

South of the Garden

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

Volume 28, Number 1

March, 2007

Thirty

by Jeanette Stokes

The evening before I turned 30, I jumped in the car with a friend and rode from Greensboro to Raleigh. It was a whim. I wanted to do something impulsive before I got *old*. Just before leaving my apartment, I called another friend in Raleigh to say I was coming and needed a bed. When I reminded her it was about to be my birthday, she consented to the impromptu visit.

The Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South is turning 30 this year. While it does not feel like the organization is *old*, it's certainly not a kid anymore. It amazes me to realize that our interns weren't even alive when we began in 1977. I think of the life of the Resource Center in decades. For the first decade we supported and connected women in and entering ministry and worked on the campaign to pass the Equal Rights Amendment. In the second decade, we sponsored annual conferences on feminist theology and on social justice issues, such as economic justice and violence against women. We also housed a program for two years called RESPONSE: A Religious Response to Violence Against Women and Children. As we began our third decade in 1997, our direction shifted again as we constructed a canvas labyrinth and turned our attention to creativity and spirituality. In an attempt to provide opportunities for renewal, especially for women well over 30, we sponsored a variety of retreats and workshops on meditation, writing, art, menopause, and being over 50.

Since we like to celebrate, we will probably say that everything that happens this year is in honor of our 30th anniversary. Some of the year's activities include programs, retreats, a book and a movie. See the Calendar for a list of events for the year. This spring you will want to pay particular attention to two events led by women whom we have invited to North Carolina.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF THE SOUL: A Writing Workshop led by Sharon Doubiago, April 20–21, 2007 (Friday, 7–9 pm, and Saturday, 9:30 am–4:30 pm). This workshop will put the creative back in creative writing and explore writing as a spiritual undertaking. Aimed at anyone writing poetry, memoir, personal essay, or fiction, the workshop will offer participants an opportunity to practice writing from the psyche, from the content of the self. Using memory, poetry, and exercises we will identify our own stories, rhythms, dreams, issues, and voices. You will love award-winning writer Sharon Doubiago, who has written more than two-dozen books and has been leading *Autobiography of the Soul* workshops for twenty years. Injured by her own experience in writing classes, she is gentle and inspiring to her students. Since she lives in San Francisco, we are thrilled to have snagged her on a rare trip North Carolina. You can read more about her at www.writersontheedge.org/doubiago.html.

LIKE A BURNING FIRE SHUT UP IN MY BONES: Women and the Prophetic Voice, April 28, 2007, 2:00–4:00 pm, will be led by Carolyn J. Sharp, Associate Professor of Hebrew Scriptures, Yale Divinity School. Participants will examine the prophetic voices of several Hebrew prophets to assist in claiming our sources of authority, understanding our communities, and discerning when

(Continued on back.)



Eggs

by Jeanette Stokes

There are little bits of colored eggshell and confetti on the carpet at our office. I've not been able to bring myself to clean them up, because they remind me of something I seem to enjoy remembering. Let me explain.

I stopped by my artist friend Bryant's house, at the end of February, to pick up gifts for Margie Hattori and Anita McLeod, trustees who were rotating off the RCWMS Board. Margie and Anita have shouldered much of the weight of the Resource Center for six years and the Board wanted to thank them with a gift. Bryant's handmade books, made of recycled materials, seemed appropriate. Beautiful to look at and pleasing to hold in the hand, the books are great to write in, because they open all the way and lie flat.

While I was looking through Bryant's stack of finished books, she and I started talking about another artist, Mary Margaret Wade, who is also on the RCWMS Board. Mary Margaret has been undergoing chemotherapy treatments that make her nauseated and tired. "Here, I have something for her!" said Bryant as she reached for three colorfully died eggs that looked like Easter eggs but had tissue paper glued over the ends. "Cascarones!" she announced. I screwed up my face and said, "What?"

Bryant explained that she had just been to visit a friend in San Miguel de Allende in Mexico for a week that included Ash Wednesday. There must be some sort of celebration similar to Mardi Gras, because people were having parties and cracking these brightly colored eggs over each other's heads.

