

South of the Garden

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

Volume 39, Number 2

June 2018

Falling

by Jeanette Stokes

In late February, I was at the NC coast for our art workshops with Sue Sneddon when I got a call that my mother had fallen in her kitchen in Tulsa and was in an ambulance headed to the emergency room. While my husband (who was at home in Durham) made travel arrangements for the two of us for the following day, I went for a walk on the beach.

Just the day before, I had spent a long while taking pictures of puffy clouds mirrored on great expanses of wet sand. It had been so calm and peaceful that I felt as though I were floating. But that day, when I went out for a walk carrying the news that my mother had fallen, I felt like I had crashed onto the shore. Everything in me was worried about how we would get to Oklahoma and how she would do in surgery the next morning.

When I arrived in her hospital room at supper time the next day, Mother was sitting on the side of the bed asking if she could get up. With a spinal block and no general anesthesia, she seemed more or less her cheerful self. The nurses insisted she wait until the next day to get up, but her willingness to move about was encouraging. After two more days in the hospital, during which she was pretty droopy, and a transfer to a nice skilled nursing facility, the next chapter of our lives had begun.

I had packed for a week or ten days in Tulsa and had arranged companions for myself for about two weeks. Dwight stayed for five days, my cousin Anne came from Texas for a few days, and my childhood friend Sally drove over from New Mexico for a week. They were all good company and plenty of help with Mother. I saw a few high school friends and a few very kind neighbors, but I spent most of my time at the nursing facility.

Apparently, I went right on being myself, spending mornings at Mother's house and six or eight hours at the nursing facility in the afternoons and early evenings.

Though I did very little writing in the mornings, I did a lot of organizing and communicating, changed light bulbs, managed laundry, and packed lunches for myself. In the afternoons and early evenings, I chatted with Mother, encouraged her to eat, observed her therapy, and when she napped, got to know the staff, used the swimming pool, and had my hair cut in the beauty salon. I took daily walks on a long path that circled the property and led to a pleasant fishing pond.

Out of curiosity, I started asking visitors my age if they had grown up in Tulsa and graduated from Edison High School, as I had. Though some turned out to be near my age, and some had gone to Edison, none were people I had known before, until the last

(Continued inside.)



Montgomery

by Jeanette Stokes

Back in January, I saw an announcement that the Equal Justice Institute in Montgomery, Alabama would be opening a new slavery museum and lynching memorial in April. I knew that EJI primarily worked to exonerate wrongfully convicted people on death row in the deep South and had read *Just Mercy* by the Executive Director, Bryan Stevenson. Since it cost less than \$10 to buy a ticket to the opening, I reserved one, thinking that I'd figure out later whether I could get myself to Montgomery. Then a couple of months later, I got information about a two-day conference planned to accompany the opening that would include Vice President Al Gore, lawyer and author Michelle Alexander, actor Anna Deavere Smith, children's rights activist Marion Wright Edelman, feminist activist Gloria Steinem, and many more. I bought a ticket to the conference and booked a hotel room.

That was all before my mother fell and broke her hip.

When I found myself in Tulsa a week before the opening in Montgomery, I decided to drive to Alabama and then on to North Carolina. Eleven hundred miles, but I could do it slowly, and it had been more than a decade since I had taken a road trip.

I borrowed a family car and left Tulsa. I stopped first in Bentonville, Arkansas to see the Crystal Bridges Museum. Who would have guessed that Northwest Arkansas would be the home to a world-class museum? Look it up if you haven't heard of it. I was particularly interested in an exhibition of modern African American artists called *Soul of a Nation*. The exhibit, which is currently at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, was worth the trip as was the space-age architecture of the buildings and the beautiful grounds and trails.

From there, I drove to Memphis, Tennessee, where I stopped at the Lorraine Motel. It was April and exactly fifty years since the tragic murder of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The inspired civil rights leader is commemorated in an extensive museum inside the motel, but I arrived on a Tuesday when the museum was closed. As I stood looking up at that iconic balcony, I remembered MLK was in Memphis to support striking sanitation workers. He knew that people would never be free unless they were paid a decent wage for a day's work. It also occurred to me that in organizing a new Poor People's Campaign, Rev. William Barber is picking up where MLK left off.

From there, I drove to Birmingham, Alabama to hear my friend Melanie Morrison read from her new book, *Murder on Shades Mountain: The Legal Lynching of Willie Peterson and the Struggle for Justice in Jim Crow Birmingham* (Duke Univ. Press, 2018). Melanie had attended a couple of our RCWMS weeks of quiet and writing at the beach, and I had been following the development of the book. RCWMS was organizing a reading for Melanie in Durham a few weeks later,

(Continued inside.)

