

South of the Garden

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

Volume 29, Number 4

December, 2008

Obama

by Jeanette Stokes

For the last few years, whenever a waitperson in a restaurant or a clerk in a store asked, "What would you like," I'd answer, "A new president." Sometimes they'd smile. Sometimes they'd say, "Me, too." Very late at night on Tuesday, November 4, 2008, I got what I wanted. I'm so excited that I'm like a teenager with a new rock star. I just want to look at pictures of Barack Obama and watch endless TV interviews with him.

We have elected a president who is *not* another white guy. This man cares about and is personally related to much of the world. He was born into a multi-cultural family in a multi-cultural state, Hawaii. His father was Kenyan and his mother from Kansas was part Irish. (I was delighted to hear a song on YouTube that goes: "O'Leary, O'Riley, O'Hare and O'Hara, there's no one as Irish as Barack Obama.") His half sister, who is half Indonesian, married a man who is Chinese and has a child who is mostly Asian. The president-elect has half siblings who are Kenyan and his wife Michelle has a cousin who is a black rabbi in Chicago. When John Kennedy was elected, we thought being Irish and Catholic was being *diverse*. This year, Joe Biden's Catholicism was hardly mentioned.

America has often been called the great melting pot, but the white supremacy that has governed much of the land resisted the mixing of light and dark skinned people. In the Jim Crow South, interracial marriage was dreaded by many whites and illegal in many southern states.

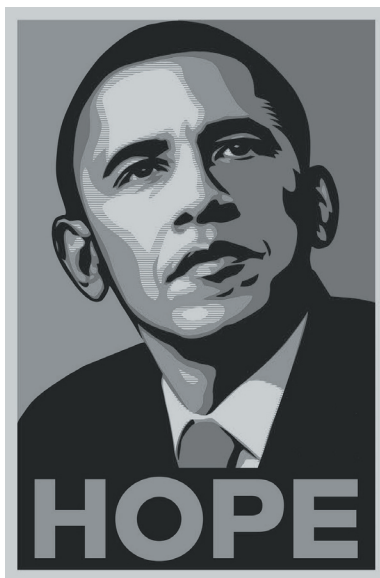
Now, a man who is bi-racial and talks about it has been elected to the highest office in the land. Very few people I know thought it would really happen. We observe the racism around us on a daily basis and know the racism in our own hearts. Barack Obama would be the last person to suggest that we have solved the problems of racism in this country, the problems of the historical and systemic oppression of people of color. But we've made a powerful symbolic gesture in that direction by electing him and giving him the tools to leverage even more change.

When Harvard's Ron Heifetz gave a lecture at Duke Divinity School this fall, he said the role of a good leader is to manage change well. He went on to explain that many of the changes we experience as monumental are actually quite small. For instance, in the evolutionary process the amount of DNA that had to change to get from a chimpanzee to a human being is less than two percent. A small change that makes a big difference.

When I look at Obama, I see a *huge* change. But maybe he's not all that different. Like other U.S. presidents, he is well educated and well-spoken. He's a lawyer. That's not new. He went to Harvard. That's not new. He worked as a community organizer before law school, which may be a first, but serving the good of the community is not. His wife is an attorney. Even that's not new. There will be little children in the White House. Again. His mother-in-law will probably move into the White House along with his family. I doubt that's a first.

So, what is different? He looks different. His family

(Continued next column.)



tree reaches into a community that may be a first. His mother-in-law, his wife Michelle, and his daughters are descended from proud people in South Carolina who survived being enslaved, people who were brought to these shores against their will and provided much of the labor that built this country. That's different. And *that* difference, along with more public apologies and more efforts toward restitution, would go a long way toward healing one of the worst collective sins of this nation and one of the most painful divisions among its people.

In many ways, Barack Obama will be like other presidents. He'll be better than many and only time will tell whether he will be considered one of the best. But from the day he was elected he began to send a different message to the world: This is what power and authority look like. This is what the First Family of the USA looks like. If he does nothing else, he has changed the world just by standing there.

Hillary Clinton's presence would have also been a change. No woman has ever occupied the Oval Office. I was surprised that I, as a feminist, was not more enthusiastic about Hillary as a candidate. Many of my friends were. I was enthusiastic about the election of her husband to the White House and happy when she became a senator from New York. I guess that I was reluctant to go back and that I've never quite forgiven Bill Clinton for not being able to control his appetites. He was a fine president, but his presidency ended badly, and I don't recall that he ever publicly apologized. I wasn't ready to send that whole family back to the White House. I wanted a different family sitting around the breakfast table discussing the future of the world.

