

South of the Garden

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

Volume 34, Number 2

June 2013

Climate

by Jeanette Stokes

A group of friends and I went to hear Bill McKibben speak last fall when he was in Durham. He's the man who started 350.org to educate and organize around the dangers of climate change. One of the targets of his campaign is "big oil."

I grew up in Tulsa, Oklahoma in the 1950s when it was the oil capital of the world. A seventy-six-foot tall oil man, known as the Golden Driller, still stands watch over the Tulsa fairgrounds. I thought the refineries on the other side of the Arkansas River were stinky but charming when lit up at night. Though my father was a doctor, I still grew up on oil and gas.

Some of my friends had dads who were petroleum engineers, and the oil business separated me from my best friend Sally for several years when her family moved from Tulsa to Houston.

I have cousins in the oil business and I learned a lot from my step-father, a geologist who spent his working life in the oil and gas field equipment business. Over the years, I learned to speak oil and gas. By that I mean that I know the "price of oil" is set at Cushing, Oklahoma, which is a major trading point for crude oil. I can give a short lecture on various aspects of vertical drilling, fracking, and underwater drilling stations, because I've listened to the details at family gatherings for years. I've visited drilling sites, pumping stations, and places that look like the backside of the moon, because an oil company had used them, "cleaned up," and then left.

My family was in it up to their eyeballs before I was even born. My mother went to West Texas with her father to visit a newly discovered oil field while she was pregnant with me.

But my Texas family was also in cattle and for most of my adult life, I've been more focused on being a vegetarian and not killing animals than on the gooey black stuff that people in Texas and Oklahoma were so expertly figuring out how to extract and burn. I'm still a vegetarian, but I am now drawing my head up out of the sand and beginning to admit that I have black tarry stuff all over my hands.

I am well aware that I have lived a comfortable life because my family, my hometown, my state, my region, and my country have been so successful at exploring, leasing, drilling, piping, and refining fossil fuels.

I have long understood that we burn too much fossil fuel and have eagerly taken up practices such as turning off lights, turning down the heat, making sure my home and work are close together, and batching errands so that I drive less. I have blamed the auto industry for not making fuel-efficient cars sooner, the manufacturing industry for its polluting smokestacks, and the government for not regulating polluters.

In his talk, Bill McKibben helped me understand that we need to slow the production and sale of fossil fuels. We are pumping, storing, and using oil too fast. It's hurting our world. He argues that the fossil fuel industry has five times more oil and gas in its reserves than even

(Continued on back.)



Nature

by Anita McLeod

To be human is to become visible while carrying what is hidden as a gift to others. To remember the other world in this world is to live in your true inheritance.

—David Whyte

Spending time in the world of nature feeds my spirit and soul. Walking in the forest, sitting quietly on a bench in a garden, lying in a hammock immersed in the green of spring trees and digging in the earth, planting flowers and vegetables all open me to a deep connection with the earth.

As a child, I knew I was a part of an enchanted world. I would often go into the forest for solace and companionship. This connection was lost for many years while I was busy growing a family and career. Now, in my elder years, I am being called home again to the natural world. These days I am recovering a rapport with the trees, birds, and creatures of the land. As I practice going beyond aesthetic appreciation, dropping below my senses into an intuitive knowing, I find the way to my soul. Many people experience this in meditation and other spiritual practices. I have joyfully re-discovered that my path is in the natural world. Because of this, I responded to Pat Webster's desire to create a workshop focused on nature.

RCWMS sponsored "Our Nature, In Nature" at Timberlake Earth Sanctuary April 19–21, and twelve women gathered for a weekend camping retreat. Pat designed the workshop, and I assisted with the leadership. Pat's training as a vision quest guide and leader with the School of Lost Borders in California inspired her to create a local program grounded in the earth-based spirituality of the Medicine Wheel.

