



Online or onsite, our Writing Circles support women in sharing their prose and poetry. In this issue, the chair of our Circles Program, **Mary Jo Doig**, introduces us to the facilitator of an enduring onsite circle in Indiana. If you're not yet a member of a Circle, go here to find out more: <http://www.storycircle.org/circlesprogram.shtml>

Meet Enid Cokinos of Carmel, IN

by Mary Jo Doig

Kindly join me in a warm welcome to Enid Cokinos of the Circle City Circle. (Circle City is Indianapolis' nickname.) I'm pleased to share Enid's fascinating story and the origins of the CCC here, as well as a piece of each circle member's writing. I hope you will also visit their websites to see more of their books and projects. Now, let's start...

Enid's journey to writing, connecting with SCN, and branching out to playwrighting. I've always been an avid reader and dreamed of one day writing a book. For years, my Inner Writer followed me, tapped my shoulder, and begged for attention, which I ignored until a mid-life birthday. At that point, I thought, "Well, if not now, when?" In 2014, I took a creative nonfiction class at the Indiana Writers Center (IWC) in Indianapolis. That's when the floodgates opened. That is also where I met the writers who, along with myself, formed our writing group – Circle City Circle.

I thank SCN for my first published works. I had been plugging away at several pieces, but nothing was getting published, and I was feeling down. My writing group suggested joining SCN and trying my hand at book reviews. Taking their advice and then seeing my words online seemed to break the logjam. I went on to have both a fiction and nonfiction piece published in SCN's anthologies. What a rewarding experience!

In 2014, while working on a screenplay, I was educating myself on formatting and content through online sources. Since I learn better in a classroom setting, I contacted the IWC, signed up for their foundational playwrighting workshop, and was hooked. Since then, I've written several plays. You can learn about them on my website.

Circle City Circle's structure and sustained membership. Our circle is almost six years old. The creative nonfiction class where we met gave us a good start on getting to know each other. Our writing assignments took us into some sensitive life areas, so we formed a level of trust even before we became a circle.

Over the years, our group dynamics have changed. Initially, as we learned each other's writing passions and figured out the best way to work together, we shared the facilitator role. Now our meetings don't require boundaries

and rules. Sometimes, we bring in manuscript pages, plays or poems for critique and discussion, or we bounce around story ideas. Other times, we break from writing and talk about what is going on, personally and professionally. Every meeting has a different feel to it.

We know that writers must write every day to keep creativity blossoming, and if you can't think of anything to write about, then write about that! With a writing circle, developing trust and respect is paramount, but keeping up with the meeting schedule and engaging with all members is key. Even if you have no work to share, go to the meetings. The group supports and encourages. It is the dedicated act of meeting and engaging that keeps it alive and vibrant.

How to find a circle. Check with local writing programs, perhaps a nonprofit organization (for example, the Indiana Writers Center) or a college or university. Also, check with SCN for writers in your area that might be interested in starting a group or adding new members to an existing group.

The Gifts of Participating in a Writing Circle. We share a bond and friendship I could not have imagined when we first started as a writing group. Ours is a sisterhood formed of love and trust. We genuinely care about each other and our creative endeavors, and know we can always count on each other for support.

Whether fiction, nonfiction, poetry, or plays, each group member—like all writers—brings unique life experiences and observations to their work. I'm not sure it is possible to exclude personal experiences from our writing, which makes us vulnerable. Yet that is part of being a writer.

Final Thoughts. Several SCN members are published (some, many times over), but for those just starting down the creative writing path, don't be intimidated by others' success, instead look to them as motivation. Many accomplishments of the Circle City Circle's members came after our group's formation and happened, in part, due to mutual support and helpful critique from all. We are all better, more confident, and ultimately more successful due to this support.

Meet the Circle City Circle's members and their writing. All have been published and enjoy a successful writing journey.

Marjie Giffin – poet and nonfiction writer

The Plunge (originally appeared in *Snapdragon*)

I am running out of time
but I'd like to slip down
the mossy steps
of my sister's pier
and plunge headfirst
without hesitation
into the still-chilled June waters
of her pristine Northern lake
and push off the stony bottom
and float and float and float—
perhaps as far as Canada—
where wild geese, arching,
would flap down at me
as I churned my aging body forward
and they would circle, nodding,
bestowing their respect.

Judy M. Miller (writing as Sutton Bishop) – <https://www.authorsuttonbishop.com/>

Excerpt from *Afraid to Hope*, a steamy adventure-romance novel (releases Winter, 2020):

He clasped her hand firmly and stroked her palm softly with one of his fingers. All reason evaporated as electricity shot through her system again. Appalled by what he was doing and her reaction, she squeezed his hand harder, fighting like mad to get a hold of herself, calling on her training to slow her heart rate. “Dr. Jordaan,” she snapped, her voice cracking with irritation.

A cocky grin and a glimpse of his straight white teeth flashed again. He nodded perceptibly. “You’re strong. I like that. Since we’re going to be working together, don’t you think we can be on a first-name basis?”

Working together? Oh, no. She could not work with him. She would not. Natasha shook her head in disbelief and pulled her hand from his.

Bane leaned in, his smile open and confident. “You don’t want to work with me? Oh, Doctor, you might want to rethink that,” he encouraged, his voice teasing, sexy.

Kassie Ritman – <https://kassieritmanwrites.com/>

Excerpt from *Meridian Whispers* (releases Fall, 2019)

Another couple had an unhealthy and questionable attachment to a single pet, even after its passing. Regarded by neighbors as very lovely people, the pair nonetheless

got a little odd when their dog died. They so mourned for their beloved “Muffy” upon his passing that they had him cremated—an action unheard of at the time. Muffy stood vigil on the mantelpiece for months in the finest of funerary vases. But for his grieving owners, this presence just wasn’t enough. Their hearts ached to have their beloved pet with them again.

That is until one of them formulated a solution. A specialty artist from across the Pond who worked in cremains was contacted.

Yes.

Cremains.

The dear people hired a painter to come to the US and create a likeness of Muffy on a prominent wall in the house. The ashes were mixed with a binder, and an enormous sum of cash later, the pup cheered them with his fluffy grin whenever they entered the home.

Enid Cokinos – <https://enidcokinos.com/>

Excerpt from my nonfiction piece *From Under the Rubble* (originally appeared in *Flying Island*)

“‘X’ never, ever marks the spot.”

— Indiana Jones

Nearly two decades ago, I found myself in the East-West Bookstore in Mountain View, California. It wasn’t the New Age shop’s healing crystals, Buddha statues, fragrant incense, and CDs by chanting monks that called to me, but a single book: *The Artist’s Way* by Julia Cameron. The red and gold cover, with a drawing of a snow-capped mountain and a flock of Pterodactyls, begged me to pull it off its perch, promising to open my life to new experiences if I would only give it a chance. I marched to the register. I was ready to begin the search for my hidden artist.

Thank you, CCC members for sharing your pathway to a strong writing group!

Readers and facilitators, please know that Enid is happy to answer questions at enidcokinos@indy.rr.com.

