

# South of the Garden

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

Volume 38, Number 4

December 2017

## Winter

by Rebecca Welper

As winter approaches, I'm keenly aware of the darkness settling in. This time of year, I'm reminded of my mother's rapid decline six years ago. We thought she was well at Christmas, but January told a different story. In February, she failed to recover from her first treatment for cancer. Winter darkness was a fitting backdrop for my family's grief. While I sometimes dread the creeping cold and dark, I try to remain open to the seasons of the Earth and of the heart. I look for the deep wisdom in the dark.

This has been a difficult, perhaps dark year for many. We never expected RCWMS' 40th Anniversary to occur in such a discouraging year, a time when our country so desperately needs feminist reawakening. A year in which Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* felt all too real. A year in which gun-related violence mounted senselessly, while climate change spawned hurricanes and wildfires. A year in which our own, dear Anita McLeod would no longer be counted among the living.

In the darkness there have been glimmers of hope. At RCWMS, we responded to last November's election results with more intentional advocacy around all the feminist issues at stake. We attended the Women's March in January and we have shown up every week outside Thom Tillis' office in Raleigh to demand that he listen to our voices. We have sent action alerts and hosted postcard writing parties. We rejoiced this November, when many progressive, feminist candidates won, and several made history, including transwomen, women of color, lesbians, and people of minority faiths. This year has also brought a torrent of truth-telling in the wake of the Harvey Weinstein revelations. I feel hopeful that we may have reached a watershed moment for listening to and believing women.

At RCWMS, we keep coming back to gratitude. We are so grateful for all of you who are part of this community. We are thankful for your participation and support in envisioning justice and rolling up your sleeves to get the work done. We have begun raising money for a paid RCWMS internship. The intern, a student or someone early in her career, will help continue and expand our intergenerational work, something Anita McLeod helped us begin.

Several of our upcoming programs seek to make sense of the darkness. I'll be leading a writing workshop called "Motherless Daughters at the Holidays," and our annual Interfaith Celebration will be back at Beth El Synagogue on December 17. In February, Carrie Newcomer will lead a workshop called "The Story of Now," a songwriting experience during which participants will "reclaim songwriting as a democratic experience of the heart."

Wishing you some time for reflection and renewal in the darkness of this season. May there be unexpected gifts.



## #MeToo

by Jeanette Stokes

I went to the hospital in early 1998 to see my friend Wylie Smith who was recovering from cancer surgery. A Presbyterian clergywoman and native North Carolinian, Wylie pastored a church in Raleigh. When I got to her room, she was entertaining a couple of clergywomen, and, in her typical way, had them all laughing and talking. No one was focused on illness; instead we amused ourselves with Presbyterian gossip.

One woman referred to a local presbytery official as "a real sleaze." I agreed, but before I could chime in, someone else said, "You can't possibly know the story I know about that guy." Another woman echoed, "You can't possibly know the story I know." That's when I said, "Wait, stop, you all can't possibly know the story I know about a woman in the mountains." Falling silent, we stared at one another in mild disbelief.

We had stumbled onto a pattern. A pattern that is breaking into the national consciousness this fall as stories of sexual misconduct and assault splatter across newspapers, radios, televisions, and the Internet. The stories about Donald Trump weren't enough to keep him from getting elected. His promise to defend the political agenda of the Right was credential enough. A raft of stories from Hollywood stars has been enough to have Harvey Weinstein publicly flogged by the media and apparently run out of his profession.

Sexual misconduct, abuse, and rape are part of our culture, part of patriarchy and white supremacy. They are essential weapons of war, colonialism, and fascism. Sexual predation is not even about sex. It is about the abuse of power by men who are older or have more standing, authority, money, guns, or physical strength than their victims.

Various defenses are offered for the misdeeds of men. In Donald Trump's case, people argued that the accusers were put up to it, paid, or being political. Sometimes there are pictures or other proof. In Trump's case, that wasn't enough to sway voters. His heinous attitude and actions were shrugged off as locker room talk, as though racist, sexist, or homophobic talk is acceptable if the objects of crude discourse aren't present to take offense.

It's hard to make accusations stick and hard to get the public to take them seriously. That's why it often takes a large group of women speaking up at the same time before any one of them is heard or believed. That was the case in my presbytery twenty-five years ago.

After discovering we had stories about the sleazy presbytery official from more than one woman, we began asking around. Eventually, twenty women were willing to talk. Their experiences with this man ranged from persistent overtures to full-blown affairs and covered a period of twenty years. Each of the women was vulnerable in some way. They were

(Continued inside.)

