

South of the Garden

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

Volume 33, Number 1

March 2012

Sixty

by Jeanette Stokes

I attended a sixtieth birthday celebration for a friend in late January. Guests were invited to bring poems, songs, skits, or readings for the occasion, which got me started thinking about what advice I might give now that I've been sixty for several months. Others had offered me wisdom and warnings as I approached this particular bend in the road we call life. One colleague warned that she suddenly lost interest in her job when she turned sixty. While I am still willing to do my job, I have noticed some other changes.

First of all, I don't seem to want to put on "real" clothes very often anymore. I seem happier wearing my cropped black yoga pants and sneakers every day. My yoga pants have a loose elastic waist that doesn't squeeze me and since they are stretchy pants, they don't grab me anywhere. I guess the real truth is that I want to wear clothes that feel like pajamas. I'd rather they not look like pajamas, as I'm not yet ready to be that much of an oddity.

I will admit that because I stay home in the mornings to write, many a weekday lunch hour arrives to find me still in my blue bathrobe. My husband and I have a joke: sometimes when he comes home for lunch, I holler down from upstairs, "Look out! Here comes the blue bathrobe bandit." You have to be there for it to be funny, but it amuses me. Annie Lamott says that when she was young, she wanted her father "to have a regular job where he put on a necktie and went off somewhere with the other fathers," instead of staying home in his slippers like a mental patient. I sometimes feel that way about myself.

In addition to wearing my bathrobe or yoga clothes all the time, I seem to be changing my schedule. This fall and winter, I find myself walking with my friend Jenny at 2:00 in the afternoon or racing to the Y to try to get in a swim before 3:30 when they close the pool for an hour and a half. Serious people exercise before or after work. At 3:00 pm the only people in the pool are...OLD.

A few weeks ago as I was splashing around doing my exercises from water aerobics class, I noticed that the woman in the lane next to me had finished her laps and was swimming toward the ladder. I watched her climb carefully out of the pool. Later, when I hopped out of the pool without using the ladder, I wondered whether I was just showing off. Was I trying to deny my age? After all, I WAS there in the middle of the afternoon with the retirement crowd.

People say, "You don't look sixty," so often to me that's its not really even entertaining any more. I didn't look sixteen when I was sixteen either. At least people aren't trying to tell me I look twelve anymore. When I'm with my young friends (the ones thirty and under) I often forget that I'm twice their age.

Here's the truth: this *is* what sixty looks and feels like now.

And I'm glad to have friends who are ahead of me on the path who are aging gracefully and happy to have friends my age with whom I can try to figure all this out.

Families

by Meghan Florian

Last fall I attended a candlelight vigil in Durham, NC, in opposition to the proposed anti same-sex marriage amendment. Similar vigils were taking place all over the state of North Carolina. The people who gathered in front of Duke University Chapel listened as college students shared stories about learning to love themselves and experiencing the freedom to love whom they choose. It was a hopeful evening, though a worried and prayerful one.

The next day, when the NC Senate joined the House in voting in favor of putting Amendment One on the ballot in May, I wept—in between shaking my fists in anger and asking, "Why?"

As a straight woman, I am free to marry if I wish and to receive the various rights and privileges that go along with it. My heart aches for the many others who, because their sexual orientation is different from mine, have to fight for a legal right that I have not even chosen to exercise. I do not need my church's permission to have a legal marriage, though in addition to a marriage contract recognized by the state, I might choose to also enter into a covenant relationship, celebrated before a community of friends, family, and my church. Right now, straight couples can choose to do either, neither, or both. Our LGBTQ sisters and brothers don't have the same freedom. Amendment One not only maintains the current state of things but writes discrimination into the constitution instead of safeguarding our rights. This is a move to limit those rights to a few who hold power.

