

South of the Garden

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

Volume 35, Number 2

June 2014

News

A cold winter and a cool, damp spring caused bushes, flowers, and trees to bloom with more energy and color than in recent years. At RCWMS, we're busy making plans for programs in the coming months. The first two are in June.

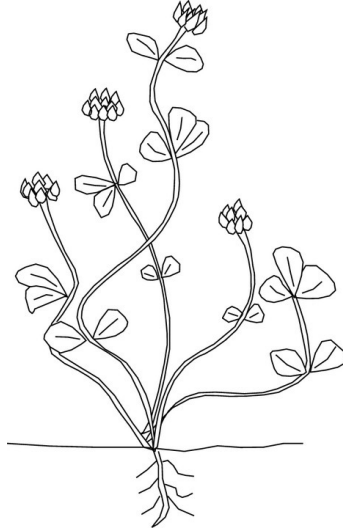
Anita McLeod and Sherylyn Pitt will lead SOUL CIRCLE: LONGING FOR EARTH on June 14, at a lovely home in Durham. Art, contemplation, and group sharing will aid a multi-generational group of participants to explore the soul's longing for a healing connection with the natural world.

Next, we will offer a great writing workshop, THE FRIST DRAFT IS THE EASY PART, on June 28. Stu Horwitz, author of *Blueprint Your Bestseller*, has developed a fabulous method for revising a manuscript that works for fiction or non-fiction. I took his workshop a year ago and it made such a difference to one of my writing projects. I was a little stuck, but Stu's method gave me hope and clear steps to follow. You will find Stu inspiring and his Book Architecture Method incredibly helpful.

In the fall, RCWMS will be an enthusiastic sponsor of HOMEGROWN: NC WOMEN'S PREACHING FESTIVAL. This event will take place over two days, October 23–24, at Trinity Avenue Presbyterian Church in Durham. Previous festivals have been deeply meaningful to the wide variety of clergy and laywomen who attended. This ecumenical gathering provides wonderful preaching from conference participants, great food, and plenty of time for conversation about the art of proclamation in all its forms. Join in the prayer, nourishment, worship, and celebration.

Lizzie McManus, one of our fabulous interns last year, will be with us again this summer. She just graduated from Mount Holyoke in May and plans to enter Duke Divinity School in the fall. She will help us organize the women's preaching festival and will work on an archival project about Sr. Evelyn Mattern, a Catholic sister who once served as the social justice officer for the NC Council of Churches. Lizzie's internship will be supported by both RCWMS and the NC Council of Churches.

Meanwhile, we encourage everyone to attend Moral Mondays in Raleigh at 5:00 pm during the short (summer) session of the NC General Assembly. These public demonstrations call attention to the right-wing agenda of the current legislature, which recently cut unemployment, limited voter access, and refused federal dollars for health care. Nonviolent acts of civil disobedience got more than 900 people arrested during Moral Mondays in 2013. People were arrested for standing in the state legislative building and trying to speak up for those North Carolinians in the greatest need. Forward together; not one step back!



Gratitude

by Mary Edwards

(The following essay won second place in the 2014 RCWMS Essay Contest. Details for the 2015 contest will be available in the fall.)

As my partner Ann and I walked in the door from delivering open house invitations to our new neighbors, the phone was ringing. I answered it.

"Hi. I'm Annabella. I'm your neighbor. I drink beer." I responded, "Great! We'll have beer. We look forward to meeting you!"

As if she thought I might not have understood, she said, "Not the hard stuff. Not wine. Beer." I started to say something friendly and reassuring, but the line went dead. She just hung up, so I knew the phone call was over.

Annabella calls herself "colored" and I'm white. She was born in 1920 and grew up in New Orleans. I was born in 1964 and grew up in Raleigh. Annabella grew up in a poor family, while my parents were a doctor and a nurse. She didn't graduate from high school. I have two advanced degrees. I grew up Southern Baptist, and she grew up Catholic. Annabella loved her husband, Brad, and I love my partner, Ann. Our lives have been very different in many ways, and we have been good friends since that phone call eighteen years ago.

