

# South of the Garden

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

Volume 38, Number 1

March 2017

## Spring

by Jeanette Stokes

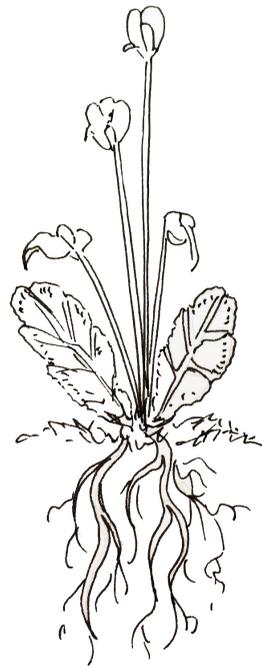
Spring has come early to North Carolina, and I find the speed of it unsettling. While I welcome the warm sunshine on my walks and the eager blooms of daffodils in my neighborhood, I wasn't quite done with winter. I could use a bit more time to hibernate before the explosion of energy that comes with spring.

This winter was hard and exhausting as we geared up for and faced the early days of this presidency. We lost our beloved Anita McLeod at the beginning of January. Former Board Chair, founder and leader of our Elder Women's Project, and the creator of nearly fifty programs in the past fifteen years, Anita's loss leaves a huge hole at the center of RCMWS and in the lives of so many. It doesn't feel right for spring to cheerily unfold as if everything were normal. (Read my tribute to her: [www.rcwms.org/blog/](http://www.rcwms.org/blog/))

Our 2017 Essay Contest and Anita's own words remind me to look to the natural world for wisdom and strength. The theme of this year's contest was "Spirituality and the Natural World." First place goes to Heather E. Goodman of Douglassville, PA, for "Roosting," which appears in this newsletter. Her immersion in the natural world during a difficult period offers guidance for all of us. Second place goes to Judith Sornberger of Wellsboro, PA and third place to Galia Goodman of Durham, NC. We appreciate the work of this year's judges, Marcia Rego, Rebecca Vidra, and Molly Williams, and we send our thanks to all who entered our contest.

I am hopeful as I look ahead to RCWMS programs coming up this spring. Time and again, I am moved by the deep soul work and connections fostered during these workshops. I hope you will join us for some of these. Back for a second time, Jan Gregory-Charpentier will lead "Mother May I? A Narrative Leadership Workshop" on March 10-11. This workshop is a fascinating exploration of the leadership style we develop based on the relationship we had with our mothers. Be sure to sign up now for Carol Henderson's "Zooming In" writing workshop on March 17-18, as it is almost full. At the end of April, we will be hosting for the first time, "Coming Out of the Shadows: Connection and Spirituality Among LGBTQ Communities." This is an interfaith festival for folks of all genders, all sexualities, and all walks of life, including allies of the LGBTQ community. We will share, heal and celebrate together. Take a look at the calendar for more details on all these programs.

In Anita's last email to the RCWMS community in December, she wrote, "The Divine Feminine is with us as lover and warrior. She is calling elder women to stand up for the precious earth and water and creatures. For ourselves. For our children." In the coming days, you might ask yourself what you can do heed this wisdom. I know the first thing I'll do. I'm going to head outside and welcome spring.



Art by Sue Sneddon

## Roosting

by Heather E. Goodman

*Therefore, all we really have to guide us is the response of joy and reverence we feel in the presence of what seems to us beautiful, good, and holy.* —Mary Rose O'Reilley, *The Love of Impermanent Things*

Two days after the sugar maples are tapped, the aconite and snow drops rock the moist dirt, and the air smells like spring, feels thinner—not so heavy, repressive, hard.

It's past sunset, but the sky blues yet. The puppy plays Frisbee with me, and then stops at the sound of a crack in the treetops. He shows me the direction, and after the second thwap, I see it: a turkey—unwieldy, discombobulated—roosts in a tree at the wood's edge. Once stilled I lose sight of the bird, but another, and then another and then more ascend into the trees, three and four and five at a time. Flopping, loud, inelegant in every way, and it is gorgeous, these bumbling fools. I count twenty-one, but I know there are twenty-seven in the flock. The turkeys have been flaunting themselves, and we've been swapping stories with the neighbors about them.

Minutes pass, and the birds readjust infrequently now. I catch just a glimpse of a snood hanging inches below a beak or an outstretched wing silhouetted against the gloaming. The pup has turned to chew on a log, every once in a while nudging my calf, reminding me we're here, this is real. Then the six o'clock church bells go, and I look in their direction, and through the naked trees, I can see the bell tower, its warm little glow on the next ridge two miles away.

