



...by, for, and about women.

Journal

Vol. 27 No. 3, Sept 2023

Join Us for Story Circle Network's Third Annual Virtual Conference *Writing from the Heart*

Saturday, October 21, 2023

9am-5pm Central Time

Secure the **Early Bird Rate** available through **September 16!**

To register, go [here](https://www.storycircle.org/virtual-conference-2023/) (<https://www.storycircle.org/virtual-conference-2023/>). Zoom links will be provided after registration. **Tickets are limited, so make sure to register early!** Even if you can't attend the whole event, recordings of all sessions will be made available to registered attendees after the event.

Conference Details & Schedule

9:00am-9:45am: **Keynote: Write Great, Get Finished, Get Published**

Marcia Bradley, MFA, seeking a “second life,” moved from Los Angeles to study at Sarah Lawrence College, earning her MFA in 2017 after receiving her BA from Antioch University. Marcia believes many people face untenable situations causing life-altering choices to be made. Her novel and published pieces focus on these themes. Her debut novel, *The Home for Wayward Girls*, published by HarperCollins in 2023, is about one young woman's plight living on a ranch that is part of the Troubled Teen Industry—programs which have spread across the country offering residential and wilderness camps that claim to fix misbehaving youth. Marcia received a Bronx Council on the Arts/New York City BRIO Award for Fiction. Her work has appeared in *The Chicago Review of Books*, *Two Hawks*, *Eclectica*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *The Writing Disorder*, *Hippocampus*, and *The Capital Gazette* among others. A native of Chicago, Marcia teaches at The Writing Institute Adult Education Program at Sarah Lawrence College and lives in the Bronx. [Click here](#) for The Associated Press's review of her book. Learn more at <https://marciabradley.com/>

10:00am-11:00am: **Workshop: Narrative Authority & the Power of Voice with Molly Dwyer**

Narrative Authority comes from our sense that the writer is fearless and in control of the story she's telling. We will look at text by several authors to see what they're doing that creates the power of voice and discuss why and how the text is working. Using visual prompts, we'll write two short pieces and share them, attempting to identify the sound of our own voices.

11:15am-12:15pm: **Workshop: Slaying the Dragon with Ann Putnam**

Flannery O'Connor warns beware of the dragon, lest he devour you. Virginia Woolf impassions us to kill the angel lest she kill you. The dragon, the angel, is the beast within that stops us in our tracks. It comes out of nowhere, or creeps up on us in our sleep. Suddenly we can't write a word. Or a word good enough. This workshop gives us weapons to slay that dragon before it slays us.

12:30pm-1:45pm: **Q&A with SCN's 2022 Sarton & Gilda Award-Winning Authors**

Pre-recorded session moderated by SCN President Len Leatherwood.

2:00pm-3:00pm: **Workshop: Turning Heartbreak into Story with Patricia Grayhall**

This workshop will help writers understand the “why” of their story, the purpose of memoir, its structure and focus. We will discuss the roles of scene and dialogue, setting, context, speculation, emotional truth, seminal events, transformation, reflection, and takeaway using examples. We will also discuss potential external consequences of writing memoir and the importance of support when reliving painful events.

3:15pm-4:15pm: **Workshop: Breaking the Submission Barrier with D. Dina Friedman**

Offering your work to journals and literary agents can be a scary thing. This confidence-building workshop will cover some strategies for setting reasonable and realistic submission goals and persevering through rejection. We'll also cover submission strategies that can increase your chances of getting your work out into the universe, where it deserves to be seen.

4:15pm-5:00pm: **Keynote: Finding Re-Vision in the Rubble**

Kimberly Garrett Brown, MFA, is publisher and executive editor of Minerva Rising Press, a literary press dedicated to publishing women writers. Her bestselling debut novel, *Cora's Kitchen*, won the 2022 Story Circle Network Sarton Women's Book Award for Historical Fiction and the 2022 Bronze Foreword INDIES Book of the Year Award for multicultural fiction. Her work has appeared in *Black Lives Have Always Mattered: A Collection of Essays, Poems and Personal Narratives*, *The Feminine Collective*, *Compass Literary Magazine*, *Today's Chicago Woman*, *Chicago Tribune*, *The Rumpus*, and elsewhere. She earned her MFA at Goddard College. She currently lives in Boca Raton, Florida. Learn more [here](https://kimberlygarrettbrown.com/) (<https://kimberlygarrettbrown.com/>).

Letter from the President



Len Leatherwood

Dear Writing Sisters,

After a long summer with record-breaking heat, I know we are all eagerly anticipating fall's cooler temperatures. Here at SCN, we've had a busy and productive summer and are heading into an even more eventful final quarter of the year. Below are a few highlights of what we've done and what we're going to do.

A few months back, SCN hired a marketing consultant, Libby Jordan.

We've been working all summer gaining insights into what we need to do differently to get Story Circle Network's name out into the world. We have focused on three areas—our website, the online classes program, and our publications. Over the next months, you will see major changes being implemented in these areas. These innovations take time and effort, but we are committed to mobilizing our resources so we can make these suggestions a reality. If you have time and expertise (or simply a willingness to help us with this), please contact us. We could use some woman power!

With the help of many of you, we've recently held our annual Poetry Contest, had lively participation in our monthly Writing Extravaganza, increased our volunteers for College Match, produced excellent book reviews, continued our DEI initiative, added more books to our new Members' Virtual Library, and had our Call for Submissions on the topic of "Mothering and Mentoring" for SCN's annual *Real Women Write* anthology. In addition, our webinars and online classes are moving forward nicely, and our e-circles, two blogs, and

"True Words" are providing numerous writing and publishing opportunities. Moreover, our social media, monthly *Flash*, and quarterly *Journal* are brimming with SCN news while showcasing our Sarton/Gilda and other contest winners, hardworking volunteers, and our favorite columnist, Jeanne Guy.

What's coming up:

- Women's retreat entitled "You've Got This! Claiming Your Creative Spirit" in Fredericksburg, Texas, September 25-27, facilitated by Jeanne Guy and Stephanie Raffelock. (There's still time to sign up!)
- 22nd Annual LifeWriting Competition on the topic "Unfinished," July 30-September 16
- 3rd Annual SCN Zoom Conference: October 21, 9:00-5:00 pm Central Time, including two compelling keynote speakers and four exceptional workshops
- The 2023 Sarton and Gilda Awards contest runs through October 31 with winners announced in April 2024
- Ongoing opportunity to help talented high-school girls from low-income families with their college essays through College Match LA.
- Ongoing monthly Writing Extravanzas with a second annual "Reading" soon to be announced and posted on YouTube
- Ongoing e-circles, book reviews, online classes, webinars
- A new international trip/writing workshop scheduled for Fall 2024

Thank you so much, writing sisters, for everything you are doing. From the youngest to the oldest, we are collectively doing our very best to stay true to our mission of encouraging *all* women to tell their stories. We're now in our twenty-sixth year! Help us keep this vibrant organization alive for many years to come.

Len Leatherwood
SCN President

In This Issue

President's Letter	2
Editor's Corner	2
In Memoriam ~ Donna Van Straten Remmert	3
Breaking News	4 - 8
DEI: The Transformative Phase	8
Unvarnished	9
Online Classes & Upcoming Webinars	9
SCN Member Benefits & Opportunities	10
SCN Marketing Campaign	11
2023 Sarton & Gilda Women's Book Awards	11
Pat Bean Interviews With Sarton Winners:	
Kimberly Garrett Brown, Anastasia Zadeik	12-13
Preview of a "Lady Bunch" Book	14
Online Classes & Webinars	15
College Match Volunteer Rewards	15
Writing Tips from Our Teachers	16
Story Circle Book Reviews	17
One Woman's Day	18
Telling HerStories	19
Our Future is Female	20
Spotlight on Volunteers	21
True Words	22-27
SCN Registration Form	27

Editor's Corner

Yeehaw! September has finally arrived after a blistering summer, so fall can't be far away. Cool down and spend some time perusing our fall issue of the *Story Circle Network Journal*.

In keeping with SCN's mission, our "Breaking News" section will introduce you to the latest and greatest events and programs coming soon or happening now. Spoiler alert . . . SCN's Third Annual Virtual Conference is in the works! This is also where you'll get the scoop on our array of writing competitions. Our usual lineup of articles by and about our members and member services is there, too, including "True Words"—the heart of the *Journal* and a delightful collection of life-writing stories and poetry by our members.

Have questions about a particular article or ideas for a follow-up? Is there something you'd like to see addressed in a future *Journal*? Email storycircle@storycircle.org (subject line: *Journal Idea*) and let us know.

Happy reading, Paula

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.

Editor: Paula Yost
 journaleditor@storycircle.org
 Layout Editor: Robin Wittig
 Copy Editor: Teresa Lynn
 Staff Writer: Pat Bean

Contributing Editors:

Susan Albert
 Elizabeth Beaty
 Jeanne Baker Guy
 Linda Hoye
 Len Leatherwood
 Shawn LaTorre
 Teresa Lynn
 Marilea Rabasa
 Susan Schoch
 Jo Virgil
 Jude Walsh

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

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

info@storycircle.org
 www.storycircle.org

ISSN: 1093-7528

©2022 Story Circle Network
 Copyrights to all contributed works remain with the authors.

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/>

In Memoriam ~ Donna Van Straten Remmert

April 19, 1937 – February 8, 2023

Donna Remmert of Boulder, Colorado passed peacefully in her sleep on February 8, 2023. She was 85, and she loved to tell stories. As SCN's founder, Susan Wittig Albert, recalls, "From the late 1990s in Austin and for quite a few years after she moved to Colorado, Donna was a zealous supporter, a regular contributor, and a generous donor to Story Circle. An avid student of Jungian psychology, she hosted circles and taught dream workshops, participated in the conferences, and lightened all her activities with an impish sense of humor and a wonderful laugh. She's the author of *The Littlest Big Kid* and *The Jitterbug Girl*, both author-published in an era when that was much harder to do."

As her obituary notes, "Donna lived a remarkable, rewarding life of travel, thought, and family that she unselfishly shared with all." For more on her life and family, go [here](https://www.tributearchive.com/obituaries/27550507/donna-van-straten-remmert/boulder/colorado) (<https://www.tributearchive.com/obituaries/27550507/donna-van-straten-remmert/boulder/colorado>).

We thought it fitting to share an excerpt of Donna's story from our January 2003 anthology to give you a taste of "her lively ways, and the rightness of that marvelous, artless child's voice," as Susan describes it. Twenty years later, the piece is a fine addition to our *Mothers and Mentors* volume. "It is so funny and so evocative (for many of us) of that era. I can see Lucy as mentor of Donna's mother, on the subject of mothering ('Pregnant, pregnant, pregnant!'). And Donna's mother as Donna's mentor, bravely standing up to the Man of the House."



A Television of Our Own

Donna Van Straten Remmert – Austin, Texas

December 1953: This Christmas will be the best Christmas ever. We're finally getting a television set! Daddy ordered it way back in July and Mother is furious that we've had to wait so long. She wanted it to arrive way before Christmas because she's tired of going to the neighbors to watch *I Love Lucy*.

When Daddy hints that she might be wearing out her welcome, Mother says, "I refuse to miss a single show. If you say I can't go to the neighbors anymore, I'll drive all the way to Appleton and stand out in the cold to watch." Weber's Appliances keeps the television that's in their window turned on after they close at night, and they even pipe the sound out to the street. Lots of people stand out in the cold to see television, but I can't imagine my mother doing this. Her feet are always cold, even when she's in our nice warm house.

I don't think the Burmeisters care when Mother comes to watch *I Love Lucy*. Heck, they put kitchen chairs into the living room for anyone who wants to come over to see the show. Louise Litzkow and Katy Dryden are there every time just like Mother. The chairs are for grownups only and kids sit up front, on the floor. A 15-year-old like myself can be a grownup when there's an empty chair. I was last week, until Grandma Schauger came.

