

# South of the Garden

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

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December 2016

## Winter

by Jeanette Stokes

When Reagan was elected the first time, my friend Mary Abu-Saba and I were mad, so we went shopping and bought clothes. When he was elected the second time, we bought an office building! I'm not sure what to do now.

When I try to remember life before the November election, I recall that we were reeling from the number of police killings of black and brown males. Before November 8, I was overwhelmed by the barrage of nearly hysterical emails from progressive candidates. I recall being pleased that we would have a woman president and rather unhappy that her husband, a man with a history of being a sexual predator, would move back into the White House.

I read a lot of analysis before the election and couldn't imagine that someone with questionable business practices who was openly racist, sexist, and xenophobic could win the election. Barry Goldwater had tried openly racist rhetoric and didn't get elected. Ian Haney Lopez's *Dog Whistle Politics* explains that all presidential candidates since Goldwater have used race in coded ways to appeal to white voters, but I didn't think someone could do it openly and win. Silly me!

Everything I read convinced me Hillary would win. Now, I don't know what to read. Many of the journalists and analysts I respect got it so wrong that I hardly expect them to interpret the situation correctly just a few weeks later. Good folks in Christian, Jewish, and Buddhist traditions are trying to offer comfort and encouragement. I keep saying all the things I've been saying for years: take care of yourself, be kind to people, being busy is not the answer, speak up against injustice, organize with others, and work to repair the breach. While good advice, it seems cold comfort.

So, I did a little counting. Less than 19% of the people living in the USA voted for the Republican candidate for President.

- The USA population is just over 325 Million.
- There are 219 million eligible voters.
- Only 55.6 % of those (126,622,000) actually voted.
- The winner only received about 61,600,000 votes.

That means that fewer than 19% of the human beings living in the USA are verifiably in favor of this man and his rhetoric. I call that a tiny minority. He didn't even get a majority of the votes, but in our peculiar Electoral College system, he got enough to be elected.

I was shocked and upset, but I have lived through Nixon, Reagan, and not one but two Bushes. One thing that worries me is the level of distress and upset of young adults. I keep saying, "We will live through this." Take care of yourself and organize. And remember the price of freedom is constant vigilance.



## Dharma

by Marcy Litle

*We cannot have a healed society, we cannot have change, we cannot have justice if we do not reclaim and repair the human spirit.*

—Rev. angel Kyodo williams, *Radical Dharma*

For the past couple of months we at RCWS have been engaging with the work of author and Zen teacher, Rev. angel Kyodo williams. Our reading group discussed her recent book, *Radical Dharma*, co-written with Lama Rod Owens and Jasmine Syedullah. In October, Rev. williams was in Durham for a public talk, "Talking Race, Love & Liberation," and a daylong workshop "Embodied Race & Power Awareness." She and her coauthors provide a powerful guide for confronting the ways our lives have been misshapen by our country's historical and ongoing racism and oppression. Her analysis is even more critical, today, as we face the appalling news that Donald Trump will become our next president.

Williams offers crucial insights about how to live in this difficult time while keeping our eyes and efforts on the work of liberation for all. She and her co-authors stress "the deep connection between personal liberation and social transformation." And, along with Ta-Nehisi Coates in *Between the World and Me*, they emphasize the centrality of embodiment to both oppression and liberation.

We must act for our own liberation. And we must disrupt racism at every turn.

I was out of town for williams' visit, but a friend who attended was left with this dual message: we must stand firm in the struggle against racism; we must embody deep compassion for all in this struggle. The personal and the social cannot be separated.

In the book, which is loosely structured, the authors, all of whom identify as queer people of color, relate their own spiritual journeys. They offer community conversations about race, love, and liberation. They discuss the relationship between anger and love in the work of liberation. They talk movingly of the need to heal. There are insightful nuggets scattered throughout.

Their words about the damage suffered by white people and our potential for healing resonated particularly for me. Here are some examples:

We're not talking enough about the fear that white folks hold as a result of race. I'm not talking about fear of colored people or fear of Black people. I'm talking about fear of one's own self, because you don't know how to have the conversation, because you feel shame about where you're located in that conversation, about how to locate yourself...

# Calendar

\* = RCWMS events. For registration form and more information: [www.rcwms.org](http://www.rcwms.org).

\*December 3, 2016, Saturday, 1:00–4:00 pm  
ADVENT REFLECTIONS: Preparing Your Inner Christmas  
Durham, NC

Beyond the wreath and candles, Advent calls out for deep inner reflections. We need to give our souls the time to review and release the year and to imagine and prepare for our own inner experience of Christmas. This workshop will offer guiding imaginations and inspiring questions for personal writing and group conversations. Please bring a laptop or a journal for writing.

Leader: Lynn Jericho, author of *Six Ways to Celebrate Christmas & Celebrate You*. [www.innerchristmas.com](http://www.innerchristmas.com).

