

South of the Garden

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

Volume 32, Number 1

March 2011

Spring

by Jeanette Stokes

Friends and I were making art together one January afternoon this year. I was painting Valentines, and RCWMS board member Jenny Graves was working on a collage. When she finished, she held it up and said, "I don't know if I even like this." I made my usual comment that making things is much more important than liking them and said I hoped she was glad she had made something. When I looked more closely, I noticed that all of the images in Jenny's collage were reaching up and pointed that out. Someone asked, "Do you know what you are reaching for?" Jenny looked at us knowingly but didn't say.

As spring approaches, the energy of the earth seems to be reaching up and out toward the returning sun. In early February, I brushed away leaves to find crocuses about to bloom by the back steps at home. By the end of the month, daffodil leaves are tall and green and the first yellow blooms have opened. The energy in the earth is inviting me to move away the dead leaves of winter and make room for whatever's coming.

That's what got a hold on me one morning recently. I was happily sitting at my desk at home getting ready to write, when I noticed a particularly dusty spot beside the desk lamp. Since I didn't have to hurry out until after lunchtime, I grabbed a rag from the laundry room and dusted the patch. Then I saw another one. Before I knew it, I had hauled the vacuum upstairs, moved piles of books and papers out into the hall, and given my small study a good cleaning. Pleased with my efforts, I swiped my dust cloth across the window blinds and was horrified by the thick layer of dust it collected. Like a woman possessed, I stuck the fluffy brush attachment onto the end of the vacuum cleaner wand and passed it back and forth until the blinds on all three windows were clean. I wanted to jump back, shout "Ta da!" and wait for the applause.

The only trouble is that what I was doing wasn't writing. According to *The War of Art* by Steven Pressfield, it was merely resistance. That may be true, but it was such a useful kind of resistance, and my theory of cleaning includes going with the energy when it shows up, because it doesn't appear that often. I'm not sure that a clean study makes my writing any better, but it certainly gives me a feeling of relief to have eliminated most of the piles. I no longer spend extra energy glancing at them and worrying about whether there's something in one of them that needs my attention.

Sometimes, I suspect that "being organized" has become a religion in this country. If not a religion, it has certainly become a big business. Eric Abrahamson and David H. Freedman write in *A Perfect Mess* that household and office organizers now have professional organizations and command good pay. Though everyone deserves to make a living—and I commend the ingenuity of the organizers—the authors suggest that the instructions the professionals offer are pretty close to the ones I heard from my mother, "Pick up your toys, and let's give some of the old ones away."

I've been joking that I have a new organizing system this year. I say I'm trying to be as inefficient and

(Continued on back.)



Marcy Maury

Notes

by Jeanette Stokes

ESSAY CONTEST

We are pleased to announce that Karen Ziegler of Durham, NC has won the 2011 RCWMS Essay Contest. You can read her essay, "Rooted in Being," on page three. Second place goes to Diane Daniel, and third place goes to Marion Thullbery. Many thanks to everyone who entered, and we encourage you to keep your pen moving. We are particularly grateful to our judges: Liz Dowling-Sendor, Jenny Graves, and Meghan Florian.

WRITING WORKSHOP

If you want encouragement and inspiration for your writing, join us for *Writing What's Ours: Illuminating the Inner Landscape*, with Carol Henderson on March 25–26 in Durham. You'll do lots of writing and leave with great ideas and techniques for making your work stronger and more your own. People rave about the workshops Carol leads. See the calendar for more details.

WOMEN WRITING THE SOUTH

The Resource Center for Women in Ministry in the South has recently begun a new program, *Women Writing the South*. Through this initiative, RCWMS offers support for research and writing on topics that lie at the intersection of faith, race, gender, and sexual orientation. We are very pleased to announce our support for the first Women Writing the South Scholar Melanie Morrison.

Drawing on the strength of her Southern roots and the spirit of her social and racial justice work, Melanie is exploring the untold stories of activists in the 1930s in Birmingham, Alabama. Her project centers on the abduction of three young white Birmingham women in 1931 and the wrongful arrest and conviction of an African American man named Willie Peterson. By focusing on this tumultuous event, Melanie seeks to illuminate the historical antecedents of forces that still tear us asunder. She also hopes to retrieve stories of Birmingham activists, both black and white, who resisted the politics of division and built coalitions across race, class, and gender.

