

## Announcing the 2022 Sarton Awards and Gilda Prize Shortlists



— MEMOIR —

*Chasing Zebras* by Margaret Nowaczyk  
*Desert Chrome: Water, a Woman, and Wild Horses in the West* by Kathryn Wilder  
*The Memory of All That: A Love Story about Alzheimer's* by Mary MacCracken  
*Mother Lode: Confessions of a Reluctant Caregiver* by Gretchen Staebler  
*These Walls Between Us: A Memoir of Friendship Across Race and Class* by Wendy Sanford  
*Working 9 to 5: A Women's Movement, a Labor Union, and the Iconic Movie* by Ellen Cassedy  
*You'll Never Find Us* by Jeanne Guy

— CONTEMPORARY FICTION —

*Attribution* by Linda Moore  
*Blurred Fates* by Anastasia Zadeik  
*Exiled South* by Harriet Cannon  
*I Meant to Tell You* by Fran Hawthorne  
*Malawi's Sisters* by Melanie Hatter  
*You Don't Know What I Have Done* by Sheila McNaughton

— HISTORICAL FICTION —

*Cora's Kitchen* by Kimberley Brown  
*Cuban Quartermoon* by Ann Putnam  
*The Lives of Diamond Bessie* by Jody Hadlock  
*Shayna* by Miriam Ruth Black  
*Singing Lessons for the Stylish Canary* by Laura Stanfill

— NONFICTION —

*Formidable* by Elisabeth Griffith  
*Her Name Was Margaret* by Denise Davy  
*Manifesting Justice* by Valena Beety  
*Recognizing Autism in Women and Girls* by Wendela Whitcomb Marsh

— GILDA PRIZE —

*Yaya's Big Black Purse* by Tassie Kalas  
*Yes Again* by Sallie H. Weissinger

The Women's Book Awards are sponsored by the Story Circle Network, an international nonprofit association of women writers.

- **The Sarton Awards** are presented in five categories (memoir, historical fiction, contemporary fiction, nonfiction, and middle-grade fiction). The award program is named in honor of May Sarton, who is 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 and girls and are limited to books published by independent authors and publishers.
- **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).

Winners receive a cash prize of \$100, a commemorative award, gold seals, and a virtual seal for their websites, as well as advertising in SCN's eletters and website and a year's membership in SCN. Winners are also invited to attend and be honored at Stories from the Heart, SCN's national conference (virtual or onsite). Finalists receive silver seals and a virtual seal for their websites.

The 2023 Sarton/Gilda competition will open in April and close on October 31.

Watch for the announcement on the [SCN website](https://www.storycircle.org/contest/story-circle-womens-book-awards/) (<https://www.storycircle.org/contest/story-circle-womens-book-awards/>).

(More on page 7)

# Letter from the President



Len Leatherwood

Dear Story Circle Network Writing Sisters,

With the coming of a new year, change is in the air, and here at Story Circle Network we have a few transitions that are important to share.

At the close of 2022, we said goodbye to our beloved Jeanne Guy in her role as vice president of the Story Circle Board. Jeanne has served as both president and vice president of

our organization over the past several years, and we can't blame her for wanting a little rest. However, I am pleased to say that she has agreed to remain as a board member. So we will continue to benefit from her continued presence. SCN has flourished under Jeanne's fine leadership, and we are most grateful for her wisdom, hard work, and quick wit. We are very happy Jeanne will not be going far away.

I would also like to thank Pat Bean, longstanding board member, who decided to retire in December 2022. Pat has served on the board for many years, and we have appreciated her level head, kind heart, and clear vision for SCN's future. We will miss her but hope to continue reading her wonderful interviews in the *Journal* with SCN members and Sarton winners.

With the arrival of 2023, I would like to welcome Susan Schoch as our new vice president. Susan is a long-term SCN member and serves as the editor and book coordinator for the *Real Women Write* anthologies and SCN's 2022 edition of *Kitchen Table Stories*. I am delighted that Susan has stepped into this leadership role and look forward to sharing ideas and implementing plans for our organization's growth. Thank you, Susan!

I am also pleased to announce that Shelley Johnson Carey will remain in the position of secretary for the board for another year. Shelley, Susan, and I will be joined on the executive

board by Shawn LaTorre and Linda Hoye. Shawn is the co-chair for the College Match Mentoring program and coordinator for our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiative. Linda is SCN's competitions coordinator and "One Woman's Day" blog editor. Other advisors for the Story Circle Network Executive Board are Susan Albert, SCN's founder; Teresa Lynn, administrator and webmaster; and Liz Beaty, program coordinator. The role of the executive board is to provide organizational direction for the board of directors and to act on behalf of the entire board in emergency situations.

Our most exciting news is that the board of directors has approved monies for the hiring of a marketing consultant for our organization this year. This will allow us to reach out more effectively to women, both nationally and internationally. We are already in the process of interviewing consultants and will have that person in place in the very near future. As SCN members, you will have the chance to watch as we implement the consultant's suggestions to improve our programs and social media outreach. We will keep you updated about our progress all along the way.

We will also implement a new teaching platform in 2023, announce another international writing workshop and sightseeing tour, and offer another online SCN conference. In addition, we are discussing an in-person writing workshop, and will continue our commitment to our Young Women's Advisory Board and our DEI efforts. Of course, we plan to continue the other classes, webinars, programs, reviews, publications, and contests that have helped Story Circle Network remain vital for the past twenty-six years. In other words, we remain committed to our beloved organization's goal to help *all* women tell their stories.

We are grateful to count you among us, writing sisters. Your love of writing and passion for success propels all of us along this path, and we are most appreciative. Happy writing to you!

*Hugs around the Circle,* Len  
Len Leatherwood, SCN President

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## Story Circle Network's Mission

*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 *Story Circle Network Journal*, our quarterly newsletter, 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.

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

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ISSN: 1093-7528

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### Membership Rates

One Year \$60 if receiving  
*online* publications;  
 \$75 (US) if receiving *printed* publications  
 \$90 Canada & Mexico  
 \$95 Elsewhere

Foreign Memberships: Please pay by  
 International Postal Money Order.

**Missed Issues:** For members subscribed to printed issues of the *Story Circle Network Journal*, we try to ensure that it 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.

You can read our monthly *Flash* eletters online [here](https://www.storycircle.org/publications/).

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

## Editor's Corner

Welcome to our celebration of Women's History Month. See the "Breaking News" section for information about an upcoming free presentation by a panel of five inspiring historical fiction authors and led by Ellen Notbohm, a prior Sarton Award winner in historical fiction.

This issue is filled with the myriad ways Story Circle supports the preservation of women's history through the encouragement of women from all walks of life to share their stories. Read on to discover more about past and upcoming events, enjoy our usual lineup of informative and intriguing articles, and of course our members' unique stories and poems in "True Words"—the heart of the *Journal*.

Happy reading, *Paula*

## In Memorium

*Story Circle Network thanks Marlene Samuels for a generous donation made in memory of her mother, Sara Tuvel Bernstein. Marlene included the following tribute.*

**Sara Tuvel Bernstein**  
 (04/25/1918 - 09/02/1983)



To those who met her casually—neighbors, shopkeepers, our teachers, and her clients—she was an energetic, upbeat dynamo of a woman, possessed of a remarkably quick wit and a fabulous sense of humor. She was an attractive, petite, blond-haired, blue-eyed woman with a Romanian accent. She also was my mother.

At twenty-three, Sara Tuvel witnessed the worst humanity was capable of delivering. She'd seen her home decimated and her parents and most of her family murdered along with her hopes and dreams for education and career. She went from relative happiness and comfort to imprisonment, starvation and suffering in Ravensbruck and Dachau concentration camps where the death rate was 98%. Yet during those years, she kept her younger sister and their closest friend alive.

The tragic irony is that after surviving, recovering, and building a new life not only once in Canada but again in the USA, she died at sixty-five. By contemporary standards, she died young.

In an era before we understood the impact of war traumas—now referred to as post-traumatic stress (PTS)—it's beyond remarkable that when I was growing up, Sara maintained an unimaginable optimism (not to be confused with naiveté), humor, and a zest for life even during the most challenging times for our family. She inculcated in me her own hard-learned survivor's life's lessons in daily, yet subtle, examples.

Sara Tuvel was a woman whose attitudes about knowledge, education, and independence were unquestionably decades ahead of her time. She drove home critical values about these and life of the mind—requisite for independence. "Always remember that what's inside your mind, your thoughts and values, can't be stolen from you. They're critical to leading a meaningful and moral life."

My great sorrow was that she died two weeks after my wedding and didn't live long enough to see my children. My great joy is that she exercised her well-honed will to live and rallied long enough to be at my wedding. Sara Tuvel Bernstein was a hard act to follow for sure. Yet even now, when I find myself in difficult times facing quandaries that feel insurmountable, I recite my mantra, "What would Sara do?"

## BREAKING NEWS. . .

Join us for a **FREE Virtual Panel Discussion . . .**

### Women's History Month Special Event

In celebration of Women's History Month (March), Story Circle Network will be hosting a special, free event on March 15, 2023, at 6:00 p.m. Central with five historical fiction authors whose books inspired us during the 2020 and 2021 Sarton Book Award seasons: Kathleen Williams Renk (*Vindicated: A Novel of Mary Shelley*), Celia Jeffries (*Blue Desert*), Jennifer Smith Turner (*Child Bride*), Samantha Specks (*Dovetails in Tall Grass*), and Margaret Rodenberg (*Finding Napoleon*). Although these stories are all fictional, each novel required extensive research to ensure historical accuracy.

Ellen Notbohm, prior Sarton Award Winner in historical fiction (*The River by Starlight*) and current Sarton Book Award coordinator in this genre, will be facilitating the discussion. With her unique perspective on the topic and process, Ellen will explore the individuality of each author and story in conversation. "Some of the questions might be a little offbeat," Ellen says, "but they will delve into aspects of historical fiction writing not frequently discussed."


*We here at Story Circle Network believe that honoring women's history through writing and reading historical fiction is a meaningful way to share the stories and experiences of the women who lived before us.*

[Click here](https://www.storycircle.org/webinars/) (<https://www.storycircle.org/webinars/>) to register in advance for this event!

**IN CELEBRATION OF WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH**  
**STORY CIRCLE NETWORK PRESENTS**

*A panel discussion with five prior finalists and winners of the Sarton Award in Historical Fiction, facilitated by Ellen Notbohm, Historical Fiction Award Winning Author & Coordinator for the Sarton Award in Historical Fiction.*

**MARCH 15, 2023**  
**6PM CT / 4PM PT**  
**COST: FREE**



**Story Circle NETWORK** *Where women become the authors of their lives.*  
*Women's life stories matter. We're committed to helping you tell yours.*

Start writing now for SCN's 2023 anthology . . .

### Real Women Write — Mothers and Mentors: The Art of Nurturing

Nurturing is what the world needs right now. The impulse to care for and encourage the growth or development of any life provides nourishment to all life everywhere. From protecting our planet mother Gaia to rearing a healthy child, we give and receive nurturing throughout our lifetime. The world is suffering from a lack of care. Nonetheless, teachers appear, and we feel the power of nurturers in our lives. Helping life to thrive matters and is an essential part of being human.

