

South of the Garden

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

Volume 29, Number 2

June, 2008

Spain

by Amy Kellum

As I write this in early May, Meinrad Craighead and I are over the ocean. We are returning from a wonderful trip to Barcelona, Montserrat, and Madrid. It was an amazing journey! We were with nine other pilgrims from all over who gathered to be with Meinrad in these special places.

Our time in Barcelona was simply magical. We wandered along La Rambla in the cool of the evening. We had wonderful meals with friends. We walked and walked through the ancient streets of Old Town. Of course, Meinrad found dogs wherever we were! We spent hours in museums and churches. We steeped ourselves in images of Our Lady. One particular museum took us by surprise. The Museum of Frederic Mares in Old Town has an amazing collection of Madonnas. We could hardly contain ourselves as we kept rounding corners and finding more and more amazing statues from all ages. We were so happy to benefit from this collector's passion for Mary. Meinrad was thrilled to find a room in this same museum that was dedicated to Montserrat. There were old posters, collectible trinkets, and drawings of devotees. It was a great warm up for our trip up the mountain.

The pilgrimage up to Montserrat was absolutely thrilling. The mountain juts out of the earth as if it is reaching for heaven. The peaks look like the teeth of a saw. The energy on the mountain was palpable. We were with hundreds of other pilgrims who had been drawn there by the Black Madonna. As we made our way up the steep stairs to her place high over the main altar in the Basilica, we joined the millions of people who over the years had been drawn by the rich darkness of her beauty and mercy. As we attended Laudes each morning, we were treated to a special time with her when the crowds were thin. It was hard to believe that we could actually walk up to her and touch the sphere in her right hand, as so many had done before us.

Walking in the mountains was awe-inspiring. So many wildflowers—hillsides covered with rosemary and thyme—rocks upon rocks upon rocks. The steep, rapid descent and the magnificent views took our breath as the cable car rushed us back down the mountain to the train station. I was able to shoot a bit more footage for the documentary we are making about Meinrad. A few shots of her at Montserrat really round out the story.

Meinrad was so happy to have been able to return to this special place. She even made a short visit to the convent nearby where she lived for nine months in the mid-sixties. Those of us fortunate enough to have joined her will never forget our pilgrimage.

As we prepare to land in the US, we are tired but very satisfied. I am so grateful to be able to accompany Meinrad on some of her teaching trips.

Note: Watch these pages for updates about the progress of the documentary. We should be finishing up soon—and can't wait to get it into your hands! Thanks so much for your support. For more information about the project, visit the website: www.meinradproject.org.



Logo of the Abbey of Montserrat

Pilgrim

by Jeanette Stokes

What I learned from a week in Spain and ten days in France this spring is that I like being a pilgrim but I don't much like being a tourist. At least that is what I kept saying to myself as I traipsed through ancient cities and whizzed past mountains, vineyards, and sea.

While a tourist travels to visit sites, a pilgrim goes in search of the divine. The wise pilgrim knows that the learning or meaning is as much in the journey itself as in the destination. I know that when I am too focused on the destination, I can miss a lot along the way, whether I am on my way to the top of a mountain, the edge of the sea, or a morning walk in Durham.

The parts of the trip to Spain and France that I enjoyed the most were when I stopped to pay attention or got off the main path and wandered around. For instance, the pilgrimage to the Abbey of Montserrat near Barcelona was fascinating. I loved the 800-year-old wooden statue of Mary and her young son that is the focal point of the church. I stood before her with other members of our small group as we wept tears of joy or loss or longing. I would not have traded seeing her for anything, but what I will carry with me forever is the sound of the peeling bells calling us and other pilgrims to prayer.

One morning on my way to Lauds, I stopped near the door to the church, put my back to the outside wall, and let the sound of the bells wash over me. Bong, bong, bong, bong—the enormous brass bells clanged again and again—the sound bouncing off the stone walls of the courtyard around me and reverberating from the great stone mountains overhead. It was like being rolled in waves of sound.

