

South of the Garden

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

Volume 26, Number 2

July, 2005

Buddhists

by Jeanette Stokes

I saw an ad for a conference on women and Buddhism to be held at Smith College in April, and I immediately thought of Rachael. It would be an excuse to visit my alma mater and a nice spring outing. Though not a practicing Buddhist, I am interested in feminist perspectives on religion, any religion. Rachael, however, is a Tibetan Buddhist dharma teacher. I thought she needed to go and it would be fun to go along.

I first encountered Buddhism when I visited Japan at age ten. Later, in college, I took a class on Zen Buddhism from Taitetsu Unno. As part of the course, Mr. Unno organized a sesshin, a weekend of sitting led by a Japanese roshi or teacher. The roshi told us not to take notes on his talks. "Anything I say that is important to you will go inside of you and live there." Mostly what I remember from the weekend is sitting still for endless hours while staring at a crack in the floor. I didn't think I ever needed to try that again, and it was another 20 years before I wanted to try meditation of any kind. But I loved learning that I did not always have to take notes.

Rachael and I traveled to Northampton with two other women from her meditation group in Raleigh, NC. They all stayed in a bed and breakfast while I stayed with Adrienne, an 83-year-old friend from my hometown, who spent her adult life teaching music at Smith. On the first morning of the conference, my traveling companions picked me up at Adrienne's and took me the short distance to the college chapel for the program.

The college's pleasantly plain, white, New England-style chapel was filled with women and a few men. I noticed a number of women with shaved heads and either red or black robes. As one of the speakers said, "Women and Buddhism" can include nuns, priests, practitioners, and people with a bedside book on Buddhism. We had them all. During the conference, I attended talks and panels on women in Buddhism, engaged Buddhism, and women changing Buddhism. There was a lecture by bell hooks, a reading by poet Jane Hirschfield and a performance by musical artist Meredith Monk, but wandering around the campus was the thing I enjoyed the most. I explored the steamy tropical Victorian greenhouses, strolled by Paradise Pond, and took a couple of walks through the wooded area beside the Mill River. It was an unusually warm weekend for Massachusetts in April, and being outside was meditation practice enough for me.

In the afternoon, I attended a Japanese tea ceremony led by Alice Unno, the wife of my Zen professor. As a young married woman, she had lived in Japan and studied the tea ceremony while Mr. Unno studied religion. Alice is a small tidy woman, well practiced in the precise movements of the ceremony. As she poured water from a wooden ladle, set it down with care, and then whipped the tea into a greenish froth, I recalled her making the same motions more than thirty years before. At the end of the ceremony, I thanked her for sharing her practice with me once again.

As I left the classroom building where the ceremony was held, I remembered walking out of that same building with Alice Unno many years before just as it had begun to snow. "Oh, no," one student had exclaimed, "I have

(Continued on back.)



Diving

by Jeanette Stokes

When I was in Tulsa, Oklahoma this summer, I went swimming with my niece Lily, not quite five. A competent only child, Lily directed our play in the water. "Catch me when I go down the slide," she instructed as she climbed the bright blue and yellow plastic children's slide. After a few times down the slide, she said she did not need me anymore and could do it on her own. I watched her splash into the water and then swim like a fish to the side, get out and do it again. When she tired of the slide, I asked if she wanted to watch me jump off the diving board. She agreed and we left the children's area for the thirteen-foot deep diving tank with two low boards and a high one. After I took three long strides down the board, bounced once on the end, and jumped in, remembering to point my toes and stay straight as a stick, it was "Catch me when I jump off the board, Aunt Jeanette." I positioned myself near the spot where she might enter the water and told her to try not to jump right on me. Two jumps later, she was saying, "I can do it by myself." I watched for a while, as did a lifeguard, and then took up jumping or doing a simple dive off one board while Lily jumped off the other.

Finally I got up my nerve to climb the ladder to the high diving board. It felt like it was twenty feet in the air, though I doubt it was over twelve. I inched my way out to the end of the board and tried to blank out the idea of falling off sideways and killing myself. I stood calmly, took a deep breath, and stepped off into space. My only thought was, "Stay real straight or this could hurt." The next thing I knew I was swimming like crazy through a mass of bubbles, reaching for the surface and air. Even straight as a stick, I hit the water hard and wondered about the wisdom of such antics at age fifty-four. Lily said that next year she's going to try the high board and I allowed as how I thought that was a good idea.