# 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)

December 10, 2017, 1:00–5:00 pm  
HOLIDAY SALE by local artists  
1202 Watts Street, Durham, NC  
Contact: Jeanette, [stokesnet@aol.com](mailto:stokesnet@aol.com)

\*December 11, 2017, Monday, 7:00–9:00 pm  
MOTHERLESS DAUGHTERS AT THE HOLIDAYS: A Writing Workshop  
RCWMS Office, 1202 Watts St., Durham, NC  
This time of year can be especially challenging for anyone who has lost her mother, whether it's been one month or many years. Honoring the waning light and making holiday preparations can bring back memories and trigger grief. To honor complicated feelings and search for some peace, let's gather to write, share, and remember our mothers. This workshop is open to all who have experienced motherloss, whether through death, abandonment, estrangement, aging, or illness/incapacity.  
Leader: Rebecca Welper has an MFA in playwriting from Catholic University of America. She lost her mother in 2012.  
Cost: \$10. Register: [welper.rcwms@gmail.com](mailto:welper.rcwms@gmail.com)

\*December 12, 2017, Tuesday, 11:30 am–2:00 pm  
ART OF CONSCIOUS AGING: A Group for Women  
Trinity Avenue Presbyterian Church, Durham, NC  
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 17, 2017, Sunday, 7:00 pm  
INTERFAITH CELEBRATION  
Beth El Synagogue, 1004 Watts Street, Durham, NC  
We gather to reflect on the fading of the light and the promise of its return, on community and connections, on loss and love. All spiritual paths and religious traditions are welcome. Please join us to celebrate with song, readings, dance, and ritual designed to include and connect us all. Bring a candle.  
Suggested donation: \$5–10  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

December 28–31, 2017, Thurs. dinner–Sunday lunch  
NEW YEAR'S UNTENSIVE  
Summit Retreat Center near Greensboro  
A New Year's InterPlay retreat in a beautiful setting with time to dance, sing, tell stories, eat, have fun, rest, reflect on the old year and anticipate the new.  
Cost: \$275 for housing and food (double) or \$350 (single) plus donation for the leaders.  
Leaders: Ginny Going & Tom Henderson  
Contact: 919-821-3723, [colleagues.interplay@gmail.com](mailto:colleagues.interplay@gmail.com)  
To register: Send a \$100 deposit to Colleagues, 400 S. Boylan Avenue, Raleigh, NC 27603.

\*January 2–9, 2018  
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 15, 2018  
RCWMS ESSAY CONTEST deadline  
Theme: Essays should focus on the theme "Roots & Branches."  
(See back page for details.)



\*Jan. 28, Feb. 11 & 25, March 4, 2018, Sun., 1:30–4:30 pm  
READING & WRITING MORTALITY: Reflecting on the End of Life

In a private home with a cat, Durham, NC  
This workshop will use Nina Riggs' 2017 memoir, *The Bright Hour*, along with other prose and poetry to reflect on our personal assumptions about and experiences of grief and loss. Riggs, 38 with two young children, was treated at Duke for terminal breast cancer. Her memoir helps us redefine what hope means in a situation that is not fixable. Each week we will discuss and write about the gifts and challenges of loss and mortality. In the last session, we will also complete Advance Directives. Open to people of all ages and genders.  
Leaders: Jehanne Gheith, PhD, MSW; Carol Henderson, writer, editor; and a Duke student  
Cost: \$100. Scholarships available.  
Register: <http://bit.ly/ReflectingEndOfLife>  
Contact: [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

\*February 9, 2018, 7:00–9:00 pm  
THE STORY OF NOW: An Intergenerational Songwriting Experience with Carrie Newcomer  
Durham, NC  
Have you lost heart in this season of politics or become overwhelmed by activist possibilities? Do you long for life-giving skills to sustain you and an intergenerational community to inspire you? Join folk singer Carrie Newcomer and friends, old and new, of the Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South as we reclaim songwriting as a democratic experience of the heart. In this two-hour workshop, we will work through the steps of weaving together our individual stories with a common theme, developing language and music that compels us, and creating a group song that speaks to the story of now. The entire process happens in one fast-paced, fun and inclusive experience. No prior songwriting skills necessary. Open to ages 12 and up.  
Cost: \$50.  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

