

# South of the Garden

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

Volume 26, Number 4

December, 2005

## Goddesses

by Jeanette Stokes

I was a raving lunatic for the first two weeks of November. A combination of things happened on Halloween that sent me over the edge. That morning's email brought news that President Bush had nominated another right-wing judge to the Supreme Court and the sad news that Christine, the wife of a colleague in Florida, had died of a brain tumor. The president's slap in the face to feminists and the loss of one fine woman rocked me at a deep level. Something snapped inside of me and a voice started screaming, "That's it! I have to do something to stop the madness."

I started emailing money to good causes and messages to the president and congress—to stop the war, the torture, the tax cuts, the attempts to drill in the Arctic National Wildlife Preserve, and the right-wing judicial appointments. I also wrote the governor of North Carolina asking him to stop the executions. There were three scheduled this fall and all three took place. I kept at this insistent communicating every day for two weeks.

As I calmed down, I returned to my current spiritual practice of trying to get myself to email or write at least one elected official each week. As Sr. Evelyn Mattern once said, "The price of freedom is constant vigilance."

Meanwhile, I felt Christine's death and her family's grief more intensely than I had anticipated. I hardly knew her. I had only met her once, but I had developed a deep concern for her as I followed her yearlong illness from afar. I was grateful that her husband Tom, a Presbyterian minister, decided to have two memorial services, one in Florida where they lived and a second in Durham where they had many friends and family.

I attended the service in Durham and was especially touched by a story Tom told just before the benediction. He said that sometime during her illness, Christine had said that when the end came, whenever that might be, she wanted her sister-in-law Shelley to be present. So, when it became apparent that Christine was in her last days, Shelley left her home in Durham and flew to Florida. She arrived one evening and went straight to a motel. Early the next morning, just after 6:30, Tom called Shelley on her cell phone. He knew she was an early riser and figured she'd be up. "Where are you?" he asked. "I'm here," she said. "I know you are here, but when are you going to be over here?" "I am here," she repeated. "Open the curtains. You will see." Tom pushed aside the curtains, and there she was, standing on the patio.

When I heard this story, I thought to myself, that's a perfect Tara story. Tara is the beloved female Buddha of Tibet and is the Buddha of compassionate action. Tara is depicted sitting on a moon cushion atop a lotus blossom. She sits cross-legged with her right foot extended, indicating that she is ready to come to our aid. In fact, it is said that when we call, she is already here.

Tom told the congregation at the memorial service that his wife was smart. She had known way ahead of time that in her dying she would have what she needed, but her husband and son would need Shelley. She was right. And when he called, she was already there.

(Continued next column.)



Growing up as a Protestant, I was offered very few images of the feminine divine. No female entity was the object of my meditation or prayer. There was no powerful, holy, feminine being to whom I could appeal. Catholics had Mary, but Protestants were warned against devotion to anyone except God the father and his son Jesus. (I use male language here on purpose, with emphasis on *father* and *son*. No mothers are allowed.) For me, Mary was a pale background figure dressed in washed-out blue. As an adult, I've been left to reinvigorate stories of women in the Bible or borrow female figures from other religions.

I am so glad for the current series of RCWMS programs on the Feminine Divine, because I am learning more stories about sacred feminine figures like Tara and Kali. In October, Rachael Wooten led a meditation retreat that focused on Tara. In November, Mary Love May and Anita McLeod led a workshop on Kali. (See the Calendar page for more programs on the Feminine Divine.) I've already told you a little about Tara, so now I'll tell you a bit about Kali.

I have known of Kali for many years, but I only had a vague sense of her as a wrathful Hindu goddess who, like Mother Earth, eventually consumes all living things. I was uncomfortable with the wrathful goddess. As a female and a Christian, I had been taught that rage and anger were bad. The story of Jesus overturning the tables of the moneychangers in the synagogue was the only one I knew that suggested a holy person could be angry.

