

South of the Garden

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

Volume 37, Number 3

September 2016

Fall

by Rebecca Welper

With my daughter recently turning six months, I'm starting to come up for air. We've got the basics covered by now: she's eating, sleeping (when she feels like it), and desperately wanting to crawl. Even more impressively, I'm eating (thanks to my partner cooking all the meals) and sleeping (for the most part), and thinking about resuming some aspects of my former life. I'm hoping to write a little more or be able to read something longer than a Facebook post. That's why I love the book reviews in this newsletter. I find them inspiring as a sort of back to school reading list for those of us seeking our own continuing education and inspiration. If you're thirsting for more after reading these reviews, take a look at the RCWMS books and media blog: wordsandspirit.tumblr.com.

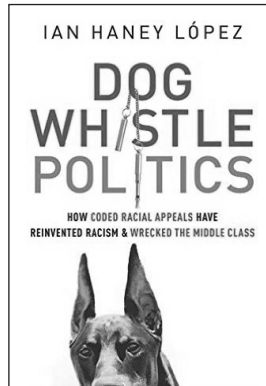
While fully immersed in the day-to-day details of caring for a new being in this world, I also see parallels to caring for elders before they make their journeys to the other side. This summer, Jeanette Stokes has been to Oklahoma twice to visit her 94-year-old mother and 89-year-old stepfather. She says that reading *Being Mortal* has changed the way she thinks about her elders. The series that we're co-sponsoring this fall on the *Being Mortal* book and film tackles the challenges of caring for those we love at the end of their lives. (See page 3 for more on this.)

Neither at the beginning nor near the end of its life, RCWMS had a birthday (technically an incorporation anniversary) this summer and is approaching middle age! We turned 39 in August and will be celebrating our 40th birthday all next year. Stay tuned for more announcements about how to join in the fun.

RCWMS keeps on going because of wonderful people and interesting programs. This quality of perseverance is one thing that Jeanette writes about in her forthcoming book, *Just Keep Going: Advice on Writing and Life*. Jeanette has published five books in the last fourteen years. When asked how she does it, she says she just keeps on going. Look for an announcement about the publication of this book later this fall.

And how do the rest of us keep going, whether caring for others, making strides in our careers, or fighting for justice in an increasingly polarized and hate-filled political climate? After a writing workshop this summer, one of the participants wrote to us, "I slept so well last night, having gotten my inner conflicts down on paper, out of me and shared into a safe place." That's what we hope to do: help folks find connection and healing, so they can get a good night's sleep and go out the next day to keep fighting the good fight. The world needs us out there, more than ever, so come to the Resource Center and let us know what you need to just keep going.

Rebecca Welper leads writing workshops at RCWMS and blogs at creatrixlife.wordpress.com.



Race

by Marcy Litle

A couple of years ago a small group of us at RCWMS took up Ta-Nehisi Coates' challenge to followers of his blog at *The Atlantic* to read and discuss Michelle Alexander's magisterial book on mass incarceration, *The New Jim Crow*. (You can read a brief review on our *Words & Spirit* blog: wordsandspirit.tumblr.com.) The discussions about the book made us want to further explore how racism and white supremacy have profoundly undermined our ability to imagine and move towards the world we want to create. For our second book we took on Coates' brilliant and moving letter to his son, *Between the World and Me*. In this book Coates eloquently describes what it is like to live in America, in Baltimore particularly, in a Black body. He insists on the centrality of embodiment to the Black experience. He also introduces us to the notion of people who "believe themselves to be white," a phrase that he borrowed from James Baldwin. Throughout our subsequent reading we have continued to explore the implications of this provocative phrase.

Our conversations about these two books helped to deepen our understanding of these vital issues, but also showed us how much more we have to learn. So we invited a few more people to join us and kept going. During this past winter and early spring we read three books that focus primarily on the Black experience: *Citizen*, by Claudia Rankine (also with a *Words & Spirit* review); *Americanah*, by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie; and *Just Mercy*, by Bryan Stevenson.

Rankine, a poet, presents essays and prose poems that are part memoir and part social commentary, including an eye-opening essay on the gender and racially-tinged politics around Serena Williams. The words are complemented by stunning artwork; the whole book is a work of art.

