

# South of the Garden

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

Volume 35, Number 4

December 2014

## Autumn

by Jeanette Stokes

Maple leaves floating on a pond. The crunch of acorns underfoot. I fear that I have not spent enough time this year watching the changing pattern of those maple leaves or noticing the sound of acorns. What was I thinking? They only perform this particular dance once a year. A Japanese tea gathering I attended at Duke Gardens in early November helped me to remember.

Both Spring and Fall are celebrated in Japanese art and culture. Special attention is given to the blooming of the cherry blossom trees, the falling blossoms, and the “snow” the blossoms make in the wind and on the ground around the base of tree. Similarly, the brightly colored fall leaves of maple trees are held in high regard and honored in art and poetry. While walking in the gardens before the tea gathering, I was stopped in my tracks by the stunning beauty of reds and yellows.

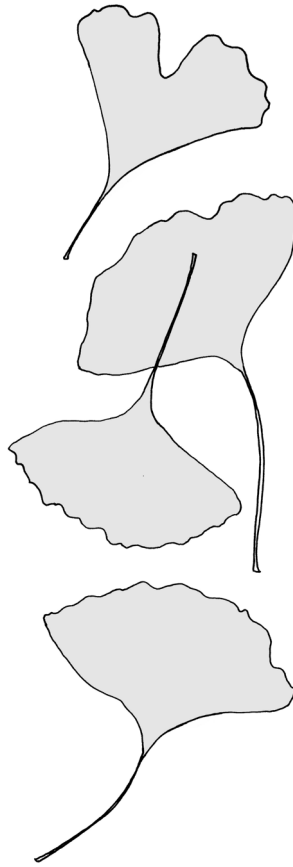
When I attended the tea gathering, the theme was “Dancing Leaves.” The implements and utensils used in making, serving, and drinking tea that day had been carefully chosen to reflect the autumn theme. The brushed calligraphy on the scroll that was hanging in the alcove translates as “Hills and rivers are filled with autumn leaves.” The tea container, which Chizuko Sueyoshi, the tea group leader, recently brought from Japan, was shaped like an acorn. The sweets served before tea were in the shape of fall leaves and flowers. And the first three tea bowls were named autumn wind, colored maple leaves, and autumn sky.

The bamboo tea scoop used by the host was one Chizuko had carved out of black bamboo that grew right there in Duke Gardens. The simple scoop is one of the most honored items in the tea house. This particular one had the poetic name, “autumn sky,” which recalls a poem by Bishop Shinkei (1406-1475):

With whom can I share  
The feelings wrought in my heart  
By the autumn sky  
In the reeds, the evening wind  
In the clouds, wild geese calling.

After the tea gathering ended, I walked back through the gardens to admire more trees dressed in their finest colors. One tall yellow tree at the end of a long path was catching the sun and glowing as though lit from within—against its still green neighbors. I could almost imagine a deity speaking a message from within the tree.

I have been keeping my eye on the Ginkgo tree in the park next to my house. It still held onto its bright yellow leaves in mid-November. But I knew that one day very soon, it will release its leaves, almost all at once, as though sending a prayer of blessing or gratitude, celebrating this season and reminding us of the delight to come in the spring.



## Day One

by Jeanette Stokes

Day One. That’s what we called it in North Carolina. October 10, 2014--the first day people of the same gender could legally marry in our state. The announcement came late on a Friday afternoon and left us surprised and a bit confused at first.

A couple of weeks earlier, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals had ruled on a case in Virginia, opening the way for judges to declare the ban unconstitutional in other states in the circuit. There were four cases winding their way through the courts in NC.

On October 10, the Rev. Carla Gregg and her partner Lindsey Kearns celebrated their fifth anniversary. They had a wedding in 2009 at a United Church of Christ in Durham, where Carla was a pastor. They were hoping for a ruling on October 10 so they could get legally married on their anniversary.

Carla, Lindsey, and their daughter Mia waited at the courthouse that afternoon. RCWMS Board Chair Rev. Lori Pistor waited with them for a while. About 4:30 pm news came that the federal judge in Greensboro who was most likely to offer a ruling had decided to delay for a few days. Since that seemed like the end of it for the day, Carla, Lindsey, and Mia went to Motorco, the site designated for a celebration whenever the time came.

