

South of the Garden

The Newsletter for the Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South

Volume 27, Number 1

April, 2006

Truth

by Jeanette Stokes

"Yes means yes, no means no, whatever I wear, wherever I go," we chanted as we marched the mile from the East Campus to the West Campus of Duke University on a recent April evening. Over five hundred of us showed up for the annual Duke *Take Back the Night* march. "What does survival look like?" one woman called out. "This is what survival looks like!" we responded as we walked four and five abreast, I with Miriam, Rose, and Megan—three friends still in their twenties.

The march was larger than usual this year—a response to newspaper reports a few days earlier of an alleged rape at a party of Duke lacrosse players. An exotic dancer hired to entertain at the party charged that three men trapped her in a bathroom and assaulted her. The male students claimed they were innocent and submitted to DNA testing. The woman is black. The three students are white, as are forty-six of the forty-seven team members.

I attended a candlelight vigil at sunset on the day the story appeared in the newspaper. Two hundred students, faculty, and townspeople gathered in front of the house where the party took place. Vigil organizers said we were there to support the courage of victims who speak out. I thought to myself at the time that whatever had happened, the wild drunken parties for which the team was known were exactly the kind of out-of-control situations that could lead to violence.

For years, neighbors have complained to police and university officials about Duke students' off-campus parties. One night a few years ago, I was awakened at 3:00 a.m. by some hollering outside. From my bedroom window, I could see students in the yard of the rental house across the street. One young man was standing in the middle of the street screaming obscenities at the top of his lungs. Another was peeing in my front yard.

The *Take Back the Night* march ended in front of Duke Chapel where we sat on cold flagstones to listen to a Speak Out. Several women told of having been raped at age thirteen, several more of being sexually assaulted by friends or boyfriends on campus. Men spoke of feeling helpless in the face of a girlfriend recovering from rape. One woman said, "I did not even know it was sexual assault. My friends had to explain it to me."

The crowd was reminded that the Duke Sexual Assault Support Services defines sexual assault as "any sex act against your will, without your consent, or when you are unable to freely give consent." Rape is "any sex act involving penetration of any body opening by any object, that is against your will, without your consent, or when you are unable to freely give consent."

From the first reports, I assumed the woman was telling the truth. More than thirty years of work by rape crisis and domestic violence advocates has taught us all to believe the victim. Thirty years ago, authorities might have ignored the claims of a divorced exotic dancer with a minor police record. The police, hospitals, the media and the public believed the woman's allegations. She had bruises to support her story. The local District Attorney promised to prosecute to the full extent of the law.

(Continued on back.)

Art

by Jeanette Stokes

Art and the Feminine Divine: An Exhibit will be on display in multiple Durham venues April 21–May 14, 2006. Come to the opening reception on April 21, 6–9 pm, in conjunction with Culture Crawl in Durham. (For all the details visit: www.rcwms.org.)

Art and the Feminine Divine will bring together a hundred artists whose work celebrates the many forms and faces of God the Mother, Lover, Creatrix. Sponsored by the Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South, the exhibit reveals the many ways we celebrate and demonstrate the feminine divine. The artwork is both abstract and representational and includes pieces in fabric, collage, painting, and sculpture. Musical events, storytelling, and a meditation session will be held during the exhibit. (See below for a listing of events.)

The exhibit was inspired by Mary Love May. Several years ago, Mary Love began making and giving away small clay bowls that resembled goddesses. This process grew into the idea of an art project involving many artists and also became a way of honoring the spirit of her mother, Mary Shaw May, now 83, who lives with Alzheimer's disease. No longer able to speak a clear sentence, Mary Shaw once wrote poetry, essays and stories about Earth and spirit, women, and her own life. May's idea for the exhibit is an extension of giving away her goddess bowls, and this exhibit is a way of spreading goddess seeds all over Durham.

Artwork will be on display through May 14 at multiple locations in Durham: 117 Market Street; Transom Gallery, 305 E. Chapel Hill St., 599-7904; The Scrap Exchange Gallery, 548 Foster St., 688-6960; Okun-Stern Loft, 208 Rigsbee St., 949-0609; Francesca's, 706 9th St., 286-4177.

Events:

Friday, April 21, 6:00–9:00 pm, *Opening Reception* in conjunction with Culture Crawl. Begin at any of our downtown Durham venues.

