



## HEALING STORY ALLIANCE ANNUAL REPORT 2020

### INTRODUCTION

Healing Story Alliance (HSA) is a Special Interest Group of the National Storytelling Network (NSN).

HSA's mission is to explore and promote the use of storytelling in the healing arts and professions. HSA develops resources to share and increase knowledge of stories and how best to use them to inform, nurture, inspire, and heal individuals, organizations, or the entire planet. HSA strives to reach beyond the storytelling community to engage all those in other professions (or personal paths) who can see the benefit of story as a vehicle for healing.

With a membership of close to 150 individuals, HSA has maintained its services to both members and the broader community, through its List-serve, Website, programs, and publications.

As 2020 began, HSA had initiated planning towards participation at NSN's annual conference, which was scheduled for early July. Plans for a full day preconference in partnership with the Storytelling in Organizations SIG, and for a preconference concert were under way, when everything was interrupted by the COVID Pandemic.

### *OARS in the WATER* HSA RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC

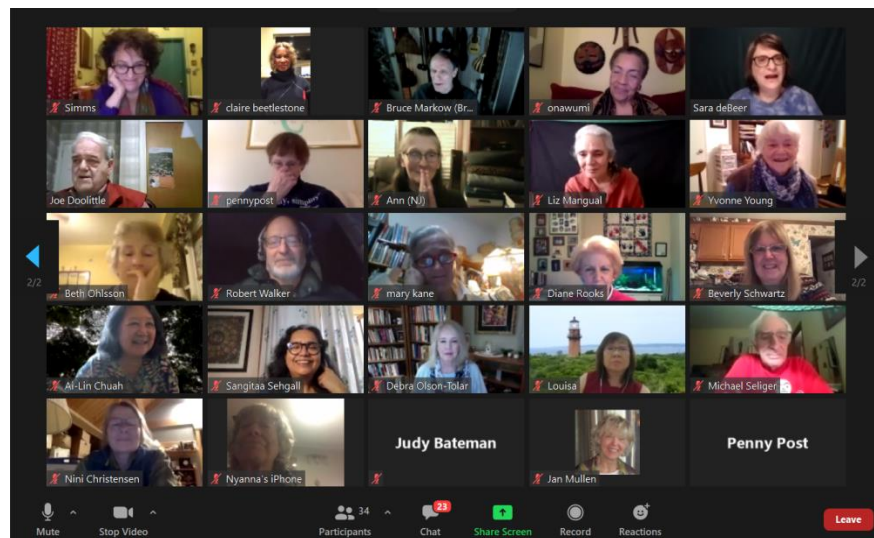
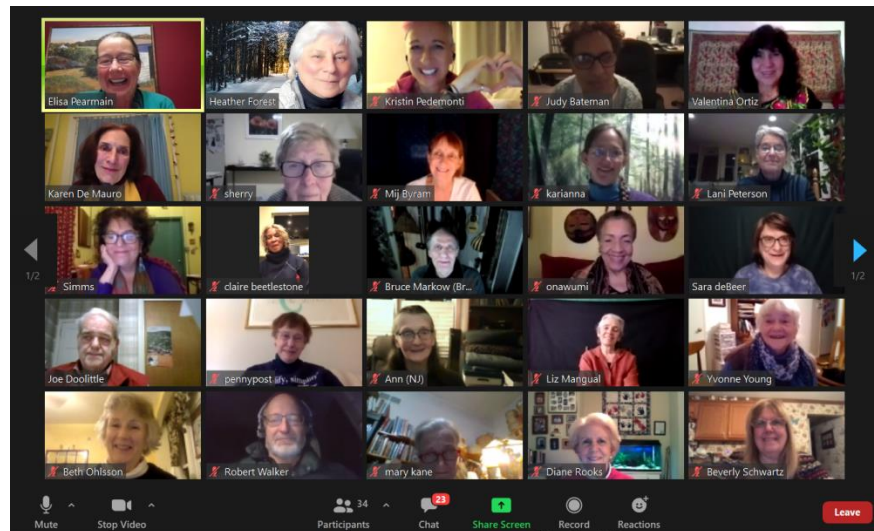
In March and early April, meetings were held among HSA Executive Committee and other active members, to address the question, "What should we, as the Healing Story Alliance, be doing at this time, that we are well equipped to undertake, to deliver a needed meaningful service that is not already being done by others? In attendance at these seminal meetings were Laura Simms, Lani Peterson, Michael Seliger, Joe Doolittle, Elisa Pearmain, Wally Scott, Libby Tipton, Cheryl Cofield, Merna Hecht, Lili Pang, Bob Kanegis, and Jim Brule.