Just before 6:00 pm, I was on my way to a birthday dinner in downtown Durham when I got a text from Lori Pistor saying, “Ban just overturned! Yes! Judge in Charlotte. About 30 mins. ago!” I contacted my colleague Meghan Florian to see what she knew; she said she was at Motorco celebrating with Carla and Lindsey. At the birthday party, my friends and I toasted the repeal of Amendment One, though we were a little confused about what had happened.

Apparently, a judge in Asheville surprised everyone by ruling on another of the four cases. The United Church of Christ, Carla’s denomination, was a plaintiff in that case, arguing that the state was impinging on the religious freedom of clergy by preventing them from officiating at same-sex marriages. The judge in Asheville ruled that Amendment One was unconstitutional. Day One had arrived, but it was after 5:00 and the Durham Register of Deeds was closed. You can’t have a legal marriage without a license.

Carla and Lindsey then heard that the Wake County Register of Deeds was keeping her office open for the evening and issuing marriage licenses. So they called a clergy friend who agreed to meet them at the courthouse, hopped in the car, and hurried to Raleigh. The ACLU met them with roses and chocolates and great celebration. After obtaining a marriage licence, Carla and Lindsey were legally married on the courthouse lawn on October 10, their fifth wedding anniversary.

(Continued on inside.)

# Calendar

Now through January 25, 2015

PAULI MURRAY: Imp, Crusader, Dude, Priest  
The Levine Museum of the New South, Charlotte, NC  
This exhibit offers a timeline of Murray's ambitions, accomplishments, and struggles.  
Details: [museumofthenewsouth.org](http://museumofthenewsouth.org)

November 30–December 27, 2014

ILLUMINATED: An Online Journey into the Heart of Advent & Christmas with Jan Richardson  
Find spaces for reflection and be drawn deep into this season that shimmers with mystery and possibility.  
Cost: \$90 per person (group rates available)  
Contact: [janrichardson.com/adventretreat](http://janrichardson.com/adventretreat)

December 12, 2014, Friday, 6:00 pm

READING: *Power Through Partnership: How Women Lead Better Together*, Betsy Polk & Maggie Ellis Chotas  
Cameron's, 370 E. Main St., Carrboro, NC  
Join Betsy and Maggie for an evening featuring sisters Bridget McMillan and Wendy Smith, of Cameron's.  
More: [powerthrupartnership.com](http://powerthrupartnership.com)

\*December 14, 2014, Sunday, 7:00 pm

INTERFAITH CELEBRATION  
Beth El Synagogue, Watts St. Durham, NC  
All are welcome. Please bring a candle.  
Suggested donation: \$5–10  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

\*January 2–9, 2015

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](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

\*January 6, 2015

EPIPHANY LABYRINTH WALKS  
Various locations. Details forthcoming.  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

\*January 14–February 4, 2015 (four Wednesdays)  
6:30–8:00 pm

WRITING FEARLESSLY  
Community Church, 106 Purefoy Rd., Chapel Hill, NC  
Fear can be a constant companion to a writer, creating doubt and reluctance. In this class, we will learn to recognize many forms of fear, how it interferes with our work, and techniques to move past roadblocks. Whether you want to start writing or have experience with nonfiction, fiction, or poetry, this class will help you. We'll use in-class and take-home writing exercises, essays, and observations from other fearless writers, and our own work to learn how to write more bravely. Class dates: January 14, 21, 28, and February 4  
Leader: Julia Green holds an MFA in fiction writing from the Iowa Writers' Workshop.  
Cost: \$60.  
Register online: [www.rcwms.org/calendar](http://www.rcwms.org/calendar)  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)  
Questions: Julia Green, [julia.green@gmail.com](mailto:julia.green@gmail.com)

\*January 18, Feb. 15, March 8, 2015, 1:30 pm–4:30 pm

BEFRIENDING DEATH: A Sunday Afternoon Series  
In a private home with a cat, Durham, NC  
Death can be a great teacher. Gather with a group of women to discover that in contemplating death, we can revitalize our lives.  
Leaders: Betsy Barton, Stacy Grove, Anita McLeod, and Jocelyn Streid  
Cost: \$90.  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

