

South of the Garden

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

Volume 29, Number 2

March, 2008

Carter

by Jeanette Stokes

Seventeen years ago, the phone rang and a friend's voice said, "Carter has had a heart attack. We are not sure if she will survive. Please come." I was standing in the condominium on Gregson Street that my first husband and I had rented for several months that winter while we looked for a house to buy in Durham. The heavy Spanish-revival furniture we had in that dining room is forever burned into my memory along with my saying, "I have to go to Winston-Salem. I'll be back sometime."

Anne Carter Shelley was one of my first Presbyterian clergywomen friends. She followed her first husband to Durham where he had a job, shortly after I finished seminary at Duke and moved to Greensboro. Though we never lived in the same city at the same time, we became close friends.

Carter went about finding a call for herself in the most systematic, energetic way I have ever seen. She wrote nearly every parish minister in the Presbytery, introduced herself, said she was looking for a job and explained what she could do for them right then.

When a call came from the Butner Presbyterian Church, she gave it her whole heart. She tried to organize all sorts of programs and was disappointed to discover that the federal employees who made up the membership of the church only wanted church services on Sunday morning and not much more. When her first husband came home one day, said he had met someone on an airplane, fallen in love, and was leaving her, she was cared for and supported in the most wonderful way by her otherwise not very enthusiastic congregation.

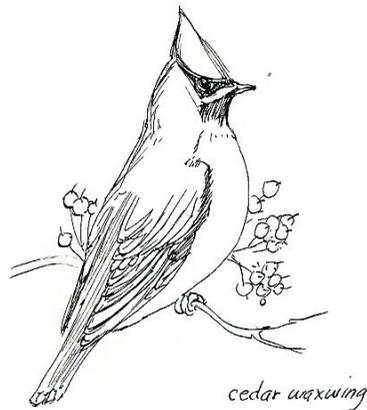
Single again, Carter rented an apartment designed for a handicapped person. While she was not disabled, she enjoyed the bathroom that was so large she could do her exercises in it. Always more interested in ideas than housework, she forgot to buy a vacuum cleaner for the apartment. The carpets were new, and I teased her for years about the fuzz balls that rolled around the floors.

Eventually she became the associate minister at First Presbyterian Church in Durham. We were central to one another's lives for the better part of three decades. We served as co-chairs of the Committee on Women's Concerns in our Presbytery. She participated in my ordination in 1982. When I married my first husband in 1990, she served as one of the clergy. When she got married a second time, I was one of the ministers in her wedding.

Carter left First Presbyterian in Durham to pursue a Ph.D. in preaching at Princeton Theological seminary but was not thrilled with the program, and her health was declining from kidney disease. When she returned to North Carolina, she did some work with me at the Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South until she figured out what to do next. Eventually she chose a Ph.D. program in rhetoric in the English Department at UNC Greensboro, which was an alternative way to study preaching. She went on to serve more churches and to be an Associate Executive Presbyter.

We often joked about the three Presbyterian clergywomen who had served in North Carolina: Carter Shelley, Shelley

(Continued on back.)



drawings by Sue Sneddon

Hope

I'm taking a Duke class, *The South in Black and White*, taught by Tim Tyson, a white guy from North Carolina with a Ph.D. in African American history, who is best known for his book *Blood Done Sign My Name*. I thought I knew something about the history of the South. After all, I am descended from southerners in every direction. Reading about slavery, white supremacy, lynchings, burnings, and every manner of human evil after Reconstruction and in the Jim Crow south, made me feel like people are simply horrible creatures.

In the class, I learned that there was a coalition called the Fusion Coalition in North Carolina in the early 1890s that had been successful in electing black and white officials to state and local offices. The short version of the story is that Josephus Daniels, who would later own the *Raleigh News and Observer*, the paper of record in North Carolina, and Charles B. Aycock, who would later be the governor of North Carolina, and their white supremacist buddies marched into Wilmington, burned the black newspaper building, shot some African Americans, and herded others to the train station, telling them never to come back. In an armed coup, they ousted Coalition leaders all over the state, forcing elected officials to resign or flee on the spot.

One of the assignments for the class was to do research on my hometown. "Tulsa, Oklahoma, how boring," I thought. "Nothing ever happens there." In looking online, I was reminded of a race riot in Tulsa in 1921. I had not known of the riot until a commission was appointed a decade ago to study what had happened. After interviewing survivors (children at the time of the riot) and doing extensive historical and archeological work, the commission determined that the Tulsa Riot (better thought of as a massacre) was the deadliest race riot in the history of the country, and the only time aerial bombing had taken place on U.S. mainland soil.

