

South of the Garden

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

Volume 33, Number 2

June 2012

Notes

by Jeanette Stokes

We have had lots of good news this spring at RCWMS and one big defeat. I'll start with the bad news.

North Carolina has now joined the rest of the southern states in adding a measure to its constitution banning gay marriage. Our constitution will now have a dreadful section that says the only legally recognized domestic union is between one man and one woman. In addition to banning gay marriage, which was the most likely intent of the amendment, it also jeopardizes all sorts of benefits presently enjoyed by non-married, same-gender couples and their children. The exact effects of this measure will be determined in the courts in the coming months and years. The good news about the campaign to defeat Amendment 1 is that a strong and broad coalition was formed that will organize to repeal the amendment and work for the rights of each adult North Carolinian to marry the partner of his or her choice.

After the passage of the amendment, we were ready for some good news. On a rainy afternoon in mid-May, Mike, our friendly neighborhood postal carrier, brought a certified letter from the Kalliopeia Foundation. RCWMS trustee Meghan Florian opened the letter to find a check for \$20,000 inside. She and I started whooping, hollering, and high-fiving it with each other and with Mike. The foundation's contribution is for our program on spirituality and elder women, which is led by Anita McLeod. Watch our website and these pages for more information about a whole host of programs in the coming months. We are deeply grateful to the Kalliopeia Foundation, which also provided support for our documentary film *Meinrad Craighead: Praying With Images*.

RCWMS is fortunate to have three trustees who are thirty years of age or under: Meghan Florian, Jenny Graves, and Candice Ryals Provey. All three of them are graduates of Duke Divinity School, and each one has had exciting things happen this spring.

Meghan Florian was accepted to the MFA program in Creative Writing at Queens University in Charlotte, NC. The two-year, low residency program will require her to spend a few weeks in Charlotte but she gets to live in Durham (and to continue her many activities with RCWMS) the rest of the time. Meghan spent her first week in the Queens program at the end of May.

Jenny Graves completed her certificate in Documentary Arts at the Center for Documentary Studies Program at Duke University. For her final project, Jenny created a short documentary about her Polish ancestors, "Immigrant's Great Granddaughter." Stitching together poems, photographs, and film, Jenny explored her ancestors' journey from Eastern Europe to Wisconsin and Michigan and connects their struggle for economic survival to the struggle of so many in American today.

Candice Ryals Provey has accepted the position of Associate Chaplain at Yale University, beginning in June. We are sorry to see her leave Durham, but we are excited about her new job. She has been approved to receive a call by The Presbytery of New Hope (in NC), so her ordination should follow soon.



Sue Sneddon

Nuns

by Jeanette Stokes

When RCWMS began thirty-five years ago, there were few Protestant women in formal ministry in North Carolina. Some of our early role models were Roman Catholics nuns, who were readily apparent even in the South. I first noticed them in campus ministry, in academia, and in social justice work. I was grateful to the Catholic sisters even then for blazing trails, for being strong, independent professional women, and for creating new definitions of community beyond the convent walls.

That was 1977, a dozen years after the Second Vatican Council. Many nuns had shed their habits, "women religious" like Evelyn Mattern who worked in social justice for the Catholic Diocese and then for the NC Council of Churches. I remember noticing her tasteful dark blue dress the first time I met Evelyn. She had left her canonical order to help form Sisters for Christian Community, a new community outside the traditional structures. Keeping vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience to the community, this group of women religious went right on with their calling to religious life and with their work in the world, but without priests and bishops breathing down their necks.

Some women left the sisterhood altogether, but many remained in communities under the control of local priests and bishops, giving faithful service for low wages, while running schools, hospitals, and parishes.

Being in religious life is not as popular as it once was. At the time of Vatican II (mid-1960s) there were 180,000 women religious in the US. Today there are less than 70,000, with a median age of over 70. It is these faithful, stalwart, selfless servants of the church who came under attack in April 2012.

In April, the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a condemnation of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), the main umbrella organization of Catholic sisters in the US, and appointed a conservative archbishop to oversee the organization's activities. The Vatican justified its takeover by accusing the LCWR of challenging church teachings and of being radical feminists.