Calendar

* = RCWMS events. For registration form and more information: www.rcwms.org. Online registration for some events: www.rcwms.org/calendar

June 16-19, 2018

YOUNG CLERGY WOMEN INTERNATIONAL ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Christ Church Cathedral, St. Louis, Missouri

Theme: We--Embodied Ministry, Justice & Reconciliation

Dr. Karoline Lewis will lead a week of conversation about embodied ministry. We'll explore the collective "we" of ministry, embodied to work together for justice and reconciliation wherever we serve.

Details: youngclergywomen.org/ycwi-events/conference/

June 21-24, 2018, Thursday through Sunday

OR July 19-22, 2018 (choose June or July)

SUMMER UNINTENSIVE ON THE NC COAST

Trinity Retreat Center, Atlantic Beach, NC

Come to the ocean for an extended time of creative play in a community of people who'll affirm and applaud you! There'll be time for sharing stories, dancing, singing, walking on the beach, swimming in the ocean, enjoying nature and being part of a playful community.

Leaders: Ginny Going and Tom Henderson

Cost: \$290 for housing and meals. Participants are invited to make a contribution to Ginny and Tom for organizing and leading. To register, send \$100 to Colleagues, 400 S. Boylan Avenue, Raleigh, NC 27603. Contact: 919-821-3723, colleagues.interplay@gmail.com

*June 27, 2018, Wednesday, 7:00-8:30 pm

READING: *The Never-Quite Ending War: A WWII GI*

Daughter's Stories by Nancy Corson Carter

RCWMS Office, 1202 Watts St., Durham, NC

The stories of this book stretch from the '40s & '50s to the present. Reflecting on her family, especially her father, and the war, Nancy Corson Carter's stories seek peace and healing in personal and beyond.

Cost: Free

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

*July 9, 16, 23, 30, 2018, Mondays, 7:00-9:00 pm

SHAPING THE PERSONAL ESSAY

RCWMS Office, 1202 Watts St, Durham NC

Margaret Atwood says, "If I waited for perfection, I would never write a word." In this workshop, we'll practice writing imperfectly and learn new craft techniques and skills for revision. Using prompts, exercises, and examples from other essayists, we'll play and experiment together in a warm, encouraging environment. Come ready to write, and leave with tools to help you continue developing as an essayist.

Leader: Meghan Florian, the author of *The Middle of Things: Essays*, teaches writing at William Peace Univ.

Cost: \$100.

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

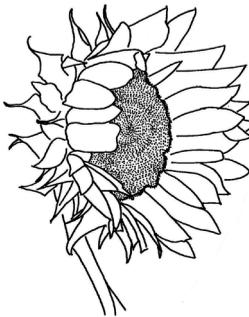
Contact: meghanrcwms@gmail.com

*July 10, 2018, Tuesday, 7:00pm

THE ART OF THE CONDOLENCE NOTE with Carol Henderson

1202 Watts St, Durham, NC

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.

Cost: \$10 donation to RCWMS appreciated.

Register: <http://bit.ly/2q4eZMD>

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

*DOING OUR OWN WORK: An Anti-Racism Seminar for White People

Part 1: September 6, 7, 8, 9 - Pilgrim United Church of Christ, Durham, NC

Part 2: October 11, 12, 13, 14 - Trinity Ave Presbyterian Church, Durham, NC

Thurs. evening, 9-5:00 on Friday, 9-5:00 on Saturday, and 1-5:00 Sunday afternoon

Doing Our Own Work is an intensive seminar for white people who seek to deepen their commitment to confronting white privilege and challenging racism in all its forms. Offering more than 40 hours of "class time," Doing Our Own Work equips participants with the analysis, skills, and tools needed to be more effective anti-racist allies. By limiting enrollment to 16 people, this seminar provides a context for in-depth reflection, learning and dialogue as participants work to deepen their knowledge of systemic racism, offer each other support and accountability, grow beyond shame and guilt, and practice the skills of interrupting racism.

Leader: Melanie Morrison

Cost: \$475. Scholarships available.

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

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

October 5-7, 2018

THE VIEW FROM HERE: A spirituality and writing retreat

Norbertine Conference and Retreat Center, Albuquerque, NM

This is a small group writing and reflection experience with writing prompts and time and space to write. You do not have to consider yourself a "writer" to be a part of this spiritually uplifting and reflective retreat. The Retreat Center is located in the South Valley, a quiet and rural area with spectacular views and great facilities. As a part of this weekend, you will be able to attend the Mass Ascension at the Balloon Fiesta held every year in Albuquerque. (Balloon Fiesta tickets are \$15.) There is space for 12 participants.

