

South of the Garden

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

Volume 34, Number 3

September 2013

Autumn

Summer is coming to an end, and, as usual, it is leaving us without making good on all of its promises. Where were the endless days of kicking back, taking a deep breath, and not worrying? If you locate them, please send some of them my way!

We've had a busy summer at RCWMS. Our two wonderful interns, Katie Anderson and lizzie mcmanus, did research on foremothers, learned about grief, worked on publicity options, launched a blog, created a writing group, and produced a booklet. You can read about one of lizzie's projects, *Courageous Conversations*, on Page 3. The booklet she mentions is now available. If you send \$5 to RCWMS, we'll send you one of these brand new forty-page booklets.

Our Facebook page has been buzzing all summer long. If you follow us (www.facebook.com/ResourceCenterWomenMinistrySouth), you know that we've been posting work by young feminists of faith. Some of our favorites include: femmonite.com, by our own Meghan Florian; holyhellions.com, by RCWMS trustee Erin Lane; boldlybeloved.wordpress.com by intern Katie Anderson; wanderingwrites.com by lizzie mcmanus; emmanism.com by Emma Akpan; *Women in Theology* at womenintheology.org; and the Young Clergy Women Project at youngclergywomen.org.

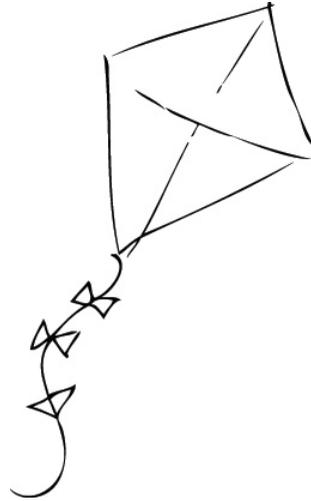
We are very enthusiastic about the fact that there is an intergenerational conversation happening online among feminist theologians of all ages. We regularly follow and post from older feminist theologians such as Marion Ronan, marianronan.wordpress.com, Mary Hunt of WATER (www.waterwomensalliance.org), and Susan Thistlethwaite of Chicago Theological Seminary. You'll frequently find Mary Hunt on religiondispatches.org. Susan Thistlethwaite often appears on the Washington Post's blog, "On Faith."

Fall is upon us, and we have lots of wonderful programs planned. The Art of Aging takes place in Durham on September 7. Anita McLeod is very excited about having gerontologist Lyndall Hare with us for this event. We only have a few spots left, so look at the Calendar for more information.

We have two readings planned in September. On the 17th, Jean O'Barr will read from *Transforming Knowledge*, a new collection of her essays, and Elaine Neil Orr will share some of her new novel, *A Different Sun*, on the 19th. These readings are free and open to the public. See the Calendar for details.

If you are a clergywoman or a preacher, don't miss Homegrown: North Carolina Women's Preaching Festival on October 10–11 at Trinity Ave. Presbyterian in Durham. The women who attended last year's festival had a rich experience. Listening to one another preach was particularly moving. (More at ncwomenpreaching.wordpress.com.)

We want to say a special word of thanks to the Kalliopeia Foundation for their faith in us and their support of our work. They have been particularly interested in our efforts to make space for and encourage spiritual practices. They have made a grant of \$25,000 to support our programs over the coming year.



Soaring

by Anna Hope LaSala-Goettler

Every morning at eight o'clock I catch the cross-town bus. I get off at Madison Avenue and walk north. As the upscale East Side clothing stores pass by, all I can think about are my kids. I am a peer counselor, a teacher, at a summer school program run by the International Rescue Committee. I tutor ten and eleven-year-olds, refugees from all over the world, in math and English, music and art.

Tenzin and Dakpa, the Tibetan boys, are always the first to appear at camp. We play Rock Paper Scissors at breakfast while we wait for more kids to arrive. Dakpa proudly shows me his rolled up paper wand, excited about the Harry Potter book from the school library. I sit next to Koumba, from Mali, who keeps her head down, leaving her pink barrette out for me to see. "How are you Koumba," I ask. "Good?" She nods and puts her head back down. But Koumba isn't the only hesitant one.

I have so many questions but I'm not sure if we know each other well enough to ask. When Jennifer tells me she's from Togo, I want to understand why she's here.

