

South of the Garden

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

Volume 30, Number 4

December 2009

Teahouse

by Jeanette Stokes

It was raining the September morning I had agreed to join my friend Dot Borden for a traditional Japanese tea gathering in the teahouse in Duke Gardens. As I grabbed my raincoat and umbrella, I wondered about the advisability of attending anything in a building with paper walls in the rain. Since I stay home in the mornings to write, I was surprised I had agreed to go. Clearly, I wanted to take part in the event.

I became interested in Japan when I was a child. My doctor father was drafted into the Air Force during the Korean War in the early 1950s. Afterwards, he volunteered for the Tulsa Air National Guard and began traveling on military air transport (MATS) planes to Hawaii and Japan, just because he could. He built a small Japanese garden at our house, adding soft grass, bamboo, a low bench, steppingstones, and a stone lantern. He hung a painted scroll at the end of a long hall inside. When he moved into a new medical office, he had Shoji screens built and pasted fake Japanese characters onto the chart holders outside the examining rooms.

In 1960, Daddy took Mother and me to Hawaii. On the way, we stopped in San Francisco and visited the gorgeous Japanese Garden at Golden Gate Park. The next year, we went to Japan. Americans were still a novelty, and dark-headed school children in matching uniforms stopped us on the Ginza to practice their English. We visited the Golden Pavilion in Kyoto. I was nipped in the butt by a deer at the Deer Park in Nara. And we rode the fast train through the countryside. I've been fascinated by all things Japanese ever since.

When Dot suggested the tea gathering, I was delighted. I had attended a Japanese tea while I was in college, led by the wife of my professor of Buddhism. She had studied tea in Japan while he studied religion. I wanted to attend a tea gathering again and wanted to spend some time in the new teahouse in the Duke Gardens.

The teahouse was built as part of the Durham Sister Cities Program, which pairs Durham with four cities around the world, including Toyama, Japan. Volunteers had worked for twenty years to develop relationships and raise money before undertaking the construction of the teahouse. Dot Borden, the program's founder, served for many years as board president.

When I arrived at the gardens and realized there would be only eight guests for tea, I felt as though I had won a contest. I was lucky to be part of this special event.

We walked through the soft mist to the entrance of the tea garden, surrounded by a graceful wooden fence. Once inside the garden, our host Mr. Nakasone poured water into a large ceramic bowl in which we would purify our hands before entering the teahouse. Mr. Nakasone, a landscape architect and tea master from Toyama, was invited to Durham to teach garden design and conduct tea gatherings.

Each of the objects and gestures that are part of the ceremony has beauty and purpose and helps to focus the mind. I gazed into the beautiful basin as I lifted the

(Continued on back.)

Circles

by Anita McLeod

I invited thirty women to my home one evening in November to help me celebrate turning seventy. Most of the women who came were members of the various women's circles to which I belong. There were women I worked with at Duke Hospital twenty years ago. The wild women circle that began after a class on Exploring Women's Spirituality has been meeting monthly for fifteen years. Another circle grew out of a yearlong Duke Divinity School class on women and spirituality twelve years ago. There were women who were on the RCWMS Board of Trustees with me, yet another circle. The youngest woman present taught a water aerobics class at the Y, a circle in deep water. Other circles present included a yoga circle, a sailing circle, a circle from a weekend party, an elder circle that grew out of a Women Over Sixty workshop sponsored by RCWMS, and a "Crow Women" circle that grew out of a January writing week at Trinity Center. As we came together in a new, larger circle, we discovered that many of us knew one another from RCWMS events such as Art and the Feminine Divine, the Meinrad Project, Wise Choices retreats, and writing workshop. RCWMS is a huge circle out of which many other circles are spawned. Women who want to be in community naturally form circles of meaning and purpose. Many women choose to live their lives within overlapping and interconnected circles.