For the 2023 issue of our annual anthology, *Real Women Write*, we ask you to reflect on the varied ways—whether

the good, the bad, or the ugly—that we mother and are mothered, and on the significance of giving and receiving guidance and care. What part has nurturing played in your life? Who or what has nurtured you? How have you experienced mothering and/or mentoring?

This is a powerful topic and a great publication opportunity. It's not too early to begin writing! **Submissions will be open May 1 - July 1.** Check the SCN website for [updates](#).

## BREAKING NEWS. . .

### SCN Announces Third Annual Poetry Competition

Coinciding with National Poetry Month, our third annual poetry competition opens for submissions in April. Our judges look forward to reading your work again this year, so don your poetry caps and start writing! 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.

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

**Open for submissions April 16 – June 10, 2022**

**Topic: Lost and Found**

“In search of my mother's garden, I found my own.”  
—Alice Walker

“When I don't know what I'm doing, I look like I don't know what I'm doing. When I'm excited or nervous, I look excited or nervous. And when I am lost, which is frequently, I look lost.”  
—Elizabeth Gilbert

“You are unique, and if that is not fulfilled, then something has been lost.”—Martha Graham

We are looking for entries that are fresh and original, responsive to the topic, rich in detail, and that have been polished and carefully proofread. Open only to members. To join go [here](https://www.storycircle.org/registration/) (<https://www.storycircle.org/registration/>).

**The 2023 Blog Post Competition  
Winners will be announced in  
Mid-April.**

**The 2023 LifeWriting Competition  
will open July 30.**

### Coming soon to Story Circle Online Classes ... Guided Autobiography

by Sarah White

“I am surprised the effect this writing class had on me. I feel revitalized.”

“I loved the wonderful stories, their variety and depth.”

“I loved the nonjudgmental attitudes and gentle suggestions of the participants.”

These are the words of past participants in my Guided Autobiography (GAB) workshops. One of my first discoveries, as I explored becoming a personal historian, was the Guided Autobiography methodology developed by Dr. James Birren in the 1970s at the University of Southern California.

“The purpose of GAB is to help people see that memoir writing isn't reserved for the rich and the famous,” said Cheryl Svensson, executive director of the Birren Center for Guided Autobiography. “It isn't just for people who are good writers. The act of writing down the story of your life belongs to every person, because every person has a story, and every story counts.”

To date, the Birren Center has trained over 600 instructors in thirty-three different countries. Dr. Birren originally designed a ten-week curriculum, but instructors frequently adapt that to workshops of various lengths.

I have taught writing workshops for Story Circle since 2009. For the 2023 Spring 1 and 2 terms, I am bringing the Guided Autobiography methodology to my online classes. In “Introduction to Guided Autobiography,” we cover four themes—branching points, family, the role of money in your life, and your major life work or career.

For those who find they want to continue, “Going Deeper into Guided Autobiography” covers the remaining five themes, which are increasingly personal in nature. Students who enroll in “Going Deeper” should have completed “Introduction” or a comparable reminiscence writing workshop. “Going Deeper” will be offered in the summer term. Watch for updates and registration information here: <https://www.storycircle.org/online-classes>

**Sarah White** is an author, ghostwriter, memoir writing coach, and teacher. She holds a bachelor's degree in journalism and an MFA in creative nonfiction. Her published work includes articles in print and online, several business marketing books, and *Write Your Travel Memoirs: 5 Steps to transform your travel experiences into compelling essays*. For more information, visit her website [firstpersonprod.com](http://firstpersonprod.com) and blog [truestorieswelltold.com](http://truestorieswelltold.com).



# Unvarnished

## Questionable Notes on the Writing Life

by Jeanne Baker Guy

### Vaginal Fortitude

*Fortitude*: From the Latin word *fortis*, meaning "strong," in English is used primarily to describe strength of mind.

—Merriam-Webster Dictionary

*Vaginal Fortitude*: Female ability to witness life through strength of mind, patient courage, and emotional power in confronting life's challenges by relying on internal wisdom.

—Jeanne Guy

Just to be clear, I've realized how much I don't like but am hooked on media—be it a book, a sermon, a blog, or a podcast—that tells me they have the answer or solution to my living my best life, in general and as a writer. Even I, in the last articles of this very column, have provided pointers in how to live, how to write, how to move forward.

Enough already!

When was the last time you listened to *your* heart, *your* inner wisdom?

- When did you last turn off the outside noise and let your subconscious, your inner voice (the honest loving one) speak to you?
- When was the last time you took a breath and with curiosity witnessed the clues, the signs, the inspirations?
- When was the last time you meditated, connected with your internal wisdom, and allowed the truth-telling silence to feed, nurture, and nourish you?

Dear sister-writers, where is our vaginal fortitude? Our trust and belief in ourselves? Who are you, and who do you want to be? Maybe this will come across as yet one more piece of advice, but I'm going for it . . . **Incubate!**

*Incubate*: To cultivate, promote, encourage, nurture, foster, nourish optimal environmental conditions for growth.

Incubation happens on a walk. Incubation happens in the shower. It happens in your dreams. It happens when you're gardening. When you're resting. When you're meditating. Incubation is the answer. It is where vaginal fortitude is born. I've spent the last year incubating, trying to determine what writerly path I wanted to follow. I even questioned whether or

not I was a real writer because I decided *not* to write another book.

My memoir, *You'll Never Find Us*, received the 2022 Readers' Favorite Book Awards Silver Medal in Non-Fiction-Memoir. Picture happy dancing. As part of their program, the book was also awarded consideration for representation by Folio Literary Management, but at the end of 2022 was not selected. A Readers' Favorite rep emailed, "...it does not currently fit with [Folio's] representation needs. Although they did not offer any specifics, they did say they loved your book and could see why it was an award winner."

I paid attention to what I considered a strange but strong sense of relief, and wrote a trusted mentor, "This email left me feeling relieved rather than disappointed. Guess I'm on a different path for 2023."

She responded, "Well, that's a pretty strong clue to your secret heart, don't you think? And it's totally wonderful that you have other plans for you and your self."

Len Leatherwood, in her January Story Circle webinar "How to Start (or Revive) Your Writing Habit," posed questions for me to chew on. By focusing on my identity as a writer rather than the habit of *how* I write, I could, through incubation, focus on the heart of the matter. Why do I write? What do I tell myself about being a writer? And what do I need to do to maintain that identity?

I paid attention to my internal guidance. I write because I cannot *not* write. Being a writer is how I see, how I know myself. Len's questions reminded me of the oh-so-basic tenet: Writers write, whether they seek publication or not. With great vaginal fortitude, rather than diving back into the book-publishing world, I chose to make my heart happy by once again creating a self-awareness curriculum and facilitating writing circles for group sharing, deep listening, and conversation. I also love creating articles for this column. And joy of joys, I love my role as a wedding officiant—creating, writing, and delivering kickass wedding ceremonies.

There's a universal truth in what I'm saying. Even if the only thing you've ever written is a check, this "non-advice" holds true for you.

Well, there you have it. Writers and non-writers, incubate and find *your* vaginal fortitude. Personally though, I'd be a little leery of taking advice from a person who tells you to stop taking advice. But, hey, it's your life. Do what you think is best.



**Jeanne Baker Guy** is based in Cedar Park, Texas, and is the author of *You'll Never Find Us: A Memoir*, the true story of how her children were stolen from her and how she stole them back. Past president of SCN, Jeanne also co-authored *Seeing Me: A Guide for Reframing the Way You See Yourself Through Reflective Writing*. Learn more about her books and writing workshops at [www.jeanneguy.com](http://www.jeanneguy.com).

## What's Up with the Sarton/Gilda Team?

The 2022 Sarton/Gilda Book Awards program has moved into its second round with the publication of the finalists list (p. 1). The program, which celebrates the writing of independently published women authors, is named in honor of the memoirist-poet-novelist May Sarton and the comedian-memoirist Gilda Radner, is now in its thirteenth year. Winners of this year's competition will be announced in mid-April. The 2023 competition will open in April and close on October 31. Watch for the announcement on the SCN website.

Planning for the 2023 Sarton/Gilda is already well underway. The program will see another expansion with the addition of a Young Adult category, bringing the categories to seven: Memoir, Historical Fiction, Contemporary Fiction, Young Adult Fiction, Middle Grade Fiction, Nonfiction, and Gilda. Entries are accepted in either print or eBook formats. The competition is held in two rounds with SCN members jurying Round One, and librarians (not affiliated with SCN) judging Round Two.

The program is managed by a team of coordinators—Memoir and Nonfiction: Susan Albert; Contemporary Fiction: Jo Virgil; Historical Fiction: Ellen Notbohm; Gilda: Paula Yost. This year, two new members are joining the team: Regina Allen (Middle Grade and Young Adult) and Christina Wells (Memoir and Nonfiction). Both have previously served as Sarton jurors and are active contributors in one of SCN's online chat groups.



**Regina Allen**, a retired school librarian, is currently at work on a novel about a woman who has lost her way. She is also collaborating with a Coahuiltecan storyteller and an artist on a picture book that will be published by Texas A&M University Press. Regina is a reviewer for SCN's book review program. She lives in Canyon Lake, Texas. Her blog (currently on hiatus): <https://reginamallen.com/>



**Christina M. Wells** has published in the *Northern Virginia Review*, *Crab Fat*, *bioStories*, *Big Muddy*, and *Sinister Wisdom*, as well as in five anthologies, including SCN's 2022 *Real Women Write: Seeing Through Their Eyes*. Christina was a finalist for the 2022 Conger Beasley Jr. Award for Nonfiction and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. She lives in Annandale, Virginia. Her website: <https://bychristinamwells.net>.

Mirroring the growth of independent publishing and the entry of women into the book world, the Sarton/Gilda program has grown steadily since its beginning. The 2022 competition was the largest ever and 2023 is expected to see even more entries. "We are actively looking for jurors," says Susan Albert, who leads the Sarton team. "If you're an SCN member who enjoys books by women and is willing to devote some of your reading time to support women writers and their publishers, we would love to have you join us. Sarton jurors tell us that they look forward to the experience every year and are proud to be part of the program."

Jurors have six weeks (usually in July-November) to read and evaluate three assigned books and to score them via the online rubric. If you're interested, email [susanalbert01@gmail.com](mailto:susanalbert01@gmail.com).

(Continued from page 1)

### Sarton/Gilda Procedures

The Sarton and Gilda competitions are open to women authors whose work is published in English in the United States and Canada. The awards are limited to submissions originally written in English and published by independent publishers, university presses, and author-publishers (self-publishing authors) with editorial offices headquartered in North America. Entries from/about women of color and LBT+ women are welcome in all categories.

Professional librarians not affiliated with SCN select the winners from finalists chosen by first round jurors. Winners receive a cash prize of \$100, a commemorative award, gold seals, and a virtual seal for their websites, as well as advertising in SCN's eletters and website and a year's membership in SCN. Winners are also invited to attend and be honored at Stories from the Heart, SCN's national conference (virtual or onsite). Finalists receive silver seals and a virtual seal for their websites.