We decided that our community of storytellers and healers were in need of a place (virtual) where they could find support and reaffirmation that we are not alone in our concerns, fears, and need to both listen and be heard in a safe setting that supported hope and resilience. That led to the planning, development, announcement, and implementation of the Oars in the Water program which drew its name from the nautical concept that, when facing turbulence, keeping the oars in the water helps keep the boat on course and headed toward its safe destination.

Out of this discussion, the concept of “Oars in the Water” evolved. A summary of its development, approaches, and impact is included as an Appendix of this report. This weekly gathering provided that place to be, to be heard, to hear, and to find a reassuring place to listen, breathe, and find strength for resilience. The gatherings, which attracted thirty to sixty participants each week, were held weekly from April through July, and twice monthly since September.

During 2020, over 25 evening Oars programs were conducted using a constantly evolving approach that included an initial focusing exercise, opportunity for all to be heard in small and large group settings, with prompts from the worlds of poetry, story, and personal experience making this a safe and welcoming setting. During this time, hundreds of participants benefitted. More than fifteen people served as facilitators or hosts for these evenings, with several mastering the needed skills to be the vital “behind the scenes” support needed for these Zoom sessions to run smoothly.

Examples of materials developed for, or in response to prompts during these sessions, are appended. They show how the themes evolved with the times, from Fear and uncertainty, to concerns about social justice, feelings of isolation and resilience, encouragement of commitment to action, to hope and desire for Home...



Participants at OARS Zoom Meeting

FIRST OARS IN THE WATER FLIER  
APRIL 22, 2020



**Keeping our Oars in the Water:**

Gathering to bear witness to experiences and stories of vulnerability and resilience during these turbulent times.

**When a small boat meets turbulent water, the best way to maintain balance and stay upright is to keep your oar in the water. It will become your stabilizing rudder, enabling you to maintain course and steer your vulnerable craft towards safety. We are each like that small boat. HSA hopes that sharing our experiences, stories and ideas might be another stabilizing oar in the water for each of us. Please join us.**

**WHAT:** Please join HSA members and other storytellers for an evening of listening to each other; a chance to “keep our oars in the water” through being heard or witnessing your peers in the experiences, stories, ideas that have emerged through this time of COVID-19.

**NOTE:** this is not a therapeutic circle, but we do hope that it will be healing, supportive, informative, inspiring.

**HOW:** Each Wednesday at 7:00 PM EDT there will be a facilitated gathering to create a holding space to share the experiences and stories that have emerged through this turbulent time.

**WHEN:** Our gatherings will be on Wednesday evenings 7:00 to 8:30PM PM EDT  
Hold the dates: Wednesdays at 7:00 on April 22, April 29, May 6, 13, 20 and 27

**WHERE:** For more information or to get a Zoom link to join the call, kindly contact Lani Peterson ([Lani@lanipeterson.com](mailto:Lani@lanipeterson.com)). Once you have the link, it will remain the same for all meetings.

**Co-Facilitators** for April 22nd: **Lani Peterson and Wally Scott**  
Future opportunities to co-facilitate a meeting are available. Please let us know if you are interested.

These gatherings are offered by the Healing Story Alliance as a service to our Community without charge. Please join us!