I'm not religious, but I think of my father-in-law, the brain tumor remnants they're killing with chemicals and lasers. I'm not comfortable with prayer. I'm too insignificant in these galaxies and eons, dinosaurs, and Sanskrit—too giant in this world of atoms, moss, a single grain of creek bed sand. All I know how to do: please, I ask. I try not to beg or whine.

And then the turkeys creak the branches again. When they finally settle, it's silent, and I would never know they were roosting, couldn't pick out their silhouettes, their beards or wattles or caruncles. I just have to trust, to know: they are there. Waiting till morning to descend in cacophonous, ungraceful bundles. Winging to the ground until again they alight to the sky.

*Motivated to pursue fiction after attending Bread Loaf Writers' Conference and working as a Mentor Series award winner in fiction at the Loft Literary Center, Heather E. Goodman's work has been published in Gray's Sporting Journal, Hunger Mountain, The Crab Orchard Review, Shenandoah, where her story was awarded The Shenandoah Fiction Prize, and the Chicago Tribune, where her story "His Dog" won the Nelson Algren Award.*

# Calendar

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

\*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.

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

\*March 17-18, 2017, Fri. 7-9 pm & Sat. 9:30 am-3:30 pm  
ZOOMING IN: Writing Workshop with Carol Henderson  
Durham, NC

In this writing workshop, we will explore and write about some of our most meaningful personal experience. We will work with memory, point of view, voice, "perhaps-ing," backstory, and the idea of omission-what's left out and why. Come prepared to write a lot and to leave with skills and perspective that will serve you well in any writing you undertake.

Leader: Carol Henderson is a writer, editor, and workshop leader who has taught in the US, Europe, and the Middle East. She is the author of *Losing Malcolm*, and *Farther Along: The Writing Journey of Thirteen Bereaved Mothers*, and edited, among other titles, *Wide Open Spaces: Call Stories*. Learn more about Carol at [www.carolhenderson.com](http://www.carolhenderson.com)

Cost: \$125.

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

March 25, 2017, 9:30 am-4:00 pm

RADICAL WELCOME: Living with the Other  
The 2017 Jack Crum Conference on Prophetic Ministry  
Jarvis UMC Church, Greenville, NC

The purposed of this conference is to encourage churches and individuals to learn to embrace the Other—regardless of whether the Other is an immigrant, refugee, male, female, trans, gay, lesbian, African American, Asian American, Hispanic, etc. Leviticus 19:33-34 told how to treat the alien and Christ said in Luke 10:27 to love thy neighbor.

Leaders: Marcia Owen, Will Willimon, and more  
Registration and more: [mfsancc.org/events/2017-jack-crum-conference/](http://mfsancc.org/events/2017-jack-crum-conference/)

\*April 4, 2017, Tuesday, 8:00 am–5:00 pm

LABYRINTH WALK

Duke Chapel, Durham, NC

Walk the RCWMS Labyrinth. Please wear clean socks. Allow about half an hour for your labyrinth walk.

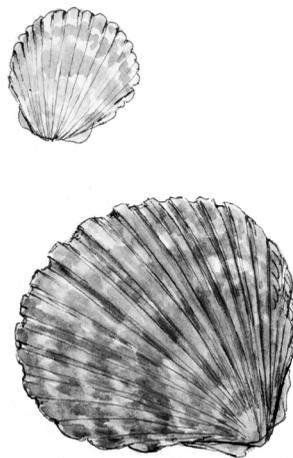
Free & open to the public.

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

\*April 9–14, 2017

ECUMENICAL HOLY WEEK LABYRINTH WALK  
Binkley Baptist Church, Chapel Hill, NC

Sponsors: Several Chapel Hill churches



Art by Sue Sneddon

Free and open to the public. Please wear clean socks.  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

April 21–23, 2017

WRITING WITH SPIRIT: Spring Writing and  
Meditation Weekend

Kirkridge Retreat Center, Bangor, PA

For any level of writer, this class is about opening to a deeper creativity by combining meditation and writing.

Leader: Nancy Kilgore, DMin

Cost: \$400

For more info and to register: [www.kirkridge.org](http://www.kirkridge.org)

\*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, and erased from religious texts and rituals. But we have always been participants and leaders in our communities, if too often in the shadows. This interfaith festival for all genders will feature workshops and talking circles to help us reclaim our hidden histories, support our spiritual journeys, and celebrate 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.

More: [lgbtqspirituality.wordpress.com/](http://lgbtqspirituality.wordpress.com/)

\*May 5, 2017, Friday, choose 10:45 am or 1:00 pm

TRADITIONAL JAPANESE TEA GATHERING

Teahouse, Sarah P. Duke Gardens, Durham, NC

Join RCWMS for a traditional Japanese Tea Gathering.

Enjoy the calm simplicity of the tearoom and the beauty of the gardens. Host will demonstrate traditional Japanese tea and guest will enjoy a steaming cup of frothy green tea. Small group. Please choose morning or afternoon seating.

