

South of the Garden

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

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March, 2009

Labyrinth

by Jeanette Stokes

I was glad I had remembered to pack a wool sweater, a hat, and gloves when I went to San Francisco in January of 1997, because it was cold. On a cloudy morning, I dressed warmly and took a cable car from the apartment where I was staying to Grace Cathedral in order to walk their labyrinth. I had fallen so in love with this form of walking meditation at the cathedral the year before that I had vowed to make a labyrinth.

I made good on that promise a few months later at a spirituality retreat I led in western North Carolina. The group and I rolled out newsprint to cover a forty by forty feet space. We then drew a full-sized labyrinth using a pencil, a string, and magic markers. I wasn't even sure it would work. I was afraid the crunching of feet on paper would so distract everyone that no one would enjoy the walk. But the pattern, found in the stone floor of Chartre Cathedral in France, is so compelling that it worked. As people began to make their way through the thirteen concentric circles, they settled into their own interior journeys.

I was looking forward to a journey of my own on that cold January morning as I sat on a pew and waited for the right moment to start my walk. Several rows of pews had been removed from the back of the church to make room for the Grace Cathedral carpet labyrinth, which is open to the public when the church is open. I sat and watched light streaming through high stained-glass windows and resting on the labyrinth. Only a man in a red jacket, a woman in gray socks, and one other man were walking.

I stared at the pattern, trying to follow the path with my eyes. The labyrinth at Grace is a 40-foot circle containing a winding path that leads from the outer edge to the center. The design came from Chartres Cathedral in France where it was laid into the floor in the 13th century. A labyrinth has no dead ends or tricks. By following the path, a walker eventually reaches the center. The path is just complicated enough to prevent a walker from knowing how far it is to the beginning or the end. Eventually my mind gives up wondering and gives over to just following the walking.

When the time felt right, I took off my shoes and stepped onto the purple and gray carpeted path. I walked slowly, paying attention to my steps and my thoughts and feelings, rounding the curves until I reached the center and its six-petaled rose. I walked across the center to the petal that pointed toward the altar.

As I stood there, my feet were awash in red light, my mid-section in lavender, and my head in the warm golden light of the sun. I stood very still, soaking in the warm golden light as though I were soaking in the love of the sun or the love of God the Creator. Then I sat down and watched as the red light moved slowly across the center of the labyrinth, like the Holy Spirit floating through the middle of our lives.

I looked up to see which window was throwing all these beautiful colors on the labyrinth and was startled to see a picture of a printing press. Publishing! It seemed like a sign, like a Western Union telegram from God saying,

(Continued on back.)



Arts & Letters

WINNING WRITERS

We are pleased to announce the winners of the 2008 RCWMS Essay Contest. First place goes to Ashley Makar of New Haven, CT. Her winning essay, *My Holy Ghost People*, is printed on page three. Second place goes to Linda Tefend of Loveland, OH; and third place to Karin Weir of North Carolina. Many thanks to the judges: Candice Ryals, Debra Brazzel, and Betty Wolfe. The Essay Contest is made possible by a grant from the Clifford A. and Lillian C. Peeler Family Foundation.

If you want inspiration for your writing, join us for *Mining for Gold: A Reflective Writing Workshop* with Carol Henderson on Friday evening March 27 and Saturday March 28 in Durham. We got to know Carol when she assisted with the editing of Sue Versenyi's volume of poems that RCWMS published two years ago. Carol is a delightful writer and writing coach who lives in Chapel Hill and teaches in such exotic places as France and Qatar. She promises to help us find fresh material by exploring our unconscious minds, memories and dreams. Writers of poetry, fiction, essays, and memoirs are all encouraged to attend. Details are in the Calendar.

MEINRAD DOCUMENTARY

We are thrilled to have dates for the first screenings of our Meinrad Craighead documentary and to let you know that Meinrad plans to be present at both of these. After working on the film for almost four years, Executive Producer Amy Kellum can't wait to share it with you. Find more at www.meinradproject.org.

Community Screenings of the documentary, *Meinrad Craighead: Praying with Images*, will take place:

- Thursday, May 21, 2009, 7:00 pm
Nasher Museum, Duke University, Durham, NC
- Sunday, June 28, 2009, 2:00 pm
KiMo Theater, Albuquerque, NM

BRYANT HOLSENBECK

Bryant Holsenbeck is the RCWMS Artist-in-Residence for a second year. As an environmental artist, her work highlights how much stuff we throw away and inspires people to become more involved in full-circle recycling. In the past year, Bryant has added art activities to several of our retreats, led a bookmaking workshop for us, and provided graphics for this newsletter. Drawing on our experience with the Meinrad video, we are now helping Bryant make a short documentary about her work. RCWMS intern Jenny Graves has been planning and raising money for this effort, and emerging filmmaker Margaret Morales is making the film. The four of us, Bryant, Jenny, Margaret, and Jeanette are having a great time meeting for tea at Bryant's house every couple of weeks to move the project along. Filming has begun and we hope to have a video before summer.