"What's so special about the *I Love Lucy* show that you have to see every one of them?" Daddy asks. "It's on at the same time the other channel broadcasts the news. I've got to watch the news."

"We're watching Lucy!" Mother says like she's the boss. "Nothing that resembles anything about my life has ever been on television before this."

"Lucy's life isn't anything like yours. She's a rich Hollywood celebrity," Daddy says.

"That's in real life. On television, she's an ordinary person like me, who gets pregnant and then has a baby to fuss over. This is the story of my life and it's about time people hear what it's like." Mother's voice shakes like she might be on the brink of tears. It's because she thinks Daddy doesn't appreciate what she's gone through having all seven of us kids. I know because I heard her saying this to the washing machine, as if it were Daddy. She didn't know I was sitting on the basement steps where I could hear.

"You shouldn't talk like this in front of the kids," Daddy says.

"Hogwash!" Mother snaps back. "I'll say pregnant whenever I want to. Pregnant, pregnant, pregnant! If Lucy can say it on television, I can say it in front of my own children." Lucy got herself into big trouble for saying this word on television. People think it's indecent to talk about this sort of thing in such graphic language. The *Appleton Post* wrote that if Lucy must talk about it, she should at least have the decency to say expecting instead of pregnant. I don't see why it's such a big deal. Doctors say this word so why can't ordinary people? Also, I think it's good to talk about things like this on television. It's educational. I didn't know anything about expecting a baby before Lucy told about it. Now that I know the gory details, I know more about my mother's life. The gory details also make me wonder about my own life. Like, do I really want to put up with morning sickness just to have a baby?

BREAKING NEWS

2023 Poetry Competition Winners

Topic: *Lost and Found*

1st Place: *Variations On An Old Love Song* by Jere Pfister

2nd Place: *Photographs* by Pamela Stockwell

3rd Place: *Keeping Time* by Pat Anthony

After launching our third annual Story Circle Poetry Competition this year, we were delighted with the caliber of the entries. It was no small task choosing the finalists. Sincere thanks to everyone who entered the competition and to the judges who carefully read and evaluated every entry. Congratulations to our winners! To enjoy the 2nd and 3rd place poems and poets, go [here](https://www.storycircle.org/contest/the-story-circle-poetry-competition/) (https://www.storycircle.org/contest/the-story-circle-poetry-competition/).

Variations On An Old Love Song

by Jere Pfister

He can no longer find me across a crowded room.
I watch him panic fearing, what, that I have left him?
I call out but he cannot hear me. I walk toward him.
He moves away winding his way through strangers.
I stalk him, reach out, gently, I touch his arm.
"Here I am."
Recognition.
"Where were you?"

I see this old man walking aimlessly through the parking lot.
And then I recognize the stoop of his shoulders and head.
My husband has lost his car. I see it parked across from Goodwill,
where he searches for romances. I pull next to him.
"Are you stalking me, Woman? I'm a happily married man."
"Sometimes," I say.
A smile fills his eyes.
He can still recognize a joke.



Jere Pfister began writing stories in her head. Her first computer opened up the connecting link to the world of writing. Her poetry has been published in the 2007 and 2022 editions of Mutabilis Press. Her prose has appeared in *The Bayou Review UHD*, where she taught storytelling. She has an MFA in Theatre from the University of Houston.



Virtual Library Changes

Writers, we have good news! We've reduced the cost of listing your book in [our virtual library](#) by 50%. That means you can now get your book in front of hundreds of potential readers for just \$45/year. Each listing features the book cover image, a description, an author bio with photo, and links to both the place to buy the book and the author's website. To submit your book, simply [fill out the form](#) on our website. We'll review your submission and get your listing live as soon as possible. We think this is a great opportunity to promote your book to a wider audience.

Readers, this is good news for you, too! We now [have more listings](#), so you can find books by your circle sisters. Each listing has a link to the place you can obtain your copy. This is an excellent way to support fellow members of Story Circle Network.

BREAKING NEWS

New at Story Circle Network: A Convenient Calendar Link

More good news . . . The SCN website now has a calendar link on the [Events page](https://www.storycircle.org/programs-and-events/) (<https://www.storycircle.org/programs-and-events/>) showing deadlines for various submissions, online classes startup dates, webinars, and other events. Check it out!

Important Notice to Story Circle Network Members . . .

We're Going to Sicily!

Please join us for a writing and travel adventure to the magical island of Sicily, October 13-21, 2024. The trip includes an air-conditioned private coach, a private tour guide for the entire trip, breakfasts and dinners, three nights in Giardini Naxos and four nights in Palermo in 4-star hotels, plus entry fees to archaeological and historic sites. The trip also features a daily, one-hour writing workshop for SCN members at our hotel, where we will take time to record what we see, hear, taste, touch, and smell while exploring this ancient, historically rich island with its beautiful beaches and pristine sea. On the final day, we'll have a reading from all willing workshop members for our entire traveling group to commemorate our Sicilian experience.



Our instructor is Len Leatherwood, two-time Pushcart nominated author, nationally honored writing teacher, coordinator of our Online Classes Program, and president of Story Circle Network. She will be leading the daily writing workshop using the "sense-sational" Sicilian land- and seascape as a jumping off point to infuse your memoir, poetry, or fiction with evocative sensory details. Len will also serve as the trip's host—a role she has successfully played twice before for sold out SCN writing/sightseeing trips to Italy in 2019 and 2022.

Highlights:

- Catania for a visit to the cultural sites and beautiful outdoor markets in the ancient city
- A scenic drive along "La Riviera dei Ciclopi," where Etna's lava flows over the centuries have created twisted rocks and steep cliffs guarding inlets with clear water
- Mount Etna, where we will reach "Rifugio la Sapienza." From here, we travel by cablecar and jeep/bus with an alpine guide to the highest part of the Vulcan "Grande Cono" (3300 meters or 10826.77 feet)
- Syracuse and a visit to the island of Ortygia—Syracuse's historic center, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2005
- Piazza Armerina, a beautiful medieval town with a superb baroque and Normand historical center. Home to the Villa Romana del Casale, famous for its intricate mosaics depicting scenes of ancient Roman life and described by UNESCO as the finest mosaics in-site anywhere in the world
- "Valle dei Templi," the Valley of the Temples, where we'll see ancient temples of the Greek gods along with the Hardcastle Villa.
- Palermo, where we'll explore the ancient city with its beautiful beaches and historic sites nearby
- A varied breakfast buffet to start each day and dinner each night at our hotel

A 7-day stay in Sicily with a writing workshop included would normally start at \$3500, but we are offering this trip at the non-profit rate of \$2740. In addition, all SCN members and their guests are automatically provided a \$500 Debra Winegarten scholarship, making your cost only \$2240, excluding airfare. Space is limited, and members and their guests will be given priority. Men are invited for the trip; however, the writing workshop is women only.

This is a nonprofit trip. Members and their guests are automatically provided a \$500 Debra Winegarten scholarship, making your cost only \$2240, excluding airfare, extras, lunches, and minimal city taxes. Space is limited, and members and their guests will be given priority. Men are invited for the trip; however, the writing workshop is women-only.

We hope you'll join us for this fun-filled adventure and enjoy the opportunity to learn and write while immersing yourself in sensory-drenched, breathtakingly beautiful Sicily.

Click [here](https://www.storycircle.org/travel-writing/) (<https://www.storycircle.org/travel-writing/>) for more details.

BREAKING NEWS

Sign Up Now ...

You've Got This! Claiming Your Creative Life

Story Circle Network's Fall 2023 Women's Retreat

Fredericksburg, Texas / September 25-27, 2023



Fredericksburg Inn



Join us for a rejuvenating getaway on five acres of lush landscape.

American poet and novelist Charles Bukowski posed the question, "Can you remember who you were, before the world told you who you should be?" Who are *you*? Story Circle Network is offering a retreat where you can experience the freedom to connect with your creative self. What can you expect at this retreat? Time and space to experience the freedom of being who you already are. Your creative essence has never left you, and this retreat is a renewal and celebration of your creative spirit.

Through insightful writing prompts, self-reflection, deep listening, and meaningful conversations, with a healthy dose of humor throughout, you'll enjoy the opportunity to claim and enhance your creative life and to explore new depths of intimacy with your creative self and others. Unstructured leisure and renewal time for breathing,

writing, meditating, taking walks, shopping, fun, and laughter will also be included.

Here's the deal. Don't come wanting change. Come to this retreat to:

- Find out who you already are.
- Be open to what you find.
- Discover the freedom of Female Fortitude.
- Bear witness to your life; witness others.
- Be vulnerable and in the moment.

The retreat will be facilitated by award-winning author and veteran Re-Story journal-writing coach Jeanne Baker Guy of Jeanne Guy Gatherings and will include a session led by award-winning author, podcaster, and all-around amazing story-gatherer Stephanie Raffelock.

Time is running out. Learn more and register now [here](https://www.storycircle.org/2023-retreat) (<https://www.storycircle.org/2023-retreat>).



Stephanie Raffelock.



Jeanne Baker Guy

BREAKING NEWS

While You're Waiting . . .

SCN 2023 Real Women Write Anthology

Our 2023 *Real Women Write* anthology is in preparation—a big task—and will be available on Amazon in November. The theme this year is Mothers and Mentors: The Art of Nurturing. This topic brings up memories and emotions, good and bad, as experiences of being cared for and guided, or not, that have a major impact on shaping identity. You will find much to ponder and enjoy in this new collection. So while you await the publication, we decided to whet your enthusiasm with a few varied excerpts from our 22nd collection of members' prose and poetry.

From "You Have to Eat Lunch" by Linda C. Wisniewski:

The empty house echoes as I work. Here in my parents' postwar version of the American Dream, women's voices come back to me. Women who worked at home and in factories, raised me, my sister and my cousins, read *McCall's* and *Good Housekeeping*, and always had a fresh cake or a plate of cookies ready for whoever might drop in. They are the kind of woman you can count on, the ones who show up unannounced before you even think of asking. . . .

Now, on this early spring day, the sky is painted periwinkle blue, as only an Adirondack sky can be. Hundreds of tiny green leaves wave like flags on gnarled trees in the backyard of my mother's house. Inside, I clean out the last of her belongings . . .

Outside in the driveway, a car engine stops and doors slam. The back doorbell rings and before I can answer it, my mother's kitchen door swings open. The aunts walk in laughing, arms laden with brown paper bags. On the old Formica table, Ceil and Willette unpack lunchmeat wrapped in white butcher paper, small jars of mayonnaise and mustard, fresh tomatoes, and a package of rolls.

"We knew you were here," they say, smiling. "You have to eat lunch."

From "My Natural Mentor" by Jo Virgil:

...the one mentor who has helped me in every step of my life is Mother Nature.

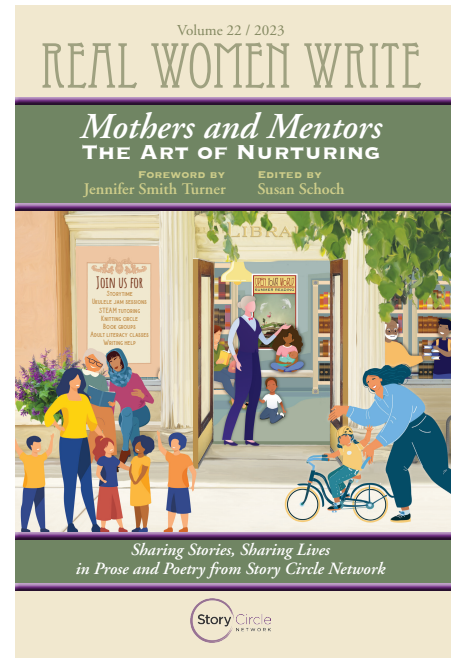
In my early childhood, I came to notice how inspiring it was to be outside and to just be quiet, to listen to birds chirping, to leaves rustling in the wind, to cicadas humming their songs at night. Mother Nature was reminding me to pay attention and to keep an open heart and an open mind. From then until now, I have learned so much from listening, paying attention, being curious about what we humans can learn from Mother Nature. The lessons come to us without words, without exams, without judgments. I have learned to keep my heart, my soul, and my mind open to what Mother Nature wants me to know by showing me metaphors and connections that express much more than words . . .

