features, and weak, yet determined, smiles. I, too, had a fraught relationship with my mother and, like Anne, was self-aware, sensitive, and easily hurt. At 13 years of age, I was also a diarist with no friends, recording my boredom, fear, and struggles. I dreamed of writing for publication and documented daily happenings as future material. Although we were not hiding in an Amsterdam annex, my family also had its secrets. There had been rumors that my grandparents had been German Jews who had changed their identity (and religion) to survive the atrocities of war. Grandpa Schiller would never discuss it, and we will never know. The Holocaust was, therefore, elusive and fascinating for me to think and learn about as a teenager. Throughout my life, at various times, I have wondered if Anne, had she lived, would still resemble me—or me, her.

As I recently culled books, from dusty, worn, and crowded shelves, I found a copy that I was drawn to read—*The Diary of a Young Girl*. It had been nearly 50 years since I had done so. What a timeless piece of writing, especially during a global pandemic with restrictions, anxiety, and isolation. What really struck me was the reminder that, for 761 days, Anne was contained with seven others in space less than 400 square feet. She never went outdoors. 761 days! And still, there was hope, gratitude, peace, loving interactions, and time to write. As my COVID fatigue has gotten the better of me in recent weeks, I started to say to myself, "What would Anne do? How would Anne describe this time?"

Knowing how it all ended so tragically for her, and for those she loved, I feel inspired to recognize my own potential and live fully in whatever life deals in these unprecedented times.



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.

Endless Summer

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The sun teases the horizon, only to kiss it as it leaves again for its daily arc. Gleaming globe in the sky seems to never move farther than an arm's reach.

Glaciers shimmer as they hover over blue lagoons. Great chunks of ice float toward their destiny in the north Atlantic Ocean.

Horses, great Icelandic beasts, famed for their stocky build and thick, hairy coats run the lengths of green fields and rolling hills along the highways. Freedom in icy air. Sheep graze, lambs, blind but faithful, frolic behind mothers.

And the sun beams.

Ribbon-thin roads turn and spike through lava fields, barren and desperate for appreciation of life that once was. Hard tufts of lava cling in petrified bubbles—looks like moss, but no, moss is green, not burnt amber.

A wide gaping hole faces us as we round a bend alongside the North Atlantic. The end of the world, but wait—it's a tunnel, and under the ocean we follow the road. Three miles of Atlantic salt water, deathly cold, presses upon us. We feel the descent to the channel floor halfway through the tunnel before we rise up again to see the light.

Great precipices await us looming out from under thick low clouds, lush green mountainsides with waterfalls crashing down on farmlands below. Red roofs perched on white-washed wooden framed houses.

And the sun beams.

Sulphur stings the air while great mud pots bubble and froth. With a mighty heave the earth's core lets go a magnificent roar and all the fury is unleashed in a specular white rush reaching as high above the earth as deep as when it gurgled in its greatest depth.

Day is done.

The sun teases the horizon, only to kiss it as it leaves again for its daily arc. Sixty-six degrees north latitude is a long way from sleep.

And the sun beams.

Close from a Distance: Another for My Mother ... and Me

Margaret Dubay Mikus
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She looks into the mirror
and sees an old woman there,
though she does not believe she is old,
though she well remembers
her youth and energy.

Allowing her mind to
drift back in time
reviewing life lived deeply
and a body deeply scored
by thirty thousand days passing.

Not an easy life she chose,
it was honest and tough, joyful and messy
and she is close to her natural end.
The lines on her face have deepened,
her well-formed cheeks have sunken,

her eyes and ears dimming, present still but
mind clinging more to wisps of the past
and more words now elude her in frustration.
Often she feels lonely or gets bored.
She is getting ready to pass

but grasps still to a thick branch
on the bank of the river.
I send all love to her from here
and say it is OK to stop struggling
and drift sweetly, easily on,

OK to just let go, peaceful and calm.

Mirror Images

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I never miss a chance
to look in a mirror.
I'm okay seeing my whole body
because so far, my figure
is still not so bad.
Other women tell me
they never look down
past their necks.
They cannot stand the sight
of what's below.
These reflections have a way
of confronting us with
both good and bad news.
Good for those beautiful youngsters
I see at the gym,
and super-bad for women seventy plus
like me who'd rather keep
their reflections to themselves.