## From Sarton Winner to Active SCN Member

### An Interview with Sarah Byrn Rickman

by Pat Bean

*The Sarton isn't just any literary award. It exemplifies what Story Circle Network is all about—honoring the lives of women and girls and providing support for their stories, especially those that might not otherwise be heard. Because of this fundamental connection between our organization and its awards, we are always delighted when a Sarton winner shares her gifts, her energies, and her skills with us.*

There is nothing better for boosting a writer's confidence than winning an award—except maybe winning it twice. And that's exactly what Sarah Byrn Rickman did. She won Story Circle Network's Sarton Award for Biography in 2016 for *Finding Dorothy Scott*, then won again in 2018 for Young Adult Nonfiction with *BJ Erickson: WASP Pilot*.

"Proof of the pudding," Sarah says, is that the award gave her enough confidence to follow the Erickson biography with five more YA biographies about women who flew aircraft for the Army in World War II. Her sixth in the series, *Cornelia Fort: WAFS Pilot*, comes out this month. In addition, the book she wrote for her master's thesis, which is not about the WASP, is currently making its way around New York publishing houses.

Sarah attended her first SCN gathering in Austin in 2018 to accept her second Sarton Award and promptly became a member of a Work-in-Progress group. But what with writing her books, Sarah says she hasn't had much time to become more involved. She relies on her WIP group for support and says, "It's a great group, and our participation varies with each writer's needs. Love it!"

"I knew at age five that I wanted to write books. At thirteen, I read about Amelia Earhart and wanted to learn to fly. Later in life (after age sixty), I managed to do both. Fresh out of college, I began as a reporter for a small suburban Detroit weekly. A year later, I moved downtown to *The Detroit News* to become a staff writer. But after six years, an office romance, followed by marriage and motherhood, interrupted her career. "That's how it was back in the day," she notes, but adds that the outcome was "two wonderful boys who are now adults with children of their own."

Her husband's job, meanwhile, took the family from Michigan to Ohio, where Sarah eventually got a job at a twice-weekly suburban newspaper, the *Centerville-Bellbrook Times*. When



the editor who hired her left, she landed the editor's job. "I felt like I had grabbed the gold ring," she said.

Then she met the administrator of the International Women's Air and Space Museum. This introduction to Women Airforce Service Pilots of World War II (WASP), changed her life. Two years later, Sarah left the editor's job. She wrote and edited her city's newsletter and worked with the museum, which led to her meeting female pilots who had flown during World War II, including Nadine Nagle, who introduced her to the WASP's amazing story.

Sarah then met Nancy Batson Crews, who told her about the Women's Auxiliary Flying Squadron (WAFS)—twenty-eight female pilots who preceded WASP and were the first women to fly military aircraft for the United States. Nancy, who was one of them, asked Sarah to write the WAFS' story. Her request resulted in Sarah's first book, *The Originals*, published in 2001. This month, Sarah will have published thirteen books about female pilots of WWII. "My journey with the WASP of WWII has been an incredible and relevant experience," she says. "Friendship and, yes, hero worship ended up being the connection I needed to produce books that resonate with a specific audience."

"I'm very proud of, and thankful for, my writing path through the years. I've been writing since I made up my own Winnie the Pooh and Piglet story when I was sick with the measles. I wrote short stories in my younger days. I've written for newspapers and magazines. I've created, written, and edited newsletters for Women Writing the West as well as for the WASP Archive at Texas Woman's University and others. I blog," she says.

"And I've loved every minute of it."

*Please join us in thanking Sarah for her generous and very active support of our Sarton Award program! If you would like to share your energies and skills with SCN, as Sarah does, we would love to hear from you. Visit our "[Opportunities](https://www.storycircle.org/opportunities/)" page (<https://www.storycircle.org/opportunities/>) to explore ways you can help.*



**Pat Bean**, staff writer for the *Journal*, is a retired award-winning journalist. She traveled the country in a small RV for nine years 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, Scamp. She blogs [here](https://patbean.net) (<https://patbean.net>).





## Spotlight on Story Circle Volunteer Cynthia F. Davidson

*Volunteers provide the energy that keeps Story Circle Network (SCN) going and growing, and the sticking power that holds us all together. Standing tall among this team of dedicated women is Cynthia Davidson, a long-time SCN faculty member who contributes much to our organization. Shawn LaTorre conducted the following interview with Cynthia.*

A former CBS News journalist, Cynthia has lived and worked in eight different countries. She possesses an undeniable passion for writing, telling, and teaching women's stories, something that comes through in her award-winning memoir, *The Importance of Paris*.

As a member of the Story Circle Network Board of Directors, Cynthia serves as Reading Group Coordinator.

This year, she is running an experimental reading and reviewing group entitled "2023 & Me: A Year of Celebrating the DNA of True Stories." Her group will combine the identification of universal themes with an increasing awareness of our personal, inherited particularities. Members will read and review one memoir each month. It's not too late to join this group. Find out more [here](https://www.storycircle.org/2023-me-a-year-of-celebrating-the-dna-of-true-stories/) ([https://](https://www.storycircle.org/2023-me-a-year-of-celebrating-the-dna-of-true-stories/)

[www.storycircle.org/2023-me-a-year-of-celebrating-the-dna-of-true-stories/](https://www.storycircle.org/2023-me-a-year-of-celebrating-the-dna-of-true-stories/)).

In the spring, Cynthia will present a new writing manual entitled *The Alphabet of Memoir: 500+ Prompts and Preparation* that includes a progress tracker for readers to chart familiarity with the lingo and themes of memoir as they learn to write their stories.

About her ninety-minute workshops on memoir writing at her local Rhode Island and Connecticut libraries, Cynthia says, "The participants' questions sure help to keep me on my toes!"

She adds, "If I hadn't joined SCN, I think my manuscripts would still be languishing in a drawer. The women in this organization galvanize each other. Their gumption energizes me. We are on similar journeys, each going through whatever our next part is, yet knowing we're not alone."

**From Story Circle:** Grateful thanks and a warm hug to Cynthia for the time, attention, and energy she dedicates to our organization. You'll want to visit her website <https://cynthiadavidson.com> or find her on Facebook and Instagram. Learn more about her books on [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

*Interested in volunteering? We'd love to hear from you!*  
Go [here](https://www.storycircle.org/opportunities/) to let us know how you can help: <https://www.storycircle.org/opportunities/>

## 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/>

### Angels (\$1,000+)

Anonymous: \$15,000

### Friends (\$100+)

Kali Rourke; Marlene Samuels; Susan Schoch

### Contributors In Kind (\$100+)

Shawn LaTorre; Cindy Rasicot; Anonymous

### Choose-Your-Charity Donations

We also wish to thank all who contributed through their purchases. By setting Story Circle Network as your charity of choice, you enabled the following contributions last year. Many companies, large and small, have programs by which they donate a portion of your purchase price to a charity of

your choice. Ask at the stores and companies with whom you do business and set Story Circle Network as your charity of choice to donate with every purchase—at no increase in price to you!

PayPal Giving Fund: \$36.00

\*Amazon Smile: \$23.23

Albertsons: \$41.95

*\*Thanks to all who donated through Amazon Smile last year. Unfortunately, the program will no longer be in effect for 2023.*

### Story Circle Board of Directors

Last year, our board members donated 1,898 hours of their time to SCN. The national value of 2022 volunteer hours is calculated (by IndependentSector.org) at \$29.95/hr. Our board's contribution was valued at \$56,845.10. Thank you, thank you to an incredible team!

# Writing Tips from Our Teachers

## The Heroine's Journey

by Kate Farrell

We might imagine that the concept of the heroine's journey is a modern one, made popular by recent scholars and psychologists who've challenged Joseph Campbell's work, *Hero With a Thousand Faces*, that limited women's role in its "monomyth." But traditional storytellers always knew of the heroine's journey from enduring myths and fairy tales—those told in ancient matriarchal cultures, revealing a secret history of the feminine heroic at the very heart of our cultural imagination.

The old stories spoke of the feminine quest, unique with obstacles and challenges of its own, far different from the masculine heroic. These archetypal heroine myths, their origin beyond the reach of recorded history, were passed down by word of mouth through millennia, then found in cuneiform tablets, hieroglyphics, Chinese calligraphy, or Greek and Latin scrolls. The heroine's journey has always existed.

Much later, the European heroine came to us in new garb: the French *Cinderella* and her glass slipper or the British maid's *Cap 'o Rushes*, hiding in plain sight. With immediate, enduring appeal for girls, these "romantic" tales masqueraded their powerful roadmap for women's development and self-actualization. They had derived from the fuller, darker, and more dangerous myths of the distant past, ones that still survive, such as the primal, Slavic tale of the witch/crone, "Baba Yaga and Vasilissa the Brave," or of the epic descent of the Sumerian goddess Inanna to seek her sister, Ereshkigal, in the Underworld—a myth told in a matriarchal culture dated from 6,000 BCE, during the early Bronze Age.

Here is a brief comparison of the hero's and the heroine's journey:

**The Hero's Journey in Myth, Fairy Tales, Movies, and Video Games** begins as the hero competes with other men in a quest to rescue the princess held captive in a tower. He is challenged to prove his might, win the princess and her

kingdom—succeed where others have failed. This character is often the third son, a peasant, a fool, or simply the underdog in the fateful contest. Overcoming great forces and confronting the evil wizard, lord, or dragon, he slays them in fierce battles, thereby freeing the princess who then marries him. He returns to claim his prize, his victory, and eventually becomes king.

**The Heroine's Journey in Myth, Fairy Tales, Movies, Fiction, and Memoir** begins with the princess trapped in the tower, a place of restrictions, societal expectations, entanglements, and suppression—that the princess *leaves*. She either escapes because she defies conventions, is cast out, flees in a catastrophe or from violence, or her mother dies. On her own, she confronts jealous, narcissistic women in her stepmother, stepsisters, jealous goddesses, is reduced to nothing, and forced to perform impossible tasks. Aided by the spirit of her natural mother, allies, or a godmother, she faces her enemy, her own shadow, journeys to the underworld, and succeeds. As she gains strength and capacity in developing masculine aspects, she is recognized by the prince who marries her.

- As readers of fiction or memoir, recognizing the difference between the two archetypal quests and being able to identify the heroine's journey can be illuminating.
- As writers, knowing how to construct a narrative arc based on the heroine's journey with its unique motifs and tropes can provide a powerful, appealing lure.
- As journal writers, identifying the universal themes that challenge the archetypal heroine and understanding them in your own entries and issues can empower.

Women still clamor for equal rights in the global community, but a heroine cannot wait for permission to explore the wisdom that comes from the ancient tales of her feminine journey.



