

South of the Garden

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

Volume 33, Number 4

December 2012

Anniversary

by Jeanette Stokes

We have had such a good time celebrating the 35th Anniversary of the Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South this fall. One crowd gathered at our office on our actual birthday weekend in August for Locopops, Daisy Cakes, conversation, and lots of laughter.

Another group gathered on November 16 at the elegant King's Daughters Inn in Durham for tea, dinner, and an overnight stay. We had toasts, readings, music, yoga, massage, and a walk around Duke's East Campus. We had three amazing cakes by Jenny Leinbach—chocolate, apple, and coconut. Check out her website: yellowbird-bakery.com. Marcy Litle made a flourless chocolate cake for our gluten-free friends, and for breakfast on Saturday morning the inn made pumpkin waffles. Yum! Many thanks go to Amy Kellum for organizing, registering, and hosting. Also for leading yoga! Many thanks to all who joined in the festivities and raised \$2,000 for RCWMS!

As part of our anniversary celebration, RCWMS has published two new books: Julia Scatliff O'Grady's, *Good Busy*, and my own *35 Years on the Path*.

Most of us think the answer to being busy is to try to become more efficient. Maybe, maybe not. Efficiency, as we know it in this country, was developed to help factory workers be more productive and to help households with lots of children run more smoothly. Not every moment of every day is the equivalent of an assembly line or a kitchen at 5:30 pm full of hungry children. What's your relationship with time? Let *Good Busy* help you explore that question.

So far the book has caused quite a stir. We have held five local readings for *Good Busy*—at Documentary Studies at Duke University, McIntyres Books, Flyleaf Books, The Regulator Bookshop, and Bull's Head Bookshop. The book has been written up in the *News & Observer*, *The Daily Tar Heel*, and *The Carrboro Citizen*. Julia was also interviewed on WUNC's *The State of Things* with Frank Stasio.

The book makes a great holiday gift. You can order it directly from us (www.rcwms.org) or buy it from one of the independent bookstores listed above.

RCWMS published *35 Years on the Path* to sum up our journey thus far and to collect some of my essays from the last ten years of *South of the Garden*. The book is a great companion to *25 Years in the Garden*, which we produced ten years ago. Order copies of the book at www.rcwms.org.

In honor of our 35th anniversary a small group of donors has agreed to give a total of \$35,000 if we can secure another \$35,000 in gifts and pledges from our wonderful network of supporters. That includes you! Through this ambitious challenge, we hope to raise at least \$70,000 to ensure that RCWMS can continue to provide resources and programs on creativity, spirituality, and social justice. We invite you to make a gift or a pledge before January 15, 2013. Watch your email box and mail box for more on this or go to www.rcwms.org and push the DONATE button. You will have until the end of 2014 to make your monetary donation.



Yoga

by Jeanette Stokes

I go to a yoga class every Wednesday afternoon. We meet in a place where we have to move furniture and lie on uneven flooring. We are sometimes an unruly bunch. But I love it and am really unhappy if anything gets in the way. In fact, I work hard to make sure nothing does.

My yoga group is a lot like what a women's prayer circle or Bible study group might have been for a previous generation. We get together to be in a holy space together. We pray for the President of the United States. We offer up the names of people in need. And we do yoga, irreverently.

When talking with people who are about to get married, I often mention that it does not really matter to me whether they belong to a congregation, what matters is whether they have a community of support. One good reason to belong to a church or synagogue is that when difficult things happen, or when happy things happen, you will need a group to support you or to celebrate with you. And you can't just run down the block and find one at the last minute.

It's sort of like a garden. If you don't plant tomato plants in May or June, you won't have any to eat in July or August. You can't just stick a little plant in the ground today and expect it to produce fruit tomorrow. (Yes, of course, you can go to the farmer's market or grocery store to buy tomatoes, but you can't get them from your own back yard.) Similarly, you can get support from professionals when you need it, but it helps a lot to have some you have cultivated on your own.