Bryant went in the kitchen and returned with a pasteboard cylinder covered in green paper with the word *tea* on the side and began to put three eggs inside. I was so enamored with the container that I hardly noticed when she reached in her paper shredder to grab a handful of strips to stuff the cylinder and protect the eggs. Bryant's whole house is like an art studio. Everywhere you look there are beautiful and unusual things to see. My imagination gets a jump-start when I walk in the door, and if I don't want to make art when I arrived, I will by the time I leave.

I left Bryant's with two handmade books, a canister of eggs, and a smile on my face. When Mary Margaret came by the office a couple of days later, I told her I had something for her from Bryant, asked if I could demonstrate, and cracked one of the eggs over her head. Bryant had said they were filled with confetti but I was surprised by the amount of stuff that fell out on Mary Margaret's head, her jacket, and fluttered to the floor. She laughed and took the other two eggs home, where I expected she would put them on a shelf with other precious objects. But no, she knew a good thing when she saw it. Within days, she had cracked the remaining two over the heads of a couple of young Hispanic men who came to do some work on her house, who grinned and knew exactly what the cascarones were.

In the midst of a world of brokenness, we need to remember when and how to celebrate. We weren't put on this earth us just to struggle and to suffer, but also to know joy.

Calendar

Programs sponsored by RCMWS are marked with *.

April 1–6, 2007

ECUMENICAL HOLY WEEK LABYRINTH WALK

Binkley Baptist Church, Chapel Hill, NC

April 1, 4:00–8:30 pm; April 2 & 3, 6:30 am–8:30 pm;

April 4, 6:30 am–4:30 pm; April 5, 6:30 am–6:30 pm;

April 6, 6:30 am–12:00 noon

Sponsors: Several Chapel Hill churches

Cost: Free and open to the public. Please bring socks.

Contact: GJordan@thechapelofthecross.org or

rcwmsnc@aol.com

April 5, 7:00 pm

The Regulator, Durham, NC

A READING from *EXPLORING THE GEOLOGY OF*

THE CAROLINAS: A Field Guide to Favorite Places from

Chimney Rock to Charleston by Kevin G. Stewart &

Mary-Russell Roberson

[Reading also: April 29, 2:00 pm McIntyre's, Fearington

Village, south of Chapel Hill, NC]

April 9–13, 2007

WOMEN'S WEEK AT DUKE DIVINITY SCHOOL

Duke Divinity School, Durham, NC

Theme: Women and Vocation

Contact: www.divinity.duke.edu/studentlife/womenscenter

*April 20–21, 2007

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF THE SOUL: A Writing

Workshop

Poetry, Memoir, Personal Essay, Fiction

Durham, NC

The approach in this workshop will be writing from the psyche, from the content of the self, from all that's inside. One objective will be to find and strengthen the individual voice and vision in a way that won't be lost to rejections, criticisms, self-doubts and other voices. We will use memory, self-exploration, poetry exercises and experiments to help identify our own stories, rhythms, dreams, aesthetics, and voices. We will put "creative" back into Creative Writing. We will learn that craft is spiritual. For women and men.

Leader: Sharon Doubiago, award-winning San Francisco author (www.writersontheedge.org/doubiago.html)

Cost: \$75

Sponsor/Contact: RCMWS, 919-683-1236, www.rcwms.org

April 23–26, 2007

SOMEBODY'S CALLING MY NAME: SEJ

Clergywomen's 2007 Consultation

Epworth by the Sea, St. Simon's, GA

Leaders: Bishops Charlene Kammerer, Mary Virginia

Taylor, Hope Morgan Ward, Linda Lee, and Minerva

Carcano. Also Lisa Allen and Sally Bates.

Cost: \$180–315 based on lodging

Contact: www.epworthbythesea.org

*April 28, 2007, 2:00–4:00 pm

LIKE A BURNING FIRE SHUT UP IN MY BONES:

Women and the Prophetic Voice

Durham, NC

Ancient Biblical prophecy has long served as a source of moral strength and spiritual imagination for believers committed to social justice. Prophecy was a complex and marvelously artistic phenomenon. The prophets did not simply rant at those in power, they worked passionately to understand and communicate God's purposes for living communities. We will examine dynamic models for Biblical prophecy offered by Amos, Ezekiel, and Isaiah. These prophetic voices will guide us in reflection on urgent questions facing women today.

