

South of the Garden

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

Volume 38, Number 3

September 2017

Stages

by Rebecca Welper

My fortieth birthday looms on the not-too-distant horizon. I might find that alarming except that it's hard to look past the chaos of this messy mothering stage to think a few days, much less a few years, ahead. And I mean literally messy: food on clothing, floors, and hair; endless unfolded laundry; toys everywhere; sweaty toddler feet kicking my face in the night. Sometimes, I remember this stage of life is temporary. Then I get sad, thinking about this time of joyful discovery and sweetness ending in the blink of an eye. But I also look forward to a time when I might have more energy for engaging in the outside world.

Recently, I watched the news from Charlottesville with horror, weeping with Heather Heyer's mother at her loss and with people of color facing threats of violence from emboldened white supremacists. I felt hopeful that so many turned out to oppose hate, knowing we have a long way to go.

I was not among the local activists who toppled the Confederate statue in front of Durham's old county courthouse in the wake of Charlottesville, but I sympathized. Since the NC legislature had passed a law a couple years ago barring municipalities from removing such statues, citizens took matters into their own hands. Days later, the Robert E. Lee statue at Duke was defaced by activists and then removed by the University. NC Governor Cooper has since endorsed the removal of Confederate statues across the state, including "Silent Sam" down the road on UNC's campus in Chapel Hill.

I'm not in a stage of my life to take actions that will get me arrested, or even go to the Tuesdays with Tillis rallies that RCWMS folks have been faithfully attending and helping organize since the inauguration in January. (They fall during oh-so-sacred nap time.) But I participate in ways I can, including donating to people on the ground, making phone calls to my representatives, and sharing articles and actions online. Occasionally, I attend an event in person. And I value the work we parents and caregivers are doing to raise members of the next generation to be loving, strong, feminist, and antiracist.

At this stage of life, I also feel lucky I am paid to work for an organization that's prioritizing issue advocacy as well as self-care for folks doing various kinds of activist work. In the next column, Jeanette writes about some of the early stages in the life of RCWMS, how we got to our 40th anniversary, and the work we're doing now.

We hope you'll join us for some of that work this fall, whether it's protesting, writing, or honoring those who have come before us. In the middle of September, we'll honor Anita McLeod's life and her love for the waters of the earth at the Timberlake Earth Sanctuary. October 7, we're hosting a 40th anniversary celebration to thank YOU for the ways you've nurtured RCWMS along the way. The celebration is called "Roots and Branches," and includes a potluck lunch, art and writing workshops, and more—all at the Scrap Exchange in Durham. I'm glad you're with us on this stage of the journey.



Our 40th

by Jeanette Stokes

Just after the Duke Divinity School dean handed me my Masters of Divinity diploma in May 1977, I turned to my friends and said, "They'll be sorry." I wasn't even sure what I meant, but I had an idea I was going to do something they wouldn't be thrilled about.

Earlier that spring, I visited my beloved mentor, Helen Crotwell, the Associate Minister to Duke University, to discuss my future. When I suggested I might get a job in a local church, she said she had never heard me say anything to indicate I wanted to be a parish minister. I must have said, "So, what am I going to do?" because I remember her response. Helen looked at me through her over-sized glasses and said, "Why don't you do something no one else is going to do?" I waited for her to tell me what that might be, but she didn't know any more than I did.

I had the idea that I wanted to do something for my peers, for the women who were finishing seminary and entering ordained ministry, so I decided to ask some of them what they needed. What I learned was that they wanted a person or a group that would care they existed, provide some resources, and connect them with other women in ministry. Since there were not many ordained women serving congregations in the South at that point, they had a hard time finding one another.

I knew about women's centers. I had heard about the one at the University of Massachusetts, observed the one at the Durham YWCA, worked in the one at Duke Divinity School, and had corresponded with or met staff from feminist theological centers in Boston, Chicago, and Berkeley. It seemed to me that my friends needed a women's center focused on connecting and supporting women in and entering ministry, and I thought I might just have the wherewithal to create such a thing.

Friends directed me to an attorney and to someone who had just set up a nonprofit for a folk life and music festival in Durham. With their help, the Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South was born on August 17, 1977. Helen Crotwell, my classmate Sue Parkerson, and I served as the original RCWMS trustees. The only remaining question was what we were going to do.

I didn't want to stay in Durham to try to launch this new women's center in the shadow of the Divinity School, but I wasn't sure where to go. I thought of moving home to Tulsa, Oklahoma, or to Boston, where I had a childhood friend, but neither of those seemed good options, and neither was in the South.

I had visited Greensboro, North Carolina, many times, because of an old boyfriend, and I had friends there. In late October 1977, I went to Greensboro for a night and wound up staying for a decade. I found an

(Continued on back page.)