**Kate Farrell**, storyteller, author, and librarian, is the author of the award-winning *Story Power: Secrets to Creating, Crafting, and Telling Memorable Stories*. Kate founded the Word Weaving Storytelling Project and researched and published numerous educational materials on storytelling. She has contributed to and edited award-winning anthologies of personal narrative, including *Times They Were A-Changing: Women Remember the 60s & 70s* and *Cry of the Nightbird: Writers Against Domestic Violence*. With a BA in English Literature, World Lit emphasis, a masters in Library Science, and with her decades of experience as a traditional storyteller, Kate researched the heroine's journey in myth and fairy tales in the late 1990s, in order to apply the mythic process to her own life through journaling and to accelerate her personal growth. She is currently querying her hybrid memoir, *Quest: A Heroine's Journey*, <https://katefarrell.net/quest-a-heroines-journey/>



## Our Future Is Female

**Chloe Ebrahimi**, the daughter of two Iranian immigrants, grew up in Los Angeles, California. In addition to her studies as a first-year at Santa Monica College, Chloe enjoys taking advantage of the LA sunshine by spending days at the beach, going out with friends, and listening to a variety of music. She loves spending time with her brother, Ryan, and is excited to further her studies.

### Gheseh—The Farsi Word for “Story” by Chloe Ebrahimi

Growing up, I begged my mother for a gheseh at bedtime. Her stories weren’t fairy tales like *Cinderella* or *Jack and the Beanstalk*. They were autobiographical—road trips to the Caspian Sea, dancing at bat mitzvahs, and soccer games with six siblings.

As I got older, my mom revealed more personal experiences about her years in Iran. She is the youngest of seven children, which caused her to face adversity in many parts of her life. She was treated differently than her four brothers. Teachers dismissed her ambitions and viewed her as lesser just because she had goals that were too “unrealistic” for a Persian Jewish woman. Even after moving to the United States, my mother was met with new obstacles. Although she had a deep passion for interior design, she felt pressured by her family to pursue the more reliable career of accounting. Her stories remind me that inequality is still a deeply rooted societal problem.

Despite being born and raised in the United States, I also have faced prejudice as a woman within my close-knit Persian Jewish community. Growing up, my brother and boy cousins had much more freedom than I did, simply because they were male. However, as a young woman who has grown up in a society where women have been fighting for their rights for decades, I have more confidence in speaking out and pursuing my own passions. I am joined in this fight by my female friends and peers. Consequently, I place a high value on fighting for equality not just specific to genders, ethnic minorities, and the LGBTQ+ community, but to any excluded group.

I believe in standing up against the social barriers people face. Over the summer, I was given the opportunity to do just that by participating in Dr. Sharona Nazarian’s campaign for City

Council. I felt proud to be part of a team that challenged gender biases within politics and successfully placed the first female Persian Jewish candidate on the governing council of Beverly Hills. Also, having grown up with a brother on the autistic spectrum, I have felt compelled to support children with learning differences. Consequently, I volunteered from seventh to twelfth grade at the Miracle Project, an organization that uses mindfulness and the expressive arts to help children with learning differences develop social skills.

As someone who values morality and fairness, advocating for marginalized groups drives me to be a more active member of society. I want to educate myself and others to ensure that the injustices many people experience desist, and also to work toward a more inclusive and accepting future. By shining light on the various inequalities marginalized groups face across the globe, I hope to spark intriguing discussions about women’s education, the wage gap, and the college rape culture while also bringing people together. I aim to achieve this goal by encouraging safe, constructive conversations in order that people may share their thoughts and experiences freely. Through these discussions, I aspire to highlight how our similarities outweigh our differences and how by talking with one another we can spark change.

My mother’s gheseh is a global issue, something everyone can relate to whether from personal experience or that of a loved one. Her stories are one of the reasons I am intrigued by social justice issues. I want to empower young girls and women of all backgrounds, advocate for those in need of a voice, and contribute to the fight toward equality as a whole.

I want my gheseh to reflect a more equal world.

## From the SCN Blogs:

# One Woman's Day

For over a decade, our *One Woman's Day* blog has provided a venue for Story Circle Network members to share stories about a day in their life. That's a lot of life stories! This post from November 2022 was selected by Linda Hoye, our blog coordinator. She welcomes your submissions about a day in your life at: <https://www.storycircle.org/category/one-womans-day/>.

## Sending Postcards to Myself

by Debra Dolan

In my twenties, I was wanderlust, a true peripatetic. I was curious about the world and its people. I wanted to escape the confines of my small town and discover for myself what I learned in books. I drifted without a camera. At the time, they were cumbersome, used up precious backpack space, expensive, and drew attention to a solo female holidaymaker. In its place, I always travelled with a beloved notebook, chronicling my daily experiences on a hostel bunk late into the night. When full, I simply sent to my parents for safekeeping.

As a young diarist, I found this an obvious way to record impressions of people and places I wished to remember. I also knew I could never take the beautiful images captured by professional photographers of architecture, landscape, and tributes. Therefore, I started to rely on postcards found in tourist bureaus, museums, gift stores and the like, to complement my descriptions. Since I don't need to see myself in front of things, this seemed like the perfect way to add to my memories. In 1979, I started sending postcards to myself from all the countries and places I visited. I now possess hundreds. They tell a story of a young woman in search of something in Australia that she later found in Ontario. The ones mailed from Arequipa, Peru—a colonial-era capital with a stately main square—in August 2010 took eighteen months to arrive. Nevertheless, they did, and to great joy for I had forgotten about my profound insight unleashed at Santa Catalina Monastery in my fifty-second year.

From Manhattan, while sitting at the Church of Heavenly Rest on Museum Mile, I described the street scene after a beautiful morning in Central Park and afternoon at Guggenheim Museum. From Turkey, there was a collection sent from magnificent beaches and ancient ruins reminding me of sacred times. Over the years, each card had a concise summary of the day, the meaning, and the feeling of the place. Choosing a card, the right card, is also fun and challenging. I search for

the one most accurate of the time and the place visited. Of course, when in Vienna at Christmas, the picture had to have snow, showcasing the magnificent lanterns outside the State Opera House.

The older cards (*from the late 1970s-1980s*) were all photographed, designed, and printed in the country where they were purchased. As years progressed, this became harder and harder to find. Even cards from Japan or Korea would be "Made in China," which I found astonishing. Standing in line and visiting post offices throughout the world also contributed to the experience of being far from home. Finding a post office in a foreign country when you don't know the language or understand their processes can be an exercise in great patience and fortitude.

Upon review, postcard stamps tell stories of national events near the time of travel (9/11, Nagano Olympics, fall of the Berlin Wall, Expo 86) and the purchasing currency. Remember the German Deutsche Mark, French Franc, Italian Lira, or Soviet Ruble? Stamps are inexpensive, miniature works of art that can provide harmony to the printed photograph or symbol on postcards serving as recaps.

Last autumn, I travelled to Italy and the Republic of San Marino. Ten days were spent on the wonderful tour organized by Story Circle Network plus twelve days in Rome and five days in Venice. It was great to connect with like-minded writing women and celebrate the lifting of global travel restrictions after several years of pandemic lockdown. Again, I did not travel with a camera. Again, I sent one or two postcards to myself weekly. Again, I had to reconcile the bureaucracies of two countries with divergent protocols of purchasing stamps and sending international mail. Again, they have all arrived.



**Debra Dolan**, a self-described pluviophile, lives on the west coast of Canada. She is a longtime (50+ years) private journal writer, an avid reader of women's memoir, and an SCN member since 2009. Debra enjoys deep conversations over red wine and candlelight, as well as solo nature walks. She has completed two book projects—*Writings and Reflections: 1958 to 2018* and *Writings and Reflections: Turning 50 in 2008 (Walking the Camino de Santiago)*.

## From the SCN Blogs:

# Telling HerStories

*This 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. Blog coordinator Jude Walsh selected the post below to share with you. Jude also invites you to enjoy other posts and welcomes your submissions [here](https://www.storycircle.org/category/herstories) (<https://www.storycircle.org/category/herstories>).*

## I'm Listening by Fran Hawthorne

Like many people in the first months of Covid, I transformed my social life from meals and movies into long walking-talks with friends. But by early 2021, I pretty much ended those excursions. Life was too messed up, and I didn't feel like chatting.

However, that created new problems: My friends were confused and hurt, and I missed them. So I offered a suggestion, "I'd love to see you, if you'll do all the talking." As it turned out, those new walking-talks were wonderful. They made me a better person and a better writer.

In the olden days, even as my friends were speaking, part of my brain would already be mapping out my potential response. ('Fess up, don't you do the same thing sometimes?) Now, I simply listened. With my complete attention. And I heard more. I heard the hesitations before words, and the words that were swallowed at the ends of sentences. I heard the seventh and eighth and ninth details, and the phrases that were countered by "never mind."

Meanwhile, my friends got all the time and space they needed. An initial topic might wander into multiple side channels. One friend was worried about her father, who had dementia and lived many states away from her. She was trying to arrange to visit him, but her job suddenly got busy so it was hard to take time off, especially since there was an annoying client who texted her at all hours.

Not talking didn't mean ignoring my friends. When they seemed to come to a long pause, to want me to speak up, I certainly did, and I was probably able to give them a more thoughtful response than I used to do.

For my part, I didn't miss the supposed opportunity to unload my own problems or brag about my newest success. In fact, it was a relief not to have to articulate a lot of words. I didn't have to worry about clumsily saying the wrong thing or recounting a stupid joke that fell flat.

Although I didn't start doing this extra-sensitive listening to improve my writing, of course it did. Inevitably, I think, I've gained more insight into why and how people feel about the complications of their lives, and how they express those feelings. All of that—you could call it accidental research—is helping me create deeper characters and better dialogue.

Still, I'd be a lousy friend if I did nothing but listen. Most people don't really want to spout a permanent monologue, and they certainly don't want to be guinea pigs for scenes in my novels. If I never speak, I become a vacuum cleaner, sucking up other people's vulnerabilities without revealing my own.

Yes, I'm talking with my friends again. I haven't figured out how to be a perfect listener, friend, or conversationalist, and certainly not a writer of pitch-perfect dialogue. But I've learned that communication involves a combination of speaking candidly plus listening with love.



**Fran Hawthorne** has been writing novels since she was four years old, although she was sidetracked for a few decades by journalism. In addition to her award-winning nonfiction books, Fran was an editor or regular contributor for *The New York Times*, *BusinessWeek*, *Fortune*, and more. But she never abandoned her true love . . . Her second novel, *I Meant to Tell You* (Stephen Austin State University Press), is short-listed for the SCN Sarton Award and long-listed for the Chanticleer International Book Awards.



## Circle Voices

The following interview was conducted by **Caroline Ziel**, SCN's eCircles Coordinator, with **Marion Hunt**, an active eCircle participant. We hope you'll enjoy learning more about Marion through her thoughts and comments below. Discover more about the Circles Program [here](http://www.storycircle.org/circlesprogram.shtml) (<http://www.storycircle.org/circlesprogram.shtml>).

**Marion Hunt** enjoys traveling and journals extensively during her visits to such places as the Galapagos, Machu Picchu, Mt. Everest, Antarctica, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Burma, and Central America. She has had an adventurous life, participating in activities such as scuba diving, tap dancing, and playing the violin with her local symphony.

### *On Discovering Story Circle Network . . .*

After midnight one night in 2005, feeling the need for support—a formal and safe place to reflect on my life circumstances—I turned to the Internet and found Story Circle Network. This initial contact gave me the opportunity to write a real and honest poem about the feelings I had been unable to express anywhere else. It was my first writing competition and resulted in my work being included in the June issue of the *Journal*.