## HSA PARTICIPATION IN NSN's NATIONAL VIRTUAL CONFERENCE- CONNECT: MAY 30 & 31, 2020

HSA participated in NSN's virtual conference *CONNECT* offering two robust events in the Pre-conference. HSA presented a Spotlight Concert on Saturday, May 30th, and a preconference workshop on May 31st focusing on how the Oars in the Water Program was developed. Approximately 80 persons attended the Spotlight Concert and approximately 50 attended the workshop.

### HSA Spotlight Concert *Stories from the Servant's Heart* National Storytelling Network Conference 2020



On Saturday, MAY 30th, 8:00pm-9:30pm EST, HSA presented a ninety minute spotlight storytelling concert entitled *Stories from the Servant's Heart* that was featured as part of the National Storytelling Network's pre-conference offerings. The concert, curated by Heather Forest and Laura Simms featured personal and traditional tales told by an accomplished, international cast of multicultural storytellers who have devoted their lives to healing and compassionate action in the world. The concert was attended by approximately 80 listeners.

Featured storytellers included:

Heather Forest (USA)  
Michael McCarty (USA)  
Noa Baum (Israel)  
Antonio Rocha (Brazil)  
Valentina Ortiz (Mexico)  
Nancy Wang (USA)  
Dan Yashinsky (Canada)  
Laura Simms (USA)



Heather Forest



Michael McCarty



Noa Baum



Antonio Rocha



Valentina Ortiz



Nancy Wang



Dan Yashinsky



Laura Simms

## THE HSA PRECONFERENCE WORKSHOP

The HSA preconference workshop presented our approach to creating the Oars in the Water program, expanding the reach of this valuable offering providing guidance to others on how such programs were developed and how it can be applied to other settings. The summary of the Oars in the Water approach, as presented at the workshop, is appended.

### Healing Story Alliance's Pre-Con Workshop **KEEPING OUR OARS IN THE WATER**



**Come join members of HSA's Board of Advisors as they talk about their response to the COVID crisis. Learn about what they did, why they did it and what they learned through doing it.**

**SATURDAY, MAY 30<sup>TH</sup>, 2020 at 12 noon Central or 1:00 PM EDT**

**Join Co-Presenters:**

**HEATHER FOREST, LANI PETERSON, WALLY SCOTT  
LIBBY TIPTON & CHERYL COFIELD**

**This workshop is offered as part of NSNs Virtual Conference  
You can register (\$30) for this Special Pre-Conference Workshop in the  
Package Registration link at:**

<https://storynet.org/virtual-conference-registration/>

*When a small boat meets turbulent water, the best way to maintain balance and stay upright is to keep your oars in the water. They will become your stabilizing force, enabling you to maintain course and steer your vulnerable craft towards safety. We are each like that small boat...*

## ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

During spring and summer of 2020, planning meetings were held to clarify both the scope of what is meant by Healing Story and what HSA's role in the community could become. We are examining best approaches for achieving goals. As a result, new committees have been formed, each charged with specific roles and responsibilities:

The Program Committee is responsible for developing new programs, managing existing programs such as OARS in the WATER, and creating a way for assuring that new programs address existing community needs and are consistent with HSA's mission.

The Communication Committee creates and disseminates information about HSA programs, maintains correspondence with members and other interested parties and is responsible for the oversight of website, list serve, and HSA's Facebook page.

Administrative Oversight, Liaison to NSN, and Publication committees are currently in development.

## PROBLEM AREAS

Website –Under NSN management, the extensive resources previously available through HSA's website have not been “up and running” and accessible to people trying to use it. This is of serious concern and we hope to rectify the matter in the coming year.

Financial Reports -- We have been awaiting an updated financial summary which will enable us to more efficiently plan.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Programmatically, we are continuing OARS in the WATER on the second and fourth Wednesday evenings of each month. New programs are currently being planned and implemented. Our newest offering is KIND STORIES in CONCERT which takes place the first Sunday of the Month. Its debut concert is Feb 7<sup>th</sup>.

