

THE STORY CIRCLE LOVE CAFÉ

READY OR NOT,
HERE COMES LIFE



SELFHELP INNOVATIVE SENIOR CENTER
TEACHERS & WRITERS COLLABORATIVE

AUTUMN 2023 / SPRING 2024

TEACHERS & WRITERS COLLABORATIVE (T&W) partners with New York City schools and community-based organizations to offer dynamic creative writing programs led by professional writers. Since 1967, T&W has worked with more than 750,000 K-12 students and more than 25,000 teachers at schools throughout New York City; published more than 80 books and an online magazine about creative writing education; and provided free resources for students, teachers, and writers. To learn more, visit our website: www.twc.org.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This residency was made possible in part through the Mid Atlantic Folk and Traditional Arts Community Projects program of Mid Atlantic Arts with support from the National Endowment for the Arts, Selfhelp Innovative Senior Center, and Teachers & Writers Collaborative

T&W programs are made possible in part by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature and public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council. T&W is also grateful for past and present support from the following: the Academy of American Poets, Lily Auchincloss Foundation, E.A. Michelson Philanthropies, E.H.A. Foundation, Bydale Foundation, Cerimon Fund, Charles Lawrence Keith and Clara Miller Foundation, Hawthornden Foundation, Kenneth Koch Literary Estate, Laura B. Vogler Foundation, NBC Universal / Comcast, the Poetry Foundation, Simon and Eve Colin Foundation, William T. Grant Foundation, and friends of T&W.

A Teachers & Writers Collaborative Publication

Copyright © 2024



TEACHERS
& WRITERS
COLLABORATIVE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WITH GRATITUDE & THANKS	1
STORY CIRCLE LOVE CAFÉ MEMBERS	2
FOREWARD	3
READY OR NOT, HERE COMES LIFE !!!	4
THERE IS A ROAD	5
PERSEVERANCE	6
AGE.....	7
OUR BRAINS!	8
STIRRING THE POT OF GRATITUDE	9
PERSEVERANCE - WHAT DOES IT TAKE?.....	11
REFLECTIONS, BLESSINGS & CHALLENGES 2023	12
SPRING 2024	13
LIGHT.....	14
TO LIVE A LIFE OF MEANING	15
OUR RECIPE	17
KUI'S ART WORK.....	19
I DID IT MY WAY!!.....	20
THE CAFÉ	21
THE STORY CIRCLE LOVE CAFÉ	23

WITH GRATITUDE & THANKS

To the Flushing Selfhelp Innovative Senior Center. Thank you Winnie Hu, Joy Mau, Michelle Xia & Annie Cheng for keeping us on track, online and on time. You made our first HYBRID meetings possible, both virtually and in-person. Thank you for the invitation to present at the wild and wonderful Volunteer Luncheon Celebration. It is great to be an active part of the community.

To Teachers & Writers Collaborative. Thank you Asari Beale, Nancy Weber & Alice Pencavel for always being ready and finding the ways needed to support and assist us.

To Joanne Chang. Thank you for your generosity & tech expertise in putting this anthology together. You came back just in time! As Elena Wolfe mentioned, "Technology has become a testimony of our presence on the planet." Our anthology would not be present without you.

To our Café members. It is so joyful to know one another, deepen our connection, and highlight our carousing together. Ready or not, here we come!

To CARMELA IOVINO, In Memoriam. We dedicate our anthology with love to our dear friend who passed on in autumn 2023. Carmela was one of the longest standing members of the Story Circle Café. She greatly looked forward to returning to the center in the Fall of 2023 after a long virtual hiatus. We miss you, Carmela.



STORY CIRCLE LOVE CAFÉ MEMBERS

RUTH LEE
EDITH M.
KUI KWOK
ZOFIA PIENKOS
EUGENE SADOWSKY
BAKU TRIVEDI
NITA SIM
ELENA WOLFE
HARVEY WOLFE (HONORARY MEMBER)

TEACHING ARTIST FACILITATOR :
MARSHA GILDIN

BAKU, MARSHA

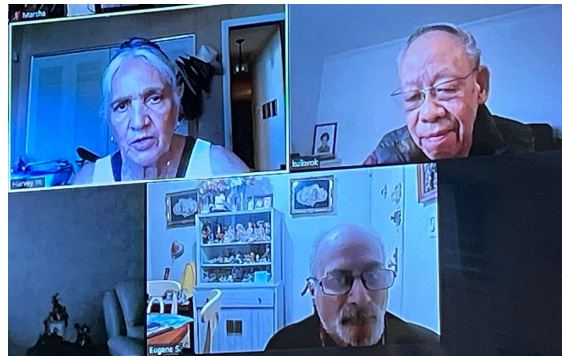


ELENA,

EUGENE,

KUI

RUTH , ZOFIA , NITA



FOREWARD

“The journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step.” LAO TZU

There is a road we travel. At the Story Circle Love Café we come from many places. We carry the tendrils of our ancestors with us, spread across thousands of miles, tunnels of time, from India, Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, Philippines, Malaysia, Japan, Spain, Puerto Rico, Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx.....