The weekend's teachings were focused on the wisdom of indigenous people who honor the sacredness of the natural world and understand the many ways the natural world mirrors our own nature. We gathered in circle, listened to the teachings of each compass direction and then carried questions for reflection as we wandered the trails, paying close attention to what was being mirrored to us. Afterward we sat in council sharing what had been revealed to us. It was through our sharing we became a tribe of twelve. At the end of the workshop, a few of us said we would like to stay at Timberlake and live each day like this; in communion with the numinous in ourselves, the land and each other...in love with our life. Many of us yearn for ways to share this wisdom with our larger communities and with the children in our lives. We join with other companions to work on programs that focus on protecting our beloved planet earth.

The Elder Women's Project will continue to sponsor and advertise programs that connect us with the sacred in the natural world. Upcoming programs that focus on nature include the following. (See CALENDAR for details.)

June 29, 2013, DEEP LISTENING, with Diantha Rau, Timberlake Earth Sanctuary, near Greensboro, NC.

October 19, 2013, COUNCIL OF ALL BEINGS, with Ann Koppleman & Anita McLeod, near Chapel Hill, NC.

Calendar

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

June 7–10, 2013 and October 4–7, 2013
CONTEMPLATIVE AGING RETREATS
Mepkin Abbey, Monck's Corner, SC
Explore contemplative practices that welcome the inner life of self development and spiritual growth. Learn to savor the process of aging.
Contact: Fr. Guerric Heckel, guerricheckel@gmail.com

*June 12–July 31, 2013, Wednesdays, 7:00–9:00 pm
WRITING FOR OUR LIVES: A Prompt Writing Workshop
Five Oaks Clubhouse, 5109 Pine Cone Dr., Durham, NC
"Writing about stressful situations is one of the easiest ways for people to take control of their problems and release negative effects of stress from their bodies and their lives." –James Pennebaker, Ph.D.
This supportive group is open to anyone. If you are grieving the loss of a loved one, you know how isolating and lonely grief can feel. Social support can facilitate healthy grieving and encourage shifts in perspective. It helps those experiencing other life stressors or transitions as well. Change can be hard. Join us and take time to remember, to get your thoughts down, to reflect through writing, and to share with others. We will use prompts to tap into our creative expression and begin to gently explore feelings that silence or limit us, so that we may move forward freely. No writing experience necessary!
Leader: Heidi Gessner, MDiv, UCC Minister and UNC Hospitals Bereavement Coordinator and Palliative Care Chaplain
Cost: \$195
Contact: Heidi, heidigessner@gmail.com, 919-357-4148

June 24–28, 2013
FOCUSING ON FORM: A Writing Workshop for Women
Meredith College, Raleigh, NC
Workshops offer instruction, manuscript critiques, and publishing advice. Courses: Fiction, Zeld Lockhart; Creative Nonfiction, Nancy Peacock; Poetry, Ruth Moose; Journaling, Carol Henderson; and Getting Published, Susan Ketchin
Cost: \$300 for the week
Contact: hogana@meredith.edu, 919-760-8300

June 29, 2013, Saturday
DEEP LISTENING
Timberlake Earth Sanctuary, near Greensboro, NC
A day-long renewal for women in the heart of nature's embrace. Join us to expand your sensory awareness and listen deeply - to nature, to your own wisdom, and then create a chant or mantra from the experience with Diantha's guidance. No musical experience is needed.
Details: www.diantharau.com.
Leader: Diantha Rau
Cost: \$75.
Contact: Diantha, 919-370-2122, zephyr@yellowsprings.com

July 15–20, 2013
ENTERTAINING ANGELS: Peacemaking Through Radical Hospitality
Spokane, WA
Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America's Summer Conference Gonzaga University
Contact: Thea L. Mateu, thea@bpfna.org, www.bpfna.org/gather/summer-conference

July 18-21, 2013
SUMMER INTERPLAY UNTENSIVE
Trinity Retreat Center, Atlantic Beach, NC
Play, dance, tell stories, rest, walk on the beach, swim in the ocean and enjoy being part of a playful community. Life doesn't have to be so hard!