From "Drama Mama" by B. Lynn Goodwin:

... My drama students loved our short improv pieces, and they'd often bring their friends to class. I let them stay on two conditions: They must have their teacher's permission and they must participate. No one got to sit and judge the work of others without putting themselves on the line.

Those who performed well were invited to reprise their roles in Lunchbox Theatre and the best of the best took their work to drama festivals. My students took home prizes, and once, when our improv group was entertaining the crowds at the end of one of those festivals, one of my students shouted "Drama Mama" with enthusiasm and respect. How I loved that recognition. I had no biological offspring.

Because I was in my late 20s and didn't know about limits, I pushed my actors—they were always actors rather than high school students—beyond their imagined limitations. I didn't realize I was building their confidence, creativity, and right brain thinking in ways I never imagined . . .



BREAKING NEWS

Pushcart Prize Nominations

In 2022, we initiated a program of nominations for the renowned Pushcart Prize: Best of the Small Presses, which annually honors the best writing from this country's small and independent publishers. Its national recognition means that simply being nominated is a high honor and one that gains pride of place on authors' resumé's.

If you are not familiar with this program, here is their brief description:

"The Pushcart Prize: Best of the Small Presses series, published every year since 1976, is the most honored literary project in America - including [Highest Honors from the American Academy of Arts and Letters](#). Since 1976, hundreds of presses and thousands of writers of short stories, poetry, and essays have been represented in our annual collections. Each year most of the writers and many of the presses are new to the series. Every volume contains an index of past selections, plus lists of outstanding presses with addresses."

For more details about the prize and Pushcart Press, go [here](http://www.pushcartprize.com) (www.pushcartprize.com).

Last November, drawn from SCN's 2022 anthology, *Real Women Write: Seeing Through Their Eyes*, six SCN members were recognized with nominations for a Pushcart Prize. These excellent authors enriched the book's theme of "empathy" with their writing.

Sharon L. Charde: *Five Women Around a Table*

Linda Healy: *Will Work For Food*

Len Leatherwood: *My Mother and Her Pain*

Teresa Lynn: *Lines*

Janet Grace Riehl: *I Will Take You Halfway*

Christina M. Wells: *Talking About Buffalo With the Dead*

Many submissions are received each year, and with good fortune we hope to see these works appear in the 2022 Pushcart Prize volume that will be published in November 2023. To read the nominated pieces, and discover more excellent writing on an important topic, check out our 2022 anthology [here](#).

Please spread the word of these nominations, which should provide powerful encouragement for our writers. We anticipate making more nominations for outstanding writing annually. Responsiveness to the theme, originality of approach, and clarity of imagery, description, and language are among the criteria our selection panel will be using. Watch the monthly *Flash* and the quarterly *Journal* for further Pushcart news.

DEI: Transformative Phase

by Shawn LaTorre

As trends come and go, our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiative remains critically important. Driven by an inspired team led by SCN President Len Leatherwood and supported by an amazingly talented array of board members, the initiative, I believe, is in a transformative phase. Our longterm commitment will ultimately lead to organizational growth and transformation that will include many different kinds of women's voices from today's world.

Diversity is not to be feared. Each person is diverse and unique in some way. This diversity may be related to age, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language differences, nationality, parental status, physical/mental/developmental abilities, race, religion, sexual orientation, skin color, socio-economic status, work/learning/behavioral styles, perspectives on others shaped by nationality, unique life experiences, cultural knowledge or biases. For every unique story shared, our group benefits and becomes richer with the knowledge.

Equity ensures that SCN continues to make necessary adjustments to organizational practices to ensure equal opportunities will be provided in a safe, affirming environment. Courage, as Brené Brown says, is contagious. The hearts and minds of our directors remain focused on intentional outcomes in their respective work group practices every week. By embedding a culture of empathy and equity, our board supports all women finding their voices and gathering the courage to share them.

Inclusion speaks to the sense of belonging to something. To be an active member of Story Circle Network, or to volunteer within an organization that values contributions big and small helps strengthen our systems. Just inviting new members is not enough. We need to communicate with one another, check in, and invite others to participate.

If you care to listen to a Ted Talk that may be transformative for you, please go to YouTube to hear Anthony Jack's "[Access Ain't Inclusion](#)." Stay with him to the end!

DEI is embedded in our mission and our vision for the future. This undertaking promises to strengthen both recruitment and retention of members. If you would like to share DEI resources for the SCN list, please email me at shawn.latorre@gmail.com with title and format. Thank you

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.

Unvarnished

Questionable Notes on the Writing Life

by Jeanne Baker Guy

You've Got This! . . . Until You Don't When Life Is Messy, Write On

I wear my mistakes like badges of honor, and I celebrate them.—Amy Schumer

I'm looking for a little forgiveness. Maybe even a bit more than a little. I hate upsetting people. And, because I'm human and known for inserting both feet when opening my mouth, forgiveness lessons are a daily exercise. I know the impossibility of trying to keep everyone happy, yet the desire to do that is a personality trait I've been dealing with my whole life.

Life is messy. It just is.

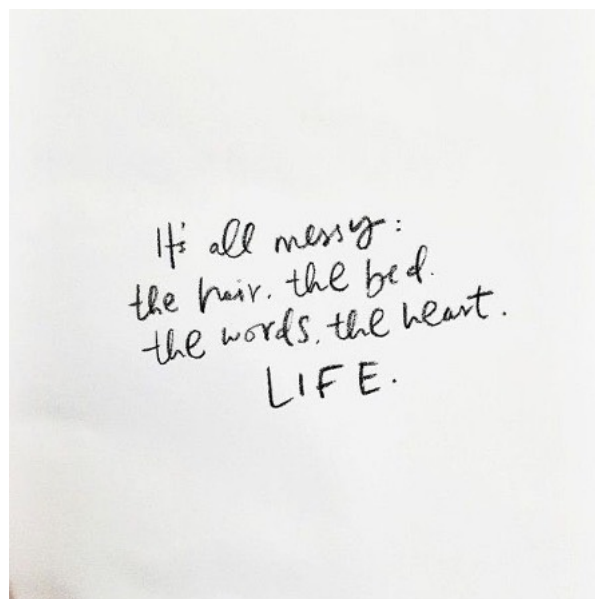
The question: *How do we best ride this rollercoaster called life?* The answer: *Turn off the noise in your head.*

Journal—shift your internal story and wait it out. The mornings I journal have proven to be salvation for me. I know it's not everybody's cup o' tea, but for me, when I need a friend, my journal says, "Come sit down, sweetie. Tell me what's on your mind and your heart. I'm here for you." And the words spill out onto the page.

After my memoir, *You'll Never Find Us*, hit the streets in 2021, *Writer's Digest* asked me to write a piece on journaling. I got carried away and gave them almost 2,000 words. They printed it all; I swear I didn't pay anybody. Invest nine minutes to read "[25 Ways Reflective Writing Can Help You Grow as a Writer \(And as a Person\)](#)." It is, of course, full of great advice from me—the non-advice giver.

Deborah Louth, a member of the current SCN Book Club, sent me a compliment: "I loved the article . . . it zeroed in on my writer's block, which I will no longer believe in. Thank you!" I responded by letting her know she'd caused me to reflect on my own words—which I needed, especially right now—and take them to heart. "We are each other's guides in human form sometimes," she said. "Everything is meaningful."

It reminds me of Rumi's words, "The wound is the place where the light enters you."



When things aren't working for you, when you're out of sorts, best to journal and remember two things:

- This too shall pass.
- What you tell yourself matters.

Tom Hanks, in a YouTube clip, sits at a round table with Robert DeNiro, Jamie Foxx, Adam Sandler, and Shia LaBeouf, and says when things aren't going well, it's best to remember "This too shall pass," and when things *are* going well and you think you know everything, it's best to remember "This too shall pass."

I find it ironic that right now, as I write about dealing with the messiness of life, I'm struggling. I'm moment-by-moment reminding myself that I can choose how to respond (to people, to situations, to my writing) rather than react out of some fear-based head thoughts.

Does the messiness go away? Nope. Still here. However, I breathe and tell myself . . .

- This too shall pass.
- The most important story I'll ever hear is the one I tell myself.

Time is my ally. Through journaling, I can shift the story in my head, remain curious, and wait it out without rumination, judgment, or blame.

"I'm here for you, sweetie." My journal calls me.

Again, and again, and again.



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.

Where are YOU in the Circle? SCN Member Benefits and Opportunities

by Teresa Lynn

Writing is the loneliest of professions. You sit alone in a room with your thoughts and your words, and you try to make something out of nothing.—Margaret Atwood

Well, Margaret must not be a member of Story Circle Network! We are **not** alone. As SCN members, we are part of a sisterhood committed to supporting one another as we each find and use our voice, helping each other grow as writers to amplify our collective story.

How do we provide that support when we are scattered across the country and the world? SCN's role is to offer a multitude of opportunities to learn from and to encourage interaction with each other. Listed below are various ways to join in—some by receiving, others by giving. We invite you to participate fully in our Network. We're stronger together!

- Take advantage of our publishing opportunities
 - In the quarterly *Journal* <https://www.storycircle.org/journal/>
 - In the yearly anthology <https://www.storycircle.org/publications/real-women-write/>
 - In one of our other publications (periodically available)
 - On one of our blogs <https://www.storycircle.org/blog-post-submission/>
 - As a book reviewer <https://www.storycircle.org/book-review/for-reviewers/>
- Take an online class (discount for members!) <https://www.storycircle.org/online-classes/>
- Teach an online class or present a webinar <https://www.storycircle.org/online-classes/class-proposal/>
- Advertise in our member library <https://www.storycircle.org/member-library/>
- Participate in one of our contests <https://www.storycircle.org/contests/>
- You can also volunteer to be a judge for one (or more) of our contests—including the Women's Book Awards! <https://www.storycircle.org/contest/story-circle-womens-book-awards/> Email storycircle@storycircle.org for details.
- Publicize your achievements <https://www.storycircle.org/members-in-news/>
- Put the social in social media:
 - Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/StoryCircleNetwork>
 - Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/storycirlenetwork/>
 - YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/@storycirlenetwork>
 - Twitter <https://twitter.com/storycircle>
 - TikTok <https://www.tiktok.com/@storycircle>
- Log in to a monthly webinar <https://www.storycircle.org/webinars/>
- Get a book reviewed <https://www.storycircle.org/book-review/for-authors-publishers/>
- Join a writing circle <https://www.storycircle.org/resources/circles-program/>
- You can even host a circle, online or in person. <https://www.storycircle.org/resources/circles-program/> We'll help you get started and provide guidance along the way. Email storycircle@storycircle.org for details.
- Take part in the monthly Writing Extravaganza on Zoom—email storycircle@storycircle.org for details.
- Join a roundtable <https://www.storycircle.org/resources/roundtables/>
- Attend a conference <https://www.storycircle.org/virtual-conference-2022/>
- Enjoy a writing getaway (international trips or Hill Country retreats offered periodically)
- Read our entire archive of *Journals* and anthologies <https://www.storycircle.org/publications/archives/>
- Fill an area we need extra help in, such as advertising or (virtual) reception, or serve on the Board of Directors <https://www.storycircle.org/about/>
- Share your ideas. Whether you want to suggest a topic for a class or *Journal* article, volunteer (we always need help!), or simply connect, send an email to storycircle@storycircle.org.
- Be a vocal sister by spreading the word about Story Circle Network. Need ideas? Email storycircle@storycircle.org.

It's impossible to have a circle with only one segment, nor can there be a network without an entire group. So don't go it alone—come help fill the circle!