### *On Motivation and Inspiration . . .*

My earliest writing experiences happened in grade school, where I created fictional stories using the names of students and friends. Eventually, I developed a curriculum and became “the teacher who taught writing to kids who loved to write.” This blossomed into the development of children’s writing sessions, camps, and weekends. One of my most cherished memories are of the Mother/Daughter weekends I held in an old hotel in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Though I didn’t feel that I was an expert on writing, I enjoyed sharing the excitement of learning along with them. Then I learned to write with my Story Circle friends.

When women express their concerns about writing, I tell them that if they can talk they can write, that their lives are worth writing about. I also assure them of the privacy of our circles and of the support available there. Our lives are all stories that deserve to be heard. My goal as a facilitator is to inspire and encourage women to own their stories and to share them.

### *On Writing . . .*

Today, I write frequently for e-circle 6 and have recently become a facilitator, creating writing prompts that hopefully inspire some deep reflection from the women in our group. I have contributed photos and an article titled “One Hit Wonder” to *Woos Magazine*, describing the connection between Berkley, California and Guatemala. My favorite book on writing is *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott. The following is part of the poem I first published upon joining Story Circle:

Trapped words  
 unable to be spoken  
 outside their bodily boundaries.  
 fearful of the audience.  
 Tears streaming untold feelings  
 Tears held back  
 whispering  
 release me.  
 Words  
 Words crashing into phrases  
 Long, captive phrases  
 Deep emotions  
 begging  
 to be heard



## Story Circle Book Reviews

Find your next great read at Story Circle's Book Review website (<https://www.storycircle.org/book-review/>), where all the books are by, for, and about women and are published by independent or small presses. Interested in reviewing for us? Details at <https://www.storycircle.org/call-for-volunteers/>.

### Halfway From Home: Essays

by Sarah Fawn Montgomery  
(Split/Lip Press, 2022. ISBN 9781952897252)

Reviewed by Susan J Tweit

*Halfway From Home* is a lyrical and precise cartography of what it means to belong—to a place, to poverty, to a family where abundance never visits, to a life shaped by restlessness as an escape from pain. Montgomery sings language like the poet she is and charts the connections between her life and life in general with the care of a scientist explicating data. The result is a riveting mapping of her search for home and self in a life propelled by the tightly braided love and trauma of her upbringing, the pain of losing siblings to addiction and violence, and the tearing grief of her beloved father's death from cancer.

Excavating her past like an archeologist sifting through layers, Montgomery carefully examines what she finds like so many artifacts, from the treasure holes in a childhood backyard that her fence-building father salted for her with bits he found as he dug post-holes, to her fear of clocks ticking the passing of time, and spiraling outward, to gun violence, the pandemic, and the great anguish of loss from climate change.

Along the way she writes a brilliant lesson on maps and the way we draw lines to tell the story that reinforces our view of the world, examines the trauma of drug abuse in her siblings and her students, and reckons as best she can with her grief at moving to a place she cannot feel at home, a whole continent away from the California coast where she grew up and where her father is dying.

Montgomery's reflections come in chunks like artifacts sifted out of soil, and she turns each over with such precise language that the reader catches her breath at the contrast between personal revelation and the dispassionate observations of contemporary culture and knowledge. Listen to this passage from the essay "Chronostasis":

*The invention of the pendulum clock in 1656 erased time.*

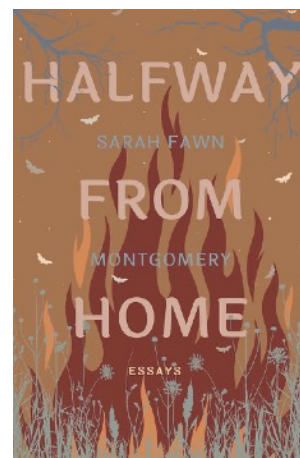
*Until then, clock accuracy averaged a deviation of fifteen minutes a day, as though it were possible to live across memory and history.*

*. . . In fifteen minutes, you can walk a mile or sleep with your lover . . .*

*With the clock's invention however—a swinging weight around its neck—the accuracy of clocks improved. The deviation shrunk to a mere fifteen seconds a day.*

And then her musing turns personal: "As a child, I lie in bed, worrying about time. It is running out, meaning I am already dying, am a fearful ghost haunting my own room, my chance at sleep slipping through my fingers like sand, the next day destined to be a blur, dreamlike without the watercolor and whimsy. I do not like clocks that make sounds."

Montgomery's ability to explicate grief and pain is breathtaking, the very essence of memoir. The meaning she makes from her life is harsh and at the same time, poignantly beautiful, a kind of grace rising from the sifted ashes, like the Phoenix itself. *Halfway From Home* is a song of seeking, a restless journey that spans miles, years, and hearts, a careful mapping of the route one soul has traced in order to survive and even thrive through the darkest of times.



**Author Sarah Fawn Montgomery** is the author of *Quite Mad: An American Pharma Memoir* (Ohio State University Press, 2018) and three poetry chapbooks. She is an assistant professor at Bridgewater State University. Her website is <https://sarahfawnmontgomery.com>.

**Reviewer Susan J. Tweit** is a plant biologist and the award-winning author of twelve books (including her award-winning memoir *Bless the Birds* and *Colorado Scenic Byways*, winner of the Colorado Book Award), numerous magazine articles, and newspaper columns. Read her popular blog and learn about her books at <http://www.susanjtweit.com/meet-susan>.

# Online Classes

Spring I Term: March 13–May 8, 2023

Story Circle Network strives to provide its members with quality instruction in all types of writing so women may gain the skills and confidence they need to share their stories with one another and the world. Course offerings may be accessed [here](https://www.storycircle.org/online-classes/) (<https://www.storycircle.org/online-classes/>).

## Journaling/Self-Discovery

Breaking the Silence: A Four-Week Explorative Journey to Your Truth - Mary Tuchscherer  
Four weeks beginning 3/16/23

The Art of Hearing: The Sounds of Spring. Nature, Writing, & Listening - Christine Hassing  
Six weeks beginning 3/20/23

Journaling the Heroine's Journey: A Writing Workshop - Kate Farrell  
Four weeks beginning 3/21/23

## Short Story Writing

The Key to Short Story Writing - Kimberly Garrett Brown  
Eight weeks beginning 3/14/23

## Writing Craft

Photography as a Writing Tool - Ariela Zucker  
Four weeks beginning 3/13/23

## Fiction Writing

Writing Autobiographical Fiction - Michelle Parks  
Five weeks beginning 3/18/23

Reflective Writing - Lisa Baron  
Four weeks beginning 3/15/23 for Section I and 3/16/23 for Section II

Introduction to Guided Autobiography - Sarah White  
Five weeks beginning 4/1/23

## Essay Writing

What Lurks Beneath: Finding the Emotional Current Beneath the Story Events - Rhonda Wiley-Jones  
Five weeks beginning 3/14/23

## Independent Study

One-on-One Sessions - B. Lynn Goodwin  
Four weeks beginning 3/13/23 for Session I and 4/10/23 for Session II)

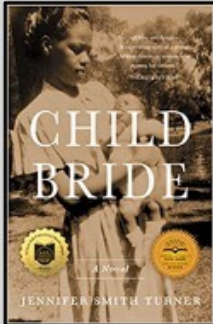
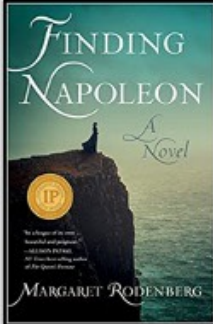
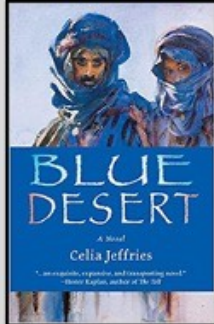
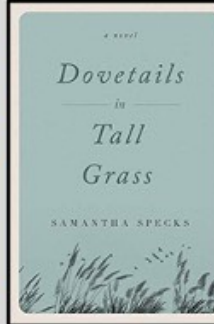
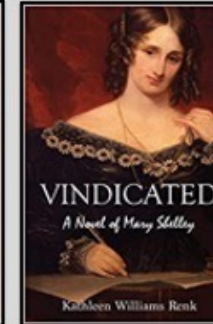
# Upcoming Webinars


Watch for future webinars information and registration links at [Programs & Events](#). If you missed one of our many fantastic webinars in the past, you may purchase (\$10) a link to a replay [here](https://www.storycircle.org/webinars/) (<https://www.storycircle.org/webinars/>).

**IN CELEBRATION OF WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH**  
**STORY CIRCLE NETWORK PRESENTS**

*A panel discussion with five prior finalists and winners of the Sarton Award in Historical Fiction, facilitated by Ellen Notbohm, Historical Fiction Award Winning Author & Coordinator for the Sarton Award in Historical Fiction.*

**MARCH 15, 2023**  
**6PM CT / 4PM PT**  
**COST: FREE**

 **Story Circle NETWORK** *Where women become the authors of their lives.*  
*Women's life stories matter. We're committed to helping you tell yours.*



## A WEBINAR PRESENTED BY STORY CIRCLE NETWORK

### Transforming Trauma into Art

*Jane Hirshfield wrote, "That anxiety, grief, and the abysses of chaos can be lured into beauty and meaning, and into the freedom such transmutation itself brings, is no small part of literature's power."*

*Poetry has saved me these last thirty-five years. When I got the call that my son had died in an accident in Rome where he was in his junior year abroad, I fell into a chasm of grief. It was learning to write poetry, then actually writing, publishing it, and reading to audiences that gave me the ladder up from that hole, a way to transform the inchoate into art.*

*All of us have struggled with pain in our lives—family dysfunction, sexual abuse, illness, loss, grief, simply being human. I hope to give you some poetic tools in this workshop that can empower you to translate that pain into language, thus shifting it to a bearable distance from yourself, creating a piece of art.*

**Wednesday, April 12, 2023**

**6pm CT / 4pm PT**

**Cost: \$25**



**Where women become the authors of their lives.**

*Women's life stories matter. We're committed to helping you tell yours.*



**WITH SHARON CHARDE**

LICENSED PROFESSIONAL COUNSELOR, WRITING GROUP LEADER, POETRY AWARD WINNER, PUSHCART AWARD NOMINEE (10 TIMES), AND AUTHOR OF SEVEN PUBLISHED COLLECTIONS OF POETRY, THE LATEST IN SEPTEMBER 2021, "THE GLASS IS ALREADY BROKEN," FROM BLUE LIGHT PRESS.

## A WEBINAR PRESENTED BY STORY CIRCLE NETWORK

### If our Stories were Puzzle Pieces, what Picture could we Build?

*If we looked at chapters of our stories as pieces to a puzzle, would we find extraordinary pictures in development? Would we wish certain pieces had fallen and been swept away by the broom? Could we fit even the most jagged pieces together such that the picture became nothing short of beautiful?*

*This workshop will offer attendees the opportunity to explore these pieces and then compassionately write a paragraph, chapter, or story with a new view.*

**Wednesday, May 17, 2023**

**6pm CT / 4pm PT**

**Cost: \$25**



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**WITH CHRISTINE HASSING**

LIFE STORY WRITER/TEACHER, AUTHOR, COACH, BUSINESS OWNER, ADVOCATE OF COLD NOSES AS HEALERS AND A CHAMPION OF UNCONDITIONAL LISTENING AND HOPE.