In the eight years we've been doing yoga on Wednesday afternoons at 4:30, various members of the group have changed jobs, gotten married, had children go off to college, had grandchildren or even great grandchildren. Others have lost jobs or friends, been unemployed or undergone medical treatments. Sometimes we complain of aches and pains of various kinds usually of the joint variety. Still, we come together to stretch when we can and lie on the sofa when that's all the strength we can muster.

And so, as in other women's groups I have been part of, we mark the passage of time, celebrate successes, grieve losses, and make it all sacred by paying close attention and breathing together.

I wouldn't say that we always do yoga all that well, though our teacher is both skilled and kind. What I would say is that we make a good effort, talk too much, and have developed a deep affection for one another in the process. Yoga is a good container for us. It even persuades the talkative ones, like me, to be quiet for a time.

Doing yoga with this group once a week is one of my most precious spiritual practices. It resets my clock the way church on Sunday used to. It brings me back to myself and reminds me that I don't walk this earth alone.

No, I'm sorry, you can't have my yoga group. You can't have my family either. But you can create your own. Trust me on that. Your tribe or community is out there. Love it if you already have it. If you don't, then you might want to put finding it at the top of your list.

Calendar

* = RCWMS events. For registration form and more information, see our CALENDAR at www.rcwms.org.

*December 1, 2012, Saturday

A DAY OF QUIET

King's Daughters Inn, Durham, NC

Leaders: Barbara Anderson & Anita McLeod

Cost: \$35

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

*December 16, 2012, 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: \$5-10, suggested donation

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

*January 4-11, 2013

WEEK OF QUIET & WRITING FOR WOMEN

Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC

Unstructured week of writing for women.

Cost: \$750 includes lodging & meals.

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

*January 12, 2013, Saturday, 12:30-4:30 pm

REACHING YOUR FUTURE WITH EASE

55 Vilcom Center Dr., 2nd Floor Studio, Chapel Hill, NC

How often we have heard from our elders that "getting old is not for sissies." The Feldenkrais Method® offers this affirming idea: "Improve movement, improve life!" Join Betty Wolfe, GCFPcm for an afternoon of Awareness Through Movement® lessons designed to enlarge the possibilities for safety and comfort in living your unique future, however far that reaches. Mats and blankets will be provided as these lessons are taught on the floor. You should be able to get up and down with minimal assistance. There will be time for breaks as well as refreshments and reflections.

Leader: Betty Wolfe, M. Div., is a Board Certified biofeedback practitioner with 35 years experience. In her business, Lessons with Ease, she offers integrative and personalized learning opportunities to help with pain and stress related issues.

Cost: \$25. (Workshop made possible by a grant from the Kalliopeia Foundation. Scholarships available.)

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

*January 27, Feb 10, Feb 24, Mar 10, & March 17, 2013, Sundays, 1:30-4:30 pm

END OF LIFE SERIES

Durham, NC in a comfortable private home with a cat
This multi-part series offers resources, information, and exploration of issues facing all of us as we prepare for the end of our life. Join a circle of courageous women willing to explore what a "good death" might mean and how preparing for it opens us to wholeheartedly embrace the precious life that awaits us.

Leaders: Anita McLeod, RCWMS Elder Women Project Director; Betsy Barton, MPH, Duke Medical Center; Carolyn H. Burrus, M.Div., Hospice Chaplain and Bereavement Counselor; Sharon Thompson, attorney; Lisa Gabriel, financial planner; and Anne Watson Davis, attorney.

Cost: \$125. Please plan to attend all five sessions.

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

*February 8-10, 2013, Fri., 2:00 pm to Sun., 2:00 pm

FINDING YOUR MEDIUM: Art with Sue Sneddon

Emerald Isle, NC

A weekend of exploration into various media for painting and drawing. No experience needed.