In *Americanah* we follow the journey of Ifemelu, a young woman who travels to America from her home in Nigeria to attend college. Through Ifemelu, and Adichie's beautiful prose, we get an intimate portrait of what it is like to encounter America's racial complexity as an African immigrant. And via Ifemelu's blog posts we get a pointed commentary on race in America.

The third book, *Just Mercy*, documents the recent history of the death penalty and the work of the Equal Justice Initiative that Stevenson founded in Montgomery, Alabama. In the book Stevenson intersperses chapters tracing the case of falsely-accused death row inmate Walter McMillian with other chapters outlining the larger politics and issues surrounding the death penalty.

In the past couple of months we have been focusing on whiteness. We started with Jennifer Harvey's *Dear White Christians*, a book that makes a compelling

(Continued on inside.)

Calendar

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

*September 7, 2016, 7:00 pm, Wednesday
A SISTER REFLECTS: John Boswell & LGBTQ History
RCWMS, 1202 Watts St., Durham, NC 27701
Join chaplain Pat Boswell as she reads from her forthcoming memoir. Based on a 30-year correspondence, the memoir chronicles the impact her late brother, Yale historian John Boswell, had on her personally and on the struggle for LGBTQ rights. When John Boswell published *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* in 1980, documenting an inclusive early church, it was praised as groundbreaking and won The National Book Award. So why are so many churches and religious communities still struggling to respect all God's children? Pat will also read selections from John's book, recently reissued in celebration of its 35th anniversary, and lead a discussion on where we are today. Free. No need to register.
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

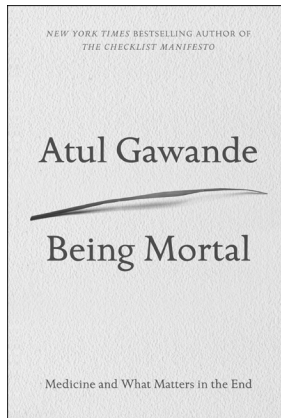
September 9–11, 2016, Friday–Sunday
SISTERLY CONVERSATIONS 2016: Nurturing Our Spirits—Sharing Our Sacred Practices
Kirkridge, Bangor, PA
Focus on spirituality, sexuality, and our LGBTQ lives.
Leader: Mary E. Hunt, feminist theologian and co-director, WATER in Silver Spring, MD.
Cost: \$375. Details: www.kirkridge.org

*September 11, 2016, Sunday, 6:30–8:30 pm
FILM SCREENING of *Being Mortal*
Binkley Baptist Church, Chapel Hill, NC
Join us for a film screening and discussion of the PBS documentary *Being Mortal*. Follow surgeon Atul Gawande as he considers the needs and the desires of patients and families facing terminal illness. The discussion will include ways to identify and communicate wishes about end-of-life goals and preferences. Free. Reservations: <http://bit.ly/binkleybeingmortal>
Sponsors: Binkley Baptist Church and RCWMS
Contact: Betsy Barton, bb3579@frontier.com

September 11–17, 2016
CHOOSING CONSCIOUS ELDERHOOD:
Discovering Purpose, Passion, & the Call to Service in the Elder Third of Life
Laughing Heart Lodge Retreat Center, Hot Springs, NC
An introduction to conscious aging and the inner work it takes to becoming a conscious elder.
Leaders: Ron Pevny and Anne Wennhold
Cost: \$1,095, tuition and meals. For lodging options, contact Karen, 828-622-0165, laughingheartlodge.com.
Contact: Ron Pevny, 970-247-7943,
www.centerforconsciouseldering.com

Sept. 13, 2016, (2nd Tues. each month) 11:30 am–2:00 pm
ART OF CONSCIOUS AGING: A Group for Women
Colony Hills Clubhouse, 3060 Colony Rd., Durham, NC

