

# South of the Garden

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

Volume 39, Number 1

March 2018

## Grateful

by Jeanette Stokes

We are thrilled and honored to announce a remarkable gift that Mike MeLeod has made to RCWMS in memory of his late wife, Anita McLeod. Our beloved former board chair, Anita created our Elder Women's Project. She also taught us about menopause, the natural world, and the joy of working intergenerationally. Last month Mike donated \$50,000 to the Resource Center. The funds will be used to support an RCWMS internship focused on intergenerational work. Mike's gift will allow us to employ and fairly compensate one intern per year for the next decade or so. His forward thinking shows a deep faith in our work and a desire to honor Anita's transformational leadership that touched so many lives. We will be honored to carry on Anita's legacy with this gift.

Below is an excerpt of Mike's remarks from an event held in Anita's honor last fall:

*It is my intention to support the Resource Center in continuing Anita's work around conscious aging and intergenerational circles.*

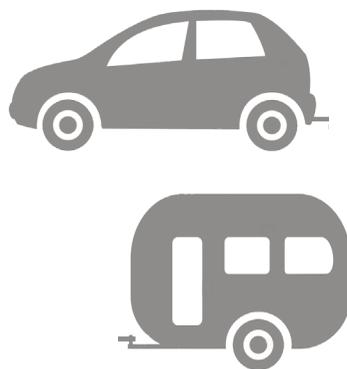
*Anita felt circles allowed the creation of a safe container where women could share their experiences and be received and affirmed in the circle and in doing this could discover their own truth, listening to their own inner source of wisdom. For Anita, circles involved levels of vulnerability and the courage to discover who we are meant to be in the face of a culture that promotes living on the surface of life. She felt circles generated an energy that could be given to the center of the circle or taken from the center to the individual, depending on the needs. Circles also led to a sense of belonging.*

*These circles that will continue to gather through the efforts of the Resource Center are in their essence about love and the courage to open our hearts, letting down our protective walls, and willing to be vulnerable. Loving involves vulnerability, and as poet David Whyte says, are you "willing to live, day by day, with the consequences of love and the bitter unwanted passion of your sure defeat"?*

Anita showed us all how to live with vulnerability and to open our hearts to love. We are so grateful that she shared her courage with us for so many years. And despite the unwanted bitterness of having to carry on without Anita's physical presence with us, we are grateful that Mike's gift is helping us continue her legacy.

We're also especially grateful to those of you giving smaller, recurring gifts. We have a growing group of women who are giving monthly, including Barbara Anderson, Samantha Bryant, Becky Carver, Amy Dossier, Marya McNeish, Elizabeth Norman, Courtney Reid-Eaton, Ann Ringland, Molly Williams, and one

(Continued on back.)



## Outside Eden

by Angela Yarber

The scene is Laramie, Wyoming, and I'm sitting in a junkyard behind a mechanic's shop where the vehicle that has towed my queer little family's home across the country rests in shambles. Flanked by two rusted semis, bunnies hop toward our camper as my toddler swats mosquitoes languishing in the summer heat. How on earth did we get here? The simple answer is that an old Ford Explorer isn't fit to tow an RV all over the country for a year. Our aged car expressed her fatigue with blown head gaskets smoking through the steep mountains of the Togwotee Pass. Eight days stranded in grizzly country, and we were convinced we fixed her. Then we found ourselves in Laramie, marooned again in lonely country, an uneasy feeling settling in the pit of our stomachs.

The not-so-simple answer is that my wife and I severed our ties to the universities and churches that employed us in search of the great unknown, a vocational beckoning calling our family to bear witness to the grace, beauty, and travesty of the American landscape. Branching out, we sold our house, quit our jobs as professors and pastors, and hitched our hopes to a camper we call Freya, aptly named after the intrepid explorer, Freya Stark. This decision was made after over a year of discerning, planning, and saving, and over a decade of dreaming. The church had rendered my weary soul broken, so after fourteen years as a pastor, I pruned back the branches blocking my view out of Eden and climbed the Garden's walls. Breaking down in a dilapidated town wasn't in the plan. Neither was a mass shooting at Pulse nightclub. And while the two seem disparate events in most minds, they are inextricably intertwined in my own.

Just days before our car's engine sizzled her last breath in Laramie, a man opened fire at Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida. A club filled with people who look and love and dance like me grooved to the beats that create sanctuary for countless queer folk as their beloved bodies were rendered silent by the bullets of homophobia. In our younger days, my wife and I danced those dances in the sacred spaces of San Francisco, the roots of our southern heritage and religious exclusion trembling under the weight of our queer love. Removed from our communities, we had no place to mourn and wail, so we wept between two semis as we remembered Laramie's crucifixion.