Cost: \$45.

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

\*December 13, 2016, Tuesday, 11:30 am–2:00 pm  
ART OF CONSCIOUS AGING: A Group for Women  
Colony Hills Clubhouse, 3060 Colony Rd., Durham, NC  
Topic: Myths and Gifts of Aging. Bring a bag lunch & a drink. Newcomers welcome. No fee, no need to register.  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

\*December 18, 2016, Sunday, 7:00 pm  
INTERFAITH CELEBRATION

Friends Meeting, 404 Alexander Ave., Durham, NC  
All are welcome. Please bring a candle.

Suggested donation: \$5–10

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

January 10–13, 2017, Opening Retreat  
COURAGE TO LEAD® FOR YOUNG CLERGY &  
COMMUNITY INNOVATORS: A 6-month Courage &  
Renewal® Retreat Series

The Calvin Center, Atlanta, GA

Are you committed to faith work, but trying to sustain yourself in the midst of institutional tensions, relational expectations, and internal pressure to make a difference? This retreat series offers time to renew, reflect, and reconnect with what matters most to your vocation. For young leaders age 40 and under.

Cost: \$600

Contact: [www.couragerenewal.org/ctl-youngclergy/](http://www.couragerenewal.org/ctl-youngclergy/)

\*January 1–8, 2017

WEEK OF QUIET & WRITING FOR WOMEN

Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC

Cost: \$800 (includes a private room and meals)

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

January 20–22, 2017, 6:00 pm Fri. thru 11:00 am Sun.  
WINTRY MIX: Art, Spirit & Rest Retreat  
Avila Retreat Center, Durham, NC

Welcome the New Year by giving yourself a weekend immersed in art, spirit, and rest. Fun, inspiring, hands-on and multi-media art projects in a supportive and safe environment. No art experience is required.

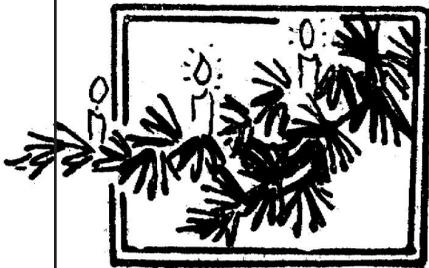
Leader: Claudia Fulshaw

Cost: \$265 full weekend, \$90 Saturday only.

Contact: Claudia, 919-306-2919, [cfdesign19@aol.com](mailto:cfdesign19@aol.com)

\*February 5, 19, March 5, 19, April 2, Sun., 1:30–3:30 pm  
BEING MORTAL: Workshop Series  
Durham, NC

Dr. Atul Gawande's book, *Being Mortal*, will be the centerpiece of a five-week workshop. The book and several exercises will help us understand aging, dying, and death as both personal and social concerns. Embracing mortality allows us live more consciously and richly. We'll consider practical strategies, advance directives,



and conversations about final wishes. This workshop is designed as an intergenerational conversation.

Leaders: Jehanne Gheith, LCSW, PhD and a student from Jehanne's Medical Ethics class.

Cost: \$100 for the series.

Questions: Jehanne Gheith at [gheith7@me.com](mailto:gheith7@me.com)

\*February 17–19, 2017, Friday 2:00 pm–Sunday 2:00 pm  
FINDING YOUR MEDIUM: A Weekend of Art at the Beach with Sue Sneddon  
Emerald Isle, NC

"I can't draw a straight line." Well, who said you should? Sue Sneddon will lead you in exploring various media for painting and drawing. These will include: pencil, pen and ink, charcoal, pastel, oil pastel, watercolor, gouache, acrylics, and some mixed media options. Let's find the ones that float your boat! Sue will provide all art supplies needed for the workshop. You may also bring any art supplies you have.

Leader: Sue Sneddon has been a full-time painter since 1984. Much of her work has concentrated on the ocean, especially the NC coast, where she now lives.

Cost: Workshop & food, \$375, plus housing in beautiful beach house, \$125 double or \$225 single.

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

\*February 24–27, 2017, Friday 7:00 pm–Mon. 10:00 am  
MAKING YOUR ART: An Advanced Workshop with Sue Sneddon  
Emerald Isle, NC

For those who've taken Sue's "Finding Your Medium."

Leader: Sue Sneddon (See February 17-19.)

Cost: Workshop & meals, \$400, plus housing in beautiful beach house, \$125 double or \$225 single.

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

\*March 10–11, 2017, Fri. 7–9:00 pm & Sat., 9:30 am–4 pm  
MOTHER MAY I? A Narrative Leadership Workshop  
Durham, NC

Despite the growing number of female role models available to us today, for most women, our first example of female authority and leadership was provided by our mothers or primary female caretakers. Workshop participants will explore who they are and who they have become as leaders in their own fields through the lens of what they learned from their mothers about being a "woman in charge." This workshop will invite you to enter the story of your relationship with your mother and identify insights for your life and work.

