

# South of the Garden

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

Volume 38, Number 2

June 2017

## Summer

by Rebecca Welper

Being the mother of a fifteen-month-old and working part time can get overwhelming. Thank goodness for the beautiful early summer in North Carolina. After a frustrating morning when my toddler takes a too-short nap, I take a breath, grab my trowel, put our sun hats on, hold my cranky toddler's hand, and gently guide her down the front porch steps into the once-well-manicured front landscaping. She cheers up immediately, delightedly crying "birdie!" as she hears chirping cardinals, bluebirds, and robins. I try to follow her lead to find awe in our surroundings. Instead I attack weeds with my shovel and curse my late arrival to this raging weed party. But soon I feel my breath return and find relief in touching Mother Earth's black, loamy soil. My little helper wanders away and returns, plucking grass and clovers, occasionally bringing a piece of gravel to her lips. I begin to feel a sense of accomplishment as the weeds diminish.

Whether your frustrations stem from the daily grind at home or the office—or our increasingly maddening political situations—try going outside. Even if it's just for a moment. Even if it's raining. As Richard Louv writes in *Last Child in the Woods*, "Time in nature is not leisure time; it's an essential investment in our children's health (and also, by the way, in our own)." Galia Goodman's essay "White Blaze" received third place in our 2017 contest and appears in this issue, describing the spiritual connectedness Galia finds in hiking sections of the Appalachian Trail. She reminds me that I love to sojourn deep into the natural world when I can, and that even spending a few minutes in the front yard will soften my breath and perspective.

Anything that gets us out of our daily routine and face to face with nature or our fellow human beings can be an opportunity for spiritual reawakening. That was the goal behind "Coming Out of the Shadows," our first ever LGBTQ spirituality festival that took place at the Recreation Center at Lyon Park in Durham on April 29. Sixty people, many of them new faces to RCWMS, gathered on an unseasonably hot Saturday with our full queer, spiritual selves, to sing, share, and re-imagine our stories and faith journeys. Workshops celebrated our hometown saint, Pauli Murray; offered prayer as movement with dance and yoga; and provided queer perspectives on the Hebrew Bible, our activist forebears, and how to heal from spiritual trauma. Other offerings included free Tarot and Reiki sessions and a panel discussion on disparate faith journeys.

Where is your journey taking you this summer? This week? Today? Hopefully some part of it will lead outside. Let us know what you find.

*Rebecca Welper is the Director of Development and Special Projects at RCWMS. She teaches seasonal writing workshops and is the grateful and sometimes harried mother of the office baby (now toddler!), Frieda.*



Re-Imagining logo

## Re-Imagine

by Jeanette Stokes

On Easter this year, I attended a Presbyterian church in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where I'm from. While I knew College Hill Presbyterian was "liberal" and near the University of Tulsa, I had never been inside. Before the service was half over, I noticed that I was relaxing into the pew. There was no patriarchal language and no Christian triumphalism even on this Easter Sunday. And the music was great. I was amazed.

I can't find all those ingredients in a Presbyterian congregation in North Carolina, and I've been looking since 1973. Some congregations have good music, preachers, or politics, but most use patriarchal language and cling to notions that Jesus died for our sins and was bodily raised from the dead. Unitarian or United Church of Christ churches offer some of what I want, but as a Presbyterian, Unitarians don't have enough liturgy for me and the UCC just isn't home.

While I can tolerate some patriarchal language in hymns and creeds, I don't like it. But in the small congregation in Tulsa on Easter they had even revised the Lord's prayer to address a more inclusive God.

On Palm Sunday, I went to Duke Chapel to wave palm branches and hear some grand music, but the language was so patriarchal it made me cringe. Helen Crotwell, a former Duke University chaplain, cleaned up the Chapel's language forty years ago, but over the years since, they reverted to old-school language.

Sometimes I am just pessimistic about whether the language will ever change, but recently I have been wondering why it hasn't. What factors over recent decades have stalled the progress of inclusive language in mainline churches? What happened to the comprehensive guides to inclusive language for worship many denominations produced in the 1970s and 80s? Why are we still stuck with "the fatherhood of God?" (Note: Many churches have made progress with language about humans. I rarely hear the "brotherhood of all mankind" anymore when referring to adults.)

During a recent lecture at Duke, I got a glimpse into why we are still so stuck. RCWMS helped to sponsor lectures in April about "Re-Imagining," a Christian feminist conference that took place 1993. The Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture at Duke is assisting scholars who are collecting materials and oral histories about "Re-Imagining" and invited two of the scholars to speak.

"Re-Imagining" was a historic gathering of over 2,000 women and a few men in Minneapolis in 1993 organized in celebration of the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988–1998), which followed the United Nation's Decade for Women (1976–1985). Sponsored and funded by women's offices in the

(Continued on back page.)

