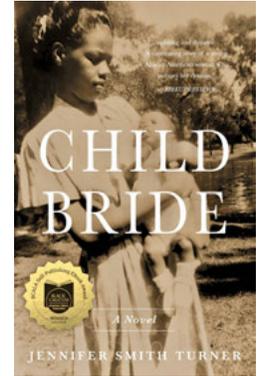


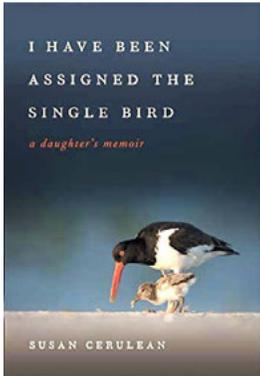
Congratulations to the Winners 2020 Sarton and Gilda Awards

Sarton Winners

Sponsored by Story Circle Network, Sarton Awards are presented in four categories (memoir, historical fiction, contemporary fiction, nonfiction). This award program is named in honor of May Sarton, remembered for her outstanding contributions to women's literature as a memoirist, novelist, and poet. Sarton memoirs, novels, and nonfiction books are distinguished by the compelling ways they honor the lives of women.



Don't miss Pat Bean's fascinating interview with *Child Bride* author Jennifer Smith Turner on page 4.

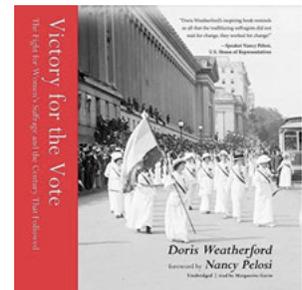


Contemporary Fiction: *Luz*
Debra Thomas
She Writes Press, Phoenix AZ

Historical Fiction: *Child Bride*
Jennifer Smith Turner
Spark Press, Phoenix AZ

Memoir: *I Have Been Assigned the Single Bird: A Daughter's Memoir*
Susan Cerulean
University of Georgia Press, Athens GA

Nonfiction: *Victory for the Vote*
Doris Weatherford
Mango Publishing

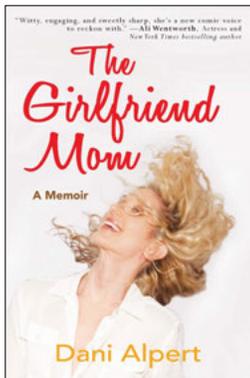
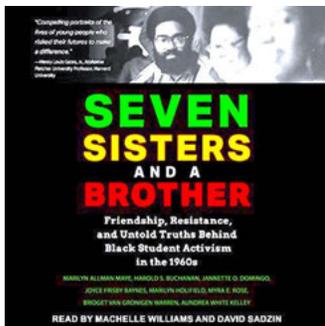


Special Recognition: *Seven Sisters and a Brother*
Marilyn Allman Maye, et al.
Books and Books Press, Florida

The Gilda Winner

The Gilda Prize: "It's Always Something" is named in honor of comedian Gilda Radner. Gilda memoirs are distinguished by their fresh voices, their honesty, and their authenticity. They make us laugh, even when we want to cry.

The Girlfriend Mom: A Memoir
Dani Alpert
Little Ricky Press



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Letter from the President

Hello Everyone,

I am now beginning my sixth month as president of Story Circle Network and the word that comes to mind for our beloved organization is *vibrant*. I have so much good news to share with you about our volunteers and programs. Everywhere I look, we seem to simply be pulsating with life.

First, we have a new board member who has joined our ranks, Tina Games, who is a longstanding member of Story Circle Network. I'm delighted to see that Tina has jumped right in and taken up the reins of our Social Justice Committee. She also will be looking into grants for our College Mentorship program that we will soon be putting into place. Welcome, Tina!

Also, we have a new Periodicals Editor for both our monthly *Flash* newsletters and the quarterly *Journal*. Paula Yost, another long-term SCN member, has graciously accepted this new post, and this current *Journal* is her first labor of love for us. Paula brings years of experience in the publishing realm to this job, and we're delighted she has assumed this position. Thank you, Paula! We know we're in good hands with you at the helm.

Susan Schoch, our *Real Women Write* Anthology editor, has recently put out the call for our 2021 anthology. The prompt for this year's edition is "Beyond Covid: Leaning into Tomorrow." I hope everyone will dive into this topic and send in your submissions. The anthology is a wonderful compilation of powerful writing and also a publication opportunity for all of our members. Submissions open on July 1, and the anthology will come out in December 2021, just in time for a perfect holiday gift to friends and family.

We also have announced our Sarton/Gilda Award Winners for 2020. I personally had the honor of communicating with all of our winners, and I was deeply touched by both their excitement over winning this prestigious award as well as

their gratitude to SCN for offering this unique opportunity for Indie writers. Currently, the 2021 Sarton/Gilda season has begun, and we have even more submissions than last year. Susan Albert and her crack team are already busy at work, for which we can all be most grateful.

Also, a big shout-out to Carol Ziel and B. Lynn Goodwin, who are heading up a monthly E-Circle Writing Extravaganza on the 2nd Thursday of every month from 4 - 5:30 p.m. Pacific time. This is an opportunity for the E-Circle writers to not only write together but also share. As a member of one of the E-Circles, I welcome this chance for dedicated writing time coupled with camaraderie. I know our E-Circle members are as excited as I am!

Our webinars and online classes are also going strong. We even have Jane Friedman coming up in August as one of our webinar speakers! We are so excited to have the chance to hear what Jane has to tell us about the different routes to go in publishing.

Our program director, Liz Beaty, also has been hard at work organizing a mini-conference on Zoom in October 2021. This will be a full day of learning opportunities and should be packed full of information along with a little fun. Stay tuned on this. We'll have more information to share in the near future.

And we are definitely going to Italy in October 2022 for a writing workshop and sightseeing tour. This time we'll focus on Umbria and Tuscany with a visit to the Adriatic Coast. We have launched a page on the SCN website and are already half full. Space is limited, so if you'd like the chance to write and sightsee in beautiful Italy, this is your opportunity.

It's clear that we are indeed a vibrant organization with many dedicated volunteers. We're all working together to encourage all women to tell their stories through the aid of our beloved Story Circle Network. Thank you, my writing sisters.

*Big hugs to all,
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.

Editor: Paula Yost
 journaleditor@storycircle.org
 Layout Editor: Robin Wittig

This Month's Contributing Editors:

Linda Hoye
 Len Leatherwood
 Teresa Lynn
 Susan Schoch
 Jo Virgil

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

Story Circle Network
 723 W University Ave #300-234
 Georgetown, TX 78626

info@storycircle.org
 www.storycircle.org

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 \$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.

SCN Welcomes New Periodicals Editor

Paula Yost may be new to the job of managing Story Circle's quarterly *Journal* and its monthly *Flash* eletter, but she's no stranger to the organization. Over the past two decades, she has volunteered to work in almost all of SCN's special projects and has a valuable long-term view of its many activities.

In 2001, Paula became the first coordinator of the fledgling book review program, working with Peggy Moody and Susan Albert to set up a website, develop a team of reviewers, and obtain books for review. She continued that work for nearly a dozen years, turning Story Circle Book Reviews into the internet's largest and longest running review sites for independently published women authors.

A few years later, Paula joined a small team of editors to produce *What Wildness Is This: Women Write About the Southwest* (University of Texas Press, 2007). She worked to compile and edit contributions from Story Circle members, as well as collect and excerpt material from published authors. She also produced the book's index.

And Paula was again on the front lines when SCN launched its Women's Book Award program in 2011. She helped to coordinate the first memoir jurying and, when the program was expanded in 2014, assumed responsibility for the fiction awards. This year, she is managing the new Gilda Award.

In addition to her volunteer work for Story Circle, Paula has had a long career as a newspaper journalist and editor. She is the founder and president of LifeSketches/Heirloom Memoirs Publishing, a biography services company that documents people's lives in custom-designed books and oral histories. In that capacity, Paula has worked with more than forty memoirists to publish their books and produced over 300 oral histories. She has also worked as a writer and conference coordinator with the Association of Personal Historians, serving as editor for their 2014 anthology, *My Words Are Gonna Linger: The Art of Personal History*.

SCN's founder Susan Wittig Albert, says "For me, one of the greatest pleasures of Story Circle has been the opportunity to work with gifted, creative women who have a passion for helping ordinary women tell the stories of their extraordinary lives. It's been a joy to work with Paula Yost, and I'm delighted that she is able to assume responsibility for our periodicals."

Paula began her new assignment with a redesign of the May *Flash*. The June issue of the *Journal* is hers, in cooperation with Layout Editor Robin Wittig, and her plans for new features in the September issue are already underway.

Welcome, Paula!





An Interview with Jennifer Smith Turner

Author of *Child Bride*

2020 Winner of SCN's Sarton Award for Historical Fiction

by Pat Bean

Jennifer Smith Turner knows who she is and where she came from.

"...my great-grandfather was a slave on a pecan and hog farm. Which became my grandfather's sharecroppers' home. Which became my father's home that holds history in its fist. I am from slavery and freedom. I am from all of this," Jennifer wrote in a poem called *Where I'm From*.

Jennifer also wrote that she is from: "Fishing poles and bowling shoes lined up seven-deep in the hallway...From 'Stop fighting, hug and kiss your brother'...From Sunday school, Easter sunrise service, blessings before every meal... From Margaree, the youngest of nine, and Herman, the oldest of twelve...and from 'You can be whatever you want to be in this world' and 'Education is the answer to everything.'"

The author followed the advice about education. Among her many credits and honors are a bachelor's degree from Union College, a master's degree from Fairfield University, and an honorary doctorate degree from the University of Hartford. She has been featured on National Public Radio, served as a featured speaker at Yale University, and served as the Interim President/CEO of Newman's Own Foundation in 2019.

When Jennifer retired from her job as CEO of Girl Scouts of Connecticut in 2012, she thought about what she wanted to do with the rest of her life. The answer was that she only wanted to do things that made her smile. Some of the things that make her smile, she enumerates, are: "My twenty-year marriage to Eric; living on Martha's Vineyard with my husband; my entire family. I'm a great-aunt five times over. Writing; reading both for pleasure and for knowledge; gardening; golfing; having friends and being a friend; traveling; author events, even on Zoom; working with young people. And a sunny day."

Jennifer says she has always been a writer, but that she put this aspect of her life on hold for a few decades. Then on February 4, 2000, her mother died.

"That night I made a promise to her to become a writer. She always encouraged me to excel in whatever I decided to do. But she would gently remind me, 'You know Jen, you are a very good writer.' Her words echoed in my mind the day she joined the ancestors. So I made a promise to focus on my writing skills, and here I am all these years later with two published poetry books and a debut novel."