Once Barack won the Democratic nomination this summer, I really wanted to see the Obamas up close. First I attended a small event for Michelle in Durham in September and heard her speak. I was impressed by how clear she was that the election was about *all* of us. I was so excited that when it was my turn to shake her hand, all I could get out of my mouth was, "Thank you, thank you, thank you."

Then I wound up in Asheville on a weekend in early October and learned that Barack was coming to town. I searched the Internet for a place he might show up in addition to the Sunday afternoon stadium event for thousands. I discovered an annual western North Carolina Democratic fundraiser to be held that Saturday night and bought last minute tickets. A small group of us attended the dinner, as did 700 other hopeful people. Sure enough, between the salad and the main course, Governor Mike Easley got up, mumbled a few sentences, and then announced, "The next President of the United States." The crowd went wild. We were near the back of the ballroom, so I jumped up on my chair and started screaming my head off. Everyone had the same plan. It's a good thing the speech was taped, because all I heard was Senator Obama say, "I hope you don't mind my crashing your party." Who was he kidding? We were thrilled out of our minds.

The speech was over in a flash and for the rest of the evening I kept asking, "Were we really in the same room with Barack Obama?"

(Continued on back.)

Calendar

RCWMS sponsored events are marked with *.

December 5, 2009, 9:30 am-2:00 pm

PEACE HILL DAY

The Stone House, Mebane, NC

Enjoy a peaceful day of meditation in a beautiful rural location. Bring lunch to share.

Free

Directions: www.stonecircles.org

December 7, 2008, 1:00-5:00 pm

HOLIDAY SALE

1202 Watts Street, Durham, NC

Handmade cards, books, jewelry and other art by: B. J. Fusaro, Galia Goodman, Iris Gottlieb, Harriett Hopkins, Kaudie McLean, Katie Rose Guest Pryal, Jeanette Stokes, Jewel Wheeler, and Bonnie Wright

Come by to visit, to look at our art, and to buy great gifts. Bring friends and family.

Contact: Jeanette, 683-1236

*December 11, 2008, 6:00-8:00 pm

EXHIBIT OPENING FOR THE MARY PROJECT

St. Philips Episcopal Church, Durham, NC

Exhibit of life-size, interactive images of Mary, the mother of Jesus, painted by artist Carole Baker.

Contact: rcwmsnc@aol.com

*December 14, 2008, 7:00 pm

INTERFAITH CELEBRATION of COMMUNITY, SPIRIT, and CHANGE

Beth El Synagogue, 1004 Watts St., Durham, NC

All are welcome. Bring a candle.

Sponsors: RCWMS and stone circles

Cost: \$5, suggested donation

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

December 24, 2008

CHRISTMAS NIGHT CELEBRATION (Dances of Universal Peace)

Raleigh/Durham/Chapel Hill, NC

Celebrate the joyous new birth of Light in the middle of the darkness of winter. Honor the deep love of the Mother who brings the human soul from the lowliest of stables amidst the quiet beasts. Welcome the eternal renewal always available through recognizing and embracing the sacred cycles of emptiness and fullness, within and without.

Sponsor: Rose Heart Sufi Community

Contact: Lukah, 919 859-3051, lukahk@gmail.com, or

Laurie, 919 484-8840, lgl@nc.rr.com

December 31, 2008

NEW YEAR'S EVE CELEBRATION (Dances of Universal Peace)

Raleigh/Durham/Chapel Hill, NC

Will include Dances of Universal Peace, chanting, walking the labyrinth, a Universal worship service, and more!

Sponsor: Rose Heart Sufi Community

Contact: Shirin, 919-493-9109, ForJuls@aol.com

January 3-13, 2009

LADIES, LOVERS, AND LEADERS: Experiencing the Stories of the Biblical Women (and Men!)

A storytelling trip to Israel/Palestine.

Leader: Tracy Radosevic, Biblical Storyteller

Cost: \$2298 from Baltimore

Contact: Tracy Radosevic, Tracy@tracyrad.com

*January 4-11, 2009

A WEEK OF QUIET AND WRITING FOR WOMEN

Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC

An unstructured week of writing for women at the beach. Please come for the whole week.