To raise money for the film about Bryant, we're hosting an *Art Party & Fundraiser*, Sunday, March 22, 2009, 2:00–4:00 pm at our office, 1202 Watts St., Durham, NC. We are holding this event in conjunction with national SWAN Day (Support Women Artists Now Day).

(Continued on back.)

Calendar

RCWMS sponsored events are marked with *.

March 1, 2009, Sunday, 3:00 pm
STANDING TALL IN PROUD SHOES: Pauli Murray
Auditorium, Main Library, Durham, NC
Panel on the life of American civil rights and women's rights activist, lawyer, author, college professor, and Episcopal priest Pauli Murray, who grew up in Durham. Speakers: Anne Firor Scott, Barbara Lau, Courtney Reid-Eaton, and Davison Douglas
Free and open to the public.
Contact: 919-560-0171, lrichard@durhamcountync.gov

March 3-4, 2009
PHYLLIS TRIBLE LECTURE SERIES: Scandalous Women and Religious Traditions
Wake Forest Divinity School, Winston-Salem, NC
Lecturers: Elizabeth Clark, Emilie Townes, Phyllis Tribble, Wilma Bailey, Jane Crosthwaite, Yvonne Chireau
Cost: \$100
Contact: divinity.wfu.edu/tribble-lectures.html

*March 5, 2009, Thursday
WOMEN'S LABYRINTH WALK & POTLUCK
Groce UMC, Asheville, NC
Walks at 4:30 & 7:00 pm, potluck at 6:00 pm
Leader: Jeanette Stokes
Cost: \$15, reservations requested
Contact: Holy Ground, 828-236-0222

*March 22, 2009, Sunday, 2:00-4:00 pm
ART PARTY & FUNDRAISER
1202 Watts St., Durham, NC
Help celebrate SWAN Day (Support Women Artists Now Day) and raise money for a documentary film on environmental artist Bryant Holsenbeck.
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*March 24, 2009, Tuesday, 9:00 am-6:00 pm
LABYRINTH WALK AT DUKE CHAPEL
Duke Chapel, Duke University, Durham, NC
Free and open to the public
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*March 27-28, 2009 (Friday 7:00-9:00 pm and Saturday 9:30 am-3:30 pm)
MINING FOR GOLD: Reflective Writing Workshop with Carol Henderson
Mine the unconscious for jewels of fresh material. Explore memory and dreams, and work with characters and inner dialogue. We'll play with genres—poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction—and access our truest voices. Uncover new levels of creativity and be inspired by the stories you find within yourself. (Appropriate for all skill levels and genres. Open to women and men.)
Leader: Carol Henderson teaches writing workshops and coaches writers. Her memoir, *Losing Malcolm: A Mother's Journey Through Grief*, is a redemptive story about the loss of a baby. She lives in Chapel Hill, NC. Learn more about her: www.carolhenderson.com
Cost: \$100
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

April 1, 2009, Wednesday, 3:30 pm
READING by Gerda Lerner
Perkins Library, Duke Univ., Durham, NC
Gerda Lerner will read from *Living with History/Making Social Change*. A founding member of NOW and a creator of Women's History Month, Lerner is a visiting professor of history at Duke. Reception to follow.
Contact: library.duke.edu/specialcollections/bingham/

April 2-4, 2009
THE LONG CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT: Histories, Politics, Memories, Methods
Hyde Hall, UNC, Chapel Hill, NC
Contact: Joshua Davis, jcdavis@email.unc.edu



Sue Sneddon

*April 5-10, 2009
ECUMENICAL HOLY WEEK LABYRINTH WALK
Binkley Baptist Church, Chapel Hill, NC
Sponsors: Several Chapel Hill churches
Free and open to the public
Contact: beth@binkleychurch.org or rcwmsnc@aol.com