Fortunately, other religions are not so reluctant to include the dark emotions or angry, wrathful deities in their understanding of the holy. When I get as angry as I was in early November, I would like for some furious, blazing goddess like Kali to come to my aid. Mary Love told a story about Kali in the workshop this fall that helps me imagine just such a thing. A version of the story appears in China Galland's *The Bond Between Women*. It goes something like this.

There was a time when the world was at the brink of destruction. Rivers dried up, all dancing stopped, demons roamed freely, and the gods could not stop them. So the gods retreated to the Himalayas where they remembered a teaching that said only a woman could save the world from this sort of destruction. So the gods shot forth streams of fire that converged in a pillar of flame as tall as the mountains themselves. Out of the fire came the Great Goddess Durga, riding a lion, wearing the crescent moon on her head. Durga quickly defeated thousands of demons and returned to her throne in the Himalayas. But the demons did not give up. Instead of trying to defeat her in battle, the Lord of the Demons and his younger brother tried to woo her. They asked her to marry them. She declined, saying she had vowed only to marry one who can defeat her in battle. Enraged, the Lord of the Demons commanded his forces to attack, but Durga defeated them with a glance. The Lord of the Demons sent more forces and commanded them to drag Durga to him by her hair. That was the last straw. Durga got so furious that her face turned dark as a storm and Kali sprang forth from her brow. Kali, a hideous, angry, frightening creature with many arms and a flashing sword, finished the job, defeating thousands of demons and leaving only the Lord of the Demons himself. Durga

(Continued on back.)

# Calendar

Events connected to our Art & the Feminine Divine program are marked by ©. For more information: [www.rcwms.org](http://www.rcwms.org).

January 8–15, 2006

A WEEK OF QUIET AND WRITING FOR WOMEN  
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC  
Cost: \$600, includes room and meals  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

© January 11 & 25, 2006, 2 Wed., 9:30 am–2:30 pm  
CREATING A SHRINE, LIVING THE FEMININE DIVINE  
New Hope Camp & Conference Center, near Chapel Hill, NC  
Combine art-making with prayer, ritual, meditation, and commitment toward action.  
Leaders: Nancy Corson Carter and Allison Davidson  
Cost: \$65, includes lunch  
To register: [ncarter@nc.rr.com](mailto:ncarter@nc.rr.com), 919-383-1338

© January 14, 2006, 9:30 am–12:30 pm  
GROUNDING OUR ART AND HEART  
Unity Center for Peace Church, Chapel Hill, NC  
Make art with Polaroid transfers, working from a relaxed connection to breath and body.  
Leader: Ann Ehringhaus, photographer, Reiki Master, and Rosen bodyworker  
Cost: \$50 (plus \$5 materials fee to the leader)  
Sponsor/Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

© January 19, 26, and February 2, 2006, Thurs., 7–9 pm  
JOURNAL MAKING WORKSHOP  
The Scrap Exchange, Durham, NC  
Leader: Bryant Holsenbeck  
Cost: \$75 (plus \$10 materials fee to teacher)  
Sponsor/Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

© January 21, 2006, 10 am–4 pm, plus Feb. 4, 10 am–noon  
SCULPTING THE GODDESS WITHIN  
The Barn at Valhalla, west of Chapel Hill, NC  
Coming out of the long nights of winter, our reflections and introspections are slowly starting to bud. Join us for a day of ritual, meditation, and expression of our divine selves through clay sculpture. We will complete our goddesses on Feb. 4.  
Leaders: Melissa York, clay sculptor, and Judith Winston, artist, energy/bodyworker  
Cost: \$80, plus \$15 materials/firing fee  
To register: [MelissaYork@earthlink.net](mailto:MelissaYork@earthlink.net), 919-732-9481, [mcYorkart@earthlink.net](mailto:mcYorkart@earthlink.net)