The response to the Vatican crackdown was swift and the response of progressive US Catholics was outrage. Feminist scholar of American Catholicism Marian Ronan wrote, "The idea of these utterly dedicated and highly educated women coming under this kind of attack for exercising their freedom of conscience by sometimes disagreeing with the American bishops drives me nuts."

There you have it. The women didn't agree with the men in charge and got slammed for it. Ronan points out that the conflict between the men and the women is age old. (See her blog, marianronan.wordpress.com.)

Commentators have suggested that the current disagreements between the sisters and the Vatican include opinions on homosexuality, same-sex marriage, the ordination of women, and a whole range of family planning issues—from birth control to abortion to Obama's healthcare plan, which included some

(Continued on back.)

Calendar

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

June 8–10, 2012

WRITE TO SOUL IN THE DESERT: A Weekend Retreat
Focusing on Writing as a Spiritual Discipline

Blowing Rock Conference Center, Blowing Rock, NC
As a spiritual discipline, writing helps you find your truth. This retreat provides you with opportunities to reflect, consider, and write. 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. Join us for a weekend of contemplation, writing, and sharing.

Leader: Lynne Hinton is the author of *Pie Town* and other books. A United Church of Christ minister, she teaches people to use writing as a creative expression and a tool for spiritual growth and development.

Cost \$300 includes room, meals, and program.

Contact: www.brccenter.org or lynnehintonnm@aol.com

*July 18, 2012, Wednesday, 6:30 pm

PAULI MURRAY CONVOCATION

St. Titus Episcopal Church, 400 Moline St., Durham, NC
The convocation will commemorate the life of Durham's amazing daughter, the Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray. Historian, attorney, poet, activist, educator and Episcopal priest, Pauli Murray was shaped by her early years in Durham. She worked tirelessly throughout her life to address injustice, educate, inspire, and promote reconciliation among all people.

Cost: Free

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

July 30–August 4, 2012

ONE HEART, ONE SOUL: Building Communities that Work

St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN

People of all faiths are invited to join the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America for a gathering we affectionately call Peace Camp. Peacemakers from throughout the continent will come together for a week of inspiration, training, and fun that will empower our personal and corporate work for justice. Through meditation, worship, music, workshops, intergenerational recreation, Bible studies, movies, educational programs for all ages, and more, we'll equip ourselves for the work of creating a better world.

Contact: www.bpfna.org

*September 8, 2012, Saturday, 9:30 am–3:30 pm

HARVESTING OUR STORIES: Collecting Our Wisdom
Durham, NC

The autumn of our lives is the time for harvesting the wisdom of our lives. As we enter our later years, it is important to unearth and gather up our life stories, to share them with others, to reflect on what we have learned by experience, and to discern how we might want to pass on our wisdom. This workshop is designed for women 55 and older. As a follow-up, we will offer an optional monthly morning writing circle for those who attend the workshop and who would like to continue to harvest their stories.

Leaders: Anita McLeod and Liz Dowling-Sendor

Cost: \$85

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

*September 22, 2012, Saturday, 9:30 am–3:30 pm

WHEN GRANDMOTHERS SPEAK, THE EARTH WILL HEAL

Timberlake Earth Sanctuary, Whitsett, NC (near Greensboro) www.timberlakeearthsanctuary.com

It has been well said that in today's technological world, grandmothers have a special role to fulfill in sharing their love of the natural world with succeeding



Sue Sneddon

generations. Come and enjoy a quiet day spent at nature's pace surrounded by beauty and learn some special ways of sharing a love of the earth with grandchildren and all children.

Leaders: Carolyn Toben and Anita McLeod

Cost: \$85. Register early, space is limited.

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

*September 23–30, 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. Send \$100 deposit.

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

October 4–5, 2012

HOMEGROWN: A North Carolina Women's

Cooperative Preaching Festival

Trinity Avenue Presbyterian Church, Durham, NC

We'll bring together women in ministry to encourage and inspire, share and learn, hone our craft, and lift up the voices of clergywomen. We'll hear wonderful preaching and have conversations on the art of

proclamation in all its forms. Our vision is to come together and invite each participant to share her gifts. Some will preach, others may dance or sing, and still others will listen and respond. Some will offer their

homes to out-of-town guests and others will staff the reception desk. We believe that there are great gifts among the "ordinary" yet extraordinary clergywomen of

North Carolina.