Some circles meet around a table and share food and life stories. Some form to plan and carry out a project. Others create ritual and ceremony. Still others gather in silence around a candle for meditation and deep reflection. Circles help us create, help us get our work done, and give us a safe home in which to be our full selves. Within a structured format, circles encourage us to speak the truth, to listen deeply, and to hold each other in unconditional positive regard. There are helpful guidelines for creating, sustaining, and maintaining safe circles. A strong circle is based on a covenant and agreements the members make with one another. In an egalitarian structure, the participants hold the rim of the circle while the center contains the sacred energy where souls can touch. The feminine divine is at work in the center of such circles calling us to our deepest and most authentic selves, mending the places of conflict and brokenness, and calling forth healing. She calls us to be together in community, to be at home in our world.

In October, I attended Crones Counsel at a retreat center near Atlanta. Over 150 women, ages fifty to ninety-five, came from twenty-five states, many of them traveling from the west coast where Crones Counsel began. They gathered to celebrate and cherish their aliveness and deepen their wisdom. Four days of storytelling, workshops, dancing and drumming, sacred ceremony, and honoring the elders engraved my soul with sparkling images of aging women, fiercely alive.

I got excited about turning seventy, about becoming even more free and expressive. I saw that getting old did not mean I had to be quiet or compliant. I can be myself, wild and free. Participants met with the same small group for sharing each day. In my circle, I met elders whose openness, humor, sexuality, and courage contradicted all the cultural stereotypes of "old women." Being in circle with these wise elders inspired me to offer

(Continued on back.)



Calendar

* = RCWMS events. See more at: www.rcwms.org.

December 6, 2009, Sunday, 1:00-5:00 pm

HOLIDAY SALE

1202 Watts Street, Durham, NC

Handmade cards, books, jewelry and more by: B.J. Fusaro, Galia Goodman, Bryant Holsenbeck, Harriett Hopkins, Katie Rose Guest Pryal, Jeanette Stokes, and Bonnie Wright. Come visit, look at art, and buy gifts.
Contact: Jeanette, 919-683-1236, stokesnet@aol.com

December 9, 2009, Wednesday, 7:00 pm

READING by Jeanette Stokes

Regulator Bookshop, Durham, NC

Jeanette Stokes will be reading from her memoir, *Hurricane Season: Living through a Broken Heart*

*December 20, 2009, Sunday, 7:00 pm

INTERFAITH WINTER CELEBRATION for COMMUNITY, SPIRIT, and CHANGE

Beth El Synagogue, 1004 Watts St., Durham, NC

All are welcome. Bring a candle.

Sponsor: RCWMS

Cost: \$5, suggested donation

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

December 31, 2009-January 3, 2010

INTERPLAY NEW YEAR'S UNTENSIVE

The Summit Retreat Center near Greensboro, NC

An InterPlay retreat with time to dance, sing, tell stories, have fun, rest, reflect on the old and anticipate the new.

Cost: \$165 dorm with bunks; \$210 in double occupancy

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

*January 3-10, 2010

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: \$680, includes room and meals

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

*January 16, 2010, Saturday, 9:30 am-5:00 pm

GET YOUR GANGES ON

Durham, NC

Start the New Year with a day focused on your long-neglected dream project. Put errands aside and bring your passion, energy and greatest strength to what you really need to do. Discover/define your goal and develop a realistic plan of action you can commit to. It's time to follow your inner sacred river.

Leader: Peggy Payne is a spiritual novelist (*Revelation* and *Sister India*) and a consultant to other writers.

Cost: \$100

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

*January 17-22, 2010

ANOTHER WEEK OF QUIET & WRITING FOR WOMEN

Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC

The writing week in early January filled so quickly that we reserved Pelican House at Trinity Center, for an additional unstructured five-day session of writing.

Cost: \$500, includes room and meals

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

*February 5-6, 2010, Friday evening and Saturday day

ENNEAGRAM WORKSHOP

Durham, NC

Leader: Sandra Smith, certified Enneagram trainer, founder of Holy Ground in Asheville

Cost: \$100

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

*February 19, 2010, Friday, 7:00 pm

OPENING RECEPTION for THE CONFESSIONAL: An

Installation by Carole Baker



Golden Belt, Durham, NC

Visit an installed environment in which viewers are prompted to reflect on issues of brokenness and forgiveness. Exhibition open Feb. 19-March 14, 2010.
Contact: cbaker@duke.div.edu

*February 18-21, 2010

FINDING YOUR MEDIUM: A Weekend of Art at the Beach with Sue Sneddon

The Boat House, Emerald Isle, NC

Sue Sneddon will lead a weekend of exploration into various media for painting and drawing. These will include: pencil, pen and ink, charcoal, pastel, oil pastel, watercolor, gouache, and acrylics.