The riot was set off by an incident in which a black man probably bumped into a white female elevator operator. She screamed and he ran from the building. He was then arrested and accused of rape. Determined not to let the man be lynched, the police chief and his deputies barricaded themselves in the courthouse as a large mob of white men gathered outside. A smaller crowd of black men gathered in Greenwood, the African American part of Tulsa, and went down to the courthouse to protect the accused. Some gun was fired and a riot broke out. Thousands of white males armed with shotguns, rifles, and pistols stormed into Greenwood.

Estimates are that 150 to 300 people died, though death certificates exist for only 39. Some think it could have been as many as 3,000. Thirty-five blocks of Greenwood were burned to the ground. Black people were shot in the street, dragged from their homes, and rounded up like criminals. Others simply walked out of town and never came back.

Reading about the racial history of Tulsa was anything but boring. I was horrified. In the face of all that, I wondered whether there were any signs of hope.

Recently, I had lunch with a friend who is an avid watcher of presidential campaigns. We celebrated the fact that two Democratic candidates are a white female

(Continued on back.)

Calendar

RCWMS sponsored events are marked with *.

March 4–5, 2008

INTERFAITH FEMINISMS: Jewish, Christian, & Muslim
The Phyllis Tribble Lecture Series

Divinity School, Wake Forest Univ., Winston-Salem, NC
Speakers: Mary C. Boys, Susannah Heschel, Yvonne Haddad, and Hibba Abugideiri
Contact: www.wfu.edu/divinity/tribble-lectures.html

March 7–8, 2008

WICK OF DESIRE: Carolyn McDade Singing Weekend
Jubilee! Community, 46 Wall St., Asheville, NC
Cost: \$85
Contact: www.holygroundretreats.org, 828-236-0222

March 12, 2008, 7-8:30 pm (2nd Wednesday each month)
TARA MEDITATION

Long View Center, Raleigh, NC
Meditation instruction, practice, and commentaries on Tara, the beloved female Buddha of Tibet.
Leader: Rachael Wooten, Ph.D., Jungian analyst and meditation teacher
Cost: \$10 suggested donation
Contact: Rachael Wooten, rw.moonlight@earthlink.net

March 14, 2008, 9:30 am-2:00 pm

PEACE HILL DAY: Day of Mindfulness and Reflection
The Stone House, Mebane, NC
Sponsor: The Peace Hill Community
Contact: mwiggins@duke.edu

March 16-21, 2008

ECUMENICAL HOLY WEEK LABYRINTH WALK
Binkley Baptist Church, Chapel Hill, NC
Sponsors: Several Chapel Hill churches
Cost: Free and open to the public
Contact: RCWMS or GJordan@thechapelofthecross.org

March 28–30 2008

HERSTORY 2008: Women Who Testify—Proclaiming the Gospel in Our Own Voice
Massanetta Springs Conference Center, Harrisonburg, VA
A feminist perspective on the testimonies of biblical and historical women can offer hope and vision.
Speaker: Anna Carter Florence, Columbia Theo.Seminary
Contact: Sally, sallyorob@ntelos.net 540-377-9296

*April 5, 2008, 2:00-5:00 pm

EMBODIED WRITING: Yoga & Writing
Durham, NC
Use yoga to deepen your creative voice. Gentle yoga stretches, writing prompts, and discussion will help make our writing rich, varied, and full of concrete images.
Leader: Faulkner Fox, author of *Dispatches from a Not-So-Perfect Life*, yoga teacher, and creative writing professor
Cost: \$40
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*April 6, 2008, 3:00 pm

SCREENING OF *My Autobiography in Scripture: Thelma Chandler Moorhead*
Center for Documentary Studies, Durham, NC
Film is by Meggan Morehead about her mother, Thelma, a southerner who became a missionary to Japan in 1948. Meggan and Thelma, now 91, will attend the screening.
Cost: \$5 suggested donation
Contact: Meggan Moorhead, meggan9@juno.com

April 12, 2008, 8:00 am-5:30 pm

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & SEXUAL ASSAULT:
Providing Competent Medical & Spiritual Care
Durham Regional Hospital, Durham, NC
Designed for clergy and laity, health care providers, etc.
Sponsors: Duke Divinity and Duke Univ. Health System
Cost: \$20, \$10 Students, includes breakfast and lunch
Contact: 919-684-4293 or candice.ryals@duke.edu