A little over a year after her mother died, Jennifer married Eric. Both were forty-nine.

"If anyone had told me in my twenties that I'd be at a marriage altar at the age of forty-nine, well, it would have been unimaginable to me. Yet there we were saying, 'I do,' and here we are in 2021 celebrating our twentieth anniversary." Shortly after the wedding, Jennifer published her first poetry book, *Perennial Secrets*. "It was a homage to my mother, my way of keeping the promise to her and also a way for me to grieve her loss."

Child Bride, the author says, was born from the failure of her first attempt at writing a novel, one in which Nell, the protagonist of *Child Bride*, was a minor character. Jennifer says she will always be grateful for the honest criticism people offered of that first manuscript, which eventually gave her Nell's voice and the strength to write her story.

Although that first novel never saw the light of day, she says it taught her that there was a big difference between writing a book and writing poetry. "First, it was simply the longevity needed to develop each scene and character."

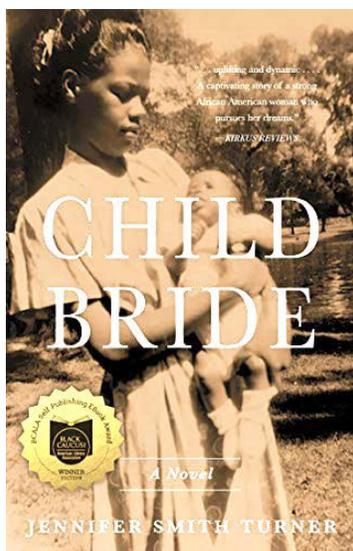
Another stumbling block was that in poetry, the goal was to "capture a sentiment, an image, or feeling in as few words as possible and yet with enough descriptive language to grab the reader's attention." That didn't work for a full-length book, she says, and early readers of that first novel told her it had far too much telling and not enough showing. "This baffled me since showing is how I successfully communicate through poetry," she admits. But she wrote on, finished the book, and tried to find a publisher. "I waited anxiously for the offers to come in, but you guessed it, that never happened." Instead, she got brutal feedback, including the comment from one agent who wrote, "Telling, telling, telling, typical first-time novelist mistake...and oh the grammatical errors!"

Several years later, when taking another look at the book and critiques, Jennifer says she realized it was Nell's story that she needed to write. "Writing happens in my mind long before words find a home on a page. It's as though I need to visualize the story, sense the characters, feel their lives. Once I've lived with this uncertainty for a time, suddenly my fingers want to take to the page or keyboard and begin to form sentences. . . . There were long pauses between the creative process, times when I thought there was no way the novel would ever be completed. But then, from seemingly nowhere, images would begin to visualize and the words would flow."

Jennifer says her editor's advice helped move the story to a higher level, but that her husband's feedback helped, too. "The best advice he gave me was to incorporate my poetic voice into my writing... His advice gave me the freedom to be a

poet who is writing in novel form.”

The Black Lives Matter movement, the author says, made her think about the correlation to the underlying thread of racism in her book. Even as she wrote *Child Bride*, racial discrimination incidents were being reported in the news. But heightened sensitivity around racism and social injustice in this country resulted in readers looking at the novel with a very different lens. “A number of book clubs chose *Child Bride* as their selection,” Jennifer says, “and I’ve been meeting with some of them, and it’s been amazing to listen to the discussion from readers.”



When Jennifer began to transform from the corporate world to the writing world, she says she sought advice from those in the literary world. One of the best pieces of wisdom came from an editor who told her to get over the romantic notion of writing while sitting on a secluded beach in the tropics. “Writing is work,” the editor said. “And so it is,” says Jennifer, whose own advice to other writers is simple: “Just sit down and write, not for an audience, but for yourself; write from your heart.”

Meanwhile, winning Story Circle’s May Sarton Award is especially memorable to Jennifer, who notes that May’s weathered paperback copy of *Journal of Solitude* has been on her bookshelf for decades.

“Decades! Underlined, dog-eared, with scribbled notes in the margins...It is an incredible honor to have my novel acknowledged as a recipient of an award that stems from the force and beauty of Ms. Sarton’s writing...I am inspired by her writing and hope that I can continue to grow my creativity through the written word to share with others as Ms. Sarton has done.”



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

Call for Volunteers We Need YOU!

Special thanks to SCN member Dorothy Rice, who answered our call for help with Story Circle’s Twitter account! But we’re still looking for volunteers to help with ongoing and upcoming projects. If you’re available, please send an email indicating 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. 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!



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?

2021 LifeWriting Competition

Congratulations to the Winners!

We are proud to announce the winners of our 2021 LifeWriting Competition. The topic for this year was *Journey*. We are grateful to the many writers who submitted their work, to the jurors and judges who generously donated their time to evaluate the entries, and to Linda Hoyer for coordinating the process. Watch for details of our next competition coming soon.

1st Place Winner

“The Forty Year Journey” by Cynthia Davidson, Hope Valley RI

2nd Place Winner

“Infertility in Three Acts” by Carrie Steckl, Austin TX

3rd Place Co-Winners

“Winning the Losing Battle” by Sarah Etgen-Baker, Anna TX

“Jungle Jaunt” by Suzanne Adam, Santiago Chile

Enjoy Cynthia Davidson’s story below. Go here for more information about the winners and to read their stories. <https://www.storycircle.org/lifewriting-competition-winners/>

It is our inward journey that leads us through time—forward or back, seldom in a straight line, most often spiraling. As we discover, we remember; remembering, we discover; and most intensely do we experience this when our separate journeys converge. ~ Eudora Welty

The Forty-Year Journey

by Cynthia Davidson
Winner of 2021 LifeWriting Competition

On that deceptively beautiful Tuesday, September 11, 2001, my phone rang, just before nine o’clock in the morning.

“Turn on the TV,” my fiancé urged. “This is not a joke.”

His anxious tone triggered my immediate response. He rarely called during his workday, and those were my writing hours. But I could picture him, 150 miles away, at his cluttered office desk on the fifteenth floor of the Sony Music building on Madison Avenue in midtown Manhattan.

I hurried to switch on the set in my Rhode Island home. Neither of us watched daytime television, so it stayed silent in the living room until the evening news. The CBS news program flickered into view. The set was tuned to that channel out of habit since my days at the network. I had worked at the Foreign Desk of their New York broadcast center on Manhattan’s West side.

“Nothing unusual,” I told him.

“Switch to CNN.”

The World Trade Center’s massive white twin towers filled the screen. Smoke rose incongruously from the North Tower’s upper floors, at the southern edge of the city. The bright blue

sky beyond was utterly cloudless. The live video was coming from an uptown office window.

“An airplane appears to have hit the building, approximately fifteen minutes ago,” explained CNN reporter Carol Lin. “Fire crews are on their way to the scene.”

We both presumed this was an accident. My father had flown commercial jets for a living. Many planes had gone down over his four decades in aviation. We often discussed the reasons behind the most spectacular crashes in the US and overseas. Yet in my family we still believed, ‘the most dangerous portion of an airplane journey is the car ride to the airport,’ statistically speaking. Each time Dad returned home safely, he’d ceremoniously drop his flight kit on the hallway floor and declare, “Another trip without a fatal accident.”

Our fatalistic attitudes were further toughened by my family’s gruesome experiences during the war in Lebanon and the grisly photographs never shown to the public while I’d been in the news business.

Watching the smoke pour from the World Trade Center, I recalled my last time there, seven years ago. Before I’d left New York City for good, a friend came to visit from out of town. She wanted to see the view from the Windows on the

World Restaurant. We rode the ‘fastest elevators in the Americas’ up to the 107th floor of the landmark eatery. It had opened in 1976, the year my studies began at New York University. I had lived in Manhattan on and off since then, in my love-hate relationship with the place. My three children had been born there. Their father Max, my Moroccan-born Israeli ex-husband, was probably in New York this morning. His company renovated offices and apartments there.

Less than a minute after switching on the television, I saw a second aircraft hit the WTC South Tower at 9:03 a.m.

“That was no accident,” I blurted to Malcolm, who was still on the phone. We didn’t want to believe our own eyes. But we’d definitely seen the passenger jet slam *deliberately* into the building’s upper floors. Adrenalin coursed through my bloodstream. Without taking my eyes off the television, I told him, “I have to hang up now. I need to call my children at their school.”

Minutes after speaking to them briefly, my eyes still glued to the TV, I watched aghast as the fires spread through both skyscrapers. The full tanks of flaming jet fuel had combusted, incinerating everything in their path. The intense heat set off a chain reaction and threatened the buildings’ structural integrity.

In the confusion, many called 911 for help. Most were told to shelter in place. Some used their cell phones to call family and friends to say goodbye. Others called the news stations with firsthand reports of conditions inside the buildings. The elevators had ceased to function. Hundreds rushed down the few stairways still passable.

Office workers started jumping from the burning North Tower by now. Two people clasped hands before leaping to their death. Bodies bounced off the dusty parked cars before landing on the concrete streets and sidewalks below.

Less than an hour after I’d turned on the television, the South Tower collapsed. As horrifying as it was unexpected, I saw the space left by the disappearing building fill in for several terrible moments, by a roiling balloon of exploding white dust. It choked the bystanders and covered those fleeing from the scene.

And then, even more unimaginable, down came the North Tower, too. The first of the twins to be hit that morning, it disintegrated less than half an hour after the South one crumpled. All the souls inside their walls and stairwells, who had not yet made their way to safety, were taken along. Their remains turned to dust in that grey cloud nightmare.

Cynthia F. Davidson: A member of SCN for over a decade, Cynthia has never missed a conference since she joined. A long-time expatriate and former CBS News journalist, she spent two decades as a pioneer in the global management field. Since leaving corporate life to write fulltime, she credits SCN membership with the support and skill development required to publish *The Importance of Paris*, her first memoir. Story Circle also inspired her to start facilitating workshops and writing groups to capture women’s lived wisdom.

I spent the rest of the day watching television. We saw those buildings come down at least fifty more times, as news outlets replayed the terrible footage. It seemed as if they had to convince the public these impossible incidents had really happened. Reports came in later that morning about two more hijackings: one plane hit the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.; the other crashed in a Pennsylvania cornfield.

As more details trickled in, we learned that this had been the deadliest terrorist attack in human history. On that tragic September day, 2,977 people perished. And 9/11 was the deadliest incident for firefighters and law enforcement officers in the history of the United States with 343 and 72 killed, respectively. Over 25,000 had been injured, and the fallout continues as the toxic dust continues to kill those who worked in the cleanup efforts.

