

South of the Garden

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

Volume 28, Number 3

September, 2007

Celebrations

Thirtieth Anniversary Luncheon

The Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South turned thirty years old in August this year. The Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture at Duke hosted a luncheon in our honor on Thursday, September 6, 2007. Friends and colleagues gathered in the Rare Book Room at Perkins Library to share memories of RCWMS and enjoy tasty treats. The Resource Center's papers have been archived at the Bingham Center for fifteen years.

Laura Micham, Director of the Bingham Center, welcomed everyone. Jeanette Stokes gave a brief history of RCWMS; Anita McLeod read from *Enough Room*, Sue Versényi's collection of poems that RCWMS just published; Debra Brazzel offered reflections on the Meinrad Craighead Documentary Project; and Rachael Wooten commented on the interfaith work of RCWMS.

In addition to the RCWMS papers, the Bingham Center has archived papers of former RCWMS board members Nancy Peeler Keppel, Mary Margaret Wade, and Bett Hargrave.

Enough Room by Sue Versényi

RCWMS is pleased to announce the publication *Enough Room*, poetry by Sue Versényi. On Sunday afternoon, September 9, forty-five people came to Market Street Books in Chapel Hill, NC for a reception for the book.

Sue Versényi was born in New Haven, Connecticut and moved to Carrboro, NC, in 1988. She earned her B.A. from Hampshire College and an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from Warren Wilson College. Sue had a thriving private practice in Carrboro as a reading and writing specialist and coach. An artist in many mediums, she was a published poet, an exhibited fabric artist, and an avid gardener. Sue died of breast cancer in 2006, leaving behind her husband Adam, two teenaged daughters, Elena and Nina, and scores of friends. She was forty-nine.

In this bittersweet collection of poems, Sue reflects on the body, nature, family, love, and living with cancer. Many of the poems were written in 2005 at the beach during RCWMS-sponsored writing weeks. Spare and deep, these poems will take up residence in your heart.

To order *Enough Room*, Sue Versényi (RCWMS, 2007), send \$19 (includes tax & shipping) to: RCWMS, 1202 Watts St., Durham, NC 27701, or see www.rcwms.org.

Meinrad Craighead Documentary Project

On the last day of August, twenty people gathered at Anita McLeod's house to see a ten-minute preview of the Meinrad Craighead documentary and to enjoy food and conversation. We've had fourteen house parties for the documentary project this year, which have raised \$12,000. We have now reached \$80,000, on our way to the goal of \$100,000. People have been wonderfully generous. This fall filmmakers Georgann Eubanks and Donna Campbell will be editing the final version of the film, which will be released in 2008.

For more information about the Meinrad Craighead Documentary Project, see www.MeinradProject.org.



Creek

Rachael called and asked if I wanted to go to Asheville with her for a weekend in August. She was half joking, and I said, "No." I had just returned from ten days in Oklahoma and Texas, and I did not want to go off anywhere else. It's a four-hour drive to Asheville. Rachael owns thirty-eight acres north of Asheville, near Hot Springs, NC, and she likes to go up that way a couple of times a year.

Then I thought about it. The weekend she suggested was the same weekend Dwight was planning to drive his daughter to her college near Asheville. I could ride up with Rachael on Friday, spend the night with my friends Lucy and Tom in their new house in south Asheville, Dwight could come on Saturday, and then he and I could drive back to Durham on Sunday. It started sounding like fun. So I said, "Yes, probably." This being a last minute sort of plan, I kept saying we would just lean in that direction.

Rachael called her favorite B&B in Hot Springs to reserve a room. Lucy said she'd be happy to see us and to have any combination of us stay with her. In recent years, I've learned to have more ease, to struggle less, and to walk through doors that open. The doors to this little adventure seemed to swing wide open, and sure enough on a Friday in August, Rachael and I got in her red Subaru station wagon and headed for the mountains.

I complained for the first half of the trip, because I did not like the seats in Rachael's car, but after stuffing several pillows under my butt, I shut up about it.

We arranged to meet Lucy in downtown Asheville and arrived in time to spend a few minutes in Malaprops, that city's wonderful independent bookstore. After a delicious dinner, Rachael headed to Hot Springs and Lucy and I went to her house where Tom was returning from a meeting and we all settled in for a night's rest.

On Saturday morning, Lucy and I went back into downtown Asheville where I bought a pair of winter shoes and some yarn for my newest cool weather hobby: knitting. Then we started up the windy road to Hot Springs to join Rachael for lunch and to see her land.