Leaders: Ginny Going and Tom Henderson
Cost: \$275 for housing and meals plus a gift to the leaders
Contact: Ginny or Tom at 919-821-3723 or interplaync@nc.rr.com

August 12–15, 2013
HABITS OF THE HEART: The Courage to Practice a Faith Worthy of the Human Spirit
George Williams Conference Center, Williams Bay, WI
This is an opportunity for ordained and lay leaders throughout North America, and people of faith serving in broader ministries, to find a revitalized sense of wholeness amidst the common tensions of ministry and practice the tools to sustain their service. Parker Palmer will be present on the first day of the retreat to introduce the "habits of the heart." Trained Courage & Renewal® facilitators will lead the Circle of Trust® approach to spiritual formation.
Sponsor: Center for Courage & Renewal
Contact: www.couragerenewal.org/clergy813

*September 7, 2013, Saturday, 9:30–4:30pm
THE ART OF AGING: Celebrating Elderhood
Durham NC
Join a circle of women as we explore our experience of aging and discover ways to embrace the opportunities and challenges of this rich time of life. Contemplate awakening to the adventure of conscious aging and the many possible gifts of enlivenment.
Leaders: Lyndall Hare, PhD gerontologist, and Anita McLeod, Director of the RCWMS Elder Women Project
Cost: \$85, some scholarships
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*September 19, 2013, Thursday, 7:00 pm
READING: Elaine Neil Orr, *A Different Sun*
Durham, NC
Cost: Free. Please RSVP and we'll send directions
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*September 22–29, 2013
WEEK OF QUIET & WRITING FOR WOMEN
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC
An unstructured week that includes days of quiet and writing and evenings of readings and conversation.
Cost: \$750, includes lodging and meals.
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*October 12, 2013, Saturday, 9:30 am–3:30 pm
HARVESTING OUR STORIES: Collecting Our Wisdom
Durham, NC
The autumn of our lives is a time to harvest the wisdom of our lives, 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 pass on our wisdom. For women 55 and older.
Leaders: Liz Dowling-Sendor and Anita McLeod
Cost: \$85, some scholarships
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*October 19, 2013 9:30–4:30pm
COUNCIL OF ALL BEINGS
New Hope Camp & Conference Center, Chapel Hill, NC
Leaders: Ann Simon Koppelman & Anita McLeod
A chance for people to experience their connection with the natural world by speaking in the voice of an endangered being, such as a plant, an animal, a rock, etc.
Details: TBA
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*October 27, 2013, Sunday, 1:00 pm–4:00 pm
WOMEN & MONEY
Durham, NC
Leaders: Anita McLeod & Lisa Gabriel
Cost: \$30
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

Sabbatical

by Martha Abshire Simmons

(Note: Martha Abshire Simmons won second place in the 2013 RCWMS Essay Contest. Enjoy her essay, which is printed here. Guidelines for the next RCWMS Essay Contest will be available in the fall.)

It is January, the month nobody wants; not the event planners, not Travelocity, not the gardeners. The sun and the sap are too low. It is perfect for my annual attempt at a sabbatical.

"What do you do?" ask my friends, vaguely curious. "It is more what I don't do," I say, equally vague, because I don't really know. It is different each time, although the "goal," if there is one, is the same.

The goal, as indistinct as it is insistent, is to come home. But first I have to find it, home that is, underneath the dirty guest room sheets, the leftovers, and the piles of torn wrapping paper. Before that, more guest room sheets, and the shards of pumpkin pie. Before that the seasonal onslaught of ambition as the weather cools and on and on and on, back to the last sabbatical, past airplanes, and surgeries and big and little triumphs and disappointments. All choreographed in the calendar, now worn and marked through, sticky notes still attached, the Bible of last year. All now irrelevant; all of that sequential urgency... vanished.

The momentum of it all pushing into the eddy that is New Year's Eve, leaving us tumbled and breathless, washed up onto 2013, and January.