Sunday, April 23, 8:00 pm, *Songs of the Feminine Divine: A Concert by Jewelsong*, Blayloc Café

Saturday, April 29, 8:00 pm, *Lise Uyanik and the Mobile City Band & STELLA*, Blayloc Café

Wednesday, May 3, 7:30 pm, *Moons and Mirrors: Sacred Fabric Art*, slide/lecture by Jude Spacks, Okun-Stern Loft

Saturday, May 6, 2:00 pm, *Storytelling from Five Faiths*, Okun-Stern Loft

Friday, May 12, 2:00 pm, *Tara Meditation*, led by Rachael Wooten, Okun-Stern Loft

The Art & the Feminine Divine Committee includes Miriam Biber, Sallye Coyle, Kathleen Hannan, Bryant Holsenbeck, Mary Love May, Anita McLeod, Courtney Reid-Eaton, Candice Ryals, Jeanette Stokes, Candace Thomas, Sue Versenyi, and Ann Woodward.

We would like to give special thanks to Hopkins Design Group, RGG Architects, Self Help Ventures Fund, Tema Okun & Tom Stern, The Scrap Exchange, The Transom, Francesca's, Emily Wexler, and Jennifer McGovern.

Exhibiting Artists: Kelly Adams, Kit Adcock, Cynthia Aldrich, Charron Andrews, Brianna Atkins, Barbara Barnes, Susan Baylies, Margo Wiley Bennett, Thomas

(Continued on back.)



Melissa York

Calendar

Events connected to our Art & the Feminine Divine program are marked by ©. For more information: www.rcwms.org.

April 9–14, 2006

ECUMENICAL HOLY WEEK LABYRINTH WALK

Binkley Baptist Church, Chapel Hill, NC

Sunday, 4–8:30 pm; Monday 6:30 am–8:30 pm; Tuesday, 6:30 am–8:30 pm (4–6 pm time for children); Wednesday, 6:30 am–4:30 pm; Thursday, 6:30 am–7 pm; Friday, 6:30 am–noon, Good Friday service at noon.

Sponsors: Several Chapel Hill churches

Cost: Free and open to the public

Contact: GJordan@thechapelofthecross.org or rcwmsnc@aol.com

© April 16, 2006, 1:00 pm–dark (Sunday)

CELEBRATION OF MANY CULTURES: Outdoor Multi-Cultural Festival

Occaneechi Village Site, Hillsborough, NC

1:00–4:00 pm, Drumming & dancing

4:00 pm–dark, Fire circle and jamming

Cost: Donations appreciated

Contact: 919-644-1592, merpig@juno.com

© April 21–May 14, 2006

ART & THE FEMININE DIVINE EXHIBIT

Durham, NC (Venues: 117 Market Street, Transom Gallery, Okun-Stern Loft, Scrap Exchange, & Francesca's)

Art by 100 artists representing many forms and faces of God the Mother, Lover, and Creatrix.

OPENING RECEPTION, Friday, April 21, 6:00–9:00 pm in conjunction with Culture Crawl (www.culturecrawl.com). Begin at any of our downtown venues.

Free and open to the public.

© April 23–30, 2006

CONVERSATIONS ON ART & SPIRITUALITY—in

Rome, Italy with Meinrad Craighead

Contact: www.meinradcraighead.com

© April 23, 2006, 8:00 pm

SONGS OF THE FEMININE DIVINE: An Earth Day

Evening with Jewelsong & Friends

Blayloc Café, downtown Durham next to the Arts Council

Jewelsong, an eclectic women's vocal ensemble (Betsy Bickel, Farrunnissa Lila Rosa, Marilyn Grubbs, and Sofianna Sue-Anne Solem), shares inspirational songs from many spiritual traditions. Middle Eastern dancers Leigh Brown and Mariel and others will join them.

Admission: \$10

© April 29, 2006, 8:00 pm

LISE UYANIK & THE MOBILE CITY BAND plus

STELLA: A Concert

Blayloc Café, Durham, NC

Dance till you drop to the hot rhythm and blues sounds of Lise Uyanik & the Mobile City Band. Opening the evening will be STELLA, seven women singing a cappella with attitude.

Cost: \$12 in advance, \$15 at the door. Tickets: Regulator or www.brownpapertickets.com/event/4242.

© May 3, 2006, 7:30 pm

MOONS & MIRRORS: Sacred Fabric Art

Okun-Stern Loft, Durham, NC

In this delicious slide/lecture, Jude Spacks will explore the process, images, and meaning of her amazing fabric collages.

Leader: Jude Spacks, portrait artist, fabric artist, and teacher

Suggested donation: \$10



Charron Andrews

© May 6, 2006, 2:00 pm

STORYTELLING FROM FIVE FAITHS

Okun-Stern Loft, Durham, NC

Storytellers from five of the world's great religions (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism) will share tales from their traditions. Louise Omoto Kessel will moderate the afternoon.