Calendar

* = RCWMS events. For registration form and more information: www.rcwms.org. Online registration for some events: www.rcwms.org/calendar

*September 12, 2017, Tuesday, 7:00 pm
FINANCIAL FITNESS FOR YOUNG WOMEN: Smart Strategies for Managing Your Money
RCWMS Office, 1202 Watts St., Durham, NC
Take charge of your financial future, create a workable budget to pay down debt of all kinds (student loan, credit cards, etc.), save, and invest wisely for today and tomorrow. A chance for young women (40 & under) to discuss money matters with a financial professional. Leader: Lisa Gabriel, a certified financial planner with over 30 years of financial services experience designing strategic solutions for individuals and families.
Cost: \$10, free for students/low income.
Register: www.rcwms.org/calendar
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

September 14, 2017, Thursday, 7:00 pm
BOOK LAUNCH for *The Middle of Things: Essays* by Meghan Florian
Arcana, 331 West Main St., Durham, NC

*September 16, 2017, 10:00 am–2:00 pm
REFLECTIONS ON WATER: A Retreat in Honor of the Life of Anita McLeod and the Waters of our Lives
Timberlake Earth Sanctuary, Whitsett, NC
The natural world will be the setting for weaving together of our love for Anita McLeod and for the waters of the earth that she loved. Includes reflections, prayers, ceremony, and a silent "water walk" around the lake and ponds. No charge, but donations will be accepted for the Ocean Conservancy. Lunch provided.
Sponsors: Mike McLeod, Chris McLeod, Carolyn Toben, Sherylyn Pitt, Timberlake Earth Sanctuary, and RCWMS
Register: www.rcwms.org/calendar
Questions: Sherylyn Pitt, 919-749-3646

September 16–17, 2017
WOMEN AND SPIRITUALITY CONFERENCE
Mayo Civic Center, Rochester, MN
A conference for people of diverse spiritual traditions to share ideas about traditions and spiritual growth.
Website: www.womenandspirituality.org

*September 18, 24 & Oct. 2, 2017, Mondays, 7:00–9:00 pm
NATURAL GROWTH: Writing from Your Roots
RCWMS Office, 1202 Watts St., Durham, NC
In this prompt-based workshop, we will look closely at the natural world we find around us. We will write about what we see, as well as how the wild world around us informs who we are. We hope you will join us for three evenings of exploration.
Leaders: This class will be taught by essayist Meghan Florian and environmental artist Bryant Holsenbeck.
Cost: \$60. Register: www.rcwms.org/calendar
Contact: meghanrcwms@gmail.com

*September 24–October 1, 2017
WEEK OF QUIET & WRITING FOR WOMEN
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC
Cost: \$800, includes lodging and meals.
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

October 6–8, 2017
WRITING WORKSHOP with Lynn Hinton
Norbertine Center, Albuquerque, NM
Cost: around \$350–\$400 includes room and meals.
Contact: lynnhintonnm@aol.com



*October 7, 2017

"ROOTS & BRANCHES: RCWMS 40th Anniversary Celebration
Scrap Exchange, Lakewood Shopping Ctr., Durham, NC
Please join us for a community potluck at noon, art and writing workshops in the afternoon, followed by cake.
Details & registration: www.rcwms.org/calendar

October 9, 16, 23, & 30, 2017, 6:30 pm–8:30 pm (Mondays)
WRITING FEARLESSLY
The Mothership, 401 W Geer St., Durham, NC
Fear can be a constant companion to a writer, looking over your shoulder, creating doubt and 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. Includes new prompts, exercises, and discussion topics.
Leader: Julia Green holds an MFA in fiction writing from the Iowa Writers' Workshop.
Cost: \$125. Register: www.juliafgreen.com
Questions: Email julia.green@gmail.com

*October 13–15, 2017, Friday evening–Sunday afternoon
DYING TO LIVE TOUR & CABARET
Pilgrim UCC Church, 3011 Academy Rd., Durham, NC
Are you invested in conscious living, wondering about conscious dying, seeking peace in the midst of change, someone who doesn't plan on living forever? With years of experience helping people get into and out of their bodies, Cynthia and Stephen honor the lessons of community around our biggest dance—living and dying.
Leaders: Cynthia and Stephen Winton-Henry. Stephen, hospice chaplain, pastor, and grief educator. Cynthia, InterPlay cofounder and has taught at Pacific School of Religion. Scholarships available.
Sponsors: RCWMS & Triangle InterPlay
Cost: \$200. Contact: colleagues.interplay@gmail.com
Register: bit.ly/DyingToLiveTour