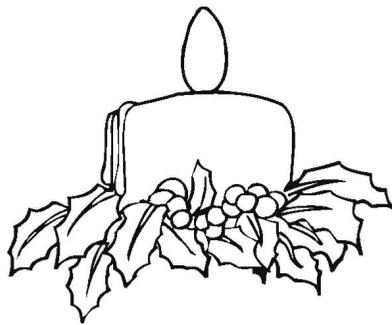
January 27–30, 2006, 10:00 am–4:00 pm  
WOMEN'S PREACHING ACADEMY  
Auburn Theological Seminary, NY, NY  
Leaders: Barbara Lundblad and Felicia Thomas  
Cost: \$225 for the program  
Sponsor/Contact: Auburn, 212-662-4315, [Laa@auburnsem.org](mailto:Laa@auburnsem.org)

© January 28, 2006, 1:00–5:00 pm  
BRIGIT: Tending the Fire in our Hearts  
Durham Friends Meeting, Durham, NC  
On Feb. 2, torches all over Ireland light the way for the goddess Brigit to emerge from the dark wintry Earth. Come hear her stories, make art, write and more. Let your heart-fire be lit!  
Leaders: Mary Love May and Jeanette Stokes  
Cost: \$40  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

February 10, 2005  
CONCERT BY CARRIE NEWCOMER  
St. Philips Episcopal Church, Durham, NC  
Contact: [boxoffice@stphilipsdurham.org](mailto:boxoffice@stphilipsdurham.org), 919-682-5708, ext. 17

February 11, 2005, 10:00 am–3:00 pm  
THE SACRED ORDINARY—WRITING MINDFULLY:  
A Workshop with Carrie Newcomer  
Durham, NC  
Leader: Carrie Newcomer, singer and writer of songs & stories  
Cost: \$50  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

© February 24, 25, March 3, 4, 2006  
(Fridays 7:00–9:00 pm and Saturdays 1:00–4:00 pm)  
FACES OF THE DIVINE  
Eno River UU Fellowship, Durham, NC  
Guided imagery, mask making, music and ceremony.  
Leaders: Martha Dyer, artist & Jen Worthen, musician  
Cost: \$150, includes materials and refreshments  
To register: [m4m919@aol.com](mailto:m4m919@aol.com) or [jenwo1@juno.com](mailto:jenwo1@juno.com)



February 28–March 1, 2006

GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND FAITH: Phyllis Tribble Lectures  
The Divinity School, Wake Forest Univ., Winston-Salem, NC  
Speakers: Phyllis Tribble, Rosemary Ruether, Elizabeth Bounds, and Kelly Brown Douglas  
Contact: [www.wfu.edu/divinity/tribble-lectures.html](http://www.wfu.edu/divinity/tribble-lectures.html)

March 2, 2006

LABYRINTH WALK IN ASHEVILLE, NC  
Contact: Holy Ground, [www.holygroundretreats.org](http://www.holygroundretreats.org), 828-236-0222

© March 4, 2006, 2:00–6:00 pm  
BEFRIENDING THE GODDESS: Balance in the 21st Century  
Durham, NC  
Leader: Joanna Haymore, MS, OTR/L  
Sponsor: Piedmont Bioregional Institute  
Cost: \$25  
To register: 919-383-6253, [Joanna-Dave@mindspring.com](mailto:Joanna-Dave@mindspring.com)

March 9–11, 2006

SPIRIT FLAMES: Celebrate Ordination of Presbyterian Women  
First Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, GA  
Leaders: Katie Cannon, Catherine Gonzales, Rebecca Reyes, Margaret Towner, and more  
Contact: [rhicks@presbyteryofgreateratl.org](mailto:rhicks@presbyteryofgreateratl.org), 404-898-0711

© March 11, 2006

SONGS OF THE FEMININE DIVINE  
Kathleen Hannan & Sheila Warner in Concert  
Francesca's, 9th Street, Durham

© March 18, 2005

BEING VISIBLE, BEING SACRED, BEING GODDESS:  
Revealing the Sacred Feminine Within and Exploration through Movement, Ritual, Stories and Art  
Leaders: Janice Gellar & Libby Outlaw  
Cost: \$65  
To register: Janice, 919-384-0323, [jlakegellar@verizon.net](mailto:jlakegellar@verizon.net)