Suggested donation: \$10

© May 12, 2006, 2:00 pm

TARA MEDITATION

Okun-Stern Loft, Durham, NC

Tara is the beloved female Buddha of Tibet. She embodies enlightened consciousness, wisdom and compassion—in female form. She is the Buddha of Enlightened Action, making her a refuge for spiritual activists. Tara practice calms our fears, generating clarity about inner emotions and outer circumstances.

Leader: Rachael Wooten, psychologist & Jungian analyst who practices and teaches Tibetan meditation

Suggested donation: \$10

June 9–11, 2006

A RETREAT AT THE BEACH

Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC

This weekend retreat will be a time to rest, play, be creative or write.

Leader: Jeanette Stokes

Cost: \$270, includes room and meals

Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

June 11–18, 2006

WEEK OF QUIET AND WRITING FOR WOMEN

Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC

Cost: \$600, includes room and meals

Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

July 20–23, 2006

EVANGELICAL AND ECUMENICAL WOMEN'S CAUCUS CONFERENCE

Charlotte Hyatt at SouthPark, Charlotte, NC

Theme: Rooted in Love, Powered by God

Speakers: Mel Bringle, Nancy Hestenes, Virginia Mollenkott, Reta Finger, & Mary Emma Evans. Plus Martha Ann Kirk, Catherine Cuasay, & Janice Pope.

Contact: www.eewc.com, Nancy Hardesty, 864-294-0911, nhardes@clemson.edu

August 13–17, 2006

2006 INTERNATIONAL UNITED METHODIST CLERGYWOMEN'S CONSULTATION

Hyatt Regency McCormick Place, Chicago, IL

Cost: \$225–275 plus housing

Contact: www.gbhem.org/clergywomen/consultation2006/home.html

August 17–September 4, 2006

MOTHER MEERA IN THE U.S.A.

Los Angeles, August 17–20; Denver, August 22–23;

Chicago, August 25–26; Raleigh, NC, August 28–30; New

York City, September 1–4

Mother Meera, an emanation of Divine Feminine presence, will offer darshan, her personal transmission of light and energy.

Contact: www.mmdarshanamerica.com

September 24–October 1, 2006

WEEK OF QUIET AND WRITING FOR WOMEN

Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC

Cost: \$600, includes room and meals

Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

October 21–29, 2006

CONVERSATIONS ON ART & SPIRITUALITY—in

Paris, France with Meinrad Craighead

Leaders: Meinrad Craighead and Lydia Ruyle

Cost: \$1,500 plus travel, lodging, and meals

Contact: 970-227-7513, info@goddessconversations.com, www.meinradcraighead.com

Heart

We are pleased to announce the winners of the 2005 RCWMS Essay Contest. First place goes to Carol Shumate of Chapel Hill, NC for "Invisible Heart" (printed below), second place to Marya McNeish of Durham, NC, and third to Becky Holtzman of Albuquerque, NM. You will see these essays in future newsletters. The Essay Contest is made possible by a grant from the Clifford A. and Lillian C. Peeler Family Foundation.

Invisible Heart

by Carol Shumate

Once in my youth I got a fortune in a fortune cookie that was blank. It terrified me. That was what I thought would become of my life. For many years I could see no future for myself. Even my past was blank. I was trapped in a fog of unknowing with no visible path backward or forward.

I was born in the flat, dry landscape of west Texas where, as they say out there, there's nothing between you and the horizon but a barbed wire fence. I used to climb those barbed wire fences to get a view. I also climbed clothesline poles, trellises, even houses. I felt no fear of heights. It was life on the ground I feared. I wanted a heart connection with others, yet I seemed to lack the knack of friendship. Barbed wire fences do not make good neighbors.

As a child I shared a bedroom with my brother who was six years older and of course I adored him. When I was six and he was twelve, he went swimming with his boy-scout troop in a culvert. The water was dirty and he got an ear infection. The infection spread to his mastoid bone, and he began to have operations to remove the bone. It took hours to reach the nearest big-city hospital. One night when we left the hospital to make the long drive home, my father broke down at the wheel of the car, causing the car to run off the road. The sound of his sobs accompanied by the lurching and bumping of the wheels on rough ground was so alien I thought the world was coming to an end. I put my hands over my ears, but Mother's voice penetrated: "Horace: Get control of yourself. You'll get us all killed!" My father replied, choking: "I just can't stand to leave my son alone in that hospital again." I lay down on the back seat and tried to be invisible. I succeeded only too well.