Both Annabella and I have slowed down over the years. Annabella's "practically ninety-four," and her knee bothers her. She doesn't hear well, and sometimes loses her hearing aids, so I have to shout to be heard. Sometimes she gets confused about the day. I'm almost fifty and have had two brain tumors over the last seven years. I have low vision, fatigue and balance struggles as a result of the tumors, neurosurgery and radiation.

We attend the Silver Sneakers class at the YMCA with other exercisers, who are mostly in their seventies and eighties. I am the youngest member of the class, and she is among the oldest. She is the best dressed, with matching shoes, hat, gloves, and scarf. Last Halloween, I dressed up as Annabella, wearing a gold hat with black polka dots (she had left it at our house after dinner one night), cute black and white sneakers, teal and black striped socks (a Christmas gift from her), and large rimmed purple glasses. I'm not sure that the other members of the class noticed that I was dressed as Annabella, but many told me how nice I looked.

In class, we sit in chairs, tap our toes and lift our weights to music. (Everyone whistles and sings along with "Everyone knows it's Windy....") For coordination, we throw rubber balls in the

(Continued inside.)

Calendar

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

*June 10, 2014, 11:30 am–2 pm (2nd Tues. each month)
THE ART OF CONSCIOUS AGING: An Ongoing Group

Colony Hills Clubhouse, 3060 Colony Rd., Durham, NC
This is an open group. Newcomers welcome. No fee to attend. No need to register. Bring a bag lunch.
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*June 14, 2014, Saturday (9:30am–3:30pm)

SOUL CIRCLE: Longing for Earth

A comfortable private home with a cat, Durham, NC
Through the use of images, solo eco-contemplation, arts, and council share, this intergenerational retreat will support us in exploring our soul's longing for a healing connection with the natural world.

Leaders: Sherylyn Pitt and Anita McLeod

Cost: \$80

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

To register, print registration form and mail it in or register online at www.rcwms.org/calendar.html.

June 19, 2014, Thursday, 7:30 pm

CONCERT: Holly Near with emma's revolution

Community Church, 106 Purefoy Rd, Chapel Hill, NC

The Standing on the Side of Love Concerts focus on a social justice issue. This concert's focus is on connecting our interfaith community with each other in the Moral Monday tradition. Her music certainly fits the Forward Together tradition.

Cost: \$25.

Contact: Ginger Long gingerlong2@gmail.com

*June 28, 2014, Saturday, 2:00–4:30pm

THE FIRST DRAFT IS THE EASY PART

Durham, NC

The First Draft is the Easy Part will introduce writers to the Book Architecture Method, a process for organization and revision of fiction and narrative non-fiction that has helped bestselling writers transform their messy manuscripts into polished books. An engaging presentation will provide examples of the Book Architecture Method in action, alternating with in-depth workshop exercises. The First Draft is the Easy Part assumes nothing of a writer's previous knowledge of technique, nor how much of their manuscript is complete. Accomplished and aspiring writers alike will leave with the confidence that they too can create a compelling narrative.

Leader: Stuart Horwitz is the founder and principal of Book Architecture, a firm of independent editors based in Providence and Boston, and the author of *Blueprint Your Bestseller: Organize and Revise any Manuscript with The Book Architecture Method* (Penguin/Perigee).

Cost: \$35 (includes a copy of *Blueprint Your Bestseller*)

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

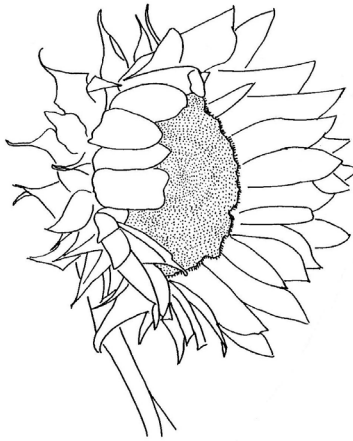
To register, go to www.rcwms.org/calendar.html and print registration form or follow links to register online.