Leader: Sue Sneddon, artist

Cost: Workshop, \$300. Rooms, \$125 double, \$225 single.

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



*February 14-18, 2013

MAKING YOUR ART: Advanced Workshop with Sue Emerald Isle, NC

For those who have taken "Finding Your Medium" and want more comfort with media they have explored.

Leader: Sue Sneddon, artist

Cost: Workshop, \$325. Room, \$125 double or \$225 single.

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

*March 5, 2013, 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, or

Duke Chapel

*March 15-16, 2013

Friday 7:00-9:00 pm & Saturday. 9:30 am-3:30 pm

CREATING STORIES TO KEEP: Unearthing the Secrets of Powerful Narrative

Durham, NC

The late poet Stanley Kunitz wrote that a good story, like a good garden, cultivates the "wild permissiveness of the inner life." In this two-day workshop, we will give voice, through a series of craft exercises, to our own wild inner lives. From deep within ourselves, we will pull stories we had no idea were there, and learn how to mold them into narratives with energy and momentum. Come prepared to write a lot; come expecting the unexpected; and come knowing you'll leave with a deeper feel for story anatomy—as well as plenty of robust material. Open to writers of all genres and levels of experience, men and women.

Leader: Carol Henderson is a writer and editor who teaches in the US, Europe, and the Middle East. She is the author of *Losing Malcolm: A Mother's Journey Through Grief*, and recently edited *Wide Open Spaces: Call Stories*.

Learn about Carol at www.carolhenderson.com

Cost: \$125

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

*April 12, 2013, Friday, 1:00 pm

A TRADITIONAL JAPANESE TEA GATHERING

The Sarah P. Duke Gardens, Durham, NC

Join RCWMS for a traditional Japanese Tea Ceremony.

Enjoy the calm simplicity of the tearoom and the natural beauty of the gardens. This will be a small group.

Leader: Nancy Hamilton and others

Cost: \$25

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

*April 19-21 2013, Friday-Sunday

OUR NATURE, IN NATURE: A Women's Retreat

Timberlake Earth Sanctuary, Whitsett, NC (near Greensboro)

In the spring, we are called to be outside, relishing earth's warm winds, colorful blooms, and blue skies. The natural world, mirror of our own nature, invites us to nurture, empower, and transform ourselves. Indigenous cultures knew the sacredness of the natural world, its seasons, and its compass directions. Together we will explore the wisdom of each direction as it pertains to our current life situations. As we establish a safe community together, we will spend time in Council practice and alone time on the land to experience its messages for us. Camping is an option. Elder women and younger women will learn from and inspire one another.

Leaders: Pat Webster and Anita McLeod. Pat is a clinical psychologist in private practice in Durham and New Bern, NC. Anita McLeod directs the RCWMS Elder Women Project, which is devoted to helping women awaken to their wisdom and sacred connection to each other and to the web of life.

Cost: \$275. Register early, space is limited.

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

Among Us

by Meghan Florian

I am one of the teachers for the three-four-year-old Sunday school class at my church, Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship. Sometimes it surprises people who know my theology background to hear that I teach the smallest members of our congregation. I am also a deacon and a preacher, but I have found that it is ministry with children that most often reveals the limitations of my theological knowledge.

Last year the teachers at CHMF agreed to make an effort to use gender inclusive language in class. I already use inclusive language myself, so eliminating male pronouns for God in my interactions with the children was like second nature to me. Still, when teaching I frequently come across other, less easily solved problems of gender exclusivity. It's one thing for me, as teacher, to refer to God only in non-gendered terms, but how do I work with a given curriculum, and somehow help the children to experience God above and beyond gendered constructs? I don't have a clear answer to that question yet, save repeated threats to write my own curriculum.

Last fall we began with a series of stories about Moses. I remember holding up the poster provided with the Sunday school materials, which showed Moses standing in front of the burning bush. Red and orange tongues of flame enveloped the bush without burning it up. My fellow teacher and I pointed to different things in the picture and asked the children to identify them. "Where is God?" I asked. One of the children pointed to the gray-haired figure of Moses.