ART

Once again, our *Finding Your Medium* workshop with Sue Sneddon was great fun this year. We are forever grateful to Julia Batten Wax and Emerald Isle Realty for arranging our fabulous accommodations at the Boat House on Emerald Isle. Though the weather can be cold and dreary in February, we had bright days, and the sea and sky amazed us in their ever-changing colors of blue.

Sue set up stations for work in pencil, pen and ink, charcoal, pastel, oil pastel, gouache, watercolor, and acrylic. I'm an enthusiastic watercolor painter. My pieces are mostly abstract, swaths of color adorned smaller patterns. The new thing for me this year was that Sue persuaded me to use a white oil pastel to make marks on the paper before painting. Though I have used various kinds of crayons before, the oil pastels thrilled me.

This illustrations in this newsletter were created by Betsy Barton and Marcy Maury during the workshop.

Calendar

* = RCWMS events. See more at: www.rcwms.org.

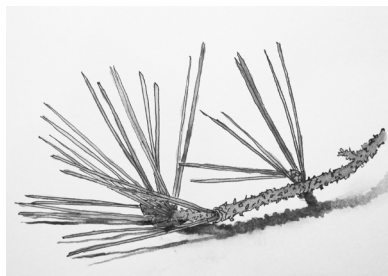
*March 12, 2011, Saturday, 3:00 pm
SCREENING of MEINRAD CRAIGHEAD: PRAYING WITH IMAGES
Main Library, 300 N. Roxboro St., Durham, NC
Hosted by the Durham County Library. Free and open to the public.
Contact: 919-560-0268 or ak@meinradproject.org

March 19, 2011, 2:00 pm–4:00 pm (Saturday)
CREATING A SACRED SPACE THROUGH ART
5540 McNeely Drive, Suite 203, Raleigh, NC 27612
Come and spend a delightful, easy afternoon with 5 others making a sacred 3D collage/ assemblage in a shadow box as an artistic and visual expression of your sacred journey. Leave inspired and refreshed as your internal spiritual path is seen and experienced in a new and exciting way. Artistic talent is welcome but not necessary.
Leader: Ginger Poole, LPCA, Art Therapist
Cost: \$45, includes all materials
Contact: 919-971-4104, ginger@gingerpoole.com

March 22–27, 2011
DOING OUR OWN WORK: A Seminar for Anti-Racist White People
The Leaven Center, Lyons, Michigan
Doing Our Own Work equips white people with the analysis, skills, and tools needed to be more effective anti-racist allies with people of color and to help bring about institutional change.
Leaders: Melanie Morrison and Diane Schmitz
Cost: \$690, includes lodging and meals. Scholarships.
Contact: www.alliesforchange.org/calendar.html

*March 25–26, 2011, Fri. 7–9 pm & Sat. 9:30 am–3:30 pm
WRITING WHAT'S OURS: Illuminating the Inner Landscape, with Carol Henderson
Durham, NC
Using lively writing exercises and reflection we will explore the "obscurity within us," that which is ours and ours alone—our unique voices and stories. We will unearth new material and fresh meaning. We will play with: voice, point of view, narrative drive, character, plot, dialogue, and more. Come prepared to discover a lot and to produce plenty of engaging material—fiction and nonfiction. You'll leave with great ideas and techniques for making your work stronger and more your own. Open to all genres and levels of writers. Men and women welcome.
Leader: Carol Henderson teaches writing workshops and coaches writers at every skill level. She has published columns, reviews, essays, and feature stories. Her memoir, *Losing Malcolm: A Mother's Journey Through Grief*, is a redemptive story about losing a baby and learning how to live again. Currently, she is editing several essay anthologies and memoirs. She lives in Chapel Hill, NC. Learn more about her at www.carolhenderson.com.
Cost: \$125
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

April 2, 2011, 11:00 am–3:00 pm
THE DIVINE FEMININE THROUGH ART
5540 McNeely Drive, Suite 203, Raleigh, NC
Join five others in a small group exploring the visual expression of the feminine spirit through embellishing paper mache feminine forms. We'll paint, alter, collage, and attach to transform the forms into works of art that express your feelings about the divine feminine. It will be a fun day with a small group. Come join us!
Leader: Ginger Poole, LPCA, Art Therapist
Cost: \$65 includes lunch and materials
Contact: 919-971-4104, ginger@gingerpoole.com