© March 25, 2006, 10:00 am–4:00 pm

SHE WHO IS ALL NAMES AND ESCAPES ALL NAMING:  
Sacred Play with the Divine Feminine  
Eno River UU Fellowship, Durham, NC  
Leaders: Adele Wayman and Anne Deloria  
Cost: \$60  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

March 30–April 2, 2006

WOMEN OVER 60 RETREAT  
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC  
Leaders: Anita McLeod & Margie Hattori  
Cost: \$325 single, \$305 double  
Sponsor/Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

April 9–14, 2006

ECUMENICAL HOLY WEEK LABYRINTH WALK  
Sponsors: Several Chapel Hill churches  
Cost: Free and open to the public  
Contact: [GJordan@thechapelofthecross.org](mailto:GJordan@thechapelofthecross.org)

April 8, 2006, 9:30 am–2:00 pm

THE SPIRIT OF ART, THE ART OF SPIRIT  
Avila Retreat Center, Durham, NC  
Multimedia art workshop to explore, ponder, and relax.  
Leaders: Claudia Fulshaw and Lisa Giannini, Durham artists  
Cost: \$25  
Sponsor/Contact: Avila, 919-477-1285, [avila@raldioc.org](mailto:avila@raldioc.org)

© April 21–May 14, 2006

ART & THE FEMININE DIVINE EXHIBIT  
Durham, NC  
Contact: RCWMS, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com), [www.rcwms.org](http://www.rcwms.org)

© April 23–30, 2006

CONVERSATIONS ON ART & SPIRITUALITY  
IN ROME, ITALY WITH MEINRAD CRAIGHEAD  
Contact: [www.meinradcraighead.com](http://www.meinradcraighead.com)

June 9–11, 2006

A RETREAT AT THE BEACH  
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC  
Leader: Jeanette Stokes  
Sponsor/Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

June 11–18 and September 24–October 1, 2006

WEEKS OF QUIET AND WRITING FOR WOMEN  
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC  
Cost: \$600 per week, includes room and meals  
Sponsor/Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

# Sabbath

(This essay, *The Sabbath—at My House*, by Sally Hicks was one of two third place winners in the 2004 RCWMS Essay Contest.)

The end of Shabbat is observed by lighting a special candle and inhaling the scent of spices. The fragrance of cinnamon and cloves marks the end of the holy day of rest and the beginning of the new week. It is a lovely idea to usher in the everyday with a sweet scent, something beautiful but homely, a reminder to carry the sacred into every day of our lives. Light the beautiful candle with its three wicks, drink the wine, say the blessing and begin anew.

I love this ceremony, just as I love the candle lighting that begins the Jewish Sabbath. We say “Blessed are you, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe...” and give thanks for the lights and the bread and the wine.

But my image—my fantasy—of our family members gratefully thanking God over the flickering candles and golden braid of challah quickly disintegrates in the face of reality.

My husband and I rush home from work, racing into the grocery to pick up the challah. One of us throws together dinner. We set the table and call the children, who grumble about being pulled away from the television. They push and shove each other as they approach and the tussles continue with kicks under the table. They bicker over who will light the candles. My son interrupts the prayer; my daughter blows out a candle so she can light it again. My husband admonishes one child; I admonish the other.

My daughter wants to sing the blessing over the wine by herself. We insist on singing it as well. She corrects our Hebrew pronunciation. My son knocks over his grape juice. Havoc.

When it comes time for the *hamotzi*, the blessing over the bread, the children sing obnoxiously loudly, then rip the bread to shreds as my husband and I exchange looks.

“Keep control of yourself,” we say to each other silently. Many nights this does not work. One of us snaps and yells. This is followed by tears and banishment.

So much for the day of rest.

The same goes for *havdalah*, the ceremony with the spices at the end of Shabbat, though sometimes I think it might go more smoothly because we aren’t as tired as we are on Fridays. But of course we rarely get around to it since Saturdays are busy with all the usual stuff: dinner parties and movies and kids’ sleepovers.

