

South of the Garden

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

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Occupy

by Jeanette Stokes

Pictures of UC Davis police officers pepper-spraying protesters in the face left many of us with a deep sense of moral outrage. The images reminded me of police violence at anti-war protests decades ago. I was a freshman in college in 1970 when National Guardsmen shot and killed demonstrators at Kent State. I didn't think that the use of such force against protesters was appropriate forty years ago and I don't think it is now.

I have been following the Occupy Wall Street movement with great interest. I was unhappy about the bail out of big banks a couple of years ago and the redistribution of wealth over decades. Enough pressure from the movement could shore up regulations, strengthen legislation, and eventually reduce inequities.

I was shocked by the treatment of protesters in New York, Berkeley, and Oakland and surprised that NYC mayor Bloomberg had the right, under the Patriot Act, to delay the press in publishing pictures of injured protesters. But when my friend Jen Schradie was arrested on the Friday after Thanksgiving while taking pictures inside a Raleigh mall, I got really mad.

Jen was visiting from Oakland, CA and attended an Occupy Raleigh protest at the mall. From reports, it seems a small group entered the food court. One man addressed the crowded eating area, saying things like "give thanks, not stuff" and "stop corporate greed." Others joined in and then police arrested six of them.

Jen's charges included, "...intentionally cause a public disturbance at CRABTREE VALLEY MALL, by making utterances, intended and plainly likely to provoke immediate violent retaliation and thereby cause a breach of the peace. The acts of the defendant were directed toward CROWD IN FOOD COURT and consisted of remarks about the OCCUPY RALEIGH PROTEST." She was reportedly taking video with her iPhone when arrested, an odd "breach of the peace." Though large open areas at a mall may look like public spaces, they aren't. They are private property owned by large corporations. If you aren't doing what the owners want, you can be arrested for trespassing or breach of the peace.

By November 26, there had been 4,784 arrests connected with Occupy activities around the country (a Facebook page keeps count). The arrests made me wonder about the state of our civil rights and civil liberties. I wondered whether it was legal for UC Davis police to use pepper spray on people sitting quietly on the ground, so I did some looking on the Internet. It turns out it's NOT legal. Several months before the events at Davis, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in a case about a similar incident and found that "the use of pepper spray on the protesters' eyes and faces was plainly in excess of the force necessary under the circumstances, and no reasonable officer could have concluded otherwise."

Perhaps the UC Davis police were unaware of the new standards or mistook the seated students for a dangerous mob. In fact, truth spoken to power often provokes intimidation, and as NC activist Sr. Evelyn Mattern used to say, "The price of freedom is constant vigilance." So, stay calm and keep your cameras on!



End of Life

by Anita McLeod

End of Life Series: Contemplating Death, Embracing Life

Entering the decade of my 70s has inspired me to re-examine the end of life decisions I made in my 50s and 60s. I am now deeply motivated to learn more about current end of life options and contemplate my choices in a circle of thoughtful women. I do not want to do this alone. I have learned so much about living into my elder years by participating in a variety of women's circles over the past twenty years. Hearing the experiences and stories of others has always inspired and deepened my own process. At a Wise Choices retreat several years ago a woman said, "I am here to consider what will comfort me when I am dying." Her brave words touched a deep place in my heart and I continue to learn from reflecting on her question. It is my contemplation of her question that led me to put together a workshop series on end of life issues, which RCWMS will offer in 2012.

Death is a taboo topic in our culture. There are very few times and places we talk with others about our own death. Every one of us is going to die; yet we act as if death will not happen to us. We plan for so many things during our lifetime, yet we often fail to make plans for the end of our life. People end up in situations they would never choose for themselves, such as dying in a hospital rather than at home because they had not made their wishes known. Many of us do not want to end up spending our last days on earth hooked up to a breathing machine, being fed through a feeding tube, and having extravagant painful procedures performed on us because we did not complete a plan for the health care we want at the end of our life. The idea of considering our preferences in a circle of others willing to explore these issues has led me to invite three skilled and empathic professional women to join me in leading this series.