Marcy Maury

April 6–9, 2011
CARRIE NEWCOMER IN CONCERT
April 6, 7:30 pm, Old Theater, Oriental, NC, \$15
Contact: www.pamlicomusic.org, dsligh@coastalnet.com
April 8, 7:30 pm, Holly Springs Cultural Center, Holly Springs, NC
Contact: hollyspringsnc.us/dept/park/culture/, don.brisicar@hollyspringsnc.us, 919-567-4000
April 9, 8:00 pm, Davis Theatre, Concord, NC
Contact: www.cabarrusartscouncil.org, sara@cabarrusartscouncil.org, 704-920-2787

*April 12, 2011, Tuesday, 8:30 am–6:00 pm
LABYRINTH WALK AT DUKE CHAPEL
Duke Chapel, Duke University, Durham, NC
Walk the RCWMS Labyrinth. Free & open to the public.
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*April 17–22, 2010
ECUMENICAL HOLY WEEK LABYRINTH WALK
Binkley Baptist Church, Chapel Hill, NC
Sponsors: Several Chapel Hill churches
Free and open to the public. Please wear clean socks.
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*April 29, 2011, Friday, 9:30 am–4:00 pm
WHEN GRANDMOTHERS SPEAK, THE EARTH WILL HEAL (from a Hopi saying)
Center for Education, Imagination, and the Natural World, Timberlake Farm, Whitsett, NC (near Greensboro)
Inspired by the International Council of 13 Indigenous Grandmothers now speaking on behalf of the earth, this full day retreat will offer participants several ways to bridge the separation between humans and the natural world. In the morning, through meditations, shared story and silent walks on earth sanctuary trails, we will affirm our sense of personal connection to the earth. In the afternoon, participants will be introduced to ways to share the bond of intimacy we feel in the natural world with the children in our lives. Limited to 20 women.
Leader: Carolyn Toben is a grandmother of nine and founder of the Center for Education, Imagination, and the Natural World at Timberlake Farm Earth Sanctuary.
Cost: \$80, includes lunch. \$25 deposit will hold a space.
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com, or Anita McLeod, anitamcleod@aol.com

* June 10-12, 2011
DEEPENING TARA PRACTICE: Spiritual Practice in the Natural World
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC
Experience the benefits of meditation practice centered on Green Tara, the beloved female buddha of Tibet. Walk in ancient maritime forests, gaze at open sky, immerse yourself in the ocean, and dive into Tibetan Buddhist teachings. Explore qualities of awakened consciousness such as wisdom, loving kindness, generosity, patience, and peacefulness. The natural world mirrors all these qualities, as well as the teachings on interconnectedness of all life and compassion for self and others. As the beauty of nature infuses our practice with joy, our capacity to bring joy to the world increases. Through meditation, discussion, and time in nature, we'll open ourselves to the joy of our inner Tara nature!
Leader: Rachael Wooten, PhD., Jungian analyst, has been practicing and teaching Tibetan Buddhist meditation with the Twenty-one Taras for seventeen years.
Cost: \$400, includes lodging and meals. \$100 deposit will hold your space.
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*May 8–15, 2011
WEEK OF QUIET & WRITING FOR WOMEN
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC
An unstructured week of writing for women with quiet days and conversation in the evenings.
Cost: \$700, includes lodging and meals. (\$100 deposit.)
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*September 25–October 2, 2011
WEEK OF QUIET & WRITING FOR WOMEN
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC

Rooted

Karen Ziegler's essay, "Rooted in Being," which took first place in the 2011 RCWMS Essay Contest. We are so pleased to be able to share the essay with you.

I was never able to grow roots as a child. We moved every few years, and I went to four different elementary schools. The people in my family resisted connection even with each other. My brother played detailed, obsessive games by himself, my mother's moods scared me, and my father seemed always busy or not at home. There was minimal connection with my extended family.

It seemed to me that surely there must have been a mistake, and that my real parents would eventually come and claim me. I read books from the library about orphans and envied their adventurous lives. I wandered around our impossibly silent, too-large house, contemplated the many poor people in the world, and hid in my room. I was a little girl who read the Bible with unusual intensity, as though it were an instruction manual, which could lead me out of hell. In sixth grade, attending my fourth elementary school, I had no friends. During recess I would walk around the edge of the playground by myself and talk to God.