Leader: Sue Sneddon is a painter living near the ocean
Cost: \$300, plus \$100 double, \$200 single, or arrange your own accommodations. Food's a joint effort.

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

*February 27, 2010

WOMEN'S SOULFUL CIRCLES

Durham, NC

For thousands of years, women have gathered in circles to share their lives, to support and learn from one other. Sitting together and sharing stories of our lives deepens our relationships with others and with ourselves. Within the safety of a structured circle, you will learn the basic practices of council sharing. Come to experience a safe women's circle and learn to create your own community.

Leader: Anita McLeod

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

March 2-3, 2010

PHYLLIS TRIBLE LECTURE SERIES: The Body in Sickness and in Health—Feminist Perspectives

Wake Forest Divinity School, Winston-Salem, NC

Lecturers: Phyllis Tribble, Ann Belford Ulanov, and more

Cost: about \$100

Contact: 336-758-5121, www.divinity.wfu.edu/tribble

*March 4, 2010, 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

Sliding scale: \$10-20, cost should not keep anyone away

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

*March 9, 16, and 23, 2010, Tuesdays, 6:30-9:00 pm

BOOKMAKING WORKSHOP WITH BRYANT HOLSENBECK

Location: Scrap Exchange, Durham, NC

Make whimsical, usable books. Learn to make paste paper, cover book boards, sew the Coptic stitch, and use found papers to enhance the inside of a book.

Leader: Bryant Holsenbeck, www.bryantholsenbeck.com

Cost: \$75 for 3-part workshop (plus \$10 materials fee)

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

*March 26-27, 2010, Friday evening and Saturday day

WRITING WORKSHOP WITH CAROL HENDERSON

Durham, NC

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

*March 28-April 2, 2010

ECUMENICAL HOLY WEEK LABYRINTH WALK

Binkley Baptist Church, Chapel Hill

Contact: beth@binkleychurch.org or rcwmsnc@aol.com

*May 2-9, 2010

WEEK OF QUIET AND WRITING FOR WOMEN

Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC

Join RCWMS at 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: about \$680, includes room and meals

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Auschwitz

by Rachael Wooten

I have wanted to go to Auschwitz for years, though I could never explain this deep impulse to myself or my friends. I had dreamed of the infamous gate, the words *Arbeit Macht Frei* (*work makes freedom*) floating like a wrought iron banner above the entrance. Yet I could not formulate travel plans that would take me to that gate in waking life. Until recently.

On a cold windy Tuesday this October, I found myself approaching that gate. When I tried to take a photograph, the sun's glare was blinding. Green leaves from a nearby tree seemed to fill the spaces between the words, making them illegible. My guide, Vita, saw my distress, took the camera, moved to the right of the gate, and snapped the shutter. I followed her and took another picture for myself. Then we went through the gate onto the grounds of Auschwitz and later Birkenau, the labor camp and extermination center two kilometers away. We walked through large brick buildings with red tiled roofs, former Polish army barracks. Now, they could almost pass for office buildings standing among stately poplars.

Instead, these buildings hold exhibits detailing the atrocities. Thousands of shoes lie piled up behind glass enclosures. Stylish women's shoes, children's shoes, wooden clogs, men's shoes worn to shreds, now gray and dusty, remain—as if waiting for their owners who left them before being herded into a crowded gas chamber to die.

Another exhibit reveals an enormous map with a red dot in the center marked *Auschwitz*. Black lines radiate from that dot to the many European countries from which millions of Jews were transported.

The building marked *Polska* (Poland) contains evidence of Hitler's unfettered hatred of the Poles. 8x10 photographs line the walls, healthy men and women wearing striped prison garb, their occupations listed underneath their names: architect, factory worker, professor. They stare wide-eyed into space, hundreds of faces wearing the same frozen countenance. The crime for which they died was being Polish. Words on other walls shout Hitler's orders: show no mercy, spare no one, murder these people, deport them to unlivable places, or enslave them.