When they ask, I tell them about my home in Connecticut and what it's like for me to be in New York for the summer. They laugh when I say the subway is too loud and that I'm living in an apartment with someone else's furniture. They begin to tell me about their homes, too, their refugee camps, their tiny New York City apartments. I want them to trust me, to confide in me.

As the weeks pass, it happens, slowly. Rupesh and Jean Bosco, next door neighbors in Brooklyn, but originally separated by the 7,000 miles between Nepal and Tanzania, are best friends. They like to have cartwheel contests. Tenzin tells me that the scar on his left hand is from the time a dog bit him in Tibet. Shishir turns ten, and I learn that he likes chocolate frosting and green sprinkles on his cupcakes. I also learn that cupcakes and frosting have too much sugar for ten-year-olds to handle.

In art class I ask my students to draw a picture of their homes. "I can't really remember my home in Tibet," Tenzin says. I'm disappointed because I want to know, disappointed that he's not yet ready to tell his story. "Draw what you do remember because we're going to make kites," I explain. Colors explode onto their papers.

We head to Central Park. Jennifer and Shishir walk beside me, careful not to let their kite tails touch the grungy sidewalks. We find a field where we can run. My kids may not know much about America, but they know how to fly kites.

"Miss Anna, can you hold this until I run?" asks Tenzin. I watch as he gets ready to fly. I look at his kite. It is covered in green trees. I see the makings of a brown house and then suddenly it's out of my hands

(Continued on back.)

Calendar

* = RCWMS events. For registration form and more information: www.rcwms.org.

*September 7, 2013, Saturday, 9:30–4:30pm
THE ART OF AGING: Celebrating Elderhood
Colony Hills Clubhouse, 3060 Colony Rd, Durham NC
Join a circle of women as we explore our experience of aging and discover ways to embrace the opportunities and challenges of this rich time of life. Contemplate awakening to the adventure of conscious aging and the many possible gifts of enlivenment.
Leaders: Lyndall Hare, PhD gerontologist, and Anita Mcleod, Director of the RCWMS Elder Women Project
Cost: \$85, some scholarships
Contact: RCWMS, www.rcwms.org, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*September 11–October 30, 2013, 7–9 pm (8 Wednesdays)
WRITING FOR OUR LIVES: A Prompt Writing Workshop
Five Oaks Clubhouse, 5109 Pine Cone Dr., Durham, NC
If you are grieving the loss of a loved one, you know how isolating and lonely grief can feel. Social support can facilitate healthy grieving and encourage shifts in perspective. Join this supportive group and take time to remember, to get your thoughts down, to reflect through writing, and to share with others. We will use prompts to tap into our creative expression and begin to gently explore feelings that may silence or limit us. No writing experience necessary!
Facilitator: Heidi Gessner, MDiv, UCC Minister and UNC Hospitals Bereavement Coordinator and Chaplain
Cost \$195. Co-sponsored by RCWMS.
Contact: Heidi, heidigessner@gmail.com, 919-357-4148

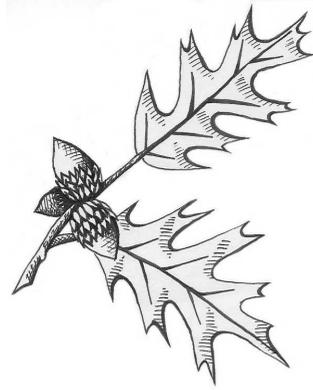
*September 17, 2013, 6:00 pm
READING: Jean Fox O'Barr, *Transforming Knowledge*
Thomas Room, Lilly Library, East Campus, Duke Univ., Durham, NC
A reading by Jean O'Barr from her collection, *Transforming Knowledge*. Reception to follow.
Cost: Free and open to the public
Contact: laura.m@duke.edu, or rcwmsnc@aol.com

*September 19, 2013, Thursday, 7:00 pm
READING: Elaine Neil Orr, *A Different Sun*
Durham, NC
Cost: Free. Please RSVP and we'll send directions
Contact: RCWMS, www.rcwms.org, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*September 22, 2013, Sunday, 1:00 pm
CONSIDER THE CONVERSATION: Film & Discussion
Watts St. Baptist Church, Durham, NC
When longtime friends Terry Kaldhusdal, a fourth grade teacher and filmmaker, and Michael Bernhagen, a healthcare business professional turned hospice advocate, each lost loved ones to chronic disease, their experiences led them to produce a documentary that would inspire change and end-of-life care that is more person-centered and less system-centered.
Cost: Free. Co-sponsored by RCWMS.
Contact: Diane Hill, diane@wattsstreet.org