*October 26–27, 2017, Thursday–Friday
HOMEGROWN: NC Women's Preaching Festival
Trinity Avenue Presbyterian Church, Durham, NC
Theme: Her Prophetic Voice.
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.
Preachers include: Rev. Shyrl Hinnant-Uzzell, Rev. Dr. Carolyn Sharp, Rev. Chalice Overy, Dr. Sharon Schulze, and Yolanda Santiago.
Website: ncwomenpreaching.wordpress.com

October 31–November 2, 2017
ROLLING THE STONE AWAY
Ecumenical Christian Conference, St. Louis, MO
For LGBTQ+ saints and prophets, past and present, to honor our history and empower our future.
Includes: Mary Hunt, Janie Spahr, Carter Heyward, Jimmy Creech, Jan Griesinger, Gene Robinson, Troy Perry, Karen Ziegler, and more
Website: rollingthestoneaway.org

*Future Weeks of Quiet & Writing:
January 2–9, 2018
May 6–13, 2018
September 23–30, 2018

Our 40th ...

apartment and began volunteering for McNeill Smith, who was running for the US Senate, and the next thing I knew, I had a new life in a new place. I worked for that campaign and then for another, which carried me through the fall of 1978.

Meanwhile, I set up shop for the Resource Center in the spare bedroom of my apartment, designating a desk and procuring a cardboard file box and a card file. I created files labeled "Inclusive Language" and "Women in Ministry" for the file box and wrote names and addresses of people interested in feminism and religion on three-by-five-inch cards and alphabetized them in the little card file.

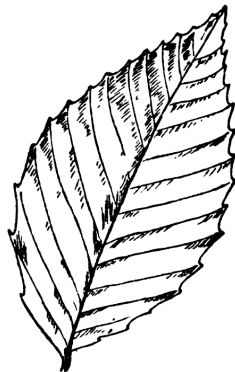
Our first project honored the 125th anniversary of the ordination of Antoinette Brown Blackwell, a Congregationalist often recognized as the first woman ordained in the US. I mailed a one-page flier about her to everyone I thought might be interested. I asked them if they wanted to receive similar information from us and added those who responded to our mailing list. Reaching people was a little harder then. We didn't have email or Facebook, but the mail worked pretty well. As the RCWMS list of contacts grew, we needed to figure out how to communicate with people regularly. A newsletter seemed the obvious answer.

The publication needed a name, which I puzzled over for months in the summer of 1978, until one morning when I was out for a walk around the park in my neighborhood. Crossing Elm Street, a major Greensboro artery, it came to me: we should call the newsletter *South of the Garden*. "Out of the Garden," was the title of a feminist song by Dorie Elzey that described women's experience of the ever-changing landscape of gender roles and expectations. My favorite line was, "I'm in the water, but the bathtub is gone." Adding the "s" and the "h" to "out" made it "South," since we wanted to focus on the South. Also, some people referred to the interdenominational center in New York where Presbyterians, Methodists, and others had their offices, as "heaven on the Hudson." In North Carolina, we were south of that "heaven" or south of the Garden of Eden. In the newsletter's masthead, the "S" and the "h" in "South" are a lighter color as if fading away, so that "South" can also be read as "out."

Carol White Odell, an artist I had worked for one summer on Cape Cod, designed the tree that became our logo. It has roots reaching down, branches stretching up, and little balls at the ends of the branches that could be fruit, leaves, or possibly fireflies. We've used it on the newsletter, and elsewhere, ever since.

Matilda Kirby-Smith, a Greensboro artist, created the layout, which turned out to be so great that we have continued to use it for four decades with only slight modifications. Since professional typesetting was expensive, I used a fancy self-correcting Selectric typewriter to create the columns for the newsletter. Between my passable typing skills and my imperfect spelling, we faced endless rounds of proofreading and pasting in infinitesimally small corrections. Looking back, it is hard to believe we ever produced any newsletters at all.

The first issue of *South of the Garden* (Volume 1, Number 1) was published in October 1978. It was



distributed free of charge for the first year, in an attempt to build readership. We didn't start charging until October 1979, when we set the subscription charge at four dollars per year.

Matilda and I found an office in downtown Greensboro in a block of two-story commercial suites right behind West Market Street United Methodist Church. In February 1979, we moved into one room about the size of a modest bedroom. I set up a desk, Matilda set up a drawing table, and we went to work. A few months later, another artist, Mary Margaret Wade, asked if she could join us, so we rented an adjoining office, which felt like a luxurious amount of space for the three of us.

In those early days, I hardly ever felt like I knew what I was doing. I remember telling Tom Langford, then Dean of Duke Divinity School, about the nonprofit I was starting. "Very risky," he said. It didn't seem risky to me; it seemed like the very thing for me to do. I guess I did risk some things: salary and pension come to mind. But I'd do it all over again.