I thought of things that were not being reported. At 9:30 p.m., twelve hours after the attacks, CIA Director George Tenet informed President Bush and senior U.S. officials that Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda were responsible. As details emerged about the nineteen dead hijackers, fifteen of them were reported to be Saudi citizens. Evidence of the group’s plans, and the list of all their names, were discovered in the lost luggage of the operation’s mastermind, the Egyptian, Mohamed Atta. By sheer chance, his bag had missed its connection in Portland and did not make it onto American Airlines Flight 11.

That week, my dad and I discussed these events on the phone. He emphatically defended his opinion concerning the improbability of official explanations. “There is no way the Arabs could have pulled this off.”

I did not dismiss his comment. He had earned the right to his conclusions. After all, he’d spent twenty years working in commercial aviation in the Arab world. In a slow-motion montage, I replayed forty years worth of intervening scenes from when I was eight years old and my family moved to Arabia.

Two Boeing jets had taken off from New York, bound for Jeddah, in 1961. My father had been in the cockpit of one of those planes. Trans World Airlines had sent him to Arabia on a mission “to teach Saudis how to fly Boeings.”

In the interim of those forty years, what went wrong?



Back by Popular Demand! Writing Trip to Italy



Story Circle Network Members, please join us for an exciting writing workshop in **Italy, October 15-23, 2022**. The trip includes all private guides, transportation, most meals, and first-class hotels in Tuscany and Umbria.

Our instructor is Len Leatherwood, Pushcart-nominated author, nationally honored writing teacher, coordinator of our Online Classes Program, and president of Story Circle Network. She will be leading the workshop using the "sensational" Italian landscape as a jumping off point to infuse your memoir, poetry, or fiction with evocative sensory details. To keep costs low, Len has generously donated her time to host the trip and provide instruction.

Some highlights to anticipate:

- Tours of Assisi, San Marino, Perugia, Cortona, San Marino, Rimini and the Adriatic Coast, Bologna, and Florence
- A full-time guide who will travel with us via tour bus

- Seven nights of accommodations in hotels (based on double room occupancy)
- Breakfasts and most dinners at three different first-class hotels

This is a non-profit trip. SCN members and their guests are automatically provided a \$500 Debra Winegarten scholarship, making your cost only \$1,560, excluding airfare. Space is limited; members and their guests will be given priority. Men and children (sixteen and over) are invited for the trip; however, the writing workshop is women only.

Here is the link to the website for complete information: <https://www.storycircle.org/join-us-in-italy/>

We hope you'll join us for this fun-filled adventure, where you will have the opportunity to learn and write while immersing yourself in the sensory-drenched countryside of gorgeous Tuscany and Umbria.

Summer Webinars

June

Finding Sanctuary

Cindy Rasicot, Judith Teitelman, Anniqua Rana & Veena Rao
June 16, 4:00-5:30 p.m. Pacific ~ Fee: \$25

Participants will hear the above four authors discuss the unique paths they chose for their characters to find sanctuary, and then participate in a relevant writing exercise.

July

Mapping Characters' Journey to Self-Discovery

Linda Ulleseit, Marian Wernicke,
Mary Helen Sheriff & Sally Cole-Misch
July 28, 4:00-5:15 p.m. Pacific ~ Fee: \$25

Join these four accomplished authors as they share their secrets for creating memorable characters, developing character arcs (including how they overlap with plot, setting and theme), and tapping into real life to write award-winning

fiction. Participants will receive presentation summaries and worksheets to help them identify their own characters' paths to self-discovery.

August

Sharing Your Story With the World: Which Way To Go?

Jane Friedman: August 18, 10:00 a.m. Central ~ Fee: \$25

Author of *The Business of Being a Writer*, Jane Friedman has worked in publishing for over twenty years. She offers writers clear and honest guidance in making the best career decisions, "providing a signal amidst the noise." Webinar participants will be given an overview of the various publishing paths, including the costs, risks, and rewards of traditional, hybrid, and self-publishing. A Q&A session about publishing paths will follow.

More details about these informative and inspiring webinars coming soon.

Real Women Write— The 2021 SCN Anthology

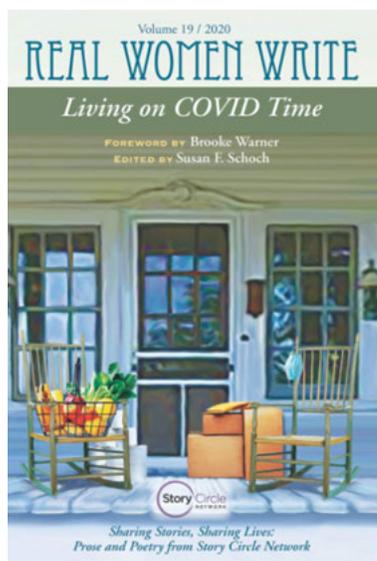
In 2020, SCN's real women wrote about what was the reality of *Living on COVID Time*. That theme was inevitable, and our members wrote with feeling and insight. (If you haven't read it, that issue is currently available through Amazon, Barnes & Noble, or your favorite local bookstore.)

It's 2021 now, and while we're all still reluctantly on COVID time, there are vaccines and better treatments. Businesses and schools are opening up. The pandemic struggle has become familiar, and we have much more knowledge about it. Social divisions are unresolved, but there's also dialogue. Once again, we can imagine a future. As Susan Wittig Albert suggests, we're "Dreaming of good times to come (with all of the ambiguities and uncertainties that go into that)."

So it's appropriate for the new *Real Women Write* anthology to explore women's visions of what's to come *after* COVID. Those visions will shape how we move forward. Susan noted, "It often seems too many people find it easiest to believe that going forward means going back to the good times we had before." But we've seen the division and injustice in our society, and we can't un-see it. We've seen the destruction of increasing climate change, and it won't be ignored. How will our individual lives look when the world has recovered from COVID-19? Beyond "roses and rainbows," what visions do we have for what comes after all the catastrophes of 2020? What do we imagine with longing, envision with excitement, or anticipate with anxiety in the years ahead? These are the questions we hope you will address, and our 2021 title reflects that:

Beyond COVID: Leaning Into Tomorrow

Submissions open on July 1, so it's not too early to start writing. *RWW* will be published in December 2021. Submission details will be sent to you when available. Please speak from your heart, and together we will create the best SCN anthology yet!



Online Classes and Dates, Spring II

May 17 – July 12, 2021

Flash Writing

An Experiment:

Writing 20 Minutes a Day for One Month
Len Leatherwood, 6/14 - 7/12 (4 weeks)

Independent Study

Part One:

B. Lynn Goodwin, 5/17 – 6/14 (4 weeks)

Part Two:

B. Lynn Goodwin, 6/14 – 7/12 (4 weeks)

Journaling & Self Discovery

The Place Where You Live:

Finding Inspiration in the Ordinary
Katherine Kirkpatrick, 5/17 - 6/14 (3 weeks)

Using the Full Moon for Creative Inspiration
Tina Games, 5/31 - 6/28 (4 weeks)

Memoir and Life Writing

Would I, Should I, Could I Write a Memoir?
(Part II):

Cynthia Davidson, 5/14 - 6/14 (4 weeks)

Non-Fiction

Learning from the Best of Women Travel Writers
Rhonda Wiley Jones, 5/17 - 7/12 (5 weeks)

Publishing

*Taking Away the Intimidation
of Traditional Publishing*
Kristin Owens, 5/17 - 7/12 (5 weeks)

Writing Craft

Refresh Your Expressive Writing Skills
Sarah White, 5/31 - 6/28 (4 weeks)

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.

Crawl Inside Your Character's Head

by B. Lynn Goodwin

Has someone told you your characters are one-dimensional? Or flat? Or predictable?

Let's take a flat character and make her three-dimensional.

Based on an acting exercise, this will let you become your character, discover multiple objectives, find obstacles, and turn her into someone both likeable and flawed.

- Breathe in character—whatever that means, and exhale any negativity.
- Breathe in character again as you stand up. Does she stand slower or faster?
- Begin walking as your character. Does she walk more confidently or hesitantly than you?
- Turn as your character. Is her balance the same?
- Look out the window as your character. What does she see that you never noticed?
- Continue walking and observing.
 - Is her posture straighter?
 - Does she feel more weighted down or lighter than you?
 - What feels different about being your character than being yourself (whatever that means)?

Answer these questions in your head, but please don't skip any. Notice your attitude as you answer them. Is this your attitude or the character's?

As your character, sit in front of your computer, pick a font and color she would use, and complete the sentence starts below. The more you can become her physically, the more you will also be her mentally. There are no wrong answers. Trust the answers.

Speaking in the voice of your character, finish each sentence.

- My full name is ...
- I live at ...
- I live with ...
- I am happiest when ...
- I daydream about ...
- If I had my way ...
- I don't understand why ...
- What I could do is ...
- Sometimes I think that I ...
- If I were in charge ...
- I get angry when ...
- People wouldn't like it if ...
- I am afraid I ...
- I know ...
- I really am ...
- A person can't be happy unless ...

How did this work for you? I'd love to know. Write to me at Lgood67334@comcast.net.



Writer and editor **B. Lynn Goodwin** owns Writer Advice, www.writeradvice.com. The author of a YA, *Talent*, which was short-listed for a Literary Lightbox Award, she won a bronze medal in the Moonbeam Children's Book Awards and was a finalist for a Sarton Women's Book Award. She's also written a memoir, *Never Too Late: From Wannabe to Wife at 62*, which won a 2018 National Indie Excellence Award, Human Relations Indie Book Award, Dragonfly Book Award & Next Generation Indie Book Award, and a Dragonfly Book Award. Lynn has written a collection of journaling prompts and short articles. Her flash fiction is published in *Flashquake*, *Nebo*, *Cabinet of Heed*, *Murmur of Words*, *100-Word Stories*, *Ariel's Dream*, and *Writing in a Woman's Voice*. A reviewer and teacher at Story Circle Network, she's currently at work on a sequel to *Talent* and several editing projects. She hopes to start a novella in flash soon. She lives at the foot of Mt. Diablo, California, with her energizer-bunny husband and their exceptional terrier.

From the Blogs:



One Woman's Day

This March 29, 2021, post was selected by Linda Hoye, our blog coordinator. She welcomes your submissions at: <https://www.storycircle.org/category/onewomans-day/>

When Life Hands You...

By Kalí Rourke

My last post on my personal blog was about grandparenting in a pandemic, and I thought I was ready.

We had the masks, we had set the protocols with the parents-to-be, and were isolating hard so we could be in our new grandson's bubble. We even had COVID tests when our daughter went into the hospital, and we were doing a happy dance to see that all of our hard work of isolation, keeping physical distance, and wearing masks at all times outside of our condo had been successful.

We were going to be able to meet and hold little Miles in our arms! And we did! He was adorable, but not very happy, seemed to be hungry all the time, and had been losing some weight in those first three weeks. Our young parents were going the extra mile and feeding him what seemed to be constantly, but his sleep came in fits and starts, and all three of them were getting so tired.