Cost: \$385 with food and airport transport; \$250, food and retreat only

Contact: lynnhintonnm@aol.com

*October 25-26, 2018, Thursday-Friday

HOMEGROWN: NC Women's Preaching Festival

Trinity Avenue Presbyterian Church, 927 West Trinity Avenue, Durham, NC

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.

Website: ncwomenpreaching.wordpress.com

*Future Weeks of Quiet & Writing:

September 23-30, 2018

January 2-9, 2019

May 5-12, 2019

Roots: Beet

by Lisa Richey

(Note: The following essay won second place in the 2018 RCWMS Essay Contest.)

Lunch was the time when everyone spoke in Danish. I tried to excuse myself from the entire ordeal by insisting that I would just have a sandwich at my desk, justified by my made-up embodiment of an American work ethic. However, a well-meaning colleague took me aside and said, "If you ever want to get a real job here, you have to go to lunch with everyone else."

I still have the recipe somewhere, handwritten in careful block letters on a small piece of white paper, but I've never used it. It didn't make any sense to me when I received it, and now, well, I guess I'm too lazy, or just not committed enough to prepare pickled red beets by hand.

The clear and precise handwriting was Mette's (pronounced "met-uh's"). She was the cook in our work canteen. We paid a subsidized price for lunch and ate well. Every day she prepared an entrée, two vegetables and a starch for the entire building. The building housed the large research institute where I worked and a strip club on the ground floor. It was fun to give directions to my ever-so serious visiting international colleagues on how to arrive at my office. Without pause or special intonation, I would say "If you've passed the naked ladies, then you've walked too far and have to turn around for the entrance to the institute."

Mette made no special provisions for vegetarians, so I quickly took up eating fish. Despite being typically of a substance I recognized, most of the Danish food had unfamiliar tastes. There were onions and shallots on the fish, cheeses that smelled like feet after the gym shoes had been removed, and bits of dead pig hidden within most cooked food, even the vegetables. As a Southern girl, I should have recognized the ham hock and fatback, but my own teenage rebelliousness had led me to vegetarianism, so these tastes had long become unfamiliar. The only thing that I discovered to my delight that was part of my new culture, and had been part of the culture of my upbringing, was pickled beets.

My paternal grandmother—who we called, not "Granny," or "MeMaw," or "Grandma," but "Grandmother"—lived in the countryside in Alabama and kept a big farm. She grew corn and okra, black-eyed peas and butterbeans, bell peppers and tomatoes, and beets. Every summer, the family vacation of my childhood consisted of an eight-hour car ride for a short week in which my mother would lament the lack of air conditioning in Grandmother's farm house. At the end of the trip, a large cooler would be packed with frozen peas, creamed corn, butter beans and black-eyed peas, and two or three large cardboard boxes would be filled with jars of homemade vegetable soup, green beans and pickled beets. My dad would place two twenty-dollar bills into the hand of his mother, and we'd pile back into the car to drive the farm spoils eight hours to our air-conditioned house in the suburbs.

As I progressed in my Danish language course, I would try to practice my skills at lunch. It was my attempt to demonstrate that I was making the proper integration efforts required of anyone who hoped to

(Continued on back.)



Falling...

Friday night of what had turned into a three-week stay. I was pushing Mother's wheelchair down a hall past the front door of the health center when a man about my age walked in. I took a chance. "Did you grow up in Tulsa and go to Edison?" I asked. "Yes, I did," he said. "And I think I'm a year younger than you. My name is David." His family had lived next door to us for a decade when I was young, but I hadn't seen him since high school, and wouldn't have recognized him. He looked more like his father than the teenager I remembered.

David said he lived out of state but was visiting his mother, Patty, who was recuperating in skilled nursing. As we followed David to his mother's room, I realized she and Mother had been sitting in the same dining room for weeks without noticing one another.

When David announced us at Patty's door, she exclaimed, "I haven't seen Jeanette for twenty years!" and I think she was right. Mother and Patty greeted one another warmly and we all took a slow stroll down the hallway. I pushed Mother in her wheelchair while David supervised his mother on her walker.

Somehow, it helped to know that there was someone in the nursing facility Mother has known for decades. I guess it made this strange new world seem less strange and more like the next chapter of a naturally evolving story.