I feel sometimes I have failed my family and myself. I think, “Can’t we have one special meal, one moment of peace, one day of rest?” And, of course, I would prefer to live my ideal, not my reality. I want to be the mother who has cooked the pot roast and baked her own challah. I want the house to be filled with the smell of delicious food and to be the one who quietly insists that Saturdays are reserved for rest and reflection. I want to be gentle and wise, observant of our traditions while tolerant of transgression.

But I take heart when I think of the lessons I am teaching my children: We do not give up on our traditions because they are inconvenient. We keep at it. If I can’t bake challah, I buy it. If I rush home from work on Friday, at least I pause and take a deep breath when the candles are lit. The children may shout the words of the *hamotzi* to annoy us, but they do know them.

(Continued on back.)



# Bedtime

(June Ellen Haislip's essay, *My Favorite Bedtime Story*, was one of two third place winners in the 2004 RCWMS Essay Contest.)

“Tell me a story.” This simple request, spoken in the soft voice of a child has often persuaded a parent to linger at bedside, delaying bedtime with the soothing sound of a story. I suspect that neither the story nor the delayed bedtime is actually the aim of the request. Rather it is the silent affirmation of a loving parent’s presence that is sought.

I was no different than generations of children before me. I often made the request of the parent who came to tuck me into bed at night. But my request was specific. It was the same story I requested time after time. “Tell me about when I was born,” I would ask. You see, my birth was legend among family and friends, and I loved hearing about it. My mother had had a difficult pregnancy, and spent many weeks in bed prior to my birth. My birth by Caesarean section was intended only to spare my mother, for it came three months early. Doctors were surprised, however, to discover a living, perfectly formed two pound infant. The local pediatrician knew of new resources at a hospital in the state capital, equipment designed especially to serve premature infants. This new equipment would closely regulate the amount of oxygen an infant would receive, decreasing the potential for brain damage, blindness, and a host of other infirmities. The necessary arrangements were made, and my father and a nurse from the local hospital were dispatched on the hundred-mile journey. By the time the story reached the point at which my father flagged down a State Trooper to escort us to our destination, I was always asleep. And, strangely, I never felt the need to know the details of the journey beyond this point.

But often during my childhood years, a parent would introduce me to a friend, or a business acquaintance, or a member of my large extended family, and they would ask, “Is this the one who was so small?” And when the question was answered, they would walk away, shaking their head and marveling at the miracle of my survival. In the five decades that have passed since that desperate drive to the capital city, I have often sought a yellowed newspaper clipping from its hiding place. Now brittle with age, it is simply a photograph of a severely premature infant, grotesque in her smallness, and the smiling nurse who was responsible for her care. I have been told that when, at last, my parents came to take me home, Nurse Worrell cried. No doubt her tender care was a crucial factor in my survival.

But not her care alone. My father remembers that the doctors encouraged frequent visits to the 50’s version of Neonatal Intensive Care. They explained that the babies who enjoyed visitors at the nursery window thrived more quickly than those who had no visitors. It still astonishes me to think that the simple presence of those who care could contribute to the health and survival of those fragile infants. How could they know that the people on the other side of the nursery window were making fools of themselves for their sake? We are connected to one another in ways that cannot be explained. My mother was prevented from visiting her new infant by her own recovery. My father’s visits were restricted by the demands of a farmer’s life. So the first faces who visited me on a regular basis were those of an uncle and his new wife who lived nearby.

“Tell me about when I was born.” Years have passed since I last made that request. But I was a much wiser child than adult, for I knew then to ask for my story of connection and community when I felt vulnerable.

(Continued on back.)

# Sabbath...

And when I get discouraged about our family's inability to observe the Sabbath as I think it should be observed, I remember a comment from Rabbi Tarfon in the *Pirke Avot*: "You are not required to complete the work; but neither are you free to desist from it." Of all the ancient quotations I've heard, this is the one that is most inspiring to me in the busy round of work-family-home.

I am not required to be the perfect pot-roast mother, but neither can I throw up my hands on Friday evening and flop down in front of the television.

And when I inhale the scent of freshly baked challah or cinnamon and cloves, my mind is filled with two images. One—the ideal—of our family gathered around the beautifully set table, passing around the loaf of bread or the spice box, graciously marking the observance of the holy day.