Between surgeries, my brother attended school and played football, his head bandaged. My mother's handwriting in her letters to her sisters grew shakier and shakier. My brother began having nightmares and would wake up screaming. One night he refused to say our nightly prayer: "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep . . ." One Sunday in church, he refused to say the Twenty-third Psalm: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the Shadow of Death . . ."

After a year of this, he seemed better. He quit having nightmares; the bandages came off; the surgeries ceased; the atmosphere in the house grew more normal. And then with no warning he died in his sleep.

At age seven, I hoped my brother's death would give me some novelty value, rescue me from social oblivion. But it didn't work that way. Other children only wanted to know how it felt to have a death in the family. It felt like nothing, and I had to keep that awful secret hidden. I only wanted to protect my parents, to prevent the world from exploding in a paroxysm of despair that would run us off the road into the nothingness beyond.

I became a tomboy, a whirlwind of activity to distract us all from sadness. I rejected dolls, dresses, anything that smacked of sentiment. A picture of me from that period showed downcast eyes, skinny legs, and knobby knees in a green satin tapdance skirt. I hated that picture and threw it away.



Ebeth Scott-Sinclair

The emptiness in our house was intolerable. My father began having nightmares in which he moaned like a banshee. These nightmares would continue to the end of his life. We moved and then we moved again, eventually moving as far away as seemed possible in those days, to New England. But the empty landscape of my childhood followed me everywhere—it became a permanent feature of my mental landscape. I had shut down the feeling factory and put up the barbed wire fence. Years later, when I saw the film *Orfeu Negro*, it sucked the breath out of me. I recognized that frenetic carnival of forced gaiety where everyone laughs and dances, grotesquely oblivious to death. Like Orpheus, I danced desperately to retrieve my beloved from the underworld.

Maybe it was because I was so determined to compensate my parents for their loss that I assumed a male role. When puberty came, I felt like a female impersonator. I hid my true self and faked femininity, accommodating everyone at the expense of myself. I tiptoed around the landmine of other people's emotions, utterly cut off from my own. I built my resume as if that could ensure a full life. I studied foreign languages and lived abroad. If only I could find the right place, I thought, perhaps I could fit in and escape the loneliness. But everywhere and always I feared the silence of an empty room. I had lots of "friends," but I suspected that if they ever knew the real me, they would disappear. The real me had been neutered.

For years I carried my dead brother around on my back. Often I prayed for him to visit me in dreams to alleviate the loneliness. Without any evidence, and contrary to the teachings of my childhood religion, I had always believed that the dead could communicate with us in dreams. But the only dream I had of him was a recurring nightmare: He lay sleepless in bed in a remote hospital, with no visitors and a view of an empty parking lot. It was as if he had lingered in that hospital for all the intervening years, sick, alone, forgotten, and I was the one who had left him there. Once, my father returned to our hometown to visit his grave, only to find that the gravestone had disappeared. No one knew any longer where my brother's grave was.

Then one day, everything changed. My father, who traveled constantly for his job (we were all running away in our family), was passing through the Los Angeles airport, when a woman called him by name. She identified herself as one of my brother's teachers. She said that the day before he died, my brother had told her that it was his last day in school and he thanked her for being his teacher. Tearfully, she recounted how my brother had gone around to all of his teachers that day and told them all good-bye—apparently in perfect health.

Learning that my brother knew not only that he would die, but the exact day of his death, rescued us all from the desert of grief. It gave the lie to my nightmare: My brother had died peacefully in an attitude of acceptance—even gratitude. He had not died alone. I had not abandoned him. This news assured me that none of us are alone in death. But more importantly, it taught me that we are not alone in life either. I had not been abandoned. In that moment I experienced what every religion teaches—that God is. What I had always longed for was there all along: the heart connection. I suddenly saw it everywhere, in every chance encounter.

Not that returning from the dead was easy. I rehabilitated my frozen heart gradually, with the aid of my husband and my son and especially, my writing. Writing allowed me to express truths that seemed too dangerous to unleash in speech. Like my mother writing

(Continued on back.)

Truth...

The fact that a third of the lacrosse team had been arrested for alcohol or noise violations also helped us believe the victim, as did a horrific email the night of the party by a student who proposed another party at which strippers would be killed and skinned. The report that the lacrosse players' DNA was not found on the victim and the claims that the victim arrived at the party with bruises make us wonder about truth.