The Story Circle Café is a place of belonging. Whether we gather in person, virtually on screen, or in this new hybrid fashion of both, we gather as One.

In heart and humor, wonder and loss, pain and triumph, in every day quandaries and unique considerations, we converse and congratulate one another for being here. We are not afraid to be honest and kind.

We love and we laugh. We speak of aging, of change, of war and of peace; we touch on art, on self, on longing and on life.

We have fun. We are real. We come together each week, opening our hearts to one another, grateful to connect in this recipe of life.

~*~

Let's start with humor and the seed story that inspired this year's anthology title

READY OR NOT, HERE COMES LIFE!

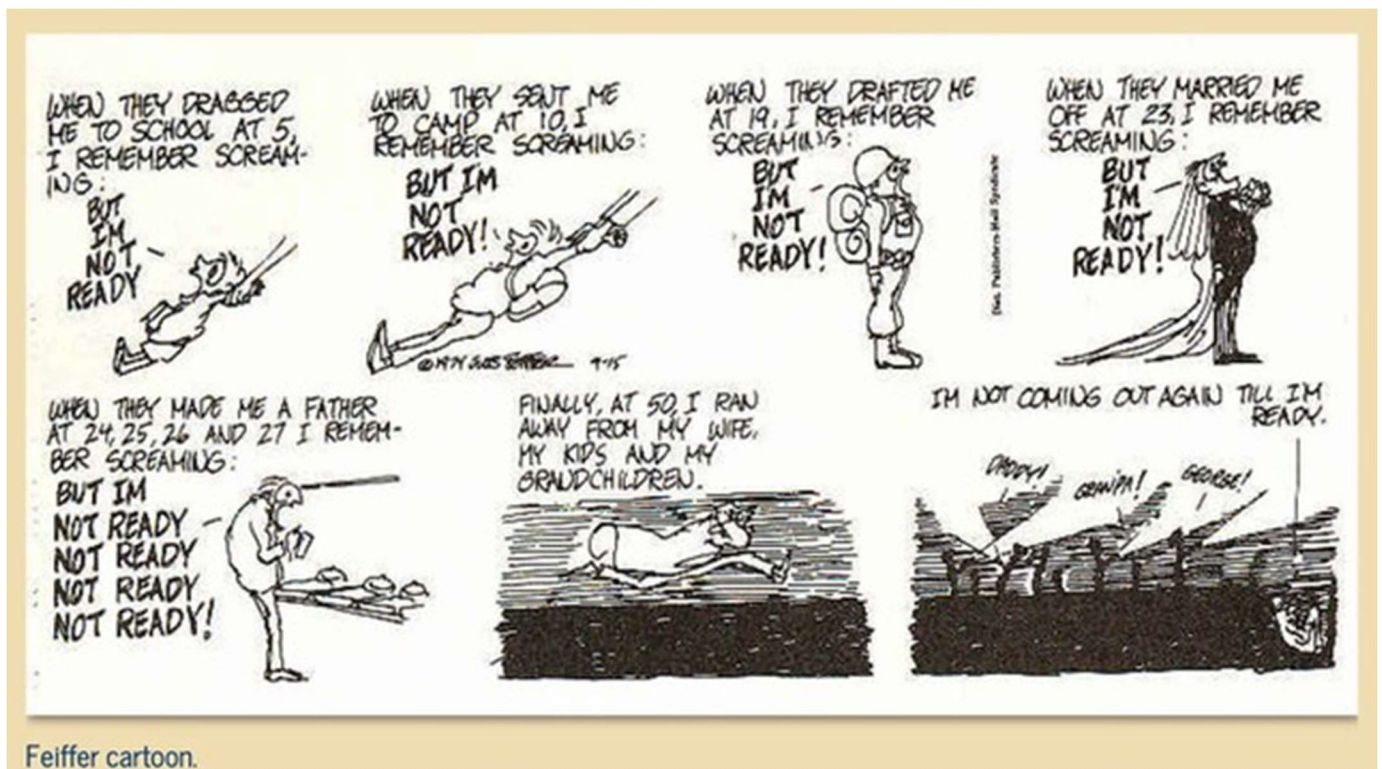
READY OR NOT, HERE COMES LIFE !!!