In one session, we will reflect on our experiences with death and dying. As we write and speak and listen, we become more aware of our hopes and wishes regarding our own death. We learn more about what we want, identify how we want to be treated, and are fortified to have meaningful conversations with our loved ones.

During another session, we will discuss the essential legal documents needed to protect yourself, your health and your assets. These documents include health care powers of attorney, living wills, powers of attorney, and wills and trusts. We will consider the legal implications of these documents and how they can be used to insure that your wishes will be carried out. In addition, there will be time to consider how these documents might bring up sensitive family issues and how to address them with your loved ones.

In another session, we will explore what a "good death" might look like and what possibilities are available to help us achieve our ideal dying experience. This exploration will include contemplating individual spiritual views, and how secular and religious traditions may have shaped us in ways inconsistent with those spiritual views.

(Continued on back.)

Calendar

* = RCWMS events. For registration form and more information: www.rcwms.org.

*December 1, 2011, Thursday, 12:30–1:30 pm
JUSTICE NOTES: A Lecture by Emilie Townes
Duke Divinity School, Westbook Building Room 0016, Durham, NC
Rev. Dr. Emilie Townes, Professor of African American Religion and Theology at Yale Divinity School, will deliver the second Jill Raitt Lecture.

*December 7, 2011, Wednesday, 7:00 pm
GLUTEN-FREE BAKING
RCWMS Office, 1202 Watts St., Durham, NC
When his wife discovered she was gluten-intolerant, culinary-minded Phil Baer threw out all the flour and went to work figuring out how to make baked goods without gluten. Come learn some of Phil's secrets and taste his yummy treats.
Leader: Phil Baer
Cost: No charge, but please let us know you are coming.
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*December 18, 2011, Sunday, 7:00 pm
INTERFAITH WINTER CELEBRATION for
COMMUNITY, SPIRIT, and CHANGE
Beth El Synagogue, 1004 Watts St., Durham, NC
All are welcome. Bring a candle.
Sponsor: RCWMS
Cost: \$5-10, suggested donation
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*January 1–8, 2012
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: \$750, includes lodging and meals. \$100 deposit will hold your spot.
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com.

*January 21, 2012, Saturday, 9:30 am–5:00 pm
BEGIN A BOLD NEW YEAR OF WRITING
Durham, NC, in a lovely private home with a cat
Give your writing a fresh burst of energy this January. Start a project or bring what you're working on (or want to be working on.) This day is an opportunity to decide and clarify what you're going to accomplish in your writing, how you'll manage your schedule in order to succeed, how you'll deal with inner and outer obstacles. The workshop offers a time and place--and the company of kindred spirits--to begin or begin again.
Leader: Peggy Payne is a spiritual novelist, of a very eclectic sort, as well as a consultant to other writers. Her books include the novels *Revelation*, set in a Chapel Hill church, and *Sister India*, set in a Hindu holy city.
Cost: \$115, some partial scholarships available
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*January 22, Feb 26, Mar 25, & April 22, 2012, Sundays, 1:30–4:30 pm
END OF LIFE SERIES
Durham, NC in a comfortable private home
This multi-part series offers resources, information, and exploration of issues facing all of us as we prepare for the end of our life. Join a circle of courageous women willing to explore what a "good death" might mean and how preparing for it opens us to wholeheartedly embrace the precious life that awaits us.
Leaders: Anita Mcleod, Elder Women's Network and RCWMS; Betsy Barton, Institute on Care at the End of Life, Duke Divinity; Carolyn H. Burrus, M.Div., Hospice Chaplain and Bereavement Counselor; and Sharon Thompson, attorney
Cost: \$100. Please plan to attend all four sessions.
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com