A few days later, my husband and I were driving in the Camargue, the agricultural area in the south of France below Arles. We left the main road and followed the map to smaller and smaller roads, hoping for an adventure. Near midday, we came to a ferry that crossed the Petit Rhone (a branch of the Rhone), but could not cross because the ferry stops every day for lunch. Beside the dock, there was a small restaurant, the sort of place that, in the US, would serve greasy hamburgers and give you indigestion. In the south of France the tiny cafe served us delicious crepes, salad, and a fine glass of wine. We relaxed in the shade of an umbrella until it was time to take the five-car ferry across the narrow river. Later that afternoon, on another back road, we stopped at a fruit and vegetable stand, where we finally met a woman who spoke no English at all. It seemed like we had to drive to the very end of France to get away from traffic, tourists, and people who spoke English. We succeeded, not by going directly to a ferry or a produce stand, but by wandering around, slowly.

After a week in Provence, we took the fast train from Avignon to Paris. Arriving too late in the afternoon to take in a museum, we decided on a twenty-minute walk to Notre Dame. The entry line was a block long, but moved along steadily. Once inside, the place was mobbed. It felt like being at the state fair. Hordes of people, shoulder to shoulder, snaked through the cavernous church. The constant sound of voices

(Continued on back.)

Calendar

RCWMS sponsored events are marked with *.

*June 7–August 31, 2008, Saturdays, 9:00–10:30 am
YOGA IN THE PARK

Durham Central Park (on the hill above the Farmers' Market), Durham, NC

Free yoga taught by a different local teacher each week. Bring a towel or blanket and some water to drink.

Sponsors: The Scrap Exchange, stone circles, Cozy, RCWMS, and Durham Central Park, Inc.

Cost: Free

June 8, 2008, 4:00–5:00 pm

A POETRY READING by Nancy Corson Carter in celebration of her recently published book, *Near the End of the Rainy Season: Poems from Japan*

Church of Reconciliation, Chapel Hill, NC

Contact: Nancy Corson Carter, nccarter@nc.rr.com

*June 13–15, 2008

TARA & THE BLACK MADONNA: A Weekend Retreat at the Beach

Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC

Explore the history of Tara, the beloved female Buddha of Tibet, and the Black Madonna, a profound symbol of healing, through lecture, discussion, meditation, and art. There will be plenty of time to reflect and rest by the sea. Leader: Rachael Wooten, Ph.D., Jungian analyst and meditation teacher

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

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

June 14, 2008, 12 noon–4:30 pm

A SUMMER SOLSTICE CELEBRATION

Unity Center of Peace Church, Chapel Hill, NC

Enjoy an original Angels message for the Solstice, a visualization about learning to love oneself, making an amulet and bag for the Divine Feminine with yourself, personal sharing, and a delicious vegetarian lunch.

Leader: Susanya Schuett, visual artist and former Penland Resident Craftsman

Cost: \$100

Contact: Susanya, 919-688-9584

June 15–20, 2008

FEMINIST THEOLOGIES: Heritage and Future
Washington, DC

The Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual (WATER) and Feminist Studies in Religion, Inc. (FSR) invite graduate students and junior faculty to apply.

Leaders: Katie Cannon, Mary E. Hunt, Judith Plaskow, Kwok Pui-lan, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and more

Cost: \$800 (room, board, & program), some scholarships

Contact: WATER, water@hers.com, 301-589-2509

June 20–22, 2008

SUSTAINING EARTH, SUSTAINING SPIRIT: Weekend with Miriam Therese MacGillis

Grailville, Loveland, OH

Be inspired, transformed and empowered to move through the unprecedented dangers and opportunities unleashed in these early years of the 21st century.

Leader: Miriam Therese MacGillis, O. P., Genesis Farm

Cost: \$250 (double room and meals), some scholarships

Contact: 513-683-2340, www.grailville.org

June 27–29, 2008

A PLACE AT THE TABLE: EEWC (Evangelical and Ecumenical Women's Caucus) Biennial Conference

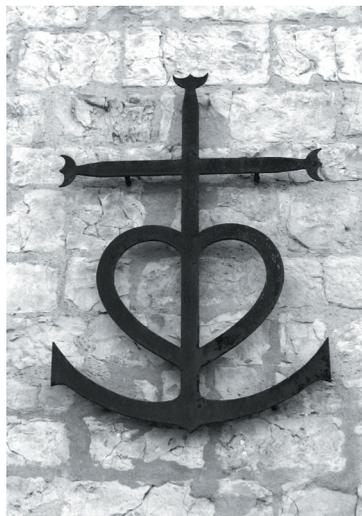
Sheraton City Centre Hotel, Indianapolis, IN

Join feminist Christian EEWC in celebrating its longstanding commitment to compassion, equality, and justice for all people.