THE HEALING STORY ALLIANCE PRESENTS

# KIND STORIES IN CONCERT

LISTEN, SHARE, AND REFLECT ON STORIES OF KINDNESS GIVEN, KINDNESS RECEIVED

**SUNDAY  
FEBRUARY 7  
4:00PM -5:30PM EST**

**Free for HSA members  
Donations Welcome from  
Non-members**

**Emcee**  
  
ELISA PEARMAIN

**Community Tellers**  
  
MEHREEN BUTT

  
ARIEL BROWN

  
SARA deBEER

  
JO RADNER

  
LACONIA THERRIO



Looking ahead we also hope to have the HSA website restored and well used. Meanwhile, our Facebook page activity has increased and is now well managed. When the website is restored, we will have a page that refers visitors to our list-serve, with instructions on how to access that resource. Communications via newsletter, blog, podcasts and or journal are being reviewed and will result in improved communication with members and with the public in the coming year.

## CONCLUSIONS

While it has been a challenging time, HSA has been able to stay true to its mission, deliver needed program services, build its organizational structures, and emerge stronger and ready to make 2021 a “very good year.”



## APPENDIX

### Overview of HSA Virtual Pre-Con workshop, May, 2020

Following the onslaught of COVID into our lives and culture, The Healing Story Alliance merged healing intention and group creativity to develop a new offering called OARS. Opening our virtual Zoom door to both members and nonmembers on Wednesday evenings for 90 minutes, HSA facilitators provided safe space, gentle themes and prompts for reflection, opportunities for connection in small groups, and a place to process the stories we are all living through COVID, political tensions, the climate crisis and the Black Lives Matter movement.

### **Keeping our Oars in the Water:**



Gathering to bear witness to experiences and stories of vulnerability and resilience during these turbulent times.

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**your vulnerable craft towards safety. We are each like that small boat.**

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As NSN redesigned their conference from in-person to virtual, HSA Executive Committee members Lani Peterson, Heather Forest and Wally Scott joined together to share the experience and learning from facilitating OARS as part of an NSN Pre-Conference offering. Below is a sampling of what we shared, matching didactic learning with real time experience for participants to integrate the theory and practice of these kinds of healing story gatherings.



## *NSN Pre-Conference Workshop Outline*

### *Welcome and Overview of workshop*

- HSA is a learning community for Healing Stories and Stories that Heal
- History and background: When COVID hit, advisory board met virtually to brainstorm how to serve members suffering isolation and more with the pandemic.
  - How to nurture the nurturers (our membership, rather than direct services to healthcare providers which was an original intention.)
- Created elements of a plan for an online gathering (Holding environment) to listen, build and share compassion in a safe and trusting environment
  - Although stories are central, it is different than story swap
- Metaphor for Keeping our Oars in the Water-
  - Oars: Metaphors for Stability and forward momentum
    - Lay them flat for stability-metaphor of pause
    - Put them back in the water for forward movement
- Organically evolved structure for Keeping our Oars in the Water through six sessions of seeing what worked and what else was needed.
  - Has maintained participation of between 35 and 50 over weekly meetings.
  - Have had participants from many groups beyond HSA- NSN, NEST, and international community across several time zones
- Overview of this Pre Con workshop
  - We'll take you in the back door to understand what we did, why we did it as you experience it for yourselves.