*September 22–29, 2013
WEEK OF QUIET & WRITING FOR WOMEN
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC
An unstructured week that includes days of quiet and writing and evenings of readings and conversation.
Cost: \$750, includes lodging and meals.
Contact: RCWMS, www.rcwms.org, rcwmsnc@aol.com

September 28, 2013, Saturday, 1:00–8:00 pm
WOMEN-CHURCH CONVERGENCE 30th Anniversary Celebration
Country Inn & Suites, Mt. Prospect, IL (near Chicago)
Join in a celebration of thirty years of work for justice. will include theater, liturgy, dinner, and music.
Contact: dquinn4220@aol.com



October 4–5, 2013, 8:30–5:00
DISMANTLING RACISM WORKSHOP
CAARE Center, Durham Central Park, Durham, NC
Workshop is designed to ground us in a shared language, analysis, and history of race and racism. We will share our personal stories, take a close look at personal, institutional, and cultural racism, delve into a history of the construction of race, investigate white privilege, internalized racial superiority and inferiority. The workshop also includes People of Color and white caucusing, visioning, and moving from analysis to action.
Cost: \$100–\$250, sliding scale
Sponsor: dRworks
Contact: Tema Okun, temaokun@earthlink.net or www.dismantlingracism.org

*October 10–11, 2013
HOMEGROWN: NC Women's Preaching Festival
Trinity Avenue Presbyterian Church, Durham, NC
Planned and led by NC women.
Cost: \$40. (Free to Duke Div. students.)
Contact: ncwomenpreaching.wordpress.com/

*October 19, 2013, 9:30–4:30pm
COUNCIL OF ALL BEINGS
New Hope Camp & Conference Center, Chapel Hill, NC
In this program based on the work of renowned environmentalist Joanna Macy, we will experience the present-day plight of our endangered earth from an unexpected perspective that will touch the heart, awaken a sense of connection with all of nature, and inspire a vision of possibility for a sustainable future. We will each be led to speak in the voice of a non-human life form—such as a plant, animal, mountain or cloud—in order to witness the dangerous impact of our species on other beings of the earth and to uncover the wisdom these beings can offer us as we respond to this crisis of our times.
Leaders: Ann Simon Koppelman with Anita McLeod
Cost: \$75
Contact: RCWMS, www.rcwms.org, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*October 27, 2013, Sunday, 1:00 pm–4:00 pm
WOMEN & MONEY
Durham, NC
Leaders: Anita Mcleod & Lisa Gabriel
Cost: \$30
Contact: RCWMS, www.rcwms.org, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*November 9, 2013, Saturday, 9:30 am–3:30 pm
HARVESTING OUR STORIES: Collecting Our Wisdom
Durham, NC
The autumn of our lives is a time to harvest the wisdom of our lives, to unearth and gather up our life stories, to share them with others, to reflect on what we have learned by experience, and to discern how we might pass on our wisdom. For women 55 and older.
Leaders: Liz Dowling-Sendor and Anita McLeod
Cost: \$85, some scholarships
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*December 8, 2013, Sunday, 1:30–4:30 pm
A DAY OF QUIET
King's Daughters Inn, Durham, NC
Details: TBA
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

*January 3–10, 2014
WEEK OF QUIET & WRITING FOR WOMEN
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC
An unstructured week that includes days of quiet and writing and evenings of readings and conversation.
Cost: \$750, includes lodging and meals.
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

Future Weeks of Quiet & Writing:
January 3–10, 2014
May 4–11, 2014

Courageous

by elizabeth mcmanus

Stage fright has never been an affliction for me—with one knee-knocking exception. It was my final high school chorus concert, and i would be singing a solo number. It wasn't the overexposure of stage lights that dried my mouth with worry. No, it was the sheer fact that i'd be alone out there, with only a pianist tucked out of my peripheral vision. Without my usual flanking of fellow altos, i suddenly realized just how many chances i had to stumble over my words.