July 7–10, 2014

OUT OF THE DEEP: Young Clergy Women Project
2014 Summer Conference

Westminster Presbyterian Church, Minneapolis, MN

As religious leaders, it can sometimes feel as though we are wading in the waters of chaos when it comes to trying to discover God's call and God's will for us—as well as for the communities we serve. What is God calling us to do? Where is God leading our faith communities? How can we recognize God's



hopes and dreams for us? Drawing on her passion and experience, Ruth Harvey will be our guide as we explore the practice of discernment in a variety of spiritual traditions.

Details: www.youngclergywomen.org/conference/

*September 21–28, 2014

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 13–17, 2014

WISDOM SHARING: A Deepening Retreat with Alice Walker, Gloria Steinem and Dr. Chung Hyun Kyung
Ghost Ranch, Aiquiu, NM

This retreat is designed to allow women and men to be stirred, taught and guided by exceptional teachers and mentors, women who have deep feminine wisdom and life experience.

Cost: \$375 to \$1,200 depending on housing options

Contact: Ghost Ranch, registrar@GhostRanch.org,
www.ghostranch.org

*October 23–26, 2014 (7:00 pm Thursday to 3:00 pm Sunday)

HERONS WALK ON WATER'S EDGE, A Retreat
Cedar Cross Retreat Center, Louisburg NC (north of Raleigh) www.cedarcrossretreat.org

She walks along the water's wooded edge. Her steps intentional. Heron stands knowing wisdom is rooted in intuition, imagination, and bodily sensations. Her observation is keen. During this intergenerational retreat, we will return to our natural pace and draw closer to Sacred Mystery embodied in the earth community. We will find the Divine in our own reflections, in each other and in "all of our relations." Through soul circles and eco-contemplative practices, we open to the most relevant reciprocal healing medicine of our time, intimate relationship with the natural world.

Leaders: Sherylyn Pitt and Anita McLeod

Cost: \$395 before Oct. 1. After Oct. 1, cost is \$425.

Single room is \$50 extra. To register, go to www.rcwms.org/calendar.html & print registration form or follow links to register online.

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

*October 23–24, 2014

HOMEGROWN: NC Women's Preaching Festival
Trinity Avenue Presbyterian Church, Durham, NC

Hundreds of Christian clergywomen in North Carolina are faithfully and creatively engaging in ministries where they proclaim the Word of God, week after week. In an ecumenical spirit of love and collegiality, we will lift up the voices of local clergywomen to encourage and inspire; share and learn; and to hone our craft. Together we will hear wonderful preaching from conference attendees and have time for group conversations on the art of proclamation in all its forms. We will pray, eat, worship, and celebrate together.

Sponsors: Duke Divinity School Women's Center and RCWMS

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

An Internet registration site will be set up soon.

Future Weeks of Quiet & Writing:

January 2–9, 2015

May 3–10, 2015

September 20–27, 2015

Gratitude...

air and clap once before catching them again. In another exercise, our right feet circle clockwise while we snap in a counter-clockwise motion. The coordination is challenging, so we laugh.

Annabella always thanks me for introducing her to this class, and she thanks Ann for driving. Annabella says, "It's important to say thank you and you're welcome. 'Don't mention it' or 'No problem'—what is that?"

On warm, sunny days when Ann can't take us to class, we walk on the path around the park down the street. I struggle going downhill, and she struggles uphill, so we're slow. We rest on benches at the halfway mark and cheer for kids on tricycles.

As we sit, Annabella shares stories from her past. She was raised by her mother, who was "one hundred percent Cherokee Indian" and was quick with a switch, and her father, an African-American man who carried the family name of slave owners who owned his grandparents.