Then came a phone call that none of us expected.

In Texas, all newborns have a little blood sample taken at birth to screen for problems, and our little Miles had tested positive for Cystic Fibrosis (CF). Our daughter was calling to tell us that he had been referred to the Dell Children's Hospital, where an actual CF center was located, and that they had also been put in touch with the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation.

Kalí Rourke is a full-time philanthropist and volunteer in the Austin, Texas, area and has lent her writing, public speaking, and social media skills to many local non-profits, including Story Circle Network. She is a wife, mom, "Gigi" to her first grandson, a professional singer, and an advocate for mentoring in all its forms.

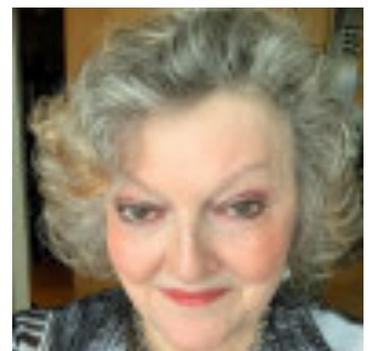
She asked us if there was any CF in our family. Since I was the genealogist for our side of the family, I could categorically say, "No, I had seen no indication of it going back for centuries." Her husband's family had no known history, either. So they had not even thought about it when going through genetic counseling at the beginning of their parenthood journey. My husband and I reeled in shock, and then we did what we do when confronted with the unexpected.

We educated ourselves.

I won't go into a lot of detail here about the disease, but Cystic Fibrosis treatment has come a long way since I first heard of it (*A friend's daughter had it and died before she reached twenty back in the 1980s*). Although Miles will deal with daily lung treatments, a special diet with extra enzymes every time he eats, and will need to take special (and expensive) medicines, the combination of these will give him a good chance at a normal lifespan. This is such a blessing, and we are so grateful to the CF Foundation, all the folks who worked on the treatment improvements, and a potentially game-changing new medicine.

There is much ahead for all of us, but we have hope, faith, and this beautiful little boy to focus on.

When life hands you difficulties...you make the solutions you can.



Circle Voices

SCN e-Circles Gain New Energy In Zoom Meetings

by B. Lynn Goodwin

“We’re going to start with a ten-minute free write,” I say to the e-Circle participants who joined our second Zoom meeting. “You already know how this works. I’ll give you three sentence starts. Pick one or write about whatever’s on your mind. Go wherever the writing takes you.”

Zoom meetings bring members of the e-Circles together to write in an expanded community, and they are the latest program started by Story Circle Network. Our sentence starts from the second meeting are listed here:

1. My mother/father/child insisted...
2. Against my better judgment...
3. Having crossed paths with...

Almost every woman wrote about her mother. Their words were reasoned and articulate, expressive and emotion-filled. Ideas were well supported and the voices were completely believable. No surprise. Mothers and daughters have been the subject of tons of memoirs, each one nuanced and no two the same.

Here are a couple lines that I love no matter how many times I read them over. I’m sharing them with the author’s permission:

“My heart pierced like the crown of thorns...”
 “My heart softened and my whole being opened.”

Would you write those lines in that way? Maybe...if that was your experience. Nobody can tell *your* story but you. This woman told *her* story—not for the first time—and found a new, deeper version in this free write.

When we respond, we only say what we love in this fresh, new writing. These are responses from the chat box posted by two participants speaking about two different free writes:

“A true liberation story”
 “That was so very strong! Your vulnerability is so very human!”

By the way, if you are considering joining us but you don’t know what a chat box is, we have great technical support! I follow the philosophy that there are no mistakes—only new material. Tech experts from SCN do the rest.

We followed our free write with some lists. They are one of the ways I jumpstart my brain when I don’t know what to write about. I gave five possible subjects with the caveat that people were also free to write about whatever was on their minds:

1. People I love
2. Things I regret
3. Relationships I regret
4. Things I hope for personally
5. Things I hope for globally

Afterwards, those who chose to read their lists did so. Most people used the first two topics. One woman said she didn’t get very far because she just kept spinning off on the third person she listed. I did exactly the same thing, saying I loved my drama students from the seventies and listing one person after another who had become an accomplished actor or Hollywood writer as well as a couple of men who died too soon.

NOTE: The writing doesn’t have to be positive just because the comments are. The writing needs to be authentic. We’ve agreed that what happens in our Zoom room stays there. Guaranteed privacy helps insure authenticity.

With the assistance of Carol Ziel, who is responsible for e-Circles and Len Leatherwood, who is the current president of Story Circle Network, we’re offering this opportunity to every Story Circle e-Circle Member. Later we hope to offer it to *all* Story Circle Members. Come join the fun and let your writing grow with the confidence you gain.

Contact Carol Ziel at ziel.carol@gmail.com for additional information about either e-Circles or our Zoom group.



NEW MONTHLY ZOOM E-CIRCLE WRITING EXTRAVAGANZA

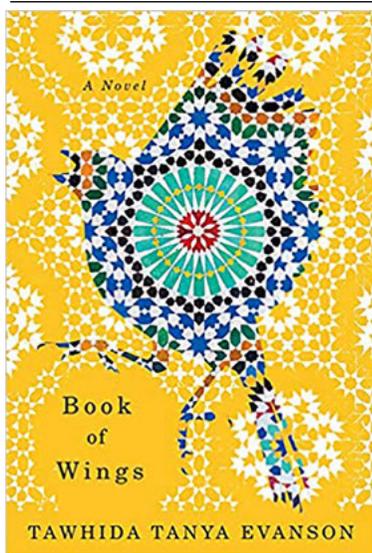
COME POETS, MEMOIRISTS & STORYTELLERS
ALL E-CIRCLE MEMBERS WELCOME

JOINS US FOR WRITING IN COMMUNITY
FACILITATED BY B LYNN GOODWIN

2ND THURSDAY OF EVERY MONTH
4 - 5:30 PM PACIFIC TIME

QUESTIONS?

Contact Carol Ziel ziel.carol@gmail.com



Story Circle Book 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 will be found here. <https://www.storycircle.org/book-review/for-reviewers/>

Here is a recent review.

Book of Wings by Tawhida Tanya Evanson Reviewed by Mary Ann Moore

Book of Wings is a novel that has the hypnotic aspects of poetry. And while the heaviness of grief on the part of the narrator is tangible, the prose is wonderfully melodic. It is a beautiful artifact to hold in one's hands; the cover design, by David Drummond, is outstanding.

I could describe the novel as exotic but not as alien, rather as fascinating and intriguing. It is full of the marvels of taste (roasted eggplant tagine, for example), scent (rose oil and cannabis referred to as "kif"), sound (a choir of muezzins) and many sights as the narrator travels from British Columbia's West Coast to the Gulf of Mexico and on to France and then Morocco.

While a novel is a work of fiction, the narrator of *Book of Wings* puts it this way: "There are three versions of this story: mine, his, and the Truth." In an interview, author Tawhida Tanya Evanson said about her writing, "The work is only ever as good as my ability to transmit the Truth." She also said, "I write from epiphany that is then crafted. The result may want to remain on the page or take another art form. I try not to get in the way."

In this beautifully crafted series of epiphanies, the "his" or he of the story is Shams. (Hz. Mevlana Jalalu'ddin Rumi's teacher and beloved friend was a man called Shams, meaning "sun." Rumi is quoted at the beginning of the book.)

"Mine" or the me of the story, is the narrator, a woman named Maya.

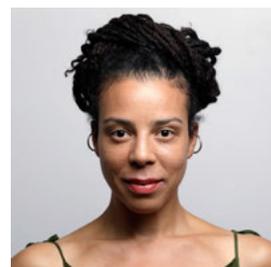
The references to wings begin with Shams, the narrator's lover who has packed up and left during "Paris in the Springtime"—"two wings, un oiseau." (Evanson uses French at times and provides translations. Some of the translations of French words and phrases, as well as Arabic, are provided at the beginning of the book.)

"Everything that occurs becomes poetry, whether by crime or accident. Even my hatred is transformed. The laws of love may elude, but I will get through this theatre, this flower of folly," Maya says before she leaves France.

Her encounters with men on her travels are unwanted intrusions, with a few exceptions. She sees Matthieu, a man who is also from Tiiiohtia:ke/Montreal, as part of the "organic process" and is able to "take refuge in him because in my state, there are still too many aggressors around..." In the end Maya says, "I failed to keep the company of my beloved. But I will never fail Love."

A gorgeous book that with its end will lead you back to reading it all over again.

Author **Tawhida Tanya Evanson** is a poet, performer, and producer who lives in Tiiiohtia:ke/Montreal. Tawhida means "unity or oneness of God," and the name was given by her Sufi teacher. She is an Antiguan-Canadian artist, a dervish, and the author of two books of poetry: *Bothism* (2017) and *Nouveau Griot* (2018).



Reviewer **Mary Ann Moore** is a poet, writer, and circle leader in Nanaimo, British Columbia. She has facilitated circles for the mental health community, a First Nations reserve, community care workers and hospice counselors, women's retreats and conferences, and adult literacy programs. Her poetry, fiction, book reviews, personal essays, and articles have appeared in various publications in Canada and the U.S.





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, Ariela Zucker offers advice on using photos in your writing.

Using Photographs to Enhance Writing

By Ariela Zucker

I have always been drawn to images but recently realized what an immense power they can have on my writing. After using images created by others, I decided to use my own photographs to trigger stories. I am not a photographer, but with the simple, accessible camera on my phone, I can capture images that activate an exciting inner conversation.

“Show not tell,” we are told time and time again. The secret is in the details. And so, as writers, we attempt to paint with our words three-dimensional scenes on a white canvas. The challenge of deciphering the world with words can be, at times, frustrating.

We're visual beings; images speak to us. Even before we learn how to articulate our world with literal symbols, our brains, thirsty for stimulation, absorb the abundance of images surrounding us. The power of photography lies in its ability to bypass our verbal mind and aim directly for the senses.

Photography means drawing with light. The word, derived from the Greek *photos* (light) and *graphein* (to draw), was first used in the 1830s. It is now, as I am sure it was when it was first invented, no less than magic.

It is tempting to compare the act of photography and that of writing. A photograph is a compact capsule, two-dimensional,

the same as writing. The uniqueness of images, however, is that they can do what we as writers aspire to—they can show, not tell.

Like any good magic, there is a secret spell. Let me share it with you:

- Choose a verbal prompt.
- Armed with your camera, look around for images that can express the prompt.
- Shoot...as many photographs as you desire.
- Observe the results.
- Pick a photograph that speaks to you either because it expresses the prompt, or
- better yet, take it further.
- Paste it to the top of your writing canvas (a page or a computer screen) that now is no longer an empty white void.
- Verbalize the exchange between the visual and the literary.