Leaders: Nancy Wilson (MCC), Virginia Mollenkott, Reta Finger, a concert by Carrie Newcomer, and more

Cost: \$100-225

Contact: www.aplaceatthetable2008.com



Logo of Saintes Maries de la Mer

July 21–24, 2008

BRITAIN AND IRELAND SCHOOL OF FEMINIST THEOLOGY

The University of Winchester, England

Leaders: Rosemary Radford Ruether; Beverley Clack, Oxford Brookes Univ.; Anna King, Univ. Of Winchester;

Mary Grey, St Mary's Univ., Twickenham; Mary

Condren, Institute Of Feminism & Religion, Dublin

Contact: www.bisft.org.uk

July 24–27, 2008

SECRETS OF INTERPLAY ONE and SUMMER INTERPLAY UNTENSIVE

Trinity Retreat Center, Pine Knoll Shores, NC

Come play and unwind in the free and easy atmosphere of an InterPlay Untensive or experience the practice and philosophy of InterPlay through Secrets of InterPlay.

Leaders: Ginny Going and Tom Henderson

Cost: \$200–300 tuition plus \$240 room and board

Colleagues, 400 S. Boylan Avenue, Raleigh, NC 27603

*September 18–21, 2008

A MEDITATION RETREAT: with Therese Fitzgerald & Wendy Johnson

Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC

Theme: Wisdom and Compassion in the World

Retreat will include Dharma talks, sitting and walking meditation, writing, silent meals, yoga, discussion groups, and time for rest and reflection.

Leaders: Therese Fitzgerald and Wendy Johnson,

Dharma teachers ordained by Thich Nhat Hanh. Wendy is the author of *Gardening at the Dragon's Gate: At Work in the Wild and Cultivated World*.

Cost: \$450 double, \$500 single (includes room and meals)

Scholarships available. Send \$100 deposit to register.

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

September 29–October 3, 2008

SOLATIDO: a Southern Singer/Songwriters' Workshop
Wildacres Retreat, Little Switzerland, NC on the Blue Ridge Parkway

Share music and learn from peers in a non-competitive, supportive environment. Featuring Carrie Newcomer.

Cost: \$275 double (room, meals, workshop & concert)

Contact: www.solatido-workshop.net

*September 26–October 3, 2008

A WEEK OF QUIET AND WRITING FOR WOMEN
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC

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 will focus on silence and writing.

Leaders: Anita McLeod & Margie Hattori

Cost: \$450 for a single and \$425 for a double (meals included)

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

2009 WRITING WEEKS

*January 4–11, 2009

May 10-17, 2009

September 20-27, 2009

Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC

Unstructured weeks of writing for women. Please come for the whole week.

Cost: about \$675 (includes room and meals)

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

www.rcwms.org

Steve

Kathryn Banakis of New Haven, Connecticut won second place in the 2007 RCWMS Essay Contest. Her essay, Steve, Psych, Sanctity, is printed here.

When I was assigned to the adult psychiatric ward at the large urban hospital where I was completing summer chaplaincy training, first thing I did was buy a beta fish. Male betas notoriously fight each other (or their own reflections in a mirror held up to the bowl) until one of them dies. In the case of a mirror, both fish, so to speak, die. With my father's dimples but my mother's horrible poker face, I was nervous about responding to advances from male patients. So I purchased Steve. That way, when I was asked about my marital status I could answer that I was seeing a guy named Steve. We saw quite a bit of each other and, truth be told, he was pretty aggressive towards other men.

Steve wallowed in his new home and took to an anorexic habit of spitting out his food. My pleas of: "You're a fish! This is your lot in life" fell on deaf ears. OK, no ears, but still. I moved him into a bigger bowl with a more artistic shape, more water, and lined with glass marbles that matched the teal in his fins. He began to preen. He did gainers into triples ending in a perfect swan dive into the marbles. In time he began eating half the recommended amount of food after solid workouts, choreographed to the soundtrack of Steve! the musical. I had purchased Greg Louganis. Just my luck.