Leader: Carolyn J. Sharp, Associate Professor of Hebrew Scriptures, Yale Divinity School

Cost: \$25

Sponsor/Contact: RCMWS, 919-683-1236, www.rcwms.org



*April 29–May 6, 2007

A WEEK OF QUIET AND WRITING FOR WOMEN

Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC

RCWMS has reserved Pelican House, the retreat house on the beach at Trinity Center, for an unstructured week of writing for women. Please come for the whole week.

Cost: \$625, includes room and meals

Sponsor/Contact: RCMWS, 919-683-1236, www.rcwms.org

May 14–26, 2007

LABYRINTH PROGRAMS at CHARTRES CATHEDRAL

Chartres, France

May 14–19, Walking a Sacred Path with Marion

Woodman, "Virgin, Mother, Crone"

May 19–20, School of the Sacred Feminine

May 21–26, Walking a Sacred Path with Lauren Artress,

"Revelations of Divine Love, Julian of Norwich"

Sponsor/Contact: Veriditas, www.Veriditas.net

May 23–27, 2007

INTERNATIONAL EXPRESSIVE ARTS THERAPY

ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

Broyhill Inn and Conference Center, Boone, NC

Contact: www.conferences-camps.appstate.edu

June 18–24, 2007

A ROOM OF HER OWN 2007 WRITING RETREAT

Ghost Ranch, Abiquiu, New Mexico

Workshop \$750; housing at Ghost Ranch \$250 to \$875

Contact: www.a roomofherown.org/retreats.html

July 23–29, 2007

BUILDING INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY AT WORK:

4 Dialogues of Heart

Ghost Ranch, Abiquiu, NM

Explore heart-centered leaders to see how personal values and self-awareness can be used for organizational and personal development.

Leaders: Rebecca Reyes and Polly Weiss of Durham, NC

Cost: \$240 plus housing & meals

Contact: www.ghost ranch.org

July 26–29, 2007

INTERPLAY SUMMER UNINTENSIVE IN NORTH

CAROLINA

Trinity Retreat Center, Pine Knoll Shores, NC

Leaders: Phil Porter, Tom Henderson, & Ginny Going

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

*September 13–16, 2007

MEDITATION RETREAT WITH THERESE

FITZGERALD

Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC

Leader: Therese Fitzgerald, teacher in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh

Cost: \$400 single, \$375 double, includes room and meals

Sponsor/Contact: RCMWS, 919-683-1236, www.rcwms.org

*September 23–30, 2007

A WEEK OF QUIET AND WRITING FOR WOMEN

Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC

RCWMS has reserved Pelican House, the retreat house on the beach at Trinity Center, for an unstructured week of writing for women. Please come for the whole week.

Cost: \$625, includes room and meals

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*October 4–7, 2007

WISE CHOICES: A Retreat for Women Over 50

Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC

We'll explore how to respond to our soul's calling in midlife and through our elder years. Journaling, conversation, art, and the healing presence of nature will help us find what nourishes us as we create our own vision of growing older.

Leaders: Anita McLeod & Margie Hattori

Cost: about \$375

Sponsor/Contact: RCMWS, 919-683-1236, www.rcwms.org

Mother-to-Be

We are pleased to announce the winners of the 2006 RCWMS Essay Contest. First place goes to Linda Gupton of Louisburg, NC for A Mother to Be (printed below), second place to Claudia Horwitz of Durham, NC, and third to June Ellen Haslip of Eden, NC. An Honorable Mention was also given to Katarina Whitley of Vilas, NC. You will see some of these essays in future newsletters. The Essay Contest is made possible by a grant from the Clifford A. and Lillian C. Peeler Family Foundation.

A Mother-to-Be

by Linda Gupton

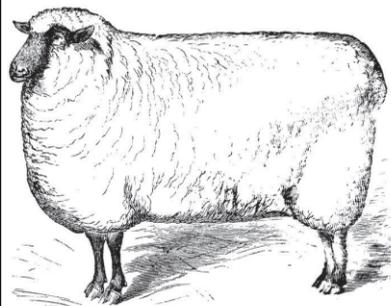
For most of my life, I seemed to be missing that maternal gene that all women are supposed to have. Born late in life to my parents, I never had younger siblings to care for. I had a few dolls that I played with, but reading books was of greater interest to me. Books would take me to all the faraway places and great adventures that were missing from my boring, predictable home life. While most of my girlfriends earned their spending money babysitting, my few attempts at childcare left me feeling like a bumbling idiot who might actually endanger the life of the vulnerable infants and toddlers placed in my care. Instead, I worked after school in my dad's accounting office where I was comfortable and at ease with rows of numbers and ledger sheets.