*April 17–20, 2008

WISE CHOICES: A Retreat for Women Over 50
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC
Explore ways to respond to the soul's calling in midlife and our elder years. Create a new vision of growing older.
Leaders: Anita McLeod and Margie Hattori
Cost: \$500 single, \$475 double (includes room and food)
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*April 28–May 3, 2008

BARCELONA & MONTSERRAT WITH MEINRAD CRAIGHEAD
The Meinrad Craighead Documentary Project invites you to join artist Meinrad Craighead for a week in Spain.
Contact: Amy Kellum, ak@meinradproject.org

*May 2–9, 2008

A WEEK OF QUIET & 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: \$660, includes room and meals
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*June 13-15, 2008

TARA & THE BLACK MADONNA: A Weekend Retreat
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC
Focus on the history and legends of the Black Madonna and explore her connections to Kali of India and Tara, the female Buddha of Tibet. There will be plenty of time to meditate or relax by the water's edge.
Leader: Rachael Wooten, Ph.D., Jungian analyst and meditation teacher
Cost: \$400 single, and \$375 double (meals included)
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

June 15-20, 2008

FEMINIST THEOLOGIES: Heritage & Future
Washington, DC
Summer institute for graduate students and junior faculty.
Leaders: Katie Geneva Cannon, Mary E. Hunt, Judith Plaskow, Kwok Pui-lan, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and Deborah Whitehead
Sponsors: The Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual (WATER) and Feminist Studies in Religion
Cost: \$800 (room, board, and program). Apply by April 1
Contact: WATER, water@hers.com, 301-589-2509

*September 18-21, 2008

MEDITATION RETREAT: Wisdom & Compassion in the World
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC
This retreat will include periods of sitting meditation, indoor walking meditation, and dharma talks.
Leaders: Therese Fitzgerald and Wendy Johnson, Dharma teachers
Cost: about \$450 including room and meals
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com, www.rcwms.org

*September 26–October 3, 2008

A WEEK OF QUIET & 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: \$660, includes room and meals
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*October 16–19, 2008

WISE CHOICES: A Retreat for Women Over 50
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC
This retreat for women over 50 will focus on writing.
Leaders: Anita McLeod and Margie Hattori
Cost: \$450 single, \$425 double (includes room and food)
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

Waiting for...

We are pleased to announce the winners of the 2007 RCWMS Essay Contest. First place goes to Libby Fosso of Chapel Hill, NC (see below); second to Kathryn Banakis, New Haven, CT; and third to Alison Louise Harney, Wilmington, NC. The judges were Marya McNeish, Alison Jones, Mary Russell Roberson and Betty Wolfe. The Essay Contest is made possible by a grant from the Clifford A. and Lillian C. Peeler Family Foundation.

WAITING FOR NOTHING TO CHANGE

by Libby Fosso

*Oh, the Lord's been good to me,
And so I thank the Lord,
For giving me, the things I need,
the sun and the rain and the apple seed.
The Lord's been good to me. A-MEN!*

That's a blessing. A prayer before mealtime that some of our dearest friends taught us when we had only "God is great, God is good" and the Moravian grace in our repertoire. Their children were around the same age as my girls, who were three and a half and six. Kids and parents joined hands around the dinner table, swinging, gripping, and singing with a rollicking and joyous rhythm. The syncopated pause before "A-men" was a favorite moment, as was the squeezing of hands before letting go and digging in.

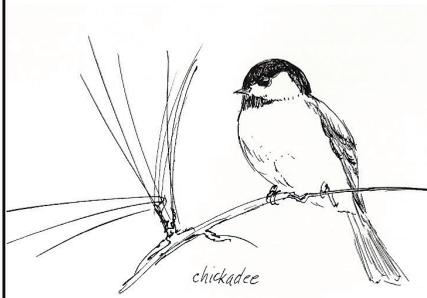
What is it about hand-holding? There is such perfect union in hands—in connecting through laced fingers or cupped palms. A small hand folded safely in a bigger one, a daughter's smooth hand holding a mother's careworn one, a husband and wife finding connection for a brief moment in a busy day, a son unabashedly clinging to his dad's. The warmth, the texture, the intimacy between people is daring and bold and necessary.

But one person in my family refused to hold hands. My youngest, Camille. She was born into the world with a sensitivity and defensiveness about her body. A defensiveness so strong that she screamed and cried when we tried to teach her things, hand over hand. It traumatized her. So when the blessing was sung, Camille was left alone. Family on either side of her left their palms upturned and open in case she might, by some miracle, have a change of heart and complete the circle.