Cost: \$660, includes room and meals

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



January 24, 2009, 9:30 am-3:30 pm

THE FRUITFUL DARKNESS: A Winter Retreat for Women

Raleigh Friends Meeting, Raleigh, NC

Winter beckons us to hibernate and be still, gather our energies inward, rest, and reflect. This retreat will use the simple, accessible forms of InterPlay to explore the fruitful darkness through stillness, movement, stories, and song. Come for a gentle and playful time to hang out with the unanswered questions in our lives.

Cost: \$50

Contact: A Place for Women To Gather, 919-846-3601

*February 19-22, 2009

FINDING YOUR MEDIUM: A Weekend of Art at the Beach with Sue Sneddon

The Boat House, Emerald Isle, NC

"I can't draw a straight line." Who said you should?

Pack up some art supplies and head to the beach. Sue Sneddon will help you explore a variety of media for painting and drawing: pencil, pen and ink, charcoal, pastel, oil pastel, watercolor, gouache and acrylics.

Leader: Sue Sneddon has been a fulltime painter since 1984. She lives at the coast and much of her work has concentrated on the ocean.

Cost: workshop, \$300; housing at The Boat House, \$100 double or \$200 single; food will be a joint effort.

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

March 3-4, 2009

PHYLLIS TRIBLE LECTURE SERIES: Scandalous Women and Religious Traditions

Wake Forest Divinity School, Winston-Salem, NC

Lecturers: Elizabeth A. Clark, Duke University; Emilie M. Townes, Yale Divinity School; Phyllis Tribble, Emerita, Union Theological Seminary, Wake Forest University Divinity School; Wilma Bailey, Christian Theological Seminary; Jane Crosthwaite, Mount Holyoke College; Yvonne Chireau, Swarthmore College

Cost: \$100

Contact: divinity.wfu.edu/tribble-lectures.html

*April 30-May 3 2009

WISE CHOICES: A Retreat for Women Over 50

Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC

Leaders: Anita McLeod & Margie Hattori

Explore how to follow your soul's calling from midlife through your elder years.

Cost: \$500 for a single, \$475 for a double

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

*May 10-17, 2009

A WEEK OF QUIET AND WRITING FOR WOMEN

Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC

An unstructured week of writing for women at the beach. Please come for the whole week.

Cost: about \$660, includes room and meals

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

*June 12-14, 2009

RCWMS ANNUAL BEACH WEEKEND: Yoga with Amy

Come rest and enjoy the ocean. Have time alone as well as time and conversation with others. Yoga sessions will be led by Amy Kellum, a certified yoga instructor trained in the Kripalu method. No experience necessary.

Leaders: Amy Kellum and Jeanette Stokes

Cost: \$375 single, \$350 double

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

April 2-4, 2009

THE LONG CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT: Histories, Politics, Memories, Methods

Hyde Hall, Institute for the Arts and Humanities, UNC, Chapel Hill, NC

Contact: Joshua Davis, conference coordinator,

jcdavis@email.unc.edu

Crows

by Bryant Holsenbeck

Have you seen the crows? They are everywhere: on the telephone wires as I drive down West Club Boulevard in Durham, in yards, in fields, in the woods, in parking lots, and always by the side of the road. In groups and in pairs, they gather. Sometimes I hear them before I see them: a few stark and loud caws from a tree, or just somewhere in the distance. They are talking to each other. Like us, crows are social animals. They live in families connected to larger groups, they use tools, they play, and they store food. A wild species is living, loving, mating in our midst. They have learned to live all around us, yet they are wild and free.

I make crows. It began to dawn on me that I am drawn to making crows because they represent two values I hold sacred: freedom and community. As artists and humans we need both.

I began my professional artistic life as a basket maker, hunting and gathering natural materials to weave into my work, much like a wild bird. Very soon, I started collecting and using post-consumer waste, because I got interested in the “stuff” I saw everywhere: the man-made detritus of our industrial society. Because I was using all sorts of “junk” in my work, it seemed like the entire world wanted to leave all their own absolutely great stuff on my doorstep. All of this led me to my work as an environmental artist.

For over a decade now, I have been documenting the stuff of our society that we use once and throw away. Americans create more garbage per capita than any other culture, yet we are blind to our waste. I collect many things, among them bottle caps, credit cards, pencils, shoes, and chop sticks. I use these everyday items to make works that transform the objects and surprise us. We are used to using things once and then throwing them away. We may throw them away, but I hope my work makes us aware of their continual impact.

