

# South of the Garden

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

Volume 31, Number 3

September 2010

## Where am I?

Note: Excerpted from an essay by Jeanette Stokes.

### Where am I now? Where are we now?

I am not an evangelist for Christianity. I am an evangelist for finding or creating a community of support and practices that sustain you. For my beloved Presbyterian grandmother, spiritual support came in reading the Bible and praying every day. For me it comes from a weekly yoga class, from painting and walking, from writing every day, and from feminists with whom I share the journey of faith.

As a writer, I am accustomed to having words and images pour out of me. I am interested in many things feminist, Presbyterian, in ministry, spirituality, creativity, in justice and social change. When asked to write about Christianity these days, I freeze up. Having said that, I acknowledge I am a thoroughgoing Christian—soaked in it, professed in it, ordained in it, and in “good standing” with one arm of it.

Instead of being an apologist, trying to explain Christianity to feminists and feminism to Christians, I choose to be a heretic, to remain within the bounds of the Christian faith, to create new forms, and to explore new practices.

I spend a lot of time with women who grew up as practicing Christians and now have found other, more sustaining practices. Many of them have “defected in place” and some of them simply defected. These deeply spiritual and ethical women would rather do yoga or art than attend a church, even a progressive one, on a Sunday morning. Most of the churches in our area are still Christocentric and use patriarchal language. Some of my feminist colleagues have turned in their ordinations. I have no instinct to do that. I still love the religion of my childhood; it is just that when I step into it these days, I tend to freeze. I do not want to say some of the words anymore.

Almost all the gatherings I am part of are interfaith or multi-faith. RCWMS's gatherings may include a Protestant woman who attends a local synagogue and teaches Buddhist dharma, an African American who grew up Protestant and is now a Zen priest, Jewish women who practice Buddhism or yoga, and women who have no interest in claiming any particular religious tradition. The faithful, spiritual feminism I see, organize, and participate in, can hardly be contained in the label “Christian.”

I am tired of the ways Christianity has said to people, not just women, “Believe like this, make art like this, make love like this.” I have trouble with traditional Christian theology and practice—from baptism, which we cheerfully say is a sign of welcoming a child into a community of faith, but is really the washing away of the uncleanness of being born of a woman; to communion, which can be seen as sharing the feast of the “kingdom,” but manages to steal some of the grace from the Passover feast and from food women have prepared at home for thousands of years.

I do not believe in and I cannot subscribe to a version of Christianity that insists that what Jesus meant was

(Continued on back.)



Pauli Murray in *Service*, a UNC School of Government mural created by Colin Quashie

## Pauli Murray

*It has taken me almost a lifetime to discover that true emancipation lies in the acceptance of the whole past, in deriving strength from all my roots, in facing up to the degradation as well as the dignity of my ancestors.*

—Pauli Murray, *Proud Shoes*

The Rev. Dr. Pauline (Pauli) Murray was born in Baltimore, MD, November 20, 1910, and grew up with relatives in Durham, NC. She completed undergraduate studies at New York's Hunter College, but was denied admission to the University of North Carolina Graduate School because of her race. She graduated top of her class from Howard Law School, the first female to do so. For her predecessors, this had meant a post-graduate fellowship at Harvard, but Harvard refused to admit her because she was a woman. A founding member of the National Organization for Women, Murray worked as a civil rights lawyer, professor, college vice president, writer, adviser to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, and deputy attorney general of California. In 1977, Murray became the first black woman in the U.S. to become an Episcopal priest.

Murray's grandmother was the daughter of a white plantation heir and a woman enslaved to his family. Her grandfather was a mixed race Northerner who came to Durham as a teacher determined to lift African Americans out of ignorance and poverty. Murray's autobiography, *Proud Shoes: The Story of an American Family*, chronicles not only her childhood in Durham, but also the early history of Durham as a place in large part built by former slaves, freed blacks, and working class whites.

For more information about Pauli Murray, read her memoir, *Song in a Weary Throat*, google her, or see: [paulimurrayproject.org](http://paulimurrayproject.org).

### ESSAY CONTEST

RCWMS is committed to supporting women as they find their voices and make them heard. Our 2011 Essay Contest is now open for submissions. Women eighteen years of age and older may submit previously unpublished nonfiction essays of 1400 words or less.

Essays should be inspired by Pauli Murray's idea of drawing strength from all our roots. They should focus on or exemplify issues embodied in Murray's life, work, witness, and ministry. For example, essays could focus on issues that lie at the intersections of faith, race, gender, or sexual orientation.