Embrace reality. It's about acceptance & compliance.
There's no use in fighting against it. Just go with the flow.

There's this Village Voice cartoonist, Jules Feiffer
He was popular and prolific. For the longest time, I have always remembered this favorite cartoon of his of this kid growing up...and at each stage, the voice says, GROW UP! and he answers, "But I'm not ready!" GET MARRIED. "But I'm not ready!!!" HAVE KIDS!!! "But I'm not ready!!!!" He finally runs away and climbs under a rock shouting, "I'm NOT coming out until I'm READY!!!"

Are we ever READY? That was me yesterday. Pain in my knees...I'm not ready!!!! ...to grow OLD...But I'm not ready!!!

You've got to roll with the punches. Acceptance is the key.
'Cause, READY OR NOT, HERE COMES LIFE!!! (Elena)



THERE IS A ROAD



Nita, our newest member to join the Story Circle Café, shared this piece of writing that means a great deal to her.

THERE IS A ROAD by Elen Pavlovsky, Theosophist ~ Inspired, adapted and lightly edited by Nita Sim

There is a road, steep and thorny, beset with perils of every kind, but yet a road, and it leads to the very heart of the Universe. I can tell you how to find those who will show you the secret gateway that opens inward only, and closes fast behind the sincere true seeker of life, love, truth and beauty forever more. There is no danger that dauntless courage cannot conquer; there is no trial that spotless purity cannot pass through; there is no difficulty that strength of character cannot surmount. For those who fail, there are countless other lives wherein you'll succeed. For those who win onwards there is reward past all telling - the glorious achievement to be a champion - to bless and save humanity.

"Speaking to the gatekeepers, the sincere seekers, the author seems to say, remove your fears. We can overcome. I witness my soul through these words." *(Nita)*

"Everyone has a story they have to fulfill." *(Eugene)*

"It is one story, different paths.

HUMANITY staring us in the face .

Welcome, Nita, to the Story Circle Love Café" *(Elena)*

PERSEVERANCE

Being able to go forward
To continue
Fortitude
To keep going
Breaking out of your comfort zone
Willingness to change
Expanding our knowledge
Getting rid of old beliefs and fears that hold you back
Progressing
No stagnation

HOW PERSEVERANCE SHOWS UP IN MY LIFE

“I can DO THIS!” That is what I tell myself. When I had cancer I had to fight for my life. I had fortitude. I would visualize getting better, moving forward, being positive, stimulating myself. I can DO THIS! And I did. I fought for my life. You have to fight. (*Elena*)

When my husband passed away, I was left to learn all the tasks he had taken care of - bills, balancing the checkbook, taxes, everything. I had the support of my family to learn, but I had never done this before. I really had to stick with it. (*Ruth*)

I come to this class to learn and listen. I write things down to remember and to go back to. I gather new words, new vocabulary, to develop my language and communicate my ideas in English. I push through my shyness and take risks to express myself in a different way. (*Zofia*)

When I lay down at night, I pray to get up in the morning. (*Eugene*)

I never had children. When I was older, I felt like what can I leave of myself on this earth? How can I help others? I decided to adopt, as a single mom, at the age of 50. I adopted my daughter from Colombia, South America. My mother became a grandmother at the age of 80. When you have a thought, GO FOR IT! (*Edith M.*)