Three million non-Jewish Poles suffered the same fate as the three million Jews who died in Poland. They were murdered in the streets, starved to death, worked to death, or gassed at Auschwitz or another of the 2,000 concentration camps the Germans built across Poland. My friend, Gabrielle Bershen, of Polish Jewish descent, visited this exhibit a few months before me. Like myself, she had only been vaguely aware of Hitler's unstinting aggression towards the Polish people. "I realized then," she told me later, "that Auschwitz is really a monument to hatred."

I staggered out of this building into the tidy tree-lined street. I had lost track of Vita. She was waiting outside, a beautiful small woman in black jeans, dark curly hair contrasting with her orange coat. We walked to other sites, including the building where her father had been subjected to Joseph Mengele's infamous medical experiments. He had survived, but only spoke of these experiences in the final years of his life.

Vita worked for a Jewish touring agency in Prague, a rare organization that helps pilgrims reach the destination of Auschwitz. The drive from the Czech Republic took five hours, but my journey had also required several plane flights over thousands of miles, and a prior convergence of remarkable circumstances.

I had heard from my friend, Rabbi Raachel Jurovics, about her two previous trips to the Czech Republic.



In 2008, Raachel had made her first trip with Rabbi Lucy Dinner, members of Temple Beth Or, Presbyterian minister Joe Ward, and interfaith minister Stacy Grove.

The spark that ignited the flame of that journey occurred in 2005. Students from Southeastern Baptist Seminary were visiting Temple Beth Or. Raachel mentioned that one of the congregation's Torah Scrolls came from Hermanuv Mestec, a tiny village in the Czech Republic. Although the scroll had escaped Hitler's destruction, no Jews had survived the war to use the scroll in its original home. This Torah joined 1500 others that were later distributed to viable Jewish communities throughout the world. One of the seminarians, Eliska Donatova, excitedly informed Raachel that she was from Hermanuv Mestec, and that the townspeople had recently restored their synagogue. This unlikely encounter became the inspiration to take the scroll to its home synagogue and conduct services there for the first time in seventy years.

As Raachel and others began planning their third visit, the focus shifted to interfaith dialogue and celebration. After all, the people responsible for this restoration were Christian. When Raachel suggested I join them and offer stories about Tara, the female Buddha of Tibet, as well as a story about Jesus in connection with stories from Judaism, I had the sensation of puzzle pieces locking into place. My first thought, "This is how I can get to Auschwitz." I could participate in something directly related to healing this deep wound of humanity. I also realized that I could travel to Switzerland, where I had studied for several years, and consult with my Tibetan teacher, Lodro Rinpoche, on my book project, *The Tara Cards*.

Within two months of this conversation, I arrived in Switzerland and I met with beloved friends. I confirmed meeting dates with my teacher and other spiritual friends, assuring myself that these connections would be there when I returned from Eastern Europe. Then I flew to Prague to meet Raachel, her husband Steven, Stacy Grove, and Joe Ward. We visited important Jewish sites and completed our planning for the meetings and services that would take place in Hermanuv Mestec.

When we arrived, the townspeople showered us with warmth and joy. I witnessed the bond of love and affection that had grown during their previous exchanges, which was immediately extended to me. I marveled at the large numbers present for every service we conducted. Along with the townspeople, visitors came from Prague and from a Jewish congregation in London. I struggled to remember that there were no living Jews in Hermanuv Mestec.

Our final service was a healing service held at an Evangelical Church on Monday night. The ministers of the town planned the service based on one from the previous year, assigning readings to all the clergy. Scriptures were read in Hebrew, Czech, and English. Each person attending held the Torah, which was returning to its homeland, and prayed silently for the healing they desired, while we sang or hummed a Hebrew chant. The room was packed.

The loving intentions radiating from that service accompanied me to Auschwitz the next day and brought me back again, a different person. Healing and insight, immense grief and profound relief, have been steady companions since my return. Sharing these insights as they slowly arise provides the channel for continued healing, the healing that occurs through shared experience in loving communities, wherever we find them on this wildly beautiful planet we call home.