Laramie was the town where Matthew Shephard was beaten, tortured, and strung to a fence to die. All because he was gay. A generous mechanic who had lived in Laramie his entire life towed our car to his shop, invited us to park our camper in the backlot for free, and even showed up with 21 gallons of water and a backup generator in case we needed power. He lived there when Matthew Shephard was murdered by hatred bolstered by a bigoted bible and bad theology. He extended hospitality to two queer women and their child. Did he realize that we're

(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)

\*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](mailto:rcwmsnc@aol.com)

\*March 11, 2018, Sunday, 2:00–4:00 pm  
THE MINISTRY OF BLACK WOMEN'S SELF-CARE:  
Setting Free the Suffering Servant  
King's Daughters Inn, Durham, NC

Self-care is often the component that remains a form of intervention (after the break or the medical emergency) rather than a preventative measure. When we allow our bodies, minds and/or spirits to break down in the course of doing this work, we are not only putting ourselves at risk but we are putting at risk the integrity of the work for which we are laboring. This work is a work of self-love, communal love, Womanist Ethicist, it is multi-generational, multicultural and is not finite, but is instead as infinite as the beauty in the divinity that is Blackness. Come and share in this life's work! This program is specifically designed to offer practical tools for everyday self-care to Black women-identified individuals doing all forms of ministry, in church and community.

Leader: Kimberly Gaubault (McCrae) is an intentional lover of humanity and actively lives the self-care life about which she teaches and advocates.

Sponsors: RCWMS and Pauli Murray Center for History and Social Justice

Cost: \$10-40, sliding scale. Scholarships available.

Register: <http://bit.ly/2DCLPK4>

Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [rcwmsnc@aol.com](mailto: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 the editor of *Wide Open Spaces: Call Stories*.

More: [www.carolhenderson.com](http://www.carolhenderson.com)

Cost: \$125.

Register: <http://bit.ly/2zM2qKk>

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

\*March 21, 2018, Wednesday, 7:00–9:00 pm  
SPRING FLING WRITING NIGHT

RCWMS Office, 1202 Watts St., Durham, NC  
Snow days will be a thing of the past, and spring will finally arrive! Come out of hibernation and join our seasonal writing workshop to re-ignite earthy,



messy creativity, excitement, and potential. What does spring hold for you? What makes you feel most alive? We'll use a variety of prompts to write and share about all sorts of springy possibilities. Brought back by popular demand, with brand new prompts. Everybody welcome.

Leader: Rebecca Welper, MFA

Cost: \$10-\$25 sliding scale.

Register & Questions: [welper.rcwms@gmail.com](mailto:welper.rcwms@gmail.com)

\*March 25–30, 2018

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

Sponsors: Several Chapel Hill churches

Free and open to the public. Please wear clean socks.

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

April 5, 6, & 7, 2018

TO BUY THE SUN: A Play about Pauli Murray  
Trinity Church Wall Street, New York, New York  
Website: <http://www.trinitywallstreet.org/>

April 6–7, 2018, Friday–Saturday

BEARING WITNESS TO WOMANISM: What Is,  
What Was, What Shall Be

Union Presbyterian Seminary, Richmond, VA

Keynote: Alice Walker, author of *The Color Purple*

This Center for Womanist Leadership inaugural gathering will include three platforms: education/training, research, and community engagement.

Contact: [cwl@upsem.edu](mailto:cwl@upsem.edu)

\*April 13, 2018, Friday, 10:45 am and 1:00 pm

A TRADITIONAL JAPANESE TEA GATHERING

The Sarah P. Duke Gardens, Durham, NC

Join RCWMS for a traditional Japanese Tea Ceremony.

Enjoy the calm simplicity of the tearoom and the natural beauty of the gardens. This will be a small group. Choose morning or afternoon. PLEASE meet at the Doris Duke visitors center in the gardens.

Cost: \$30

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

This workshop will build 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, intuitive story, movement, and song forms to create more ease, spaciousness, and respect in places where they can be of deep benefit. It uses fewer words and more body-based wisdoms to identify and practice ways of dislodging the harmful effects of white supremacy we face daily. Incorporating restorative and contemplative practices and improvisation, the workshop will bolster our skills to unpack inequity to its roots and discern 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, OurThing Arts Company founder & 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)

# Calendar...

\*April 22, 2018, Sunday, 2:00-4:00 pm  
ART PARTY & FUNDRAISER for *The Last Straw*, by Bryant Holsenbeck  
RCWMS Office, 1202 Watts St., Durham, NC  
Join us for a fun afternoon and help us raise funds to support *The Last Straw*, a book by Bryant Holsenbeck to be published this year by RCMWS. A SWAN (Support Women Artists Now) Day event.  
Cost: Donations welcome  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