APRIL 17-19, 2009
THE YOGA OF SOCIAL CHANGE: A Weekend Retreat
The Stone House, Mebane, NC
A retreat focused on how yoga deepens the journey of awareness and informs our desire for collective liberation.
Retreat guides: Claudia Horwitz, director of stone circles and The Stone House and trained Kripalu yoga teacher, and Brian O'Grady, yoga teacher who trained at the Asheville Yoga Center
Cost: Sliding scale, \$75-200, to cover meals, housing, and materials. Scholarships available. A "dana" or gift to the teachers.
Contact: The Stone House, www.stonecircles.org, or www.TheStoneHouseNC.blogspot.com

April 17-19, 2009
HERSTORY 2009: Strong Women, Strong Voices, Making Strong Changes
Massanetta Springs Conference Center, Harrisonburg, VA
Leaders: Nancy Sehested and many workshop leaders
Cost: \$200-280
Contact: Beverly, briddell@verizon.net, 540-255-8039

*April 30-May 3 2009
WISE CHOICES: A Retreat for Women Over 50
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC
Women are entering their 50s, 60s, and 70s with more education and resources than ever before. Even so, we find ourselves asking, "Who am I, really? What is important to me now? How do I want to live the rest of my life?" Answering these questions is our soul's work. Each of us was born with a gift to give to the world, and as we grow older, the need to find new ways to express it can grow more urgent. In this retreat for women, we'll explore how to meet our deepest needs from midlife through our elder years. Scholarships are available.
Leaders: Anita McLeod & Margie Hattori
Cost: \$475 for a single, \$450 for a double
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*May 10-17, 2009
A WEEK OF QUIET AND WRITING FOR WOMEN
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC
An unstructured week of writing for women at the beach. Please come for the whole week.
Cost: about \$660, includes room and meals
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*May 21, 2009, Thursday, 7:00 pm
Community Screening of the Documentary
Meinrad Craighead: Praying with Images
Nasher Museum, Duke University, Durham, NC
Contact: Amy, 919-418-4000, ak@meinradproject.org

*June 12-14, 2009
RCWMS ANNUAL BEACH WEEKEND: Yoga with Amy
Come rest and enjoy the ocean. Have time alone as well as time and conversation with others. Yoga sessions will be led by Amy Kellum, a certified yoga instructor trained in the Kripalu method. No experience necessary.
Leaders: Amy Kellum and Jeanette Stokes
Cost: \$375 single, \$350 double
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*June 28, 2009, Sunday, 2:00 pm
Community Screening of the Documentary
Meinrad Craighead: Praying with Images
KiMo Theater, Albuquerque, NM
Contact: Amy, 919-418-4000, ak@meinradproject.org

Holy Ghost

My Holy Ghost People

by Ashley Makar

I don't understand Holy Ghost people, but I better believe them—every strange word. I'm a quarter Holy Ghost person myself: Pauline begat Judy and Barbara, and Barbara begat me.

I can't remember witnessing anybody speak in tongues, but I must have heard the Word like that when my grandmother would take me to her Church of God when I was little. And I've heard from my mother what it's like: When people get worked up in church, somebody may break into what sounds like gibberish. And sometimes somebody will run whooping around the sanctuary, and some loud-mouthed Sister so-and-so may interpret—it'll be something generic, like *Praise the Lord! Hallelujah!* They don't always interpret, though, and they don't speak in tongues at every service. It's supposed to be when the Spirit comes up on you, as they say, and when it does, they say something like *ashundado ashundado kundai!* *Ashundado ashundado kundai!*

I can tell my mother's about to laugh when she imitates speaking in tongues, but she doesn't. She's not making fun of it, she'll tell me; she's just trying to demonstrate. But then a spooked look will come over the green eyes she got from her mother, and she'll say she doesn't understand it, but she's not going to criticize: The Bible says blaspheming the Holy Ghost is the only unforgivable sin.

My Aunt Judy spoke in tongues. Just after she was diagnosed with cancer three years ago, my mother heard her do it. Judy and Grandmother came straight from the oncology clinic to Mom's house, to tell her the bad news. Mom cried; Judy said, "Let's pray." They stood up and held hands in an almost circle and closed their eyes. Judy and Grandmother took turns praying out loud; Mom prayed to herself, still crying. Judy broke into tongues. I imagine a quiet change in her voice—as subtle as the way breath changes from awake to asleep. But Mom didn't describe the sounds of Judy's prayer in tongues. She just said *ashundado ashundado kundai* was part of it, and wondered aloud why it always sounds like that: Maybe that's what comes out when some people who've heard it all their lives get deep in prayer. Or maybe that's some phrase God uses whenever He gives a message in tongues. Mom knows it's supposed to be a gift, like prophecy, but she's afraid of the Holy Ghost.