Looking at a Body in the Bathroom

Mirror: Acceptance

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The face in the mirror could be me. Yes, if her hair was auburn-brown. If she only had one chin. If her eyes were not hooded over. If those were full eyebrows, even the unibrow that would scare her every time.

If there weren't those lines around her mouth from too much smoking and straw-sipping. If the lips were full. If the lines on each side of her mouth did not make her look like a nutcracker.

If her eyes still sparkled. If there were no creases on her forehead. If there were no scar on her neck.

The body in the mirror might be me if her breasts didn't reach down to her waist. If these were not one muffin top but a whole dozen of muffins concealing her waist.

If there weren't the scars of childbirth, hysterectomy.

Oh, crap. It is really me.

The Mirror of Time

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There's a stranger in the mirror
Looking back at me.
She doesn't look familiar.
Who can she be?
Her hair is white,
Her face is lined.
There's bags beneath her eyes.
Who can she be?
OMG it's me.

Walking Meditation

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Shuffling through
soggy, aspen leaves
along the riverbank,
honking, Canadian geese
with snow on their backs,
paddling in the gentle
ripples of icy water.

Secret

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4 August 2020

It's early and misty as I drive to Dana Point to play pickleball. Suddenly, a flash of brown fur rushes across four lanes and right in front of my car. He dashes up the hill, quickly turns and sits, his ears at attention. He's out of breath and panting, but his face is laughing. I pull to the side of the street to look.

Coyote.

I name him Joey. Joey Coyote. It has a nice sound to it.

He gives me a quick, unconcerned glance, but his gaze is fixed across the street, focusing on the opposite hillside and the fields beyond. He isn't scared or he'd have kept running. Was he playing a game of "chicken" and he's gloating for his unseen playmates? Or did others chase him away, and he's basking in his successful escape?

He's beautiful and looks happy and healthy. As I slowly, reluctantly, drive away, I give him an unheard whisper, "I wish for you a long, healthy, happy life. *Please* be safe."

I can't wait to share my story when I get to pickleball, but when I get there, I don't. It seems that I can't even begin my story. I'll share it with my husband or neighbors when I get home.

But I don't tell a single neighbor. And I don't tell my husband.

Would anyone understand how special the moment was? Would anyone have the time to listen? To appreciate Joey Coyote's beauty?

Joey Coyote will be my special memory. Another secret memory that I, for whatever reason, can't seem to share.

Fear

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Gazing at my masks hanging on the wall—one from Honduras, one from the Amazon, and the one I made while earning my Master of Arts in teaching—I wonder why I'd collected and saved them all. What was my fascination with face masks?

In graduate school, my classmates and I made some colorful ones with paint and feathers and buttons on our papier-mâché faces. That was the messy part—molding our faces to that gooey stuff.

The other students were hard at work describing themselves and appeared to enjoy the stimulating exercise in self-expression. But I was at a complete loss. *How shall I decorate my face?* Unable to make a visual of who I was, I just chose random items to do something—a feather here, a bead there—as though I had a purpose.

I ended up with a red face, a purple mouth, green eyes, and yellow eyebrows, a mask that didn't even vaguely resemble me.

Well, of course not. The woman on the outside was attractive and accomplished. I'd traveled and seen much of the world; I'd raised three children to adulthood; and I'd worked at a satisfying teaching career, culminating now with completing two years of graduate school.

The inside me, the adult child, the addict afraid of her own shadow, had been hidden. I kept what I considered to be my ugliness out of sight. But the mask I made with my school classmates revealed my dark side.

By 2005, with three years of early work in recovery, I was starting to face up to it. I was taking the first of many moral inventories I would take—Step Four in my recovery program.

What I've discovered over the years is that under the murky darkness lies a simplicity that we can uncover by peeling away our coping mechanisms, our defenses, our strategies for living. We then see ourselves as we once were, in all our softness and light. And stripped down to our purest form is a lovely innocence.

Acceptance

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On a late afternoon
at the brink of autumn,
I'm sitting on the beach at low tide,
watching a large gathering
of seagulls and sandpipers
on the shore.

Facing incoming breeze, gulls
preen, rest, even sleep,
tucking their heads
under their wings.