\*February 23–25, 2018, Friday, 2:00 pm–Sun 2:00 pm  
FINDING YOUR MEDIUM: A Weekend of Art at the Beach with Sue Sneddon  
A beautiful beach house, 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, including: 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 provides tons of art supplies and you may also bring your own.  
Leader: Painter Sue Sneddon often focuses her work on the ocean, especially the NC coast, where she lives.  
Cost: Workshop & some meals, \$375, plus housing in beautiful beach house, \$125 double or \$225 single.  
Register: <http://bit.ly/FindMedium>  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

\*March 2-5, 2018, Friday, 7:00 pm–Monday 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 23–25.)  
Cost: Workshop & some 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)

# Calendar...

\*March 6, 2018, 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

\*March 16–17, 2018, Fri. 7–9 pm, Sat. 9:30 am–3:30 pm

## LOST & FOUND: Finding Yourself in Your Words

with Carol Henderson

Durham, NC

In her book *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, Rebecca Solnit talks about the importance of allowing yourself to get lost—both in life and in writing—in order to become more fully conscious. In this workshop, we will explore several writing techniques to illuminate not only things we have lost but also ways in which we have been lost—physically, emotionally, spiritually, on the page, and otherwise. We will also write about what we have found. Come prepared to write a lot and leave with stories that matter, deeper self-awareness, and a trove of possibilities for further writings. Open to writers of all levels and genres. For women only.

Leader: Carol Henderson is a writer, editor, workshop leader, and the author of *Losing Malcolm*, and *Farther Along: The Writing Journey of Thirteen Bereaved Mothers*, and edited *Wide Open Spaces: Call Stories*. More: [www.carolhenderson.com](http://www.carolhenderson.com)

Cost: \$125.

Register: <http://bit.ly/ReflectingEndOfLife>

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

April 20–21, 2018, Fri. 7-9 pm & Sat. 10:30 am-9 pm

## CHANGING THE RACE DANCE: A Workshop in

InterPlay Methods and Performance Forms

CURRENT Studio @ Carolina Square, 123 W Franklin St, Chapel Hill, NC 27516

This workshop is focused on building our creative toolkit as educators and learners, and our capacities as individuals-in-community to move out of systems of oppression, assimilation, and uneven methods of attending to racist violence and white silence. The workshop is rooted in InterPlay forms that center the body, breath, and intuitive story, movement, and song forms to create more ease, spaciousness, and respect in places where they can be of deep benefit. Changing the Race Dance uses fewer words and more body-based wisdoms to identify and practice ways of dislodging the harmful effects of a white supremacist social order that we face daily. Incorporating restorative and contemplative practices and the sometimes-radical act of improvisation, the workshop focuses on bolstering our skills to unpack inequity to its roots, and discern and celebrate what's working in people-based movements toward freedom and change. InterPlay forms are accessible to all physical mobilities and experience levels.

Leaders: Soyinka Rahim, founder and director of OurThing Arts Company, and Cynthia Winton-Henry, InterPlay cofounder

Cost: Suggested donation \$5-50, for those who are able. Participants must attend entire weekend. Free homestays can be arranged with advanced notice.

Contact: [marie@itisinyou.org](mailto:marie@itisinyou.org)

\*Future Weeks of Quiet & Writing:

May 6–13, 2018

September 23–30, 2018

# #MeToo...

young or recently separated, employees or women seeking ordination, and all seeking this man's counsel and advice.

Lawyers got involved. As evidence mounted, the man eventually agreed to resign his post (with his pension intact) and never to function as a minister again. The parties involved signed an agreement of silence. (A big mistake, but a common one twenty-five years ago). I was out of the state for most of the year the negotiations took place, so I never agreed to silence. While I was not in on all the details of the case, I have never stopped talking about it.

At about the same time, in the early 1990s, my favorite male Presbyterian minister got involved with a woman in his congregation. The problem was not just that she was a parishioner, the man was married. It took almost two years to get him out, nearly split the congregation, and left parishioners feeling battered and confused.

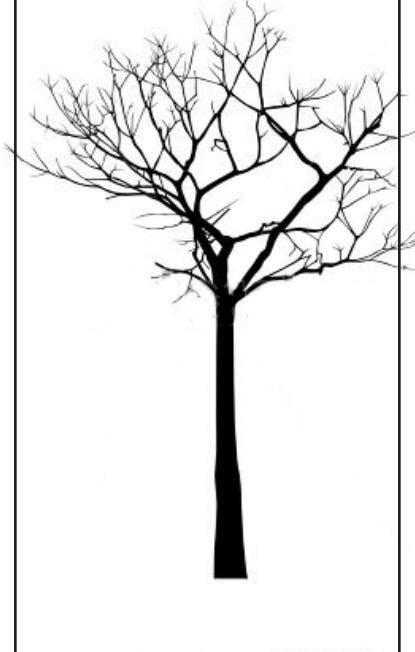
Sexual misconduct, harassment, and violence know no boundaries of race, class, religion, or economic status. Doctors, lawyers, ministers, professors, politicians, entertainers, athletes, plumbers, carpenters, and ditch diggers. It's everywhere and happens to nearly everyone.