# True Words from Real Women

Coordinated and edited by Jo Virgil, *True Words* is a quarterly selection of short lifewriting pieces by Story Circle Network members. For this issue, the optional theme was “Springing Into Action.” The suggested topic for the June issue is “One Thing that Scared Me,” but we welcome all entries should a different topic strike your fancy. **Deadline: April 15.** Prose or poetry, the voice and the perspective you bring are welcome. Member submissions happen [here](https://www.storycircle.org/journal-submissions/) (<https://www.storycircle.org/journal-submissions/>).

## A Fresh Chance

Sara Etgen-Baker  
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I replayed that day in the surgeon’s office a thousand times. “We’ve tried therapeutics and physical therapy, but you’re not getting relief from your shoulder pain,” he said. I watched his eyes, noting the change in his facial expression and demeanor sensing the inevitable. “You need rotator cuff surgery,” he continued. My knees buckled; I broke into uncontrollable tears. My world crumbled, for I’d intentionally made conscious choices to stay healthy and avoid the common infirmities, diseases, and discomforts affiliated with age. But something unexpected and unavoidable happened—a hard fall onto concrete resulting in broken ribs and my now torn rotator cuff muscles.

Two weeks later (weeks shy of my seventy-first birthday), I was on a hospital gurney being wheeled down a hallway. I pulled my eyes from the highly polished linoleum floor catching a glimpse of the hallway that stretched beyond, cut into tiny squares by the thin wire in the window panels ahead. Art hung on the walls in colors as bright as glacier meltwater or spring flowers. The air had a pure fragrance—not sterile, just clean. I reached a set of double doors that swung open soundlessly and with ease. The light inside was too bright for my eyes. I closed them, and hours later awoke, my bandaged arm and shoulder in a sling—a sling I’d wear 24/7 even while sleeping.

The pain, silent as grenades, stayed with me for weeks. At times I thought I’d feel the knives in my shoulder forever, the long blades slicing into my sensitive flesh. Some days I existed as a matter of willpower, not even having enough emotional energy to read the books at my bedside. Every day was a battle between losing hope and having faith in healing and physical therapy. Slowly the pain ebbed; I realized that the adage, “You come out of these things stronger,” was true.

I’m wiser, too, having learned there’s no dignity in surgery, not in the pain or the recovery. Yet, it’s also a form of hope—a fresh chance to spring forward and enjoy the art of living well.

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**CONGRATULATIONS**  
to Linda Wisniewski!

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

## Wide Open Spaces

Linda C. Wisniewski  
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Driving from San Marcos to Austin on a wide ribbon of highway, cars coming toward me took forever to get close. I could see ahead for miles. It was a new sensation, terribly interesting. And terrifying. I would see trouble coming and have plenty of time to run but trouble would see me too. There was no shelter here.

The next day, I left the six-lane highway to drive beside it on the access road, closer to the fast-food restaurants and strip malls along one side, places where I could stop whenever I wanted.

I was almost an hour late for lunch because Jane’s directions assumed I’d be driving the Interstate. I pulled into a business park and stopped a mailman to find the way. “Get back on the highway,” he said. When I finally arrived at the restaurant, everyone had ordered. A few women said they were sorry I was late. Jane said, “I gave her perfectly good directions, but she refused to use them,” her New Zealand accent clipping her words sharp.

“I know,” I said. “I just don’t like the Interstate. You’re out there in the open, in the middle, in the sun, nothing to touch on either side. Adrift, no boundaries at all.” They looked at me, bemused. As if openness could produce anxiety. Imagine.

The next day, as I drove to another meeting, I listened to the Dixie Chicks sing “Wide Open Spaces.” I pictured them singing about the great expanse of the Texas landscape, not the busy highway, not the cars and trucks, only their own wild selves on a deserted road. And I saw myself anew, with all of their agency, driving my own car, joining the wide and moving stream.

If you have a limited amount of time to write, you just sit down and do it. You might not write well every day, but you can always edit a bad page. You can’t edit a blank page.

— Jodi Picoult

## Take My Hand

Kimberly Krantz  
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Little girls play in parks,  
swinging and sliding.  
Giggles and pinky swears  
to life's most treasured secrets.

Teenagers discuss diaries  
filled with boyhood crushes and movie star dreams.  
The phone lines burn up every night  
over whispers of "Do you really think he likes me?"

Young ladies face grown-up challenges  
and turn to friends for guidance.  
Her true friend listens, really listens  
during these decisive times.

Women. Women support women.

We hold each other up in good times or bad,  
never doubting intention or purpose,  
providing caring, compassionate thoughts.

She always offers a hand to hold and a heart to hug.

## Rascal Sprang

Linda Healy  
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My shoulder hurt that day.  
Rascal, the cat, sprang into action.  
He climbed in my lap,  
placed his face  
on my chest  
as if offering a kiss,  
then gently crawled  
across my body,  
head under my arm,  
11½ lb. of furry baby  
draped across me,  
his arm straight up in a hug.  
Laid his head on the sore spot  
and promptly fell asleep.  
I closed my eyes  
and dozed in my chair  
until Rascal was done.  
Then my shoulder hurt no more  
because Rascal sprang.

## Light Speed

Nancilynn Saylor  
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e-Circle 4, e-Circle 6

I remember it was 2004, because it was after my oldest son died.

It was summer, possibly early fall, still hot and humid. I was leaving the hospital after a stressful day and slogging to the parking garage. At the elevator door, I encountered a disheveled young woman in her thirties. What caught my attention before the house shoes were the two intact IV lines in her right arm.

My position at the hospital was a supportive role to Mission Integration and as such, I worked with the vice president over the patient representatives, among others. I could sense this was wrong. I introduced myself; she said, "My name is Roxanna." We got in the elevator together and she pushed all four buttons. I sighed but still was becoming more curious.

I exited when the door to the second floor opened. Roxanna said, "I'm going to the roof—to jump off." Her words trailed past the closing door.

It took a second, but the words sank in, and adrenaline shot to my brain. I ran to my car and sped up to the roof, driving to the corner where Roxanna was beginning to scale the four-foot wall.

I took a moment to say something I hoped were hopeful words before leaping to the wall and pulling her into my arms. She was crying and quaking, and I hugged her tightly while steering her to the car. I got her bundled into the seat belt and pulled my phone out to call people who could help her. I was frazzled but acting with odd calmness as I drove down the four floors of the garage going the wrong way.

I turned Roxanna over when we reached the entrance. Pulling into a parking space in the adjoining lot, I cried like a toddler whose mom left them at daycare for the first time.

## September Turning

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children spill from houses  
bearing big new backpacks  
hurrying to board yellow school bus  
bronzed sunrise spreads  
bringing light to see  
one scarlet crepe myrtle leaf  
among skittering oak leaves  
crimson blossoms top pineapple sage  
hummingbirds hover for sweet nectar  
then continue their journey  
lemons ripen on sagging branches  
I prick my finger on a thorn  
blood drop rolls down yellow fruit  
I hear a call of geese heading south  
September turning

## a tanka tribute to non action

Joan Connor  
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e-Circle 4

1.  
from start to (un)completion  
the multipotentialite  
undertakes  
to initiate  
one more project
2.  
as choices loom  
the years dissolve  
a decade remains?  
to accomplish  
or not
3.  
does non action  
spring forward?  
perhaps backwards?  
a sidelong glance  
at shelved projects
5.  
books are stacked  
paint brushes left dry  
enthusiasm declines  
remnants remain  
of possibilities
6.  
alas, she springs  
into non action  
the rv awaits  
one more journey  
she inaugurates

## Springing Into Action

Patricia Roop Hollinger  
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Some folks might say my penchant for reading obituaries has a diagnosis; however, as a psychotherapist and chaplain, my interest is in a life's journey that led someone to pursue their life's profession, how many marriages they had, and why on earth they moved to Africa. I hoped that when my own is read, it will depict someone who lived life to their fullest potential. Never did I dream that in 2009 I would need to write the obituary of my forty-seven-year-old son and spring into my chaplain role to prepare a meaningful memorial service.

"Oh dear," I thought. "I need to write an obituary for my husband," who was under the care of hospice and in the throes of dying in the living room. Earlier in our marriage, I had discreetly obtained significant milestones in his life, so I could pull this off.

Yes, I was still faithfully reading obituaries, never knowing who might show up.

"Oh my God—Byron's wife died?" I exclaimed to whoever might be in hearing range. We had dated when I was age fourteen and he was age eighteen—obviously too young to consider marriage. But here he was just a mile from where I lived, and he was single again. My still small voice spoke loud and clear, "Call him, call him, call him," which I did immediately. I wanted to be respectful of his time to grieve, so I just suggested we might have lunch sometime in the future. Instead, he suggested breakfast the next morning.

"I'll be there," I said without hesitation. We understood we could not pursue our relationship until my husband died, so we managed time together very discreetly. We were finally married on October 30, 2010, in the same location where we had dated those earlier years. It pays to spring into action to pursue a goal in life.

## From Italy with Love

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An old woman is sitting on the sidewalk of a narrow street in Perugia, on the way to the open-air market. Her head, covered in a black scarf, is bent, her eyes downcast. At her feet lies a small dog, his head peeking through a shabby, gray blanket which covers his whole body. A white, stained bowl with dog food is next to him. I want to stop, take a photo, and give the woman some money, but my handicapped husband, Elan, is hobbling ahead of me.

"Look," I call out to him.

He turns, his head following my pointed finger. "Oh." His tone is gruff. "It's the city."

The sound of music floats towards me, a sweet, familiar melody. A young man sits on the other side of the road,

strumming along on his guitar, his upturned hat placed in front of him. God, I think, I have only a two-euro coin left in small change. I want to give it to the musician; I have empathy for him—music speaks to me. And if he's in need of money, I'll give him some; I'll show my appreciation. Yet, I deliberate, what about the old woman with the dog? Doesn't she need it more?

I stand there undecided—on what fork of the road should I turn? Listen to my heart or my reasoning? Just then, a passerby drops some coins into the musician's hat. A light bulb turns on—I'll give the money to the old lady! I approach her gingerly and stretch out my palm with the two euros. She lifts her head and takes it from me. I bend down and stroke her little dog's head. The woman's eyes crinkle with a smile. My heart glows with a warm feeling of love and gratitude.

## Caregiving

Sharon Steenton  
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When everyone else was slowing down in the Covid year of 2020, life set a different pace for my husband and me. We found ourselves taking care of his elderly parents in our home as their health declined because of kidney and heart failure. My heart goes out to all you caregivers out there. It is an exhausting job. May you find some kind of calm during each day.

We called emergency services three times that year. The same week that his father died, our thirty-nine-year-old daughter went into the hospital with complications from a broken ankle and neuropathy. Although I was not able to go visit her in the hospital because of Covid restrictions, I did drop off a care package to a very nice volunteer waiting in the front lobby.