Jeanette Stokes

*February 10–12, 2012, Fri., 2:00 pm to Sun., 2:00 pm
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." Well who said you should? Isn't it time to pack up some art supplies and head to the beach? Sue Sneddon will be in residence at The Boat House on Emerald Isle for a weekend of exploration into various media for painting and drawing. These will include: pencil, pen and ink, charcoal, pastel, oil pastel, watercolor, gouache, acrylics, and some mixed media options. Let's find the ones that float your boat! Sue will provide all art supplies needed for the workshop. There may be a small materials fee for extra canvases and papers. You may also bring any art supplies you have.
Leader: Sue Sneddon has been a fulltime painter since 1984. Much of her work has concentrated on the ocean, especially the NC coast. After 28 years in Durham, she moved to the coast in 2003 to be closer to the water.
Cost: Workshop, \$300. Housing at The Boat House, \$125 double or \$225 single. Food will be a joint effort. You may also arrange your own accommodations.
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*February 16–20, 2012
MAKING YOUR ART: An Advanced Workshop with Sue Sneddon
The Boat House, Emerald Isle, NC
This workshop is designed for those who have taken Sue Sneddon's "Finding Your Medium" and now want to find their own personal expression and gain more comfort with media they have explored before.
Leader: Sue Sneddon (See February 10–12.)
Cost: Workshop, \$325. Housing at The Boat House, \$125 double or \$225 single. Food will be a joint effort.
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*February 28, 2012, Tuesday, 9:00 am–6:00 pm
LABYRINTH WALK AT DUKE CHAPEL
Duke Chapel, Duke University, Durham, NC
Free and open to the public
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com, or Duke Chapel

*March 23–24, 2012, Fri., 7–9 pm & Sat., 9:30 am–3:30 pm
CAPTURING LIFE ON THE PAGE: Writing the Pictures in our Minds
Durham, NC, in a lovely private home with a cat
I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see, and what it means. What I want and what I fear. What is going on in these pictures in my mind.
—Joan Didion
In this two-day workshop we will give free reign to the pictures in our minds; we'll delve deeply into our creative selves and find fresh ways to evoke our own stories and those of others—real and fictional. Come prepared to explore different ways of seeing and new techniques for evoking setting, character, dialogue, voice, momentum, and other aspects of story. We will write a lot and leave with a deeper understanding of what we see and what it means, and how to express ourselves in vivid word pictures. Open to writers of all genres and levels of experience, men and women.
Leader: Carol Henderson is a writer, editor, teaches, and writing coach, who teaches in the US, Europe, and the Middle East. She is the author of *Losing Malcolm: A Mother's Journey Through Grief*, and recently edited *Wide Open Spaces: Call Stories*. Learn more about Carol at www.carolhenderson.com
Cost: \$125
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*Future WEEKS OF QUIET & WRITING FOR WOMEN
May 6–13, 2012
Sept 23–30, 2012

Sister Mother Earth

by Becky Holtzman

*Praised be you, my God, through our Sister Mother Earth,
Who sustains and governs us,
And who produces varied fruits with colors and herbs.*
—The Canticle of Creatures, St. Francis

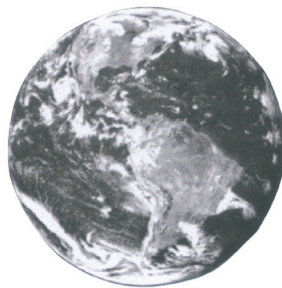
*Make a break for it, kids! Flee to the wilderness! The one
within, if you can find it....*
—Utah Phillips

Visiting Franciscan Sister Joan Brown on a sunny September morning in Albuquerque's North Valley is to enter a desert oasis. Extensive gardens spill over with messy abundance; chickens cluck at the back of the property, a few feet from bustling beehives. This plot of land, three quarters of an acre, is communally rented and tended by Joan and three others. Overflowing with food for people, the property has also been declared a wildlife habitat. A small sign posted at the entrance to the property indicates that there is a water source, ground cover for animals, and flowers, trees and bushes for pollinators.