It is hard to believe that at summer camp just forty years ago, I was able to do an inverted somersault off the high diving board. That's the one where you run out to the end of the diving board, throw yourself up into the air, flip over backwards towards the board making sure not to hit your head on it, spin around one and half times, and dive in the water head first. (I think the summer camp still has it on 16mm movie film if you want to see it.) As a scared adult, I now wonder how I, a small, finicky, well-protected child, was ever able to learn to do such tricks. I remember receiving good instruction from a great coach, learning each dive incrementally, and wearing a sweatshirt in case I landed splat on my back, but still it seems totally impossible to me now.

When I was recently with my cousin Beth (my father's brother's daughter), she reminded me that our grandfather, Henry Stokes, could walk on his hands. I did not know him well. He was already old, maybe sixty, when I was born in Oklahoma, and he lived in Georgia, so he never walked on his hands for me. He also gambled and lied about it to Viola, my rigid Southern Baptist grandmother, which I always liked about him.

I never realized I was descended from circus people until Beth and I were talking. Henry worked for the circus when he was young, perhaps walking on his hands. I already knew Viola's father had owned a

(Continued on back.)

Calendar

August 6–11, 2005

BEING CHANGE: The Way of the Activist
Taos, NM

A retreat of reflective spiritual practice for activists.

Leaders: Claudia Horwitz and Jesse Vega-Frey

Sponsor: stone circles

Cost: \$465–\$515

Contact: 919-682-8323, www.stonecircles.org

August 12–16, 2005

WOMEN IN BLACK CONFERENCE

Jerusalem

Cost: \$200 for program, room & meals.

Contact: www.coalitionofwomen.org

Fall Semester, 2005 (Wednesdays, 6:00–8:45 pm)

CREATIVE NONFICTION (English 590)

North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC

This course will help you in writing a memoir or other pieces of nonfiction. People rave about this class.

Professor: Elaine Orr, Ph.D.

Contact: Elaine Orr, 919-782-6310, Elaine@unity.ncsu.edu

September 3–6, 2005

SECRETS OF INTERPLAY

Wellspring Retreat Center, Washington, DC

Learn techniques and principles of an embodied life.

Leaders: Ginny Going and Tom Henderson

Cost: \$550 tuition, housing & meals

Contact: Ginny, interplaync@nc.rr.com, 919-821-3723

September 8–11, 2005

BOUNDLESS HEART: Mindfulness Meditation Retreat

Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC

The Buddha's teaching on the Four Unlimited Minds (love, compassion, joy, and equanimity) is a guiding light as we open ourselves to life's opportunities and challenges. Daily presentations on these practices, a program of meditation, silence, mindful eating, and focused discussion groups will encourage and ground us. For both beginning and experienced meditators.

Leader: Therese Fitzgerald, longtime student and meditation teacher in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh

Sponsor: RCWMS

Cost: \$350 single, \$290 double, includes room and meals

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

September 23–25, 2005

PRAYING WITH IMAGES: Creative Retreat for Women

Albuquerque, NM

Leader: Meinrad Craighead, visionary artist

Cost: \$550 plus housing and meals

Contact: Meinrad Craighead, 505-344-7109

September 26–29, 2005

SOLATIDO: Retreat for Writers of Song, Poetry, & Prose

Wildacres Retreat, near Asheville, NC

Do you have a writing project that needs a jump-start?

An idea you'd like to take time to reflect on? A manuscript that just needs a little push to get done?

Come to a guided retreat for writers of all genres—fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and song.

Special guest: Kate Campbell, singer songwriter

Cost: \$245, includes room and food

Contact: www.solatido-workshop.net

September 30–October 7, 2005

FALL WEEK OF QUIET AND WRITING

Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC

Unstructured week of writing at the beach for women.

Sponsor: RCWMS

Cost: about \$550, includes room and meals

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



October 7–9, 2005

TARA MEDITATION RETREAT

Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC

This retreat for women will introduce participants to the short practice of Prajnaparamita as the Great Mother and to Green Tara practice. The emphasis for both practices will be on rest, deep renewal, and creativity. There will be a focus on spaciousness in the practices and plenty of time to just be.

Leader: Rachael Wooten

Sponsor: RCWMS

Cost: about \$275, includes room and meals

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

October 7–9 or October 28–30, 2005

EXPLORING SPIRITUALITY THROUGH ART: A

Retreat for Seekers

Cedar Cross Retreat Center, Louisburg, NC

Women of all faiths and spiritual paths are invited to explore spirituality and seek the Divine through the creative use of clay, collage, pastels and other media.

