

# South of the Garden

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

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December 2019

## Tradition

by Rebecca Welper

Dislodging the myths that were embedded in me as a child has been a painful and illuminating project of adulting. In a cosmic game of Jenga, I delicately loosen, rearrange, and rebuild the planks of my beliefs and practices, hoping to avoid a total collapse.

This project takes on more urgency as my three-year-old begins to understand more and more about the world. When we go to the Christmas Eve service at the church where I grew up, I want her to experience reverence and beauty—choral music, handbells, candles—but not misogyny. It doesn't seem like too much to ask. Why do we need to keep hearing the old verses about Mary's virginity and Joseph's judgment of her sexuality? And the gendered implications of Jesus' being the son of God the Father, who will grow up to be King can't be lost on young ears. Mary Daly observed in 1973, "If God is male, then male is God." As the #MeToo movement continues to remind us, our society is still struggling with this conflation. These beliefs seep in very young.

What if we just switched pronouns? That's what *Silent Voices: The Feminist Bible* does. Take a look at these familiar passages, from [silentvoicesbible.com](http://silentvoicesbible.com):

*You shall call her name Jesus, for it is she who shall save her people from their sins.* (Matthew 1:21)

*Behold, wise women from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is she who is born Queen of the Jews? For we saw her star in the east, and have come to worship her."* (Matthew 2:1-2)

*The Word became flesh, and lived among us. We saw her glory, such glory as of the one and only Daughter of the Mother, full of grace and truth.* (John 1:14)

How refreshing! Now, I'm not suggesting all of our world's problems will be solved by empowering women and oppressing men. Nor does this website include nonbinary genders or gender fluidity; including all genders and disrupting the entire notion of gender are important projects as well. What reversing a few pronouns in canonical texts can do is shake things up and make us think. What if I suggested to the church of my youth that we start balancing out 2,000+ years of Biblical male-dominance with a Christmas Eve reading giving women and girls the spotlight? Why would this still be controversial in the year 2019? But in response, I would fully expect loud, panicky calls for "Tradition!" from otherwise reasonable and well-meaning Presbyterians.

I saw this meme on my friend's Facebook page not too long ago: "Tradition (n). Peer pressure from dead people." It made me laugh out loud. At its best, tradition can give us a sense of belonging and stability. But who are we leaving out when we invoke tradition? Who is being harmed? Is it worth it?

(Continued on back.)



## Road Trip

by Jeanette Stokes

I took a long road trip in October to New Orleans, Tulsa, and points in between. I drove because I don't really like flying, and it would have required many airplanes to get to those two cities on consecutive weekends. I covered almost 3,000 miles in just over two weeks and enjoyed most of it. I drove by myself for part of it and had company for the rest. Along the way, I visited people with connections to RCWMS, so I thought you might be interested in my adventure.

One of my goals was to avoid I-85 as much as possible, so I plotted my route through Asheville and the mountains of Georgia. I left Durham on a Tuesday afternoon thinking I would make it to north Georgia that night, but it was raining and I didn't want to drive wet, winding roads in the dark. So, I stopped in Asheville for dinner with Lucy Oliver, her husband Tom, their daughter Sarah, and Sarah's two school-age children. After a lovely dinner at Tom and Lucy's retirement community and a misty walk around the property, I went to bed feeling as grateful for Lucy's hospitality as I had been for her long-time support of RCWMS. A volunteer and board member in the 1990s, she spent long hours helping to keep the organization running from 1995 to 1997 when I took two years off.

The next morning, I drove the winding mountain roads to Georgia admiring bright sunlight on glistening trees. No fall colors yet, but beautiful all the same. I was on my way to meet Helen Neinast for lunch in Clayton, Georgia, a town near her mountain-top home. Helen, now a writer and retired United Methodist minister, was a year behind me at Duke Divinity School. A strong feminist, she participated in the divinity school's Women's Center while I was the director and followed me in that job. She served on the RCWMS board early on, and remained a friend and supporter whether she lived in Texas, Tennessee, Florida, or Georgia. I saw Helen too infrequently until the last couple of years when road trips have taken me through her area.