### **TRANSITION TO ACTUAL EXPERIENCE of an OARS GATHERING-**

*Each meeting begins with housekeeping and welcoming-true for this workshop too!*

- Create safety through structure and clear expectations.
  - Adapted from our original "Guidelines for participants" created week 1
- This is a welcoming space, a holding space-safety images/journey images (Lifeline, oars, etc.) positive synergy
  - Everyone is bringing something different, be it a story, an experience, a thought about what it means to keep ourselves afloat, stable and headed somewhere intentional in these turbulent waters. All will be different. All will be welcome.
    - Not therapeutic, but we do intend it to be healing.
  - Suggested time of 5 minutes or less to talk or tell. Be respectful that there are many on the call who might like some time as well.
    - If people don't have a chance to speak to tonight, know that we are all speaking on behalf of everyone.
  - Put a note on chat if you would like to share with the group

- Let host know if it is a story, a comment, an experience, a helpful hint, so that we can order the contributions thoughtfully.
- This is not a conversation or a swap, but a growing, respectful dialogue
  - Dialogue: each speaker is contributing bricks that are building something together
- We ask everyone to be on mute if you are not speaking.
  - Hosts maintain a respectful pause between each speaker
  - We are all learning to communicate in new ways (virtual).

*(A student asked the great teacher Zhao Zhou: “When times of great difficulty visit us, how should we meet them?” The teacher said, “Welcome.”)*

#### ***Experiential Opening ritual- bringing people to quiet and together-entering the space-***

- Facilitate an opening ritual
  - Sign Language hand signs for applause and appreciation taught by **Libby**

#### ***Heather Forest delivered an opening story that leads to a breakout room prompt-***

- Journey Theme-we are all headed somewhere in these turbulent times, even if we don't know exactly where our boat will land.

#### **Jewish story about not knowing**

*An old man walked out of his house and across the village green to the synagogue each morning. A soldier stationed on the green watched him do this day after day. One day the soldier was in a foul mood. He stopped him and asked, “Where are you going?”*

*The old man answered, “I don't know”*

*The soldier said, “Don't tell me you don't know! Every day I watch you come out of your house at this time, cross the village green and go into that synagogue. Tell me! Where are you going? Once again the old man said, “I don't know.”*

*Infuriated, the soldier grabbed him by the scruff of the neck, dragged him to the jail, and pushed him into a cell. Just as the soldier was turning the key, the old man looked over his shoulder and said, “See? You don't know.”*

- Stories are a lifeline in troubled waters.
- PROMPT: “What has been your oar in the water? On your journey, what keeps you going that brings you stability, restoration and resilience during this time?
  - Short reflections-2 minutes each max
  - Say yes to the invitation to share.
  - Can leave at any time and come back to main room.

## Breakout Groups,

Three to Four persons per room – introduce yourselves, Allow 8 minutes in rooms with 1 minute to return.

### *Welcome back from breakouts*

- *Introduce idea of taking a pause, a breath after each sharing*
  - *Can appreciate another's sharing through a sign language*
- Participants invited to share up to 5 minutes of story, reflection, or experience.
- If dialogue slows down, invite participants to share something from their breakout rooms.

### **Co-hosts bring sharing time and experiential component to a close**

- Emerson quote: “Life is a journey, not a destination”

### **Transition to Q and A**

- Adopting the not knowing approach
  - Invitation to curiosity
    - Different than being grounded in fear
    - A creative and active state of mind
- Question posed to participants: “What do you perceive as healing elements in this process?”
  - Movement-can't predict where we are going, but there is movement.
  - Clear metaphor frame and quality of listening
  -

### **Lani ends with story on - “Don't know” theme**

*There is an old story about a priest walking down the road during the Russian revolution.*

*A passing soldier said, “Halt. Who are you? Where are you going? Why are you going there?”*

*The priest paused, reflected, and then asked the soldier, “How much do you get paid a month?”  
“Ten rubles,” replied the soldier.*

*The priest said, “I will pay you twenty rubles a month if every day, you stop me and ask me those same questions: “Who are you, where are you going, and why are you going there?”*

- Ask the questions, pause, reflect, move forward with intention

Since the Pre-Con workshop in May, The Healing Story alliance has continued to offer OARS gatherings on Wednesday evenings. In September, the model shifted to twice monthly, freeing up room for other HSA offerings on alternate Wednesday evenings. As COVID continues to take its toll on our citizens,

social inequities continue to flourish, environmental concerns seem monumental and the country wrestles with division of beliefs in how to move forward, OARS continues to provide a place of refuge. As all are welcomed in on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesdays of each month, participants find a place to listen, to be heard, to be part of a compassionate community where storytelling and healing go hand in hand.