*September 18–25, 2016
A WEEK OF QUIET & WRITING FOR WOMEN
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC
Come spend a week of quiet and writing with a supportive group of women in Pelican House, at the beautiful Trinity Center on Emerald Isle, NC. We observe silence in the daytime so participants can read, write, or rest. In the evenings we gather to reflect on the day and often share our work with one



another. Room and meals are included. Everyone gets her own room, her own space, her own time.
Cost: \$750, includes lodging and meals.
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*September 27, 2016, Tuesday, 7:00 pm
SPARKLING IN THE DARKNESS: Joy in Pauli Murray's Story
Ahmadih Family Lecture Hall (Garage), Bay 4, Smith Warehouse, Duke University, Durham, NC
The lives of caregivers are often weighted down by stress and vicarious suffering. Mary Moschella, Yale Divinity School Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling, explores narratives of care that "make room for joy." In her new book *Caring for Joy: Narrative, Theology, and Practice* she offers glimpses and glimmers of joy-in-action, found in the narrative accounts of five Christian caregivers. The practices, beliefs, and values identified in these narratives are analyzed so that they might inform a practical, pastoral theology of joy. This presentation highlights one of these figures, Pauli Murray, the noted attorney, poet, and early civil rights activist who later became the first African American woman ordained as an Episcopal priest. Murray's autobiography, seen in its historical context, offers clues illuminating the ways in which joy undergirded the struggle for justice that was her lifelong quest. Sponsors: RCWMS and the Pauli Murray Project at the Duke Human Rights Center/FHI
Free and open to the public
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*October 3, 10, 17, 24 (4 Mondays) 7:00–9:00 pm
SEASONS OF OUR LIVES: An Intergenerational Writing Workshop
RCWMS Office, 1202 Watts St., Durham, NC
We'll explore archetypes such as maiden/mother/crone, and find new metaphors, as we write in a supportive, intergenerational community. Open to all who identify as women.
Leaders: Anita McLeod, director of RCWMS Elder Women Project, and Rebecca Welper, MFA
Cost: Pay your age, by decade (women in their 20s pay \$20, etc., up to \$60 for those 60 or over)
Register: See rcwms.org/calendar.html

*October 13–14, 2016, Thursday–Friday
HOMEGROWN: NC Women's Preaching Festival
Trinity Avenue Presbyterian Church, Durham, NC
Theme: Her Voice Through the Seasons
In an ecumenical spirit of collegiality, we'll lift up the voices of local clergywomen to inspire, learn, and hone our craft. We'll hear wonderful preaching and discuss the art of proclamation in all its forms. We'll pray, eat, worship, and celebrate together.
More details: ncwomenpreaching.wordpress.com

*Oct. 19–Nov. 16, 2016 (5 Wednesdays), 6:30–8:30pm
WRITING FEARLESSLY
Mercury Coworking Studios, 401 W. Geer St., Durham
Fear can be a constant companion to a writer, looking over your shoulder, creating doubt and reluctance, holding you back. In this class, we will learn to recognize the many forms fear takes, how it interferes with writing, and techniques to move past each roadblock. Whether you've never written before but want to start or have experience writing nonfiction, fiction, or poetry, this class will help you learn how to write (and maybe even live!) more bravely. Back by popular demand, this session of Writing Fearlessly will include lots of new material and will be a great re-energizer for writers at any stage.
Leader: Julia Green holds an MFA in fiction writing
Cost: \$140. Register: rcwms.org/calendar.html
Questions: Julia Green, julia.green@gmail.com

Relish

by Meghan Florian

I love food. Growing it, cooking it, eating it, sharing it with friends. I also love to read, so it should come as no surprise that when I came across Lucy Knisley's graphic memoir *Relish: My Life in the Kitchen* I knew I had to have it. I picked up a signed edition at a conference, and Knisley had drawn a fork with an olive stuck on it on the title page, next to her name.

I've been taken with the graphic memoir form ever since I read Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* years ago as a student. For those who are unfamiliar with the genre, imagine comic books, but with a wider range of stories and audiences than what you might traditionally associate with comics. Graphic novels and memoirs have been growing in popularity and earning more critical praise in recent years, as Bechdel's success (she won a MacArthur "Genius Grant" in 2014) demonstrates. Reading *Fun Home*, I fell in love with the way that the text and images work together to tell a story, and the form's ability to express a range of emotions and experiences. I felt like I had been missing out all this time, assuming comics were only about superheroes and villains, when in fact they are about all sorts of things, sometimes even people like me.