From the moment we arrived at Rachael's favorite B&B I was charmed by the place. The Duckett House is a stately two-story clapboard house with a big front porch that sits on a rise above Spring Creek. The two men who own the place have loved on it for seventeen years, and it shows. The yard, the house, the furnishings, the hand-built barn, the simple well-equipped kitchen, all radiate love and a commitment to place and to quality. Hot Springs is a tiny community, near the Appalachian Trail, surrounded by miles and miles of forest. It was the site of a popular nineteenth century spa, which burned, but you can still take the baths and drink the mineral water at the location of the old spa in the center of town. I loved everything about Hot Springs, which I will now think of as the Ocracoke of the mountains.

We pulled chairs around a small table on the front porch of the Inn, got out our picnic foods, and had lunch in a most delightful setting. A generous yard with a plot of sorghum to one side stretched out in front of the Inn. Hummingbird feeders hung in low branches

(Continued on back.)

Calendar

Programs sponsored by RCMWS are marked with *.

*September 13–16, 2007

GENERATING TRUE PRESENCE: A Meditation Retreat with Therese Fitzgerald
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC
Leader: Therese Fitzgerald, director and teacher of Dharma Friends, based on Maui, Hawai'i
Cost: \$400 single, \$375 double, includes room and meals
Sponsor/Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, www.rcwms.org

September 14–15, 2007

SHARON SALZBERG LECTURE & WORKSHOP
Long View Center, Raleigh, NC
Contact: <http://FlyingMonkey.ws>

*September 16–23, 2007

WEEK OF QUIET & WRITING FOR WOMEN: Week I
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC
An unstructured week of writing for women at Pelican House, the retreat house on the beach at Trinity Center. Please come for at least the first five days.
Cost: \$625 (5 nights for \$500), includes room and meals
Sponsor/Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, www.rcwms.org

*September 23–30, 2007

WEEK OF QUIET & WRITING FOR WOMEN: Week II
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC
Unstructured week of writing at Pelican House. Please come for the whole week.
Cost: \$625, includes room and meals
Sponsor/Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, www.rcwms.org

September 28–30, 2007

THE COURAGE OF SPIRIT: A Retreat for Women
Camp Kirkwood Presbyterian Retreat Ctr., Burgaw, NC
Sponsor: CroneWorks Practical Spirituality Series
Contact: www.deborahbowen.com, 910-256-9777

*October 4–7, 2007

WISE CHOICES: A Retreat for Women Over 50
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC
We'll explore how to respond to our soul's calling in midlife and through our elder years. Journaling, sacred conversation, art, and the healing presence of nature will help us find what nourishes us as we create our own vision of growing older.
Leaders: Anita McLeod & Margie Hattori
Cost: \$400 single room, \$375 double
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, www.rcwms.org

October 13, 2007, 10:00 am–4:00 pm

CREATING A WORKING ARTIST'S JOURNAL
Center for Documentary Studies, Duke Univ., Durham, NC
Create a large, functional journal out of recycled materials with environmental artist Bryant Holsenbeck. Learn the Coptic stitch and make a book that will hold images, drawings, photographs, thoughts, and ideas.
Leader: Bryant Holsenbeck, www.bryantholsenbeck.com
Course fee: \$105 (\$95 before Sept. 28), & \$10 materials fee
Course ID: 11195
Contact: Duke Cont. Ed., 919-684-6259, <http://www.learnmore.duke.edu/weekend/courses/classsearch.asp>

October 26–27, 2007

NEITHER MODEL NOR MUSE: A Symposium of the Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture
Duke University, Durham, NC
Learn more about women's involvement in and their unique approach to a wide range of art forms. Explore ways women have expressed themselves through three centuries in domestic, visual, literary, and performing arts. Enjoy exhibits, performances, workshops, and other sessions, with students, faculty, staff, scholars, and artists.
Cost: Free & open to the public. No reservation needed.
Contact: <http://library.duke.edu/specialcollections/ingham/art-symposium/index.html>



October 26–28, 2007

SOUTHERN REGIONAL MEETING OF UCC WOMEN
Blowing Rock Conference Center, Blowing Rock, NC
Theme: "In the Fullness of God's Creation, Renewing Spirit, Building Community, Doing Justice..."
Keynote speaker: Rev. Bernice Powell Jackson, former Executive Minister for Justice and Witness in the UCC
Cost: \$125–150 depending on the accommodations
Contact: Louise Tate, 919-563-5408, or registrar Claristine Shaw, 426 Jerkins St., Burlington, NC 27217