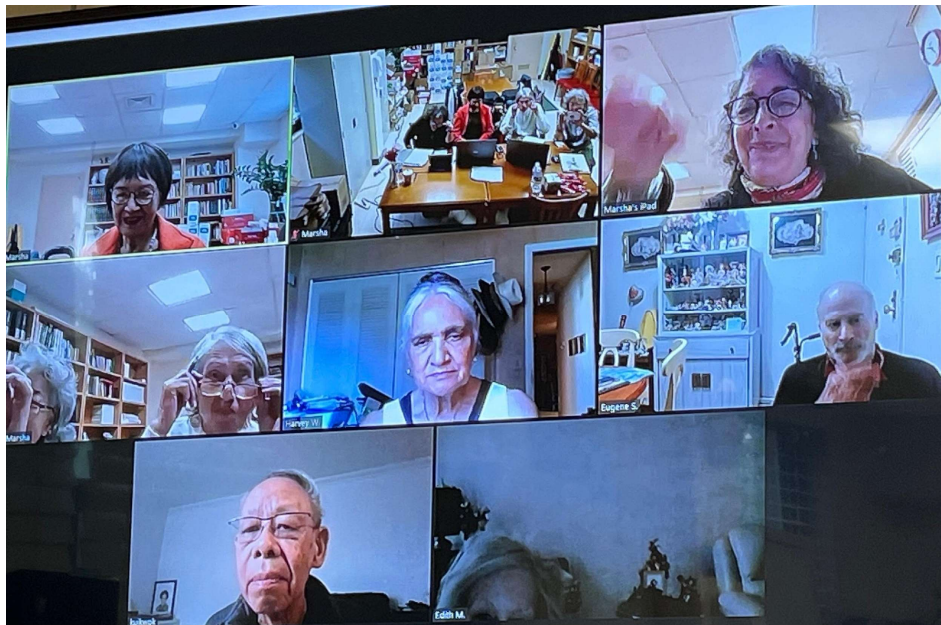
AGE

If we get to add a number, I figure we are winning.
 There's no shame. No shame. Never be ashamed of your age.
 A pain in the neck is better than the alternative.
 Pain, pain, pain...helps you know you are alive.

*When I feel stuck, I try to motivate myself.
 I look at the problem in a different way.
 What can I learn from this? What is it trying to teach me?
 I use the phrase, "I hope so..." leaving room for hope and possibility.
 There's always a way, a different way, to move forward. (Elena)*

Every day that passes brings us closer to God
 And what of the mystery of the Universe?
 What happens afterwards...?
 Is there an afterlife?
 What is eternal?

Love is eternal. Time is eternal.



OUR BRAINS!

Keep warming up your brain!
Either by taking a leap, or moving step by step.

Short term, long term, our memory changes.
You need to exercise it. Stay active. Swim. Read. Play games.

“It takes imagination. Your imagination gets you through.” (*Eugene*)

“Personally, I like quantum leaps! I like the Unknown.
Our brain can be our best friend or worst friend. It lies to you a lot.” (*Elena*)

“I write things down. I do planning the night before.” (*Zofia*)

“You want to know what I plan for the night before? What am I having for
breakfast?!? My kids say, you need to eat more protein, Ma.” (*Ruth*)

“I do computer solitaire, the regular one.” (*Eugene*)

“I’ll whip your butt on Spider solitaire!” (*Elena*)

STIRRING THE POT OF GRATITUDE

Gratitude is.....Being alive,
Feeling heartfelt tears of joy, good tears,
Tears welling up when you hear something,
Coming to understand a situation better

Gratitude isTo feel a void,
To feel something empty, and then to feel something filled,
The awareness of everything around us,
Seeing the best in one another

With gratitude.... Creation matters
The sun, the moon, the natural ways, all together
Understand the world is beautiful



I have learned from this group, from reading your stories about family, marriage, parents, our journeys, that I found inspiration. My daughter and I have been estranged. After reading your stories, something happened. I decided to call my daughter. We spoke for two and a half hours. I feel gratitude and wholeness.
(Nita)

Gratitude is ongoing. I live in Gratitude for My Heavenly Father.... When I moved from a life in Brooklyn to a new life in Flushing, I have always found welcoming people. I am grateful for the acceptance and welcome I feel from the senior center, my church, my community. *(Ruth)*

Sixty-three years ago, I had my bar mitzvah. My beautiful parents, Rose and Al, were there and they made a big party for me. One hundred fifty family and friends gathered in my honor on May 18th. I carry that feeling of gratitude with me always. Even as I speak about it now, it feels like yesterday. *(Eugene)*



I love to experience gratitude in moments of serendipity, when I am open to the unexpected. Sometimes you may find a spontaneous smile, tears of joy. Acquiesce. Give in to these moments. Give in to your calling. Speak to the ancestors. *(Elena)*

I am grateful coming to this class where I learn from others' lives. It helps me to learn from our different cultures, countries and languages. I am grateful for learning new vocabulary, by listening, taking notes and writing things down. *(Zofia)*

We are ubiquitous. Body & soul. Wind and air are everywhere. I speak to the ancestors. *(Baku)*

There are four kinds of gratitude I feel: Gratitude to parents for bringing us into this world. Gratitude to my wife for her companionship for more than 50 years. She passed away last spring. I miss her and appreciate her even more now. I am grateful to my nephews for encouraging me to move to Manhattan. I am grateful to the Story Circle Café for our growing friendship, connection and care. *(Kui)*



PERSEVERANCE - WHAT DOES IT TAKE?