As it turned out, I didn't need Steve as a cover. Once or twice male patients shyly mentioned that they really liked coming to spirituality groups on Wednesdays, but they may have said the same thing to the art therapist and medication counselor. The questions that caught me off guard in the psych unit were those asked with an honesty that is usually filtered out by social decorum. My psychiatric patients, or in the Yankee euphemism "people who are not well," taught me the questions I needed to be asking many of my patients in the hospital. Lacking inhibitions, brought about by some combination of chemistry and circumstance, those patients ably articulated what many other patients in the hospital were feeling but could not bring themselves to say. God bless them.

When groups weren't going on in the Day Room where meetings were held, it hummed like an elementary school recess yard, complete with girly shrieks and occasional tears. Telenovelas on the TV competed with 10 minute or less phone calls home (made more difficult by a blasting stereo) topped off by running water from the corner kitchenette sink being used by the patient who soothed himself by pouring-washing-rinsing anything he could get his hands on, including his own hands.

During any group, though, everything was turned off. No matter how I began the discussion, the conversation inevitably led to how hard it could be to talk to God because they felt angry or guilty or scared or ignored. Many patients and families elsewhere in the hospital feel the same way, but without the psychiatric patients' help, I might not have known how to hazard a guess at my other patients' emotions, to hit the sweet spot where the patient smiles, slightly surprised and says, "yeah, that's it." Then I tried my best to do what Job's friends couldn't do, and just sit with them in their misery.

Patients coming out of surgery were often grateful for their lives and procedures. But when complications arose, when their time was long and languishing in recovery, when families were faced with unenviable end-of-life decisions after an injury or illness, some wondered why God hadn't just taken them to heaven in the first place. My psychiatric patients struggling through the aftermath of suicide attempts or trying to regulate psychotropic drugs wondered the same thing.

There is a strong co-morbidity between mental illness and substance abuse—many patients in the psychiatric ward were bumped and bruised from falling off the bandwagon



so many times. Most expressed shame for letting down their families and God alike. "I can't ask God to help me again when I've been so lousy in holding up my end," explained one patient. Added another, "God's busy, and I had my chance too many times." Patients in other wards for ailments related to obesity, addiction, or failure to follow a regimen felt the same way to some degree. They had made their bed, and now they could hardly ask God to help them out.

Steve offered no help for my most risqué conversation with a patient. She was my age, so I took a conversational approach, offering to talk about anything she wanted to. "Well," she looked up at the ceiling and then hard, into my eyes as if challenging, "some people would say that I have a sexual relationship with Jesus Christ." Huh. Would she describe it that way? Rolling her eyes, "If God is better than anything we can imagine, wouldn't that just be the best sex ever?" I was speechless, a very popular and useful technique in chaplaincy. She continued, "I bet you think I'm sick or crazy or something." I wanted to say that actually she had nothing on Marjorie of Kemp and the other female mystics, those wacky wanton women who were far more graphic in their descriptions of relations with Christ. Instead I said, "My job is just to be here with you."

Silence. She asked then if I could talk for a minute so that she could get her thoughts back. Her meds had just been changed, and it was hard to concentrate.

I asked directly, "When you pray, what do you pray for?" Instantly awake, she looked at me with complete panic. "I can't tell you that. It's too personal! Everything I'm keeping together here would break." Though confused by her barometer of what was personal and what was fit for public consumption, something struck me as familiar about her expression, like seeing a distant work acquaintance at the mall on the weekend. I stared at her trying to place the particular contortions on her face. Then I remembered. It was in the ER when I watched the on-call resident tell a woman that her partner had died of cardiac arrest while driving down the highway. It was the face of losing whatever it was that had been just barely holding everything together by a string. The woman had crumpled, moaning, "He's everything."

Sadness could be oppressive in the hospital. I felt like I was stuck three quarters of the way through all of my patients' lives, right in the crises and never seeing the conclusion. Some days I couldn't help but try to bring some of the warmth of the summer outside into the windowless halls of the hospital. In a rebelliously chipper act one day I led the spirituality group in cheery Bible camp songs. When I asked what role music played in their spiritual lives, the room remained silent. Some of the more engaged patients squinted, confused. It was as if someone were to ask if you'd like to grab lunch, except that it's three in the afternoon and no one is really thinking at all about eating lunch just then. When I asked after several happy clappy songs what was the connection for people between music and spirituality, my audience had to reformulate the question into the one that I actually should have asked, which was—what kinds of songs do you all like to sing for your spirituality and why. Finally, one helpful, kind, patient saved me from my tambourine ways, "Music helps when I can't come up with words by myself or I'm afraid to." So much for "Rise, and shine, and give God the glory," complete with hand motions.