October 28, 2007, 3:00–7:00 pm

CELEBRATION OF EL DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS (Day of the Dead)
Oak Lodge, New Hope Camp & Conference Center, north of Chapel Hill, NC
Blend Christian and Mexican cultures in a contemporary "Day of the Dead" (a social ritual to recognize the cycle of death & life for us all). Make *ofrendas*, small shrines to celebrate people or events you choose to honor. Bring photos, mementos, prayers, etc. Includes simple Southwest supper.
Leaders: Nancy Corson Carter and Allison Davidson
Cost: \$35, RSVP by October 22
Contact: 919-383-1338, nccarter@nc.rr.com

November 1–4, 2007

WOMEN IN THE SECOND HALF OF LIFE: Spirituality & Community
Western NC
Limited to a diverse group of 16 to 20 women, this will be a time of spiritual refreshment, soulful deepening, and joy in the company of other women.
Leaders: Lisa Anthony and Jude Thomas
Contact: www.secondjourney.org; or Lisa, 919-402-1814

November 3–4, 2007

LIFEWITTING 101: A Workshop for Beginners (Save a Life!)
GardenSpirit Guesthouse, Durham NC
An easy-going, practical workshop in a cozy setting. You don't have to be "a writer" to enjoy and benefit from this interactive experience. Learn a variety of methods to help you create your own treasured and lasting legacy. Save a life! Get started now preserving your own or a family member's life stories.
Leader: Susan Carver Williams, MCJL
Cost: \$125 before Oct 22; after that \$150
Contact: Susan, 919-475-7998 or susan@artfulword.com

November 15, 2007

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: RCWMS Essay Contest
See back page for details.
Mail entries: RCWMS, 1202 Watts St., Durham, NC 27701

December 16, 2007, 7:00 pm

INTERFAITH CELEBRATION of COMMUNITY, SPIRIT, and CHANGE
Beth El Synagogue, 1004 Watts St., Durham, NC
Celebrate the 30th Anniversary of RCWMS and community, spirit, and change. All are welcome. Bring a candle and, if it's easy, a folding chair or cushion.
Cost: \$5, suggested donation
Sponsor/contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, www.rcwms.org

December 29–31, 2007

NEW YEAR'S INTERPLAY UNTENSIVE: At the Beach
Trinity Center, Atlantic Beach, NC
This is a great way to celebrate the turning point from one year to the next and it's the first time the New Year's Untensive will be at the coast. We'll tell stories, dance, sing, rest, reflect on the old and anticipate the new year.
Leaders: Ginny Going and Tom Henderson
Cost: \$400, double occupancy (single rooms additional)
Register: Send \$100 non-refundable deposit to Colleagues, 400 S. Boylan Avenue, Raleigh, NC 27603

Sweater

by June Ellen Haislip

June Ellen Haislip won third place in the 2006 RCWMS Essay Contest for Fearfully and Wonderfully Made: The Sweater, printed below. Our annual Essay Contest is made possible by a grant from the Clifford A. and Lillian C. Peeler Family Foundation. Deadline for this year's contest is Nov. 15, 2007.

I learned to knit in the tenth grade. It was the lesser of two evils, or so my Home Economics teacher thought. The previous semester we had begun to learn to sew, and I had been excited. The class was instructed to purchase a particular jumper pattern, and when that was done, my mother and I picked out a beautiful brown wool fabric for my project. She said that it would set off my eyes, and I couldn't wait to get started. On the appointed day in class, I took my fabric out of the bag, and laid it out on the table. I was envisioning myself in my new jumper. I began to pin furiously. When the pieces of the pattern were all laid out and pinned to the fabric, our teacher stepped over to my table, and asked, "Would you leave that right there for a moment?"

Then she turned to the class, and called them over to my table, asking, "Now, girls, what is wrong with this lay-out?"

I was humiliated. I could have crawled under the carpet, but the room offered no hiding place. In my excitement to get started, I had done it all wrong and now everyone knew it. When the spring semester rolled around, and we embarked on another sewing project, I found myself knitting instead of sewing. To compound my distress, I found myself knitting shapeless bedroom slippers instead of sewing a stylish dress. I don't remember who suggested the alternate project, my teacher or me, but I welcomed the substitution, relieved to be delivered from one avenue of embarrassment. Shapeless bedroom slippers were a far cry from a smart skirt or dress, but I soon discovered a surprising satisfaction in this work of the hands. I have delighted in the accomplishment of dozens of knitted afghans since that spring project as well as many scarves and a few sweaters and shawls. Perhaps that spring project even prepared me for a life of standing apart, as I have pursued a way of life different from that of most women of my small eastern North Carolina hometown.