Away from the crowd,
one sandpiper walks alone
with slow, deliberate steps,
probing for sand crabs
with his slender, curved beak
into wet sand mingled
with tiny white shells.

His ruffled and tattered feathers
make him appear
aged and vulnerable.

Is he nearing
the end of his journey
surviving by instinct,
but not knowing
what's ahead of him?

Someday I may walk alone
down the same path,

understanding,
we are both
just visitors here.

From Poem by Marie Howe: What the Living Do

Margaret Dubay Mikus
Lincolnshire, IL

Into the mirror
is a mirror
at a specific angle
on into a future
one that begins here
and could go anywhere
as long as I am
framed in the picture

Some day the bed
will be neatly made
the silvered glass polished
Some day the hair
will grow and gray
more than it is today
and beyond that to when

I look in the mirror
and see no reflection

Mirror Moon

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I sat with her in her last days, the two of us alone on her porch. Together, as was our ritual, we watched the moon rise over the flat plains of Illinois. She had always followed the moon—its cycle of waxing and waning.

Its mysterious phases mirrored her own, she told me more than once. In the waning, a descent into stillness. In the waxing, an ascent into anticipation. Under its fullness, creation.

Under the lambent light, she wrote poetry, music, letters to her children; decorated her house with prisms that cast rainbows on her walls; designed glass pieces alive with color and light meant for loving friends. Under the full moon, she planted a garden of white irises, snowdrop, and spirea.

On those last nights, we followed the moon's path into the sky. She sipped chai tea, her favorite, for the strength she needed. The diagnosis was new, the end to be swift.

There in the moonlight, we relived our adventures as the rich cinnamon scent of chai drifted in the still, cool air. We talked of our hikes in the Wisconsin woods in October under an orange harvest moon sitting on the horizon and filling the sky. Here in the dry fall air, she heard the voice of God in the trees, she said—a God she had only then come to trust.

We talked of those hot June days in Greece, the sweet relief of a cold, dark Aegean Sea—itsself a keeper of mystery. We tasted again the bite of chilled sharp wine we shared on the little beach outside of our hotel.

Now tonight, the moon once again arcs its path through the night sky. Here I sit alone and remember.

She will rise again, one with her old friend the moon. I will see her in its silver mirror and know she is home.

What Do You See?

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e-Circle 3

Many years ago, while attending a crowded outdoor event for the library's kick-off for the summer reading program, I lost my younger child. Through a series of events that would be difficult to explain later, it was some time before I realized she was missing. Yes, I had every reason to believe that she was safe, watching a puppet show with her brother. I also thought that their behavior would be better watching a show than waiting in an unbearably long line for free popcorn. When her brother walked back to me without her, I flew into full panic mode. I began to push my way through the crowd, realizing I couldn't even remember what she was wearing. After what felt like several lifetimes, I saw a security guard approach me, holding Evelyn's hand. After the tearful reunion, (all the tears were mine) the guard told me, "When I asked her to describe you, she told me, 'Her name is Erin. She has red hair. (It was brown.) And she looks like someone who never lets you do anything.'" I gaped at her before starting to laugh.

"From this you found me?" I manage to say.

"Well, I don't know about the hair, but you look like a mom who's afraid she's lost her kid."

I am now almost at the age where I'll have the face I deserve, as the saying goes. When I look in the mirror, I see gray hair. My eyelids are drooping, and brows are almost completely gone. I've gained a couple of chins. I don't mind the laugh lines but pause at the puckering around my lips. I'm afraid to ask, "Do I look like someone who doesn't let anyone do anything?"

A Day at the Beach

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"Hello."

"Hey there," I respond with a sprinkle of apathy in my voice.

"Can you see me?"

"I sure can. Crystal clear!" I reply, slightly squinting my eyes, selectively diminishing my vision. "I see the dark puffy circles around your eyes that remind me of a pelican's bill gorged of seawater. Your hooded eyelids, which, with a stroke or two of color could serve as beach umbrellas. I see the lines spreading from the corners of your eyes as if a seagull landed on you from above. The lines on your forehead, never-ending like the horizon. The deep folds of your cheeks, like the waves

rippling with every word you speak. The bright white light of the sun illuminates your hair with gleaming silver streaks. Your skin, pale like the sand, embedded with footprints of all who have come and gone. The palms, waving in the wind, reflect in your eyes, like memories of those you love, waving good-bye. Your teeth, brittle and dry like the scattered seashells on the shore. Your nose hangs over your disappearing upper lip, like a child collecting ocean water in a bucket."