My best buddy in high school was married and pregnant before I finished my first semester of college. My head was swimming with dreams of being a journalist who traveled to exotic locales around the world and lived only a stone's throw away from real danger. Never much of a winner when it came to the dating game, I assumed I'd marry late in life, if at all. My mother even casually mentioned one summer afternoon as we were sitting on the front porch at home that she had never really been able to imagine me having kids. There, I thought—the truth of the matter was evident to all.

Much to the astonishment of my friends as well as myself, I was the first among my group of college buddies to walk down the aisle. He was an adventurer and risk-taker—a budding photojournalist just out of college like me, itching to see the world. We felt like soul mates and best friends almost from our first date and the question of kids was an easy one to resolve—neither of us was much interested. Had more important things to do at the time, it seemed.

For two decades there were more important things to do—fulfilling careers, working together on projects, traveling whenever we could find clients to pay the bills and send us to distant ports of call. As babies started arriving in the lives of our friends, the deep and rich conversations that we'd had with them in the past seemed to turn to tales of "poopy" diapers and sleepless nights. From then on, they had no other life except kids. And most didn't really seem that happy about the fact that kids had come along. Even more reason, I thought, to rejoice that my maternal instincts were practically non-existent.

An assignment to photograph the faces of poverty-stricken children in Appalachia spurred a profound about-face for my husband. The haunting, needy face of one particular young girl broke his heart. He would have brought her home in his camera bag if he'd had the chance. All of a sudden, he was on fire about how we could help kids like this young waif. The next day he was calling foster-care agencies, signing us up for foster parent training. I was reeling from the shock and sick to my stomach. Did he know what he was saying?!? Did he know what he was talking about?!



How could two people who had never had kids take in troubled foster children? It took me eight weeks to come around to a point of being even willing to consider the possibility. I reluctantly showed up for the first night of training, looking to find every fault, every reason why this wasn't going to work. And there were plenty of faults to find. My husband got angry because all I wanted to do was shoot down the idea. I thought it was an idea that needed shooting down. I kept hoping the whole thing would just go away. I was already past 40—the whole idea of being a mother, even a short-term foster mother, was a long-ago chapter, irrevocably shut away in a book on a dusty back shelf.

After the training was done and we had certificates in hand, it wasn't a week before the social worker was at our door with information on a child that he knew needed just what we had to offer. With no logical reasoning to support it, I felt a tug to say yes. This would be an adventure like none other, I knew. But I really didn't know—didn't have a clue what was in store for us. The next six months were the most exhausting and difficult of my life. I learned more about myself—about my weaknesses more than my strengths—as I grappled with how to love this child, how to care for him, how to even know what he needed. I've never known with any certainty what the whole experience was about, but I know that in a strangely unexpected way that child showed me that I did indeed have something maternal inside me. With all the pain and struggle and frustration he brought, I can still feel the weight of his slight body against my shoulder as we sat on the couch reading a book. You see, he loved books. That's one of the few things we had in common. Just as they had for me when I was his age, books helped him escape too—not from a life filled with boredom and routine, but from a life filled with abuse and abandonment.

He stayed with us for six months before we reached an impasse—with the system, not with the child—that could no longer be resolved. The next week, after he had been relocated to another foster home, we left for four days to celebrate our 20th wedding anniversary at a mountain cabin nestled in the Virginia woods. It was the best anniversary we've ever celebrated. I was so glad to be done with mothering—done with confronting my failures every day. But it wasn't really over, I knew. Something had been ignited in my heart, a flame of desire—faint, but there—that had never been there before. With all the struggles our foster child had brought, he gave me the first glimpse of what I had missed, what joys there could have been in parenting. Though our mistakes and missteps had been many, both of us had realized that we did have the potential to be parents—actually, pretty good parents. It was something we realized that neither of us had believed. For the first time, I could really understand the joys that we had missed. But I knew, even as I acknowledged the change in attitude, that I was beyond the point in my life where I would be willing or able to make such an enormous change. I could allow myself to plunge into regret or I could savor what I had learned and realize that life offers many choices, all of which we can't take advantage of.