Marketing Campaign Elevating SCN to New Heights Through the Expert Recommendations of Libby Jordan

Story Circle Network is thrilled to share some exciting updates and future plans with you. Thanks to Libby Jordan's marketing audit, we've been diligently working behind the scenes to take our organization to new heights. Libby's insights are truly invaluable. Since March, she has been conducting an in-depth assessment of our website, online courses program, and publications, gathering input from volunteers, board members, and key individuals involved. Her strategic recommendations will shape our journey over the next six months to one year.

Let's start with our website, where Libby's proposed improvements aim to enhance user experience and engagement. We're exploring restructuring navigation, adding a search button, and featuring the newsletter link more prominently. Captivating images will be added to enrich the visual experience, and each page will be content reviewed for more clarity and an improved user experience.

Moving on to online classes, Libby has recommended updating/adding SEO keywords to boost our course visibility and offering course bundles. Enhanced course descriptions, such as "Who should take this course?" will be added in the future to clarify their benefits. We also plan to showcase testimonials on social media to highlight our remarkable teachers. Finally, keep an eye out, because we do plan to change our course platform in the near future!

Now, turning our attention to publications, Libby has some great recommendations to enhance your reading experience. We're planning to create a social media editorial calendar and invite guest bloggers to contribute enriching content on our blogs (contact us if you're interested!). Additionally, we're working to optimize SEO, blog URLs, and metadata to attract more readers. We're also looking into sharing book reviews more widely and creating monthly roundups of member-published titles.

Of course, this is just the tip of the iceberg. There's a lot more in store and many goals and plans for the future. But we're moving slowly and steadily to implement what Libby calls "Quick Wins" before tackling the bigger ticket items.

We welcome members to share their thoughts and ideas about the latest updates. Your feedback is crucial in our efforts to provide a vibrant and enriching experience for everyone at Story Circle Network. Lastly, if you're interested in volunteering to assist with making these dreams a reality, we would appreciate your help. If you have experience or a general interest in SEO and some spare time, please contact Liz Beaty, SCN Program Director, at programs@storycircle.org for further information.

Celebrating Women Writers 2023 Sarton & Gilda Women's Book Awards

The 2023 Sarton & Gilda book awards are well underway, celebrating independent women writers and recognizing outstanding works in seven categories: Memoir, Contemporary Fiction, Historical Fiction, Middle Grades Fiction, Young Adult Fiction, Nonfiction, and Humorous Fiction/Nonfiction. In a publishing world often dominated by a few large houses, independent publishing plays a crucial role in bringing fresh perspectives and diverse voices to literature. We take great pride in honoring [forty-four exceptional authors since 2011](https://www.storycircle.org/scn-award-winners/) (<https://www.storycircle.org/scn-award-winners/>).

This year, we introduced a brand-new category—Young Adult Fiction! This, along with our Middle Grades Fiction category, allows us to celebrate outstanding works tailored for young readers, amplifying the impact of independent women writers even further.

If you're not submitting your book for the awards this year, we invite our members to become a juror in the first round of reviewing to help select the finalists. In the second round, our winners will be chosen by women librarians from all over the country. We would be grateful if you, or any librarian friends you might know, would like to join us as first-round jurors or second-round judges. To express your interest or to recommend a librarian, please contact SCN Program Director Liz Beaty at programs@storycircle.org.

The submission period for the book awards is coming to a close soon (October 31, 2023). If you haven't already, don't miss the chance to submit your exceptional works. Winners will be announced in April 2024. Join us in our mission to support independent writers and publishers and promote an inclusive and diverse literary world for all readers. The application form and all other pertinent information can be found at <https://www.storycircle.org/contest/story-circle-womens-book-awards/>.

Pat Bean Interviews With Sarton Award Winners:



Kimberly Garrett Brown
 Author of *Cora's Kitchen*

Winner of the 2022 Sarton Award
 for Historical Fiction

Kimberly Garrett Brown, author of *Cora's Kitchen*, knew from age twelve that she wanted to be a writer, but it wasn't until she read Natalie Goldberg's *Writing Down the Bones* that writing took a more prominent place in her life. And it wasn't until she received a rejection slip on a Christmas Eve that she realized there was no interest in the type of stories she wrote and decided to start her own literary press.

She created Minerva Rising Press six months after graduating from Goddard College and served as its publisher and executive editor. "Just as the Goddess Minerva represented creativity, wisdom, medicine, commerce, arts, and education, our press provides the opportunity for women artists to share their diverse experiences and talents in order to nurture a collective creativity."

Kimberly grew up in a suburb of Detroit and graduated from The University of Michigan with a bachelor's degree in psychology.

"I met my husband during my freshman year. We got married the summer after I graduated. At the time, I thought I wanted to be a marriage and family counselor. Though I loved writing, I didn't know much about how to make that into a career. Not to mention my family didn't see it as a viable option," says Kimberly.

Instead, she pursued a career in social work and worked in the foster care system for several years. "When I started to have children, writing was pushed further into the margins of my life, though I still dreamed of publishing a best-selling novel one day. I transitioned from social work into staff development training and motivational speaking. But in my heart, I always wanted to be a writer."

Kimberly took a writing correspondence course that got her writing again a few years after graduating from college. "I filled copious notebooks, took writing workshops, and eventually returned to school for a master of science in written communication. *Cora's Kitchen* was my creative thesis."

A historical novel set in Harlem in the 1920s, *Cora's Kitchen* is Kimberly's first book. "The emergence of Black creativity and innovation drew me to Harlem," Kimberly says. "The writers of the *Harlem Renaissance* beautifully captured the essence of life as a Black person in America. So much of what they wrote about still rings true today. I wanted to celebrate the period. I also wanted to explore the interconnectedness of women regardless of race or social-economic status."



Anastasia Zadeik
 Author of
Blurred Fates

Winner of the 2022 Sarton
 Award for Contemporary Fiction

The author's other publications are short stories and essays that appeared in *Black Lives Have Always Mattered: A Collection of Essays; Poems and Personal Narratives; The Feminist Collective; Compass Literary Magazine; Today's Chicago Woman; Chicago Tribune; and The Rumpus*.

The advice Kimberly received that she believes benefitted her the most was to trust the process. "Writing takes time. It ebbs; it flows. Trusting the process lights the way when it becomes challenging and/or tedious. I would tell other writers to make a commitment to their writing. Do the work. It will not always be easy. There will be times when no one values your work. But value yourself, value your writing. Value that longing in your heart to write."

"Winning the Sarton Award," says Kimberly, "has been confirmation that my work matters, that stories like *Cora's Kitchen* matter. It encourages me to keep writing historical stories about Black women."

Kimberly lives in Boca Raton, Florida and is currently in the discovery stage of writing a new novel based on Detroit in the 1950s. She talks about her writing on a podcast found [here](http://allwriteinsyncity.com/) (<http://allwriteinsyncity.com/>).

Anastasia Zadeik never imagined she would become one of the authors she has come to admire, but writing is something she has always done, beginning in a puffy, pink vinyl diary with a key at the age of six.

"I stored the minutiae of my life, poems or lyrics that moved me, tirades against myself and existential musings. For me, journaling was a way of processing my life," says Anastasia.

The author grew up in a close-knit family with four siblings. Her mother was a preschool educator and her father a Lutheran minister who spent nearly every Sunday morning as a guest pastor all around Chicago. "My mother, siblings, and I would often accompany him," she says, "staying after the morning services for potlucks, where we met people from all walks of life and came to appreciate Jello molds with marshmallows and green bean casseroles made with Campbells Soup and crispy onions."

Reading and storytelling played a huge part in Anastasia's young life, including tall tales from a grandfather who claimed he made his entry into the United States by diving off of a

freighter with his shoes tied to his head and a bowie knife between his teeth. "Which my siblings and I did not learn was untrue until we were well into our forties."

"Though my parents may not have intended to turn us into storytellers like my grandfather, we were each given three minutes to share the most important or interesting thing that happened to us that day every night at dinner," she recalls. "Only when I began writing stories myself did I realize I learned how to structure a short story and maintain my audience's interest around my childhood kitchen table. I may have also learned a thing or two about the beauty of elaboration, or as my grandfather would have said, 'making the story more interesting for the listener.'"

Anastasia graduated summa cum laude from Smith College in 1985. She thought she wanted to be a lawyer, but after working for a law firm for a year, she decided it was not her path. It was, however, where she met her future husband.

She ended up getting a job with an entrepreneurial PhD who was starting a memory research firm. "How lucky I was. For nearly a decade, I worked in the field of international neuropsychological research focused on memory disorders." It was a career, she says, that helped her cope when her mother was diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer's.

In the late 1980s, experiencing empty nest syndrome, Anastasia took a writing class with Marni Freedman, who encouraged her to write a memoir or a novel. She began a memoir about being a mother to two children while losing a mother and dealing with a drug-addicted stepdaughter. "But after writing about a third of the book, I realized I was still living in the story and needed some space from it in order to write it with any balance or nuance, instead of just frustration and rage."

So she began working on what would become the award-winning novel, *Blurred Fates*.

"I came up with my main character, Kate. I could see her, the woman behind me at Starbucks, or the one driving erratically in the pickup line at school, or the one sitting alone on the sidelines of the soccer game. And I gave her a triggering conflict and let it unfold."

Winning the Sarton Award, Anastasia says, has given her a much-needed boost of confidence. "In the past, I convinced myself that everyone in critique groups who loved my work was saying so just to be nice."

With added confidence, Anastasia continued writing, and her second book, *The Other Side of Nothing*, is planned for a May 2024 release.



Pat Bean is an SCN Board member and a regular contributor to the *Journal*. 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 at <https://patbean.net/>.

Sarton ~ Gilda Award Winners Get Your Copies Here:

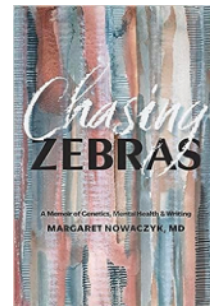
Memoir:

Chasing Zebras

Margaret Nowaczyk

Wolsak and Wynn Publishers

[Order from Amazon](#)



Contemporary Fiction:

Blurred Fates

Anastasia Zadeik

She Writes Press

[Order from Amazon](#)



Historical Fiction:

Cora's Kitchen

Kimberley Brown

Inanna Publications & Education

[Order from Amazon](#)



Nonfiction:

Manifesting Justice

Valena Beety

Kensington Publishing

[Order from Amazon](#)



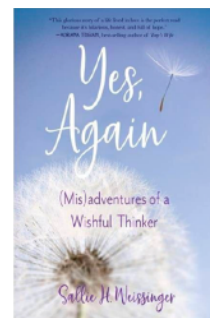
Gilda Prize Winner:

Yes, Again

Sallie H. Weissinger

She Writes Press

[Order from Amazon](#)



Here's Our Story: Nine Women Write Their Lives

A Behind-the-Scenes Preview of a "Lady Bunch" Book

by Andrea Simon

When I was preparing a workshop for SCN's in-person national conference in the summer of 2018, I had reservations (and not the invitational ones). Being a worrier, I wondered if I could attract enough women and if I could devise a topic that would be compelling. With a deep breath, I entitled the workshop "My Mother, My Muse—Writing about Your Mom Without Guilt." I crossed my fingers.

Six courageous women in their fifties and sixties ambled into the conference room. After an introduction, I handed out sheets entitled "Fill in the Blank" with ten items, including: "If I could speak to my mother now, I would tell her . . ." Within seconds, there were audible groans. One woman yelled, "Oh, here we go." Needless to say, the workshop was a success and instant friendships were formed.

In the fall of 2020, I proposed an online SCN course on the same topic. Within days, registration reached the maximum number of eight students. Three enrollees (from Washington, New York, and North Carolina) were members of my long-term writing group. A Texas author attended my SCN workshop. One registrant was my younger cousin from Idaho, a physician who loved to write. Three women were not personally connected—a retired commercial real estate developer from California studying Italian, the daughter of a Holocaust survivor and entrepreneur of used books, and an artist and ghostwriter from Melbourne, Australia.