"Look a little closer deary," she says. "Into my heart, for when the day at the beach comes to a halt, the promise of forever will be our new start."

My Mirror

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The mirror has never been my friend. I've looked at this face my entire life and saw only the sad woman who balanced the weight of the world on her shoulders. Today the face in the mirror looked different—it was fresh, relaxed, soft, and calm. I wondered if other people could see the changes or if it was only obvious to me. What had changed, and why?

After 60 years of marriage, I became a widow two years ago. I knew then that my life would be forever different. I was married when I was just 16 and living alone was foreign to me. I'd never had an identity of my own. I had always been either a daughter, wife, mother, or caregiver.

This year, the country was in turmoil with health issues, and life became boring when restrictions came on the scene that ended all social activities. I needed a new hobby and I turned to on-line dating for the distractions of pen-pal experiences.

Who would believe that people over 80 could enjoy dating, first-time dates and even romance? Long ago the older women that I knew joked that what older men looked for and wanted in a woman was either a nurse or a purse. Who in the world would want one of them?

How surprised I was when I found a man who wanted to take care of me and spoil me in ways that I'd never known before or dreamed possible. I have always been a strong woman and I was unable to trust a man enough to lean on or to expect help. I didn't believe there could be a man strong enough emotionally for me to depend on.

The woman that I see in the mirror today is without cares and responsibilities. She is happy and well cared for and her mirror reflects the changes.

The Broken Mirror

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My mirror is broken, or at least it seems to be,
for today I discovered an old woman staring back at me.
She had hair of gray, and there were wrinkles around her eyes,
and her face I no longer recognized.
I waved. I rubbed the mirror with my sleeve.
No matter what I tried, she simply wouldn't leave.
This can't be me, I thought. I am younger and much more svelte.
Now, just look at the way my stomach pooches out.
I also thought it was quite strange.
The hair atop her head was thin; what exactly brought about such a change?
Who was this imposter, and what is she doing there,
this woman of age with thinning silver hair?
Why, oh why is my mirror doing this to me
having this old woman staring back at me?

Looking in the Mirror

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I often dusted my mother's dresser
Wondering if I should confess to her

That I tried out her orange lipstick
Wondering would it make me sick?

The church made lipstick forbidden
So, my mother kept hers well hidden

She only wore this once in awhile
It must have made my Dad smile

I wanted my lipstick to be red
Church teachings I could shed

What did it matter what color I wore?
By it being forbidden I just wanted more

Now before my mirror I stand
With my red lipstick in my hand

The church no longer scares me
From their dictates I am now free

Puppy Love

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They call it puppy love,
but if you're a puppy,
nothing
could be more
serious.

This puppy love is
whole-hearted,
light-hearted,
warm-hearted,
heartfelt.

It's an intoxicating ride
on the pirouette of a carousel
until it flings us off into a
heartless,
heart-sickening,
heartwrenching

heartbreak.
Make no mistake -
it's nothing to laugh about
There is nothing
more serious for us puppies
than this thing called
puppy love.

Life Is Short

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Upon waking this morning,
after a wonderful, uninterrupted night's sleep,
I discovered my body had aged tremendously.
It was old, not just plain old, but dry wrinkled old.
My hands look like my grandmother's hands.
When we were children, we called them
chicken skin hands. The skin hung loosely from her bones
and we could see her veins. There were tiny red ones
and large dark blue ones rising above the tissue.
We would roll the skin between our fingers and giggle.
Grandmother didn't seem to mind for she loved us.
Now my hands are covered with the same chicken skin.
How did I get here? When? To my surprise,
I've become like my old antique end tables
with their scratched surfaces, cracked dry wood and old
wobbly legs. I looked through our old photo albums
trying to remember those days filled with wild amazing adventures
and childlike laughter. Sadly, age is robbing my memory too.
To my horror, I discovered on New Year's Eve, the thrill
of experiencing brilliant, colorful fireworks exploding in the skies
had dimmed. What is happening to that child in me?
Where has she gone?
I need to take a stand before it is too late.
Life is outrageously short.
I resolve to grab each moment,
to be aware of what life is offering me.
I vow to celebrate the new year
one day at a time for that is all we are promised.
So, world, good morning. I'm still here,
just a day older.