Camille was born into the world and crowned with a diagnosis. A label of "autistic spectrum disorder" was the umbrella designation to include mental retardation, apraxia and other maladies. Medical journals, books, popular articles, and experts helped me learn too much about this neurological disorder—but I detest every iota of information I've sought to amass. It objectifies my daughter. The reports and grim outlooks dim her smile and potential and turn her into another case, a statistic.

This child, now four years old, has no words. Not one. Not "ma ma," "da da," "ball," "no," "mine"—nothing. I long to talk with her, not just to her. What an irony for me—one who has spent her professional career as a museum educator, as a communications officer, a teacher—to have a child who cannot utter one single, intelligible word.

How would my life be different without her? I have wondered many times, enough to feel guilty about it. So I squelch those escapist daydreams and try to walk through the days as I see others do. Before Christmas, our family went on a favorite Saturday morning outing to the Farmer's Market in Carrboro. While there, I spent time chatting with a talented man who makes sculptures and furniture—fantastic and wonderful works of art. I commented upon three tables he'd made, using Vermont slate for the top. "I was born in Burlington!" I exclaimed, and we traded stories; I spoke about my parents cross-country skiing and my own toddler escapades getting lost in the fields among cattle and snowdrifts.



I studied his three tables; two were twin-like, the same rectilinear regularity of shape, identical in all aspects. The third was kin to an insect, with one leg of the table poking out into space—a granddaddy longlegs getting ready to edge his spindly appendage out front, testing, ever so gingerly reaching. The top had a natural curve to it, a seductive sweep like the inside rim of a coffee cup. It was my favorite of the three, I told him, because of its differences and the way blemishes in the stone's awkward shape were incorporated, rather than honed down to fit a perfect geometric frame. He laughed and said, "I call that one my autistic table, not my artistic one—get it?" As I clenched Camille's hand so she wouldn't run away from his hearty guffaw, I winced—and laughed politely.

What would you have me do? Quote him chapter and verse from my impressive knowledge about autism and educate the insensitive dolt? He's just a guy, a regular person, a fellow who tried to lighten my morning with his brand of humor. If I were living another life, I probably would have laughed as loudly as the next person. But I confess, I tire of pretending it's always O.K. I make excuses for my daughter's behavior when people peer into her face to say hello and she reacts by biting her arm or scrunching her hand over her eyes and wailing. "She's shy," I smile and say, or "she's tired."

The truth is, I'm tired. And respite is hard to find. I don't want to sit on a hard church pew and be subjected to another parable about Jesus healing the sick, raising the dead, making the blind man see and the lame man walk. Don't tell me again how lucky Camille is to have me as her mother and how one day I'll know what a blessing she is. I'm sick of all that.

Instead, tell me a story about how the deaf man lived his whole life and never heard an owl's lonesome call outside his window at dusk, how the blind woman never saw a sunset through the mountain pines, and how the little girl grew up and was never able to tell her mother, "I love you." Tell me about miracles that never happened and how these people managed to find their faith in spite of it all. Tell me the truth that happens when hope disappears and there isn't anything left. Acknowledge my angry faith and don't promise me miracles of the flesh.

But please understand. There are moments, after all, when the word "blessing" doesn't seem like a curse. How many times has my daughter's delicious vivacity been acknowledged and honored. How lucky we have been to have friends who treat my girls as their own and whose hands rest gently on their shoulders (and ours) as a healing reminder of acceptance. How often have I felt that gentle weight on my shoulder—every time another child includes my youngest in his play, every time she is invited to a birthday party, every time her sibling sticks up for any disadvantaged child in the face of teasing. I feel weighted down, in a most uplifted way.

And so you can well imagine the joy, not long ago, when we began to notice a difference around our table at dinner. Our outstretched palms were open, waiting, as usual. And then, we noticed (eyes closed, heads bowed for grace) the ever-so-gentlest, light-as-duck-down, tentative touch. Like the seeds of a dandelion being blown across your palm. Like a glider touching down on a runway built only for 747s. Like—indeed, like what it was, the touch of small four-year-old fingertips reaching across, daring to hold hands. A touch so imperceptible, you might not even have noticed—unless you'd been waiting for it as long as we had.

So there it is, my faith. Imperceptible, filtering in by glacial degrees, taking me by surprise when I least expect it. Nothing much changes in the world, except that a small drop of possibility ripples out and keeps the next day coming.