Prizes will be \$500 for first place, \$300 for second place, and \$200 for third place. The winning essay will be published in the RCWMS newsletter, *South of the Garden*, in March 2011. Winners will be notified by mail.

The limit is two essays per person. Submit four double-spaced copies of each essay. Previous winners and RCWMS Board members are not eligible. No sermons, please. No e-mail submissions. Manuscripts will not be returned. Do not put your name on your essay(s). Attach a cover letter with essay's title, your name, address, phone number, and e-mail. Submissions must be postmarked by January 15, 2011. Mail submissions: RCWMS Essay Contest, 1202 Watts St., Durham, NC 27701.

(Continued on back.)

# Calendar

\* = RCWMS events. See more at: [www.rcwms.org](http://www.rcwms.org).

September 10–12, 2010

SISTERLY CONVERSATIONS: Honoring Our Diversities  
Kirkridge, Bangor, PA

For lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender women & allies.

Leaders: Mary E. Hunt of WATER & Virginia Mollenkott,  
professor emeritus of English at William Paterson

Cost: \$335 (for scholarships, contact Jean, 610-599-4604)

Contact: [www.kirkridge.org](http://www.kirkridge.org)

\*September 25, 2010, Sat., 9:00 am–noon & 1–4:00 pm

THE BEGINNING OF THE BIRTH PANGS: Exploring  
Pregnancy and Motherhood as Embodied Spiritual  
Experiences

Durham, NC

Come for one or both sessions. Explore the body's  
wisdom and its spiritual capacity in these two experiences  
that touch us all, whether we are mothers or not.

Morning session, "The Sacred Poetics of Pregnancy:  
Exploring Relationship and Interdependence"

Afternoon session, "The Mystical Metaphors of  
Motherhood: Exploring Ambiguity and Adventure"

Leader: Dr. Marcia Mount Shoop, author and theologian  
in residence at Univ. Presbyterian Church, Chapel Hill

Cost: \$50 for one session (half day), \$75 for all day

Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

\*October 2, 2010, Saturday, 2:00–5:00 pm

MAKING A MISHKAN IN YOUR WILDERNESS

Durham, NC

Create a *mishkan*, a portable sacred gathering space  
or altar built in the wilderness. Use new and reused  
treasures to bring you in deeper connection with the  
Divine. Bring a box, art, words, scissors, and strong glue  
along with your longing for home and imagination.

Leader: Rachel Galper, [rachelgalper@yahoo.com](mailto:rachelgalper@yahoo.com)

Cost: Sliding scale \$ 20-30

Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

\*October 8, 2010, Friday, 9:30 am–3:30 pm

WHEN GRANDMOTHERS SPEAK, THE EARTH WILL  
HEAL (a Hopi saying)

Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural  
World, Timberlake Farm Earth Sanctuary, Whitsett, NC

Inspired by the International Council of 13 Indigenous  
Grandmothers now speaking on behalf of the earth, this

full day retreat will offer participants a twofold way to  
bridge the separation between humans and the natural  
world. In the morning, through meditations, shared

story and silent walks on earth sanctuary trails, we will  
affirm our sense of personal connection to the earth. In

the afternoon, participants will be introduced to ways to  
share the bond of intimacy we feel in the natural world  
with the children in our lives. Limited to 20 women.

Leader: Carolyn Toben, founder of the Center for  
Education, Imagination, and the Natural World at

Timberlake Farm Earth Sanctuary

Cost: \$75 with lunch. \$25 deposit will hold your space.

Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com), or Anita  
McLeod, [Anitamcleod@aol.com](mailto:Anitamcleod@aol.com)

\*October 10–17, 2010

WEEK OF QUIET AND WRITING FOR WOMEN

Pelican House, Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC

An unstructured week of writing for women at the

beach.

Cost: \$690 with room & meals. \$100 holds your space.

Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

October 12, 2010, 7:00 pm

READING by Enuma Okoro

Regulator Bookshop, Durham, NC

Local author, Enuma Okoro, will read from her new  
book, *Reluctant Pilgrim: A Moody, Somewhat Self-*

*Indulgent, Introvert's Search for Spiritual Community*. See  
Enuma's website at [www.enumaokoro.com](http://www.enumaokoro.com).