Every photograph is a choice. It creates a refreshing duet of colors and sensations, and can enhance your writing by presenting a vantage point as well as a point-of-entry into a story worth telling.



Ariela Zucker lives with her husband in Down East Maine, where they run their mom-and-pop motel. Ariela was born in Jerusalem and lived in Israel till 2001. For almost thirty years she was an educator, a counselor, and a director of a learning disabilities programs. From there, the professional move to hospitality was an exciting challenge and a substantial change. Nonfiction and poetry are what she writes most of the time.



Our Future is Female

Anabelle Murray is currently a high school senior at the Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies, with plans of majoring in Film at the University of California, Berkeley. Aside from writing and filmmaking, Anabelle has danced ballet for fourteen years and has an active role in her school's Associated Student Body. She also enjoys working with children and is an identical twin.

How We Do It By Anabelle Murray

I wiped away my tears as I made my way towards the bimah to eulogize my ninety-four-year-old grandmother. I followed my eldest cousin, a composed Ivy-league doctoral student, and suddenly felt silly walking up red-faced in my polka-dot minidress.

During my childhood, my grandma was an indestructible and fiery charmer. She could get away with anything, including plucking a sweet potato fry off a stranger's plate at Johnny's Po-Boys. While everyone looked horrified, my grandmother grinned and said, "This is how we do it in New Orleans." However, her luck ended at ninety when she acquired an infection that wouldn't improve. This cascaded into a cycle of infections, septic shock, and recovery; each time taking away a piece of my grandmother's memory.

As her condition worsened, my family and I increased our cross-country trips to visit her. Despite her being miles away from lucidity, I was determined to reignite her spark. She was still my same grandma, with a contagious laugh and sharp wit, so I treasured the moments when her charisma could shine through her illness. While holding each other's hands, we chatted for hours. I drilled my name into her head, then quizzed her—asking her to recall her address, count to ten, and read sentences. When we took her out to her favorite restaurants, "escaping" her assisted living facility, I would help hoist her into her wheelchair, remembering the way she would clumsily strap my sister and me into our stroller as toddlers.

When she was ninety-four, she fell ill with shingles, which quickly spread to the point that she couldn't open her eyes or eat. I couldn't believe that after all the times she had cheated death over those four years, it was *shingles* that did her in. My sixteenth birthday dress became funeral attire.

At the news of her death, I tumbled into a state of pain and numbness. I knew that without my attempts at grasping onto my grandmother's spark, her life would've lacked companionship, mental stimulation, and outside activities in her last years. Still, it felt unfair, as if people were sugarcoating the situation. My grandmother didn't just "pass away," she *died*. She wasn't going to be there anymore for me to see, talk to, or take care of. I found it unfathomable that someone with such spirit and moxie could just cease to exist, and I refused to find peace in the situation. I didn't care that she had "lived a long life" or if she was "in a better place." However, it did help that everyone in New Orleans and its surrounding parishes had a story about her—some couldn't figure out how to beat her in a game of Bridge and others told of how they had seen her at Torah study well into her nineties.

I wondered what made my connection with her so special. It wasn't that I'd inherited her sneeze (although she took great pride in that). It certainly wasn't the time I locked her out of our hotel room in Hawaii or teased her about her white hair. It was that I was one of the few people that never gave up on her. I thought back on all of the times my grandma refused to give up on me. Whether it was learning to knit, play complicated card games, or stand up for myself in conversation, she'd absolutely forbid me to doubt myself. That doggedness had become a part of my personality, and I was touched to realize I had returned to her the gift she had given me so many years ago.

So, as I stood at the podium looking out at the crowded sanctuary, I felt proud. Proud of my grandma, my hard work, and the relationship we'd fostered. Oh, and that she'd remember my name even if she'd forgotten her own.

Call for Proposals: SCN October 2021 Virtual Conference

Story Circle Network invites your creative proposals for our first ever Virtual Conference, which will be held via Zoom on Saturday, October 16, 2021. Our theme is "Taking Your Writing to the Next Level." The conference program will feature three 60-minute workshops.

We're specifically looking for proposals related to Honing Your Craft, Elevating Your Writing Practice, and Marketing & Promoting Your Writing. However, we will consider any creative proposal that fits our theme, so please don't feel bound by these categories. If you have more than one good idea, feel free to submit more than one proposal!

Although presenters do not have to be members of Story Circle Network, preference is given to current members. As compensation, each presenter will receive \$200 and free admission to the conference.

We look forward to seeing you at Story Circle Network's first ever Virtual Conference!

Click here to submit your proposal.

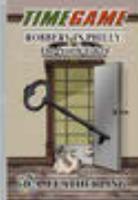
<https://www.storycircle.org/virtual-conference-call-for-proposals/>

Deadline for submissions is June 30, 2021



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>SEEK A SAFE HARBOR MERRY ANN CHRISTY HEARD BOWEN</p>	<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>What's Up, Cody? BRADLEY C. CHAMBERLAIN Illustrated by Sara Gustafson</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>DISPOSABLE SOULS KATHA L. FULLER</p>	 <p>Understanding Copyright Author's Edition Teresa Lynn</p> <p>An easy-to-understand guide to copyright, especially for authors.</p>	 <p>TIMEGAME BIBBEE C. KELLY Illustrated by Sara Gustafson</p> <p>Sixteen-year-old time-traveling twins Marcus and Samantha land in Philadelphia during America's first bank robbery. They agree to help accused blacksmith Pat Lyon prove his innocence, but it's a challenge when the police and bank officials are convinced he's guilty.</p> <p>For ages 9 and up.</p>
 <p>TRAVEL TALES Winnie Bowen</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>THREADS OF RANIC C. Y. M. W. E.</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>

Story Circle Network Classifieds

Time to promote your writing related services to SCN members? **Place your own classified ad in the next *Journal*.** Email us at storycircle@storycircle.org with *Classifieds* in the subject line for more information.

Upcoming *Journal* Issues and Deadlines

September: Aug 1, 2021

December: Nov 1, 2021

March: Feb 1, 2022

Looking for a feel-good read, with lots of armchair traveling to combat isolation of the past year? Check out *Travels with Maggie* by Pat Bean, available on Amazon.

“Paris has a soul, and she’ll test yours. Will you sell out or stay true?” Discover more, in this IPPY award-winning memoir, *The Importance of Paris*, by Cynthia F. Davidson.

The moon has influenced creative seekers for centuries. Through its eight phases, it has served as a *muse* in many ways. **Join me on a magical journey** of creative exploration: www.JournalingByTheMoonlight.com

Writer Advice, www.writeradvice.com, offers writing contests, manuscript consultations, book reviews, author interviews, plus marketing and writing advice. Editing and evaluating manuscripts are our specialties. Why not take a look? —Lynn Goodwin

Preorder Jeanne Baker Guy’s *You’ll Never Find Us: A Memoir* – “The story of how my children were stolen from me and how I stole them back,” debuting August 17, 2021.

The Presence of Absence by Linda Hoye is a spiritual memoir about a sacred journey to a lost mother, a found family, and an encounter with divine love.

Writing Workshop in Gorgeous Victorian. November 6-7. "How Writing 20 Minutes a Day Can Change Your Life." Sherman, Texas. Award-winning author/writing coach Len Leatherwood. Info: lenleatherwood@gmail.com.

Many are escaping into the oblivion of addiction in this dystopian time. Walk with Marilea C. Rabasa along *Stepping Stones: A Memoir of Addiction, Loss, and Transformation*, available on Amazon.

Getting divorced is one thing; being divorced is another! Jude Walsh’s *Post-Divorce Bliss: Ending Us and Finding Me* offers eight practices and journal prompts to create your new life.

As a memoir coach, **I help people write and share their life stories.** I’m here to help you get started, stay motivated, and publish—with delight. Sarah White, firstpersonprod.com.

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/](https://www.storycircle.org/donate/)

Angels (\$1,000+)

Susan Albert
Stephanie Raffelock

Guardians (\$150+)

Shawn LaTorre
Janice Kvale
Marlene Samuels
John Webber

Friends (\$100)

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

Contributors In Kind (\$200+)

Shawn LaTorre
Len Leatherwood
Teresa Lynn

Helpers (\$50)

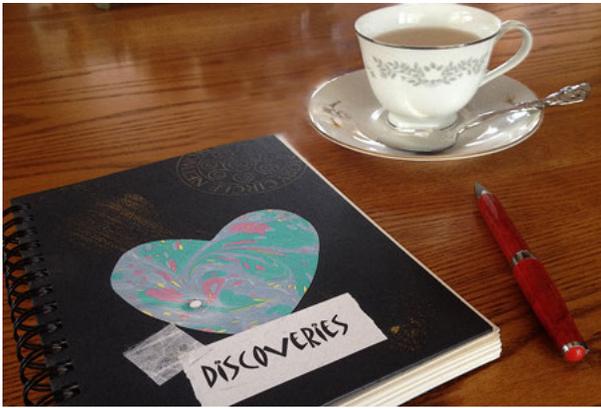
Anonymous (5)
Lorraine Cathro
Sonja Dalglish
Barbara Frandsen
Darlene Goetzman
Jeanne Guy
Ann Haas
Judith Helburn
Betty McCreary
Danelle Sasser
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Paypal Giving Fund, Benevity, and Amazon Smile

We also wish to thank all who contributed through their purchases from the above online businesses. SCN has received \$261 in donations from them so far this year.

Story Circle Board of Directors

Last year, our board members 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.



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 “**The Final Say**.” See future topics and deadlines on page 28. 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/>

Listening to Oneself

Debra Dolan
 Vancouver, BC
Debradolani958@gmail.com

One of the joys of being a solo dweller is that I have a greater opportunity to experience life on my own terms. Over time I have become progressively confident to trust myself when confronted with complicated choices about my own circumstances. Although I may resist having the final say in my loving partnership or other interactions, the last word is always mine in terms of conversations with me-myself-and-I. Because I have nothing tangible that is intertwined with anyone—property, pension, children, finances, insurance, healthcare, etc.—every decision is ultimately mine alone. It can be both a blessing and a curse. Imagine taking full responsibility for your own life.

During the past thirty years, I have increasingly had conversations with myself leading to a deeper understanding of my true identity. In tandem, I intentionally observe my feelings, reflect on my past, align as best I can with intrinsic core values, and write everything down. As life advances, becoming closer to ending than beginning, I listen more carefully when the inner voice surfaces.