Although this was far from a therapy group, the women produced deep and primal stories. Many not only vented for the first time, but gained new insights and appreciation of their mother's gifts. At our last session, we couldn't bear to end our special bond. We decided to continue our meetings, putting the subject of our mothers aside (at least consciously).

On December 17, 2020, we met for the first time as a voluntary, non-affiliated group. Counting me as the former instructor, we were nine women. We agreed on the new format: a different member leading each monthly meeting, preceded by prompts or ideas. Almost immediately, we gave ourselves a name—the Lady Bunch, after the iconic and almost prescient Zoom-like opening format of the classic TV comedy, *The Brady Bunch*. As we began our monthly Zoom meetings, each member popped into view like a Brady kid (or Alice), fitting snugly into our triple-line grid. Occasionally, a Lady Buncher was absent. Karen, our visual artist, said, "It

feels like a missing tooth!"

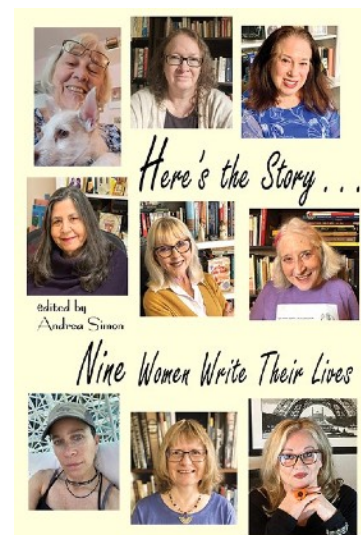
During our first year, we produced stories about childhood trauma, travels, illnesses, reaching life's goals, friendships, and the pandemic. After a particularly moving reading, one of us flippantly suggested that we include our best stories in an anthology. This joke slowly turned into reality as we searched our files. We also created new stories about significant chapters in our lives. We wrote about notable relatives, financial survival, the writing life, our passions (books, music, horses, travel), personal liberation, and even our hair. We named the book *Here's the Story*, based on the Brady Bunch theme song. Forty-two essays, stories, and poems later, *Here's the Story . . . Nine Women Write Their Lives* will be published by Bedazzled Ink in March 2024.

In analyzing the contents of our book, we realized that we hadn't focused on the usual "female" subjects, such as our significant others, children, and jobs. This was not deliberate avoidance; we veered toward what we most wanted to explore. Invariably, we wrote about the women we had been and the women we wanted to be. Each of us had lived a full and singular life.

Contributing writers include Amy Baruch, Stephanie Cowell, Linda Aronovsky Cox, Karen Finch, Jane Mylum Gardner, Rhonda Hunt-Del Bene, Katherine Kirkpatrick, and Kathleen M. Rodgers.

We are a mix of seasoned writers with several published works, along with those who write journals and other personal reflections. Despite our varying geographic locations, we Lady Bunchers are at home in our virtual space, with our lives to share.

To preorder *Here's the Story*, go [here](https://amzn.to/3Yn2XgT): <https://amzn.to/3Yn2XgT>



Andrea Simon is an award-winning author with three published books. She has an MFA in creative writing and lives in New York. Check her [website](http://www.andreasimon.net) (www.andreasimon.net) for more information about her work.

ONLINE CLASSES

Fall Term

September 18 - November 13, 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/>) or click on the session you're interested in below.

Journaling/Self-Discovery:

Elemental Journaling and Poetry with Francesca Aniballi
The Body in Writing with Kimberly Lee

Memoir and LifeWriting:

Introduction to Guided Autobiography with Susan Curtin
Hope Whispers, Nature Speaks: How Both Can Aid in Reframing our Life Stories with Christina Hassing

Essay Writing:

Reflective Writing with Lisa Baron

Writing Skills:

Crafting an Effective Scene: A Step-by-Step Approach with Len Leatherwood

Independent Study:

Sessions 1 & 2 with B. Lynn Goodman

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/>).

A Webinar Presented By

Story Circle Network



The Yin and Yang of Writer's Life: Finding Balance as a Woman Writer

With Jan Phillips

This is an intensive writing workshop that deals with the yin and yang of a writers' life— the intuitive, interior creative side and the logical, external marketing side. We will cover both the WHY-TO and the HOW-TO of our craft, since it is the fusion of both that leads to creative combustion and commercial success. This one's for you if you want to bring your creativity to a whole new level, find out where your inspiration has been hiding, sharpen your focus and voice, and decide, once and for all, what you're really up to here.

Wednesday, November 15th, 2023
6pm Central Time
Cost: \$25



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



Through the Maze and Out: From Fairy Tales to Life Stories

With Francesca Aniballi, PhD

In this workshop, you will learn to tap into the transformational power of fairy tales to tell one or more of your life stories. After reading a fairy tale, you will dig into its suggestions and associations for your life through journaling, creative prompts and activities.

You will realize how the magical filter of fairy tales can lead you to a remarkable degree of clarity and insight into your personal circumstances.

Saturday, December 9th, 2023
9am Central Time
Cost: \$25



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

The Rewards of Being a Volunteer with College Match

In the June *Journal*, we featured one of our College Match volunteers, Juliana Lightle. Her energy and enthusiasm are nothing short of inspirational. Here, in her own words, are some of the highlights of her work . . .

“After retiring from high school teaching because I moved from Texas to California, I missed working with teen students. Then, through SCN, I learned about College Match LA, submitted my application, and became a CMLA Counselor. For my first CMLA adventure, I met part of the team and some students on a field trip to visit the Claremont Colleges in August 2022. Then two weeks after school started, I drove to Mendez High School in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles to begin the real work.

“Because CMLA students must meet certain GPA requirements, my students last year maintained good GPAs and were highly motivated to succeed. Two were the student body president and vice president. Besides maintaining a high GPA, it is important for CMLA students to participate in both school and community activities. Last year one of my students

ran marathons and was student body president. He left for UC Berkeley early to attend summer school. He has learned Mandarin and is saving money for a trip to China next summer.

“Another student last year was accepted at Dartmouth as well as all the UC schools. He chose UCLA for its civil engineering program. He is interested in urban infrastructure in poor, minority communities. In high school, he was involved in a community effort to prevent a freeway from negatively affecting his community.

“This year I will be working with four girls, all of whom are in the top ten students of their class. They have already started their college essays. I will edit, help them choose colleges that fit their interests, and be one of their cheerleaders. One of the students shares my love of mariachi and plays in the mariachi group at Mendez. Here's to another wonderful CMLA experience.”

Thank you for sharing your experience with us, Juliana. You are a treasure!



Writing Tips from Our Teachers

Launch Pad: Countdown to Writing, Publishing, and Marketing Your Book

This is a story about what happened when two seasoned educators and authors, who had never met, found themselves in the uncharted waters of becoming debut novelists. Spoiler Alert! It has a happy ending and hopefully, your story will as well.

Launching our novels in the middle of a pandemic was one thing, but even without the pandemic, it became evident quickly that there was a lot more to becoming novelists than we initially anticipated. In truth, our existing skill sets were not sufficient for the challenges we faced. This realization prompted us to embark on unexpected journeys that involved not only honing our own craft but also supporting and guiding other writers along the way.

In our individual approaches, we took different paths toward achieving our goals.

Mary, with a targeted approach, created the Bookish Road Trip Facebook group, a thriving community for readers and writers to connect and share their passion for books. She then set out to learn everything she could about book marketing, social media, algorithms, and networking. This led her to establish Author Marketing Coach—a marketing company aimed at equipping authors with the necessary tools and resources for success. Here she created *The Ultimate Book Launch Workbook*, a comprehensive resource that provides authors with guidance for planning and executing successful book launches.

Conversely, Grace took a more spontaneous "spaghetti against the wall" approach to building community and getting her book and her author brand in front of readers and influencers. She joined forces with Mary at Bookish Road Trip, taking on the role of director of membership. Grace's creativity and networking skills led her to establish the Author Talk Network—a platform that provided authors with opportunities to showcase their work through interviews and discussions. Furthermore, Grace launched two award-winning radio shows that shed light on authors' journeys and how they leave their mark on the world through the art of story.

Although our paths diverged at times, we recognized that there was always room to learn and share knowledge. This recognition gave birth to the *Launch Pad* book series, a collective effort that enlisted the contributions of over forty authors. Through this series of anthologies and downloadable toolkits, we aimed to provide aspiring authors with a comprehensive guide on writing, publishing, and marketing their books. We believed that by combining our experiences and the wisdom of others, we could propel authors across the writing spectrum toward success. In short, providing them with a "launch pad" for all their bookish needs.

The series encompasses a wide range of perspectives and insights, offering aspiring authors valuable resources from seasoned writers, publishers, and marketers. Each book brought new learning into play. In book one on writing, topics covered include using online research tools effectively, the power of working with a book coach, and the importance of developing scenes, tension, and characters. Book two explores the multiple paths to publishing and how not one path works for all authors, nor even all books. Finally, book three addresses the absolute need for developing a brand, a network, and a marketing plan. We were inspired, informed, and so excited to share these expert tips with others floating around in the uncharted waters we experienced.

The [Launch Pad series](http://www.LaunchPadRadio.com) (www.LaunchPadRadio.com) stands as a testament to today's authors who, truly, must have the willingness to adapt, hone their craft, understand the bookish publishing pathways, and market their book regardless of how that book arrived in the world. Our novels were the catalysts that propelled us toward personal growth and a shared purpose.

Discover more about book marketing and Mary Helen Sheriff at www.MaryHelenSheriff.com

Meet Grace and explore her work at www.GraceSammon.Net



Story Circle Book Reviews

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

I Will Die On This Hill: Autistic Adults, Autism Parents, and the Children Who Deserve a Better World

by Meghan Ashburn and Jules Edwards

Reviewed by Mary Jo Doig

The autistic parent community and the non-autistic (allistic) parent community are standing on two hills, divided by rivers of information and connected by bridges. In both communities, there are bridge-builders, bridge-burners, and people who believe there should be no bridge at all. What we must all keep in mind is that our children are standing on the bridges. If we burn the bridges, the children perish. If we remove the bridge, the children drown. The only real option to save our children is by working together to make those bridges stronger.

—Meghan Ashburn and Jules Edwards

Meghan Ashburn is a former teacher who is also a white, allistic mother of four sons, two of whom are twins diagnosed with autism. Jules Edwards is a woman who was diagnosed autistic late-in-life. She is also an ADHD mother of three Black and Ojibwe autistic children. Each mother was well into her journey of seeking knowledge and help from professionals, support groups, reading and research, and other pathways about how best to raise her children when they met. The two could not have been more different culturally and genetically. Unsurprisingly, due to diverging theories and plentiful misinformation, they respectively lived on the two different hills they describe above.

As I read through the pages, chapters, and then to the end of this remarkable book, I felt myself moving right along in learning with the mothers and other diverse individuals contributing their unique situations and perspectives.

Most impressive was the authors' early recognition and faithful ongoing commitment to listening with respect to the viewpoint of each parent, whether allistic or non-allistic, and

others. This important value is impressively prevalent in all discussions of the issues.

There's so much for each of us to learn. The most important things I learned are that the autistic spectrum is wide and deep. The diverse needs of each individual child don't fit the mold of one-program-fits-all. Heartbreakingly, our present economy and social structure affords more children of privileged parents the access to programs—the first hill—and often places disadvantaged families on the second hill. It's vital that we seek to work together with all people with respect and kindness.

The book concludes with a thoughtful, detailed chapter about the many ways we can each find a niche to match our skills and time, as well as an excellent multi-page resource list at the end. Indeed, reading this powerful book is a great way for all of us to become a large or small part of the support network needed for autistic parents and autistic children.

"Our goal is to make the world a better place for all autistics, present and future," Ashburn and Edwards tell us. May it be so.