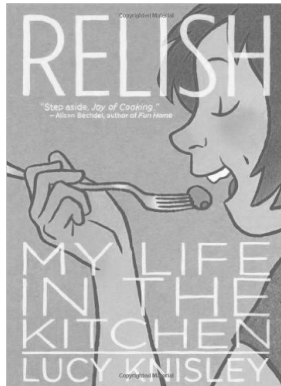
I went looking for more women writing graphic fiction and nonfiction, and that's how I found Lucy Knisley. I identified with Knisley as a narrator immediately, as she shares chapters from her life through the lens of cooking and eating with family and friends. Each chapter of *Relish* contains an illustrated recipe, too, giving the book a deliciously interactive feel. Her mother is a skilled chef, thus Knisley's memoir about food also becomes, ultimately, a memoir about family, and in particular, about the bonds between mothers and daughters, parents and children, and the ways that kitchens can bring us together.

Knisley herself recently gave birth to her first child, and shared humorous snapshots of her sketchbook throughout her pregnancy, and now her first months as a parent, which you can see on her instagram account. These rough sketches offer an honest, loving view of the ups and downs of this particular season, as she and her spouse care for their son. Her next book, *Kid Gloves*, due out in 2018, will be a full fledged graphic memoir about her journey toward parenthood. In the meantime, she's written several other books you can check out while you wait. I particularly recommend *French Milk*, her first book, a travelogue detailing a six-week trip she took to Paris with her mother as a college student. Spoiler alert: she eats a lot of croissants, so you might want to read it at a bakery. Next, I plan to pick up a copy of Knisley's newest book, *Something New: Tales from a Makeshift Bride*, released in June 2016, which details her combined fascination and horror about DIY wedding culture as she planned her own.

It's a delight to see how Knisley's work has grown and changed from that first book until now, always keeping the same personable curiosity and wonder at its core.

Meghan Florian is the RCWMS Communications Director and blogs at www.femmonite.com.

A version of this piece was first published on the RCWMS books and media blog, *Words & Spirit*, where you will find interesting reviews of books and media: wordsandspirit.tumblr.com.



Race...

argument that churches, and by extension other institutions, make a fatal error when they focus their anti-racism efforts on the laudable goal of reconciliation. Harvey argues that before there can be any hope of reconciliation, we must do the slow and arduous work of confronting the white supremacy that permeates our society. She calls for repentance and a "reparations paradigm," building on the work of the Black Power movement and its challenge to white-dominated churches.

More recently we discussed *Dog Whistle Politics* by Ian Haney López, which traces the use of thinly veiled racist language in presidential campaigns since the days of George Wallace and Barry Goldwater. He makes the compelling case that dog whistling (using racially charged images such as "welfare queens," and racially coded language such as the war on drugs or being "tough on crime") has made possible the unraveling of middle-class prosperity through the deliberate actions of those who would shape the world to their own advantage. Not to mention its devastating impact on people of color.

Our conversations have opened our eyes, taught us many things, and helped us to understand how much more we have to learn. After a summer-long hiatus, we will resume in the fall.

Marcy Litle is a member of the board of trustees of RCWMS. This piece was first published on the RCWMS news blog, www.rcwms.org/blog.

Being Mortal

In his 2014 book, *Being Mortal*, Harvard surgeon Atul Gawande points out that in the US we have given over end of life care to a medical model. But aging and the end of life are not simply medical problems. Gawande says that we are suffering from a failure of imagination. There are better ways to provide care and support at the end of life, and he suggests some possibilities.

The RCWMS reading group read and discussed *Being Mortal* this summer. One favorite part was the author's suggestion that while we prefer autonomy for ourselves, when thinking about our elders we opt for safety. What they want is autonomy, just like everyone else. No wonder many elders resist moving out of their own homes.

In the coming months, RCWMS will offer several ways for people to engage with Gawande's work. This fall, we will sponsor two showings of the PBS documentary *Being Mortal*. The film investigates the practice of caring for the dying, explores relationships between patients and their doctors, and allows Gawande to share stories of people and families he encounters. A guided conversation will follow each screening. Dates are: Sunday, Sept. 11, 6:30 pm, at Binkley Baptist Church in Chapel Hill, and Sunday, Oct. 30, 12:45 pm at Watts Street Baptist Church in Durham.