\*February 20–23, 2015, Friday to Monday  
MAKING YOUR ART: An Advanced Workshop with Sue Sneddon  
Emerald Isle, NC  
Workshop designed for those who have taken Sue's "Finding Your Medium" and want to do more.  
Leader: Sue Sneddon has been a full-time painter since 1984. Much of her work has concentrated on the ocean, especially the NC coast, where she now lives.  
Cost: Workshop & meals \$400. Housing in beautiful beach house, \$125 double or \$225 single.  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

\*February 27–March 1, 2015, Fri. 2 pm–Sun. 2 pm  
FINDING YOUR MEDIUM: A Weekend of Art at the Beach with Sue Sneddon  
Emerald Isle, NC

"I can't draw a straight line." Well, who said you should? Isn't it time to pack up some art supplies and head to the beach? Sue Sneddon will be in residence for a weekend of exploration into various media for painting and drawing. These will include: pencil, pen and ink, charcoal, pastel, oil pastel, watercolor, gouache, acrylics, and some mixed media options. Let's find the ones that float your boat! Sue will provide all art supplies needed for the workshop. You may also bring any art supplies you have.  
Leader: Sue Sneddon (See February 20–23.)  
Cost: Workshop & food, \$375. Housing in beautiful beach house, \$125 double or \$225 single.  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

\*March 20–21, 2015, Fri. 7–9 pm & Sat. 9:30 am–3:30 pm  
MOMENTS MAGNIFIED: Writing Short, Writing Strong—A Writing Workshop with Carol Henderson  
Durham, NC

In this workshop we will select fragments from our lives or our imaginations and create powerful vignettes, which we will string into a necklace of related narrative pearls. We will focus on several aspects of craft: a strong narrative persona, tight thematic control, effective use of reflection, and powerful endings. Come prepared to think and write a lot. For women writers in all genres and levels.  
Cost: \$125.  
Register: <http://bit.ly/1kQve4Z>  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

\*May 3–10, 2015

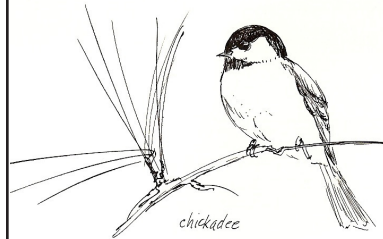
WEEK OF QUIET & WRITING FOR WOMEN  
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC  
An unstructured week that includes days of quiet and writing and evenings of readings and conversation.  
Cost: \$750, includes lodging and meals.  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

Future Week of Quiet & Writing: Sept. 20–27, 2015

## Grief Work...

(Continued from p. 3)

Our project is ambitious. We're nudging young people out of their comfort zone. And we're sure we'll be nudged out of our comfort zone, too. But we're going to forge ahead; we can't wait to see how the youth we meet respond to the workshops. At the very least, they will know what an advance directive is before they (or their parents) need one. We also want to see the connections and contrasts between our death and dying workshops and the RCWMS series for elder women. Death, after all, is as fundamental to human existence as birth. It may, for some, be terrifying—but it is also inherently unifying. It can be broached at any age, and we know that each life stage will bring its own kind of wisdom to the conversation.



Drawing by Sue Sneddon

# Grief Work

by Jehanne Gheith & Jocelyn Streid

It makes sense for older people to think about death and dying, but why might youth be interested in these issues? Do young people need to think about such difficult things? Why? Under the umbrella of RCWMS we, Jehanne Gheith and Jocelyn Streid, are developing and implementing workshops for youth groups to explore these issues. We held our first workshop in September in Pittsboro and are preparing to visit a number of other groups in the next few months.

We knew that it would be difficult for young people to engage with questions about death and dying, but we didn't understand the full extent of the challenge until our first workshop. There we found that small groups worked best to explore the big questions; they brought up issues that were troubling them, both about people (or pets) they knew who had died and about dying in general. Questions ranged from "What happens to a dead body after the person dies?" to "How would you tell your family if you were dying?"