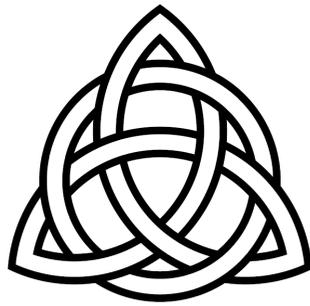
Already they've learned that God is a gray-haired man, a sort of cosmic grandfather. I gently told them that no, that person was actually Moses. Then I said, "Do you know where God is in this picture? God is in the fire!"

Later on, in the spring, we heard the story of the shepherd and the lost sheep. Judy, a member of our congregation who keeps sheep, spins, and knits, came and talked to the class about shepherding. She showed the children pictures of the animals, passed around some wool for them to touch, and answered their questions. As we transitioned to story time, and to our male-centric storybook, I thought, well, the shepherd we just talked to is a woman. That day I changed all the pronouns to "she" and the children didn't miss a beat. Of course the shepherd could be a woman. Or a man. Like Judy, or like her husband Dirk.

Children are often more receptive to this sort of inclusivity than adults. Our kids love to sing "Father Abraham," and they understood when this year we said, "But some of you aren't sons! So we're changing the word to *children*." That makes sense to them more simply than it does to adults who've been taught to believe that male terms apply to women, too.

Teaching children requires creativity and improvisation. I have to pay attention, and look for those little moments to tweak things, to enrich a simple message and help it stick in their minds and hearts. And isn't this what children require of us daily, no matter what we're doing? Creativity, adaptability, a willingness to respond to the unexpected with loving words and actions?

As a theologian often interacting with orthodox male theologians who are set in their ways, I sometimes get



in heated debates about gender language. I am tired of these arguments. I am tired of explaining myself, of trying to convince others that our words matter, that they really do in some sense create or shape the world in which we live. No matter how good my intentions, how sound my theology, I cannot simply will a mind to change. And so, I would rather create a space of love and kindness to teach children about God.

Sunday School is one of the children's first communal experiences of God. Their tiny bodies, so full of spirit and energy, are just barely beginning to learn to quiet themselves and wonder about the divine. Mostly it's just hard to keep their attention. Even in those moments when I think it's impossible to get preschoolers to listen, in their joyful faces I think I can see that they are learning that God is good, and that God is here.

And every once in awhile, a silence sets in, if only for a moment. We sit criss-cross-applesauce in a circle on the floor, and I ask them to all take a deep breath, hold it, and let it out. Once more, we take a deep breath, hold it, and let it out. I ask them to close their eyes, and I say a prayer, asking God to attend to the small prayer requests they entrusted to me minutes before. Soon we will burst out of our classroom and into the sanctuary, where they'll wiggle and giggle next to their parents, but for a moment I believe that God really is here among us, whether the children understand that yet or not.

Meghan Florian, MTS, is a writer and a scholar, and also works as the Communications Coordinator at RCWMS. She is currently pursuing a Master of Fine Arts in creative writing from Queens University of Charlotte. You can read her blog at www.femmonite.com.



Essay Contest

RCWMS is committed to supporting women as they find their voices and make them heard. Our 2013 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 this year should focus on the theme of "home." Writers may choose to write about a physical home, a spiritual home, the desire to feel at home, or other topics connected to home.

Prizes will be \$300 for first place, \$200 for second place, and \$100 for third place. The winning essay will be published in the RCWMS newsletter, *South of the Garden*, in March 2013. Winners will be notified by mail.

The limit is two essays per person. Submit four double-spaced copies of each essay. Previous first-place 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, 2013. Mail submissions: RCWMS Essay Contest, 1202 Watts St., Durham, NC 27701.