Organizers: Carla Gregg, Kori Jones, Elizabeth Michael, and Lori Pistor

Contact: ncwomenpreaching@gmail.com

*October 19–21, 2012

WRITE TO SOUL IN THE DESERT: A Weekend Retreat
Focusing on Writing as a Spiritual Discipline

The Norbertine Community of NM, Albuquerque, NM

Come to New Mexico for a weekend of contemplation, writing, and sharing. Using the nonfiction essay as our tool, participants will have the opportunity to be creative and reflective. There will be writing assignments, time to write, and time to share your work with others.

Leader: Lynne Hinton is the author of *Pie Town* and other books. A United Church of Christ minister, she teaches people to use writing as a creative expression and a tool for spiritual growth and development.

Cost: \$500 includes airport transport, single room, meals, and program. Registration deadline is September 1.

Questions: Lynne Hinton, lynnehintonnm@aol.com

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

*November 16–17, 2012, late afternoon

RCWMS 35th ANNIVERSARY: Celebration & Fundraiser
King's Daughters Inn, Durham, NC

An event and fundraiser in honor of RCWMS' 35th anniversary. In addition to supporting the Resource Center, you will be a part of a fun and soul-nourishing retreat in Durham with other women. Activities include: tea, dinner, bedtime stories with a storyteller, morning yoga, conversation, singing and connecting with new and old friends.

Cost: Packages cover various combinations of tea, dinner, overnight, breakfast and a donation to RCWMS.

Contact: Amy Kellum, ak@meinradproject.org, 919-418-4000, or contact the RCWMS office

*January 4–11, 2013

WEEK OF QUIET & WRITING FOR WOMEN

Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC

This writing retreat for women is an unstructured week that includes days of quiet and writing and evenings of readings and conversation.

Cost: \$750 includes lodging & meals. Send \$100 deposit.

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

Mimi

by Hadley Kifner

(Hadley Kifner won second place in the RCWMS Essay Contest this year. Enjoy her winning essay about her grandmother, which is printed here. Guidelines for the next RCWMS Essay Contest will be available in the fall.)

I write because words matter. I learned this, in part, because of her.

To the world, she is Margaret McLean Faw Fonvielle Heyward. To me, she is Mimi.

She wrote many things in her life—legal briefs, lists of books to read as recommended by the Sunday Times, inspiring Scriptures (she posted these on sticky notes inside the kitchen cabinets), dates on the backs of photos from travels to Africa, Greenland, Greece, checks to the Food Pantry and her grandchildren for good grades, food logs that listed everything she consumed in a day, down to the last clementine segment.... To her, words written down were markers of time, declarations of what was important in life.

During my elementary school years, Mimi would clip newspaper articles and mail them to me. They would be on the subject I was studying or a photographic essay of where we had just vacationed. Attached to the clipped article would be a small scribbled note: Thought you might enjoy reading this. Lots of love—.

In high school, she encouraged me to read the Classics. On the secretary of her house sat colorful Faberge eggs, framed family photos, and a tattered edition of works by Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates. I remember wondering how a book with such frail pages and fraying covers could be filled with anything important.

After college, during a brief stint as an editorial assistant in New York City, Mimi would call and ask what projects I was working on. I was in a cubicle 601 miles away, with a cup of hot tea in one hand and a red pencil in the other, marking up margins of fictional pieces and picture books for children (precisely what she wasn't reading), and she still aimed to connect with me over the written word.

Every time I can remember visiting her, there has been a thin stack of pages from the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, or issues of *Town and Country* magazine waiting for me on the bench at the end of the bed. Mimi never explained which of the articles were the most interesting to her so I would prop myself up under the crocheted canopy above, reading into midnight, wondering if I had yet discovered what had intrigued her.

Words off the page mattered to Mimi, too. She taught me social graces—how to say the right thing at the right time and, equally important, how not to say the wrong thing at the wrong time. I recall her pinching me under the table when a neighbor was joining us for dinner and I commented that the lemon tart was crumblier than usual. (The neighbor had brought the dessert.) And then there was that dramatic Thanksgiving when an estranged family member called shouting words of isolation and hurt into the phone. Mimi held her lips close to the receiver and spoke calmly, clearly, "It is a holiday. This is not a time to behave like this. I am going to hang up on you now." Then, click.