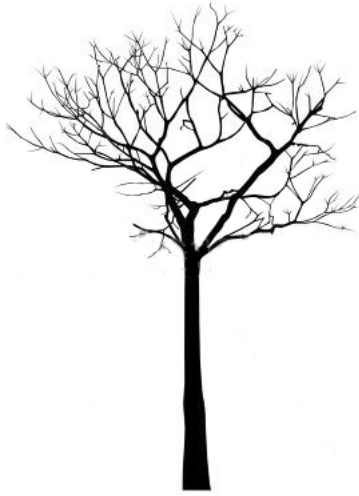
The two of us come to this project at different life stages. Jehanne has worked as a hospice social worker over the past few years in addition to her work on death and trauma in the Soviet Union under the gulag. Jocelyn is a recent college graduate who developed her interest in this challenging topic while working in a hospital in South Africa; she has explored end-of-life issues in London, Malaysia, and Durham.

Through hospice, Jehanne sees patients and families facing hard decisions about such issues as CPR, life support, and how to talk to grandchildren about a terminal diagnosis. Most often these decisions are made in moments of crisis by people who have never really considered them beforehand. This challenges their ability to think clearly and to understand their complicated emotions around these topics. As a society we have failed to create a cultural conversation that might provide context for the inevitable truth that death comes to us all.

Many of the people Jehanne encounters say, "Well, I won't think about that until I need to," or "it's a downer." That is the norm in our culture. But her social work persuades her that, it seems extraordinary—well, dumb—not to think about these issues ahead of time. Retirement can be difficult, too—but we plan for it. And is talking about death necessarily a downer? In her own life, the awareness of limits (including death) often serves to make experiences richer and deeper; it helps her to make better choices each day. And when someone is facing a terminal diagnosis seems like a terrible time to begin to think about these issues. It seems impossible to make good choices when you or someone you love is dying and you have no preparation, when you don't even know some of the basic vocabulary.

As a young person, Jocelyn knows that death feels remote. But, as she has learned in her own communities, and in speaking to various youth group representatives, youth does not preclude heartbreak. She says: Many of the students we've met have encountered mortality and loss early in life. We want to provide a safe space where they can talk about their experiences. We also hope that these discussions give voice to some of the hidden fears, anxieties, and confusion that even the youngest of us may harbor. We don't expect to have the answers; we only hope that we might begin the conversation.

(Continued on previous page.)



# Day One...

Weddings took place on Day One in the few North Carolina cities where registers of deeds kept their offices open. The statewide Day One began when county offices opened on Monday, October 13, 2014.

That day, Facebook posts began appearing before 8:00 am. Perry Morgan walked her dog to the Durham courthouse to welcome couples arriving to be married. Before long, the ACLU, news media, supporters, and couples seeking a license joined her. Rev. Ginger Brasher-Cunningham was on hand to officiate for any who wanted to get married on the spot and, in the next four hours, married over a dozen couples. I dropped by at 10:00 am to see if Ginger needed help. Not then; maybe after lunch. So, I left my contact information and went home to write.

I received a text after lunch saying a couple at the courthouse wanted to be married, so I went back downtown. There, on the courthouse steps, were two men about my age dressed in matching yellow shirts and coordinating ties. They had been together for over three decades and were beaming with excitement. I tied the knot and signed the license. We hugged one another, hugged bystanders, and took pictures. Next came two women with two little children. At least one of the brides said she had grown up Presbyterian and seemed pleased that I was also. Somehow, between chasing one child and holding another, they managed to say their vows and make their family legal in the eyes of the state.

When things got quiet, Emma Baccellieri, a *Duke Chronicle* reporter who was present, went inside to check out the scene in the registrar's office. I sat down on the steps with Tan, a volunteer from the local LGBTQ center, and waited under a bright, clear Carolina-blue sky. After a time, I gave Tan my phone number and said I'd go back to my office. He could reach me if anyone else came along.

I walked back toward my car. While waiting for the light to change at the corner of Main and Roxboro, I spotted two women walking toward me. Dressed in crisp linen shirts in different shades of blue they could have been coworkers on a mission or a couple headed to the courthouse to apply for a marriage license. I hesitated. As they got close I recognized them—Cathy Chandler and Nancy Blood, whom I have known a little for a long time.

"Are you going to get married?" I asked.

"We thought we might."

"I've been here marrying people if you want any help," I said. They said they would think about it. "Well, go on in and get your license. I'll wait and you can decide later," I said as we reached the courthouse steps. "Tan, here, could be a witness and you'd only need one more."