These gardens, both cultivated and wild, are a conscious practice of the Rule of Saint Clare by this small community. Born in 1193, Clare was a young woman from a wealthy family in Assisi who joined Saint Francis in her early teens and later founded the Poor Clares, Franciscan sisters who vowed to live in poverty and in service to humankind. Clare's Rule, the first monastic rule known to be written by a woman, instructed the sisters to not own land, "or even anything that might reasonably be called property, except as much land as necessity requires for the integrity of the monastery, and this land may not be cultivated except as a garden for the needs of the sisters." Or, as Joan Brown paraphrases, to "plant what you need for food and healing; the rest shall remain wild." This plea for wildness, spanning centuries, is ultimately a plea for diversity: to resist the urge to control and modify, the urge to *commodify* resources that should be shared. By holding a space for wildness, one lives out of the generosity and abundance of God.

The Franciscan Order was founded as a direct response to the rise of the mercantile class in early 13th century Italy, and also to the Benedictine monasteries, whose land acquisitions allowed for intensive food production. Saint Francis saw this accumulated wealth as distraction from what really matters: our relationships to one another and to all of creation. In our own era, when economic drivers incur so much ecological damage, Joan reminds us that the words *ecology* and *economy* share the Greek root *oikos*: Earth as home, household, family. Saint Francis' *Canticle of Creatures* is a call to kinship, in brotherhood and sisterhood to all of creation, but consumer culture tends to separate us from our fellow humans and the creatures that share this Earth with us. The Franciscan vow of poverty is commonly interpreted to mean austerity, but that is a misunderstanding: To "safeguard the holy poverty" is to celebrate having one's basic needs met—water, food, shelter—and being content, even overjoyed, by that simplicity.

I met Joan as we worked together on a community conference. Observing her gentle but firm pressing on the walls of conformity, I found myself thinking a lot about what it means to practice the teachings of Saint



Francis at this particular time in Earth's history, as biodiversity is declining at an unprecedented rate and human populations are forced to endure the effects of global warming. I found myself wondering: What would Saint Francis' response be to the ecological events unfolding today? I brought this question to Joan, drawing her into a conversation about the power of women's leadership in tumultuous times, and Saint Clare's defense of the uncultivated.

Raised in Olpe, Kansas, Joan came from a family that believed strongly in justice and the common good. Their mostly Catholic community celebrated Rogation Days, days traditionally set aside for processions to request God's mercy and for blessing the fields; Corpus Christi processions, celebrating the embodiment of God in Jesus Christ; and All Souls' Day processions to the cemetery to remember departed loved ones. Being in community, in the elements—the cold, the wind, the sun, close to the earth and its cycles—made spirituality a physical experience. In the first grade, in her Catholic school, Joan received a holy card bearing an image of the San Damiano cross, which hangs in the Basilica of Saint Clare in Assisi, Italy. She says that for years after, she felt drawn to pray to it, "not even knowing exactly what the *Franciscan way* meant."

In her late twenties, Joan spent some time with Franciscan sisters in southern Colorado, and admired their love of the outdoors, their down-to-earth, spontaneous sense of spirituality, their deep connection with the poor and sense of service. In her late twenties, Joan took her own vows. Over the next several years her work took her from Colorado into Nevada, and to New Mexico, where she worked with a community of women, *Tierra Madre*, making straw-bale houses for recent immigrants on the border. The complications of this project—legal and legislative issues that valued rules over humanity—led Joan to what she describes as a period of discernment, after which she decided to attend graduate school. She graduated from the California Institute of Integral Studies with a degree in Philosophy, Religion and Cosmology, and returned to New Mexico to begin practicing what she calls Ecology Ministry.

Today, Joan works as Executive Director of New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light, an interfaith organization dedicated to bringing communities of faith on board in the effort to address global climate change. She is also the president of the Partnership for Earth Spirituality, a coalition that brings together diverse groups to promote a better understanding of the interdependence of ecology and spirituality. Joan is also involved with work around water quality in New Mexico; the population is rapidly growing in the American southwest, and the limited water resources we do have are threatened by long-entrenched defense and computer-manufacturing industries. These industries are also significant employers. The dilemma of economic "need" fueling ecological damage is clearly a no-win situation, because in spite of these valuable jobs, one in five New Mexicans still lives below the poverty line.