Okra & Tomatoes

J.Stokes

October 14–17, 2010

MINDING THE MIND: A Mindfulness Meditation

Retreat with Therese Fitzgerald

The Stone House, Mebane, NC

This mostly-silent retreat includes sitting and walking  
meditation, Dharma talks, discussion, mindful meals,  
and yoga. For beginners and the experienced.

Leader: Therese Fitzgerald, Dharma teacher in Hawaii  
and co-founder of Dharma Friends, [dharmafriends.org](http://dharmafriends.org).

Cost: Sliding scale \$230-\$290

Contact: [marilyndhartman@gmail.com](mailto:marilyndhartman@gmail.com), 919-403-0627

October 15–18 & November 19–22, 2010

DOING OUR OWN WORK: A Seminar for Anti-Racist  
White People

The Leaven Center, Lyons, Michigan

This workshop for white people who seek to deepen  
their commitment to confronting racism will equip  
participants with analysis, skills, and tools for effective  
anti-racist work and institutional change.

Leaders: Melanie Morrison and Aaron Wilson-Ahlstrom

Cost: \$690 with room lodging & meals. Scholarships.

Contact: [www.alliesforchange.org/calendar.html](http://www.alliesforchange.org/calendar.html)

October 20, 2010, Wednesday evening

SCREENING of *Meinrad Craighead: Praying with Images*

Myers Park Baptist, Charlotte, NC, [www.mpbconline.org](http://www.mpbconline.org)

See the hour-long documentary about this remarkable

visionary artist, [www.meinradproject.org](http://www.meinradproject.org). Church

supper at 5:45 pm (reservations required, 704-334-7232).

Film begins at 6:30 pm or as soon as supper is over.

Contact: Amy Kellum, 919-418-4000, [ak@meinradproject.org](mailto:ak@meinradproject.org)

\*October 21, 2010, Thursday, 7:00 pm

AN EVENING WITH BETT HARGRAVE

Durham, NC

In 2009, Bett Hargrave went to Kenya to learn about the  
Nyanya Project, a program that brings hope to African

grandmothers and their grandchildren orphaned by  
AIDS. You are invited to come and hear about a program

that connects women in NC to women in Africa.

Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

\*October 24, 2010, 4:00-6:00 pm

RCWMS FUNDRAISER

St. Stephen's Episcopal, 82 Kimberly Drive, Durham, NC

Join in supporting RCWMS and enjoy the fabulous a

cappella music of the seven amazing women of STELLA.

Cost: \$15 in advance, \$20 at the door. Click "donate" on

our website for online ticket purchase.

Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

November 3, 2010, Wednesday, 6:00 pm

PAULI MURRAY: Birth of an Activist

Wilson Library, UNC, Chapel Hill, NC

To commemorate the 100th birthday of Pauli Murray,

historians Glenda Gilmore, Anne Firor Scott, James

Leloudis, Jerry Gershenson, and Genna Rae McNeil

Panel will discuss Murray's unsuccessful 1938 attempt to

gain admission to UNC and her human rights legacy.

Co-hosted by Southern Historical Collection, Center for

the Study of the American South, Carolina Women's

Center, and Duke University's Pauli Murray Project.

November 10–11, 2010

LECTURE by Emilie M. Townes

Duke Divinity School, Durham, NC

Emilie M. Townes is a professor of African American

Religion and Theology at Yale Divinity School.

\*November 19, 2010 evening

RECEPTION for *Strength from All My Roots: Textiles*

*Honoring the Legacy of Pauli Murray*

St. Philip's Episcopal Church, Durham, NC

This exhibition of textile arts will honor the 100th

anniversary of Pauli Murray's birth. Exhibition will be

open throughout November.

Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

\*January 2–9, 2011 & May 8–15, 2011

RCWMS WEEKS OF QUIET & WRITING FOR WOMEN

Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC

# Chocolate

by Jeanette Stokes

I went to Paris for a week in May and came home raving about two things: chocolate and irises.

On the first morning in Paris, I woke at 5:30 am and went out for a walk. I walked the three or four long blocks to the Seine and crossed a bridge to the Tuileries, but the elaborate iron gates were locked. I walked a little further to a café near the corner of the garden and sat down. After a breakfast of juice, hot cocoa, and a croissant, the garden opened and I strolled in.

There were hardly any people in the garden at 7:00 am, a few walking or jogging through, and no one sitting around the large reflecting pool. Empty green metal chairs rested in a random pattern around the edge of the pool. I selected a chair and sat down.