When Aunt Judy almost died last fall, I was watching people speak in tongues, on Peter Adair's documentary *Holy Ghost People*. She was getting resuscitated in a North Alabama emergency room, her blood sugar sky high, while I was getting high on taped testimonies—the quickening power of the Holy Ghost—in a New York film screening room. I watched at first in distant awe—the convulsive jerk of an Appalachian woman's head before she broke into tongues, a younger woman talking about the Lord dealing with her by a *twinglin'* in her stomach. But as I listened to these Holy Ghost people getting worked up, or the Lord working on them, as they put it, something like revelation came up on me: *My people are Holy Ghost people*. Their strange prayer is my Grandmother tongue—speaking sounds I know by the telling, stories I've heard all my life. It's in my blood, like cancer. And in the tube between my eardrum and the back of my throat, like swallowing.

I don't know tongues, but I know *how* Holy Ghost people talk to the Lord, by heart. I know how Grandmother prays, in a cadence like crickets, a tender drone—grieving and pleading and gracious all at once, swelling to that harsh stride that comes up on her when she's Cloroxing the tub with her hands, or when she used to whip her girls with a flyflap: *Whap!* I mean



you better straighten up and start actin' right, Girl or the devil's comin' after you she'd say, beating just as hard as she could, like she's in a trance, my mother's told me, over and over. Though I've never seen Grandmother whip like that, I heard her in a high-handed clap, on documentary tape. "Don't be ashamed to praise the Lord," the preacher called, repent of it. The people shuddered heal us Lord, help us. Lord, yell Yes, Lord, and fell whop, to the floor, back to the Lord.

"Have you got that kind of a Spirit?" The preacher's words haunt me. Or maybe that's the Lord working on me, wrenching my heart, where Jesus would be, if I'd just invite Him in to be my personal savior, like I was supposed to a long time ago. I've tried to get saved, but not whole "heartfully," like the preacher says.

I don't know how much of her heart was in it, but my mother's asked Jesus in—"just in case," she says. She's willing to believe He's the Son of God, because that's what she was taught, and she wants to go to heaven. But she doesn't believe He's the *only* way, just because the Bible says so. She knows men wrote the gospels, and she knows how much stories depend on who's telling them.

When I tried to tell Mom all I'd learned in college about the scribe-altered scriptures and the ambiguities of Jesus' parables, she cut me off: "What's the point, if it's all up to interpretation?" I didn't talk back, about how mystery—even the strangeness of tongues—thrills me. I revel deep in metaphors, between the sense-making mind and the babble at the pit of the throat. My mother lives in black and white, truth and lie, real and unreal. She's my witness to the Holy Ghost-peopled world I inherited, but she doesn't tell me all I want to know.

In Grandmother's prayer language, it's the Lord who gives and takes God's children. And the Lord willed not to take Judy, that time. Maybe because Grandmother prayed so hard, and I saw her do it. In an empty hospital hallway, I was the one who said "Let's pray," and she held my hand and spoke—head snapped a little forward, eyes rolled up under her lowered lids, in a voice not quite her own, almost like crying, but strong and clear, in some strange stride: *Lord, we know she's one of your children, and she's been a faithful servant to you. Lord, you ask us to remind you of the Scriptures. And we remember that You gave Hezekiah fifteen years, and we're askin' you today for those fifteen years and more. Lord, we know it's accordin' to your will, but we're askin' you to relieve her sufferin', to heal her body, in Jesus' name. Amen.*

My mother believes God could heal Judy completely if He wanted to, she told me. She doesn't understand why He hasn't yet—Judy's spent her whole life serving the Lord. Maybe because people wouldn't believe it was Him if he did it before she got so sick: Maybe people need to see suffering, or miracles, to believe.

Judy's got cancer all over her abdomen; not long to live, the doctors say. But Grandmother remembers aloud: "They didn't give Mother but three months. And she left that hospital to go home and pray—took three days alone with the Lord, and she lived six years."

Even I prayed over Aunt Judy, alone while she was asleep in her hospital bed. I laid on my hand like I've seen Grandmother do, palm to forehead. And I asked the Lord to heal her, half believing He would, maybe completely, if I completely believed. But I hardly ever believe everlastingly. A lot of the time, I forget the Lord. I've only let Him work on me in heart pangs. And the pangs come when I hear people pouring out to Him, and I remember: that healing-mercy-wrath in one Lord, God; that chorus of hand, heart and hell on Grandmother's fly flap, in her prayers. And it sounds like going back to where I was from.

Writer Ashley Makar studies literature at Yale Divinity School, is a contributing co-editor of killingthebuddha.com, an online literary magazine of religion writing, and won our 2009 essay contest.