As soon as my daughter was released, I sprang into action, picking up her mail, taking out her garbage, shopping for her groceries, washing her laundry, making lunch for her almost every day that she stayed home. And when she was ready to return to work, I drove her there and then came back in the afternoon to drive her home. I even became her personal shopper when she needed a birthday gift for her boss.

She needed surgery later that same year and it put her in a wheelchair for a while. We started the process all over again, me helping her through the healing. I am so grateful that I could help her, while at the same time grieving first the loss of her grandfather, and then three months later, the death of her grandmother.

## Before I Ran

Ariela L. Zucker  
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When I learned to walk  
I waddled, unsteady, cautious,  
studying how my body  
matched the unknown terrain.

One leg in front of the other,  
assert those who have done the road  
before me. Take your time, do not rush,  
walk before you sprint.

With the years the miles accrue  
time no longer an ally,  
there is more road behind, than ahead  
and my breathing slow and labored.

Should I slow down,  
to make the road last longer,  
or hurry my gait to accomplish  
what still needs to be discovered.

## Perfect Endings

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With a birthday on December 26, I am accustomed to having my birthday forgotten, overrun with Christmas, or my gifts wrapped in Christmas paper with even grandparents apologizing. Capricorns (Dec. 22—January 19) can be full of silliness or far too serious and instructive. For instance, on the same page as the Transcript cartoons that light up my day is positioned the Horoscope which reads: “You’ll require patience and common sense when dealing with money, friends, and relatives. Have faith in yourself. Pay attention to what you do, how you look, and what you want to achieve.” Could there be a better ending?

During the holiday season filled with expenses, family, and friends, it is easy to run out of money and patience. What do these palm readers think we are—miracle workers?

Thinking of several options to alleviate my frustration of not being able to accomplish all that the world demands of us, I googled a better horoscope for that day.

Happy Birthday for Monday, Dec. 26, 2022, from the Denver Post: “Although you are focused and determined, you are also playful and mischievous. You have a large personality, and others often look to you for strength and reassurance.”

This post makes me smile and feel good, and isn’t this what the world needs now, besides love sweet love? Then I recalled how a friend taught me to read fortune cookies—end the line with the following preposition: “In bed.”

Fortune cookie reads: “Physical Activity is Favored.”

Now, read this aloud for special effects with the new prepositional phrase: “Physical Activity is Favored in Bed.”

Why not do the same with a horoscope and consider other prepositional phrases? “Simplicity, moderation, and a keen sense of when it’s time to make a change will help you dictate what comes next—in bed; on the road; after dinner...”

Horoscopes, fortune cookies, even quotes by Goethe can fill a moment with laughter.

“Correction does much, but encouragement does more—in bed.” (Goethe might have smiled over this.)

## Springtime’s Renewal

Sara Etgen-Baker  
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two paths to ponder  
choice made at fork in the road  
springtime’s sun renews

## Jubil's Sleep

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Late in releasing my horses for the night, I dashed outside without a flashlight. I expected moonlight. Beyond the limits of my barn's motion detector illumination, I encountered total darkness. Not even starlight brightened this night.

I halted somewhere near the first horse's pen, unable to see. "Use your other senses," I thought. "Listen. Feel your way."

Before stepping forward, I recognized the rhythmic, full breaths of Jubil asleep on the sand. I had penned my colt so he could eat his hay undisturbed by the older geldings. I confined Gunsmoke near him to reassure the yearling when the sunset faded. Side by side, they consumed their rations. Then sleep overtook the youngster.

Jubil's breaths repeated slow and peaceful as I carefully felt my way to Gunsmoke. I bumped into Gunsmoke's head as he stretched his neck over the gate to nuzzle me. He was ready to leave. Whispering to him to be quiet, I opened the gate latch, and in silence eased the halter onto his nose and clasped it behind his ears. Surprisingly, Jubil's slumber continued. Reluctant to wake him, I detained Gunsmoke in our hushed space.

The time came to move out even if Jubil was off in another world. Gunsmoke's hooves rattled gravel outside the pen as I led him away. Jubil's undisturbed breaths faded with our distance.

Only when I returned to his stall did Jubil stir and promptly rise. From the clamorous thrusts, I envisioned his forelegs splayed in front, followed by his hindquarters heaving him to standing. Invisible in the darkness, his bay-colored mass was detectable only by its sounds as he sauntered past me.

One can't predict when blessings appear. As I treaded back to my house, the barn's light jolted me into the world of sight. I smiled and recalled memories when I was exhausted, asleep while a loved one guarded me or carried me home. Jubil's youthful, contented rest—his deep, "I am safe" breaths—reminded me of those sacred times.

## Coping

Jo-Ann Vega  
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This is how I cope, understand.  
I become aware of thoughts  
that reverberate and force attention  
and bring discovery into my life.  
When the thoughts persist  
I take pen to paper and start writing.

The thoughts today have risen from  
continuing experiences with illness,  
intimations of mortality.

I generally hear the  
thoughts that pierce my consciousness  
and help me cope, understand.

While the immediate road ahead is challenging,  
my inner knowing knows  
it's a chance to clear my system  
and get ready for the sprint.  
I pray it happens and this time of suffering ends.

Others may arrive at similar understandings  
through quiet contemplation or  
engagement with others.  
Unless I write it  
I don't get it.  
Period.

## Anarchy in High Heels

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In 1972, the winds of change were blowing a second wave of women's liberation across the land. I was twenty-four. My generation grew up in the 1950s. We were raised to be nice girls, groomed to become housewives, secretaries, nurses, or teachers. But coming of age during the cultural revolution in the explosive, ragged 1960s changed everything.

*Ms.* magazine hit the stands for the first time in 1972. Gloria Steinem and other women activists were leading marches demanding equality. The in-your-face Helen Reddy pop song "I Am Woman" topped the Billboard charts. Saturday morning TV aired *Josie and the Pussycats*, the first all-female animation series. But the blueprint for female equality was still being mapped out. Like other women my age, I was trying on this new suit of feminism to see if it fit.

Boomer girls wiggled out of restrictive bras and girdles. Rejecting current fashion, we opted for thrift-store duds and bell-bottom pants from the Army/Navy Surplus Store. We

replaced high heels with low-heeled boots. And hair—instead of teasing and spraying our hair into elaborate dos, we parted it in the middle and let it hang down, long and natural. Shunning norms, we refused to shave our legs and armpits and glorified in the forbidden hair. We experimented with drugs; it was just "part of the scene, man." Birth control gave us sexual permission, and boy, did we take advantage of this new freedom. We lived in sin with our sexual partners. Our parents didn't approve, but we didn't care—creating a generation gap. In 1973, the game-changing Supreme Court case of *Roe v. Wade* ruled abortion legal, giving us something our mothers and grandmothers had been denied—choices. The door opened to a counterculture shift, and we stepped over the threshold.

In the midst of this atmosphere, I created *Les Nickettes*—a bawdy, offbeat feminist musical-comedy troupe that defied the notion of the time that a "funny feminist" was an oxymoron. I didn't plan it. It was 1972 in San Francisco, and it took on a life of its own

## Winter Calls

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The power was out for just a few minutes last Saturday. Just enough time to make all the analog devices in our house return to twelve o'clock. Our cable went out at the same time and stayed out for two and a half days over the New Year's weekend. What did we used to do before we had TV?

I looked around the room and saw the stacks of books ruffling their pages in hopes that I would pick one up and read it. As a lifelong reader, I long ago limited myself to an hour a day; otherwise, I could be so absorbed by the story that the day would slip away. This past weekend we had the time to read for longer than one chapter at a time. Luckily, I had just begun *The Lincoln Highway* by Amor Towles.

When I read an epic tale, I gallop through the pages, the tension building at the end of every chapter so that I am compelled to continue to the end, and then regret having finished the book as I close the cover. My run through a mystery or gripping story is quite different from my reading a book of poetry. Reading a poem is like lifting the lid of a pot of beef stew to savor the aroma or smelling the fragrance of a newly picked peach or lemon. I want to pause for a moment to relish the sensations.

Friends listen to audiobooks or listen to podcasts instead of reading a book. As a visual person, I tend to lose track of the spoken word as my mind wanders over my view. I watch as a trail of rain slides down the outside of the window in front of my computer. Neighbors walk by holding onto their dogs' leashes and umbrellas that sway in the wind. No one stops to chat with others like they usually do. The dogs whine at each other wanting to stop and play. As I gaze from my window, these brief images could be the beginnings of a story.

## Incantation

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There is no fire that is not you  
The alchemy of itself burning into itself  
The kindling, the rise, the roar, the renew.

The lighting at the conjuring beckons you  
Let the right stanza or paragraphed extravaganza  
Engage, enrage, breath life anew  
Or stun, tame, and cast askew.

There is no timeline  
Only rite of write  
Flicker  
Flame  
Ignite  
In i's and e's and o's and ooh, the constant consonant sounds of you  
Your words—capturing  
Your phrase—calling  
Your bright insight—crackling  
Rising  
ROAR:  
*Apart from I, there is no it,  
I summon the courage called to writ.  
I be not doused by "when?"  
Devouring me for them.  
I collect my cinders and  
strike fire in time on the time it renders.*

When this light has burned through its write,  
The quiet of ash will have earned its night.

And when you call to that other flame,  
there is no smoke or signal that will quiet you again.  
There is no fire you cannot light,  
When you are the flame in ember's sight.

## Look at Me! (Prose Poem)

Sara Etgen-Baker  
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Look at me  
the buds all say  
releasing fragrant spray

The rays of the sun warm the cold ground; tiny roots begin to stir stretching from their cold slumber toward the warmth. Deep, thick roots groan, awakened by their children above.

The ground softens giving way, allowing deep roots access to the previously frozen, nutrient-packed soil. Sun-warmed and nutrient-fed, green leaves sprout joyfully, pushing white sparkling buds forth. The sweet, aromatic smell of Gardenia's perfume the air in celebration of spring.

## A New Kind of Empty Nest

Marlene Samuels  
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This spring marks a new era in my life, one not experienced in thirty years. It's reminiscent of my life pre-children and aspects of my days after they'd ventured out on their own. That second period, referred to as empty nest syndrome, has even been faulted as causing depression. I did confess to my closest friends that I felt twinges of guilt because I'd not experienced that syndrome but enjoyed the empty nest portion. My new era will be devoid of the gigantic canine companions—five across three decades—who had played such significant roles in my life and in my family's. While all were the same gigantic breed, each had his own unique, quirky “dogalities,” much like the people in my life.

There was Bob-Dog and Harry-Hound, Bill and George and Ted. Our first, Bob-Dog—a massive 140-pound hound—entered my life when my now grown-up sons were young boys. The three became instant, life-long companions. In retrospect, each canine-companion occupied a unique phase of my life. And in my memory, each evokes events that marked the progression of life—some happy, some challenging, others sorrow-laden, and yet others simply mundane, maybe even boring.