Leader: Chizuko Sueyoshi

Cost: \$30.

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

\*May 7–14, 2017

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: \$800, includes lodging and meals.

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

October 6–8, 2017

WRITING WORKSHOP with Lynn Hinton during the  
Balloon Fiesta

Norbertine Center, Albuquerque, NM

A writing retreat during the Balloon Fiesta to bring folks to the area to enjoy both a meaningful retreat and the balloons! It's a fabulous time to be in New Mexico. It will be a time for writing and reflection and even building community with other writers on an intentional spiritual path.

Cost: around \$350-\$400 includes room and meals.

(Extra nights are \$45.) There will only be room for fifteen participants. More details to come.

Contact: [lynnehintonnm@aol.com](mailto:lynnehintonnm@aol.com)

Future Weeks of Quiet & Writing:

September 24–October 1, 2017

January 2–9, 2018

# Persist

by Jeanette Stokes

It has been a long month or two. Since inauguration day, nearly every public policy issue I care about has been under attack by executive order or cabinet appointees promising to undo the mission of their department. In the first week alone, I attended three rallies and a conference on gun violence. I have made countless phone calls to my representatives. I am nearly obsessed with the news and the threat of new disasters. It wore me out, and that was only the first week.

At the end of that first week after the inauguration, I nearly panicked when I realized that we don't have an EJECT button for the people who have taken over our government. There is no quick solution for this mess. This is not going to be a short struggle.

The first thing to remember is that our world was broken even before the 2016 election. We, then as now, faced unacceptable levels of poverty and mass incarceration. We faced an out-of-control cycle of guns and gun violence. And continuing distortions of racism, overt and hidden. So, the agenda has not changed. We just thought that with Obama in the White House we had a better chance of making progress. But the Tea Party put a stop to much of that even before the recent election.

When I look away from politics and gaze out the window, I notice that the light is coming back. Unlike a month ago, it is light outside at 6:00 pm when I leave my late afternoon yoga class. This changing of seasons reminds me of natural cycles—growth, fruit, death, loss, rest, and then it starts over again. Our life together in this country, our political life, may be like that also. For some of us, it feels like the dead of winter. But look around. After a fairly gentle winter in Durham, we are seeing all the signs of spring. We need to look for signs of spring in the political world as well.

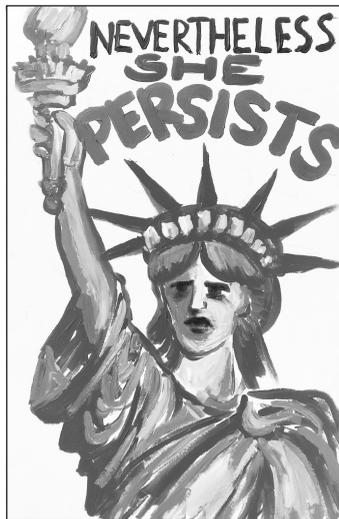
Signs of hope and resistance push up through fear and despair. Huge crowds gathered in cities across the country and the world on January 21 to protest the reign of fear. Another huge crowd filled the streets of Raleigh for the Moral March (known as HKonJ) on February 11 to speak up for civil rights, justice, equity, and peace.

RCWMS used to offer a workshop called: Keeping Yourself Together While Changing the World. I think we need those workshops again! I've been thinking about ways we can stay healthy and to keep going, and I've come up with a few suggestions:

- Pick a few issues to focus on.
- Step away from the news sometimes.
- Avoid endless sessions of answering email.
- Go outside and walk around.
- Take an action per day to resist hate and fear.

Remember when Senator Elizabeth Warren was silenced by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell while she was reading a letter from Coretta Scott King on the Senate floor. Later, he said: "She was warned. She was given an explanation. Nevertheless, she persisted."

Like Elizabeth Warren, we will persist. We will keep our sanity and our strength, and we will persist!



Protest sign at HKonJ  
Photo by J. Stokes

# Dolphins

by Linda Denton

*NOTE: In this time of great stress we might need to be reminded of the solace to be found in the natural world. We publish Linda Denton's reflection in memory of Anita McLeod, director of the RCWMS Elder Women Program, who so many times and in so many ways helped us to honor and revel in nature. Linda wrote this essay at an RCWMS Week of Writing & Quiet at Pelican House, January 2017.*

Pelicans, in a long, low-flying line, skim over the splashes and spouts of the pod. Dolphins, at least thirty of them, separate into three groups to feed. They look like diners choosing food at a long buffet, then going back to their familiar tables.