At the February meeting of the RCWMS Board of Trustees, we passed the following resolution: "The board of RCWMS opposes Amendment One and encourages NC citizens to vote against the amendment on May 8, 2012." The reality is that this amendment hurts all families, not just same-sex couples. The amendment states, "Marriage between one man and one woman is the only domestic legal union that shall be valid or recognized in this state." What this actually means is that in addition to prohibiting same-sex marriage (as state statute already does), the Amendment would prohibit North Carolina from passing civil unions, bar the state from instituting domestic partnership rights, and strip the domestic partner insurance benefits currently offered to employees by a number of local governments. That is just the beginning. Courts could also interpret the language of the amendment to ban any rights to unmarried couples in North Carolina—both same and opposite gender.

Under the pretense of defending morality, this amendment actually seeks to preserve a particular ideological position that punishes families already in existence and aims to thwart other families from forming. It is, in this sense, profoundly anticomunal and betrays the principles of diversity and freedom that make our country a true democracy.

To learn more about what the amendment would do and how it affects families all over the state, we encourage you to visit www.protectncfamilies.org.

Meghan Florian is MTS, is a writer, a scholar, and an RCWMS trustee. She blogs at www.bikingthebullcity.com.



Calendar

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

*March 2–3, 2012, Fri. 7–9:00 pm, Sat. 11:00 am–4:00 pm
FAITH VOICES FOR THE COMMON GOOD with Rita Nakashima Brock
Church of the Covenant, Greensboro, NC
The Rev. Dr. Nakashima Brock is a theologian, ethicist, activist, author and co-founder of the nonprofit Faith Voices for the Common Good. Her books include *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of the World for Crucifixion and Empire*; and *Journey by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power*.
Sponsors: Presby. Church of the Covenant & RCWMS
Cost: \$10 for Friday lecture, \$10 for Saturday workshop
Contact: www.athinkingchurch.org or call 336-275-6403

March 6–7, 2012
PHYLLIS TRIBLE LECTURE SERIES
Wake Forest Divinity School, Winston-Salem, NC
Theme: Feminist Biblical Scholars and Theologians from Across the Globe Explore Feminist Biblical Interpretation
Speakers: Ulrike Bechmann (Austria), Ivone Gebara (Brazil), Hisako Kinukawa (Center for Feminist Theology and Ministry, Japan), Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Institute of African Women in Religion and Culture, Trinity Theo. Seminary, Ghana)
Cost: \$100
Contact: triblelectures@wfu.edu, 336-758-5121

March 8, 2012, 2:00–6:00 pm
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION
Center for Community Leadership, Raleigh, NC
Join in a celebration of our diversity and roles in society.
Sponsor: A Place for Women to Gather
Contact: www.womengather.org

*March 10–11, 2012, 10:00 am–5:00 pm both days
FULL BODY PRESENCE: Skills to Energize Your Life
3331 Coachman's Way, Durham, NC
Energize your daily life in this weekend workshop. Gain practical tools and skills—enabling you to meet life's challenges with new resources that don't fade—ones that grow stronger with practice. Discover how to tune into your body's wisdom and acquire skills to stay energized in the face of life stressors and draining situations. Learn exact tools for re-charging your system to calm physical tension and quiet your mind. Leave the weekend more embodied, with clarity about how your own full body presence can support you in your world.
Leader: Joanna Haymore
Cost: \$250
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*March 16, 2012, Friday, 1:00 pm
A TRADITIONAL JAPANESE TEA GATHERING
The Sarah P. Duke Gardens, Durham, NC
Join RCWMS for a traditional Japanese Tea Gathering. Enjoy the calm simplicity of the tearoom and the natural beauty of the gardens. This will be a small group.
Leader: Nancy Hamilton and others
Cost: \$25
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*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
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. Open to writers of all genres and levels of experience, men and women.
Leader: Carol Henderson is a writer, editor, teacher, and writing coach. See: www.carolhenderson.com.
Cost: \$125
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com



*April 1–6, 2012
ECUMENICAL HOLY WEEK LABYRINTH WALK
Binkley Baptist Church, Chapel Hill, NC
Sponsors: Several Chapel Hill churches
Free and open to the public.
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