Fortunately, there was a woods near my house, and I was able to go there alone. There was a pond and a ravine with large rocks to climb. A sloping pasture was resplendent with wildflowers and grasshoppers. And in our front yard there was a sycamore tree which was my friend.

In college I changed majors many times, and fell in love more than once. I then drifted for several years from lover to lover and moved to many different apartments in two different cities. Roots were elusive.

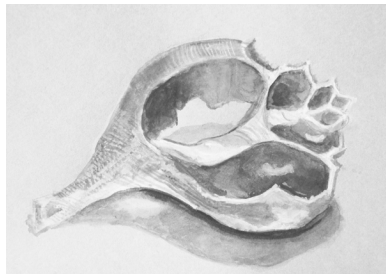
And yet.

About falling in love: At age nineteen, although I was expecting Prince Charming to arrive in the form of a white man, she arrived in the form of a woman with skin the color of dark chocolate and a huge afro. I saw the love and wisdom in her eyes and I felt so miraculously connected to her that my crisis around being a lesbian was brief. Because of her love, I began for the first time to feel rooted in life itself. I learned from her that suffering could be magnificently transcended. She taught me about racism, and about sex. I read African American history and literature and slowly came to understand the ways in which being white meant being connected to people who were responsible for genocide, slavery, and segregation.

In a certain way, this gave me a radical freedom. What I was learning required me to break out of my white, protected, conventional middle class life. Following a powerful urge to decode things around me which had never made sense, I learned about the "hidden injury of class" which had so devastated my family. I studied the Bible in a scholarly way and read about different religions.

More important, because this woman dared to love me, and I dared to love her back, I stepped out of a lifelong isolation. Tentatively at first, I began reaching beyond myself. I became rooted in friends, mentors, and habits which gradually shaped my life.

In 1972, I read Mary Daly's book, *Beyond God the Father*. "If God is male, then the male is God," she wrote, and I knew she was right. A few times while reading that book I found myself throwing it across the room. I knew life would never be the same now that I understood the legacy of patriarchy. Audre Lourde's essay, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" also changed me forever. I saw that in such an impossible world I must continue to



Emerald Isle with Sue

Betsy Barton

find the "internal sense of satisfaction" within myself, and follow it, instead of being shaped by outside expectations. Adrienne Rich's essay, "Women and Honor: Notes on Lying," was another piece of writing to which I have returned again and again over the years. It gave me an ethic of always telling the truth, beginning with the decision in seminary not to be ordained in a denomination that required me to lie about my sexual orientation.

Inspired by black and feminist and gay civil rights leaders, I became an activist and a preacher. When I stood in front of the church celebrating communion, preaching, or announcing the next important march or rally, and when I sat in the pews singing hymns, I knew I was home.

And yet.

About those hymns: This was the 70's. We changed the words into inclusive language, and we did not call God "Father." Slowly it dawned on me that when you take patriarchal language and concepts out of Christianity, it feels like a different religion. This was exciting in many ways, but there were also battles with the church hierarchy and endless dramas involving church politics. I felt overwhelmed and anxious most of the time. Believing I had been called to this particular work and this particular community, I begged God to release me. After ten years of being Senior Pastor of an inner city congregation, I finally felt that this release had come, and I was relieved even though I had no idea what I would do next. Since then I have attended church very rarely.

And yet.

About God: A few things in the Bible have stuck with me since childhood. When I read Jesus' words, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God," it made sense to me, and today it still seems like an appropriate first priority. Also, I keep coming back to the idea that "God is love." Scott Peck's definition of love is unromantic but informative. "Love is work and courage," he wrote in *The Road Less Traveled*.

In middle age, I went back to school so I could enter an entirely new profession. This was difficult, and at exactly the same time I moved to an entirely different part of the country, breaking away from personal and professional roots I had developed over nineteen years.

And yet.

I did not do this alone. Miraculously, I had a partner by that time, a magical person from whom after twenty-four years I still draw the most succulent nourishment. And once again I wander around in the woods and drink the deep stillness of nature into myself. Also, moving allowed a reconnection with my parents. For the ten years prior to her death of Alzheimer's disease, I did my best to help care for my mother. Despite my family's flaws, and my own, I feel deep love for them, and sense the roots there.

And yet.