We don't dialogue; rather, it directs and dispenses, demanding to be heard as protector, sober-second-thought, prohibitor or joy enhancer. My lived experience has demonstrated that if I ignore, disregard, or delay its deeply personal messaging, I have (mostly) been harmed. In times of comfort, it asks why I have abandoned its ever-present care. Intuition has revealed itself, on several occasions, as guardian angel, balancing emotional choices and rational responses. This gut feeling is a mystery that I recently regard as living faith, a form of spiritual guidance, trusting oneself to be instructed by one's self. It is a vibe that I pay attention to when it steps up to communicate.

Learning to listen to myself and becoming more attuned with my mind, body, and spirit has been life-transforming in a myriad of ways. It has helped me to be less judgmental or stressed, and to attract more love and positivity into my day-to-day world. I feel as if I have a friend with me constantly who is encouraging in small, meaningful, and healthy ways to live my best life.

The Final Say

Sharon Steenton
 Cumming, GA
Sharon.steenton@yahoo.com

Goodnight, Papa
 When we come to wake you in the morning
 You'll no longer be here

Your body worn down to clay
 The lifeless remnant of a soul
 Who lived, who cared
 An 86-year-old bouquet

Goodnight, Papa
 Death searched for you,
 Found you and returns you to the Eternal

Your one-way trip to our years
 Gave you a strong will
 To tend to those who needed you most
 And now you must be off to new frontiers

Goodnight, Papa
 Your passing
 Takes you away from our tears

Your lifetime of love and duty
 and unwavering loyalty shown to your wife
 We thank you for those yesterdays
 Filled with memories of love and beauty

Goodnight, Papa
 When we come to wake you in the morning
 We kiss you goodbye

As you journey home, our hearts are broken
 After the distressing milieu of the morning
 I find your yellow sock tangled in the sheets
 Your final say, one last whisper of life, unspoken

A Tribute to the Cigar Box, Cigars, and the Men Who Smoked Them

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

Cigar boxes are no longer a part of childhood. But once upon a time, cigar boxes were as common as 1943 steel pennies. For children of my generation, a cigar box wasn't about the processed, aromatic tobacco leaves our fathers smoked, but rather about creativity. Our childhood was manifested in little treasures—a Christmas pocketknife, a few illicit firecrackers, coins, discarded costume jewelry, marbles, paper dolls, jacks, and an old watch that didn't work. The cigar box served as a sort of pirate's treasure chest for these valuables, carefully hidden under the bed away from snoopy siblings.

A cigar box was equally useful in its parts for construction projects. The sides suggested airplane wings and often became such. The top and bottom could be split, useful for making aircraft cabins, hulls of boats, bodies of cars, and miniature dollhouses.

Before going back to school in August, we kids received our free cigar box from our local grocer who always saved his empty cigar boxes for us. I used mine for my pencils, erasers, ruler, compass, crayons, glue, and that tiny package of tissues for my nose.

As for the cigars that came in those boxes, it seems that those of us of my generation remember our fathers, strong and lean, young survivors of the Depression and World War II, work-stained in overalls or khakis, who, after a long day on the farm or in the refinery, celebrated life as well as the birth of their child with a *gasper*; happy at the joy of simply being alive, of being able to raise a family, and being able to feed their children.

These men, no longer rationed by desperate poverty, and who'd survived the battlefield, splurged on a box of cigars. Sure, these cigars weren't very good, but that wasn't important. Smoking cigars was the hard-won celebration, the final say, for men who'd not known much in the way of food, clothes, or shoes in boyhood. They lost themselves in it; everything faded away—their worries, their problems, their thoughts—all faded into the smoke, and they were at peace.

The Chair

Pat LaPointe
Prospect Heights, IL
Grampat8@comcast.net

I see you there in the worn-out chair you refused to give up. Of course, there's a cigarette burning in the ashtray. It's a menthol for sure—yuck! You know I'd rather go through withdrawal than take one of those. And yes, I know you feel the same way about my cigs. Didn't you once call them twigs with a filter?

I hear you now. You ask, "Did I tell you the one about the nun, the priest, and the hotel?" Even if you had told it to me before, I'd gladly listen again, just to hear your voice.

I touch your hand. You seem surprised. I know you've been ashamed of the red, flaking scales that cover your body. But you're my "little brother," and nothing you are, say or do would keep me from wanting to be close to you. Do you know, do you remember, I was holding your hand so tight as you took your last breath?

You're standing up now. You want me to sit in the chair? I hear you say, "Please sit." And as I do, I know I'm not imagining the warmth I feel, much like your hugs that once engulfed me.

Thinking Ahead

Mary Jarvis
Amarillo, TX
maryejarvis@gmail.com

Who has the final say?
Is it about what I do
Or is it about what I've done
Or something else?

Maybe I have the final say about many things.
Where I live and how I live.
Where and how I spend my days.
Where I spend my final days.

And other things—
The things I choose to do.
The things I care about.
The things I support with my money and time and energy.

And so moving forward—
Being curious.
Learning new things
Climbing rock chimneys and wooden fences.

CONGRATULATIONS to Pat LaPointe!

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

Inner Sanctum

Cynthia Treglia
Austin, TX
ctreglia@gmail.com

Expanding the Possibilities

Margaret Dubay Mikus
Lake Forest, IL
margaret@fullblooming.com

When I was born, my parents chose my name. By the time I was age three, they identified my personality. Family, friends, and acquaintances, throughout my life, informed me of who I was, or should be, or could be, through no fault of their own.

Their words mattered. As I grew into a young woman, I dragged those opinions around with me like the tattered, stuffed bear of my childhood, unable to discern the real me from the conditioned one. There was always a small, quiet part of me that questioned the validity of who I believed I was. This light deep inside of me whispered my truth, though often had a difficult time being heard. Mostly the overbearing cacophony of thoughts running through my head drowned it out like a bully asserting its dominance over the calm, steady truth whose power could instantly render the oppressor impotent, but only with my permission.

As I matured, I found ways to unearth the voice within, releasing significant parts of my being that surprised and delighted me. I also realized that the light deep inside had a louder and more substantial voice than I had originally thought. I learned that I am the authority on who I am. I have the final say regarding my life and the lessons along the way. I choose my own awakening.

The final decision has nothing to do with who I think I am or believe myself to be. The decision is my saying “yes” to the Divine, to the truth, and then allowing the veracity of who and what I am to re-emerge and assert itself in my life, obliterating any and all lies that I erroneously took to be true.

We are not taught to recognize our magnificence, or that we are an aspect of the Divine. We are conditioned, albeit mostly unknowingly, to accept an outer authority shaping us and sending us out into the world with a mistaken identity. All of this for the purpose of using a lifetime to simply remember the holy and sacred truth of our existence, and to live from that knowing.

I am responsible.

I am one who said to the Universe:

“Let the Truth be known”

and now Truth is spilling out
all over the place.

Voices being seen and heard
that had long been silenced.

Except by the Truth-averse
of which there are many
maybe diminishing.

In this time of chaotic
tumultuous upheaval

Love steps forward to help, to serve.

Fear continues acting from apparent self-interest.

And to the Universe I now say

“Let Love transform Fear

with all necessary reassurance.

Let deep healing of chasms begin...

and soon please. Thank you. Amen.”

We are One

standing in shadow, in sun.

Time Travel

Ariela Zucker
Ellsworth, ME

<https://paperdragonme.wordpress.com/>, Ldplus4u@yahoo.com

Fifteen years ago, I visited my hometown in Israel. It felt like traveling back in time—no visible changes on the surface but a vague sense of loss lingering in the air.

A lunch with my former employer, discussing money-generating ideas for her nonprofit organization, an afternoon coffee with my old friend Rachel—pleasant, comfortable, and familiar. Known scripts I heard so many times before. It took only 24 hours to convince me that my former life was a closed chapter.

Waiting for my flight back, I sat in the newly built Tel Aviv airport. Everything looked bigger, showy, with chrome and glass everywhere. I watched the water fountain in the center of the departure hall rising and falling, while reading the colorful signs around—variations on the same theme: “There is no place like home.” So easy to slip back into the known and familiar, like sliding your feet into worn house slippers—comfortable but not very exciting. It was time to stop, breathe, and choose a different path.

A week later, not far from my current home, I sat at the water edge, my legs in the water tossing small pebbles across the shallow tide pools. I watched them create a series of small waves, circles within circles. Pronounced at the center, they become gradually less distinct until they faded. The rhythmic calming movement; bend and pick up a stone, toss it in the air, the soft splash as it touches the water surface, creating concentric waves. The sun warm on my back, the water licking my feet, and the need to retreat towards the shore as the tide moved in.

I remembered a man I knew growing up who said, “You can only know who you are if you know where you came from.” I wondered if he realized that even though we came from the same small neighborhood in Jerusalem, from the same four-stories apartment building, we had nothing in common. Is it really about a place, about where you came from, or about taking yourself with you wherever you go?

My Final Rhyme

Bette J. Lafferty
Boerne, TX
Bette.j.lafferty@gmail.com

We always knew this day would come.
Joking as to who would go first.
Cleaning my playroom would challenge you,
Living alone, for me, would be worse.

You took me to so many places
That once were only dreams.
We crisscrossed our great country,
Climbing mountains and crossing streams.

We had so many good times,
Some rough times came along too.
Our marriage never reached perfection,
But then, what couples ever do?

The acceptance and understanding
That some things just don't change,
The give and take, the angry words,
Were all part of the marriage game.

You seldom said, "I love you,"
But you gave me so much more.
You tried to teach me all you knew,
A task of love you freely bore.

My eyes so full of love for you
Have closed their final time,
The service over, the people gone,
Making this my final rhyme.

Budding Entrepreneur

Mary Jo West
San Clemente, CA
mjwestsc@gmail.com

My brothers and I loved playing with clay and making all kinds of objects and animal figurines. I especially enjoyed making turtles, cats, dogs, and horses.

One day, while riding my bike, I discovered a mound of grayish sand-colored clay nestled in between massive broken concrete slabs at an excavation site near our home. As a ten-year-old, I thought I'd hit the jackpot.

I rushed home, picked up our Red Flyer wagon and returned to the site with my brother Bob. We loaded the wagon with clay and hauled it up a steep hill back to our house. To make our treasure more malleable, I hosed it down with water, and then shaped it into three-by-six-inch blocks. After smoothing the edges, we wrapped each one in newspaper and tied it with string.

"There," I said to Bob, "I'm going to sell them. Maybe I'll make enough to buy that Canasta game we've wanted."

Making a sign out of a cardboard box, I used a crayon to write in big, red letters: "Play With Clay, On Sale, Ten Cents Each." I leaned it against the back of a small table, sat in a lawn chair, and waited. In a couple of hours, the kids in the neighborhood had bought every block I had on display. I couldn't wait to share my news at our dinner table that night.

The next day, after the blocks dried out, Mom started getting phone calls from the neighbors. They all had the same complaint. Their kids thought they were buying clay, but it wasn't clay at all. It was just plain old mud!