Libby Fosso lives and teaches in Chapel Hill, NC.

Carter...

Wiley, and Wiley Smith. My friends were always getting them mixed up. "Now which one is she?" they would ask when I was talking about one of the three. Both Carter and Shelley had served on the board of RCWMS and Wiley had been to several of our retreats.

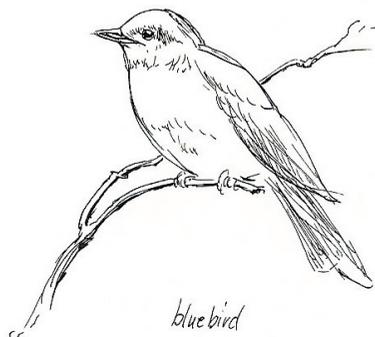
I didn't see Carter as often after 1995, when she married Tom Frazer, a crunchy granola doctor in Wilkesboro, NC, and moved there to help raise his two children. I visited her new home several times and saw her whenever she came to the Triangle. She taught English part time in Boone and Winston-Salem and pastored more congregations. Last year, with the children launched and out of the house, Tom and Carter decided they wanted an adventure and moved to Orcas Island in the Puget Sound where he joined a practice. She was writing a memoir about being a stepparent and was pursuing work in the church. He said she was the perfect partner for him.

After receiving that phone call seventeen years ago, I went speeding to the hospital in Winston-Salem. Carter was stable by the time I arrived. The doctors convinced her it was a one time event brought on by the stress of the surgery and not to worry about her heart. Eighteen months ago she had another cardiac episode but was told that reducing life stress and keeping up her exercise program (she was once a dancer and had become an avid walker) was the best medicine.

On Saturday morning, February 9, 2008, she was back in the Carolinas visiting her family and went to an exercise class in Rock Hill, SC where she had grown up. She collapsed during the class, could not be revived, and was gone forever. The world lost a vibrant, generous, kind, engaged woman, a wife, stepmother, minister, daughter, sister, and friend. She is survived by her parents, four siblings, her husband, two stepchildren, and scores of friends.

Carter's memorial service was held at Oakland Avenue Presbyterian Church in Rock Hill, SC on Wednesday February 13. Carter was still a member of Salem Presbytery when she died. Dozens of clergy attended the service. I helped to lead the service along with clergywomen Laura Smith Conrad, Dale Walker, and Jamie Pharr, and graduate school friend Warren Rochelle.

When we left Rock Hill after the service, it was just beginning to drizzle. Not far up the highway, it started to rain, though the sun was shining. We were right on the edge of the storm. "Look!", said Lori Pistor who was riding with me, "A rainbow." Just to our right was the beginning of a gorgeous rainbow and before long the other end appeared to our left. As we rolled along in the rain, the end of the rainbow moved until it was literally laid out on the pavement in front of us. Carter would have liked the rainbow road. Later, we stopped for something to eat in Greensboro, and when we came out of the restaurant it was snowing hard. Big fluffy snowflakes settled on our coats like a benediction for the day.



Hope...

and a black man. She commented that there is hope springing up around the Barack Obama campaign. She noted that some people still have John Kennedy's picture hanging in their homes, not because he was such a great president (she didn't think he was) but because they remember how they felt when he was president. Hopeful, they felt hopeful.

A few days later I ran across a *Time* magazine article about the interest of young people in presidential campaigns. *Time* reported that in 2000 13% of 18-29 year olds polled were paying attention to the presidential campaign. In 2004 it was 24%, and this year it is 74%. Nearly half of the young people polled said they were "passionate and deeply committed to a particular presidential candidate."

Later, at a continuing education event at Duke I met Tom and Farra Cottingham. Both Duke grads, they are 89 and 91 years old. I learned that Tom was from Georgia and Farra from Oklahoma, as am I. As we talked around a lunch table, it became clear that they were both very progressive. When I asked him how he could be so progressive and have grown up in Georgia, he said it was because of his father. His dad held up a grand jury for three days one time while resisting the pressure to convict a black man. "They threatened him," Tom said. "We're going to get you." They never did.

These are signs of hope. A man born in the 1880s standing up against white supremacy. A coalition of black and white people in North Carolina in the 1890s working together to get people elected. A white woman and a black man in a contest to be their party's candidate for president in 2008.

Change is slow, and as Sr. Evelyn Mattern once said to me, the price of justice is constant vigilance.

RCWMS

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