- P** Patience, Pursuit, Possibility
- E** Empower yourself
- R** Readiness to Respond
- S** Steadfastness, Satisfaction, Strength
- E** Establish a new behavior, Enter a new place within yourself
- V** Visualize Victory over stagnation
- E** Effort, Envisioning
- R** Renew & Refresh yourself
- A** Act upon something, Actualize with Attitude
- N** New ideas, New beginning, New meaning
- C** Challenge yourself, Clarify
- E** Energy boost, Experience

REFLECTIONS, BLESSINGS & CHALLENGES 2023



Waking up in the morning I feel blessed. Look! It is another day of life! I've had the blessing and finances to travel this year - to Malaysia, Portugal, Japan.... And now my body is telling me to slow down, stay in place. I'm doing more reading, discovering crochet projects I've never finished. And really appreciating this group and all of you. *(Ruth)*

We are all getting older. While the body becomes older, the mind is still young. It demands that you live. It calls you back to do something! To engage! It says, DON'T WORRY! YOU CAN DO IT! Acquiesce, my friends. Make amends. I did, with my sister this year. Family comes first. We came back around to love. *(Elena)*

When working at the Botanical Gardens, I took a class and learned about floral and greenery arrangements. I enjoy doing that. At this time of year I make arrangements with Christmas greeneries to place on your table or on your door. Picking the colors and placement is always particular. I create my own designs and put my creative thought and care into each piece I make. *(Zofia)*

This was a year of moving, technically speaking. Selling my house. Packing up my home. Moving to a new apartment. A new borough. It was a tremendous amount of work and a tremendous change. Now I can annoy my nephew better! I had to find a new senior center. They do not have as many programs and activities as we have in Flushing. But I did find a sketching class. I will show you one of my pieces....see if you can guess who it is.... *(Kui)*

Have a great new year everyone. Come back healthy. Love conquers all. Love will keep us together. *(Eugene)*

SPRING 2024



MAY WE TEND TO THE TREE OF LIFE

LIGHT



TOTAL ECLIPSE MAY 2024

“Light is life. There is no vegetation, there is nothing on earth, without light. All energy must pass through it to become something.” *(Kui)*

“Light gives life. All plants need light. You learn along the way, some plants require more light, some less. Some plants only bloom in the night!” *(Zofia)*

“I see light as HOPE. Hope enables us to go forward. If you do not have light, you don't know where you are going, where you are heading.” *(Ruth)*

“Light gives me the light of day to see everyone, the light in my eyes, the light of my life. Everyone has a story they have to fulfill.” *(Eugene)*

“Light is wisdom and truth. Light is what IS.... Even the black hole is a saturation of light.” *(Nita)*

“Light is a beautiful garden where we live with free oxygen, water, sunlight, coldness of the moon, greenery everywhere. When you open your eyes, you can enjoy it all. We smile, talk, exchange hearts, understand one another.” *(Baku)*

“We're having a love fest here. Thank you, Marsha, for sharing your light.” *(Nita)*

“YOU LIGHT UP MY LIFE... YOU GIVE ME HOPE TO CARRY ON...”

TO LIVE A LIFE OF MEANING

WHAT GIVES YOUR LIFE MEANING?

~*~

Life itself gives my life meaning.
And my Korean family, from after I had my stroke.
They give my life meaning. (*Eugene*)

God above, my Heavenly Father.
I live in appreciation of my extended family, all my family,
My faith, and the years I was gifted with my husband. (*Ruth*)

To live a meaningful life
I believe it is important to keep your health
Enjoy the fresh air!
Keep your body moving
Be a cultivator of life. (*Zofia*)

To live a life of meaning
Begin by loving yourself...you are God's creation!
What a wonderful world was created by God.
The imagination cannot even come up with the splendor of it
The natural world cannot be described, cannot be compared
How touching, moving, effective and effecting it is...
Impacting all parts of you, of your body, within and between the molecules,
Heart & soul
Be with people. Help others
Express the love to be expressed
You will get surprised by it all
You will be in a state of wonder
Life is Precious (*Baku*)

~*~

I've been taken down the Rabbit's Hole!
It's good to change your perception.
Alice in Wonderland meets the Queen of Hearts....

OFF WITH HER HEAD!