It takes awhile to find my way out of the current to the shore. It is easier to just jump back in, keep going, keep fighting for a foothold in the midst of it all, but I can't. I've learned I can't. I don't ever get that foothold in the midst of the current, except occasionally a false one, where I'm caught in a tangle, a snare of refuse piled up where the current no longer flows.

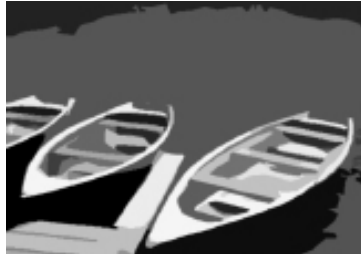
I have to step out, completely, on the shore, and watch for a while, watch it go by. It isn't easy, as there are so many sweet little boats that go by, with friends on them, waving to me, "come here and here and here, look at the treats we have on board", or "only you can help with this project, it has your name on it, come here and here and here."

It takes awhile for me to let them go on, to not grab onto the ropes they keep throwing me, as if to rescue me from this standing still, this boring standing still.

It is boring, at times, and terrifying at times, when there are no more boats going by and it is just me, on the shore, alone and maybe that is always the way it is going to be now, alone and useless, me, by myself, having betrayed all the causes I care about by letting them go by without grabbing the rope. Maybe those friends will find new friends with whom to have coffee and swap stories. Maybe when February comes they will have forgotten my phone number, deleted my email address, Martha Who?

That's part of the risk of this slowing down; this quieting all the external voices so I can hear the internal one. Another part of the risk is that there will be nothing to hear. That I have layered it over too thickly. I won't be able to hear it; it will have abandoned me and there will be no call, no quiet that will gradually grow in me, no home that will spread into me.

I have to start as if it will happen, eventually. The ritual unfolds. I come to the desk every morning for 45-minute increments, then 15 minute breaks (I set the timer; it



seems ridiculous, but I do) and do that at least three times, consecutively, phone unplugged, email hidden.

I still shower, thank God. I still exercise, because at this age I have no choice, I still put on clean clothes because all these are my fears: that without having to be in public view I will just devolve into a sniveling smelly lump. And I have a partner who lives with me, which keeps me attached to some modicum of pride, however modest.

I read, most years choose an author, always a woman whose work has spoken to me in the past year. Following the advice of a beloved high school English teacher, I "read her whole," meaning everything she wrote, consecutively, start to finish. George Eliot and May Sarton have been favorites.

I haven't done that this year. With my mother moving into assisted living in what can only be called an extraordinarily bumpy transition, the upheaval slammed into the holidays and I just didn't get around to the decision and the ordering of all the used books.

That's all right. It has to be, because here it is mid-January, and I'm still reading in this and that that is already on the bookshelves of an Amazon One-Click Junkie.

It has been less than a week at this point, less than a week. Less than a week of not going to the grocery, or the vet, or the drugstore, or to coffee with friends, of keeping my commitment to sit on the desk chair. Less than a week of taking a lunch break at noon, then a walk in the woods, maybe a nap, a few dishes, a little laundry before starting supper, reading and writing throughout.

Less than a week and yet I can already feel myself settling. I am calmer between the attacks, the interior verbal bombardment: Who do you think you are, you privileged slothful, self-absorbed philistine? The earth is warming, vast numbers of children are starving, women are being beaten, gardens are not being sown, all because you think you are so special that you have no responsibilities and you can take "time off." Time off from what? Your privileged life???? And not-very-creative permutations thereof....

Those voices are beginning to quieten and older wiser ones are beginning to be heard. I know because I am ever so slightly less reactive. I feel less and less like a punching bag. Then I talked with my dear mother, who at nearly ninety, is in her first three months in her new home, an assisted living facility in East Tennessee, and she tells me that she had an attack of diarrhea that morning, and listening between the lines, it may have actually occurred while she was in her wheelchair in the dining room, at breakfast. Oh please no, please. She still wants to go home; she wants to drive. She can't walk, a very abrupt development, and this is home now, even though she is convinced she is on the verge of being kicked out. And she may be, I don't know, but if she is that is remarkably complicated and this is January, my month for de-complicating, un-complicating, simplifying. So I repeat my January mantra: Let it go, let it go, let it go. Yes, this too.