After lunch, we studied the map on my phone for the best route to Hamilton, Georgia, just off I-85, south of Atlanta near the Georgia/Alabama line. Traffic delays looked dreadful around Atlanta, so instead of going that way, I headed straight south to Athens. I gleefully sailed through the Georgia countryside past roadside stands of concrete yard art and pumpkins. I picked up long straight Hwy 16 in Monticello and headed west.

Former RCWMS trustee Roxane Gwyn, an Episcopal priest who recently relocated from Durham to serve a church in Hamilton, met me at a rural intersection near the home she has rented for a year. A "second career" minister, she was in her fifties when she went back to graduate school at Duke. I met her the year she and Jenny Graves served as co-directors of the Duke Divinity School Women's Center. A consummate hostess, Roxane settled me into a cozy guest room before we went for a walk and enjoyed a fabulous

(Continued inside.)

# Calendar

\* = RCWMS events. To register and for more information: [rcwms.org/events](http://rcwms.org/events).

\* December 8, 2019, Sunday, 3:00–5:00 pm  
CELEBRATION of *Elder Wisdom: Searching for Truth in Circles of Women*, the Writings of Anita McLeod  
King's Daughters Inn, Durham, NC  
We are forever grateful for Anita McLeod's many roles and influences at RCWMS. As Barbara Anderson says in the introduction to *Elder Wisdom*, "This small volume is a collection of writings by and about Anita McLeod, published with the hope of savoring and sharing her wisdom and joy." Join Anita's friends and family for the launch of this labor of love and esteem.  
Cost: Free  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [info@rcwms.org](mailto:info@rcwms.org)

\* December 21, 2020, Saturday, 6:00 pm  
INTERFAITH CELEBRATION with RCWMS & Dances of Universal Peace  
Durham Friends Meeting, Durham, NC  
Gather to reflect on the fading light and the promise of its return, on community and connections, on loss and love. Join us for a potluck supper at 6:00 pm and a celebration of song, readings, and dance at 7:00 pm. All are welcome. Please bring a candle.  
Suggested donation: \$5–10.  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [events@rcwms.org](mailto:events@rcwms.org)

December 31, 2019–January 4, 2020  
HOLY WOMAN WITHIN: A New Year's Retreat for Spiritual Creatives  
Volcano, Big Island, Hawai'i  
Start the New Year with intention with guided art, writing, rituals, yoga, creativity, and radical self-care.  
Leader: Rev. Angela Yarber, author and artist  
Cost: \$1800 (additional fee for a single room)  
Contact: [holywomenicons@gmail.com](mailto:holywomenicons@gmail.com)

January 10–12, 2020, Fri., 6:00 pm–Sun., 12:00 pm  
WINTRY MIX: Art, Spirit, Nature, Rest, and FIRE  
St. Francis Springs Prayer Center, Stoneville, NC  
Start your new year with time for introspection and self-discovery through hands-on art projects, writing prompts, new connections, relaxation, and lots of fun. Come ready to kindle something new, have your spirit lifted and your mind quickened as we start a fire that will burn brightly throughout the year.  
Leader: Claudia Fulshaw, graphic designer, artist, a long-time wanderer, and leader of retreats  
Cost: \$370–\$460 (all inclusive)  
Register: Be in touch with Claudia, 919-306-2919, [claudia@artwanders.com](mailto:claudia@artwanders.com)

\* January 18, 2019, 9:30 am–3:30 pm  
HOW DID I GET HERE & WHERE AM I GOING?  
Durham, NC in a house with a cat  
As we enter the next chapter of our lives, let's explore where we are and how we got here. We can then think about what we want and need to enrich our days ahead. Come to a women's retreat and have time for self reflection and interaction with others who are also learning about the journey of midlife and onwards. In sisterhood and silence, you will clarify your visions, learn new skills, and pave a path towards what you hope for.  
Leaders: Lisa Baron, PhD, LCSW has a private psychotherapy practice in Carrboro. Cathy Meerbergen, MA has a Masters of Arts in Counseling.  
Cost: \$75 (sliding scale for those who need it)  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [info@rcwms.org](mailto:info@rcwms.org)