Young Annabella and her eight siblings did what they had to do to raise money. For a while, they raised alligators for a wealthy family. They'd feed the 'gators by reaching way down into their throats, but the 'gators never bit them. Annabella says that they knew where their next meal was coming from. She says, "We were poor, but we had fun. People would say to Mama, 'Those are some beautiful kids!' and Mama would say, 'And they all got the same pa.'"

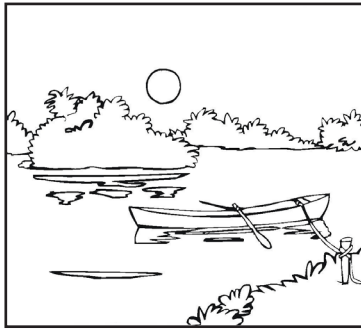
Just before the start of the Second World War when Annabella was nineteen, her fiancé, Brad, sent \$13 for her to make the train trip from New Orleans to Seattle, where he was living. However, Annabella's mother used the money to pay the rent: \$14 a month. Brad sent another \$13, and again her mother used the money for the rent. The next time, he sent a train ticket (smart guy), and Annabella finally took the train to Seattle.

Annabella was beautiful, with long dark hair and a shapely figure. She liked to dress well. Brad found Annabella a place to live with other ladies. When he took her to her new home, several men sitting in the foyer threw silver dollars in the air, wagering on Annabella. Brad told her, "Get your things. We're moving you out of here. This place is for prostitutes." She asked, "What's a prostitute?"

Soon after Annabella arrived in Seattle, Pearl Harbor was bombed, and she became a riveter at Boeing. She'll still show you her muscle. She says that when mechanics needed someone strong, they'd call for "the Indian."

As we continue our journey around the park, we look forward to eating at Annabella's favorite restaurant. The staff knows her, and she knows what to order: "that teepee thing" (chicken satay salad). The staff also knows that she likes her Bud Light with tomato juice.

At dinner she tells Ann and me about a time when a Boeing machinist who wasn't paying attention came so close to her head with his drill that he cut



a part down the middle of her hair. She was not injured, but she was mad. Being a Catholic doesn't restrict her from cursing a blue streak, which she did under the circumstances and repeats now. Other diners look over to make sure everything is okay. They smile when they see that it's Annabella. Everyone here knows her name.

Another time when the three of us are at dinner, Annabella is upset about a good friend with Alzheimer's. "She didn't know her butt from a shotgun," Annabella says, shaking her head. Her eyes tear a moment, but then she grins and lets go with a cannon-ball burst of laughter. Annabella reflects on her advancing age and says, "The Lord takes care of fools and mules. And I'm no fool." When we have all gotten our beers, Annabella makes a toast: "Here's to those of us who are left."

Annabella's not a complainer, but when she does have a gripe, she'll share it, quoting her mom: "If it's not one thing, it's two." Annabella says that young people have educated smarts, but old women have wits, and she points to her temple. Yes, Annabella has wits.

At the end of dinner, she says, "I'm going to live another ten years, and I'm going to LIVE. I've had a good life. When I go, you can say, 'That was a semi-good woman.'" She adds, "I don't want to die in my sleep. I want to moan. I want to reminisce."

When Annabella learns that we celebrate Advent in our Methodist Church, she is surprised. "Oh!" she says. "Your church is a facsimile of ours!" She's been a Catholic all her life, and she never misses mass, but she has supported Ann and me as a lesbian couple since we met her. When I ask about her support in spite of Catholic doctrine, she points to her temple again. She says, "I have my own mind."

My disposition, like Annabella's, is mostly sunny, but sometimes worries about the future cloud my day, or my heart aches with the losses I've experienced with my tumors. At these times, I feel old before my time, but Annabella keeps me rooted in the present, reminding me of how joyful it is to live. She keeps me young.