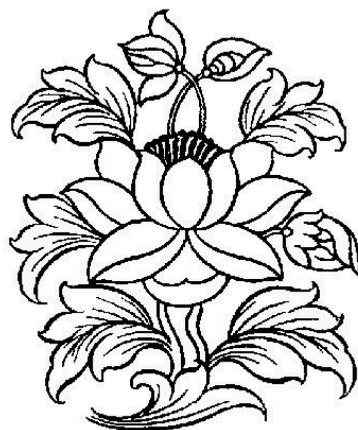
In the other, we are our squabbling, impatient, imperfect selves, trying—and mostly failing—to cherish a few moments of the sacred.

*Sally Hicks is a writer in Duke University's Office of News and Communications and a member of Beth El Synagogue in Durham, NC.*

# Bedtime...

As an adult, I once took a perverse satisfaction in the report that I fought the procedures and treatments intended to support so strenuously that doctors feared I would fatally exhaust myself. So, they placed me in the isolette, and hoped that I would live. Decades later when I feel discouraged, weak, or wounded, I often return to that infantile struggle against the assistance, even the company of others. I retreat from the world to hide myself, and nurse my emotional wounds until I feel stronger. The truth for my life, however, is that isolation almost never produces strength. In reality, my strength comes from connection, from relationship. Paradoxically the time when I least want company is the time I know that I must seek it out—like some spiritual prescription for health and wholeness. My most passionate efforts to be independent proclaim a desperate need for connection and relationship. My favorite bedtime story reminds me that even when I am least aware of those necessary connections, they are still at work for me, providing life and strength. I could not ask for a more comforting story.

*June Ellen Haislip is an ordained Disciples of Christ minister who enjoys knitting, mysteries, playing the mountain dulcimer, and bonsai. She lives in rural Rockingham County, NC and serves a Disciples of Christ congregation in southern (natives call it "Southside") Virginia.*



# Goddesses...

then reabsorbed Kali and all of her female warriors and challenged the Lord of the Demons himself. Time stopped as the goddess and the demon fought, pitching and rolling across the sky. The cosmos groaned with the enormity of their encounter. When Durga finally slays the Demon, he falls from the sky and the world is safe at last.

So on Halloween, when the president nominated the right wing's first choice for the US Supreme Court, it felt like something akin to Kali sprang from my brow. I was so angry, angry in a new way from the ways I have been angry at presidents off and on for the last thirty-five years. It feels like I have been telling presidents my whole adult life to stop with the war-making. I started college in the late 1960s in the midst of the student protests against the Viet Nam War. I came of age to the background chant of "No More War."

I now think of Kali as full of anger, but life-giving anger. Outrage at the injustices of the world. We could do with a little more outrage at the present moment. I like that she carries a sword known as the sword of discernment, one that cuts through illusions. Durga had been strong and patient in her battle to heal the world, but when pushed to the edge, she let loose a fierce version of herself.

At a recent gathering of women friends, several women reported that they were tired of being nice. Being nice will only get us so far. We don't have to split the world into good and bad, we don't have to demonize those who disagree with us, but I think that the energy we get from feeling outrage over war, torture, violence, or destruction can give us the ability to act, to speak, to reach out to for those in need, to stand in the path of galloping greed and disregard for human life.

After Durga defeated the demons, it is said that the gods crowned her Queen of the Universe. They asked her to stay and rule the world, but Durga would have none of it. She promised the gods and the people that there was nothing more to fear and said, "Do not worry. If the world is ever in danger of being destroyed again, I will return."

It is comforting to imagine that a goddess like Durga, Kali, or Tara would come to my aid or to the aid of the world. And whether I believe in such a being or not, the idea of one helps me remember that I can come to my aid and that we can come to the aid of the world every day. I can also remember that the God of my own Christian heritage promised not to leave us alone, but to send a comforter to be with us. I might even try calling that Holy Spirit by the name of one of my new goddess friends, and see what that brings.

*Jeanette Stokes is a Presbyterian minister and the Executive Director of the Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South.*



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