One knitting project stands out among the rest in my memory. It was January and I had flown home to North Carolina from western Kentucky where I had settled upon completion of graduate school. The occasion for my flight was the sudden death of my maternal grandmother. Only weeks earlier I had returned from my annual Christmas visit home, and I remembered the visit with a pang. A couple of years out of graduate school, I was still contending with student loans from both my undergraduate and graduate education. So that year I had resorted to the familiar and frugal for Christmas: I had knitted some of my Christmas gifts. There was a shawl for my mother and a sweater for my sister. The shawl was beautiful: knitted from a lovely soft gray yarn, and I was well pleased with it. But the height of my accomplishment was the sweater I had knitted for my sister. The pattern was a simple one, but I had improvised by adding sleeves and a bodice worked in the shawl pattern. The result was simple but elegant, I thought. This had all been done in a wine-colored yarn that I knew would look lovely on my sister. I had no doubt that my mother would behave in an appropriately appreciative manner, but I was anxious about my sister's response. That Christmas day when she opened her gift, her response had been characteristically gracious: "Oh, a sweater! How lovely!" she had said. She had seemed pleased, but I obsessed. I feared a repeat of that awful day in Home Economics class. Had I done the wrong thing? Did she really like the sweater? Would it fit? Would she wear it? Did she think it a ridiculously cheap gift? I would probably never know.

By the time the phone call came weeks later to inform me of the death of my favorite grandmother, I had almost



forgotten my anxiety over the Christmas gift. The doubt that still plagued me was pushed aside by the deep, crushing grief I felt over my loss. Just three weeks before, Gran had hugged me at her front door as she bid me goodbye. But that night she had done something strange. Not a demonstrative woman, she had sent me off into the night with a surprising declaration.

"I love you," she had said quickly as I turned to leave. It was almost as if she were embarrassed by her emotion. I was surprised, for I could not remember her ever having said those words to me before, but without a second thought, I responded in kind. "I love you too," I said. Those were the last words spoken between us. Instead of comforting me, those words haunted me. Why did she choose THAT moment, THAT visit to give voice to her heart? Did she have a premonition of her impending death? Did she know that she would never see me again? If so, why had I not understood her sudden expression of emotion for what it was? I felt as if I were in high school again, and I had failed an important project. I felt stupid and inept, and I grieved. I wanted to pick up the phone and hear her cheery voice again. I wanted desperately to open my mailbox and see a letter or package bearing her distinctive scrawl.

But I knew that my grief wasn't unique. My mother, my siblings, my bachelor uncle, my countless cousins—surely they all grieved as well. My grandmother had been a humble, generous woman as far as her meager means would allow, and all who knew her must have benefited. I knew that I had. As the plane bore me through the January night, I resolved to put aside my own grief for the sake of those I loved. When I returned to my residence, I reasoned, then I could indulge my own grief. Then I could feel the pain of my loss, for my grief was not the deepest. For now I must stand apart and be strong.

But the Sweater told me a different story. I entered the reception room already full of people, mostly relatives. They milled around, hugging one another and crying. Suddenly a flash of color caught my eye. It was a wine color like the yarn I had used to knit my sister's sweater. As the familiar form of my sister appeared before me, a quiet satisfaction washed over me. She was wearing the sweater! I felt connected to her as I never had before. Then I thought of the afghan my grandmother had crocheted for me, and how she must have enjoyed seeing it on my bed when she visited us at home! I thought of the endless yards of tatting which graced pillowcases and dresser scarves and necklines in our home—all worked by my grandmother's hand. Then I realized that while I was related to my sister and my grandmother by my genes, I was also related to them by creativity and industry. That must be what it means to be created in the image of the Original Creator. As my sister wrapped her arms around me, I felt the threat of tears I had vowed not to spend.