Participants will be inspired by art and by one another.

Leader: Ginger Wallace

Cost: \$250 (includes all art supplies)

Contact: Ginger Wallace, 919-785-9837,

gingermw@inspire-designs.com

October 11–16, 2005

GIFT FROM THE SEA: Reweaving Your Dreams

Trinity Retreat Center, Emerald Isle, NC

Retreat with private rooms, fresh flowers, massage and plenty of time to slow down, renew your soul, explore possibilities, welcome yourself home again.

Facilitator: Linda Roggli with special guest singer-songwriter-vibrational healer Patricia Caldwell

Sponsor: Passionate Possibility, Inc.

Cost: \$875 includes retreat materials, meals, and massage

Contact: 919-309-9300, www.passionatepossibility.com, linda@passionatepossibility.com

October 20–23, 2005

THE LABYRINTH SOCIETY ANNUAL GATHERING

Lenox, MA

Contact: www.labyrinthociety.org

October 22–29, 2005

CONVERSATIONS IN FLORENCE, ITALY, ON ART & SPIRITUALITY WITH MEINRAD CRAIGHEAD

Conversations with Meinrad Craighead and museum trips with Lydia Ruyle. Optional creative studio work.

Cost: \$1,500 plus travel, lodging, and meals

Contact: www.meinradcraighead.com

October 26, 2005, evening

LECTURE BY JUDY CHICAGO

Nasher Museum of Art, Duke University, Durham, NC

November 12, 2005

A WORKSHOP ON KALI AND DURGA

Leaders: Mary Love May & Anita McLeod

Sponsor: RCWMS

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

December 2–4, 2005

THE SOUNDS OF SILENCE: Silent Retreat for Women

Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC

Leader: Jeanette Stokes

Sponsor: RCWMS

Cost: \$270 single, \$230 double, includes room and meals

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

December 18, 2005, 7:00 pm

INTERFAITH CELEBRATION Beth El Synagogue,
1004 Watts St., Durham, NC

Sponsors: RCWMS and stone circles

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

Fudge

"Mailing Fudge" by Liz McGeachy won second place in the 2004 RCWMS Essay Contest. (The contest is made possible in part by a grant from the Clifford A. and Lillian C. Peeler Family Foundation.) In addition to writing a column on her community for a local newspaper, Liz sings traditional music with her husband Tim. I visited with Liz, Tim, and their two children this summer at their home in Norris, TN. Lunch was hardly over before I asked them to get the guitar and let us all sing some together.

Mailing Fudge

by Liz McGeachy

As I rip one last screech out of the strapping tape and pull it tight around the cardboard box, I realize I am picturing him unfolding my letter and pulling out the bubblewrap with his big, rough hands. Inside my head he's standing tall in his khaki uniform in front of one of those gun-metal gray half-barrel barracks like they used to show on *Gomer Pyle*, the little corner of a smile perched on his face.

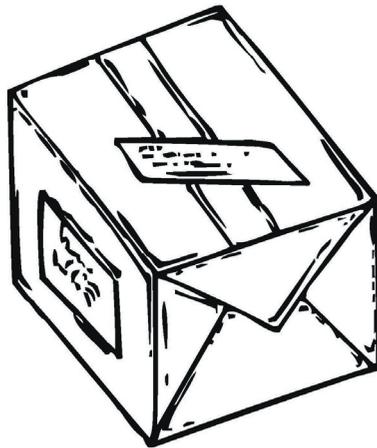
But then I remember what his wife Rhonda told me—how they had him holed up in a Texas motel room till they could ship him off. The picture shifts and I see him sitting on a bed in a Motel 6 with his rifle lying on the paisley bedspread beside him, the washed-out painting of an English garden looking down from the wall and the TV blaring in the background.

I lied in the letter and said she looks good, but the truth is she's skinny now and frayed like an old rope. You can almost hear the cancer buzzing around her insides looking for more places to take root. I asked him one time why he didn't claim a hardship or whatever they call it to get out of going, but he said Rhonda wouldn't let him, and besides, she'd lose the insurance to cover the chemo. So he had to go.