January 25, 2020, Saturday, 9:00 am–4:00 pm  
20/20 VISION BOARD WORKSHOP  
The Stable, between Durham & Hillsborough, NC  
Let's anchor our intentions for the new year (and DECADE)! Give yourself the space you need to intentionally define your dreams. Join Rev. Heidi Gessner to create your own Vision Board, to sell your own ideas to yourself, to anchor to your dreams and to allow the magic of manifestation to work in your life. No experience necessary. Lunch included!  
Leader: Rev. Heidi Gessner serves as the Palliative Care and Bereavement Chaplain for UNC Hospitals and is also a certified life coach.  
Cost: \$150 (includes lunch, snacks, and all materials)  
Contact: [heidigessner@gmail.com](mailto:heidigessner@gmail.com)

\*February 14–16, 2020, Fri. 2:00 pm–Sun. 2:00 pm  
FINDING YOUR MEDIUM: A Weekend of Art with Sue Sneddon  
A lovely cottage, Emerald Isle, NC  
"I can't draw a straight line." Who said you should? Join Sue for a weekend of exploring various media for painting and drawing. These will include: pencil, pen and ink, charcoal, pastel, oil pastel, watercolor, gouache, acrylics, and some mixed media options.  
Leader: Sue Sneddon has been a full-time painter since 1984. She lives and paints at the NC coast.  
Cost: \$375, plus housing of \$125 double or \$225 single  
Register: [rcwms.org/events](http://rcwms.org/events)  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [events@rcwms.org](mailto:events@rcwms.org)

February 14–16, 2020  
THE TREMENDOUS NATURE OF WOMEN:  
Personal Power through Connections with Nature  
The Stable, between Durham and Hillsborough, NC  
Join us as we connect with nature to remind ourselves, or discover for the first time, the strengths we have. Leave refreshed from time in nature and renewed with tangible skills for finding our voice, speaking up for ourselves, living authentically, and experiencing joy!  
Leaders: Christina Hulslander, a biologist, National Park Service environmental educator, and artist. Elise Partin, a four-term Mayor and TEDx presenter, teaches at the Univ. of South Carolina  
Cost: \$349 (early bird before Dec. 2 - \$299). Contact: Claudia 919-306-2919, [claudia@artwanders.com](mailto:claudia@artwanders.com)

\*February 20–23, 2020, Thurs. 7:00 pm–Sun. 1:00 pm  
MAKING YOUR ART: An Advanced Workshop with Sue Sneddon  
A lovely cottage, Emerald Isle, NC  
For those who've taken Sue's "Finding Your Medium."  
Leader: Sue Sneddon (See February 14-16).  
Cost: Workshop & some meals, \$400, plus housing in beautiful beach house, \$125 double or \$225 single.  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [events@rcwms.org](mailto:events@rcwms.org)

\*March 13-14, 2020, Fri. 7–9 pm, Sat. 9:30 am–3:30 pm  
WRITING WORKSHOP with CAROL HENDERSON  
Be prepared to write a lot and to leave with deeper insight, fresh perspective and plenty of material for further inquiry and writing. For women only.  
Leader: Carol Henderson is a writer, editor, workshop leader, and author.  
More: [www.carolhenderson.com](http://www.carolhenderson.com)  
Register: \$125, [rcwms.org/events](http://rcwms.org/events). Bring a bag lunch.  
Contact: RCWMS, 919-683-1236, [info@rcwms.org](mailto:info@rcwms.org)

Future Weeks of Quiet & Writing:  
January 2-9, 2020 (Wednesday–Wednesday)  
May 3-10, 2020 (Sunday–Sunday)  
May 10-17, 2020 (Sunday–Sunday)  
September 20-27, 2020 (Sunday–Sunday)

# Trip...

vegan dinner that she prepared. Ever made spinach dip without sour cream? You can use tofu and ground cashews. Try it; it's yummy. The next morning, I stopped to look at a house Roxane was considering as a more permanent home. Then I headed for Alabama.

"Sweet Home Alabama" played in my head as I crossed the state line. Now on the dreaded I-85 but free of urban traffic, I sailed along. "Poarch Creek Nation," said a billboard southwest of Montgomery, advertising gas and a museum. Creeks in Alabama? I assumed they had all been removed to Oklahoma. I stopped for gas and a visit to the small museum. Owners of only 300 acres of land, the Poarch Creeks have been recognized as a nation and now offer the public a beautiful museum and a thorough education about the tribal members who were relocated and the ones who stayed behind.