April 19, 2012, 8:30 am–3:30 pm
NC COUNCIL OF CHURCHES Critical Issues Seminar
St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Winston-Salem, NC
Contact: www.nccouncilofchurches.org

April 20–21, 2012
JEAN SHINODA BOLEN: Lecture and Workshop
Binkley Memorial Baptist Church, Chapel Hill, NC
Lecture, Fri. 7:30 pm, Trees and Tree People
Workshop, Sat. 10:00 am–4:00 pm, Grail, Goddesses, Circles and the Sacred Feminine
Leader: Jean Shinoda Bolen is a doctor, psychiatrist, Jungian analyst, and author. See: www.jeanbolen.com
Contact: Jung Society of the Triangle, www.jungnc.org

*April 26–29 (Thursday 6:00 pm–Sunday 1:00 pm)
WRITE TO SOUL IN THE DESERT: A weekend retreat focusing on Writing as a Spiritual Discipline
The Norbertine Community of NM, Albuquerque, NM
This weekend event is your time set aside for writing. Using the nonfiction essay as our tool, participants will have the opportunity to be creative and reflective. You will be given writing assignments, ample time to write, and the chance to share your work with other participants. Come to New Mexico for a weekend of contemplation, writing, and sharing.
Leader: Lynne Hinton is the author of thirteen novels and a book of nonfiction. An ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, she teaches others how to use writing as an expression of creativity and as a tool for spiritual growth and development.
Cost \$600 (includes airport transportation, single room lodging, meals, and program), register by March 8.
Questions: Lynne Hinton, lynnehintonnm@aol.com
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

April 27–28, 2012
MATTHEW FOX: Lecture and Workshop
United Church of Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC
Leader: Matthew Fox, theologian, priest and activist
Cost: Friday \$15, Friday & Saturday \$85 (\$50 students)
Sponsor: Center for Ecozoic Societies
Contact: ecozoic@mindspring.com

*April 29, 2012, 2:00–4:00 pm
LEGACY PLANNING FOR WOMEN
Durham, NC, in a lovely home with a cat
There comes a time in life when you long to know that your life somehow has purpose. You seek to leave a meaningful mark on the world. Legacy Planning can help you discover ways to use the resources and experiences you've accumulated in life to make a lasting impression on people you love and causes you believe in.
Leader: Lisa Gabriel is a certified financial planner with over 25 years of financial services experience designing integrated, strategic solutions for individuals and families.
Cost: \$25
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*May 6–13, 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 & meals
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*Future WEEKS OF QUIET & WRITING FOR WOMEN
Sept 23–30, 2012
January 4–11, 2013

Grace

(Note: The following essay, "*...And Grace Will Lead Me Home*" by Kara Scroggins won first place in this year's RCWMS Essay Contest.)

2004

"Happy Birthday to youuuuu," the crowd finishes in perfect harmony, and I blow out the sixteen candles on the giant chocolate cake. Grinning up at the flashing camera, I have that wonderful feeling of being folded into a giant web of open arms.

It was my friend Grace's idea to have my party here at Eldbrooke, her church for sixty-five years. At ninety-five-years-old, Grace is still continuously drawing everyone into this hub for "anybody and anything they want to do." She helped found a community opera company at the church and sought out musicians—including my parents—to direct it. And so here I am, on my sixteenth birthday, surrounded by a community, lovingly hand-made by Grace. Jim, Carol, and Rose, from Grace's Bridge Club, made the casseroles. The Gomez and Garcias, immigrant families who came to Eldbrooke for the English classes Grace organized, have adorned the hall with pink and green streamers. Jackie, Laura, Katie, and Emily—my best friends—walked into Eldbrooke twelve years ago to join the children's choir. The benevolent matchmaker, Grace has connected us all, and, as I stand at the center, ribbons in my hair and chocolate icing on my face, I can feel her loving me through each of these people. She has led me into this expanded world, filled my life with friends, and woven me into the fabric of a shared life.