I stand there at the kitchen table with my hands resting on the brown package and imagine what it will be like for him when he finally gets shipped over there to that world of sand dunes and 130-degree heat in the shade, if there is any shade. I never see any shade trees on the TV, but down there in that little blue box it all looks like a scene from a movie or a cop show, and anyway I can't get my brain around that amount of hot. The best my imagination can do is conjure up a picture of soldiers wandering around inside an oven, which is silly of course, but that gets me wondering if the President ever thinks about his boys walking around inside an oven and what that must be like for them. But that's not what presidents do, I suppose.

Plus that picture of the oven has brought my brain back around to the fudge I've just smothered in bubblewrap and whether it's going to stay fresh all the way into that Texas motel room. Truth be told, this mailing fudge idea is silly too, candy being a dime a dozen like it is. Even thick homemade candy is for sale at any old gas station these days.

It's not how the old folks who sit in front of the post office describe their war when the ladies knitted socks and cooked out of the Victory Garden, and the men at home scrounged for scrap metal and pulled down the shades during blackouts. It wasn't much, but at least everybody was doing it together, even the kids. My neighbor Dennis was a kid during World War II. He told me a story of waiting a whole month for the one shipment of bubblegum to finally come into the general store, and when it did, word spread like wildfire till the place was busting at the seams with kids wanting their one piece of gum for the month. Those efforts weren't the same as fighting a war with guns and ships I guess; they were just little pieces of love scattered out to a



world at war. I sometimes wonder if God isn't more pleased with those tiny haphazard pieces than the big ones that get all the attention.

Not that I want to go back to the old days, but I swear nowadays you'd hardly know there was a war going on unless of course you're related to one of those poor souls over there traipsing around in tan fatigues and black bullet-proof vests leaving footprints in the sandy oven. Really, I don't even know if he likes homemade fudge, but I keep seeing his wife with her limp hand hanging over the backyard fence and that look in her eyes.

It's like I told my friend Irene—I know we're all drowning in scrap metal and bubblegum and fudge and plastic crap and everything else for that matter, but I had to do something, so I said a little prayer and got out my recipe box. Then while the fudge was cooling, I wrote the letter, dusted off a cardboard box from the basement, and scrounged around until I found the Texas address Rhonda had given me.

Now I'm ready to drive down to the post office, so I pick up the box and head toward the door. But I stop before I get there and take a look at the box in my hand. Without thinking I bend down and give the smooth brown paper a kiss, leaving a faint, wet smudge. Then I start looking around for my car keys. I don't know why I do such things. Sometimes they just seem like the only thing left to do.

Contest

The Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South is sponsoring its third essay contest. Women eighteen years of age and older may submit previously unpublished nonfiction essays of 1400 words or less.

Essays should focus on or exemplify feminist perspectives on spirituality and daily life. We want women to write about their lives, grace, how they experience God, or how they make it through the hard places. No sermons, please.

Prizes will be \$500 for first place, \$300 for second place, and \$200 for third place. The winning essay will be published in the RCWMS newsletter, *South of the Garden*, in March 2006. Winners will be notified by mail.

The limit is two essays per person. Submit four double-spaced copies of each essay. Do not put your name on the essay. Attach a cover letter with the title of the essay(s), your name, address, phone number, and email. Submissions must be postmarked by November 15, 2005. Mail submissions to:

RCWMS Essay Contest
1202 Watts Street
Durham, NC 27701

No email submissions are permitted. Manuscripts will not be returned.

This essay contest is made possible in part by a grant from the Clifford A. and Lillian C. Peeler Family Foundation.

Buddhists...

to drive to Boston. This is terrible." "Hurrah," cheered another, "perhaps my test will be called off tomorrow." Alice Unno gazed out at the snow and said quietly, "It's snowing." Later I learned that seeing things as they are is one aim of Buddhist practice. I never needed a better example than Alice Unno in the snow.

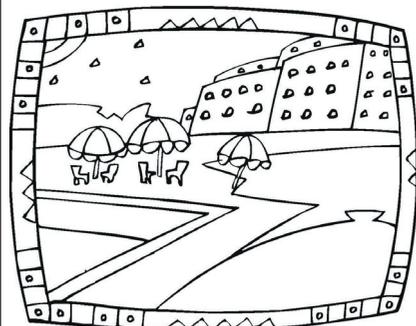
The conference planners failed to see one issue as it really is today. They somehow overlooked sexual misconduct as a topic for the program. Since the misconduct of leaders in Buddhist communities has been in the news, it seems clear that Buddhists, like every other religious group, need to deal with the issue. Though not on the program, the topic came up in the question and answer periods. I nearly jumped out of my seat when I heard someone ask a question about whether it was "right speech" to speak badly of any teacher.