"I am fearfully and wonderfully made," proclaimed the psalmist. And that night in a room full of friends and family I had traveled almost a thousand miles to embrace, I realized the fear and wonder of my life. I remembered the fear of ridicule or failure from my high school Home Economics class, and other fears as well. But standing together with those who shared my past, I also realized the wonder of my life. The Sweater reminded me of a common childhood with the one who wore it: the bedroom we shared, late summer afternoons playing in the yard until our bare feet were wet and aching with dew, washing and drying dishes together after Sunday dinner, of hand-me-down shoes and dresses. Ultimately choices had taken us in different directions in life, but the bond we shared had stretched, like some expensive yarn, to accommodate the miles. Strength and joy alike are derived from the invisible threads which link us together. And we are linked together as surely as the stitches hung upon stitches I had worked in the Sweater.

(Continued on back.)

Creek...

nearby. I was as happy as I could be to sit quietly, eat my lunch, stare out at the lawn and trees, and watch the hummingbirds come and go.

That might have been outing enough for me. I could have stayed on that porch all afternoon, writing and resting. I did not have my laptop computer, but Rachael had hers and the Inn had wireless Internet access. I could have been happy right there for many hours, but Rachael was determined we should see her land.

Off we went on another winding mountain road. After half an hour of zigging and zagging and my repeated questions about how much longer I was going to have to slosh around in the backseat of the car, we arrived at "Beasley's Cove," the rural neighborhood that includes Rachael's property.

The land is in a beautiful spot with wooded mountain ridges, a pleasant view, and a cleared area that once held a home place. Though I'm sure Rachael would have liked to have stayed longer, the gnats were biting. After Lucy stirred up a hornet's nest and got stung a few times, we surveyed the clearing and left.

Though I think of myself as loving the out-of-doors, my favorite part of the day so far had been the civilized Inn. I still had great expectations for the swim in Spring Creek, which I had been promised. I hoped that would make up for the zigzag roads and the pesky gnats.

Rachael took us to a lovely spot on the creek where she likes to swim, but the "swimming hole" looked more like a wading area to me. "Is this where you swim?" I asked. To which Rachael offered the obvious explanation: the summer drought had drained the normally chest-deep water so that it was only knee-high.

I waded into the creek and squatted down in about six inches of water, slipped on the wet rocks under my feet, and splash, I was in up to my neck. I was horizontal, not vertical, mind you, but at least I was wet. A narrow place between a couple of boulders nearby made a nice shoot and some other swimmers showed us how they had been shooting the rapids on their backs. That was so much fun I stopped being cranky about not really being able to swim. It was a beautiful spot and there were plenty of places to sit in the water, lie back, get wet, and admire the sky. I had wanted to put my foot in a cold mountain stream and that longing had been satisfied.

After a fabulous dinner at yet another inn in Hot Springs, Lucy and I filled jugs with mineral water at the site of the old spa and returned to Asheville. I counted the day as a huge success. I've been told that if you play, you will get hurt. If you allow yourself to encounter the natural world, you will probably get bit, stung, or banged up. You might also find that afterwards your heart has opened a little wider, that you have been in the presence of the holy, and you have fallen in love with the world all over again. I did.

Sweater...

Recalling the words of the psalmist, I lay my head on my sister's shoulder and cried.

June Ellen Haislip is a clergywoman in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), who serves a church in Dobson, NC. A native of an eastern North Carolina farming family with a large extended family, she says she is still taking the cheap way out on gifts: this essay was written as a birthday gift for her older sister.

Contest

2007 RCWMS ESSAY CONTEST

RCWMS is sponsoring its fifth essay contest. Women 18 years of age and older may submit previously unpublished nonfiction essays of 1400 words or less. Essays should focus on or exemplify feminist perspectives on spirituality and daily life. Write about your lives, grace, how you experience God, or how you make it through the hard places. No sermons, please.

Prizes are \$500 for first place, \$300 for second place, \$200 for third place. The winning essay will be published in the RCWMS newsletter, *South of the Garden*, in March 2008. Winners will be notified by mail. Limit: two essays per person. Submit four double-spaced copies of each essay. Do not put your name on the essay. Attach a cover letter with the title of the essay(s), your name, address, phone number, and e-mail. No e-mail submissions. Manuscripts will not be returned. Submissions must be postmarked by November 15, 2007.

Mail submissions to: RCWMS Essay Contest, 1202 Watts Street, Durham, NC 27701.

The essay contest is made possible in part by a grant from the Clifford A. and Lillian C. Peeler Family

rcwms

The Board greatly appreciates contributions of time, energy, and money to RCWMS. To make a financial contribution or to volunteer to help with office tasks, mailings, or program planning, contact the RCWMS office or see us on the web at www.rcwms.org.

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