For the first six years, I worked for free while getting paid as a part-time campus minister at UNC Greensboro. When working for free lost its appeal, we started raising money. We sent out fundraising letters and grant proposals and began charging more for our conferences and workshops.

We never had a three-to-five-year plan. We followed our noses and the interests of the people who showed up for programs. We sponsored conferences with feminist speakers such as Rosemary Ruether, Phyllis Trible, Carter Heyward, Katie Cannon, Mary Hunt and others. RCWMS joined the North Carolina Council of Churches Committee for Equal Rights in sponsoring conferences on women, faith, and social justice that focused on economic justice and violence against women and children.

I got pretty good at managing conferences for sixty or a hundred people, but eventually wore out on planning big events. When the joy went out of the work, I resigned, leaving RCWMS in March 1995 to restore myself and figure out what other work to do.

While I was gone, the RCWMS Board carried on, hired staff, published the newsletter, and put on some conferences and workshops, but they wore out after a couple of years. I noticed I was recreating the work I had done for the Resource Center. When the RCWMS Board contacted me in the Spring of 1997 to see if I was interested in being the director again, I was rested and ready. I was done with planning large events and hoped that RCWMS could focus on smaller events and spiritual practices.

From the beginning, the Resource Center has been interested in justice for women in the church and in the world. We focused on a few issues at a time and responded to what was happening around us. In the early years, we paid special attention to women in ministry, but after my return in 1997 we expanded to include more general-interest feminist programming. Our work brings together all sorts of women, and we deliberately try to include women from different generations. We welcome young and old, LGBTQ and straight, religious and not so religious people.

Our 40th ...

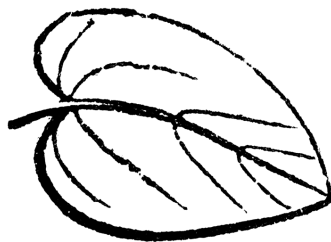
In the last two decades, we developed a writing program with workshops, retreats, and an essay contest and have published a number of books. We made a forty-by-forty-foot canvas labyrinth for people to use for walking meditation. With Anita McLeod's help, we built an elder women's program, which encourages women to appreciate their later years, value the contributions they can still make to the wider world, and begin to face the end of life with some measure of grace. In the last decade, we have once again produced large public events, this time on women and preaching and on LGBTQ spirituality. We produced two films about women artists.

This year, we have turned our attention to political issues, sending out updates about legislative issues and helping to organize a weekly protest at the Raleigh office of US Senator Thom Tillis. We have encouraged people to lobby in state capitals and Washington, DC to defend immigrants, people of color, incarcerated people, LGBTQ people, women, children, education, and health care.

In August, some of us were present at rallies or vigils against white supremacy and hate speech. Some people have wondered whether removing statues of Confederate war heroes is the best way to proceed. I think it is, because most of the statues were put up during the Jim Crow era to intimidate and terrorize black people. It would be like Germans putting up statues of Nazis after World War II to threaten Jewish people. While the Civil War is part of our history, in remembering it, we don't need to valorize the Southern rebels who seceded from the Union and fought for slavery. While I have lots of ancestors who fought in that war, they were wrong. We don't need monuments to the people who fought to enslave African Americans.

What makes working at RCWMS so interesting is that we are constantly looking around to see what is happening in the world and what is needed. We draw on the gifts and ideas of participants, staff, and trustees. We help women do things they want to do but for which they need encouragement and support.

When I add up the last forty years, it has been nothing less than remarkable. Sometimes, those of us around RCWMS look at one another and ask, "How did we pull that off?" But then I've been wondering that since the beginning of the organization. I am so grateful to have been a part of the Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South for four decades and can't wait to see what RCWMS will be up to in the years to come.



Essay Contest

THEME: Essays should focus on the theme "Roots & Branches." We invite submissions that consider this theme in creative ways. What grounds you? What helps you reach out? What sustains you in your personal or professional life? How does spiritual community help to nourish you? Where might you need pruning in order to thrive?

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 November 1, 2017 and close January 15, 2018.

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 2018.

NOTIFICATION: Winners will be notified by email.

RCWMS

RCWMS is a forty-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, E. Rhodes & Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, Vanguard Charitable, Inavale Foundation, Emerald Isle Realty, A-Squared Fund of Triangle Community Foundation, and Community Foundation of Western NC.

RCWMS Trustees: Barbara Anderson, Solita Denard, Jehanne Gheith, Cathy Hasty, Erin Lane, Márcia Rego, Rebecca Vidra, Molly Williams, and Karen Ziegler

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Jennifer McGovern, Administrative Director
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Rebecca Welper, Development Director & Programs



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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