*Whoa!* I thought as I sat. *How do you sit in this thing?* The back tilted permanently backward at a 45-degree angle; they were soldered on that way. An American recliner would have offered a choice, but not this chair. There was no option but to lean back and relax, open myself to the sky and watch the world at my feet. So I did. What a novel idea for a chair! Being short, I could rest my head on the top edge of the back and recline. A person could go to sleep. It was easily more comfortable than the airplane seat I had occupied a day or so before.

Imagine, chairs in a public park that encouraged lounging and sleeping! Dozens of them.

The next morning, I talked my husband into having breakfast at a café with me. I had picked out a nice looking one on the Boulevard St. Germain, Café de Flore, without knowing that it was once the hang out of Jean Paul Sartre and his crowd. I just wanted a place to sit, eat, and watch all the people in black walk by.

We selected a table on the sidewalk and I sat down facing the street. My husband sat across from me, as we would in any American restaurant, but it wasn't long before the waiter in the long white apron had rearranged us so we were side by side, looking out. That's when I noticed that nearly everyone in the place was facing the street.

When the waiter came back, I ordered orange juice, hot chocolate, and pain au chocolat (a croissant with chocolate inside.) My husband, now on my right, ordered coffee and eggs with ham. And then we waited.

In America, this breakfast outing might have taken all of twenty minutes—to order, get the food, and eat—but in Paris it was closer to an hour and twenty minutes. I was thrilled. The café was not full. No one was in a hurry. Eventually the waiter brought our food and laid a small bill on the table.

In Paris, people aren't paying just for food in a restaurant. They are renting a place to live for a while. I noticed at lunches and dinners over the course of the week that no one ever brought us a check until we asked for it, even after the coffee and dessert were consumed and the last of the dishes cleared away. I concluded that to bring the check would be to suggest that the establishment wanted us to leave, and that would have been rude.

When our breakfast finally arrived, everything at the perfect temperature, I had slowed down enough to be able to taste the food. As I sipped my hot chocolate and ate my bread, the flavors and textures filled me with delight.

When I told this story later, friends commented that they did not know I ate that much chocolate. I don't, or at least I didn't used to. I'm a finicky health food—not too much



Breakfast

J.Stokes

sugar, chocolate might keep me awake—sort of eater. But I said to myself, "I'm in Paris. Eat!" And so I did.

That's when it happened. I don't know if it was the dark chocolate, the butter in the bread, the whole milk (or was it cream?) in the hot chocolate, but my mouth and body were filled with the taste and the feeling of...of being loved. Of being cared for, of being held, enwrapped, encircled, of falling into a feather bed.

"God, this is good!" I kept thinking to myself. The hot chocolate was not too sweet and not too bitter and went down like silk, and the pain au chocolat was perfect, crisp and buttery with small squeezes of chocolate inside.

"Why does chocolate taste so much better in France?" I kept asking once I returned to the States. Some said, "I'm not sure it does," but I had never ever enjoyed anything quite so much. Perhaps it was the jet lag. Perhaps it was the ceremony—the waiter in black and white, looking like a penguin, speaking both French and English, the small round table with its placemat that fit perfectly inside the rim. Perhaps it was the astronomical price of the food, the stylish people on the street, or the beautiful French man in the white shirt sitting across from us. But I suspect it was the quality of the ingredients and the slow speed at which they were consumed that allowed my whole body to enjoy the experience.

To repeat the experience would cost thousands of dollars and require staying up all night and suffering jet lag for a week. I may do it again, but for now, I am happy I was present enough to enjoy the moment.

## Other Events

Friends of RCWMS are offering programs this fall that we want to call to your attention. Rachel Galper sees turning trash into treasure as a powerful metaphor for transformation. In her work as an art educator, storyteller, and healer, she teaches how creating art out of recycled and reused objects and weaving tales out of our treasures and tragedies can make our lives a gift to ourselves and others. Join Rachel on Saturday, October 2 for *Making a Mishkan in Your Wilderness*, a workshop on making portable altars. (See the Calendar for more details.)

Rachel is also a Reiki Master and spiritual doula offering ongoing Reiki, storytelling, and interfaith circles, classes, and sessions in Durham. To learn more, contact her at [rachel1galper@yahoo.com](mailto:rachel1galper@yahoo.com) or 646-241-7555.