This is not a new topic. Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish communities have been working on issues of sexual misconduct among professionals in their communities for thirty years, aided by the work of Marie Fortune, Mary Pellauer, Carol Adams, and others. I realized that the American Buddhist community is still young. Many of the western women who became Buddhists left their former faiths years ago and may have missed the work on misconduct in other faith communities. One would think that at least the Buddhist academics would be up to speed on the issue, as colleges and universities have had to deal with the issue. One can find research, guidelines, and procedures to apply to any faith.

As I see it, students have a right to fall in love with their teachers, clients with their therapists, parishioners and members with their ministers, rabbis, or priests. It is the responsibility of the professional to hold the line and it is the responsibility of the supervising profession, organization, or religion to see to it that they do.

Why should I expect the Buddhist community to be any more advanced in dealing with difficult issues than any other community? Buddhism, for all its considerable wisdom, grew out of patriarchal societies in which the treatment of women was not great.

At the end of the conference, one of the organizers apologized; she had not realized that misconduct was such a big issue. The various branches of Buddhism in the west will grow as women share their visions and insights. And we will all grow as Buddhism helps us to walk mindfully and to see things as they really are.



Diving...

whirly gig and must have traveled with the circus, but it surprised me to learn that my grandfather had circus connections as well.

My father, Malcolm Stokes, inherited his father's coordination and put it to use in the water. Daddy was a fancy diver for the Duke University swim team, the Mermen, from 1934-36. He also did exhibition diving at the Hotel De Soto, a fancy downtown hotel in his hometown of Savannah, Georgia. Mother says he worked as a lifeguard at the beach in the summers to make money. I don't know Savannah well. I remember little from a visit when I was four, and when I was there in my thirties, it poured rain the whole time. I had to look at a map to remind myself that Savannah is on a river that empties into the ocean, and I had to ask a native to learn that the beach at Tybee Island is only eighteen miles away.

When my parents moved to Tulsa in the 1940s for my father's medical practice, Daddy joined a club with a swimming pool and a golf course. He and a family friend taught me to swim and dive. My Texas mother eventually made herself learn to swim just well enough to pluck me from the deep end should I flounder. When I was eight, my parents built a house with a swimming pool. My father made sure it was a heated swimming pool, so he could dive in the water first thing in the morning. I can still imagine my father sliding open the glass door of his bedroom, taking two steps across the covered porch, stepping off the porch, and diving in the water. Now that I think of it, it is one of my strongest images of my father, suspended in the air, arms and body outstretched, reaching headfirst for the water.

I knew, of course, that my father could swim and dive, but had never given it much thought. He had so many talents, as a doctor, a surgeon, an amateur golfer, and a musician. I never really stopped to think about his connection to the water until recently. He has been dead for nearly thirty years and wanders in and out of my consciousness rather unpredictably. I've noticed that in the last couple of years I have oriented my life towards the ocean. I've managed to plan so many work-related events at a conference center on the North Carolina coast that in 2004 I spent twenty-eight days by the sea. While swimming in the ocean on one of those days last year, it struck me, perhaps for the first time, that my father loved the ocean. I could remember being in it with him several times. It feels like stating the obvious, but he was a man who grew up next to the Atlantic Ocean and who spent his whole adult life landlocked in Oklahoma.

Sitting by the swimming pool in the scorching Oklahoma heat this summer, watching my energetic niece jump into the water again and again, I realized that my ancestors had made it easier for me to overcome my fear and do somersaults off the high board. My father was a fancy diver with saltwater in his veins and my grandfather could walk on his hands.



Subscriptions to South of the Garden cost \$15 and run for 12 months from the time placed. Foreign or First Class is \$20. A subscription is free of charge to anyone for whom the subscription fee is a burden. Tax-deductible contributions over and above the subscription fee are appreciated. Make checks out and send to: RCWMS, 1202 Watts Street, Durham, NC 27701.

YOUR MAILING LABEL: The numbers above your name on the address label are the year and month your subscription will expire. 0508 = 2005 August.

ISSN 0890-7676
E-mail: rcwmsnc@aol.com Website: www.rcwms.org

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Durham, N.C.
Permit # 1054

The Resource Center for Women
and Ministry in the South
1202 Watts Street, Durham, NC 27701
919-683-1236
Return Service Requested.