Mom made me go door-to-door to apologize and pay back all the money, every penny of the dollar and fifty cents I earned.

Settling Scores

Ariela Zucker
Ellsworth, ME
<https://paperdragonme.wordpress.com/>, Ldplus4u@yahoo.com

"The entire world is a very narrow bridge, and the most important thing is not to be afraid at all."

Rabbi Nachman of Breslev

I run their faces one by one like in a police lineup. Make them stand in a straight line facing me and then in profile, maybe facing the wall. Yes, at the time, they all seemed like the ultimate villains, but not anymore.

I dive into my memory to recheck the facts, shake the dust off and examine the evidence. Run the old scripts of "I said... She/he said," over and over. Words said at the heat of the moment. From across the span of time, I strive to reconstruct

the hurt feelings, the anger, and the sense of betrayal. I close my eyes and try to concentrate.

I could easily pull out all those that I was ready to hurt at that split second in the past. Determined that my face will be the last thing they'll ever remember, even if they did not wish for it. But these moments are too far gone.

Time, like a miracle worker, softens the angles and portrays new ones, not seen, being blinded by rage. What doesn't kill you makes you stronger is the only thing that stands up, unchallenged by the test of the passing years. In the end, time always has the final say.

To Leave or Not to Leave

Danelle Sasser
Austin, TX
dsasser@wolfsonnet.com

My husband Dan and I arrived at the Chisos Mountain Lodge in Big Bend National Park late on a Thursday afternoon, just a few hours after a wildfire started about eight miles away from the Lodge, where we were scheduled to stay for four nights. From our balcony, I could see the smoke on the other side of the south rim, blowing away from us, which meant the fire wasn't headed our way.

On Friday, we came down from the mountains and explored the western side of the park. When we returned, we could see more smoke, but the wind still favored us. Saturday morning, I was up at 5:00 a.m. to take long exposure shots of the stars. I could see a pale white glow where the fire was, but I was astounded when I saw that the first images on the back of my camera showed a dramatic orange glow, with the Milky Way appearing to grow out of it. Every shot I took, the orange glow was different, continuously changing like a living thing. I was already in awe of the huge number of stars I could see and the beauty of the Milky Way that only a long exposure on the camera could capture, but the fire made me feel even smaller and more vulnerable.

We stayed up in the mountains on Saturday, and I kept watching the smoke. It started to get bigger, and the wind changed direction. For the first time, I could smell smoke. At 3:30 p.m., members of the staff told visitors that they should be prepared to evacuate, although no one knew if it would be needed. We immediately packed everything and loaded our car with most of it. I really didn't want to leave, because I wanted to spend more time with my camera, and who knows when we could get reservations here again, and probably nothing would happen. At 4:30 p.m., Dan said, "We're leaving." We found out later that the official evacuation order was announced at 6:00 p.m. As usual, Dan was right.

Pandemic White

a pantoum
Kathy Zimmerman
Littleton, MA
Kathyzimm13@yahoo.com

The steely white strands stuck in her hairbrush
cannot discourage the discouraging reality.
She passes a mirror, catches a glimpse.
Who is that white haired person?

She can no longer discourage discouraging reality
unveiled by a deadly covid pandemic.
Who is that white haired person left
unrescued by the magic hairdresser?

Unveiled by a deadly covid pandemic
what inheritance, athletics, and dark brown color could hide;
No more trips to the magic hairdresser—and
much closer to the grave than she'd dared abide.

Athletics, inheritance, and dark brown hair could fool;
at forty, everyone thought thirty; at fifty, forty; but never sixty-eight.
Closer to the grave than she'd dared to see
and now, how to accept mortality.

At forty they thought thirty; at fifty, forty; no, never sixty-eight.
Now it's her children's hearts that beat at life's core;
accepting mortality, her new clarion call—
she at high risk for eternity.

The Final Say

Patricia Roop Hollinger
Westminster, MD
woodscrone@gmail.com

For years, my son, Michael Bubel, lived with chronic pain from thoracic outlet syndrome. Medication coupled with the pain changed his personality, and our family missed the person he used to be.

In 2008, Michael moved from Maryland to South Carolina for a new beginning. It took him months to detox from prescribed and unprescribed pain relievers. His first Christmas in South Carolina, he returned to Maryland for a visit and spent a week with me. I was elated to see that Michael had returned, both physically and mentally. We saw the movie *Marley and Me*, had a meal at Olive Garden, and pigged out on potato chips and onion dip. Michael was back, and he assured me there would never be another suicide attempt as there had been a previous one during this saga.

On May 2, 2009, I received a phone call from Michael's father saying "Pat, Michael's dead." I felt like a brick had hit my chest. It just could not be true. With the passage of time, I embraced those last fond memories that we shared together. And now, when my husband leaves the house, I make sure our final words reflect our caring for each other, for we never know when a good-bye might be the final say.

Ode to Steven

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

Steven shared his love of music,
taught his students how to sing;
instruments and voices joining,
making Bach a living thing!
People list'ning at his concerts
caught a glimpse of beauty true,
saw beyond the everydayness
to a vision bright and new.

Though it seems his voice is gone now,
lost to cancer's deadly grip,
those he taught will be inspired
to keep on making music live.
Now his spirit soars forever
free from bodily restraints;
listening, encouraging, and
making music with the saints!

(Sing to Beethoven's *Hymn to Joy*)

Eileen

Doris Clark
Minooka, IL
dorisjrdc@aol.com

Some people called her Auntie Eileen.

I called her Mom.

She came from a time of strife. I was always told she was born in 1912; however, the 1920 and 1940 census say she was born in 1913. Who really knows? She was a young child during WWI. Married at nineteen to the husband who would be the father to her twelve children (the first child died as an infant). He remained the only man in her life even after many difficult years and a separation.

Each day she baked, cooked, and/or washed clothes. It was necessary to be inventive when it came to cooking. Eleven hungry mouths to feed meant she needed a lot of food. A lot of food that she didn't have. She grew some in a garden. She raised chickens for the eggs and for the meat, even serving her children the chicken feet boiled and served on a platter. She didn't hesitate to remind us this was a delicacy in some areas of the world.

She lived through the Great Depression, and I wonder if it made any difference in her life when it ended. I wonder what she would think of the current American situation.

People said she was a good woman and "a tough old bird." She continued to get up, put one foot in front of the other, and kept moving. It seems to me the best part of her life came after her children were grown.

Mom wasn't perfect—who is? If she was lacking, it came from a lack of self-worth. Maybe she thought having children would fix that. And maybe it did temporarily.

Many children brought many grandchildren and great-grandchildren onto the scene. I know for a fact that they brought her great joy. I am glad she got to feel that and be a part of most of their lives.

I had forgotten she was called Auntie Eileen. I reconnected with a cousin from my mom's side. When she spoke of her, she called Mom, "Auntie Eileen." It warmed my heart, and it still does.

Without Him

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

I don't know how
I am managing
to walk, to live in this house,
to even breathe.
My husband of over fifty years
died last night.
He just stopped breathing
and thinking
and talking
and eating and walking.
He just stopped all the things
that one does to live.
He was done with all that.
He left me alone
to find a way to live without him
to learn to walk again
without him. And I wonder
if I'll ever be able
to do that without him
by my side.

One, Two, Buckle My Shoe

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

It's Mother's Day. I know 'cause Daddy has a red carnation pinned to the collar on his shirt.

I'm wearing shorts, red ones of course, and a white T-shirt that has JANE spelled out with candy canes, obviously meant to be worn at Christmastime. Before we left home to drive to Grandma and Grandpa's, Mama had a hissy fit about the candy cane shirt and told Daddy to tell me I couldn't wear it. She told him she'd had it with my stubbornness, for *him* to deal with me. He just shrugged his shoulders and told me, "If you like it that much, wear it." Daddy knows how to handle things so much better than Mama.

Mama tied a red ribbon in my hair and added barrettes for good measure. She hates it when my hair does what it wants and not what she wants. My hair and I have both learned that neither of us will ever please her, so we just don't try any more.

I have on my white sandals, of course. I always wear them when the weather warms up. They have big-girl straps with buckles, and those buckles sometimes give me problems. Mama always says, "Oh, for Pete's sake, Greg. She can do it herself." But sometimes I just want *him* to do it. Why can't she understand that?

I'm sitting beside Daddy on the bench on Grandma and Grandpa's front porch. My right leg drapes off the bench; my left one casually flops over Daddy's lap. My sandal has his undivided attention as he buckles it for me.

I'm so relaxed and at peace, sitting safely beside him. I can say anything, and he won't be mortified, like Mama always is, and I know he isn't going to have one of those conniption fits like Mama does. I feel like I could stay here forever, far away from all that chaos we call home, but my cousin, Allen, is waiting for me so I hop down and run off with him as soon as Daddy finishes his task.

I wish now I'd stayed just a minute longer on the bench beside Daddy, that there hadn't always been a friend waiting for me to play.

Connections: Prose Poem

Suzy Beal
Bend, OR
Suzy.beal46@gmail.com

It sits in its cradle on my desk. It takes messages and flashes the number of who is calling. No more surprises. No operator to ask “number please”—“647, please.” As a teenager, I wait to hear his voice, hoping no one else on the party line is listening. Rotary phones seemed like something from outer space. You dialed with your finger or a pencil and used shoulder rests for the phone so both hands were free. We washed dishes and had conversations at the same time. Busy signals buzzed when you couldn’t reach your number. Touch Tone phones were an improvement. One quick tap and the number registered, no waiting for the rotary to return, but numbers became longer, more digits with added area codes, harder to memorize. Phones stored numbers and all you needed was one digit to dial your number. Speed dialing, but still stuck to the wall. Cell phones go anywhere and everywhere. We can walk and talk, drive and talk, eat and talk. I’m learning how to text and misspell words, that talking person to person is not the thing. I learn “connections” are made and broken in seconds; conversations are only acronyms OMG, LOL, ILY, YOLO. Today, the emoji has final say. I yearn for when “number please” meant the sound of his sweet voice.

The Last Phone Call

Marilea Rabasa
Camano Island, WA
Marilea.rabasa@gmail.com

I hadn’t heard from Annie in quite a while. She used to send me tormenting emails every so often. So at least I knew she was still alive.

But then the emails stopped, and I called her sister to see if she’d had any word from her.

“No, Mama,” Caroline answered. “Let it go. Just let it go,” she repeated, somewhat beleaguered. “Please don’t keep asking me.”

Annie had been a substance abuser for twenty years. I had long since stopped enabling her by giving her money, and that was when she cut herself off from her family.

Her sister had always been particularly close to Annie, and I know that losing her has left an insurmountable void in her life.