More than once as a young woman, I experienced her lack of words as powerful, too. One humid summer I spent taking a biology course at the college in the town where she lived. Every day on my way to class, I stopped by her house for lunch. While she readied



Sue Sneddon

the china plates, linen napkins, and silverware on acrylic table trays, I cut fruit, then spread thin slices of bread with pimento cheese. We performed our duties in silence, knowing that the other was doing her part, finding relief in a rhythm that was soothing, simple. When lunch was ready, we would carry the trays into the den, watch Wimbledon on TV, and eat. Afterward, I would tidy things up, kiss her on the cheek, and head to class. There were at least a dozen lunches that summer when we didn't say a word to each other. It didn't feel quiet or as if anything was left unsaid.

One spring when my husband's job offer fell through at the last minute and I was pregnant, working a temp job, I remember calling her from the tiny, tiled bathroom of our house. The pine trees swayed as a storm blew in, and I told her through tears that I was hopeful and knew that everything would be all right. I thought I had convinced her of my fortitude in such an uncertain time. About three days later, scrawled on a sheet of sage green Cranes stationary I read her words: "Sometimes being strong is no good. Sometimes you have to let it all out and have a good cry." Coming from her, a woman I had not seen shed a tear for the first twenty years of my life, this meant a lot.

When Mimi was in the hospital and close to death several years ago, I drove from my home to be with her. I had packed some poetry I thought she would enjoy. When I arrived to her bedside, we both knew there would be no reading that trip. She reached for my hand and a single tear slid down her cheek. I had never known her to be afraid or alone and in that moment I saw her—for perhaps the first time—as mortal. In the weeks after, I would come care for her when I could get away from graduate studies, tucking her into her king-size bed with the peach coverlet with a glass of water, a handful of pills, and massaging hand cream into her gnarled knuckles. The piles of books on her night table would go unread for some time more. Those moments of seeing her both vulnerable and resilient taught me a great deal about what is left unsaid sometimes. She didn't need to say that she needed me and I didn't need to say that this fact left me feeling both fulfilled and afraid.

She recovered and soon after we surprised her with an Indian themed party for her ninetieth birthday. She had always wanted to travel to see the Taj Mahal and had only just declared that she didn't think that was going to happen in this lifetime. When she walked into the restaurant, seeing three generations of us in colorful saris and turbans, small urns of flowers crowding the table, sitar music in the background, and silver votives everywhere, she was shocked. "I am speechless," she said. And she was, all night. She smiled and laughed and ate cardamom-sugar cookies while she read the shoebox full of birthday cards.

When I was ordained last winter, she traveled the three hours to be there, sat on the front row, and smiled through the whole service. A devoted Episcopalian most of her adult life, seeing me—sensitive, introverted me—up in the pulpit, with stole and robe, bread and cup, speaking the words of blessing and invitation to the feast must have been some moment for her. At last, I had a word to speak—a word that wasn't mine, a word that belonged to all of Us, and yet came from the deepest, truest part of me, a part that I had possessed for years but had only just begun to live into. Afterward she commented on the lovely white belles of Ireland and calla lilies at the altar but she held the order of service close to her chest and I knew she was proud.

When I think of Mimi, I don't remember the last book we read together or her favorite text of all time. When

(Continued on back.)

Innocence

In her blog, *The Last Straw*, environmental artist Bryant Holsenbeck described her efforts in 2010 to live "a year without plastic." Of course you can't completely avoid plastic, but Bryant made a concerted effort to avoid single-use plastics, all the plastic straws, forks, bags, and bottles so freely offered by commercial America. Her blog focused our attention on the plastic that clogs up our oceans. She continues to live with as little single-use plastic as possible. (Learn more about Bryant at: bryanholsenbeck.com.)

Anita McLeod, who leads our work on elder women, has joined the fight against fracking in North Carolina. She has attended activist trainings, governmental hearings, and rallies. She encouraged many of us to watch *Gasland*, a compelling documentary by Josh Fox, who traveled around North America to witness the devastating results of fracking. I'm from Oklahoma and thought I knew the oil and gas business, but even I was horrified by the pollution detailed in the film. (For more on fracking, see: www.foodandwaterwatch.org, www.cwfnc.org.)