McNamara's Band

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I remember Dad playing "McNamara's Band" on his brass trumpet. He did this while parading throughout the house and studying his profile in our various mirrors.

He fancied himself a cowboy singer, albeit never having left the tristate area and possessing a thick Brooklyn accent.

Dad's campfire instrumental and singing skills were legendary (in his mind).

My three sisters and I played a passable "She'll Be Coming 'Round the Mountain" on the piano, with Dad

on the trumpet. My Zayde (granddad) would sing along. Zayde glanced in the mirror but only to admire his beloved grandkids; Dad was focused only on his own reflection. Once having been told that he looked like Lloyd Nolan, mirrors held a greater attraction for him.

Do mirrors hold reflections, like our mind stores memories?

Our activities changed to stoop ball, and Double-Dutch jump rope. We were teenagers. We listened to songs of the '50s and '60s while my Peter Pan Dad did his own version of modern dances, reducing us to guffaws and giggles. Dad was a fun-loving character—more of an older, irresponsible brother than a father.

If I were to look in that old mirror, could I still see faded images of my sisters, Zayde and Dad? I miss them still.

Fashion Statement

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e-Circle 3, e-Circle 4

Hello old woman in the mirror. I don't recognize you these days. You have my mother's face, but not her sense of style. In retrospect (which is a place I would like to go more often), my mother had much better taste than I did. I rejected her pastel pink and yellow sweater sets in favor of bold red and gold corduroy pants that truthfully went with nothing else I owned. But they were identical to the ones my best friend wore, and we bought them with our own babysitting money, and then we wore them at the same time to local dances. At school, we wore uniforms—grey skirts, white blouses, and navy blazers. I tried to personalize the look with black tights and white bobby sox. All the rest of my clothes, Mum bought at Kresge's because my father was the manager and we got a discount. I remember living in Manitoba and racing home after school to watch American Bandstand. I was craving all the cool clothes

—wanting a hep look, a cool me. It was a hopeless ambition. I begged my parents for white buck shoes and a black leather jacket.

"White gets dirty too quickly. Black leather is what delinquents wear. No daughter of mine ..."

And I was her only daughter. So, it was black buck shoes and a pink leather jacket long before the movie *Grease* and the Pink Ladies made pink leather cool. Style is something I still embrace, but it's my own style and it leans toward comfort and away from cool. And it includes matching earrings. I have dozens of them and I choose each day's earrings carefully. If anything, they are my fashion statement. And they match because that's my style. Or do they match because of those twin sets my mother chose so long ago?

crone worthy villanelle

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it takes a lifetime to become a crone
embodiment of the elder woman
emerging from one's patterned stepping-stones

years of carrying her healing moonstone
resignation transforms to tranquility
it takes a lifetime to become a crone

daughter of Dorothy, rattle those bones
lineage of Isabel, Elizabeth
emerging from one's patterned stepping-stones

virgin to marriage, motherhood to lone
remarkable process to be finished
it takes a lifetime to be a crone

darkness to light, a woman becomes known
to seek contemplativeness, realness
emerging from one's patterned stepping-stones

allow her to seek the reassurance
"when you are real you don't mind being hurt"*
it takes a lifetime to become a crone
emerging from one's patterned stepping-stones

(*Quote from "The Velveteen Rabbit" by Margery Williams)

Maple Mentoring

(or a reality check from the tree on the edge of the creek)

Tracie Nichols • Lansdale, PA • w-Circle 4

no matter the words lobbed
long ago into your tender psyche
there's no smallness about you.
no idle cruelties hiding in your marrow.

each thought written
across cheeks and eyes.
there is no gasping moment of
discovery. no impending murmurs of fraud,
unless from your own heart when you defraud yourself of kindness.

you are complex.

no more complex than
I or my sister sycamore
but humans seem to wear their
complexity like a torment.

a whole creek bottom
of polished stones, old leaves,
and silent, still, speckled trout
runs through your pulsing center.
ferociously dedicated to living.
an osprey in the branches over that creek.
life and living and death.

you are complex.
stop worrying about the dishes.