From her throne in the middle of the party, Grace hands me a wrapped box, joking, "I bet you can't guess what this is!" It is an inside joke, but everyone laughs along. That's the thing about the inside jokes between Grace and me—we just can't keep them inside. We have our secret favorite song that we sing together so much that everyone knows it as "Grace and Kara's song." We have our signature goodbye ("See you later, Alligator") that I grew up thinking was our exclusive, secret invention. And then there are the birthday dolls.

On a dusty shelf in my bedroom is a line of glass dolls—birthday dolls. Lined up according to height, each wears on her floor-length dress a golden number for her age. When I was eight, Grace went ahead and bought the rest of the dolls, all the way up to sixteen, so that I would still get one every year, even if something happened to her. But today is the day, and Grace is still alive and well enough to hand me the final doll in person. Later, she will stand by me as I place the doll at the end of the line. On that shelf, at least, I will eternally be sixteen, waiting for the next box to unwrap so I can add another year. I wonder what it will be like to celebrate a birthday without a doll to make it official. Maybe that's when birthdays stop being fun—when you run out of dolls, or when the grandmother figures in your life aren't there to share an inside joke and tell you what it was like the day you were born. I'm glad I ran out of dolls first.

2009

Walking into a nursing home is like entering another world, where everything seems louder, smellier, full of bright silk flowers and blasts of dry, hot air. Time smothers me; clocks with giant numbers and blaring tick-tock sounds are the backdrop of every conversation, and people with nothing else to do sit in front of the page-a-day calendars to watch each passing day as it's torn from the stack and tossed into a wastebasket full of identical, used-up days. Even with the silk flowers that never wilt and the hot air that never acknowledges a changing season, time will pass.



And time has passed. Even without a birthday doll to mark another year, I have grown out of marsh-mallows and braces, have been thrown into a world where it takes more than apple juice in a wine glass to be sophisticated. Starbucks cup in hand as I check my voicemail, I'm afraid I've assumed the dreaded persona of "grown-up." But, when I visit Grace, I can still push that rewind button, even if just for a moment.

Tonight is a big night, and I bustle around her room, watering the poinsettias, leaning over her wheelchair to scrub a spot on her slacks. At ninety-nine, Grace still safeguards the tattered fabric of our community. She is the matriarch, the anchor to which all of us have affixed our thin and wandering life paths. Every Christmas, we find our way back home to sit at her feet as she reads *The Night Before Christmas*. For the past week, I have been one of those over-enthusiastic stage mothers, insisting that practice makes perfect, showing up like clockwork every afternoon to run Grace through the routine. Tonight, I cross my fingers as I wheel Grace into the Bingo Room of the nursing home. All the familiar faces are here. There's the Bridge Club arranging sandwich triangles on a platter, and the Garcia family setting up the video camera. The opera folks are here—the divas vocalizing off in a corner—and neighborhood children, now with babies of their own, come to sit cross-legged by Grace's wheelchair.

"'Twas the night before Christmas, and all through the night," she begins. I cringe. "House," Grace, "all through the house." A few people in the audience shift uncomfortably in their seats. Maybe this was a bad idea and we should have just called it off. "Ninety-nine is pretty old," we could have said, "Grace's just isn't up to reading for everyone this Christmas." I squirm and nervously realize that I don't have any sort of fallback plan if she can't finish the book. What a disappointment.

But she's already plunging on: "Not a creature was stirring, not even a—" Grace pauses and glances up, coming up with a fitting rhyme, "—a mite."

She makes it through the rest of the poem without mishap, chuckling like she always does at the part about the bowlful of jelly, making sure I hold the book so that everyone can see the pictures. "But I heard him exclaim as he drove out of sight;" Grace races towards the finish line, looking up from the pages and holding her palms in the air, "Merry Christmas to all, and to all Good Night!" She takes her hands and puts them over mine, slamming the book shut. As the room fills with applause, Grace takes my hand and holds onto it.