Deb Katz's poem is another inspiration, calling us to notice and protect our precious earth. —js



Pro Innocence by Deborah S. Katz

In less than forty years, polar bears may be extinct.
Raw rage does not calibrate. From sea ice

to seashore. From sea to shining crude oil
transforms underwater chemistry to prepare

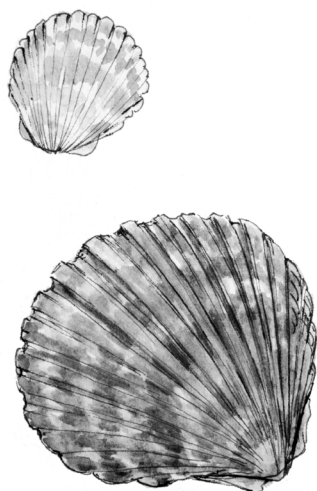
petroleum into plastic trash chokes whales, penguins,
and sea otters. Dostoevsky wrote, "The degree

of civilization in a society can be judged by entering
its prisons." Oversimplified complications from reality

shows bitter leftover mayhem, feathers, and shadows
of life without parole. The key is perception.

Please contact the poet (email pazdk128@yahoo.com) for permission to use this poem to reproduce or utilize it in any form or by any means.

Savoring rhythms, textures, and stillness within free verse and traditional forms, Deborah S. Katz writes about the mosaic of a moment. Her poem about death and ascending, *Side by Side*, was set to music for soprano and piano. Also, she is writing a memoir about her father, a decorated World War II hero, and PTSD. Deborah and her sister, Wendy Lisa Katz, are making the cinéma vérité documentary, *As Always, SPK, Going Beyond Beyond*, about their mother recovering from an emergency craniotomy while dying from a rare and aggressive uterine cancer. In addition to writing a poetry manuscript and memoir, Deborah has been invited to read her poems at local poetry series and has served on the board of the Saint Louis Poetry Center. She volunteers at the Brain Injury Association of Missouri.



Sue Sneddon

...Mimi

I think of Mimi, I think of the essence of her—the smell of Coty face powder, purple-blue hydrangeas in the hallway, leather Ferragamo shoes, the small crystal bowl of GoldFish sitting on her coffee table. I think of her swallowing a raw oyster splashed with hot sauce and chasing it down with ice-chilled vodka the Christmas we tried this outrageous appetizer. I think of her grating extra-sharp New York cheddar cheese and chopping pimentos to make her cracker dip that has been a part of every family gathering since 1988. I think of her essence—delicate and strong, frustrating and inspiring, surprising and stable, all at the same time. She embodies the paradox of an intelligent, faithful, Southern, and well-read woman.

She is the protagonist in the novel of my family's life.

Hadley Kifner is a United Church of Christ minister and a pediatric Chaplain at UNC Hospital in Chapel Hill, NC.

...Nuns

provisions for contraception. A Catholic social justice lobby that nuns started forty years ago, NETWORK, supported Obama's plan while US bishops opposed it.

But why attack the sisters now? Catholic feminist theologian Mary Hunt suggests a tactical maneuver. "How dare the very men who preside over a church in utter disgrace due to sexual misconduct and cover-ups by bishops try to distract from their own problems by creating new ones for women religious?"

Whatever the reasons, the result is to drive a deeper wedge between the Vatican and US Catholics. As Hunt says, "...truth is, most Catholics no longer look to Rome for guidance on our personal lives." Polls show 82% of US Catholics find birth control morally acceptable. Since the Vatican is not known for backing down, there's no telling how this conflict will go. There have been big splashes in the press, rallies and protests outside meetings of bishops, and the upcoming meeting of the LCWR is bound to be exciting.

Feminist and former LCWR President Joan Chittister offered one suggestion, "to disband canonically and regroup as an unofficial interest group." It's certainly the approach taken by Sisters for Christian Community and by many American Catholics who find ways to stay connected to the church while living their own versions of faithful modern lives.

Once again, I find myself grateful to the brave sisters for being fine role models. I trust they will continue to figure out how to make more space for women to be heard and for justice to be lived out even in the midst of regressive, hierarchical, patriarchal, authoritarian structures.



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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