Through the years, my art has taken many shapes. In 1993 I had a show at The Durham Arts Council entitled “Collection.” I decided to collect certain common everyday objects for a year. I wanted to see how much garbage one person was responsible for. So I saved my bottle caps, any plastic utensils I came in contact with, and my mail. My mail alone filled eight paper grocery bags and weighed 95 pounds. During the opening of the exhibition I kept seeing a familiar man out of the corner of my eye. “Hmm,” I thought, “I know that guy—who is he?” Finally he came up to me and told me that he was my mailman. He was very interested in what I had done with the 95 pounds he had carried to my house that year. “Here’s the thing, Bryant,” he said. “Actually, you don’t get that much mail. Most people on my route get lots more.”

I am an environmental artist—I collect everyday objects that were used and thrown away (where is away, by the way?) and make them into art. These works are not only about our environment, but about our throw-away culture as well. My installations are both meditations and questions. Where does all this stuff come from? Where does it go? What do we do with it? Why is it here?

As a community artist, I love to inspire people to make their own art and to motivate groups of people to make art together locally, right where they live. Most recently I have been making large-scale installations: mandalas out of thousands of bottle caps, wild animals made out of plastic bags, string, and fabric, or flora out of old books and garden hoses. Last year I assisted a large group of people in Chapel Hill in constructing a labyrinth in a



Bryant Holsenbeck

public park out of invasive species of shrubs and trees. It was very inspiring to work with so many people of all ages. Kids were running in and around the paths with joy. The huge pile of brush we had gathered dwindled to nothing as the day progressed. We were all humming, like bees.

A couple of years ago, RCWMS invited me to do a community art project as part of its Art and the Feminine Divine exhibit. So I organized “What Do Kids Care About?—A Labyrinth of Shoes with Souls Attached.” You might have seen it in the park across from the Durham Farmers’ Market. Kids from Central Park School collected old shoes and then wrote on the shoes whatever was most important to them. We then formed the shoes into a labyrinth so that others could walk and read the thoughts. The project was only possible because RCWMS saw the value of it and the community worked together to make it happen.

This year I have served as the artist in residence for RCWMS. We’ve been making up the job description as we go along. It’s a lot about community. RCWMS has given me the support of an intern and a larger circle of friends interested in my work. As I write this, they are looking for funding to make a video about me and my work!

A young woman came to my house recently to film me for an assignment to make an environmental film for a class at UNC. I was making journals when she asked, “Why do you make art?” I was at a loss for words. Well, why do people breathe? Why do writers write and singers sing? Why do people play sports or run or play the piano? Because it makes them feel whole; it makes them feel better about themselves and the world around them. If they are lucky, this feeling of joy and fullness—this curious quest to pursue what they are good at, what they love and find important—is something they can pass on and share with others. And if they are *very* lucky they can make a living out of it.

William McDonough, a well-known green architect, likes to quote a South African proverb: “If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together.” It is this sharing of ourselves, this searching for what we are best at and pursuing it, teaching it, and growing with it, that feeds us. Artists need time to work alone to contemplate and develop new ideas. We enjoy the quiet meditation of our work and the insights that come with that. We need an inner world in which to form and develop our ideas and we need the support and curiosity of a larger community in order to grow and understand both ourselves and the wider world.

I am grateful for community on many levels. I am very happy to live in a community of friends and neighbors, crows, and rabbits who sustain me. As I write this, I am looking out at blue sky shining through the red and green leaves of the huge oak tree in my neighbor’s yard. I have residencies to plan, books and butterflies to make, a film meeting this afternoon, a new president to celebrate, a walk to take, and, I am sure, a few other things I am forgetting. Like the crows who live all around us, I am finding my place, and every day learning to live and love in my community.

Bryant Holsenbeck has been fortunate to make her living as an artist for over thirty years. For fifteen of those years, she has also been making pies. After not eating pies for much of her life, she woke up one day knowing she had to learn to make them. For six months, she interviewed everyone she knew. Finally, she went to the home of a neighbor, well known and loved for her pies, and watched her make one. Bryant has been making and eating them ever since. To find out more, visit her web site at www.bryantholsenbeck.com.