So they went inside. When they reemerged, they had Emma in tow and announced that she had agreed to be a witness. Photographer Jenny Warburg arrived, as did another woman whom I assigned the role of "the congregation."

I then conducted a short ceremony for Cathy and Nancy. Jenny took photographs, as did Emma. Two days later, Cathy, Nancy, and I were on the cover of the *Duke Chronicle* in our matching shades of blue, happy to have the historic moment preserved.

# Befriending

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

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

—A medieval prayer

Death is a fact of life for all of us. We each will enter the experience of dying at some unknown moment in the future, perhaps with a loved one and certainly with our own death. But we live in a culture that denies death, so we are called to take it upon ourselves to consider death and how to “be with” dying. The recent spread of international Death Cafes evidences the desire to explore this taboo topic. In Death Cafes, people gather informally to “increase awareness of death with a view to helping people make the most of their (finite) lives.”

Over the last few years, the RCWMS Elder Women Project has offered an End of Life (EOL) series that provided resources and information on advance care planning, health care directives, legal issues, and burial options. Participants shared their fears surrounding this topic and their experiences with death and learned from one another.

In January, we will begin a Befriending Death series. These Sunday afternoon workshops will invite participants to contemplate death, consider practices that might help them be present to themselves and others in the experience of dying, and reflect on ways to deepen their appreciation of life. Music, poetry, ritual, contemplative practices and small group experiences will be used to enrich the program.

Program leaders include by Betsy Barton, Stacy Grove, Jocelyn Streid and Anita McLeod. Betsy conducts research at Duke on decision-making and patient-provider communication for the seriously ill. She also runs a national program for lay people of all faiths on integrating EOL-related issues into congregations. Stacy, an ordained Interfaith minister, is a spiritual companion for people coping with life transitions, especially life altering illness and EOL. Her work includes providing healing music to bring restoration and balance in ourselves and with the natural world. Jocelyn is a Duke Chapel Pathways Fellow and an RCWMS intern. Anita, a retired RN and health educator, is the director of the RCWMS Elder Women Project.

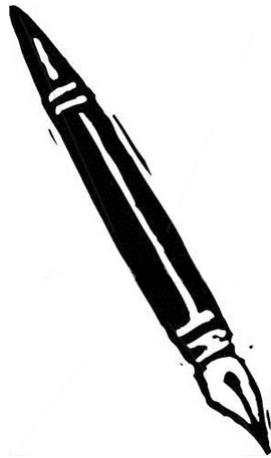
**BEFRIENDING DEATH: A Sunday Afternoon Series**  
January 18, February 15, March 8, 2015

1:30 pm–4:30 pm

Durham, NC

Cost: \$90

(See Calendar page for more details.)



# Essay Contest

RCWMS is committed to supporting women as they find their voices and make them heard. Our 2015 Essay Contest will open for submissions on October 15, 2014. Women eighteen years of age and older may submit previously unpublished nonfiction essays of 1400 words or less.

Essays this year should focus on the theme *Embodying Faith*. We invite submissions that consider this theme in creative ways. How do you embody your faith as a woman? How do you embody your faith or your deeply held values in your life, your work, or your spiritual practices?

Prizes: \$300 for first place, \$200 for second, and \$100 for third. The winning essay will be published in the RCWMS newsletter, *South of the Garden*, March 2015. Winners will be notified by email.

The limit is two essays per person. Submit via our online submissions form at <https://rcwms.submittable.com/submit>. Previous first-place winners and current RCWMS Board members are not eligible. No sermons, please. Do not put your name on your essay(s). Fill out the online cover letter form with the essay's title, your name, address, phone, and email. Submissions open on October 15, 2014 and close on January 15, 2015.

# RCWMS

RCWMS is a thirty-seven-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](http://www.rcwms.org). We are especially grateful for support of the Kalliopeia Foundation, Emerald Isle Realty, Triangle Community Foundation, and the estate of Nancy Ann Monte Santo.

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Jeanette Stokes, Executive Director  
Jennifer McGovern, Administrative Director  
Meghan Florian, Communications Coordinator  
Anita McLeod, Elder Women Project Director

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](http://www.rcwms.org).

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