*Samples of Group Poems created during OARS in the WATER Gatherings*

I AM, I CAN, I WILL  
Healing Story Alliance gathering  
July 8, 2020

I am who I am and that is as I am in this moment.  
I am present, open, a mission  
I am here, blessed and grateful  
I am loving life, now watching the clouds drift by  
Am I is often the question?  
I am creative, in a fairy tale, trying to open to the beauty and the awful  
I am many worlds and many colors  
I am restless, surrounded by fellow seekers  
I am a cosmic gamble  
I am a straddler of two worlds that both matter, rich, poor, black, white, access to opportunity and blocked adventure  
I am you and the birds at my window  
I am from Daegu, South Korea  
I am a resilient dreamer. When dreams get challenging I stand strong and resilient like the bamboo.  
When my dreams are beautiful, I float like a cloud that takes me to where my mind blows me to.  
I am an African American woman whose roots are damaged. I ask for alliance from others in their own "I am-ness" to join me.  
I am on a razor's edge, pleading for alliance  
I am a reluctant explorer, I am joy

I can persevere; pledge to be an ally for the rest of my life  
I can learn to be an ally with my deep gift of listening  
I can reach out to others, dance, be a trusted friend  
I can think, I can fast, I can wait  
I can laugh, I can cry  
I can reinvent a new me  
I can trust, I can sing, I can make new connections  
I can be a listener and a learner

I can share what I want my legacy to be  
I can perform acts of compassion  
I can let those I love, know how much and why I love them.  
I can be a trusted friend, I can be humble  
I can make more space for other people's stories. And with my gifts tell the stories of those who passed on as a way to keep their memory alive  
I can create, I can gather in my heart all who search for home. I can laugh. I can cry, I can work  
I can occupy space I can shine, I can be brave  
I can be courageous  
I can continue and redouble my efforts to fight for the earth and all its people.  
I can engage in deep conversations with people I never knew I needed yo understand better and build bridges that lead towards problem- solving  
I can help children feel safe and calm and be in joy.  
I can step out of my comfort zone and try those things I have not tried  
I can be an ally. I can take you into the forest and become another blade of grass. I can tell stories that open the heart too know innate unbiased love  
I can listen more deeply.  
I can work with others to strengthen my understanding of how to be an effective ally  
I can listen. I can share. I can offer support to those who need it. I can be open...  
I can be patient, a witness to the end go racism  
I can let my heart-a-crack. I can turn my focus towards hearticulture

I will get into the boat and row  
I SWEAR I WILL ASK FOR HELP WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT THE CHOICE TO ASSIST ME AND OTHERS WHO ARE OPPRESSED IS ENTIRELY UNDER THE CONTROL OF THOSE I APPEAL TO.  
I will listen more patiently. And learn others reality to end of racism... everything is connected.  
I will write letters to help get out the vote in the November election  
I will question my assumptions!  
I will create a community conversation on racism.  
I will love myself enough  
I will vote  
I will support those who need my strength  
I will listen and I will hear what is being intended for me to hear.  
I will continue to be optimistic that COVID-19 can be a positive force in the evolution of humanity-- catalyzing us to be more connected, empathic, compassionate and loving to all.  
I will get in and row in the manner that I am asked  
I will keep learning  
I will sing and smile more  
I will continue to teach starting with the workshop I'm co-leading tomorrow night to return my focus to the Other, as in Buber's I-Thou, and to gently nudge it away from myself onto the participants

I will listen closely to the dreams and yearnings of those whose voices have been muted and silenced, and work beside them to do whatever I can do to bring those dreams and yearnings from the ephemeral to the real.