That's when it became clear to me how much comfort i take in community—real community. A space where every voice clangs and soars with its own tempo and tune, but in which together the most beautiful music is made. Music can be dissonant when tones don't match the way we want or expect them to, but i've often found dissonance makes the most unexpectedly wondrous works of art.

This was true for me in the Women's Ensemble of my adolescent years, but it was even more apparent in my recent dialogue-based writing workshop series, *Courageous Conversations*. This workshop series, geared toward Christian women between the ages of 16 and 40, was my summer project at RCWMS. We gathered to dismantle taboos in the Church and world as much as we communed to reconstruct our faith in the face of sexism, racism, heterosexism, and prejudice.

There were three reasons i wanted to start the group. The first was to address the silent and spoken taboos women particularly encounter in Christian communities—everything from protests against women in ministry to the silencing of domestic violence experienced by one out of every four women (Patricia Tjaden & Thoennes, Nancy, "Extent, Nature and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence," 2000). The second was to grapple with the polarization i felt as a Christian in feminist/queer circles. I needed to take solace in a community of women who also danced that tricky line between gender-conscious and Christ-emulating. The third was a direct inspiration from a book i have contributed to: *Talking Taboo: American Christian Women Get Frank About Faith*, to be published by White Cloud Press this October. The book, co-edited by RCWMS trustee Erin Lane and the fantastic Enuma Okoro, is a collection of 40 essays by women addressing "taboos" they encounter in the intersection of their faith and gender.

Writing for *Talking Taboo* was a terrifying experience for me. Like of the ten-cups-of-soothing-calm-tea-a-day variety of terror. It felt like i was stripping naked for anyone who might read my essay—professors, strangers, and future in-laws included.

That is, it was terrifying until i realized this was no senior chorus concert solo. My story was one out of 40 breathtakingly bold essays tackling the unspeakable. I was reminded then of the importance of community. I termed this realization the "I-Thought-It-Was-Just-Me" moment. Though i could only speak for myself, i was not the only woman standing up and saying: *enough!* We were a Jesus-toting, taboo-confronting grown-up Women's Ensemble.

And i wanted the "I-Thought-It-Was-Just-Me" work of the book to be made accessible to as many people as possible. Through reading the book, yes, but also through that mysterious, words-from-the-head-into-the-hands creative process of writing about taboos in the Church and world. I love the active tense, *talking,*



in the book's title—sparking a conversation out loud. I knew then that the group i wanted to create as an extension of *Talking Taboo* would need to combine equal parts writing (for internal reflection) and speaking (for external processing).

So armed with a stack of Maya Angelou poems and a curriculum i'd drawn up from scratch, Jeanette and RCWMS gave me the go-ahead for our embodied *Talking Taboo*. We called it *Courageous Conversations* for the wholeheartedness needed to dismantle and reconstruct our faith in the face of prejudices.

For four weeks, six to ten women gathered on Monday nights to write and to talk. I prompted our conversations with everything from love letters written to the Church (mine was a rather foul-mouthed, let's-start-seeing-other-people type letter) to finish-the-sentence exercises ("As a woman and a Christian, i feel shamed when..." and "With God, my body is..." and "I feel the most feminine when..."). We expressed frustration at being told we were "overreacting" for calling out sexism in our churches. Some of us prayed to Mother God. We decried the expectation that our genitalia predisposed us to a love of ladies' luncheons. We delighted in congregating as a group of women, uplifting the womyn-space we engendered. We grappled with wanting to emulate a Jesus who submitted to the powers of the world in his death on the cross, we grappled with also wanting to reclaim power taken from us as women. We protested our bodies being forced into hiding because of their curves and sexualized lines; we lamented how our bodies are often labeled a "distraction" causing men to "stumble" from sexual "purity."

Women training for ordination and women who were already ordained articulated frustrations they encountered in that path to the stole. Stories surfaced of older women pastors warning younger women that they had to watch out for *other* women pastors. Of women in congregations shaming other women for thigh-riding hemlines or swinging hips. Being attractive and bright could be threatening to other women, we had been warned. A symptom, i argued, of a gender norm system that encourages competition among women rather than, as Audre Lorde writes, the embracing of difference as "a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic" ("The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," 1984). In our very decision to gather for collective empowerment we disrupted gender norms.