In early 2017, the book will be the centerpiece of a five-week facilitated workshop about issues relating to our own mortality and that of others. Jehanne Gheith, who is a Duke professor, a hospice social worker, and an RCWMS board member, will lead the Sunday afternoon workshops, which will begin February 5.

Calendar...

October 28, 2016, Friday, 7:30 pm
TALKING RACE, LOVE, AND LIBERATION, an evening with Rev. Angel Kyoto Williams
Duke Memorial Church, 504 W. Chapel Hill Street, Durham, NC 27701

The author of *Radical Dharma* looks at the conventional wisdom of inclusivity then turns it on its head and returns "disruption" to its rightful place as an act of bravery. Abandoning "being good" as motivation and guilt as distraction, she points to uncovering our natural desire to be connected as the source of living and leading from the the heart.

Free

Contact: Karen Ziegler, karenzig@nc.rr.com

*October 30, 2016, Sunday, 12:45 pm

FILM SCREENING of *Being Mortal*

Watts Street Baptist Church, Durham, NC

Join us for a film screening and discussion of the PBS documentary *Being Mortal*. Follow surgeon Atul Gawande as he considers the needs and the desires of patients and families facing terminal illness. The discussion will include ways to identify and communicate wishes about end-of-life goals and preferences.

Sponsors: Watts Street Baptist Church, Duke University Medical Center, and RCWMS

Cost: Free and open to the public.

For questions: Diane Hill, Diane@wattsstreet.org

COURAGE TO LEAD® FOR YOUNG CLERGY & COMMUNITY INNOVATORS: A 6-month Courage & Renewal® Retreat Series

January 10–13, 2017, Opening Retreat

June 7–10, 2017, Closing Retreat

The Calvin Center, Atlanta, GA

Are you committed to faith work, but trying to sustain yourself in the midst of institutional tensions, relational expectations, and the internal pressure you feel to make a difference? This retreat series offers a rare opportunity to renew, reflect, and reconnect with what matters most to your vocation. This program is for you whether you are a young leader in a church or faith-based nonprofit or one who is discerning a ministry path outside of institutional settings, such as artists, activists, entrepreneurs, & organizers.

Primarily for those ages 40 and under.

Cost: \$600.00.

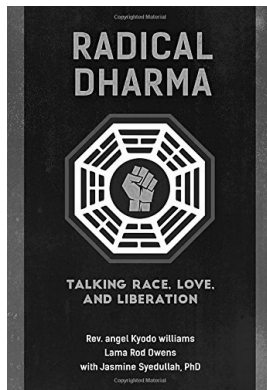
Contact: www.couragerenewal.org/ctl-youngclergy/

Future Weeks of Quiet & Writing:

January 1–8, 2017

May 7–14, 2017

September 24–October 1, 2017



Essay Contest

THEME: Essays should focus on the theme "Ecofeminism" or "Spirituality and the Natural World." We invite submissions that consider these themes in creative ways. You might consider how your spirituality or faith has been shaped by your experiences in the natural world. Does your spiritual practice include a relationship with nature? Does your spirituality or faith inform your concern for the earth?

DETAILS: Women 18 years of age or older may submit up to 2 nonfiction essays, 1,400 words or less. Submit online only: <https://rcwms.submittable.com/submit>. Previous first-place winners and current RCWMS Board members 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 October 15, 2016 and close January 15, 2017.

PRIZES: \$300 for first place, \$200 second, and \$100 third. The winning essay will be published in the RCWMS newsletter, *South of the Garden*, March 2016.

NOTIFICATION: Winners will be notified by email.

RCWMS

RCWMS is a thirty-nine-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 grateful for support from Kalliopeia Foundation, The E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, Vanguard Charitable, Emerald Isle Realty, and the Triangle Community Foundation (A-Squared Fund and Bass Walter Fund).

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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.

YOUR MAILING LABEL shows the year and month your subscription will expire. 1703 = 2017 March.

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