Labyrinth...

"Write!" I could have come on any day in any season and I wound up there on the day when the window with the words, "The words *will* stand forever" and a picture of the Gutenberg Press threw a rainbow of light right on me.

As I sat there with tongues of fire lapping at my feet, I nearly burst into tears. "But I can't write," I wanted to wail. "I don't have anything to say. No one will listen to me." But a voice inside insisted, "When God says write, you write. When the creative force in the universe says speak, you speak." I was already writing almost every day, I just didn't have any confidence in what I was doing.

The light moved. I moved one petal to the north, and the light lined up in front of me. I was facing due south with southern light streaming in on me. The southland was calling me home; that much seemed clear. I said a silent prayer that I might be as brave about writing and publishing as I had been about making my first labyrinth.

I got up, left the center, and retraced my steps to the opening at the edge of the labyrinth. Then I sat down again on the back pew. As I rested and made notes in my journal, an icon of Mary Magdalene caught my eye. I thanked Mary Magdalene for being an alternative image of woman. For being one of the disciples. For possibly being Jesus' lover or partner, certainly for being Jesus' friend. Then I lit a candle for my friends and myself, for women who were a little different, women who wanted to make things, to write, to follow their hearts.

That was a dozen years ago. In the summer of 1997, friends and I constructed a full-sized canvas labyrinth. Since then several thousand people have walked our labyrinth. When two of the panels were inadvertently damaged by a dry cleaner, friends helped draw and paint the replacements.

RCWMS has led dozens of labyrinth walks, workshops, and programs. Walking the labyrinth can be a good way of centering oneself. The serpentine path provides a metaphor for life's journey. Walking can be a time to open the heart, to experience the presence of the holy, to attend to life's questions. Often when I walk the labyrinth, I get more clarity about my life or a possible solution to a problem.

It takes thirty minutes to an hour for a person to walk the labyrinth. In an hour and a half, twenty to thirty people can walk and have a little time afterwards for individual reflection. A three-hour workshop provides enough time for an introduction, walking, journaling, and group discussion. An all-day workshop can include several times for walking, guided meditation, simple art projects, and journaling.

To schedule a labyrinth program or workshop or for more information, contact the Resource Center at rcwmsnc@aol.com or go to www.rcwms.org.

Arts...

RCWMS sponsored *Finding Your Medium*, with artist Sue Sneddon, at Emerald Isle, February 19-22, 2009. Sue set up separate stations for pencil, pen and ink, charcoal, pastel, oil pastel, watercolor, gouache, and acrylics. She demonstrated each one and then let participants play. In between we looked out windows of The Boat House at the gorgeous sound or walked on the beach. Afterwards, one participant wrote, "Sue is much more than an art instructor; she brings a wealth of wisdom, caring, experience, and engagement with life that goes beyond her impressive art talent. Watching her interact with everyone was amazing, and I felt very well tended-to and encouraged." Everyone had such a good time that we hope to repeat the workshop next winter. The workshop was made possible in part by a generous contribution from Julia Batten-Wax of Emerald Isle Realty.



Bryant Holsenbeck

RCWMS

The Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South is a nonprofit organization dedicated to weaving feminism and spirituality into a vision of justice for the world. Over the past 31 years, RCWMS has sponsored dozens of workshops, conferences, and retreats on women and religion, equal rights, economic justice, community economic development, healthcare, and violence against women and children. The organization has mentored and encouraged young women, religious leaders, writers, and activists. In recent years we have developed programs about art, writing, creativity, and spirituality.

The RCWMS Board greatly appreciates contributions of time, energy, money, and stock to the Resource Center. Your support allows us to continue offering our resources and programs. We are especially grateful for support from the Clifford A. and Lillian C. Peeler Family Foundation, the Kalliopeia Foundation, the Mary Duke Biddle Foundation, and the E. Rhodes and Lona B. Carpenter Foundation. To make a financial contribution or to volunteer to help with office tasks, mailings, or program planning, contact the RCWMS office or see us on the web at www.rcwms.org.

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SUBSCRIPTIONS to South of the Garden cost \$20 and run for 12 months from the time placed. Foreign or First Class is \$25. A subscription is free to anyone for whom the subscription fee is a burden. Tax-deductible contributions over and above the subscription fee are appreciated. Checks to RCWMS, 1202 Watts Street, Durham, NC 27701, or go to www.rcwms.org.

YOUR MAILING LABEL shows the year and month your subscription will expire. 0903 = 2009 March.

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www.rcwms.org

rcwmsnc@aol.com

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