# 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)

June 7, 2017, Wednesday, 7:00–9:00 PM  
AN INTRODUCTION TO THE DYING TO LIVE CABARET & TOUR  
Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, 1801 Hillsborough Street, Raleigh, NC  
Are you invested in conscious living, wondering about conscious dying, seeking peace in the midst of change, someone who doesn't plan on living forever? Stephen Winton-Henry and Cynthia Winton-Henry are dying to live. With decades of helping people get into and out of their bodies, they honor the lessons and questions of community around the biggest dance we do: Live and Die.  
Leaders: Stephen Winton-Henry is a hospice chaplain, spiritual care manager, pastor, and grief educator. Cynthia Winton-Henry is the cofounder of InterPlay. Cost: Donation  
Contact: Ginny Going, [colleagues.interplay@gmail.com](mailto:colleagues.interplay@gmail.com)

June 24, 2017, Saturday, 9:00 am–12:00 noon  
AWAKENING THE HEART TO JOY  
McKay Healing Arts, 4916 Wrightsville Ave., Wilmington, NC  
Joy is an innate capacity that is accessible to all of us if we learn how to cultivate it. During this half day retreat, we will explore practices for working with the body, breath, and mind to open the heart, meet our emotions skillfully, and cultivate joy. These practices originate from mindfulness meditation, and modern neuroscience.  
Leader: Jen Johnson, mindfulness teacher, psychotherapist, and speaker.  
Cost: \$50  
Contact: [www.everydaymindful.com](http://www.everydaymindful.com), [jen@everydaymindful.com](mailto:jen@everydaymindful.com) or 910-208-0518

\*July 11, 2017, Tuesday, 7:00 pm  
THE ART OF THE CONDOLENCE NOTE  
1202 Watts St., Durham, NC 27701  
In this workshop we will discuss the history of condolence notes and their value for both the recipient and the writer. Carol will demonstrate what makes a note successful and show examples of do's and don'ts. Each participant will practice writing a note and leave knowing how to tackle this difficult task.  
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: \$10 donation to RCWMS appreciated  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

July 25, 2017, Tuesday, 7:00 pm  
MEET THE AUTHOR: Jeanette Stokes  
Southwest Regional Library, 3605 Shannon Rd, Durham, NC 27707  
Jeanette Stokes is the founder and Director of the Resource Center for Women & Ministry in the South and author of *Hurricane Season, 25 Years in the Garden, 35 Years on the Path, Flying Over Home, and Following a Female Line*. She lives in Durham, NC. Join her for a reading and discussion of her latest work, *Just Keep Going: Advice on Writing and Life*. Books will be available for purchase.



Art by Sue Sneddon

August 28–September 1, 2017  
TABLE ROCK WRITERS WORKSHOP  
Wildacres Retreat, Little Switzerland, NC  
Leaders: Abigail DeWitt, Phillip Shabazz, John Claude Bemis, Judy Goldman, Darnell Arnold, and more  
Cost: \$745  
Contact: [tablerockwriters@gmail.com](mailto:tablerockwriters@gmail.com)

September 16–17, 2017  
WOMEN AND SPIRITUALITY CONFERENCE  
Mayo Civic Center, Rochester, MN  
This conference will bring together people of diverse spiritual traditions to create an atmosphere for sharing ideas about traditions and spiritual growth. Participation of all people from diverse cultural, spiritual, racial, and ethnic backgrounds is encouraged.  
Website: [www.womenandspirituality.org](http://www.womenandspirituality.org)

\*September 24–October 1, 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)

\*October 26–27, 2017, Thursday-Friday  
HOMEGROWN: NC Women's Preaching Festival  
Trinity Avenue Presbyterian Church, Durham, NC  
Theme: Her Prophetic Voice.  
In an ecumenical spirit of collegiality, we'll lift up the voices of local clergywomen to inspire, learn, and hone our craft. We'll hear wonderful preaching and discuss the art of proclamation in all its forms. We'll pray, eat, worship, and celebrate together.  
Leaders include: Rev. Shyrl Hinnant-Uzzell, pastor, and Rev. Dr. Carolyn Sharp, Yale Divinity School  
Website: [ncwomenpreaching.wordpress.com](http://ncwomenpreaching.wordpress.com)

October 31–November 2, 2017  
ROLLING THE STONE AWAY  
Ecumenical Christian Conference  
St. Louis, MO  
A conference for LGBTQIA saints and prophets—generations past and present—to honor our history and empower our future.  
Includes: Mary Hunt, Janie Spahr, Carter Heyward, Jimmy Creech, Jan Griesinger, Gene Robinson, Troy Perry, Karen Ziegler, and more  
Website: [rollingthestoneaway.org](http://rollingthestoneaway.org)

