

Ladies, look around you. Isn't SCN is something special? If you have been to a conference, or Writing from Life, or you're in a circle, you already know that. But if this is your first time, if you've been getting the journal but never been to our events before, or if this conference is the first time you've had any connection with SCN, I predict that you will simply be blown away by what we are, by what we do. Because what we are—all of us in this room—is a circle. What is a circle? Well, for one thing, it's round. And round, it turns out, is very, very strong.

In Tai Chi we round our arms because that way we can better withstand an attack. If you lock your arm or your wrist when an opponent comes at you, the bone will break. But a round arm absorbs the shock. I tell my little piano students to keep their knuckles rounded when they strike the key, because round is strong. A rounded finger can take the stress of pounding away for hours a day on some of the smallest joints in the body.

The Romans understood the strength of the circle when they discovered the arch. The curve of the arch distributes the stress in a way that makes it better able to withstand the force of gravity. So we see that roundness, the circle, is inherently strong.

A circle is also egalitarian. We circle around a campfire, because in this way, we are all equidistant from the heat. If we "squared" around the fire, the folks in the corners would be cold. King Arthur's table was round so that all the knights would have the same status, sharing the power and prestige equally.

Circles are protective. The pioneers circled the wagons when they were under attack, so they could keep the most vulnerable safe in the middle, just as the womb encircles the unborn baby and keeps it safe and protected.

The circle is feminine. Women understand it on a very deep level. We gather, we encircle the one who is crying, the one who is ill, or giving birth, or dying. We understand the power of the circle, of coming together, the wisdom of sharing, the necessity of connection, the strength in softness, in curves, in arches, in roundness. That deep, unconscious archetype is part of our feminine heritage, our collective memory. It is the source of our unique strength.

Perhaps for these reasons, the very idea of the story circle resonates so deeply with every woman I've ever spoken to. For not only circles but stories are our domain too. In the old wife's tales, the fairy stories collected by the brothers Grimm and others, the favorite family stories about great uncle David and Oma's oma's oma, we hold the precious memory of the ancestors, we hold the myths, both universal and particular, the truths that make us who we are, that give each of our families it's own history, its own culture, and which, at the same time, unite us in a common bond of understanding.

Drop a stone in the water, and the rings it gives birth too will ripple outward far beyond your ability to see them. The Story Circle Network is like that with every member like the stone that sets the water quivering. We are a circle, we in this room, we members of SCN, and every woman who has ever participated in anything we've ever done. We are a circle, where stories are the arch that spans the distance

between us. We are a circle which gives equal honor to all, shares power and prestige and resources, allows each member to reach the warm source of heat and life in the center. We are round and we are strong. We are just what we say we are, a network, an interconnecting web of relationship and memory. Every conference has been a circle of women, a circle containing smaller, interconnecting circles. And every WFL, every Lifelines retreat, every gathering of the SCN in every time, in every place. We are each like the stone dropped in the pond, which sets the circles spinning, rippling far beyond us, changing us, changing the world we live in. In the safety of the circle we give birth to new words, new worlds, we give birth to ourselves. For we are a circle, a Story Circle. And that is a powerful, magical thing.

Thanks you, all of you for coming. I'll see you back at 7:30 for Heather Summerhayes Cariou!!!!!!