My Next Thirty Years

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It is dark now in the mornings. On my way to the shower, all I can see are several lights flickering in the dark, like a control room on a ship. There are reds and greens and plain yellows—the computer, the coffee machine, the Wi-Fi system. The lights guide my way to the bathroom. Once there, the warm water from the shower fills the air with moisture; it is safe now to look into the fogged mirror. All I can see is my blurry, softened silhouette. I can pretend for a minute that nothing has changed over the years, and I am still the same.

Mornings are my alone time; I wouldn't give them up for anything. I continue to get up early even though there is no longer a need for it, grabbing a few precious moments for myself.

I think I'll take a moment, celebrate my age

The ending of an era and the turning of a page

Now it's time to focus in on where I go from here

Lord have mercy on my next 30 years.

I hum the lyrics under my breath as I brush my teeth, counting automatically—30 on the right, now the bottom, left side, up, two minutes, done.

With a quick move of my elbow, I wipe away a small area in the mirror, and through this porthole, I peek in. Rudely awakened, I am back in the present. I examine my puffy eyes (morning allergies), some new wrinkles, and the unruly curls.

Celebrating my age, I sigh deeply and let the mirror fog up again.

I brush my hair, 100 brushes each time, or 100 times a day? I can't remember which, and I grin at my silhouette, safely blurred again. If I don't see it, I can pretend that time is not catching up with me. But can I ignore my mother's face in the mirror—the haunting resemblance that is growing from day to day?

Quickly I put back on my own face and turn my back to the double-crossing mirror.

(Lyrics from Tim McGraw, *My Next Thirty Years*)

 <p><input type="checkbox"/> This is a gift membership</p> <p>My name and address:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>My phone and e-mail:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<h2 style="text-align: center;">Join the Story Circle Network!</h2> <p>Annual Membership if receiving printed, mailed publications:</p> <p>_____ Canada & Mexico: \$90 (International MO)</p> <p>_____ International \$95 (International MO) 03/2021</p> <p>_____ Annual Membership (US) for receiving <i>printed</i> publications: \$70</p> <p>_____ Annual Membership (US) for receiving <i>online</i> publications only: \$55</p> <p>_____ Internet Writing or Reading eCircle Membership : \$20/yr (in addition to national dues)</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>City _____ State _____ Zip _____ - _____</p> <p>Phone _____</p> <p>Email _____ Amount enclosed _____</p> <p>Become a supporting member and help Story Circle Network grow. Check here:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$90 Friend <input type="checkbox"/> \$150 Supporter <input type="checkbox"/> \$250 Sustainer <input type="checkbox"/> \$400+ Benefactor</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$125 Donor <input type="checkbox"/> \$200 Contributor <input type="checkbox"/> \$325 Patron</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Make your check to Story Circle Network 723 W University Ave #300-234 Georgetown, TX 78626</p>

Our Anthology: “A Small Chapter in a Humanity-Size Story”

Real Women Write: Living on COVID Time is Volume 19 of our annual anthology of prose and poetry by members of Story Circle Network. But it is a volume unlike any other. The 52 authors of the 80 pieces in this collection were writing in response to an unprecedented global pandemic and a year of profound social challenges and changes. They were writing about their lives, engaging with experiences and emotions that were uniquely their own. These selections capture moments as COVID-19 moved from rumor to life-altering reality, and together they form a small chapter in a humanity-size story.

Brooke Warner, publisher of She Writes Press, says in her **Foreword**: “To remember 2020 will be to look back on a year marked by complexity—so much loss swirled together with surprising gains.” Indeed, that swirl is evident in the responses of these contributors. “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.”

Real Women Write: Living on COVID Time is a strong addition to the literature and herstory of 21st century women enduring and evolving through a remarkable time.

Find the 2020 anthology on your My Membership Page, or at this link:
<https://www.storycircle.org/product/growing-older-2019-anthology/>

Story Circle Network, Inc.

723 W University Ave #300-234,

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:

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

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

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

Submit your stories or poetry to:

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

Call for Volunteers!

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.

CONGRATULATIONS to Sharon Steenton !

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