Author Meghan Ashburn is an educational consultant and parent mentor passionate about inclusion and communication rights. She recently graduated from Virginia's Partners in Policymaking with the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities, and she sits on her local school district's Special Education Advisory Board. A neurodivergent parent to four children, two of whom are autistic, Meghan spends her spare time trying to change the world. Her website, [Not an Autism Mom](https://www.notanautismmom.com/), is loaded with resources to help educators and parents support autistic children.



Author Jules Edwards is a neurodivergent Anishinaabe writer, gardener, accountant, and disability justice advocate. She is a recipient of the Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (LEND) fellowship, a board member of Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network, an Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) National Training Director Council trainee, and a Wilder Foundation Community Equity Program cohort member, co-founder of Minnesota Autistic Alliance, board member for the Minnesota Ombudsman for American Indian Families, board member of The Arc Minnesota, and elected chairperson of the Minnesota Autism Council. Jules is the parent of neurodivergent Afro Indigenous people and is passionate about building community and works to improve child safety and disability policy.



Reviewer Mary Jo Doig is a retired human services professional who has found many ways to nurture her reader's/writer's soul in Story Circle since joining in 2001. She has served as a board member, Sarton judge, True Words editor, book reviewer, circle facilitator, and program chair of SCN's national conferences. As she found deeper levels of her own story by reading other women's stories, her segue into writing book reviews was a natural. In 2018, she published her first book, *Patchwork: A Memoir of Love and Loss*. In her Albemarle County, Virginia community, Mary Jo facilitates Older Women's Legacy (OWL) Workshops. Visit her [website](https://www.maryjodoig.com/).

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 April 2023 was selected by Linda Hoyer, our blog coordinator. She welcomes your submissions about a day in your life at: <https://www.storycircle.org/category/one-woman's-day/>.

Me and Quentin, the Kiosk

by Sara Etgen-Baker

My endocrinologist recently ordered blood work for me. "Here," she said, handing me a computer-generated form with my name, insurance information, and testing particulars on it. "Schedule your appointment online. Then take this to the diagnostic center upstairs to get your blood work done."

I scheduled my appointment, and the following day, my husband Bill and I arrived at the center. Instead of a friendly receptionist greeting us, two kiosk machines were stationed in front of what was once the receptionist's window.

I stepped up to one kiosk (Bill nicknamed it "Quentin") and scanned the QR code on my orders. Quentin prompted me to step on the digital scale at the bottom of the kiosk. Afterward, Quentin instructed me to put my driver's license and insurance card under a scanner that quickly read the information. Within minutes, I was efficiently registered. Despite our appointment, we waited for two hours in an overcrowded, stuffy waiting room with limited seating until we were summoned behind a closed and locked door. I was poked and prodded until a plump vein was found. Eventually, four vials of blood were taken.

Before leaving, the phlebotomist handed me an orange jug saying, "Collect your urine in this for 24 hours. Store your urine jug in your refrigerator between collections. Follow the instructions on the side of the jug and bring it back the next day. Remember, always keep it cold."

For twenty-four hours I collected urine. Afterward, I labeled and sealed the jug according to her instructions, keeping it refrigerated until we could return it the following day. The next day we checked in with Quentin, who quickly alerted a nameless lab technician who emerged from behind the closed and locked door.

Without making eye contact, he retrieved my orange jug.

"What happens next?" I asked.

He offered this canned explanation: "A technician will test your urine to determine if you're retaining or flushing out your calcium. Your endocrinologist will receive the results by the end of the week. She'll use the information to determine what's causing the demineralization of your bones and your osteoporosis."

Without saying another word, he turned and walked away. On the way out, I glanced over at Quentin, resisting the urge to say goodbye. As I boarded the elevator, I couldn't help but wonder what happened to the "care" in healthcare. Why the minimal human contact, limited interaction, and overall dehumanization I experienced? Economics? Efficiency? Maybe people just don't want to interact anymore? Maybe they don't know how to, don't want to, or are afraid to do so. Maybe they're protecting themselves against "burnout" from the emotional demands of working with suffering patients.

Nonetheless, Quentin and similar health information technologies are used with increasing regularity to automate many aspects of medical practice. True, new technologies are wonderful tools. Humans have been using tools throughout time, but I wonder, are these new tools adding to or detracting from humanity?

From my perspective, they minimize our humanness, sacrificing care for efficiency.



Sara Etgen-Baker, after retiring from teaching, began writing memoirs and personal essays, many of which have been published in anthologies and magazines including *Good Old Days Magazine*, *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, *Guideposts*, *Times They Were A Changing*, and *Wisdom Has a Voice*. She's currently compiling her collection into a book titled *Shoebox Stories*. Sara recently finished writing her first novel, *Secrets at Dillehay Crossing*. She hopes to publish both books by the end of the year.

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).

How the Sears Catalog Shaped My Novel

by Ellen Notbohm

How much research is enough? Fiction writers know the dilemma well. We want to know our characters intimately. How did their world look, smell, and feel to them? What did they eat, wear, have in their homes? How did they work, love, observe rituals, doctor themselves?

The books and documents I amassed in researching my novel, *The River by Starlight*, fill a seven-foot bookcase. But the book I consulted more than any other, the one I dog-eared with use, cost me all of \$1.50.

I found the 1902 Sears Catalogue on a lonely back table at a used book sale. Author Cleveland Amory called it an anthropology lesson, “a view of the American scene at the turn of the century with an excitement and accuracy that would defy the most eminent historian.”

“THE REAL VALUE OF THIS BOOK IS PLAINLY SHOWN IN EVERY PRICE QUOTATION” blares the cover. I learned the array of choices and prices for everything from thimbles to pianos. How credit worked. How it all reflected the larger economic picture of the country. Details from the catalog colored my descriptions of home furnishings, tools, weapons, toiletries, and potions. Of appliances, hay loaders, hobby horses, paint, and fabric colors.

I learned what men, women, and children wore in every imaginable situation, and that “fat men usually experience much difficulty getting a shirt in the right shape.” I wrote a frisky scene giving an intimate look at the layers of “societally-required” undergarments my protagonist dared to forego on a sweltering day. In a charged, confrontational

scene, we can smell the “overpowering cloud of Le Muguet” enveloping the town’s queen busybody. A gorgeous tortoiseshell hair comb becomes an heirloom, and a pair of “ugly cloth-top lace-ups” leads to disaster. We see and feel the fabrics of a prostitute’s costume, a child’s nightgown, a wedding quilt, and the garish handkerchief of the queen snoop’s informant.

Exhilarating as it was to slather on such detail, much was, alas, lost to the delete button. “Cool research,” as one editor called it, that didn’t move the story forward had to go. An example: The reader knows protagonist Annie and sister Jenny shared glasses of lemonade on Jenny’s porch. But they don’t get to see the original version of the scene, which included Annie sticking a pinkie through a door screen (“handsomer than the cut shows”), opening Jenny’s refrigerator (nope, Sears didn’t call it an icebox), and pouring the lemonade into ruby-stained tumblers while Jenny finishes her work with a white cedar dash butter churn (“peculiarly adapted for milk and butter purposes”) and puts the butter into brass-locked molds (“securing the utmost possible rigidity”).

But by writing those details, I immersed myself in the world in which my characters lived and empathized with its beauties and challenges. Even when deleted, the details remained embedded in the story by virtue of how they influenced the thoughts, dialogue, and deeds of the characters.

An ancient, battered catalog: \$1.50

Creating a richly faceted portrait of another time: priceless!



Ellen Notbohm's internationally renowned work has touched millions in more than twenty-five languages. She is author of the widely acclaimed novel *The River by Starlight* (2018 Sarton Award winner for historical fiction) and the nonfiction classic *Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew*. Her short prose and poetry has appeared in journals and literary magazines including *Dorothy Parker's Ashes*, *Well Read*, and *Eclectica*. Visit her at <https://ellennotbohm.com/> and on social media.



Our Future Is Female

My One and Only Life By Jennifer Nham

I am a first-generation American born to parents who immigrated from Vietnam to escape the brutal Communist regime. They wanted to live in a country where they could have a better life. However, it wasn't easy for my parents when they arrived in the United States because they spoke only Vietnamese and Cantonese. As a result, they chose to live in immigrant communities where those languages were primarily spoken, and I started school speaking only Cantonese. I was put in English Language Development in first grade. Through hard work, perseverance, and time, I was able to improve my English and how I spoke. Unfortunately, I discovered during this time that I had a lisp.

Aware that my family did not have the resources for speech therapy, I knew that in order to correct this problem, I needed to take initiative. Therefore, I looked up lisp-correction sound-pronunciation charts and mimicked what they showed about proper tongue placement. I practiced these new placements repeatedly so that I could feel what was correct. Though it was hard to change the way I spoke, over time, I was able to eliminate my lisp. Once I became more fluent in English, I assumed the responsibility of translator for my parents and other immigrant family members.

Over these years, I have translated in many different situations from handling telephone calls to interpreting during medical visits, to explaining important documents. I have been happy to serve in this role to make life easier for others. I am grateful they took the risk to pursue the American Dream, which has offered me a future I would never have had in Vietnam. However, coming from a traditional immigrant Vietnamese family, my parents have had very firm beliefs about how women should behave.

My parents would not identify their ideas as sexist; they would say they are reflective of their culture. As a result, they believe it is important to limit and control what I can do.

Unlike other friends and classmates, I have not been allowed to go shopping with friends, attend parties, or even spend the night with my best friend, who my parents know very well. This has damaged some of my relationships but also helped me to find friends who don't mind my situation and can even relate to overly protective, immigrant parents.

Mom and Dad exclaim, "You should not be too smart as a woman. When you go to college, you should major in accounting instead of aiming to be an engineer!"

I respond, "Don't you want me to be successful? Didn't you move here so I could have hopes and dreams?"

They shake their heads. "Yes, but we don't want you to lose your femininity."

This clash between Vietnamese culture and American culture has been a challenge for me throughout my life. I have felt unsure about what exactly I should do. Disobey and break my parents' hearts or be who I am and who I want to be? My parents are primarily fearful that I will lose my cultural identity. What they do not understand is that I want to retain the traditions of my ancestry while stretching and growing as an individual.

I have been motivated by the choices my brothers have made to become an orthopedic surgeon and an electrical engineer. Seeing how they can pursue what they want gives me the courage to recognize that I have that same choice. I have come to realize that I have the right to strive to be the best version of myself. I motivate myself each and every day with the awareness that this is my one and only life. While my parents may not understand my career choice right now, I know they will be proud of my success. They will see that I can pursue my dreams, be a respectful daughter, and also honor both Vietnamese and American cultures.

Jennifer Nham, this issue's featured young female, just returned from a month-long trip with her parents to Vietnam. After having the good fortune to choose from many top-choice colleges, including University of California, Berkeley, Jennifer has chosen to attend UC San Diego, where she will begin her education to become a chemical engineer.



Spotlight on Volunteers

Len Leatherwood, Story Circle Network President
by Shawn LaTorre

Volunteers within our membership provide the energy that keeps SCN going and growing—the sticking power that holds us all together. For instance, our Sarton Book Awards program depends on a team of coordinators and jurors, just as our social media program relies on dedicated people to post. In this issue, meet Len Leatherwood, someone who took charge in a leadership position within our organization seven years ago as the online classes coordinator and vice president. She has served as our president for the past three years and has proven to be a woman with true vision. We're pleased to share Len's thoughts below, both personal and professional, with our members.

Life outside Story Circle Network

After living in Beverly Hills for 28 years, I recently moved to our family's orange grove in Ojai, California. We have 250 Valencia orange trees, a few lemons, a whole slew of pomegranates, and 63 oak trees. I've been a writing coach for the past 23 years and continue to work with students of all ages via Zoom. I also have an eBay business with my husband and youngest daughter, selling antiques and collectibles. In addition, we handle estates for people who need to downsize or are dismantling a deceased family member's home. This has been a unique chance to offer help to people who very much need a guiding hand during a difficult time. As for hobbies, I have a great interest in cooking and baking. As someone who doesn't eat refined sugar, I have developed recipes for cakes, cookies, and pies over the years using honey, maple syrup, and molasses. My family tells me my sweets are better than any "alternative" sweet they can buy. That has been my goal and makes me happy to hear.