Gradually, oh so gradually, through the narrow gate maintained by consistently unplugging the phone, consistently sitting in the chair, through the rhythm of reading and writing and having my mouth be closed, there is a world underneath that is emerging. A new territory: richer, deeper than where I have been living. The whole point of January is to give myself a chance at a new home base, at this one, where when the world comes streaming by with all its wild seduction, I can

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Climate...

the most conservative government in the world thinks it is safe to burn. If we use it at current rates, we will continue to do damage to the climate and the earth.

According to McKibben, we have had a fairly stable climate for about 10,000 years. In the last 200 years, we have burned enough coal, oil, and gas (releasing CO2 into the atmosphere) to raise the temperature of the atmosphere one degree Celsius and substantially melt the ice caps. All the scientists and even conservative governments like ours agree that if we raise the atmospheric temperature another degree, we will have a global climatic disaster on our hands.

If we want to preserve our planet, 350.org and many scientists are telling us we have to reduce the amount of CO2 in the atmosphere from its current level of 392 parts per million ("ppm") to below 350 ppm. You can learn more about the details in Bill McKibben's Rolling Stone article, "Global Warming's Terrifying New Math," or at 350.org,

One very pressing question is how to persuade oil companies that make huge profits by exploiting fossil fuels to change their ways. McKibben's answer is to hit them in their profits by beginning a divestiture campaign like the one that helped to end apartheid in South Africa. He also encourages organizations such as pension funds, denominations, colleges, and universities to divest their holdings in the fossil fuel industry. (Right off the bat, I thought of the Presbyterian Church, Smith College, Duke University, and the State of North Carolina as large institutions I could ask to divest.)

I sold what little oil and gas stock I had decades ago, because I got mad at the way the industry was behaving, but divesting was only a first step. I still benefit from the industry in myriad ways.

I've been moved by the activism of some of my friends. Anita McLeod, Rachael Wooten, and Amy Kellum went to Washington, DC in February to protest the Keystone pipeline. Anita spoke at hearings about fracking in North Carolina, and Rachael traveled to Charlotte in May to speak at a Duke Energy shareholders meeting where she appealed to fellow shareholders to oppose a proposed rate hike, because the money in the rate hike will be used for dirty energy. She advocated for clean energy which would make further rate hikes unnecessary.

I encourage you to do the math. Read Bill McKibben's article. Think about whether you might personally divest from oil and gas stocks, if you happen to own any, and encourage large institutions you are connected with to do the same. Meanwhile, keep walking places, riding your bike, turning down the heat and lights, attending protests, writing emails, calling Congress, and talking with your friends. It's the only planet we have, and if we don't look after it, there won't be any place for future generations to live.



Sabbatical...

recognize it for what it is. Where I am more deeply rooted, so that when the boats go by, in all their fantastic colors and the wonderful music I can enjoy them for what they are, without having to go for each ride: this one and this one and this one, each time hoping that the satisfaction of that particular ride will be enough.

Instead, I am hoping that by taking time out on the bank, I will give these roots enough time to sink in, to a soil rich enough to feed me, roots strong enough to hold me, to help bring up the juice that will help me choose more carefully, to respond more fully, more honestly, with more integrity, more life.

Martha Abshire Simmons is a refugee from academia and corporate America who now homesteads lite near Charlotte. She is still trying to reconcile "you go girl" support of feminist theory with the satisfying smell of clean laundry. You can read more at: www.briarpatchnorthcarolina.blogspot.com.

RCWMS

RCWMS is a thirty-five-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 especially grateful for support from the Kalliopeia Foundation and from Emerald Isle Realty.

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ISSN 0890-7676
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