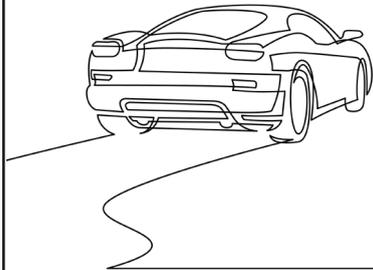
Carol Burnett, yet another friend from seminary, left Duke Divinity School to study with Beverly Harrison at Union Theological Seminary in New York. After seminary, she returned to her home state of Mississippi to serve as a United Methodist minister. For the last thirty years, she has lived in Ocean Springs and worked at Moore Community House in Biloxi, a nonprofit that aims to create economic security for women by providing affordable child care and job training. Hurricane Katrina wiped out Carol's home and the nonprofit's buildings. She and her family lost everything except important papers and photos stored in an upstairs closet in their condo. Everything on the first floor was gone but the studs--kitchen appliances, sofa, dining room table, and the sheetrock on the walls. And they were the lucky ones. Carol had family upstate where they stayed during the storm and afterward. It took four years of fundraising and construction to rebuild Moore Community House, but today, they have four lovely buildings for child care and their women-in-construction training program. Carol has been recognized for her tireless work, receiving the Ms. Foundation's Gloria Award.

My next stop was New Orleans for the wedding of John Parker, a faith-based organizer in Raleigh, and Helen Regis, a professor who lives in New Orleans. I was excited to visit the famous city for the first time. Lion Inn in the Bywater neighborhood was a great place to stay. It had a fabulous bakery across the street and was a short walk to music venues and the French Quarter.

People who like to be overstimulated must love New Orleans. Parts of the city are a nonstop party. After a wedding weekend of great food, fabulous music, and interesting people, I was joined by my Texas cousin Anne. That day there was Zydeco music in the morning, a second line parade in the afternoon (a brass band with people following and dancing in the street), and a concert by drummer Jason Marsalis in the evening (Wynton and Branford Marsalis's youngest brother). Oh, and beignets and crepes in between.

Having "done New Orleans," Anne and I traveled north on Monday morning into Mississippi. One of the reasons I decided to drive on this trip was that I wanted to see the Mississippi Delta. I have friends who grew up there, and I had only seen it from the air when flying over. So, we drove up to Jackson and had lunch at the Mayflower, Eudora Welty's favorite café.

(Continued on this page.)



# Trip...

Our waitress, Candy Caine (I kid you not) brought us delicious Southern vegetables and told us stories about the eatery, which I feel sure looks just like it did in the 1950s.

After lunch, we drove across the Delta, which is hard to describe. The fields are so flat and so large that I thought I could see thousands of acres at once from one spot, any spot. It was almost like looking out across an ocean. The only thing that broke my gaze was a line of trees so far away it would have taken all afternoon to walk there. I loved it. So much sky and so much open land. Now I know what my friend from the Delta, Melinda Wiggins, means when she talks about "space."

When we finally crossed the Mississippi River into Arkansas, we made our way to Little Rock to visit Anne's middle son who works as a television reporter. We spent two nights and then headed to Bentonville so Anne could see Crystal Bridges, a phenomenal modern art museum built by Alice Walton. Yes, those Waltons, of Walmart. The building alone is worth the trip. Look it up on the internet and go sometime.

After so much art, lots of good food, and a night at a local hotel, we left the Ozarks for Tulsa, just two hours away. The whole point of this portion of the trip was for me to attend my 50th high school reunion, but the closer we got to Tulsa, the weaker I felt. When we arrived at the home of friends where we were to stay, about all I could do was find the guest room and lie down. It eventually became apparent that I had a stomach virus, which kept me in the bed for two days. Dwight joined me in Tulsa, Anne went home to Texas, and I was flat out.

I managed to dress and gather just enough energy to attend a reunion party on Saturday night. While I was happy to see the dozen or so women who had been my friends in high school and to greet other classmates, my overwhelming feeling was that, as a group, we looked so old. We looked just like a room full of our grandparents. It took me several weeks to figure out why I thought my classmates looked so much older than my friends in North Carolina who are in their sixties and seventies. I finally realized that since I had not known most of my North Carolina friends when they were sixteen or eighteen, I don't experience the startling difference between my image of them and how they look now.