What it's like being president and serving on the SCN Board

In 2008, I was looking for a community of writers when a woman writing friend of mine recommended Story Circle Network. I went to the website, liked what I saw, and signed up for an e-circle. I'm still with that e-circle today and over the years have slowly increased my involvement—first as an online instructor, then as a conference presenter, later as online classes coordinator, and finally as a board member, serving as vice president and then president.

The best part is the daily contact I have with women writers at all levels of expertise. I also have had the privilege of working closely with our founder, Susan Wittig Albert, which has been a wonderful opportunity to watch and learn how a *New York Times* bestselling author balances her writing and her life. I also work hand-in-hand with Teresa Lynn, our administrator;

my daughter Liz Beaty, our program coordinator; and our board. All these women are not only kind-hearted but have a desire to work collaboratively, which makes our collective goals a lot easier to achieve. The most challenging part is developing a meaningful strategic plan so that our beloved organization remains strong and viable in the upcoming years. We also are challenged with finding ways for women to know more about us so we can reach as many of them as possible to fulfill our mission.

Everyone on the board is open, supportive, and dedicated to the SCN mission to help all women tell their stories. I have been inspired by their dedication and overall healthy attitude toward themselves, their lives, and their writing. We are women supporting women, and this translates to a compassionate approach in our shared work. I believe heart and soul in the importance of women finding their voices through telling the stories of their lives. Women's perspectives are sorely needed in our world today, and by empowering women to recognize the value of their stories, we can truly change the world for the better.

One of my favorite activities at SCN was offering and leading two international writing workshop/sightseeing tours to Italy for members, their friends and family. Soon, I'll offer a new trip for 2024. It is a wonderful opportunity to bond with writing sisters during the workshop and get to know everyone's family and friends while enjoying the glorious countryside or historical town centers. Be on the lookout for this next trip in conjunction with Scenic Travel of Sorrento, Italy. SCN members and their friends/families will receive a \$500 discount. I hope you'll join us for this affordable chance to get together, travel, and write.

On Reading and Writing

I'm a die-hard Toni Morrison fan and would list *Beloved* as one of my favorite novels. I also love Zora Neale Hurston, John Steinbeck, Virginia Woolf, Joan Didion, Barbara Kingsolver, Roxanne Gay, and many more. I love these books because they help the reader understand difficult social issues while being invited into an intriguing story. Currently, I am reading *The Poetry Home Repair Manual* by Ted Kooser and would highly recommend it. I also have *Good Poems* by Garrison Keillor on my nightstand along with two poetry books by Billy Collins: *Sailing Alone Around the Room* and *The Trouble with Poetry*. The best novel I've read lately is *Lincoln in the Bardo* by George Saunders, one of my favorite authors of flash fiction along with Lydia Davis.

I have written both a memoir and a novel and nurse dreams of having them published. Of course, I would love to publish a collection of my many flash fiction and memoir pieces as well. I also am delving into poetry and am excited to incorporate what I learn into my poems, fiction, and nonfiction.

From Story Circle: Grateful thanks and a warm hug to Len Leatherwood for the expertise, time, attention, and energy she dedicates as a volunteer in the board position of president.

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/>

True Words from Real Women

*Coordinated and edited by Jo Virgil, True Words is a quarterly selection of short life-writing pieces by Story Circle Network members. For this issue, the optional theme was "Forgiveness." The suggested topic for the December issue is "MotherNature," but we welcome all entries should a different topic strike your fancy. **Deadline: October 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/>).*

An Angel Letter

Ann Haas
Mogadore, OH
nyjazzie@hotmail.com

Dear Daphne:

Let me start with an apology to you. I was too young to understand at the time what a wonderful gift I was given as my first job to land in an office with such a wonderful group of women. I was not to meet someone like you again until much later in my work life. This is my angel letter to you and how our intersection in life so many years ago set me on a path I could not begin to imagine as an eighteen-year-old girl when I landed in that university office in 1966.

I had carried unspoken for many years the memory of my eighth-grade algebra teacher telling me that I was not smart enough to attend college or that I'd be college material since I had a C in the class. In my blue-collar family, college was not discussed nor considered for a girl in the 1960s, but rather that I would make my way in the secretarial world and eventually marry and have a family. How fortunate I was to be hired at a university surrounded by career women who were entirely different role models for me.

Your faith in me that I was smart enough and would without a doubt be accepted as a college applicant was what gave me the push to apply for admission at the university where we worked. I was accepted and began taking classes on my lunch hour and in the evenings. The fact that I was to learn later that you were a victim of domestic violence made me admire you even more for your personal courage to start a new life. You gave me the courage to embrace new ideas, gain confidence in myself, and to eventually pay it forward to other young women throughout my social work career.

Please know that you are my first angel in a long line of courageous and talented women I admire, and I will always be grateful for knowing you and having you by my side so very long ago.

Blessings to you,

Ann

Song

Monique S. Simon
Binghamton, NY
sixthwell@hotmail.com

Days after the bomb
The singed bird calls out sweetly—
I must learn from him

I Choose Peace

Linda Healy
Dayton, OH
lindareiki@yahoo.com

I walk my dog on a lovely day.
Neighbor breaks the silence, yelling.
Quiet interrupted, I look her way.
Pandemic disturbs in unexpected ways.
I choose peace.

Manager said she must wear mask
In apartment building.
She blames me. I have no heart.
She has high blood pressure.
I disturbed her peace.

Rush of emotions comes over me.
Disbelief she believes it is okay
this way to talk to me.
I choose peace.

Don't want to hurt her, won't lash back.
I'm sorry you are sick, I say.
Then begin to walk away
from an angry 75-year-old child.
I choose peace.

Gratitude surrounds me,
that bitterness comes no more.
Feel compassion for her.
She yells louder.
I feel peace.

Manipulation, intimidation,
Join the temper tantrum.
I pray for our humanity as I walk on.
I send a card and chocolate. Feel better soon.

What an upside-down world.
I see peace.

CONGRATULATIONS to Linda Healy

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.

The Phantom

Lucy Painter
Willow Street, PA
w-Circle 6

Today I stand at my father's grave in my hometown, the one I left, vowing never to return. The sun bears down. I wish for a breeze that doesn't come. Today I am here to seek forgiveness—for him, for me.

It began when my mother gave me the old family photos the year before she died. Digging through them, I was struck with the truth.

Growing up, I lived in the same house with my mother, two brothers, and father. We ate at the same table and slept under the same roof, yet we ignored him, as he did us. There were no family vacations or trips to the river to swim. He attended no school meetings but chose to work seven days a week. We saw little of him. If he was home, he drank alone or at the local bar.

We went about our lives as if he were not there. He was the phantom. It was easier that way.

I thought little of my father, long dead, until one winter afternoon when I began to sort through my mother's photos and noticed what I had not seen before. Often he is absent in family pictures. If present, he stands apart, staring into the distance, his face blank. He doesn't want to be there.

The truth is plain. My father suffered severe depression that he sought to alleviate with alcohol. He was ill, but we never acknowledged his pain. I may claim the ignorance of a child, but I don't. I gave up on him, as we all did, without taking the time or feeling compassion to realize that he suffered every day. My mother was angry, and I followed her lead.

Today I come to ask his forgiveness for my callousness, my neglect. How could I not forgive my father now that I have learned from my own life what he suffered? The breeze picks up and clouds gather. I walk away from his grave and forgive him for it all. Can I do the same for myself?

Senior Moment

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

One afternoon, my friend Jenny picked me up from my house to have lunch in town in San Clemente. We had to park two blocks away from the restaurant. After a delicious meal, we walked next door to a Home Decor shop that was having a sale. I bought a large copper candleholder that was three feet long and included five ten-inch amber candles. It was a perfect centerpiece for my dining table.

When I carried it out of the store, I said, "Boy, this thing is heavy. I don't think I can carry it back to the parking lot."

"Give it to me," Jenny says. "I'll carry it." But, when I handed it to her she nearly buckled over. "Whoa, this is heavy. Just wait here. I'll go back and get the car and pick you up," Jenny said. "I'll be back in in fifteen minutes."

For twenty minutes, I held this bulky centerpiece, pacing back and forth from a parking space to the edge of the street, looking for Jenny's red Nissan. But Jenny never came. I decided to give her a call.

"Hello," she said. "Who's this?"

"Jenny, it's me, Mary Jo. Where are you?"

There was a long pause. "Damn, I can't believe it. After I got into my car, I completely forgot all about picking you up, and I drove home."

"You've got to be kidding! Well, I need a ride home. Can you come back?"

"Yes. I'll be there in fifteen minutes."

When she arrived, I chided her. At our age, I guess this will be the last time we'll have a couple of glasses of wine for lunch.

The Art of Forgiveness

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

Forgiveness means
accepting what happened as it happened.

Forgiveness means
being done with pride, ego, and self-pity.

Forgiveness means
letting it go.

Forgiveness means
loving from a distance.

Forgiveness means
knowing the past offers no repast.

Forgiveness means
stepping into your present.

Forgiveness means
mastering the art of being soft and humble.

Forgiveness means
discovering a serenity never known before.

The Beautiful Surrender

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

Released from the bondage
of self-guilt
The chains broken
after walking the long
road of grief

To catch the sweet scent of flowers
in the air
To feel the heat radiating from a
fireplace to bring warmth
to the numbing coldness

To run with time
as it excavates experience
To be able to sense
the essence of both
the living and the dead

To intersect with inspiration
as it flies towards
Your crossroads
To see the sundrops of the Earth
like we've always seen the rainfall
To let the laughter of soul
Resound from your throat

All of these
are the beautiful surrender of
Forgiveness.

Self-Forgiveness

Debra Dolan
West Vancouver, BC
Debradolani958@gmail.com

I recently deep-dived into an inner journey, rereading fifty-plus years of diaries, now journals, commencing in 1969. I went into the experience with an open mind & heart as I instinctively knew that not all of what I would learn about myself was happiness and light.

Many harsh realities were brought to surface. The current confusions and uncertainties are present, as well as each and every slight along the way—a tsunami of memories of all those conversations that could have been handled differently; details of troubling behaviors involving men, alcohol or drugs; bad bosses and missed promotions; the daddy wounds and the estranged mother; the abandoned friendships; crushed university dreams; the illness with its debilitating fatigue; the discarded lovers and heartbreaking affair; the adults that did nothing witnessing childhood events; and those that loved me whom I did not even notice.

I was reminded that I had no desire to be someone's mother story, having spent most of my own teens repressed,

depressed, waiting to get out. There was a time during my childhood when I believed that all children were unwanted. I reflect intensely upon my experience, imagining myself at ten years of age, innocent and trusting, and I forgive myself for ever thinking I was somehow responsible. Being molested as a child, my mother not believing and later marrying him, left me shattered with a wounded soul. I held onto my hurt, trauma, and emotional wounds into my forties, not even knowing I was doing so. My adult recollection of it was a delicate and fractured story and, hence, was not recognized as credible for many, many years. It was easy, at the time of pre-pubescent disclosure, to view me as unbelievable, unreliable, and untrustworthy, as I lived those formative juvenile years in a world of imagination and storytelling developed by books.

Last year, I forgave my mother, privately and on my own terms. She is back in my life after nearly three decades. She will never admit any wrongdoing or that her choices profoundly affected my life; however, I no longer have any doubt of her love.