I described to Steve my failed attempt at leading the spiritual conga line. He hovered by the side of the bowl where I was talking. I chose to interpret this as an instinct for compassionate presence and not for responding to any old sound vibration stimuli. Somehow I felt better and less ridiculous than when I walked through the door, even though I had just spent the last few moments venting to a creature with a brain the size of my pinky nail. His being there attentively was enough. At some level, I have to believe that being present was enough for my patients, too.

Pilgrim...

reminded me of an elementary school at lunch hour.

When navigating the throng proved too much for us, we sat down to rest in front of a statue of Mary. When a man with a long metal stick came along and lit tall candles beside the statue, I suggested that if we sat still something might happen. Sure enough another man began to hand out programs for vespers and I realized we had arrived at the great church on the eve of Pentecost. Before the evening was over we had been through vespers, mass, and a great spectacle, which included the Archbishop of Paris, several dozen priests in red robes, and the confirmation of two hundred adult Catholics.

Though I am not a Catholic, I enjoyed the various liturgies of the church. Hearing the great moaning sounds of the main organ playing the prelude for the confirmation service was a special treat, one that came to me because I gave up and sat down for a while.

My husband, who had never been to Paris before, said he wanted to see the Louvre. I groaned to myself, knowing how huge it is. It feels like miles and miles of galleries. I decided to begin by taking him to see the outside of the building. "There it is," I said as I pointed to the castle turned museum that is large enough to hold an entire college campus. "Which part of it do you want to see?" When we went in the next day, we found the Mona Lisa so Dwight could say he had seen it, then he went off to look at the Dutch Masters and I went off to find my favorite Babylonian statue. The 2,000-year-old statue is a female nude, about 10 inches high with ruby eyes, a ruby in her navel, and a gold crescent moon on her head.

First I had to figure out which part of antiquity she was from and which football-stadium-sized wing I should search. It felt like a minor miracle that I hit on the idea of ancient Mesopotamia and found a guide who sent me in the right direction. The Sackler wing, of course. I should have thought of that. After walking for the longest time, I found the statue's case, but she was not there. A terra cotta replica of the statue (along with one of her reclining friend who usually rests beside her) and a small sign explained that she was in the special exhibit on Babylon in the Hall of Napoleon. How many miles away was that!

By then, it was an hour before closing time. When I finally located the exhibit back near the main entrance, the gatekeeper said I had to buy a ticket across the

(Continued next column.)

Errata

We inadvertently misnumbered the March 2008 issue of *South of the Garden*. While it should have been Vol. 29, No. 1, we called it Vol. 29, No. 2. The current issue is the correct Vol. 29, No. 2.



Babylonian Queen of the Night

lobby. The ticket seller said it was too late because the entrance lines were an hour long. Determined to see the statue, I protested, insisting there was no line at all. I had just been there. A brief consultation with a museum colleague confirmed my claim and I was allowed to purchase a pass.

Babylon, I thought as I crossed the lobby of the Louvre with its unusual glass pyramid overhead. What do I know or care about Babylon? The ancient Israelites were carried into exile there. When I thought really hard I remembered that ancient Babylon was approximately where Iraq is today. A desert, one in which we were currently making a huge mess.

I was not prepared for the beauty of the exhibit or the stunning array of objects from museums in Paris, London, and Berlin—enormous tablets filled with cuneiform writing, gigantic tile terra cotta mosaics of lions, sacred objects of metal and stone. Babylon rose to power after the fall of the Assyrian empire nearly eighteen hundred years before Jesus. Nebuchadnezzar built the Hanging Gardens six hundred years before Christ; three hundred years before Christ the Greeks took control of the area; and near the time of Jesus, an artisan made the small alabaster statue I wanted to see.

I found her in the middle of a large case, surrounded by objects from the same period. She was the most beautiful thing in the exhibit. As I gazed, a little girl walked up to the case and said to her mother, "Look, she has red eyes!"

As with the fine southern art of storytelling, the point of a story is not always the best part. The best part is often the details and the adventures along the way to the point. So it is with a pilgrimage. If you go searching for the holy, you might end up like that small child, amazed to find an alabaster woman with ruby eyes.

RCWMS

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