\*May 3, 2018, Thursday, 7:00 pm  
READING by MELANIE MORRISON from *Murder on Shades Mountain*  
Hayti Heritage Center, Durham, NC  
Come hear the author read from her new book from Duke University Press, *Murder on Shades Mountain: The Legal Lynching of Willie Peterson and the Struggle for Justice in Jim Crow Birmingham*.  
Melanie Morrison, PhD, is the founder and executive director of Allies for Change (alliesforchange.org).  
Sponsors: RCWMS, Pauli Murray Center for History and Social Justice, and Durham County Library  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

\*May 6–13, 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

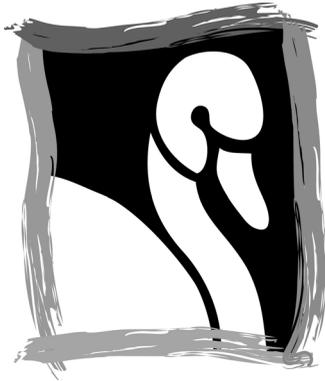
\*May 18, 2018, 1:00-4:00 pm  
SOULCOLLAGE® WORKSHOP  
Durham, NC  
Making and “reading” SoulCollage® cards is a fun, intuitive way to creatively access your own inner wisdom. Through the process of creating unique pieces of art, we will enjoy discovering and sharing new insights about ourselves.  
Leader: Diana Barefoot has been drawing, sculpting, and painting all her life. With a BFA in art and a Master's degree in education, she has taught in schools since 1969. As a SoulCollage® Facilitator, she is excited to share this intuitive and fun process, which helps others to find their own inner voice and strength.  
Cost: \$30  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, rcwmsnc@aol.com

June 16–19, 2018  
YOUNG CLERGY WOMEN INTERNATIONAL  
ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
Christ Church Cathedral, St. Louis, MO  
Website: [youngclergywomen.org/ycwi-events/conference/](http://youngclergywomen.org/ycwi-events/conference/)

October 5–7, 2018  
THE VIEW FROM HERE: Spirituality & Writing Retreat  
Norbertine Conference and Retreat Center,  
Albuquerque, NM  
Leader: Lynne Hinton, writer and minister  
Cost: \$385 for retreat, housing, and food  
Contact: [lynnehintonnm@aol.com](mailto:lynnehintonnm@aol.com)

\*October 25–26, 2018, Thursday evening & Friday day  
HOMEGROWN: NC Women's Preaching Festival  
Trinity Avenue Presbyterian Church, 927 West Trinity Avenue, Durham, NC. Details TBA.

\*Future Weeks of Quiet & Writing:  
September 23–30, 2018  
January 2–9, 2019



SWAN Day logo

# Outside Eden

gay? Did he care? Does it matter? With Orlando and Shephard on my mind, I felt afraid and grateful at the same time. Grateful for overwhelming hospitality. Afraid that the safety we often feel as queer women traveling with a young child is an illusion. Queer bodies are attacked, legislated, violated, killed, and still preachers and politicians purport that our lives and loves and bodies are abominations unworthy of acceptance, celebration, worth. Even ordination could not protect me from this. The semis in the dusty gravel lot cast eerie shadows. Trains whistled a little too loudly. My child crawled into our bed after declaring that he had a bad dream. Sleep eluded me.

The next morning, I ran through the worn-out town to clear my head and sweat my sorrows. I returned to learn that the head gaskets had blown again, the lower part of the engine now damaged beyond repair. As we navigated how to move forward, I thought about my privileges. I thought of my fears. I thought of the borderlands in which I exist on a daily basis as a queer woman who is highly educated, but who comes from a poor, working class family who never had the privilege of higher education. I thought about how I spent over a decade privileging myself with degrees, knowledge, and the ability to navigate harrowing situations, while simultaneously examining all the existential questions affiliated with them. I thought about Orlando and Matthew Shephard and my broken-down car. I thought about my roots.

I thought of how my poor father could never give me the language to speak in the world in which I now reside as a scholar, clergywoman, and author, but he gave me the language to speak to mechanics so that they don't treat me like I'm "just some girl" who knows nothing about cars. These borderlands of difference accompanied me, my wife, and our child as we traversed the country looking for a place to replant, root, flourish, and grow.

My working poor roots, which sprouted from a non-religious family, often wonder how I branched into ministry and academia. From addiction, arrests, and high school dropouts, a brother claims I'm simply balancing out the family karma. Yet, in Laramie, as I mourn the Pulse massacre, it is the roots of my southern family—poor, but working, unschooled, but educated—that hold me fast. With open arms, they welcomed their queer daughter and sister because they lacked the religious pretense to do otherwise. With the mechanic, they guide me, not because I have a Ph.D., but because my poor addict of a father taught me what a thermostat housing unit is.