But I still clung to hope. I held onto this hope, so deeply buried that I’d forgotten about it. Yet it was there—until that last phone call from Caroline several months later.

“Mama, the police called and asked me to come to the morgue to identify a body. My number was in her wallet,” she informed me, her voice breaking.

I felt my body stiffen. I knew what was coming.

“It was Annie, Mama. She was torn up from a head-on collision. Her right foot was mangled,” she continued. “But it was Annie. I know my sister’s face. It was Annie.”

Steely and controlled, I didn’t dare fall apart.

“Oh baby, I’m so sorry that it’s fallen on you to do this,” I responded, surrendering to the tears beneath my resolve. We both sobbed into the telephone, a receptacle for our grief.

Finally: closure.

“Caroline, you need to take care of yourself. Let Brad handle the details,” I implored, grateful that she had a partner who could support her. “Carter and I will be on the next plane. We’ll contact the Boston and Miami relatives and decide what to do.”

I was taking charge. My daughter had died and needed to be buried. I’d been dreading this moment for many years.

Death, that patient stalker that triumphs over us all, has the final say.

Critical Voice

Margaret Dubay Mikus
Lake Forest, IL
margaret@fullblooming.com

I thought I was safe
from the judging voice
that used to dwell in my head.

I thought I had healed
those scars and tears
replacing them with health.

But under pressure
hairline cracks grew
to yawning crevices

and there, in the dark
the critical voice lurked
ready to come out roaring.

Blindsided, taken by surprise
I was knocked flat and breathless

shocked at such flaws
so far from perfection
I had failed to do enough

to save me...from me.

Mouse Trap

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

Smack!

I know that sound, and almost knock my chair over in my rush to look under the sink.

“You killed it!” The mouse lies lifeless in the trap, its neck smashed by the metal bar. “All she wanted was a piece of cheese, and you killed her.”

“Oh, Jane, quit screaming. The mice are taking over, getting in the cabinets.”

I look back under the sink, and that’s when I see the real horror of what has happened.

“You killed his mommy!” A tiny, trembling mouse sits beside his fallen mother. “How could you do that?” I shriek.

“I didn’t know she had a baby, Jane.” Almost whispering, she says, “Poor little thing.”

The baby lets me pick him up. He’s shaking something fierce.

“Can I keep him?”

“Of course not,” she tells me. “He’ll die if you keep him.”

“If I let him go, you’ll kill him!”

Mama looks toward Daddy, but he for sure doesn’t want to get into this.

“We can’t let them take over the house,” she says, but now she doesn’t sound so sure about it now. “Oh, for pity’s sake, just take him outside and let him go. He’s old enough to take care of himself.” Almost to herself she says, “It doesn’t make a whole lot of sense to kill one and let another go.”

“What about the mama? You can’t just throw her in the trash!”

Daddy says, “Okay, take care of the baby, and I’ll bury his mama.”

Daddy takes her from the trap and we go out the back door. I start to put baby under some flowers against the house where Daddy is burying mama. Then I think that maybe being that close to the house is a bad idea. I run to the back of the yard and put him under the plum bushes.

“Don’t come back to the house,” I tell him. “*Please.*”

I walk back into the kitchen just in time to see the mousetrap drop from Mama’s fingers and hear the clanging sound it makes when it hits the bottom of the metal trashcan.

They Say the Day Will Come

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

They say the day will come
when thoughts of you will bring
a smile
before the trembling lips
and tears
rise up from an inner well
of hopes dashed,
of conversations ended.

Some say to keep busy,
for quietude lets
my heart-held grief
escape its hiding place
to overwhelm
my thoughts:
I see your body
lying on a simple bier
awaiting cremation
on your fiftieth birthday.

Would I could
truly celebrate
your next adventure—
free of pain,
your Spirit
joined with a mysterious muse,
inspiring others
to create the music
which gave your life meaning.

They say the day will come!

Quick Haircut

After Allison
Margaret Dubay Mikus
Lake Forest, IL
margaret@fullblooming.com

To read a face
behind the mask
the metaphorical mask we used to wish
was there covering scars
hiding behind a protective veil
disguising perceived imperfections
Or now, a mask you choose to wear
for common good in this chaotic era
trying to pack all your expression
in the crinkle of skin
around the eyes or the loft
or tilt of eyebrows
Before all this
it was hard enough
to accurately communicate
but now we might need to say:
if you could see my mouth
I am shocked or
I am smiling

The Final Say

Ariela Zucker
Ellsworth, ME

<https://paperdragonme.wordpress.com/>,
Ldplus4u@yahoo.com

Time always keeps the final say.
While we, mortals, struggle with the details,
toiling at bending them so they will fit
the world of our beliefs, one
we create and recreate for ourselves.
We slide backward, then inch our way up,
then slide again.
A constant effort to get a handle on life
we cannot let go of.
A Sisyphean task, we're doomed to perform
while time stands witness.

Pure Joy

Mary Jo West
San Clemente, CA
mjwestsc@gmail.com

On the beach
next to the pier,
a robust, middle-aged man
wearing gray overalls,
a baseball cap,
and green fluorescent vest
stands on white, spent
foam of surf.

Two, long, bamboo poles tied
three feet apart are dipped
into bright blue bucket
of sudsy water.

Smiling, he raises poles
high above his head,
waves them back and forth.

Giant colored bubbles
reflecting in sunlight float
in cool, winter breeze
to the sandy shore.

Barefoot kids, scatter,
squeal and giggle,
trying to catch a bubble
before it bursts
and vanishes in the air.

Children's joy
is infectious

Wearing Our Lives

Patricia Eagle
Alamosa, CO

<https://patriciaeagle.com/blog/>, peeagle@gmail.com

Standing on my tiptoes, I can almost see my boobs in the medicine cabinet mirror. Here in their seventh decade, they've found home closer to my waist.

Several years ago a close Texas friend, who prioritizes maintaining her seventy-year-old body with lifts, tucks, fillers, hormones, Botox and Pilates, suggested to me that I buy a good bra.

"This is a good bra!" I insisted.

"You need more lift," came her stern response in a tone that implied I suffered from a lack of self-care.

When I visit my old home state, I pay more attention than normal to how I dress. Sometimes I wear mascara. And, damn it, I take my good bra, the one I invested in with a Kick-Starter campaign, precisely because it offers support that avoids irritating back clasps, pressing straps with annoying adjustments and squeezing my ribcage. My 38D girls may be soft and slack, but they're heavy and have suffered years of being navigated into cups. These days if I try to manipulate where they ride in a bra, they simply sneak out the bottom. They refuse to be proudly hoisted anymore. My braless and pre-sports bra days of the 70s and 80s—with insufficient protection from miles of running and countless soccer seasons, then suffering through ballooning breasts from relentless periods and pregnancies, along with way too many years of being poked into one torture contraption after another—have simply left my breasts plum wore-out, as my Fort Worth Granny would say.

"I sure don't wanna look like your neighbor," I told my friend. She demanded an explanation. "Her high riders look like a sixteen-year-old's." What older woman would want such unnaturally perky breasts?

When did drooping breasts, wrinkles, and gray hair come to mean an older woman didn't care about herself? At what point did aging become a dirty word? Some of us choose to wear the life we've lived. Challenges we've endured nestle right into our physical geology, welcome reminders that we fought hard and won.

Please, my boobs plead, may we finally rest in peace.



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.

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Announcing Story Circle Network’s First Annual Women’s Poetry Competition!

“Poetry is the language of the soul.” These are the words Kim Rosen uses to begin her book, *Saved by a Poem*. We know that many of you know this because we love reading your poems in the True Words section of our quarterly *Journal*.

For over two decades, we have sponsored a LifeWriting competition for SCN members, and now we’re pleased to announce our first annual Poetry competition.

Prizes of \$100, \$75, and \$50 will be awarded to the top three entries. The first-place poem will be published in the Story Circle Journal, and all winning poems will be featured on SCN’s website.

Topic: Place

“What I could remember about that natural world from which our family had been separated by so little was a combination of smells, the feel of the air, a sense of the presence of Nature as a living entity all around me. All of that had been deeply imprinted in me, but more in the blood and bone and muscles – an instinctive memory – than a precise memory of events or people. I remembered it with my body, or maybe I remembered it with another sense for which we have no name but is no less real for that.”

Sharon Butala, *The Perfection of the Morning*

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“How hard it is to escape from places. However carefully one goes they hold you—you leave little bits of yourself fluttering on the fences—little rags and shreds of your very life.”

Katherine Mansfield, *Katherine Mansfield: Memories of L.M.*

###

“You have to pick the places you don’t walk away from.”

Joan Didion, *A Book of Common Prayer*

###

Maybe it’s real, a place you remember or somewhere you long to be. Or maybe it exists only in the rich realm of your imagination. Either way, you feel it with your body or another, unnamed, sense. Using poetry, take us there. Tell us who you are when you are there, what the place fills you with, or asks of you in return. Paint a picture of it with your words.

We’re looking for entries that are fresh and original, responsive to the topic, rich in detail, and have been polished and carefully proofread. Open only to members. Time to renew? Go to <https://www.storycircle.org/registration/>.

Full contest details here: <https://www.storycircle.org/contest/the-story-circle-poetry-competition/>

Open for submissions July 5-August 31, 2021



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:

- Sept 2021: Learning to Listen (Deadline July 15)
- Dec 2021: Conversations with Myself (Deadline Oct 15)

Thirty-one stories were shared by twenty-one SCN members for this issue.

Submit your stories or poetry to:
<https://www.storycircle.org/journal-submission/>

CONGRATULATIONS to Pat LaPointe!

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

2021 Mini Virtual Conference

Looking forward to seeing you at Story Circle's first-ever Virtual Conference, via Zoom on Saturday, October 16, 2021. Our theme is "**Taking Your Writing to the Next Level.**" The conference program will feature three sixty-minute workshops. More details coming soon.

2021 First Annual Women's Poetry Competition

SCN is pleased to announce its first poetry competition. Feeling creative? Ponder this year's topic, *Place*, over a cup of tea or your favorite beverage and start writing. Open for submissions July 5-August 31, 2021. Full contest details here. <https://www.storycircle.org/contest/the-story-circle-poetry-competition/>

2021 Real Women Write Anthology

Last year, our subject was *Living on COVID Time*. This year, SCN women are looking ahead. For our next anthology, please explore your visions of what's to come *after* COVID. What do you imagine with longing, envision with excitement, or anticipate with anxiety in the years ahead? *Now* is the time to start writing for our 2021 subject: *Beyond COVID: Leaning Into Tomorrow*. **Member submissions open July 1.**

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 all the important ways to participate here: <https://www.storycircle.org/call-for-volunteers/> Email us at storycircle@storycircle.org with Volunteer in the subject line. We need your support.