As we observe this era of vast ecological and economic transition, Joan points out that the *Canticle of Creatures* tells us that "Sister Mother Earth," a sibling *and* a nurturer, "sustains and governs us." It is not government or leaders who govern us but rather the ethical, moral imperative that is its own kind of natural law. Human law has distanced itself from Earth law, and the rub that so many of us feel is the tension between what is legal by the standards of our time, and what is actually ethical.

At this critical time in Earth's history, women's voices are rising all over the world for Earth and human rights. Women's religious communities have often

(Continued on back.)

End of Life...

The purpose of this series is to prepare as consciously and compassionately as we can for our own death, so we can live fully in the present. What are the essential conversations, documents, and desires we want to have so we can "let go" and live more fully in our current life? We may consider how we want to say "goodbye" and what is the legacy we wish to leave our family and community. We can then cherish the precious time remaining to us by wholeheartedly embracing the future that beckons us.

*To be blessed in life, one must learn to die.
To be blessed in death, one must learn to live.*

—A medieval prayer

The series will take place on Sunday afternoons, 1:30 pm to 4:30 pm, January 22, February 26, March 25, and April 22, 2012 and costs \$100 for the four sessions. Leaders will include Anita McLeod, Elder Women's Network, RCWMS; Betsy Barton, Program Coordinator, Institute on Care at the End of Life, Duke Divinity School; Carolyn H. Burrus, M.Div., Hospice chaplain and bereavement counselor; and Sharon Thompson, Attorney, Sharon Thompson Law Group.

Anita McLeod is a health educator who leads the RCWMS Elder Women's Network.

RCWMS

RCWMS is a thirty-four-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.

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Proud Shoe

Jeanette Stokes

Contest

ESSAY CONTEST

RCWMS is committed to supporting women as they find their voices and make them heard. Our 2012 Essay Contest is now open for submissions. Women eighteen years of age and older may submit previously unpublished nonfiction essays of 1400 words or less.

Essays this year should focus on grandmothers or elder women in the writer's life. We welcome writing about being a grandmother, having a grandmother, or having been influenced by an elder woman.

Prizes will be \$300 for first place, \$200 for second place, and \$100 for third place. The winning essay will be published in the RCWMS newsletter, *South of the Garden*, in March 2012. Winners will be notified by mail.

The limit is two essays per person. Submit four double-spaced copies of each essay. Previous first place winners and RCWMS Board members are not eligible. No sermons, please. No e-mail submissions. Manuscripts will not be returned. Do not put your name on your essay(s). Attach a cover letter with essay's title, your name, address, phone number, and e-mail. Submissions must be postmarked by January 15, 2012. Mail submissions: RCWMS Essay Contest, 1202 Watts St., Durham, NC 27701.

Sister...

provided support for strong women leaders, allowing women to support one another in finding their truth, and in finding the power to be a voice for the world. But women, particularly women in ministry, are shape-shifting, opening new paths of leadership and creating ministries tailored to their communities, to new and unprecedented needs, and to a rapidly changing world. Through activities that serve the greater good, from mothering to community organizing, we are all called to be leaders during these times. Regardless of political affiliation or the specific type of work that we do in the world, Sister Joan Brown asks each of us: what gifts do you have that can be called into service in our time? In a contemporary interpretation of Clare's Rule, perhaps by holding a space for wildness in our individual lives, we can also preserve a place of quiet where we can hear that calling and respond with confidence.

Becky Holtzman is an artist, educator and fledgling beekeeper living in Albuquerque, NM. She has co-edited two poetry anthologies: Harwood Anthology (Old School Books, 2006) and Looking Back to Place (Old School Books, 2008).



SUBSCRIPTIONS to *South of the Garden* cost \$20 and run for 12 months from the time placed. Foreign or First Class is \$25. A subscription is free to anyone for whom the subscription fee is a burden. Tax-deductible contributions over and above the subscription fee are appreciated. Send checks to RCWMS, 1202 Watts Street, Durham, NC 27701, or go to www.rcwms.org.

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