About that funeral: My father decided that he did not want my partner to sit with "the family," and my brother did nothing to support me. It was a bit like losing all three members of my immediate family at once. This is not the end of the story, though. Over the next few years both I and my partner made peace with my brother and my father.

Roots nourish our bodies and souls and make life possible. At the same time they can be elusive, and

(Continued on back.)

Spring...

disorganized as possible. (Cleaning during writing may even qualify.) It might be that I'm approaching sixty years of age, but moving quickly, doing as many things as possible, and being a whiz-bang at all of it has lost its appeal.

I find that if I move more slowly, schedule fewer hours during the day, and do less, I feel better and am happier. I also notice that by being less "efficient," there's more room for things like a conversation with a friend I might bump into. When I'm less hurried, I'm more likely to take in the color of the sky or the feel of the air around me. When I move too fast, I get cranky and irritable and wind up contributing very little to the wellbeing of the planet.

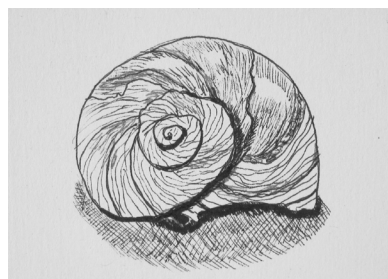
I want to stop thinking of cleanliness as right up there next to godliness, and I want to stop silently berating myself and others when our living or working spaces get messy. I don't want to live or work in dirty, chaotic spaces, but after all these years, it's pretty clear that my home and office will rarely look like a magazine cover. (My mother's still does.)

The authors of *A Perfect Mess* suggest that the time it takes to keep perfect order may not, in fact, be worth what it would cost for most of us. Perhaps we should use our time for other activities, like making art. Come to think of it, most of the artists I know spend more time making art than organizing their art spaces. Of course, one has to stop periodically to clean up a little, or else there's no room for making art. But who said an art room needed to be as clean, bright, and orderly as an operating room? A certain amount of messiness might even encourage random flashes of creativity.

Don't get me wrong. I don't want to live and work in dirt and chaos, but a certain loose ordering of our spaces might be good for us humans. I think I'd like for the spaces around me to be more like my garden.

I've now been messing around in the same garden for nineteen years. I want the garden to be a joy, not a job. My flower garden is in the backyard, which is actually a good place for it. There's sun back there, and people on the street don't have to look at it during the months when it is a little unsightly. I've known people who wanted their flower gardens to be showcases and could make them that way. I just want enough flowers during the warm months of the year that there are blossoms to cut and bring into the house. And my husband, who has serious farmer genes, wants some ground to dig in, room to plant a few things, and something to chop down periodically.

I think of the garden as a kind of recreational therapy. My relationship with it is that I get to play there, it gets to surprise me, and together sometimes we make something beautiful. It needs just enough order for the new energy, ideas, and desires of spring to be able to push through into the light of ever-warming days.



Dockside Moonshell Betsy Barton

Rooted

they can fray and break. Still, new roots can form and old ones are capable of growing in unexpected ways. I remain rooted in nature and in something I no longer call "God," because this word seems too small for so great a thing. I also feel connected to people all over the world, most of them unknown to me, who do the best they can every day to be awake to what is around and within them, to be kind, and to create a new world.

Because of my childhood and family history, I could easily have become a mentally ill person, or a person who has no roots at all. Instead, because of the people who have loved or inspired me, the continual wonder of nature, and the decision long ago to love "God" above all else, I have deep roots, which nourish me continually. I have become a person who looks into the eyes of other human beings and finds a remarkable light, and knows that this light is also in me.

Karen Ziegler is a nurse practitioner at the Durham VA. She served as Senior Pastor of Metropolitan Community Church New York in the 1980s and is currently studying to be a psychotherapist.

RCWMS

The Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South is a thirty-three-year-old nonprofit dedicated to weaving feminism and spirituality into a vision of justice for the world. RCWMS sponsors workshops, conferences, and retreats on women, religion, creativity, spirituality, and social justice. The organization mentors and encourages young women, religious leaders, writers, and activists.

RCWMS appreciates contributions of time, energy, money, and stock. To make a financial contribution or to volunteer, contact RCWMS or visit www.rcwms.org.

We are grateful for support from the Mary Duke Biddle Foundation, the Triangle Community Foundation, The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, the Foundation for the Carolinas, and The Dallas Foundation.

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ISSN 0890-7676
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and Ministry in the South
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