Other seabirds are feasting as well, on a huge school of fish running in the shallows. The air is full of cormorants and gannets, mature and immature differently colored. One brave gray-feathered chap drops into a swirling circle of sleek black skin and white froth. There's a pause in all activity as birds and mammals reassess. Then all begin to eat again, in silent agreement, or perhaps just concession; there's enough for all, and time should not be wasted in fighting.

I watch the dolphins jumping and blowing for nearly an hour as I write by a crow's nest window at Pelican House in Pine Knoll Shores, North Carolina. After saying goodbye to two of the good women I've met at this weeklong retreat, I return to my perch to find the dolphins gone, but the birds swirling above. I type for a few minutes, and when I look up again, the black dorsals are again visible, rising up, sinking down, as the amazing animals swim gracefully through the cold waves. As the free dolphin show continues, I see within one curling green translucent wave two dolphins riding the surf. They are completely still, perfectly balanced, supported and carried as if on an invisible waxed board. I lose sight of them behind the foliage of the dune.

I am amazed at their nearness to shore; if the water were warmer, I could easily walk out to where the closest ones feed, barely beyond the first breaking whitecaps. How would a human's legs change the age-old circle of life, were I able to enter their world? No doubt the fish would depart in fright as my twin towers of flesh wandered out. And as the fish changed course, I assume the birds and dolphins would as well, even if they weren't frightened of me themselves.

I've heard of wild dolphins coming close to people who need help. I don't know if these are sea stories or truth. But I can think of nothing more wonderful, nothing that would inspire more awe, than to be approached in the ocean by such a creature. How amazing, to touch and feel connected to a sentient being whom I hold in such reverence. To feel intimacy and bonding with the beautiful beings that represent our oneness with the sea. Oh, to swim with these creatures without constraint. It might feel like... communion.

*Linda Denton is a neonatal nurse living and writing in Chapel Hill.*

# White

by Marcy Litle

I live in a city—Durham, NC—that is demographically diverse. A city where black and white intersect every day. And until recently I didn't think much about race—my race, anyone's race. Except as a subject for academic exploration. I taught international studies at Duke University for twelve years, in a program that attracted students from around the world. We talked daily about diversity, about cross-cultural communications, about oppression, injustice, and misunderstanding. We talked about race as a social and historical construct. One year we read Peggy McIntosh's classic article, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," which provoked a lively and contentious conversation. And yet I didn't pay much attention to the way race permeated my own daily life, the air I breathed, the space I inhabited.

Then a few years ago a small group of us, white women, decided to take up Ta-Nehisi Coates' book club challenge and read Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* together. I knew the history she described and was not particularly surprised by the story she unfolded. I knew about the entanglement of race and freedom at the birth of the Republic. I knew about debt peonage in the postbellum South. I am not much inclined to activism (though recent events have sternly challenged that), so my main response to recent events has been to try to stop averting my eyes, to pay attention. As there has been much to attend to—Ferguson, Baltimore, Cleveland, and Charleston. Where I was born.

After Charleston, several black writers suggested that the most useful thing white people can do to combat racism is talk to white people. So that is what I am trying to do. Starting with myself. I am trying to unearth the elements of my own racial formation in order to understand how they have shaped my life, to gain some freedom, and perhaps make things a tiny bit better.

"The people who believe themselves to be white are obsessed with the politics of personal exoneration," said Ta-Nehisi Coates in *Between the World and Me*.

I am trying to take on and understand responsibility, to loosen the hold of that need for exoneration.

*Marcy Litle is a member of the RCWMS Board of Trustees She enjoys painting, reading, helping others breathe life into their writing, and playing with her granddaughters.*



Art by Sue Sneddon

# Thank you!

by Rebecca Welper

I want to say a big THANK YOU again to everyone who contributed during our year-end fundraising drive. You ended up surpassing our goal, donating a total of \$25,910. We appreciate your dedication to making the mission of RCWMS a reality. Now more than ever, the world needs you to weave feminism and spirituality into a vision of justice.

This month as part of Women's History Month, we're honoring RCWMS foremothers Sister Evelyn Mattern, Helen Crotwell, and Jill Raitt. (Read about them: [www.rcwms.org/blog/foremothers/](http://www.rcwms.org/blog/foremothers/)) They laid the foundation of feminist spirituality and activism, which you are helping us carry forward in our work.

If you want to deepen your commitment to this work, consider becoming a monthly donor or making a bequest to ensure your feminist legacy. If you find yourself updating your will, think about including a gift to RCWMS. If you do, let us know and we'll add you to the Legacy Circle. Contact Rebecca Welper for more information: [welper.rcwms@gmail.com](mailto:welper.rcwms@gmail.com).

## 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, E. Rhodes & Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, Vanguard Charitable, Inavale Foundation, Emerald Isle Realty, Triangle Community Foundation, and Community Foundation of Western NC.

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