Elder Women

by Anita McLeod

What a year this has been for the Elder Women's Project! The \$20,000 grant from Kalliopeia jump-started our programs and gave energy to our efforts. Approaching the end of 2012, I find myself reflecting on our programmatic emphasis on the sacred in the natural world and its vital importance for us and our planet. This came home to me in October when Ann Koppelman led an experiential workshop, "Giving Thanks to the Earth," which used movement, simple art projects, music, and quiet time in nature to awaken and deepen our connection with the earth.

My experience in Ann's workshop led me to ask Carolyn Toben, an educator and spiritual teacher, to give a reading from her beautiful new book, *Recovering a Sense of the Sacred; Conversations with Thomas Berry*. Reading Thomas Berry's writings can be challenging. In her book, Toben makes Berry's often lofty language and abstract concepts understandable and personally accessible. Where Berry speaks of cosmology, Toben brings the small violet growing in the middle of the path into the conversation. She says the book is "a love story of learning to see through the eyes of the heart."

In early 2013 we will offer programs designed to inspire elder women to care for their bodies, claim their wisdom and voice, lead with their hearts, and repair our sacred connection with the earth.

On Saturday, January 12, biofeedback practitioner Betty Wolfe will lead a movement-centered workshop, "Reaching Your Future With Ease," designed to enlarge each participant's possibilities for safety and comfort in living their unique future, however far that reaches. Based in The Feldenkrais Method, the workshop offers this affirming idea: "Improve movement, improve life!"

For five Sundays between late January and mid-March we will offer our "End of Life Series." These programs provide resources, information, and exploration of issues facing all of us as we prepare for the end of our lives. Join a circle of courageous women willing to explore what a "good death" might mean and how preparing for it opens us to wholeheartedly embrace the precious life that awaits us. This is offered as a series; it is important for participants to attend all five sessions.

April 19-21, clinical psychologist Pat Webster and I will lead "Our Nature, In Nature: A Women's Camping Retreat," at Timberlake Earth Sanctuary in Whitsett, NC. During the weekend participants, both elder and younger, will spend time together and in solitude experiencing the gifts of the land, relishing the earth's warm winds, colorful blooms, and blue skies. The natural world, a mirror of our own nature, invites us to nurture, empower, and transform ourselves.

For details about these upcoming programs see the CALENDAR in these pages. We encourage you to sign up early as these programs typically fill quickly.



End of Life

When we offered the End of Life Series earlier this year, we had no idea what a huge success it would be or what a profound experience it would be for those who participated.

More than twenty courageous women gathered in January to begin the series, sponsored by the RCWMS Elder Women project. We met on five separate Sunday afternoons in a cozy home in Durham to reflect together on our experiences with death and our hopes and wishes for our own death. The series offered information, resources, and an exploration of issues we all face as we prepare for the end of our lives.

The participants and leaders were deeply moved by the level of insightful sharing and the depth of information offered. We learned from one another. So many women commented that it was the stories told that impacted them the most. Speaking and listening in a circle created a safe and supportive container in which to contemplate the taboo topic of death. As we reflected on life and death, we came to a deep appreciation of the preciousness of the time we have and some clarity about what our legacy might be. Since everyone was so enthusiastic about the series, we decided to offer it again beginning in January 2013. See the CALENDAR for details. Last year we had so many sign up that we had a long waiting list, so register early.

RCWMS

RCWMS is a thirty-five-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, religion, creativity, spirituality, and social justice. The organization mentors and encourages young women, religious leaders, writers, and activists.

RCWMS appreciates contributions of time, energy, money, and stock. To make a financial contribution or to volunteer, contact RCWMS or visit www.rcwms.org.

We are grateful for support from the Kalliopeia Foundation, the Triangle Community Foundation, The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, the Foundation for the Carolinas, and Emerald Isle Realty.

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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. Send checks to RCWMS, 1202 Watts Street, Durham, NC 27701, or go to www.rcwms.org.

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ISSN 0890-7676
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