Cathie Henson Holcombe, Susan Hester, and Marcia Hinkle, of *WomenWrite*, are long-time friends and avid wordsmiths who offer one- and three-day workshops in Greensboro, NC, Washington, DC, and at the NC coast. Cathie is a teacher, Susan is a consultant to non-profits, and Marcia is a psychotherapist. They each write professionally and for pleasure, and they share a passion about words, creativity, and community. Their retreats and workshops provide an ebb and flow of time alone and time together, creative quiet space, and energized connection with other women who write. For more information, contact [Marcia.H@juno.com](mailto:Marcia.H@juno.com) or [HolcombeCatherine@yahoo.com](mailto:HolcombeCatherine@yahoo.com).

*WomenWrite* fall retreats include:  
*Writing Poetry: Exercises & Practice*, Sept. 25 (Marcia in DC)  
*Leaving Home* with Cathie, Oct. 2 (Cathie in Greensboro)  
*Lifestory: Starting Points*, Oct. 29-31, (Marcia at NC coast)  
*Time to Write*, Susan, Oct. 31–Nov. 3, (Susan at NC coast)  
*Spiritual Autobiography*, Nov. 5–7 (Cathie at NC coast).

# Where am I?

that we were to get together regularly and celebrate his torture and murder at the hand of the state. It is misguided theology. It would be like getting together every January 15 and celebrating the cold-blooded murder of Martin Luther King Jr. and saying how fabulous it was that he was murdered in the name of freedom. But maybe that is what we do and in so doing we encourage other people to go get themselves killed for what they believe in.

No thoroughgoing feminist would tolerate the language of torture and violence anymore. Christianity has changed because of a feminist analysis. One stellar example of a new feminist Christianity is found in the work of Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Parker in *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire*. The authors discovered within the early church a Christian esthetic that focused on beauty. They found that in the first thousand years or so of Christianity the focus was on this world as paradise. The focus on Jesus's suffering and dying did not come until Charlemagne forced Europeans to convert at sword point. When the Holy Roman Emperor caused suffering in the name of Christ, it became holy to suffer.

## Conclusion

Though feminist Christianity is my spiritual home, my life and work have carried me beyond, outside, and around the corner from exclusive Christianity. My perspective is certainly not feminist Judaism, or feminist Buddhism, or even secular feminism, but the weddings, funerals, naming ceremonies, workshops, retreats, and writing I am involved in no longer take an exclusively Christian view. They are much closer to the ground, to the seasons and cycles, to things that my inherited Christianity was trying to squelch.

Do not get me wrong. I actually love Jesus. I just have a really hard time with how the church has so often screwed up his message of liberation and wholeness, his concern for every person, his love of justice, his practice of peace. But I do not think he is the only one or the only way. Christianity is the path my ancestors left me. I am stuck being a Southerner (which I like just fine), being white (which is something of a burden in this country), being female (which is great), and being Christian (which I claim but have no interest in defending), and increasingly interfaith. I do not need or want to be with people of faith who are only like me. Being in a gathering with only Christians is as boring as being in a gathering of only white people, unless the conversation is about how we have used our position to limit ourselves and oppress other people. Feminist Christianity invites so much more than that.

Note: "Where Am I Now? Where Are We Now?" by Jeanette Stokes is from *New Feminist Christianity: Many Voices, Many Views*. Edited by Mary E. Hunt and Diane L. Neu (Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Publishing, 2010). Permission granted by SkyLight Paths Publishing, P.O. Box 237, Woodstock, VT 05091, [www.skylightpaths.com](http://www.skylightpaths.com).



Pauli Murray in a Durham mural created by Face Up: Telling Stories of Community Life

# Pauli Murray

## MORE PAULI MURRAY EVENTS

In addition to the Essay Contest, RCWMS is sponsoring four other events this fall to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Pauli Murray's birth.

- An Exhibition. *Strength from All My Roots*, a month-long exhibition of textile art honoring the legacy of Pauli Murray will be held in November at St. Philip's Episcopal church in Durham.
- Dr. Emilie M. Townes of Yale Divinity School will lecture at Duke Divinity School, November 10–11. This event will be co-sponsored by the Duke Divinity School's Women's Center.
- Our Annual Interfaith Service, December 12, will highlight Pauli Murray's life, witness and ministry.
- RCWMS is sponsoring "Women Writing the South," through which it will offer support for research and writing on topics that lie at the intersection of race, gender, and faith in the South. The Rev. Dr. Melanie Morrison will be the first writer to receive support through this program.

# RCWMS

The Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South is a 33-year-old nonprofit dedicated to weaving feminism and spirituality into a vision of justice for the world. RCWMS sponsors 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](http://www.rcwms.org).

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