Rachael Wooten, Ph.D. is a Jungian analyst and teaches meditation in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition in Raleigh.

Teahouse...

wooden dipper, poured water first over my left hand, then over my right, and then let the water dribble down the handle to cleanse the dipper itself.

Leaving umbrellas, coats, and shoes outside, we entered the teahouse through a square door less than three feet high, a door I had mistaken for a pass-through for items used in the tea. Entering through the low door is said to make everyone the same, as differences in status or wealth fall away.

Inside, a scroll and flower arrangement adorned an alcove on one side of the tiny room. Shoji screens formed two sides of the room and wooden walls the other two. We sat on the floor on tatami mats or in chairs and waited for our host to enter. Each time he entered or left the room, he knelt and opened the sliding shoji screen by moving it first with one hand and then the other. I was aware that every gesture had evolved over the centuries and had been repeated thousands of times.

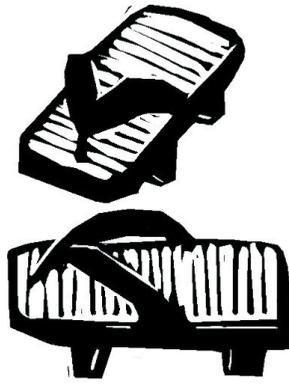
I watched as Mr. Nakasone served sweets on a tray shaped like the region of Toyoma. I listened for the sound of the water when he removed the lid of the iron pot, raised the steaming liquid with a bamboo ladle, and poured it back into the pot. I watched as he scooped powdered green tea with a small curved bamboo implement and placed it into a beautiful raku tea bowl. He added water, whisked the tea, and served it to the first guest.

Nancy Hamilton, a local tea leader, instructed us about when to bow, when to lift the tea bowl with the right hand, place it on the left palm, turn it 180 degrees, and drink the frothy green brew. The bitter taste was jarring in the quiet setting, and I was glad I had saved part of my sweets to eat after drinking my tea.

Though I sit fairly comfortably on the floor, I got fidgety, readjusting my legs when an ankle or foot began to ache. I tried to hold still and admire the mats on the floor, the simple graceful implements, and the damp beauty visible just outside each time our host opened the door.

It was beautiful and moving to sit in that peaceful setting and participate in a centuries-old practice with a master who spoke not a word of English. I felt as satisfied as I had on my first visit to the Japanese Garden at Golden Gate Park nearly fifty years before. I had been searching all those years for a fleeting beauty that finally found me again in a teahouse in Durham.

At the end of the tea, Nancy taught us to say "Arigato" (thank you). Before I left, I used the one bit of language I remembered from my childhood visit to Japan. I pulled out my tiny red Canon camera, turned to our host and the women who had helped him, said, "Ichi, ni, san," (one, two, three), and snapped a picture. Walking back across the gardens to the parking lot, I felt as though I were returning from a trip to a far-off land. If Dot Borden worked all those years to bring Durham and Toyama closer together, she had certainly succeeded that day.



Circles...

more workshops on women's circles and on eldering.

At my birthday celebration, there were gifts of music and singing, poetry and art, skits, stories, and ceremony. I felt initiated, mirrored, celebrated, honored, and deeply loved. The gratitude and love I feel I will carry to other circles of family and community. The depth of our presence with one another reflects our having learned to share our hearts with each other in a circle. I wish every woman could have such a powerful rite of passage at a significant time in her life.

The circle is an ancient symbol of wholeness, a form whose time has come again. Thousands of years of hierarchical, patriarchal leadership has endangered our planet and led to inequality and chaos among people. It is time to strengthen the circle model in our families and in our communities as we work and play together to heal our earth and all our relations. Join me on February 27, 2010 for *Soulful Circles*. Together we will learn circle basics and explore how to create nurturing community.

Anita McLeod is a retired nurse and health educator who lives in Durham, NC. She is a former Chair of the Board of Trustees of RCWMS.

RCWMS

The Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South is a 32-year-old nonprofit dedicated to weaving feminism and spirituality into a vision of justice for the world. In the past, RCWMS sponsored workshops, conferences, and retreats on women and religion, equal rights, economic justice, 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 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 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, contact RCWMS or see us on the web at www.rcwms.org.

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