Leader: Jan Gregory-Charpentier, an ordained United Church of Christ minister, is a pastor and teacher, retreat leader, ministry supervisor, and a daughter.

Cost: \$75. Click [HERE](#) to register.

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

\*April 29, 2017, Saturday, 9:30 am–3:30 pm  
COMING OUT OF THE SHADOWS: Connection & Spirituality Among LGBTQ Communities  
Lyon Center, 1309 Halley St., Durham, NC  
For generations, LGBTQ people have been pushed out of religious and spiritual communities. For too long, our very selves have been erased from religious texts and rituals. This interfaith celebration will feature a morning of workshops to help us reclaim our hidden histories and support our spiritual journeys. The afternoon will feature talking circles with skilled facilitators for healing and celebrating together. Chaplains, social workers, and alternative healers will be onsite for individual support. The day will begin and end with music and ritual from various traditions.  
Cost: \$10 suggested donation. Lunch provided.  
Contact: Rebecca Welper, [welper.rcwms@gmail.com](mailto:welper.rcwms@gmail.com)

Future Weeks of Quiet & Writing:

May 7–14, 2017

September 24–October 1, 2017

# Bodies

by Rebecca Welper

A few weeks back, I talked with a friend about watching the third presidential debate. She remarked that she wanted to skip it, but ended up watching to remind herself that all of this really was happening. I understood what she meant. I, too, had wanted to turn away from the poisonous rhetoric and unprecedented divisiveness of the presidential campaign.

In the past few weeks, I've had waves of feeling sickened, despairing, and helpless. I don't want to acknowledge the spike in hate speech and hate crimes just since the election. Some days, I don't feel I have the energy to keep fighting.

But a book that I read recently reminds me not to bury my head in the sand. It is a compelling, disturbing, and crucial book by Susan Thistlethwaite: *Women's Bodies as Battlefield*. This slim but packed volume digs deep into the history, mechanisms, and lived trauma of violence against women worldwide. The opening paragraph offers a sobering observation:

All day long, all night long, every day and every night, the bodies of women and girls are turned into battlefields. Their bodies are penetrated against their will; they are burned, maimed, bruised, slapped, kicked, threatened with weapons, confined, beaten with fists or objects, shot and knifed; their bones are broken; and they lose limbs, sight, hearing, pregnancies, and their sense of personal and physical integrity.

Yes, it is difficult to read. I had to take it in small pieces. But Thistlethwaite's rallying cry, which slowly sunk in, is that we must not turn away from the lived realities of this violence. We must engage with embodied stories of women's suffering, to continue to make it real in our own and the public's consciousness. She describes what usually happens with such stories instead:

The fact of the physical effects of violence on women's bodies, however, is aggressively hidden, qualified, reframed, reorganized, catalogued, excused, and ultimately authorized. This is how such a monumental amount of carnage continues almost unabated with very little public outcry or sustained efforts to stop it.

There was something affirming in reading this deeply truthful account, rather than going through the psychological gymnastics we usually employ to avoid acknowledging difficult truths. I think we like to disbelieve and ignore traumatic accounts because we don't know how to make it better. It feels too uncomfortable and overwhelming to see the pain. Thistlethwaite guides us in finding a new way forward. The first step is opening our eyes.

But Thistlethwaite doesn't stop there. Another strength of this book is the connection she makes between violence against women and war between nations. She argues that the same patriarchal mechanisms undergird both phenomena. I found this account fascinating, a feminist "ah ha" moment for me. Despite studying international politics and women's studies as an undergraduate, I had never come across such a compelling explanation for the patriarchal causes of war.



Graphic: theadvocatesforhumanrights.org

Thistlethwaite argues that in Western society, we have enabled ongoing death and destruction by purposefully ignoring the actual bodies that are injured and killed in war, rape, and assault. She draws on philosophical, religious, and governmental texts from the founding of Greek society to the current day. She shows the reader bodies that are "burned, maimed, bruised, slapped, kicked, threatened with weapons, confined, beaten with fists or objects, shot, and knifed." In encountering, page after page, the true effect on bodies, the true cost of war between nations and the war on women's bodies, we can no longer turn away. We can no longer allow this violence to continue.

This is not light reading, but these are not light times. Sometimes we want a break, we want to turn away and disengage. That's natural. But ultimately it feels more sane, more real, more compassionate and more whole to witness, be in the muck with those who are suffering, feel the grief for bodies harmed and lives lost, get angry, and get to work.

*Rebecca Welper has an MFA in Playwriting and teaches writing workshops at RCWMS. She also serves as the RCWMS Development Director.*

# Dharma...

What dawned on me is that not only has white supremacy robbed red, Black, brown, and yellow people of the spirit-given human right to life and liberty, it has also so thoroughly programmed and policed white people as to who and how they could love....