Montgomery

but I didn't want to wait that long, so I stopped in Birmingham on the way to Montgomery. The book is brilliantly researched and Willie Peterson's story is movingly told.

From there, I headed south to the state capital to join some six thousand people for the opening of the museum and the memorial.

Located in a building that once warehoused enslaved people waiting to be sold, the Legacy Museum has one clear message to convey. Carefully and in a variety of media, the museum makes the case that the thread of racism and racist violence running through American history is one straight line from slavery to Jim Crow and lynching to current mass incarceration. Though the methods have changed, the goal has stayed the same: to control, intimidate, and take advantage of the bodies, minds, labor, and lives of African American people.

To walk through the lynching memorial (formally named The Memorial to Peace and Justice) is to confront the massive scale of racist violence. Four thousand documented lynchings in 800 counties, mostly in the South. Eight hundred enormous steel columns hang from the ceiling of the open-air memorial, each column engraved with the name of a county and the names and dates of those murdered in that county. Watch the *60 Minutes* piece in which Oprah Winfrey and Brian Stevenson walk through the memorial, read about it at EJI.org, or read the coverage in *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, or scores of other national media. Or better yet, go to Montgomery.

Blueberries

by Rebecca Welper

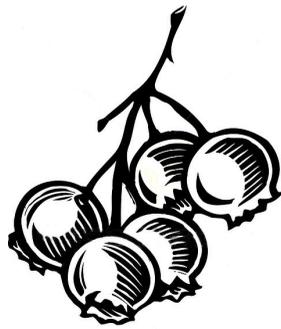
On a warm spring morning my two-year-old clutches her plastic shovel and toddles across the mulch in the garden. She exhorts the unripened blueberries on the bush, "Blue, turn blue, turn blue!" She's hoping it's a matter of moments, rather than days, before they'll be ready to eat. She adds, shaking her head, "No birdies eat them." We're both grateful for this bush that was planted by the previous owners and continues to provide handfuls of blueberries each year with just a little tending on our part. The first spring we lived here I never noticed the blueberry bush at all, since I was consumed by new motherhood. After struggling with breastfeeding and supplementing for the first six months, we mushed up frozen blueberries and gave Frieda her first taste of solid food. I'll never forget the smile of wonder and joy that spread across her face with that first bite. What a revelation, then, to discover the following spring that Frieda's favorite food was growing in our own front yard!

Recognizing abundance in our midst was a theme we kept coming back to at a recent RCWMS planning meeting. As the Resource Center, we work to empower others to recognize and use the resources they have in this community and within themselves. And we couldn't do it without the abundance of generosity from all of you. We so appreciate your gifts to RCWMS throughout the year, some of you making monthly gifts, some including RCWMS in your wills, some volunteering time or making gifts of stock. Or, if you prefer, we'll happily accept gifts of blueberries.

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. 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.



Roots: Beet

be accepted into a small country with a secure welfare system and steady employment. My colleagues, for the most part, didn't have the patience for my garbled pronunciation and rudimentary vocabulary. Learning as much from my life as a mom to pre-school aged kids as from the textbook, my Danish conversations tended to go straight from "Hi! My name is Lisa. What is your name?" to "Come on! Hurry Up!", "Nice plastic pearls," and "Oh-Chickenpox!" Nonetheless, Mette the cook was persistent in speaking to me in Danish and in waiting kindly for my fumbled replies. Over the year, I must have succeeded in expressing my delight whenever I saw the dish of rødbeder (pronounced "roll-bi-thuz") on the lunch buffet table. When Mette left her job as our cook to enjoy a Danish retirement life of grandkids and organized package tours in the tropics, she gave me a jar of her beets and the recipe to make them.

Today, as I sneak time to write this essay between the meetings and the things I am supposed to be writing that provide me a livelihood, I am eating lunch at my desk. I had sworn not to do this when I returned to live in the US, but the faculty here, it seems, are secret eaters. I miss the banal common unity of the work canteen where you might learn which colleague went canoeing last weekend or which one has five cats. Instead, I have picked up a ready-made salad at one of the university cafes. I say my silent grace over its bounty and smile. "Beet and goat cheese salad." I have roots, and my roots are red beet.

Lisa Richey is a catholic buddhist mom who enjoys chickens, advocating for socialist revolution, and lifting weights at a "pump" class with her teenage daughter. Her places are Tanzania, Copenhagen, a farm in Italy called "El Poer" and the Carolinas. She is a Professor of International Development Studies at Roskilde University in Copenhagen, Denmark.

RC People

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