The carol sing is over now, and people are putting their coats on, coming over to tell Grace goodbye before making their next holiday party appearances. David Holovac leans over to peck Grace on the cheek, and each of the three Holovac children line up to do the same. Marje Palmieri, always the opera diva, floats over in her red velvet dress to sing us goodbye. Teenage boys shyly offer a handshake, and the dwindling few of Grace's generation shuffle through the tangled web of people to share a knowing, tired smile with Grace.

Clutching my hand the whole time, she receives hugs and congratulations, and thanks each person for coming. I feel like the Mayor's Daughter, famous by association, chosen for no particular reason. "You're still my little girl," she says, with the same sincerity as the first time she said it. Her little girl. Grace put a stamp on me, laid a claim, and never let me go. She painted this beautiful world, orchestrated this brilliant community, and led me by the hand straight into its center. We have grown up side by side, our hearts wound together in memories

(Continued on back.)

Notes

FEMINIST SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Spiritual direction is a covenant relationship between fellow travelers on a journey of faith, mindfully and humbly conducted in the presence of the Spirit. RCWMS has been encouraging women and men in their spiritual development for over three decades. Feminist Spiritual Direction gives special attention to the character of being "woman" in our culture and seeks to empower women—lesbian, bisexual, and straight—in their unique spiritual journeys and thus the rest of their lives. Kaudie McLean, PhD, is spiritual director in residence at RCWMS. A writer, editor, artist and certified spiritual director, she divides her time between Durham, NC and Boulder, CO. To explore spiritual direction with her, contact: kaudiemc@earthlink.net.

JAPANESE TEA GATHERING

Join us for a traditional Japanese Tea Gathering in the Sarah P. Duke Gardens in Durham on Friday, March 16, at 1:00 pm. Attending tea gatherings has become one of my favorite activities. I love the beauty of the gardens, the peacefulness of the teahouse, the sound of the boiling water, and the sharp smell of the frothy green tea. Japanese tea gatherings are a wonderful way to slow down. Nancy Hamilton and others will lead the tea gathering and explain the customs. Space is limited, so sign up through RCWMS and meet me in the gardens. —JS

WRITING IN MARCH

I am looking forward to attending our annual writing workshop with Carol Henderson this March. This year RCWMS will sponsored "Capturing Life on the Page: Writing the Pictures in our Minds," March 23–24, in Durham. Carol's combination of inspiration, prompts, and conversation gets my creative juices flowing. The workshop is open to writers of all genres and levels, men and women. Carol is a wonderful teacher, writer, editor, and writing coach. See the Calendar for details. For more about Carol: www.carolhenderson.com. —JS

Grace...

of peanut butter crackers and birthday dolls, our lives part of a larger, spreading creation. I stand next to the architect, the gardener, and see how she has truly lived beyond herself, growing into each of us, teaching me to do the same. I am hers. Her little girl. I belong to her and she to me, and we to everyone here. Our identities are intertwined, and, even when things aren't as they always were, even when traditions peter out and groups of people disperse, we remain held, bound together, forever belonging to one another.

A native of Washington, DC, Kara Scroggins attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she majored in mathematics and English. She is currently pursuing a Masters in Divinity at Yale Divinity School.



Winners

ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS

We are pleased to announce that Kara Scroggins of Washington, DC has won the 2012 RCWMS Essay Contest. You can read her essay, "...And Grace Will Lead Me Home" on page one. Second place goes to Hadley Kifner of Chapel Hill, NC, and third place goes to Julia Sendor of Chapel Hill.

This year's essays focused on grandmothers or elder women in the author's life and were judged by Marcy Litle, Kaudie McLean, and Anita McLeod. Many thanks to the judges and to all those who entered the contest.

We are so grateful to all who entered. Please keep your pen moving and consider entering next year. Details will be available in the fall.

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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