How else could the imaginably decent, moral, ordinary white people stand to live in proximity, much less partake, in open-market slavery? Generations of people allowed their children to witness the sale and degradation of other human bodies. This most unnatural of arrangements... required the compulsion toward compassion for other beings to be systematically uprooted and replaced with widespread indifference. This has continued into post-slavery lynching, Jim Crow denial of legal entitlements, systematic mass incarceration, prison-to-school [sic] pipelines, and so on. All of this has occurred while white folks gained from the resulting wealth, presumption of entitlement to fare better than colored people, and, most insidiously, a belief that meritocracy has been at work all along, shielding them behind a cloak of ignorance and innocence while they cash their spoils at the bank.

Powerful words. Hard to hear. But not without hope. The authors stress the need for "white folks to really claim suffering around living in a racialized society." Only by committing to our own liberation can we "give way to change happening outside." It really is possible to "disrupt and dismantle structures that degrade humanity." And we do it through love.

"Most importantly, though, when you allow your practice to be one of bearing witness to suffering, opening yourself to not knowing, you directly cultivate compassion from wise action."

*Marcy Litle is a member of the RCWMS Board of Trustees. She taught international studies and writing at Duke. She loves to edit, paint, and hang out with her granddaughters.*

# Support

by Rebecca Welper

Many of us are still reeling from the election and trying to find the strength to keep fighting. What's helping us go on at RCWMS is all of you. Our community that is reawakening. A determination to stand together. A new feminist movement that just might be taking hold in the next generation.

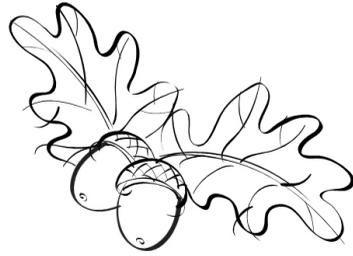
Something amazing and unstoppable happens when women, LGBTQ folks, and allies gather at RCWMS: in a writing group or anti-racist book group, while making art, in taking our rightful place in the pulpit, or planning the next inclusive, interfaith spiritual celebration. We share quiet truths with each other, perhaps for the first time. We find our voices and use them to lift each other up. We reconnect with roots of feminine spirituality that were stolen from our ancestors. We honor our true selves and create authentic community.

This is what will take us back from the brink: creating the world we want to see for our children and grandchildren, in small, everyday ways. And it's all because of you. The work you make possible at RCWMS literally has the power to change lives. To the queer woman of color seeking ordination in a straight, white, male world, you provide needed community. To the grieving widow who lost her husband too soon, you provide solace. To hundreds of people in our area and beyond, losing hope from increasing injustice, intolerance, and isolation, you provide connection, peace, and the strength to carry on.

Your donations make all of this possible. Please keep up your important work. If you've never donated to RCWMS, consider a small gift this December. If you're a regular contributor, thank you so much! Would you consider a slightly larger gift this year? Now is the time to stand up against oppression and hate. Now is the time to be a force for good in the world.

## BEQUESTS

Those of us in the LGBTQ community have been counseled to revisit our legal documents, including our wills, in light of the uncertainty of the next administration. If you find yourself updating your will, for any reason, consider what kind of positive, long-term impact you could make. After making sure your loved ones are taken care of, think about creating a legacy for feminism and social justice. Let us know if you plan to make a gift to RCWMS in your will, and we'll add you to the Legacy Circle. Contact Rebecca Welper for more information.



# Essay Contest

**THEME:** Essays should focus on the theme "Ecofeminism" or "Spirituality and the Natural World." We invite submissions that consider these themes in creative ways. You might consider how your spirituality or faith has been shaped by your experiences in the natural world. Does your spiritual practice include a relationship with nature? Does your spirituality or faith inform your concern for the earth?

**DETAILS:** Women 18 years of age or older may submit up to 2 nonfiction essays, 1,400 words or less. Submit online only: <https://rcwms.submittable.com/submit>. Previous first-place winners and current RCWMS Board members not eligible. No sermons, please. Do not put your name on your essay(s). Fill out the online cover letter form with the essay's title, your name, address, phone, and email. Submissions open October 15, 2016 and close January 15, 2017.

**PRIZES:** \$300 for first place, \$200 second, and \$100 third. The winning essay will be published in the RCWMS newsletter, *South of the Garden*, March 2016. **NOTIFICATION:** Winners will be notified by email.

# RCWMS

RCWMS is a thirty-nine-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 contribute, contact RCWMS or visit [www.rcwms.org](http://www.rcwms.org). We are grateful for support from Kalliopeia Foundation, The E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, Vanguard Charitable, Emerald Isle Realty, and the Triangle Community Foundation (A-Squared Fund and Bass Walter Fund).

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