Future Weeks of Quiet & Writing:  
January 2–9, 2018  
May 6–13, 2018  
September 23–30, 2018

# White Blaze

by Galia Goodman

I'm on a ridge in southern Virginia, on top of a lovely place called Angel's Rest. I am about two miles and 1,900 feet up from Pearisberg, where I spent last night in a passable motel after gorging myself on more than passable Mexican food and a very nice beer. It is a beautiful early fall day, very clear, and I can see for miles: to the north is West Virginia and the other side of the ridges that I descended yesterday, east I can see all the way to the lowlands, west are layer upon layer of the Blue Ridge mountains that I have climbed in earlier hikes. On the south there is a tiny problem. While more of the ridge bends around and falls away, leaving a vista of sky and clouds starting their afternoon approach, one thing seems to be missing.

That would be the white blaze that shows me where I am supposed to find the next section of the trail. I leave my pack with some nice young coeds from Virginia Tech, and cast around a bit in the area to the west of the summit. Then I make my way back, try behind me until I find the last blaze, which indicates the northbound spur back to Pearisberg. I turn around, walk back to my pack, and say goodbye to the coeds, who are headed back to their car. They wish me luck as I pass them, and for another quarter hour I pore over my maps, check my compass headings, and try to puzzle out exactly why I can't find the trail on a mountain top that has more foot traffic than anywhere I have been in six days. I do not know why I finally pushed through a thicket at the edge of the clearing on the very edge of the summit, but whatever called me (perhaps the Angel who rests there?) produced the small miracle I needed. About two hundred feet away was the White Blaze. Trail found, with much relief I went back to my pack, and before I put it on and headed south, I took some duct tape and plastered a foot square AT marker on the rocks that led into that thicket. Hopefully, I thought, I can spare some other southbound hiker a few minutes of anxiety!

The Appalachian Trail, or AT, is a 2,194 mile long footpath that has one end at Springer Mountain in northern Georgia and the other at Mt. Katahdin in northern Maine. It follows the chain of mountains that comprise the Appalachians, including the Smokies, the Roan Highlands, the Blue Ridge, the Shenandoahs, and all the way up the Eastern Seaboard to the Green Mountains, the White Mountains, and the final mountain ranges in Maine that end at Baxter Park. It runs through fourteen states, crosses many major rivers and highways and goes through many small towns and a few larger ones. In some places, it is a well-maintained and carefully sited footpath, providing beautiful views of distant mountain ranges, valleys and bucolic towns and hamlets. In other areas, it is a long green tunnel, seemingly endless, that can be overgrown or poorly marked, forcing the hiker to be aware of every step to avoid injury or the confusion of getting lost.

In all of the fourteen states, the standard blaze, or trail marker, is a white painted rectangle about 3–4 inches wide and 6–8 inches long. It's usually on the trunk of a tree, at a height of 6–8 feet. In other places it may be found on rocks, fence posts, or on the railings of a highway or other human-made structures.

Walking has always been one of my preferred forms of exercise. Hiking, which is walking with purpose and carrying what you need to survive and thrive while doing it, is walking kicked up a few notches. While some people in my life may assume that I have become obsessed with the process, including planning, it is certainly better than many others.



There are many benefits, including a healthier lifestyle and long term effects on mental and spiritual health. When I started hiking the AT almost three years ago, I knew about the blazes. ("White Blaze" is even the name given to one of the more popular online AT informational sites.) What I did not know, and was not prepared for, was the depth of feeling that something so simple and ubiquitous could become in my own life. Nor did I grasp its significance and potential as a tool for spiritual development.

The winter after my first three section hikes, I read a book by Rebecca Solnit called *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*. It was a revelation, full of wonderful essays about the history of walking, its many examples in human history, and long musings about walking as a spiritual exercise, which were extremely illuminating. I began to understand what was happening in my own mind when I saw those white blazes.

The blazes have become an invitation to enter into a spiritual journey, not just a physical one. For me, each blaze has become a mezuzah, the small box with verses that enjoin a Jew to love God with "all your heart, and all your mind, and all your strength." We are told to remember to post the words on all the doorposts and gates in which we find ourselves, thus marking the spaces as sacred. While it seems counterintuitive to consider the outdoors as sacred space, I have always considered it as such.