My life is richer because Annabella is my neighbor and my friend. I feel more loved in this world because she loves me. My life is fuller because she is in it. And our health challenges—her age and my limitations because of brain tumors—remind us both not to take one another or this time in our world for granted. We are slow and we have our struggles, but mostly we are grateful, to one another, to the people we love, to a beautiful world, and to a God who loves us.

Mary Edwards grew up in Raleigh, NC and graduated from Davidson College in 1986. After a twenty-seven year career in secondary education, disabilities from brain tumors and their treatments required her to leave her career. She is currently a Masters of Social Work student at the University of Washington in Seattle and plans to become a therapist for people with life-changing health conditions.

Web

by Jeanette Stokes

Each day during the recent RCWMS week of quiet, I went for a walk to the marsh that borders one side of Trinity Center. I love the "back side" of North Carolina's barrier islands just as much as I love the beach.

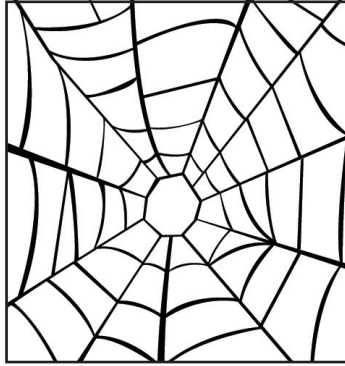
On my walk one afternoon, I came upon a spider spinning her web. I stopped and watched her for the longest time, shielding my eyes from the sun, which was low in the sky directly behind the web. I tried looking at the web from the other side, but it disappeared from view, so I went back to watching and shielding my eyes. The spider carefully laid down thread after delicate thread near the center of the web. When she had just the number she seemed to want, she crawled into the center and drew in her legs to wait.

I walked on to the marsh and sat down at the end of a long narrow dock that extends out into the marsh grasses and reeds at the water's edge. A red-winged blackbird was sitting in a tree a couple hundred feet from me singing, or warbling, or trilling. I'm not never sure how to describe the bird's song.

And then I saw a red-winged blackbird at close range. One came and sat on the dock with me, about twenty feet away. The sun behind me lit up the bright splash of red on its wing and the thin white stripe below the red slash. It sat long enough for me to study it and take it in before flying across the marsh to perch in the top of an apparently dead tree.

I saw a red-winged blackbird at close range! The fact that I could see the details of the markings on the bird—this miracle was not lost on me. Cataract surgery last summer restored my vision so I could see the bright splash of red, and I could see the dolphins yesterday, and I could see the spider, still curled up in the center of her web when I walked back by her on my way home.

Ariadne at the center of the web. To entangle, to teach, or to bless? A web, so like the labyrinth with an open center just waiting for you and for me.



Expertise

A Tiny Area of Expertise

by Betty Wolfe

My husband always asks me to, "Sign the card." The birthday card, say, or get well or sympathy, for a son, daughter, grandchild, friend. This is code for "Write a message in there, too." I am the expert Occasion Messenger.

I enjoy my job. I call up the person in my memory and imagination. I wait for meaning to arise, a connection, a meaning-fullness of this occasion for this person, and for us. Then I find words for it.

The acknowledgement of another's existence—in joy, sorrow, celebration. Searching, reaching, within our universe of personal and private acquaintance for something remarkable, or even unremarkable, and telling it all the same. Hieroglyphs on a roadside stone.

Betty Wolfe, M. Div., is a Board Certified biofeedback practitioner with thirty-five years of experience. Within her business, Lessons with Ease, she offers integrative and personalized learning opportunities to help with pain and stress related issues. She is a past RCWMS board member.

RCWMS

RCWMS is a thirty-six-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 contribute, contact RCWMS or visit www.rcwms.org. We are especially grateful for support of the Kalliopeia Foundation, Emerald Isle Realty, and the estate of Nancy Ann Monte Santo.

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