With the dust of a dilapidated town coating my sneakers and the tears of wandering six thousand miles streaming down my cheeks, I hold the hands of my wife and child, knowing that, somehow, the roots that have guided me thus far will help guide us, too, as we uproot, replant, and try to grow once again. We find ourselves held in the grace of the world as we reach up and out with open hearts. Never have I been more grateful that I pruned the church's branches. For in so doing, I discover the beauty outside Eden's walls.

*Angela Yarber is Exec. Dir., Holy Women Icons Project. The author of seven books, she holds a PhD in Art and Religion. An ordained clergywoman, she writes, paints, and leads retreats focused on empowering marginalized women on Hawai'i Island. For more: [holyywomenicons.com](http://holyywomenicons.com)*

# Practices

by Rebecca Welper

What if we let toddlers be our spiritual guides? I admit there would be some pluses and minuses to this approach. For one thing, there would be a lot more laundry to do, since we'd all be jumping in muddy puddles as often as possible. But maybe the pursuit of simple pleasures, and just plain fun, should be more prominent among our spiritual practices.

There is also a beauty in the way my toddler expresses the full range of her emotions with her body, soul, and voice. Minimally constrained by social taboos, she lets the intense feelings move through her until they're gone. If she encounters the slightest obstacle, she experiences excruciating despair and lets out an ear-splitting scream. But soon, she'll find her footing again and get on with her day. There's something to be said for the efficiency of the toddler approach. Too often I let emotional gunk pile up rather than getting to the bottom of it and clearing it out; I can see the advantages of throwing a fit and then moving on.

Still, I appreciate the sense of calm I've gained by learning mindfulness skills over the years. One thing that helps with that calm is adopting the spiritual practice of simply saying no. How many times do we overcommit or say, "Sure, I'll think about it," when we should just give a firm "no." Saying no, of course, is a toddler's specialty. They do it with such confidence and certainty. Sure, it's maddening as a parent to hear "no" for the gazillionth time before nine am, but there's something we adults might learn from this practice. Knowing when we want and need to say no is a powerful skill that many of us, especially those of us socialized as girls, have been encouraged to suppress for our entire lives, beginning when we first learned the word.

In addition to what I learn from my toddler, I also appreciate opportunities to learn spiritual lessons with other adults. We have many such opportunities coming up this spring at the Resource Center. I always look forward to the Labyrinth walks at Duke Chapel and Binkley Baptist Church as a time for contemplation and getting out of my normal routine. This month we're partnering with the Pauli Murray Center and Kimberly Gaubault (McCrae) to present "The Ministry of Black Women's Self-Care: Setting Free the Suffering Servant." We're also offering writing workshops and an Interplay workshop called "Changing the Race Dance" aimed at "dislodging the harmful effects of a white supremacist social order that we face daily." Hopefully I'll see you at one of these gatherings. I might be muddy from jumping in puddles.



# Grateful...

anonymous donor. In sharing why they give monthly, Ann Ringland noted that RCWMS is "a reliable support for my eldering and growth" and Samantha Bryant commented on the "great opportunities for growth and learning for the women of our area." As Amy Dosser put it, "I can't imagine what my life would be without the support and inspiration that comes consistently from RCWMS. I want to support that consistency by giving regularly." Knowing we have consistent donations coming in every month helps tremendously as we budget and plan for upcoming programs. If you would like to set up recurring monthly donations to RCWMS, visit [rcwms.org/donate.html](http://rcwms.org/donate.html). We are so grateful for all of your involvement and support.

WINNERS: We are pleased to announce the winners of the 2018 RCWMS Essay Contest. First place goes to Angela Yarber, of Hawai'i, for her essay "Outside Eden," printed on page one of this newsletter. Second place goes to Lisa Richey for her essay, "Roots: Beet." Lisa is living in Chapel Hill, NC this year but ordinarily lives in Copenhagen.

## 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.

RCWMS Trustees: Barbara Anderson, Solita Denard, Jehanne Gheith, Cathy Hasty, Erin Lane, Márcia Rego, Rebecca Vidra, Molly Williams, and Karen Ziegler

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Rebecca Welper, Development Director & Programs  
Bryant Holsenbeck, Artist in Residence



SUBSCRIPTIONS to South of the Garden cost \$20 and run for 12 months from the time placed. Foreign or First Class is \$25. A subscription is free to anyone for whom the subscription fee is a burden. Tax-deductible contributions over and above the subscription fee are appreciated. Send checks to RCWMS, 1202 Watts Street, Durham, NC 27701, or go to [www.rcwms.org](http://www.rcwms.org).

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