Never mind...I can still see...
Even in a surprised, altered state,
"...I hear the universe..." (*Elena*)



OUR RECIPE

Selfhelp Volunteer Recognition Celebration 2024

ELENA:

Hello, everyone! We bring love and greetings from **THE STORY CIRCLE CAFÉ**. We are happy to be here today with all of you! We want to share a Café appetizer. Something we've cooked up together. We call it ~ **OUR RECIPE FOR A LIFE OF MEANING**. Let's start with the **INGREDIENTS**:

RUTH:

1. Start with a **GENEROUS** size bowl.
2. Have measuring cups available of all sizes and **ask Harvey for his 10 Gallon Hat!**

NITA:

3. Add in bushels of Love, Happiness, Friendship, and a little bit of salt for common sense.
4. Accent with the Spices of Life....

ZOFIA:

5. Sprinkle in Unity & zest in Compassion, knowing your uniqueness and recognizing what makes us different.
6. Knead together Discipline to understand things positively and Willingness to look at yourself first.

KUI:

7. Combine Appreciation with the Qualities that make a good friendship.
8. Blend in Healthy Habits by eating good foods, doing your exercise, and joining some circles, like this Café!

BAKU:

9. Fold in Being of Service to Others - a way to forget your own troubles.
10. Let simmer gradually for Deeper Understanding and Authentic Flavor.

~ * ~

ELENA:

While cooking up this dish of a **MEANINGFUL LIFE** ~
1. Be creative ! Be artistic ! Be Free !

RUTH:

2. Value your own Presence. Speak from the heart.
3. Open your feelings to others. Be forgiving. Be part of a community.

NITA:

4. Attend meetings. Read books.
5. Engage in conversation with others.

ZOFIA:

6. Learn from their experiences. Share experiences of your own.
7. Speak to the earth, let the earth speak to you. Grow and cultivate plants. Care for living things.

KUI:

8. Laugh a lot. Let things cool down. It's all in the timing.
9. Enjoy the good smells, varieties and fragrances of Life.

BAKU:

10. Bless the meal and praise the cook! And, last but not least, at the end of the day, remember your faith, YOUR WAY of believing and seeing. Hold in your heart someone you love. Be blessed by remembering this wonderful world.

ELENA:

11. Serve and share with others. Rest, digest, stay healthy...and nourish your meaningful life. Thank you!

MARSHA: TEST the RECIPE ~ IS IT WORKING FOR YOU? WHAT MIGHT YOU LIKE TO ADD?



KUI'S ART WORK

WE'RE VERY IMPRESSED!!!! WE'RE HAPPY FOR YOU!!! BEAUTIFUL WORK!!!!



I DID IT MY WAY!!

BE CREATIVE !! BE ARTISTIC !!
BE FREE !!!



THE CAFÉ

What's percolating in the Story Circle Love Café?
What's blooming in the spring?
From the stories we share, and from the lives we live
Together, we cook up all kinds of things....

Energy * Friendship * Love * Learning
Compatibility * Togetherness * Connection * Companionship
Openness * Relatedness * Continuity * Unity
Positivity * Humor * Nurturance * Ease

We listen. We grow.
We open our hearts to hear.
United as one. We become like family.

We widen our horizons. We learn from one another.
Different cultures, different approaches to life
We discover new vocabulary and new perspectives.

We reach out. We break out of isolation.
Suddenly, you find that you are not alone.
We open our minds - become alert - and awaken to new possibilities.

We take it in and we give it out!
Feeling in a rut? Get motivated by others!
Find solutions together! Share life experiences!

There is comfort in our exchanges. A reciprocity of give and take.
A non-judgmental way of acceptance and appreciation
Our words land in a place where everyone knows your name.

And when you don't show up, you are missed!
We wonder, how are you doing?
We are in this together. It takes a village.

Sometimes it is mind over matter.
Sometimes the mind is willing but the body is not.
Sometimes you just need a little inspiration
Sometimes, our magic can influence the moment
And laughter proves itself to be the best medicine.

Join us ! Our doors are opened ! Come to the Café !



THE STORY CIRCLE LOVE CAFÉ

T Togetherness

H Humor

E Exchange

S Secret sauce

T Talkative

O Openness

R Relating, Reaching out

Y Yesteryears' memories

C Companionship

I Inspiration, Influence

R Reciprocity

C Connection, Continuity

L Learning, Listening

E Expansive

L Love, Loss

O Optimism

V Vitality

E Enthusiasm

C Compatibility, Compassion

A Acceptance, Appreciation, Adhesion

F Friendship

E Energy