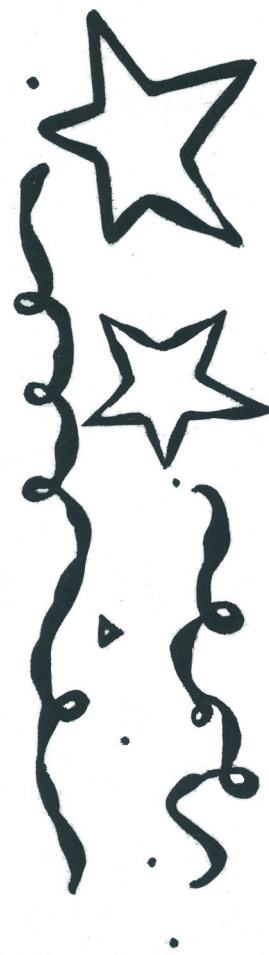
Obama

The next month was nerve-wracking. My friends were a wreck. They were anxious and no one was sleeping well. I kept remembering Maureen Dowd's advice to Democrats to breathe into a paper bag and stop making plans to move to Canada. I began to think of all the excitement and fear as labor pains. We were birthing a new America. In the last weeks leading up to the election, I kept saying, "It's happening!" We were all in labor: the contractions, the yelps of pain, the terror (will we come out of this alive?), rumors of dire consequences, claims for certain success.

The campaign in Durham was amazing. People had been organizing, canvassing, and registering new voters since February. In the end, I wound up organizing and feeding volunteers at my neighbor Faulkner's house. She had emerged as the chair of Durham for Obama and, along with her husband Gunther, turned their house into a satellite campaign office. Over the last four days we had nearly 1,000 people come through to get instructions for door knocking, to make last minute phone calls, and to enter data. It was one of the best volunteer experiences of my life. People were wonderful. They were generous, patient, clear about what they were willing to do, and reliable about doing it. We found tasks for everyone. Leaders emerged for work groups. It was amazing to watch.

Election Day was wet and messy. Volunteers donned slickers and ponchos, got rain-soaked anyway, and kept right on going. When all was said and done, Durham turned in a 70,000-vote lead for Obama and, you could argue, carried the state.

Now, we have a new president, or at least a new president-elect. When waitpeople in restaurants ask me what I want, I just smile and order my food. I have what I want for the moment. I'm willing to give the new administration a few weeks to get organized. It will take a while to undo the culture of deception and greed fostered by the current administration. In the first few days, I expect the new president and his extended family to settle into the White House. I expect Obama to close Guantanamo Bay, end the use of torture, and make a plan to draw down the troops in Iraq. I expect him to create job programs and do whatever government can do to ease the current recession. I expect Congress to pass universal health care for children *again* and for this president to sign the bill. I expect to have a president who loves us. And I expect all of us to keep working to create the change we seek, to make this a better world for all living creatures. The experience of this fall has given us hope and emboldened us to say, "Yes, we can."



Interfaith

Join us for our annual Interfaith Celebration of Community, Spirit, and Change to be held Sunday, December 14, 2008, at 7:00 pm, at Beth El Synagogue in Durham. We gather together when the days are short and the nights are long to find warmth and companionship. We celebrate the darkness of winter, which provides a time of rest and reflection. Together we open to inspiration and the coming of new light. The evening will include music and meditation from a variety of spiritual traditions. Afterwards there will be time to visit with one another.

The celebration is meant to be a welcoming space in which people from any tradition or no tradition can feel comfortable. Bring your friends and family. It's a great way to introduce people of all ages to a wider variety of spiritual practices.

RCWMS

The Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South is a nonprofit organization dedicated to weaving feminism and spirituality into a vision of justice for the world. Over the past 31 years, RCWMS has sponsored dozens of workshops, conferences, and retreats on women and religion, equal rights, economic justice, community economic development, healthcare, and violence against women and children. The organization has mentored and encouraged young women, religious leaders, writers, and activists. In recent years we have developed programs about art, writing, creativity, and spirituality.

The RCWMS Board greatly appreciates contributions of time, energy, and money to the Resource Center. Your support allows us to continue offering our resources and programs. We are especially grateful for support from the Clifford A. and Lillian C. Peeler Family Foundation, the Kalliopeia Foundation, the Mary Duke Biddle Foundation, and the E. Rhodes and Lona B. Carpenter Foundation. 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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