The larger sacred space of creation seems as important to mark as the smaller, human-made spaces. The white blazes have allowed me to continually remind myself of the amazing gifts we have been given and to better appreciate the myriad wonders of the natural world. I find myself with a wide grin whenever I see another blaze. I will reach out and touch them as I would a mezuzah on a doorpost, and I am continually reminded of the power of creation, and of the responsibility we have to the larger world beyond our towns, cities and human concerns. There are deeper and wider sacred spaces than the ones built by humans, and the Trail, for me, is one such space. Over the last three years I have developed a deep and abiding sense of spiritual belonging while hiking the AT. The sense of holiness in the wild spaces of the world is precious and I struggle to bring that back into my everyday life off the trail. I work to bring that spiritual connectedness that I feel moving from blaze to blaze into my off-trail life. It has been especially difficult over the past year due to the ugly tone in America's public life and the anger, sense of betrayal and crushing feelings of disappointment and disaster that I have felt since the elections.

It's hard to integrate the sense of wholeness, well-being and calm that I feel when I am hiking with the fear and foreboding that have been in my mind. The best I can do is to remind myself and others to not despair, remain active and politically engaged, to go on loving the world, its beings, and each other. I remind myself that we have been here before, and have survived. It also helps to remind others and myself that building community is the best tool for change that we possess. I am grateful that I have been able to find amazing communities along the trail that have allowed me, as the Quaker George Fox once said, to see that of God in everyone. It gives me hope. As I plan for my next hikes, I hold that out as the promise that we all must believe if we are to grow, change and thrive in a changing world.

Galia Goodman is a visual artist, activist, dancer, and writer in Durham, NC. Some of her art often grows out of her commitment to Judaism. She also finds spiritual grounding and inspiration for her art in wild places. Her latest passion is hiking the Appalachian Trail. After three years, she is almost halfway through and hopes to walk the whole trail (in sections) before turning 70 in 2020.

# Re-Imagine...

Presbyterian Church (USA) and the United Methodist Church, it was attended by people from various Christian communions. An unabashedly feminist gathering, it was one of the best largescale examples of feminist theology, liturgy, and practice ever to occur in the US.

Participants reported a sparkling array of speakers, musicians, and artists who stood in the middle of the room behind a clear podium (so they could be seen), while attendees sat at round tables with paper and art supplies, making art while they listened.

I didn't attend the conference, because I thought it was going to be "just one more women's conference," and I had attended so many. As it turns out, mainstream Presbyterian and Methodist news services failed to send reporters for similar reasons. That left coverage of the event to participants and to the right-wing news groups that did attend. The United Methodist *Good News* and the Presbyterian *Layman* described the event in ways that made it sound as though dancing naked women served communion with milk and honey while worshipping a goddess named Sophia. While I might have enjoyed such an event, that is not at all what happened.

The conservatives were clever. Artist Nancy Chinn painted a huge mural during the conference, which included a small bare-breasted image of Eve in the Garden of Eden. That image was plastered all over conservative publications along with sneers about Sophia (who is actually in the Bible) and quotes from theologian Delores Williams who did say, "I don't think we need folks hanging on crosses." This publicity created such a backlash that several women involved in the conference lost their church jobs, and others pretended they had not been present.

At Duke in April, historian Sara Evans and theologian Sherry Jordan talked about their efforts to document "Re-Imagining." Sherry attended the 1993 conference, and Sara became involved in the ongoing community that planned events and published newsletters for another decade ([re-imaginingcommunity.org](http://re-imaginingcommunity.org)). Sherry has collected over sixty-five oral histories from women who planned or attended the 1993 conference. In her lecture, Sara Evans reminded me of the backlash that followed "Re-Imagining" and slowed the progress of many feminist concerns in the UMC and PCUSA.

It is crucial that we not give up on our efforts to expand images of God and language about the sacred. The creator of the universe should be known by many names. Certainly more names than Father.

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# Forty!

by Rebecca Welper

As we get ready to celebrate RCWMS' fortieth birthday in August, we're reflecting on the amazing support we have received all these years. First of all, thank you for making *South of the Garden* possible. And many thanks to those of you who donate to support all of our programs. We also owe a huge debt of gratitude to all the amazing women who have served on the RCWMS Board of Trustees over the years. You have given your time, your vision, and your love to make all of this possible.

Turning forty is also helping us look ahead. To lay the groundwork for our next forty years, we are focusing on the unique spiritual needs of women under forty and LGBTQ folks. We'll offer our first paid internship next year and introduce programs that fit into the busy lives of those in their twenties and thirties.

So if you haven't donated yet this year, consider a special donation of \$40-\$400 in honor of our fortieth. You may send a check to RCWMS or donate online at [www.rcwms.org/donate.html](http://www.rcwms.org/donate.html). Thank you!

## 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, A-Squared Fund of Triangle Community Foundation, and Community Foundation of Western NC.

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YOUR MAILING LABEL shows the year and month your subscription will expire. 1706 = 2017 June.

ISSN 0890-7676  
[www.rcwms.org](http://www.rcwms.org) [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com) 919.683.1236  
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