As it turned out, this part of the trip was not quite as much fun as I had expected. The people I most wanted to see were my women friends, but at a party for 200, it was hard to talk much. I was glad that one friend had gathered a few of us at her house before the big party, so we had a chance to visit for a few minutes before we were surrounded by a noisy lively crowd.

After Tulsa, Dwight drove with me as far as Nashville, where we visited with Molly Williams and her husband Andrew. Currently the youngest RCWMS trustee, Molly is a first-year student at Vanderbilt Divinity School. She reports that she is having a great time and her favorite course is called Pastoral Care and Global Capitalism. I want to take that that class! Dwight returned to Durham by airplane and I spent one night with April Baker and Deborah Lynn in their cozy home on the east side of Nashville. Deborah was on the RCWMS board before moving to Nashville for

(Continued on back page.)

# Tradition...

When we keep asking these questions, things do change for the better. Our dear wise woman, Anita McLeod, led the way in asking questions and creating safe spaces and empowering communities. Now her writings are available in *Elder Wisdom: Searching for Truth in Circles of Women*. We hope you'll join us to celebrate the launch of this collection on December 8.

On December 21, we'll partner with Dances of Universal Peace for our annual Interfaith Celebration, where we create new, inclusive traditions. Together we can build on small changes and honor each other's wisdom. May such gatherings be a balm in a season of contradictions.

# Redbud

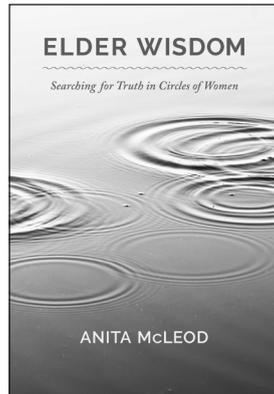
by Emily Cataneo

Everybody deserves a chance to learn how to tell their stories. That's the founding principle behind the Redbud Writing Project, an adult writing school I co-founded in May 2019 in the Triangle. The idea for Redbud was born in March last year, as I was finishing my MFA at NC State. I loved teaching creative writing to undergrads. I loved teaching them the building blocks of fiction, discussing how their characters might come to life, and introducing them to exciting literature. I loved watching them flourish and discover they could be storytellers.

Professor jobs are scarce, and as graduation loomed, I lamented the end of my teaching career. That's when one of my friends said, "Emily, why don't you make your own opportunity?" Why not? Why not take my craft lessons, workshops, and impassioned opinions about literature and transport them outside the university? Surely there were Triangle adults who yearned for writing courses that brought the rigor of university-level instruction to the general public.

So I founded Redbud with fellow MFA graduate Arshia Simkin and offered a series of six-week writing courses around the Triangle. The response was tremendous. So far, we have had almost 200 students, and in January, we'll offer ten new classes in fiction and memoir. If you're interested, find out more about us at [redbudwriting.org](http://redbudwriting.org). And happy writing!

*Emily Cataneo is a writer and journalist based in Raleigh, NC. She holds an MFA from NC State University. Her work has appeared in Slate, NPR, and the Boston Globe.*



# Trip...

April's job as a pastor at Glendale Baptist Church (not Southern Baptist, of course).

The next day, I stopped for lunch in Knoxville to visit with Liz McGeachy and Tim Marema, who are friends from decades ago when we all went to the same church in Chapel Hill. I miss them and their wonderful music, so it was good to sit in the sunshine and hear about their lives in Tennessee. One more overnight with Lucy Oliver in Asheville, and then I rolled down the mountain toward home. After two weeks of being on the road, when I finally reached Durham, I was really glad to be home.

It was a lot of driving, but I stopped frequently and rarely drove more than five hours in a day. I'm glad I went, and I encourage you to attend weddings, funerals, and reunions. I like marking the passage of time with friends and family, even if such gatherings sometimes smack me in the face with the fact that I'm closer to the end than to the beginning of this journey we call life. I feel lucky to have great companions for the journey.

# RCWMS

RCWMS is a forty-two-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 especially grateful for support from E. Rhodes & Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, Mike McLeod, Emerald Isle Realty, Inavale Foundation, and the Triangle Community Foundation.

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