Seven years ago, my husband and I bought a farm because we wanted an alternative to the fast-paced urban life. We wanted space to grow more of our own food. Cows, sheep, chickens, pigs and turkeys now live on this land with us, along with two dogs and two cats. My once latent mothering instincts have served me well as I care for my herds and flocks and fields. I rejoice over the sight of strong, young plants growing in my garden, lush with the bloom of youth. I nurse sick chickens when logic says they should just be put

(Continued on back.)

Thirty...

and how to speak a prophetic word to struggling communities and a suffering world.

We will publish a book of poetry by Sue Versenyi. Sue wrote many of the poems in her collection, *Enough Room*, in 2005 when she attended two of our week-long writing retreats. She died in 2006. A student at the UNC-Wilmington publishing lab is currently designing the book, which we plan to publish in September.

Our documentary project, *Meinrad Craighead: Praying with Images*, is proceeding apace. We anticipate its completion by the end of the year. In the last two years, we have raised \$50,000 of our \$100,000 budget for the documentary. Filmmakers Georgann Eubanks and Donna Campbell have recorded over thirty hours of interviews. Executive Producer Amy Kellum and intern Amanda Earp are planning twenty fundraising house parties for the spring and summer. We have created sets of greeting cards with two of our favorite Meinrad images to sell (10 cards for \$15). We also have Meinrad's retrospective book for sale, *Crow Mother and the Dog God*.

WISE CHOICES, a retreat for women over 50, will take place March 29–April 1. Anita McLeod and Margie Hattori have been leading workshops and retreats for women over 60 for the last few years with the post-menopausal crowd in mind. Women over 50 started saying that they wanted to be included, so beginning with the retreat in March, women over 50 will be included as well. The next retreat will be October 4–7.

We have two more week-long writing retreats scheduled this year in the Pelican House at Trinity Center on the NC coast: April 29–May 6 and September 23–30. Just give a woman a week, a bed, food, silence in the daytime, and a few companions to talk with in the evenings and watch her go. After a day or two of rest, participants write long, funny, moving, or heartbreaking pieces that lead to interesting conversations, more resting, and more writing. We did not know what a good idea it was to have these retreats when we started them four years ago. A few of us were just desperate for enough quiet to get some work done. We had no idea it would also restore deeply worn and wounded places in our souls.

We promise an event on the Black Madonna this year. Board member Rachael Wooten has been leading programs on the Black Madonna for over a decade, most recently in Charlotte and Chapel Hill for Jungian groups. These were received with such enthusiasm that we've made her promise she'll do one for us. To learn about the Black Madonnas of Europe, read China Galland's *Longing for Darkness: Tara and the Black Madonna*.

Our new Board Chair, Debra Brazell is from Louisiana and knows how to have a good time. Since her first response to the anniversary was, "Let's have a party," I expect we will. Stay tuned. It's only March and we don't actually turn thirty until August.



Mother...

down. I have the privilege of holding newborn lambs in my arms or cupping fluffy baby chicks in my hand. It's not the same as holding my own child in my arms, but it's enough. I'm satisfied.

A part of our long-term vision for this land is to make it into a haven for others as well—a place of healing and recovery for those in need. Everywhere I look, I see people hungry to be nurtured—yearning for someone to love them unconditionally, cheer them on without reservation, and gently speak truth when it needs to be said. As I've come to embrace my maternal yearnings late in life, God seems to be placing a salve on any regrets and working everything together for good. Who would ever have guessed that I'd start my fifth decade feeling so pregnant with opportunity.

Linda Gupton has been a freelance writer and journalist for more than 25 years. When not writing, she's tending to the animals and garden on her farm in northern Franklin County.

RCWMS

The Board greatly appreciates contributions of time, energy, and money to RCWMS. To make a financial contribution or to volunteer to help with office tasks, mailings, or program planning, please contact the RCWMS office or see us on the web at www.rcwms.org.

We are grateful for recent gifts from the Backyard Fund of the Triangle Community Foundation and the Presque Isle Farm Fund of the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina. We also appreciate several recent gifts of stock.

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