The Irony of Flaws

Len Leatherwood
Ojai, CA
<https://lenleatherwood.com/>

We all have flaws, yes?
Those pesky parts that demonstrate
Our humanness
The parts that make us
Crimson with shame
When we realize what they have revealed to others

Our thoughtlessness
Our inability to be charitable, kind, considerate, empathetic
On a day when we're overloaded, overwhelmed,
Over everything and everybody
Who is looking at us with
A needy eye

Yes, flaws are an element of our human condition
They also make us more understanding
On a good day
Of other people's failings
We all know how easy it is
To fall into the mud puddle of life

We are by nature self-reflective
Some more, some less
A few not at all
But the majority
Know exactly how it feels
To have muck on our face

Flaws can be
Fodder for forgiveness
Of oneself
Of others
Flaws offer us the opportunity
To gain insight and grow

Coyote

Kathie Arcide
Bellevue, WA

<https://chosenperspectives.com/>, karcide@msn.com
e-Circle 8

My Dad was a Coyote, a good trickster, according to Sioux culture.

When he died years ago, my sisters and I discovered many surprises. He was a quiet, self-contained guy so we had never known how aware he was of the separated lives his three daughters lived. We had been estranged since our mother died when we were kids.

Our middle sister was missing completely. She moved from San Diego to Hawaii and had virtually no contact with us. But apparently, Dad's relationship with this absent sibling had continued in an uninterrupted way.

He must have known about our rift but never said a word. Not really surprising. Evidence of his warmth and love was never through verbal communication, and certainly didn't involve emotions. Simply not in his repertoire.

Our very clever, deceitfully shy, and quiet father sure set us up, though. He'd found a psychologically savvy estate attorney and left specific instructions that we were to be equal executors of his will. All transactions had to be handled in person, with all three of us present. Prepared to negate all excuses, he even allotted airfare for as many of these meetings as we needed, an expense taken right off the top of our inheritance. We lived in San Diego, Honolulu, and Seattle at the time.

My Dad, the closet smart ass.

We joined in rare but delighted appreciation for this sneaky man who had raised us. As we were going through his house, under the glass top on his huge desk we found a solitary scrap of paper with the following quote in our father's handwriting: "A person who cannot forgive but continues to bear a grudge, harms only himself, for hate is like acid, eating away at the vessel that contains it...Love, Daddy"

We all groaned. We all cried. We all hugged, and for just a few moments, our only history with each other was not all the perceived wrongs, but simply our beloved Dad.

She Didn't Deserve That

Patricia LaPointe
Prospect Heights, IL

<https://medium.com/@patromitolapointe>,
grampat8@comcast.net

We had been trying for years to get past our traumatic early relationship. I felt you and I were getting closer. But there was always one thing I could barely tolerate.

You would call me and ask about the kids, etc. Mom, I had no problem letting you into my life that way. But then, I would

ask you about my siblings only to receive an abrupt, "They're OK." You would then return to questioning me.

I often discovered that you had shared everything I told you with the other family members, regardless of whether I asked you not to do so. Most of the time, I put up with it. But when you broke your promise not to tell anyone about something so very intimate I had shared with you, I lost it and slammed the phone down.

Only a few minutes later, I felt so bad and called you back. I will never forget hearing you sobbing as you answered the phone.

Was it really necessary to hurt you like that? No, I knew it then. I know it even more now, Mom. I know how devastated I would be if now that I'm the same age you were then and one of my children did the same to me.

Never Forget

Ariela L. Zucker
Auburn, ME
Ldplus4u@yahoo.com

"You shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you must not forget." Deuteronomy 25:17-19

I did not grow up with forgive,
I grew up with never forget
what they did to us.

I did not learn how to walk away,
I was commanded to remember
so, it will never happen again.

I did not learn how to surrender,
only how to stand up to oppression, how
force needs to be answered with force.

My parents instill their life lessons
in me, to pass on to my children,
and future generations.

Simmering anger, wrapped in
thoughts of revenge, of pursuing
justice, of making the impossible right.

But if there is compassion in forgiveness,
grace in letting go. Purgation and respite
to the one who grants acquittal.

To the let-go, release, send away,
unshackle, and open the way to inner freedom,
if this is the reward, I'll take it.

Rosie's Daughter

Jo-Ann Vega
Millsboro, DE
athomevega@gmail.com

Your constant companion when I was a child
You helped ease my awkwardness by warning others
"It takes her awhile to warm up, but
once she starts she can't stop talking!"

I never quite shed the social anxiety

Born during the Great Depression to immigrants
Raised during a time of want and world war
You accepted your role as a homemaker

A cloak I have never worn comfortably

Taught me the wisdom of the elders
Felt privileged rather than burdened, as
Mead broadcast in *Blackberry Winter* to
Live long enough to consider your perspective
Recognize your quiet thoughtfulness and generosity
Forgive you and then myself

We all have limitations

It is still strange to be in the world
Without your generosity and piercing honesty
Traits I share, without your patience
Grateful to proclaim

I am Rosie's daughter

The Healing Power of Forgiveness

Patricia Hollinger
Westminster, MD
woodscrone@gmail.com

I wanted to leap out of my chair to go over to scratch this woman's eyes out when she suggested that she and my then husband planned to gain custody of our son, as they planned to get married. However, my pacifist upbringing restrained me.

My husband proposed that he live in the basement of our house which meant I would be preparing his meals and doing his laundry. I made it clear that was not an option. He must move out!

I proposed that he seek a divorce as soon as possible, giving no thought to how I would support myself and our son while I was only making \$3,000 annually as secretary at the local high school. By the time the divorce was final, I had obtained a job with a \$6,000 annual income and was giving piano lessons that paid the property taxes.

Initially I was bereft, shocked, and stunned when married men came knocking at my door offering their sexual

services, when couples who were my social life no longer wanted me near them, when it became obvious I was a pariah in nomad's land.

A wedding proposal came from the first man I dated. While it felt good to be desired again, I knew I was too fragile yet to make such a commitment. Being raised in the Church of the Brethren, I had been taught that a divorce was right up there with the unpardonable sin. It was time for me to do some serious reflection on my own role in the demise of our marriage. And, most importantly, I had to admit to myself and forgive myself for still being in love with someone else when we married; thus, my need then to forgive my husband as well.

Many years later when our son died, forgiveness opened the way for his father and I to come together as we planned his memorial service and burial.

Forgive the Rainbows

Lorinda Boyer
Bellingham, WA
www.lorindaboyer.com, llboyer71@gmail.com

Gay child of fundamental Christians,
Born broken, damaged, full of sin.
To straighten me is the only mission,
Of this church I'm raised in.


My soul is shrouded in darkness,
Or so church elders say.
So, I search all day for lightness,
To cast this evil away.

"Have faith in Him," I'm told.
"For He'll illuminate the way."
But His love for me runs cold,
He doesn't answer when I pray.

Created in His likeness,
My will has steered me wrong.
I choose to be unrighteous,
I must change to belong.

Simply follow the straight and narrow.
Live my life in black and white.
Hide the rainbows in my marrow.
Those colors shine too bright.

Beg Jesus for forgiveness.
Beg the Father up above.
For the real sin committed,
Is loving whom I love.

 <p> <input type="checkbox"/> This is a gift membership My name and address: _____ _____ _____ _____ My phone and e-mail: _____ _____ </p>	<h2>Join the Story Circle Network!</h2> <p>Annual Membership if receiving printed, mailed publications:</p> <p> <input type="checkbox"/> Canada & Mexico: \$90 (International MO) <input type="checkbox"/> International \$95 (International MO) 09/2023 <input type="checkbox"/> Annual Membership (US) for receiving <i>printed</i> publications: \$75 <input type="checkbox"/> Annual Membership (US) for receiving <i>online</i> publications only: \$60 <input type="checkbox"/> Internet Writing or Reading eCircle Membership : \$20/yr (in addition to national dues) </p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>City _____ State _____ Zip _____ - _____</p> <p>Phone _____</p> <p>Email _____ Amount enclosed _____</p> <p>Become a supporting member and help Story Circle Network grow. Check here:</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$90 Friend</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$150 Supporter</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$250 Sustainer</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$400+ Benefactor</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$125 Donor</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$200 Contributor</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$325 Patron</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>		<input type="checkbox"/> \$90 Friend	<input type="checkbox"/> \$150 Supporter	<input type="checkbox"/> \$250 Sustainer	<input type="checkbox"/> \$400+ Benefactor	<input type="checkbox"/> \$125 Donor	<input type="checkbox"/> \$200 Contributor	<input type="checkbox"/> \$325 Patron	
	<input type="checkbox"/> \$90 Friend	<input type="checkbox"/> \$150 Supporter	<input type="checkbox"/> \$250 Sustainer	<input type="checkbox"/> \$400+ Benefactor						
	<input type="checkbox"/> \$125 Donor	<input type="checkbox"/> \$200 Contributor	<input type="checkbox"/> \$325 Patron							
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> Make your check to Story Circle Network 723 W University Ave #300-234 Georgetown, TX 78626 </div>									

When Will I Be Ready?

Maria Alonzo
Azusa, CA

Malonzo1@mindspring.com

When I was in elementary school, I would take my time walking because I was never in a rush to arrive home. Now, from a half a block away I could see the familiar truck in our driveway.

I broke out into a run. I was panting when I arrived and saw the guy in the beige uniform loading my kitty Misty into the small compartment. He slammed the door shut. By this time, I was sobbing and was begging my mom, "Why are you sending Misty away?"

She thanked the guy and told him that was all and he started up the truck and as he was pulling out of the driveway, he glanced at me with a pitiful look in his eye. Then mom glared at me and replied, "You know perfectly well. Maybe you'll learn when I ask you to do something. You do it right away, not when you feel like it."

"But I did take out the trash; I just finished reading my chapter, then I did it. Why is Misty suffering for something she didn't do?"

Mom was already walking away from me without waiting for me to finish my sentence.

I was so dejected walking into the house. I slipped into my brother's room. "Bobby, can you go with me to the animal shelter before it closes so I can get Misty back? I have about seventy-five cents and if I can borrow some money from you, I promise I'll pay you back."

"Gina, it won't help. It didn't work with Patches, Cleo, Fluffy, Sheba, Maya, or the kittens we hadn't named yet. They don't want our money. We're just kids. Besides, mom already gave the order to have Misty put to sleep.

Why was mom so heartless? Why did she keep getting me kittens only so they could die before their time?

These events happened so many times during my childhood. Fifty years later, I recall each incident vividly and still mourn each cat. I also ask myself, when will I be ready to forgive her? Not yet.



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.



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

NOTEWORTHY

Love to read? Always looking for a good book? More entries in our unique and important **Sarton/Gilda Book Awards** program mean that we need more jurors. Want to help choose this year's winners? [Volunteer to be a juror here \(members only\)](https://www.storycircle.org/opportunities/). <https://www.storycircle.org/opportunities/>

Submit your "True Words" to the Journal. The suggested topic for the December 2023 issue is "Mother Nature," but we welcome all entries should a different topic strike your fancy. **Deadline: October 15.** Member submissions happen [here](https://www.storycircle.org/journal-submission/) (<https://www.storycircle.org/journal-submission/>).

Congratulations to Linda Healy! 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!

Real Women Write: Seeing Through Their Eyes, our 2022 anthology of prose and poetry by SCN members, looks at the subject of empathy in seventy-five inspiring ways. **Kitchen Table Stories 2022** is an all-new collection of recipes and stories that reflect SCN's commitment to supporting women and diversity. Go [here](https://www.storycircle.org/publications/story-circle-network-books/) (<https://www.storycircle.org/publications/story-circle-network-books/>) to learn more.

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.

The **2023 & Me: A Year of Celebrating the DNA of True Stories** group meets via Zoom and newcomers are welcome to join us. Each month we read and discuss another memoir while considering what might constitute the DNA in these true

stories. Members source their own copies of each memoir. There is no fee for this program and no requirement to post reviews. For information about our schedule and upcoming books, and to sign up, go [here](#).

See books by, for, and about women listed in our **Virtual Members' Library** (<https://www.storycircle.org/member-library/>) along with a submission link. Anyone can view the library, but only SCN members may place books. [Join here](#). A fantastic marketing tool!

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.

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 with Volunteer in the subject line. We need your support.