I will sharpen my story medicine

I will stretch myself when I discover I need stretching

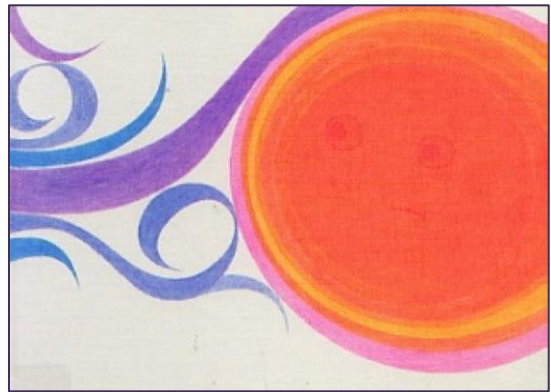
I will bring light to others by shining from joy and gratefulness.

## THE SUN & THE WIND

A group poem made at

OARS in the WATER

Healing Story Alliance Gathering



The wind in me says....it's time to blow away the dust and start fresh.

The wind in me says . . . Catch

Push over evil

The sun will come out.

The wind in me says soar high

The wind in me says I only need to blow a little harder for all the cobwebs to be blown away...

The wind in me says, you need a break for a bit, you need just a breeze, not a gale.

The wind in me says finish all my tasks first.

The wind in me says, "You can't change the system. It's sewn on."

The wind in me says, "take it easy. You can't do it all. There is time to make things happen."

The wind in me says....calm down

The wind in me says give it everything you've got.

Sometimes the wind in me says blow barely, other times blow harshly.

The wind in me says, my power is to talk, talk more, and shout to be heard

Stay calm and resolute

Stir it all up

The sun in me says stop for a while and observe.

The sun in me says...spread your warmth

The wind in me says I can be a gentle breeze.

The sun in me says shine on in spite of everything dark

The Sun in me says, listen to the wind. Be kind to yourself.

The sun in me says, let yourself shine!

The sun in me says I love the wind, it is so lovely.

The sun in me says....don't burn anything.

The sun in me says, "Be soft, be kind and everything will be good."

The sun in me says shine, shine, shine. Lighten the world.

Th sun in me says -cause few shadows

The sun in me says open heart flower to embrace your rays and let them shine.

The sun says, Enjoy our time together, do what you feel best!

The sun in me says, "We can live through this, No coat can stay on more than 4 days."

The sun in me says I need to control my heat.

The sun in me says accept, melt, infiltrate

The sun in me says, I send warmth to give life and show love

The sun says I burn but am never consumed

The sun in me says that I just need to shine my joy on the world brighter to make people throw away  
The cloak of fear and shine their kindness

The wind in me says slow down but keep steady

The wind in me calls the politicians swear names. I am powerful that way. The sun in me laughs and  
says, "What an interesting way to get revenge. Let's focus on all those we love.

The wind in me says "Nothing can stop my evil potency I penetrate and permeate all" The sun in me says  
"Currently I feel powerless and cloaked behind a cloud" Pray for us all.

The wind in me is direct

The sun in me says never stop giving me the warmth of your love.

I make people happy and I make people sad. I can be gentle and I can be harsh the wind says. The  
gentle swaying of the leaves of the Tree, and the snow that blows. I reflect what people think. And I am  
neither happy nor sad!

The sun in me is gentle

The wind in me says feel my gentle breeze

The sun in me says let me warm your heart .

The sun in me says share your light but do not blind others with it... share your light and be grateful  
for the light that returns to you...know that giving is a blessing.

The wind in me says "take a deep breath" ... "expand and fly with me" ... "feel so many possibilities of  
breathlessness and welcoming"

The sun in me might say also... I can encourage ... just as you can ... let's stay open to growth and depths  
and love and caring ... let us join together to create a middle way.

**Submitted to NSN on Behalf of the Healing Story Alliance by  
Michael Seliger  
2020 Chair of the Executive Committee  
1/28/2021**