“Why such big dogs? You're so small!” People asked so often I formulated a uniquely ridiculous response: “In case I need to ride them.” Ridiculous, of course, but no more so than their question. Maybe it was my best approach to overcoming Mom's debilitating fear of all dogs? Besides, their massiveness intensified the sense of their presence in my daily world.

Heading toward one more spring of life, I've dealt with the heart-wrenching decision to end Ted's suffering, my canine youngster. The house felt empty and George-dog, our eleven-year-old, grieved for weeks.

As with all living beings, life and death evade logic. George is on the precipice of his end, while I approach a revised spring—one free of canines and children, an empty nest without the syndrome. Apprehensive about an impending void, I'm anticipating springing into increased flexibility, decreased responsibilities, and less worry. My open dance card beckons with adventure and creativity.

## Glad I Was There

Linda Healy  
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Wandering by, not a cloud in the sky,  
on a warm sunny day,  
Glittering baubles in booths,  
wooden spoons and bowls,  
ceramics and clothes.  
Glad I was there.

As I stood in a booth,  
tall lady passed out,  
fell straight backwards.  
Was she too hot  
or standing too long?  
Glad I was there.

Eased her to the ground  
without a sound.  
Reflex on my part,  
in years of nursing  
many did fall.  
Glad I was there.

Narrowly missed hitting  
her head on a table.  
She came to her senses  
sitting on the ground,  
messed up her hair.  
Glad I was there.

“Thank you, friend.  
Glad you were there  
at the fair.”

Close the door. Write with no one looking over your shoulder. Don't try to figure out what other people want to hear from you; figure out what you have to say. It's the one and only thing you have to offer.

— Barbara Kingsolver



**Jo Virgil**, *True Words* editor, has been a member since 2005 and currently serves on the SCN Board (Publications Workgroup and Programs Committee). She has contributed as editor of *True Words* in the *Story Circle Network Journal* since 2015. Jo has a master's 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.



## One If by Land

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## The Cage

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*Paul Revere's Ride*, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Eighty years ago, it was my father,  
riding slow trains, setting the alarm,  
pleading with people to act  
on their own behalf, and  
in the mission to save lives  
oppose those whose motto  
was—this too shall pass.  
I know now, THIS  
never passes on its own.

I think of him in these troubled days.  
I ponder options during lingering nights.  
Then awake at dawn, weary  
I gaze outside. Change can start  
with the power of one,  
ready to walk all the way.  
If only by land, or by sea,  
by foot or on a horseback.

Command your own fate.  
After all the years,  
it is still fiercely ringing.  
I can summon my father's lead,  
True today as it was then.

Once I straddled future promises,  
ready to conquer new worlds.  
When did I change into a pedestrian  
who will avoid a worthy cause,  
a healthy debate,  
perhaps another opportunity  
to save the world.

From my cage,  
I watch the birds,  
Through my large picture window.

They mate, nest, feed, fly, chirp,  
Watch me through the big picture window.  
*watch M.E. through the big picture window*  
They live, appreciated.  
Their worth goes *un*-scrutinized.  
They exist, a part of what is.  
They are not diminished for a want of purpose, and  
They are not curious about M.E.  
*about me*

Yet each year, some young, feathered couple nests in my weeping cherry tree.  
This year doves—  
Grey mourning doves.

I wonder if, one day, when they fly off and land elsewhere to be watched by  
some other delighted watcher, if they will—just for me—whisper in the new  
watcher's dreams,

*There is a one like you who on her finest days cares for a tree so it can give a  
home to a one like me. She knows she might fall ill, for this very act; yet, she  
chooses love over M.E.*

On that day, doves will coo, but one will cry,

*She trims the branches, so the weeping becomes a weeping canopy of love.*

Write the kind of story you would like to read.  
People will give you all sorts of advice about  
writing, but if you are not writing something you  
like, no one else will like it either.

—Meg Cabot

## SCN's Publications: Available Now

### Sharing Our Lives in Food

*A spattered testament to decades of food from scratch, it's forever freckled from bits of vittles she deftly prepared.*

—Lavon Urbanas



In celebration of Story Circle Network's 25th anniversary, we created a new cookbook filled with special recipes and stories—the kind that are told at the kitchen table as food brings us together and stirs up memories, laughter, and even tears. In *Kitchen Table Stories 2022*, you will find eighty selections by forty-five authors—SCN members from widely varied backgrounds and life experiences. And the recipes/stories are as diverse as the contributors.

As Judy Alter, award-winning author of western American historical fiction, contemporary mysteries, and unique cookbooks, tells us in the foreword, “The recipes in this collection are intriguing—who knew that you could make communion bread at home, or that cold borscht should be accompanied by a bowl of hot mashed potatoes? But it is the stories that fascinate. A simple recipe for bread—flour, oil, salt, and water—becomes magic when wrapped in the story of the Church of the Brethren. So does sangria when it is an essential element of a healing circle. Many of the stories recall childhood memories, grandmothers who cooked treasured recipes from other lands, mothers who invented frugal dishes, and mothers who didn't cook at all.”

We invite you to share this eclectic table, and hope you will enjoy experimenting with the recipes, meeting some very interesting cooks, and reminiscing about your own food experiences. It will make a perfect holiday gift or a great addition to your cookbook collection. For more information, go [here](https://www.storycircle.org/kitchen-table-stories-2022/): <https://www.storycircle.org/kitchen-table-stories-2022/>.

### Real Women Write, Volume 2 I: Seeing Through Her Eyes



The 2022 edition of our annual anthology celebrates SCN's 25th anniversary with a rededication to our mission: “Story Circle Network ... empowers women to tell their stories, discover their identities through their stories, and choose to be the authors of their own lives.” To achieve that, we include *all* women. We appreciate the many voices represented in this collection. And we learn from them

by developing our *empathy*. We walk in each other's shoes, we see through each other's eyes. This is how we change a world threatened by 2022's dangers.

Empathy naturally became the theme of this volume, and the inspiration of a wide range of stories and poems. In these seventy-five works by forty-nine writers, you will surely find responses that speak to you. As Marita Golden, winner of SCN's 2021 Sarton Award for Nonfiction, says in her moving foreword to this collection, “These essays urge you to turn away from your cell phone, television, or computer screen, to hear the real breaking news . . . that we are in this life and in this world together.”

The writers of *Seeing Through Their Eyes* have responded in their vivid, individual voices with brave candor and thoughtful depth. Together, they reveal the experiences and responses of real women living real lives. Reading their work teaches us empathy. For more information, go [here](https://www.storycircle.org/publications/real-women-write/): <https://www.storycircle.org/publications/real-women-write/>.

## TWU Book Series

### Calling All Authors!

TWU's interdisciplinary book series works with authors focusing upon women's trailblazing leadership, the untold stories of courageous women and matters affecting the lives of women. We're actively seeking:

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## The ABC's of DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion)

by Shawn LaTorre

*As we strive to further infuse principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion into the fabric of society, those committed to effecting change must acknowledge language as a powerful tool that can draw us closer together or drive us further apart . . . The words we use are key to creating psychologically safe, inclusive, respectful, and welcoming environments.*

—Maya Akbar, PhD, Chief Diversity Officer of the American Psychological Association.

To help our members better understand SCN's commitment to the DEI initiative, this article and pursuant ones in the series will present two or three key words related to diversity, equity, and inclusion, defining each and including a brief synopsis of a particular book or poem that exemplifies one or more of the defined terms. We will begin this ongoing study of the "ABC's of DEI" with Maya Akbar's definitions of the A's therein . . .

- **Access:** The elimination of discrimination and other barriers that contribute to inequitable opportunities to join and be a part of a work group, organization, or community.
- **Ally/Allies:** People who recognize privileges they receive from society's patterns of injustice and take responsibility for changing these patterns. Being an ally is more than being sympathetic and feeling bad for those who

experience discrimination. An ally is *willing to act with, and for, others in pursuit of ending oppression and creating equality*. Real allies are willing to step out of their comfort zones. Those who decide to undertake the ally role must recognize and understand the power and privileges that one receives, accepts, and experiences and then determine to use that position to act for justice.

Geraldine Brooks' recent book *Horse* included a few **allies** who supported Jarrett, the fictional main character based on the actual person for whom few records exist. Jarrett loved and trained Lexington—one of the most famous racehorses in history. I was not aware that the industry of horse-racing in America was created thanks to the labor and skills of Black horsemen who were often slaves. After Reconstruction, however, Black horsemen were suddenly treated with disrespect, and the industry became segregated. "White jockeys conspired to put their Black competitors at grave risk during races. Some were forced to travel to Europe to continue their careers; others became destitute."

I highly recommend this book. A reader may learn not only history, but see the complex relationships built around the "extraordinary talent of Black grooms, trainers, and jockeys." Some horse owners were great allies; others, not so much.

For further enlightenment, check out the next issue of the *Journal*.



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## NOTEWORTHY

**Submit your “True Words”** to the *Journal*. The suggested topic for the June 2023 issue is “One Thing that Scared Me,” but we welcome all entries should a different topic strike your fancy. **Deadline: April 15.** Member submissions happen [here](https://www.storycircle.org/journal-submission/) (<https://www.storycircle.org/journal-submission/>).

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

Our 2022 anthology, [\*Real Women Write: Seeing Through Their Eyes\*](#), looks at the subject of empathy in seventy-five unique ways, and our all-new [\*Kitchen Table Stories 2022\*](#) includes a broad range of cultures and foods. Both books reflect SCN’s commitment to supporting women and diversity. Find them online or ask your library to order them.

Submissions open **May 1** for the **2023 Real Women Write anthology, *Mothers and Mentors: The Art of Nurturing***. Watch your email for details to come. And check our website for [updates](#).

Our **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiative** seeks women of color and unique backgrounds to share their work by becoming a part of SCN. Questions? Contact [Shawn.latorre@gmail.com](mailto:Shawn.latorre@gmail.com).

Check out the new books by, for, and about women listed in our [Virtual Members’ Library](https://www.storycircle.org/member-library/) (<https://www.storycircle.org/member-library/>). Anyone can view the library, but only SCN members may place books. [Join here](#). It’s a fantastic marketing tool! A submission link is available on the library’s homepage.

Partnering with **College Match**, SCN volunteers help high school seniors from diverse populations and backgrounds write their supplemental essays and personal statements as part of the college admission process. Beginning each summer with a Zoom College Match orientation meeting, mentors are paired with students, and the mentoring begins in earnest in September. If interested or have any questions, please contact program coordinator Marilea Rabasa at [marilea.rabasa@gmail.com](mailto:marilea.rabasa@gmail.com).

Members are invited to **blog with us** at [One Woman’s Day](#) by writing about a day in your life. [Telling HerStories](#), a blog created by women writers/teachers, seeks posts about writing strategies. Reprinted posts from your own blogs are accepted by both venues. Submit/subscribe [here](#).

**Call for Volunteers:** We’re always looking for volunteers to help with upcoming and ongoing projects. Not sure what you’d like to do? You’ll find an array of important ways to participate here: <https://www.storycircle.org/call-for-volunteers/> Email us at [storycircle@storycircle.org](mailto:storycircle@storycircle.org) with Volunteer in the subject line. We need your support.