Including me? Yes, of course, me, too. And nearly every other woman I've ever known. Females in this country don't get to be very old before they get a taste of it. For me, it was the college friend who visited one summer on Cape Cod and crawled into my bed uninvited. And the much-older professor whose ideas attracted me and whose advances took me by surprise and taught me how slippery seduction can be. Did I ever tell anyone but my closest confidants? Are you kidding? Who would I have told, and what would they have done about it in the early 1970s? No one seemed to have the first clue about how to respond to allegations of sexual assault or misconduct.

Groups such as FaithTrust (working in the religious community), End Rape on Campus (EROC), and local rape crisis programs and battered women shelters have worked to ensure that there are better resources on campuses and communities today. Still, sexual violence and harassment continue.

I groaned when I read the news about Al Franken and Charlie Rose, progressive men whose work I have respected. Both have been accused of inappropriate sexual behavior. While they should be subjected to public scrutiny and investigated by review boards in their professions, there is a continuum of offenses. While all forms of sexual predation are disgusting, not all forms deserve the same punishment.

I'm interested in what we can learn from the Roy Moore situation. The Alabama Republican running for the US Senate is accused of sexual misconduct with minors when he was in his thirties. While I think the allegations are egregious enough to disqualify a person from public office, we'll find out whether voters in Alabama agree. I worry that while some of these voters may consider themselves the guardians of morality, they'd vote for the Devil incarnate if he promised to oppose reproductive choice and gay marriage and to protect the interests of white Christians. After all, most of them voted for Donald Trump.



# Legacy

We have a big year-end fundraising goal: \$40,000 for our 40th anniversary. Thank you so much to those of you who have already given. Right now, we have a big matching challenge to help us get to our year-end goal. A small group of generous donors will match, dollar for dollar, any gift made by the end of the year, up to \$20,000.

This year we hosted our first-ever LGBTQ spirituality festival, increased programming for women under 40, and continued our programs in art, writing, elder women and end-of-life, anti-racism, spiritual practices, and women's preaching. These all provide encouragement and support to people just like you, and they only happen because of the support of people just like you. We provide many free and low-cost programs to reach those who need them the most, and we need your help to cover all the costs of these rich experiences.

In addition to annual gifts, there are other ways you can make a difference. If you find yourself updating your will, consider what kind of positive, long-term impact you could make. After ensuring that your loved ones are taken care of, think about creating a legacy for feminism and social justice by including a gift to RCWMS in your will. Here is what one member of our Legacy Circle, Beth Walker, had to say about why it was important to her to make a bequest:

*By most standards, I am not considered religious; my formal Catholic upbringing did not survive my developing skepticism and ardent second-wave feminism. So it may be surprising to some that I have included the Resource Center in my will. But RCWMS has been an integral part of my somewhat unorthodox spirituality for more than 30 years, beginning with a conference in Greensboro featuring Mary Hunt. Over the decades I have been challenged, enriched, and delighted by a variety of other RCWMS conferences and workshops (many at Trinity Center) and have found in them a family of diversely spiritual, deep thinking, loving, accepting, creative, and caring souls. Their interpretation of ministry through activism, creativity, outreach, and inclusion embraces all expressions of this great mystery of life, and I hope my gift helps ensure that in the future others can also find in RCWMS a home to nurture their souls, spirit, and creativity.*

Let us know if you plan to make a gift to RCWMS in your will, and we'll add you to our Legacy Circle. For more information, contact Rebecca Welper at: [welper.rcwms@gmail.com](mailto:welper.rcwms@gmail.com).

Thank you for always being a bright spot! Here's to 40 more years of shining in the darkness.



# Essay Contest

**THEME:** Essays should focus on the theme "Roots & Branches." We invite submissions that consider this theme in creative ways. What grounds you? What helps you reach out? What sustains you in your personal or professional life? How does spiritual community help to nourish you? Where might you need pruning in order to thrive?

**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 November 1, 2017 and close January 15, 2018.

**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 2018.

**NOTIFICATION:** Winners will be notified by email.

## RCWMS

RCWMS is a forty-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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