We live in a culture in which male violence is prevalent. We live in a country whose president acts like he can do whatever he wants to just because he can. He invaded Iraq on flimsy evidence because he and his crowd wanted to rearrange the Middle East to make it friendlier to western oil interests. Following this example young, drunk male students at an elite university sometimes act like they can do as they please and if they get caught, their daddies will get them off.

When I told someone that I assumed the woman was telling the truth and also assumed that the accused were innocent until proven guilty, she asked me how one could hold that tension.

I said, "Support the woman. Believe her." Assume she is telling the truth. That's the first thing. The question for public opinion and for the university is how to deal with the students. They have not yet been charged with a crime. It is not clear who was present at the party and who was not. The university could have done more, as in putting them all on probation until the facts are sorted out. The students have lawyers who seem to have told them not to say anything about the case. The legal system and the values of community get crossways with each other pretty quickly in cases like this one.

The thing that makes me hesitate is that in my work against the death penalty, I have learned to reserve judgment about guilt. We've wrongly executed numbers of people in this country. I've stopped assuming that I know who is innocent and who is guilty.

It is hard to hold the tension in this case. The race, class, and gender inequities are huge. Still, even disgusting macho students have civil rights to be protected. They could be expelled on the basis of the out-of-control party alone, but the university has chosen for years not to take harsh actions about such parties. One question is whether the university contributes to violent, criminal behavior by not trying to stop these wild parties and drunken male behavior.

What seems right is that the public, most students, and the press assumed from the beginning that the woman was telling the truth. That would not have been the case thirty years ago.

People on campus, in town, and on listservs have been arguing with each another over who is right. I'm trying to find another approach.



Dianne Masi

Art...

Bermudez, Betsy Blair, Jeannette Brossart, Nicole Brown, Shannon Bueker, Danny Cameron, Stephanie Campbell, Linda Carmel, Nancy Corson Carter, Shabari Case, Valerie Clack, Debbie Cohen, Sallye Coyle, Julie Dean, Dori DeSantis, Susan Draughon, Martha Dyer, Lori Easterlin, Bruce Edwards, Ann Ehringhaus, Pam Epperson, Judith Ernst, Grace Evans, Dale Evarts, Laura Farrow, Vernessa Foelix, B. J. Fusaro, Sara Gabrielson, Mickey Gault, Janice Geller, Andrea Gomez, Galia Goodman, Tamsen Moriah Coyle Hall, Kathleen Hannan, Alyssa Hinton, Louise Hobbs, Bryant Holsenbeck, Suzanne Holt, Emily Huffman, Bonnie Hummel, Ava Johnson, Amy Kellum, Carrie Knowles, Patricia Kosdan, Michelle Lanier, Marcy Litle, Melissa Manley, Dianne Masi, Mary Love May, Nancy Tuttle May, Valerie McGaughey, Zakia Virginia McGuire, Anita McLeod, Patricia Merriman, Carol Mackay Mertz, Eleanor Mills, Sandy Milroy, Ellen O'Grady, Libby Outlaw, Brydie Palmore, Delphine Peller, Martha Jane Petersen, Sally Pillsbury, Sudie Rakusin, Luna Lee Ray, Courtney Reid-Eaton, Laurel Reinhardt, Daphne Reno, Margaret Sartor, Ebeth Scott-Sinclair, Sculpting the Goddess Within Workshop, Elizabeth Shupe, Julia Simmons, Susan Simone, Sue Sneddon, David Sovero, Jude Spacks, Sue Speier, Julie Hilton Steele, Marie Summers, Gilda Morina Syverson, Candace Thomas, Dana Thompson, Melody Troncale, Sue Versenyi, Karin Vynner-Brooks, James Ward, Adele Wayman, Kay Webb, Susan Wells, Bobby Wells, Martha Whitfield, Sherri Wood, Ann May Woodward, and Melissa York.

Heart...

to her sisters, I could write the unspeakable. I could begin to feel again on the page. In retrospect, I see that that was one of the gifts of my long exile in the desert. I developed a rich fantasy life and a high tolerance for the sensory deprivation writing imposes. So my brother's death led to the unfolding of my life's work. I learned how to write my own fortune cookie fortunes, to create my own path.

But the greatest gift to me of my brother's death was that it banished forever my fear of death, enabling me to live more fully. I learned that relationships outlast death and that we are never alone. I had tried like Orpheus to rescue my brother from death, but it was he who rescued me.

Carol Shumate is a writer and teaches writing through her business, Writestyles.com. She believes that life is always a mixture, the good with the bad, and that the advantage of being a writer is that you can take the really awful moments and make something artistic out of them.



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