In luminously colored skirts and poppy-red lipstick, we worked to dismantle patriarchy. With unshaven legs and unvarnished nails, we celebrated our hewn-in-the-image-of-God womanhood. We spanned traditions, races, backgrounds, sexual orientations, educational backgrounds, and ages. Sometimes, our conversations were harmonies in unison. Still more beautiful were the dissonances, the solo lines making complicated two-steps in duets and quintets of experience. Whatever music we made, i was thankful down to my bones for each participant's voice, for her courage, for her willingness to sit in the discomfort.

We have collected our essays in a publication available from the Resource Center, *Courageous Conversations: Christian Women Unearthing the Unspeakable*. We hope these stories, paired with a curriculum i hope will soon be widely available, will engage taboo-tackling conversations elsewhere.

Our gatherings have not overturned sexist practices in ministry, the Church, or the world at large. We had only four weeks to work with a lifetime of taboos. I

(Continued on back.)

Soaring

and in the air. Tenzin's Tibet, his home, is flying. In the middle of Central Park, I look up and see Jennifer's Togo and Koumba's Mali. I hear Shishir's laughter and watch his Nepal in the clouds.

My feet stay grounded, rooted to the soil of my land, my home. I watch them run, their feet just touching this New York soil, holding tight the string that connects them to their far away homes. They run, remembering Nepal, Mali, and Tibet. They look back at the brightly colored kites of their homelands, safely held by the New York sky. They run, looking forward and beyond, embracing this new place. It's theirs now.

I know now that I've been safe my whole life; I've had this park, this sky, this home. This summer, I met some kids who invited me to be part of the pictures on their kites, part of their stories of home. They taught me that my land is theirs now, that the whole world is home, to be traveled, drawn about, and known. My heart soars.

Anna LaSala-Goettler won third place in the 2013 RCWMS Essay Contest for this essay. She is from New Haven, CT and is a senior at Middlebury College.

Courageous

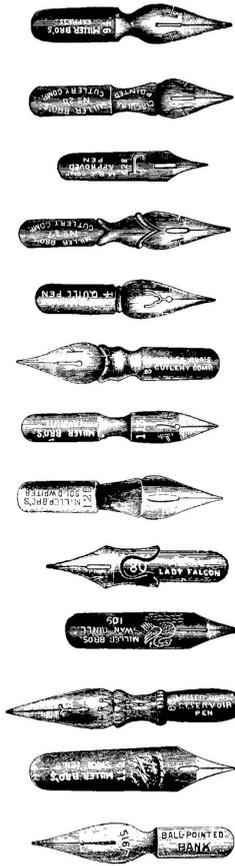
know this group was only the first of many training grounds for all of us to lead taboo-unearthing lives. But this group was the revitalizing i needed to hold both Christian and feminist identities together.

And that, i think, is a space never to be underestimated. There is something almost dangerous about women intentionally gathering to talk taboo. We each have particularities in our stories, but in the fabric we weave of collective stories something bigger than ourselves is born. The power of "I-Thought-It-Was-Just-Me" is the switchboard moment of turning self-blame into self-empowerment. In realizing we're not the only ones with frustrations to articulate, we can choose to collectively engage in dismantling those structures that have made us feel so isolated. We may not all dismantle taboos in the same ways, but to me that is less important than knowing our harmonies make music louder than the silencing of our voices.

elizabeth mcmanus enjoys toying with grammatical norms, fawning over her two kittens, roaming about Scotland, and eating burritos. She's a senior at Mount Holyoke College with a gender & sexuality focused religion major. This summer, she served as an RCWMS intern. More of her work can be found at WanderingWrites.com.

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Essay Contest

RCWMS is committed to supporting women as they find their voices and make them heard. Our 2014 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 relationships among women that are intergenerational. If you are a young woman, how have you been influenced by older women? What relationships and situations have helped you grow and enriched your life? Likewise, for older women, have you met and been influenced by young women? How do intergenerational relationships and communities benefit women of all ages?

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 2014. 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, 2014. Mail submissions: RCWMS Essay Contest, 1202 Watts St., Durham, NC 27701.

RCWMS

RCWMS is a thirty-six-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 especially grateful for support from the Kalliopeia Foundation and from Emerald Isle Realty.

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